

HUNTER-BOOK™

AVENGER



A Character Book for Hunter: The Reckoning™



Welcome to Hunter-Net

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WHY ARE WE HERE?

It is not enough that we, the imbued, must somehow come to grips with the awful truth of the world. If we do not know who we are and why we have been called to fight this war, we will never be strong enough to overcome the monsters and their domination of the human race. The mere fact that others of the chosen do not see the enemy in the same way we do is proof enough that the imbuing alone does not provide a clear course to victory.

This site is for the fighters, the warriors who see the world for what it is — a battleground. The enemy will not give in simply because we ask them to or appeal to their corrupted humanity. We imbued have found our way onto the net to find others like ourselves, to share our experiences and draw courage from one another. Instead, we are bombarded by dissenting voices, weak wills and selfish egos who try to turn the hunt into a mockery of its noble purpose. Hunter-net served its purpose well enough in the beginning, but now it acts more to weaken our resolve than to strengthen it. Think of this site as a fire in the darkness, to gather our lost and scattered numbers and renew our determination for the true cause.

If you believe in wasting your energies to protect drones or to look for the good in the souls of abomination, you are not welcome here. The Firelight website is for true hunters, the killers of beasts. This is a place for us to share our knowledge of the enemy and the tactics of their destruction. I created this site to keep our souls pure and our minds focused on the task at hand.

We're the only hope humanity has left.

PASS THE FLAME — Join the Firelight mailing list and add your voice to the revolution. Enter your email address below:

WARNING: DO NOT ENTER YOUR REAL NAME OR OTHER PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION. THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION ON THIS LIST CANNOT BE GUARANTEED.

AFTER YOU SUBSCRIBE, YOU WILL RECEIVE A RETURN MESSAGE CONFIRMING RECEIPT OF YOUR APPLICATION.

FOR YOUR OWN PROTECTION, DO NOT REVEAL YOUR REAL NAME, ADDRESS OR IDENTITY TO MEMBERS OF THIS LIST.



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MANIFESTO

We are born in darkness and baptized in the blood of the innocent. Our eyes have been opened, our chains broken by cleansing fire, yet we are none of us truly free. The suffering of the world cries out for justice and we have heard the call.

>>>AMEND: by Crusader17 — "The suffering of the world cries out for justice, and we have heard the call of the LORD JEHOVAH, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Let this be our reply:

I. HUMANITY OPPRESSED

We have seen with our own eyes the influences of inhumanity on our government, our businesses and our media. We have seen their corrupting touch in our cities, especially our inner cities, where they consume the disadvantaged in cauldrons of violence and abuse. The creatures we rightly call monsters have beaten us down and made us into little better than animals, consumed by greed, prejudice and fear.

II. DECLARATION

We the people, imbued to champion the oppressed, declare that all people have the inalienable right to freedom and self-determination, and hold the monsters of the world accountable for centuries of depredation and slavery. We charge these creatures with crimes against humanity and resolve to break their grip on our people by any and all means necessary. Thus, we accept the only recourse available to a captive population: revolution.

>>>AMEND: SpiritWarrior128 — "We the people, imbued with the power of the Great Spirits... We must show them the proper respect, or they will take away their gifts."

>>>AMEND: Cop90 — "Delete the last sentence. We are *not* here to overthrow the government or disrupt any institutions. If we kill off the monsters, everything else will take care of itself."

III. INTENT

It is the mandate of the people that the monsters who hold power over human agencies must be confronted and destroyed without mercy, so that we may gain the freedom of leadership and communication to unite and inform the rest of our race. When the revolution has accomplished this goal, we will then turn our attention to the unnatural creatures remaining in the world and complete our retribution. For humanity to realize its place on the Earth, inhumanity must perish utterly. There can be no other acceptable resolution.

>>>AMEND: Reaper201 — "For humanity to realize its place on the Earth, inhumanity must perish utterly, along with all those who show no respect for the sanctity of human life, including abortion doctors, lawyers and talk show hosts."

IV. STATEMENT OF IDENTITY

From this day forth, we who accept these dual responsibilities of vengeance and liberation resolve to set aside our personal ideologies, affiliations and allegiances to work together as a common people with a single identity, as hunters and warriors who will give the enemy no quarter. Collectively and separate, let each of us exemplify our purpose and consider ourselves humanity's vindicators, and let no outrage go unanswered.

>>>AMEND: Soldier91 — "Let us also resolve to stand by our fellow chosen, accepting their insight and strength to achieve a just and lasting solution for the future of humankind."

This is your declaration, too! Add your amendments here:

>>>Posted 11/2 by Rigger111:

This definitely looks like one of us. Anyone out there claim responsibility?

CHILD KILLER SLAIN BY MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANT

(UPI/Bloomington) Police in Bloomington received a 911 call at 3:00 am from a young boy claiming to be Tommy Martins, who told dispatchers that he was being held in a lakeside cabin 30 miles outside the city. When Patrolman Ernie Waters managed to locate the cabin nearly two hours later, he was stunned to find the missing boy, alive and unharmed - along with the corpse of the man presumed to have kidnapped him.

The cabin, Officer Waters later reported, had been decorated in occult paraphernalia and symbols. One corner of the building had been dedicated to a stone altar, stained with human blood. "It looked like the kidnapper intended to sacrifice the boy," Waters said, noting that the body was wearing ceremonial robes, and that a knife was found not far away. The kidnapper, whose identity has not yet been released, had been stabbed repeatedly by some type of hot knife or poker. "There were a lot of deep punctures... and cauterization," Waters confirmed.

Upon searching the area, investigators made a grisly discovery underneath the cabin's crawlspace

see CHILD KILLER, page A3

>>>Posted 12/18 by Reaper201:

Anybody up near Boston know who this guy is? I like his style. Hope he lives long enough to make a difference.

MASKED VIGILANTE LEAVES CRYPTIC MESSAGES TO CRIMINALS

(AP/Boston) The letters are painted five foot tall and seem to glow under halogen streetlights: TIME TO FACE THE DAYLIGHT, BLOODSUCKERS. The execution is impressive, if the meaning is unclear. According to local residents in this crime-stricken neighborhood, graffiti such as this has appeared on streets for three weeks, and is supposedly the work of one man, a masked vigilante who wages a private war against local gangs and drug dealers.

"He's got the local gang-bangers scared, but nobody will say why," reported a police officer anonymously. "If this guy has actually done anything, we haven't seen evidence of it. But whatever language he's speaking, the hoods understand it loud and clear." see VIGILANTE, page B5

>>>Posted 1/20 by Memphis68:

I think this was Cleaner221. Wasn't he trying to get some guns last month? If anybody has heard from him recently, email me. I hope I'm wrong.

STANDOFF ENDS IN TRAGEDY; GUNMAN, FAMILY KILLED

Dallas - A tense standoff with an alleged right-wing extremist ended in tragedy this afternoon as the gunman, identified as Wayne Schofield, killed his wife and children and then turned the gun on himself just as members of the Dallas SWAT team forced their way into the home.

The standoff began early this morning as federal agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms arrived to serve an arrest warrant for Schofield for the illegal purchase of three fully automatic heavy machineguns from a soldier at the Fort Hood army base, near Killeen. As the agents arrived, Schofield opened fire from inside the home, wounding one of the agents critically. Police units arrived minutes later, and Schofield barricaded himself inside with his wife and two daughters. Although negotiators attempted to persuade Schofield to surrender, his responses seemed increasingly irrational, claiming that "monsters will make me disappear" see STANDOFF, page B10



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CONSTRUCTING SHAPED CHARGES

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SECTION THREE — ASSEMBLING THE SHAPED CHARGE

Alright, so now we've got the detonator assembled, and the plastique has been mixed and stabilized. Now we're ready to put together the shaped charge.

This is where we get to the \$5,000 question — *What's the big deal about a shaped charge?*

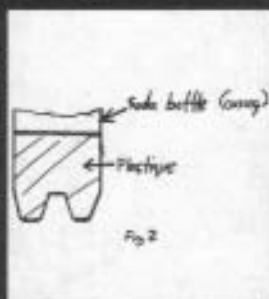
Toss a stick of dynamite into a field. When it goes off, the explosive force expands more or less in a spherical manner. That's great if you're trying to affect a big area, but what if you're trying to blow through a door or, in our case, a gas tank? The best way to do this is to find a way to channel as much of the explosion as possible into a specific area, and that's where the shaped charge comes in.



A shaped charge is an explosive packed into a cylinder around the outside of a hollow cone (see fig. 1). When the explosive is detonated, the energy follows the path of least resistance — channeled straight down the cone. So you get a focused jet of *plasma* that's great for blowing holes through armor plating and incinerating anything on the other side — like a fang who thinks he's safe inside a stainless-steel coffin, for instance.

STEP ONE — THE CASING

So where do we come up with a cylindrical container with a conical depression at one end? Look no further than the one-liter soda bottle in your hand. Cut the end of that sucker off and you're ready to go.



Now, take the plastique and carefully pack it into the soda bottle, leaving just enough room at the top for the detonator (see figure 2).

STEP TWO — THE DETONATOR

Once you've got the plastique in place, add a couple inches of foam padding for insulation, then get your detonator. Poke the wires running from the pager into the plastique, through the padding (see figure 3). Remember not to put the battery in the pager until you're almost ready to place the charge! One wrong number will ruin your whole day. Now cover the top with a removable, waterproof cap and you're ready to go.

We first used this on a fang who had some serious personal security — guards, motion sensors, you name it. One night when he was out on the town, we threw a rock through the window of his limo. The bruises took the car in the next day to get it fixed. While it was waiting at the shop, we slipped the bomb onto the gas tank, with the cone pointed toward the passenger compartment. That night, we shadowed the car and got a lucky break when the fang loaded up with a bunch of his bloodsucking buddies. We parked our car, let the limo drive well out of sight, and made a call. The bomb's plasma jet ruptured the gas tank and sent a blast of superheated air and gasoline into the passenger compartment. Incinerated all five of them in less than a second.





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WEREWOLVES

BACKGROUND

I've dug up all the reference materials I can get out of the Metropolitan library. Based on my research, here's what I have learned about werewolves. These monsters, sometimes called shapechangers, man-changers and lobos on the list, are capable of altering their physical form into *several* different body types. Legends say a werewolf can transform from a man into a large intelligent wolf-form, although there are conflicting stories that suggest the creature is actually a wolf that can assume the appearance of a man. According to the stories, they can change only when the moon is full or when wolfsbane blooms, which gives us the same advantages we have over the bloodsuckers — we're not crippled by the time of day, month or even season.

DESCRIPTION

Everything I have read indicates that the bipedal "wolfman" form popularized in horror films is a complete fabrication — perhaps perpetrated by our enemy. A werewolf turns from a man into a *giant wolf*, and vice-versa. They don't have hands or apparently human intelligence when in wolf form, but they are still very dangerous creatures, capable of inflicting terrible harm.

>>>Posted by Hunter9:

You've got it all wrong. The one I saw had four arms and four legs. It looked like a Lon Chaney reject, and it was smart enough to drive a car! Get your head out of your books and join the real world, pal.

NATURAL WEAPONS

Bite: The werewolf has a bite similar to a typical wolf's, but with tremendous jaw strength capable of inflicting severe wounds. What's worse, the bite somehow manages to pass the curse (?) of the werewolf onto its victim, causing he or she to transform on the next full moon.

>>>Posted by Howitzer114:

I can testify to the damn thing's bite. We cornered one out in the bush and the beast bit a shotgun in two. It "nipped" at one of my buddies and sheared right through his collarbone. We don't know if he's going to make it.

>>>Posted 05/01 by Reaper201:

Watch that guy really closely, Howitzer. I've never heard of anyone even surviving a werewolf attack, but you know the stories. Better be prepared if he starts to make the change...

WEAKNESSES

The most alarming element about these creatures is their ability to withstand injury. According to legend, the *only* way to destroy a werewolf is a silver bullet to its heart. There are conflicting stories of weapons coated in wolfsbane being lethal to them, but I can't corroborate that as yet. Nothing else — not fire, not holy water, *nothing* — causes them lasting damage.

Share your observations here:

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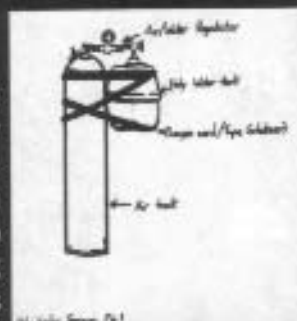
PROTOTYPE HOLY WATER GUN
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PRESSURIZED HOLY WATER GUN

I got this idea one night while watching my brother mess with his scuba gear. Forget throwing some little vial of holy water at a fang — we can put the stuff under pressure and hose him down from 15 feet away!

DESIGN

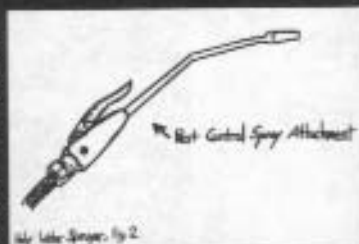
First, buy one of those large spray cans with a trigger-operated applicator, like pest control people use (gotta love the irony!). Now remove the plunger assembly — we're going to be using a *lot* more pressure! Next, rent (or buy) a compressed air tank and harness from a local scuba supply shop. Also get hoses and valves for setting up a dual-tank system. Now, connect the air tank and the spray tank using the hoses and valves, then find a way to hook the tanks together (duct tape, bungee cord, whatever). It's just that simple!



Holy Water Gun, Fig 1

GETTING THE HOLY WATER

This is easier than it seems. No, you don't have to go into a church and steal the stuff. Besides, I think that voids the blessing (any actual Catholics out there?). Just load up some jugs of water and get the local priest to bless them. You don't have to tell him why you need it, and he shouldn't have any real reason to refuse — I mean, what priest wouldn't want to bless something? Isn't that like a big sin?



Holy Water Sprayer, Fig 2

MAKING IT WORK

All you have to do is put the water in the pesticide tank, seal it off and open the valve on the air tank. I've been able to hit man-sized targets from almost 30 feet! And I know just the bloodsucker I want to try it out on. I can't wait to see the look on his face!

FIRELIGHT CHAT

SpiritWarrior128: Hes bleeding all over the place I think hes going to die

Cop90: Take it easy. Where did he get bit?

SpiritWarrior128: in the uper leg.

Cop90: Okay. I need you to look at the wound and tell me what you see.

SpiritWarrior128: Please help us

Cop90: You've got to help me here! If he won't go to the hospital, we're going to have to take care of him ourselves! I can talk you through this. Take a knife and cut away his pant leg.

THERE ARE FOUR (4) PEOPLE IN THIS ROOM



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CONVERSATION WITH A GHOST

We still don't know what to make of this. I'm posting all the information on the site to see if anyone else has had a similar experience. To tell the truth, this one really got to me.

BACKGROUND

The Weatherford House has been in the Manning family since well before the Civil War, and has a reputation for being haunted. The Mannings, who have a controlling interest in almost every major company in town, have a reputation of their own for being cruel, even violent. We wondered if there was a connection between the house and the family's behavior.

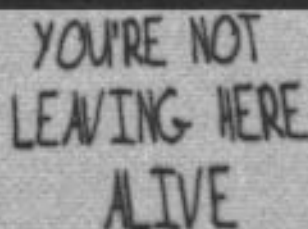
When the Mannings left the country on one of their European vacations, we cut the house's phone line and slipped in to check it out.

We ran into *something* almost immediately.

MESSAGES

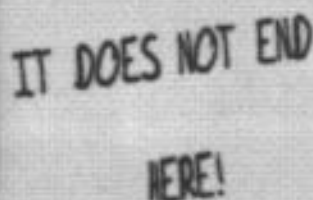
It seemed to know what we were. We couldn't do anything, but suddenly the room got very cold, and words appeared on one of the walls (see figure 1). No one was sure what the reference to "carpetbaggers" meant, but it spooked us pretty bad.

John tried to talk to it. He asked what its name was, but we got no answer. We started searching the house again, looking for any other signs of it.



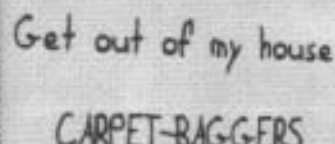
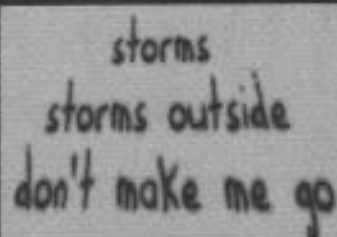
We searched the ground floor with no success, then headed upstairs. In one of the second-floor rooms, the cold returned, worse this time, and a second message (see figure 2). Shortly after, we started to get headaches. Cindy thought the thing was trying to control us. We still didn't have any idea where it was, so John suggested burning the house down. Probably not the smartest thing he could have said.

On the way downstairs, the ghost wrote another message (figure 3). Was it trying to play on our sympathies, now? We thought it meant we were on the right track. Just short of the door, all hell broke loose. We dodged flying furniture and silverware (John got a fork in the arm), and scrambled outside for the gas cans.



The atmosphere was different when we got back — almost resigned. We spread the gas around and lit it. One last message was waiting for us on the way out (figure 4). We didn't waste any time leaving.

The house burned to the ground. We thought it was over until a few days later. Cindy is hearing strange sounds in her apartment at night. Could the ghost have followed us somehow?



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ANYBODY HUNTING IN MARYLAND?

>>>Posted 10/3 by Reaper201:

I've got a situation over here near Fort Meade. Looks like a gang of warlocks, but they've got government connections and some really bizarre equipment. Any hunters in Maryland who have had any experience with government merlins and want to lend a hand would be welcome, especially if you're a bullseye — I don't want to get too close to these guys.

WOLFMEN GATHERING IN THE ADIRONDACKS?

>>>Posted 12/27 by Shaka74:

An associate of mine has seen a large number of what he thinks are wolfmen passing through his town, just a few miles west of the Adirondacks, in New York State. Apparently most of them arrive by car or van, from as far away as Kentucky and Virginia, judging by the plates. None of them stay in town — they always pass through and head into the mountains. Does anyone know what to make of this? Are these things that organized?

APB OUT FOR LOUIS RENALDO

>>>Posted 1/16 by Cop90:

Everyone in New York City be advised — the NYPD has put out an all-points bulletin for Louis Renaldo. Those moderator guys claim he's one of them and is being sought in connection with seven murders on the Upper West Side. They say he's a dud — he was there at others' imbuing, but didn't make the change — and has been fucked up ever since. Something about trying to earn a second chance! Apparently he's started his own hunt. But without the sight, how can he know who's what? His last victims were an elderly couple who ran a deli near 133rd Street. If you have any information about this freak, email me immediately. I'd prefer if we took care of this ourselves.

PROGRESS REPORT: CAPE TOWN

>>>Posted 2/11 by Howitzer114:

We've managed to make some progress since the last report — we finally tracked down one of Jager51's police buddies and got a name and address. Jager's house was empty — I mean cleaned out, down to the bare walls. Looks like no one has been there for a while. We did find one of the signs in the backyard. It marked a buried strongbox containing a pistol, a wad of cash and a notebook with some addresses in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Still no luck finding anyone in Jager's network. We're starting to think the government's involved somehow, but no real proof yet. We're going to check out the addresses and will report again soon.

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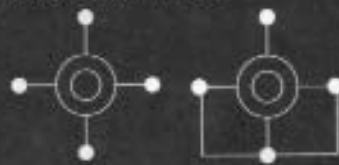
THE WORD

The following are some of those weird symbols and their apparent meanings, as posted by contributors to this site. Some have been spotted around the world, in different countries and cultures. The meanings of the ones shown have been loosely confirmed by at least three of us, presumably without prior contact. The fact that our kind from around the world can find the same sense in these symbols suggests that this is some kind of universal language — kinda like math or music. Has it always been there and was just brought out when we were changed? Or has it been imposed upon us by the Messengers so we can all communicate and get along?

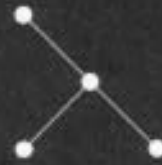
So far, it appears that the enemy is unaware or uninterested in these symbols, even when they appear prominently in their turf. Perhaps these symbols are designed to defy inhuman perceptions, like our powers escape gawkers. We can't always assume that will be the case, though. Use caution at all times.



AVENGER. ONE OF US;
A WARRIOR OR
SOLDIER.



MEETING PLACE. THIS
SYMBOL SEEMS TO BE A
VARIATION ON ONE THAT MANY
OF US HAVE SEEN BEFORE:
UNDER PROTECTION.
APPARENTLY OTHER IMBUED
CAN MAKE THE CHANGES SHOWN
HERE TO REQUEST A MEETING
WITH LOCAL HUNTERS.



SPIRITS. THIS
INDICATES A HAUNTED
AREA. ENTER WITH
CAUTION.



CACHE. THIS
SYMBOL ALERTS YOU
TO SUPPLIES OR
EQUIPMENT HIDDEN IN
CASE OF EMERGENCY.
IF YOU MAKE USE OF
A CACHE, RESTOCK IT
FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO
USE OR DESTROY THE
SIGN SO NO ONE GETS
TO RELY ON IT.



TRAP. TRIAL AND ERROR
HAS PROVED THAT THIS SIGN
WARNS OTHER HUNTERS OF AN
AMBUSH OR OTHER KIND OF
DECEPTION, PROBABLY
STAGED BY THE ENEMY, BUT
NOT NECESSARILY.
REMEMBER THAT UNWITTING
SOULLESS CAN BE USED
AGAINST YOU BY OUR
OPPONENTS.



WACKO OR ARCHANGEL.
THIS SIGN HAS RECEIVED
THE MOST CONFLICTING
INPUT. EVERYONE SEEMS
TO AGREE THAT IT MEANS A
POWERFUL HUNTER IS
NEARBY, HAS PASSED
THROUGH OR PROTECTS AN
AREA. WHETHER THAT'S A
GOOD OR BAD THING SEEMS
TO BE UP TO THE
INDIVIDUAL, AS THE
CONTRASTING TITLES
IMPLY. IF YOU'VE MET
ONE OF THESE PEOPLE, YOU
KNOW THEY'RE NO LONGER
REALLY LIKE US, KIND OF
LIKE WE'RE NO LONGER
STRICTLY LIKE THE
DEFENSELESS. CONSIDER
HOW EXTREME THAT MAKES
THESE IMBUED.



FREEDOM. SIMPLY
PUT, OUR ULTIMATE
GOAL. NO DISSENSION
ON THIS ONE.



WALKING DEAD. THE MOST BLATANT
OF OUR ENEMIES, THE ONES WHO
INVOKE OUR ANGER THE MOST BY SO
BLATANTLY DEFYING NATURE AND
EVERYTHING RIGHT. PUT THEM ALL
DOWN WITHOUT REMORSE.



PROLOGUE: IN EXTREMIS

I killed the car's headlights and eased slowly around the corner. Most of the streetlights in this part of Stateway had been shot out by dealers, leaving long stretches of darkness broken by scattered pools of weak orange light. The crumbling, pockmarked high-rises loomed on our left like old tombstones, silent and still. There were cars parked on either side of the street, many of them rusted-out hulks. I eased the old Thunderbird up to the curb next to an empty trash-strewn lot. The park was another block-and-a-half away.

My watch read two minutes to midnight. The monsters were out there, waiting.

I turned to the girl. For a few seconds, I had to struggle to remember her name. "Okay, Emily. Time to go. Just act natural, do this like all the other times and I'll take care of the rest." The words came out too harsh, like a snarl, but I was too tired and nervous to play around.

She was leaning against the car door, arms folded tightly across her chest. Moonlight through the passenger's window picked out the bald spots on her worn-out leather jacket and left deep shadows around her sunken eyes. Emily shivered, but I wasn't sure if it was from withdrawal or something else. She stared fearfully into the darkness. "Please don't make me do this," she whispered, like a frightened child.

"Goddamn it, Emily, you can't back out on me now!" The girl flinched. I didn't mean to shout. It was the fatigue. I tried to remember the last time I had anything to eat, much less sleep. Nothing came to mind. I fumbled for the cigarettes in my jacket pocket and tried to stay calm. "Just work with me here. It'll all be over in a couple minutes."

Streaks of silver ran down her cheeks. She wiped them away with a trembling hand. "I'm scared. I feel sick. Can't you do this some other way?"

I fished out a cigarette and leaned forward so the dash would hide the flare of the lighter. Breathing deeply, I waited for the rush to hit. It wasn't the lightning bolt I had expected, etching the world in razor-sharp lines and curves. The smoke cleared my head and took the edge off my fear, but I still felt like shit. "No way out but through, kid," I replied, rubbing at my eyes. "If there was any other way to do this I would. Swear to God."

The girl turned to look at me, shifting around in her seat, still wiping her eyes. She looked a lot younger than 19, just a terrified kid with bony knees poking out from a too-short skirt. "Just promise me you won't tell them I turned them in. Please. I know —" she took a deep, shaky breath — "I know what they've done, but they were good to me. They took care of me, and never asked for anything. Just — just promise me, okay?"

It was all I could do to take a long drag on the cigarette. Eighteen hours ago she'd been covered in the blood of innocent people, and now she wanted me to remember how good these fuckers had been to her.

I looked her in the eye. "I won't say a word, Emily. Not a word."

After a moment, she nodded and climbed out of the car. She started walking, hesitantly at first, heading for the park and the beasts that waited for her. I caught myself looking for another cigarette, not remembering when I'd finished the first.

Once she was out of sight, I started looking over the weapons. I checked the safety on the .45 holstered at my hip, and the Asp resting in its nylon sheath. Then I reached back and grabbed the black duster bundled on the back seat. Wrapped up in the coat was a silenced submachine gun, an HKMP5SD1 I'd borrowed from the precinct SWAT armory. There were three clips of silver-tip hollow points wrapped up next to the gun — my own contribution. I slapped one into the MP5 and chambered a round, then put the weapon's assault sling over my shoulder. I was ready. The darkness waited. My hands started to shake.

What if they couldn't be stopped with bullets? I didn't have a clue. I didn't have any idea what they were. I *did* know what happened to their victims. And I knew that I was putting myself right into their hands. If I fucked up, the forensics guys would be finding pieces of me all over the park.

I gripped the steering wheel. The keys were still in the ignition. And I asked myself the same question I asked every single goddamned night. *Can you walk away from this? Can you forget what you know and just walk away?*

The answer was no. And that pretty much said it all. I grabbed the duster and got out of the car.

* * *

They found her at the scene of the most recent murders, curled up in a ball and covered in blood. She'd crawled away from the bodies and hidden in a pile of trash, lying so still that she'd been there for almost an hour before someone from forensics literally stumbled onto her.

None of the blood was hers, but no one could believe she had been the one who killed the DeSilvas. There was no motive, no connection to the victims, and no way in hell she could have been strong enough to tear four people limb from limb. The detectives working the case figured her for a witness, somebody who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. That didn't explain why the killers let her live, but it made about as much sense as anything else where the Stateway Stalker was concerned.

Unless you knew about monsters.

The detectives were going to cut her loose. There just wasn't any justifiable reason to hold her. While they were off getting the paperwork together, I paid an unofficial visit.

She was pacing the small examination room when I walked in. They'd let her clean off in the women's locker room, but her clothes still looked like she'd been rolling around in a slaughterhouse. The air was thick with the smell of blood.

Her face was haggard, worn down to nothing more than pale skin and rough bone. When she looked at me, her eyes were like dull marbles set too far back in their sockets. She was only nineteen. I figured she'd been on crack for about a year.

I held her gaze and really *looked* at her, half-afraid of what I might find. But she wasn't one of them. She was just what she appeared to be.

"Are you here to let me go?" The girl tried to dredge up a little attitude, like she knew the score and didn't have anything to worry about. She'd been downtown enough times to know how things worked, but all that really meant was that she knew enough to get into more trouble. I dropped her file and a thick manila envelope on the table and pulled up a seat.

"Homicide's done with you. I'm from narcotics." She froze for a second. I kept my face wooden and let her read whatever she wanted from my expression. "You want to have a seat? You look a little nervous."

"I'm fine," she said, but her eyes jittered all over the place. I'd knocked her off balance, and she was trying to figure out what was happening.

I shrugged. "Doesn't make much difference to me. How would you like to go to prison for 30 years, Emily?"

She took a step back, her expression disbelieving. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about selling class-one narcotics, and accessory to murder." I opened her file. "You've got three arrests for prostitution and an arrest four months ago for possession. Now forensics has come back with their lab results and it seems that one of the DeSilva kids had crack cocaine in her system. From where I'm sitting, it looks like a young hooker got tired of working the streets and started selling product to make big money. Did you have some of your friends kill the DeSilvas so you could keep it all for yourself?"

"That's not true!" Her voice rose to a terrified shout. "That's not what happened! I'm trying to get clean. I told the others what happened—"

It was easy to sneer at that one. "You told them the DeSilvas were killed by wild dogs. Jesus fucking Christ, Emily, this is *Chicago*. Those two dickheads might have bought your bullshit story, but I know better."

"No you don't!" She rushed forward, slamming her hands on the table. There was a wild look in her eyes. It took a second for me to realize that she was genuinely terrified — damn near out of her mind. "You weren't there! You've got no idea what happened!"

"So tell me." I closed the file, trying to seem disinterested. "With everything I've got here, you can't make your situation worse...."

Emily put a bony hand to over her mouth. She stood that way for a long time, and I could see the conflict tearing back and forth in her eyes. I couldn't tell if she was more scared of what she'd seen or of how another person might react if she tried to talk about it. God knows I'd been there before.

Right about the time I was starting to worry that the guys from homicide would be back, she took a deep breath and made her decision. "There's these two guys, okay? They started hanging around Stateway last month."

Right about the time the murders started. *I'm on to you now, you bastards.* "What are their names? Where do they live?"



"I don't know. The tall one calls himself Jimmy, and the other one said his name was Rob. I only saw them when I was out working. They ran into me one night and started talking to me like I was a long-lost relative or something. It freaked me out."

"They didn't pay for anything?"

"No, never." She shook her head emphatically. "I know it sounds weird, but they gave me money. They even took care of some punks who tried to pull me into a car. They said I was part of their family, and they were responsible for me."

"And that didn't bother the hell out of you?"

"Sure it did. But try living on the streets sometime. You take what you can get and don't ask a lot of questions. The only thing that pissed me off was when they got high-and-mighty about the drugs. They beat the shit out of my dealer and said they weren't going to let me 'pollute' myself any more."

I checked my watch. If the homicide detectives caught me with their witness, there would be hell to pay. "Just tell me about the DeSilvas, Emily."

She took a second to collect herself. "They showed up on my street at a little after one. They were acting all weird, really tense and nervous. I asked Jimmy if he was on anything, and he laughed. The sound of his voice scared the shit out of me, like there was something... inside him. I can't explain it. He said that it was time, or that the time was right. Something like that. Time to show me the truth."

"So they took me about five blocks away, across a couple of vacant lots and down an alley behind an empty building. There was an old station wagon there, and a family sleeping inside. And Jimmy... he kind of growled. He sounded like an animal. When I turned to look at him... he... was... changing."

Emily's face had gone slack, her skin even paler than before. "He turned into this thing, all covered in fur, and Rob changed too. And they started pulling the people out of the car and biting them, tearing them apart. They let one of the girls live for a while just to hear her scream. They put their hands on me and covered me in blood — oh my God!"

She started to sob, her thin body shaking. "They said I was going to go away with them tonight. They said I was going to give them children." She hugged her elbows hard enough to leave white impressions on her skin, trying to collect herself. "I'm going to get as far away from Chicago as I can before it gets dark."

I shook my head. "No, not yet. I need you to help me stop them."

"Fuck you! I'm not going near those two ever again!"

"Listen to me, kid. Listen carefully." I grabbed the manila envelope and spilled out its contents — stacks of

glossy photos taken from 10 different murder scenes. I picked some at random. "Here's an elderly lady torn to bits in her apartment. Here's what's left of a pregnant woman killed in her bed. She had two other kids in the room with her, but we still haven't found all of their remains. We think some of them might have been eaten. The DeSilvas weren't the first people these monsters have killed, and they won't be the last. Homicide thinks they've got a Hannibal Lecter wannabe on their hands, but you and I know the truth. They aren't going to be able to stop these guys... but you and I can."

The girl looked at me for a moment as though she wasn't sure what she'd just heard. "You're out of your mind!"

"Tell that to the DeSilvas!" I threw one of the pictures at her. "Tell that to Eleanor Waits." I threw another, hitting Emily in the forehead. "Tell that to Shontae Brewer and her unborn kid." I threw a handful of gruesome photos in her face. "Tell that to every man, woman and child who is going to die because you don't have the guts to do something about it!" I came around the end of the table and she staggered backward, raising a hand protectively. The look in her eyes made me catch myself just short of shaking her like a rag doll.

"I just want to be left alone," she said in a terrified whisper. "I just want to go home."

"Emily, as long as those things are out there, you don't have a home. Now think: You said you were supposed to go away with them tonight. Were you supposed to meet them somewhere?"

"Y-yes," she said, choking back more tears. "They said to meet them at the park on 133rd Street, across from the high-rises. At midnight."

"Then that's where you'll be. They trust you, Emily. You can draw them out of cover. And I'll be there to take care of them."

She brought her hands to her face again, eyes bright with fear. "Please don't. I swear I'll do anything you want. Please don't make me do this."

"Emily, we are going to do this. We owe it to all the people who've died because of these guys. They're evil, and they have to be stopped. I need your help — and I'll keep you in Chicago as long as I have to. So it's in your best interest to help me get these guys before they get you."

She stood there wordlessly while I gathered the pictures. "Clean yourself up, kid," I said once I was ready to go. "Think real hard about what I said. It's them or me."

I slipped out just minutes ahead of the homicide boys. When I got back to my desk, I called in a favor from a guy in processing to tie up Emily's release till about ten that night. Once the wheels were in motion, I started to make my plan.

I'd need to get a car from the impound lot; something that would blend in. And a full-auto weapon.

I went outside for a smoke.

The park existed nowadays for hookers, junkies and thieves. It was a square block of dead grass, withered trees and empty, graffiti-covered planters. None of the lights worked, making dozens of dark corners and cul-de-sacs where people could do their business. It was a place only a monster could make.

I didn't plan on wasting time. The longer you waited, the more things could go wrong. The park sloped upward toward the center, making a kind of low hill crowned with skeletal trees. Near the top, I heard Emily's voice. She was arguing with someone.

My hand went for the submachine gun as I got to the top of the hill. I moved between the trees, listening for her voice. They were standing near a broken-down bench on the side opposite the entrance.

I brought the MP5 up to my shoulder. Emily and one of the guys were standing close together in a pool of shadow, nothing but vague gray outlines against blackness. It felt good to be laying the gun's sight on one of the beasts. "Time to pay," I whispered softly. Moving my head fractionally, I tried to get an eye on the other creature—

And that's when the son of a bitch hit me.

Its hand smashed into my left shoulder like a sledgehammer, knocking me flat on my face. I let off a long burst as I fell, in the direction I had aimed. Someone screamed. It might have been me.

The thing was on top of me the second I hit the ground. I twisted underneath it and looked into a face straight from Hell. It lunged at me, jaws wide, and I flung out my left hand, flailing at its snout. Its teeth closed on my wrist. Something snapped. I wrenched around and jammed the MP5 into its throat and held the trigger down.

It turned out bullets worked, after all.

I kicked out from under the thing's body. It was already starting to change, shrinking back into a human shape. I ran down the hill. My left arm wouldn't work from the pain, so I couldn't change clips on the MP5. I let it hang from its strap and pulled out the Asp.

Emily and the first creature I saw lay close to each other. The kid had caught a round in the temple. The beast was trying to crawl away, dragging its shattered legs.

When I saw the poor girl's body, I went cold. Even at the bitter end, the monsters managed to take one more soul down with them.

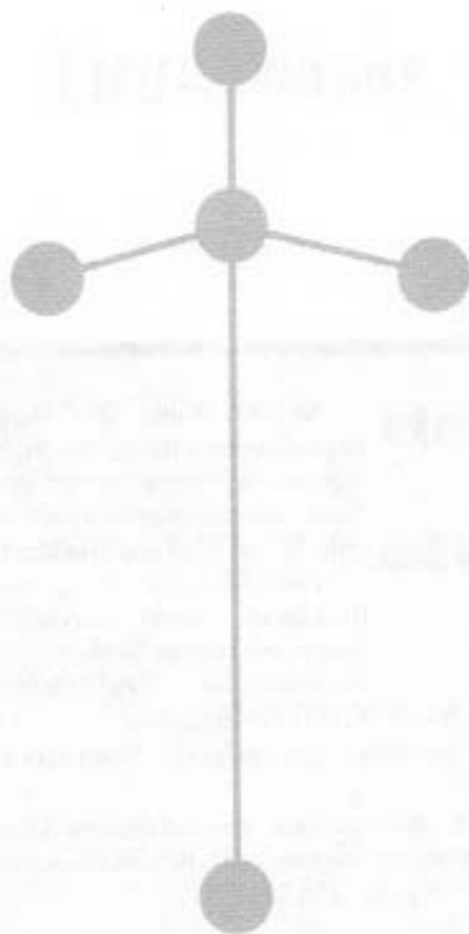
With a flick of my good wrist, the Asp's collapsible steel baton telescoped to its full, two-foot length. The knob at the end began to glow an angry red. The creature managed to tear its claws across my leg as I brought the weapon down on its head. I beat the thing until the baton warped and broke.

Limping, I turned back to the girl. Sirens sounded in the distance. I closed her tear-streaked eyes. There was nothing else I could do.

Except avenge her.

HUNTER-BOOK

AVENGER



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HUNTER-BOOK

AVENGER

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INTRODUCTION

Thou art my battle ax and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms;

—Jeremiah 51:20

BIRTH OF A REVOLUTION

Hunter Book: Avenger is a sourcebook to help you develop a better understanding of the Avenger creed and its emerging role in the world of **Hunter: The Reckoning**. As an Avenger, you're a single-minded fanatic or a ruthless destroyer. You would wage war on monsters all by yourself if you had to, and maybe you already do. The supernatural is the enemy, and the only good enemy is a dead enemy. But what makes you tick? What fire could so consume your soul that it can be quenched only by rage and violence? This book helps you decide, to determine who your Avenger is, before and after the imbuing — and all the creed's new powers and rules don't hurt, either.

But just as you need to better understand your own Avenger, you must understand hunter society as it emerges; the two are inextricably intertwined. As each of the newly imbued struggles to understand her new world, origins and purpose, she inevitably compares her experiences, philosophies and fears with ones she encounters on the streets or on the Internet. At first, the recently awakened latch onto anyone

who understands them; this new world is just too terrifying to contend with alone. However, in time, as more and more imbued dare meet and make overtures to find each other, individuals with similar attitudes and theories are attracted to one another and develop like-minded circles. These foundling social groups are the bases for what ultimately become the hunter creeds.

Yet, during hunters' emergence, many varied imbued can seem to have common goals. As the chosen make contact, try to understand their mutual condition and strive to work together, similar goals and comparable experiences can hide fundamentally different philosophies, whether about hunter purpose, the nature of the Messengers or the necessary fate of monsters. All hunters agree that the supernatural's hold on humanity must be broken, but not everyone agrees on how to accomplish it. Mutual experiences and mutual values turn out to be two very different things. Hunters can therefore be taken by surprise when a fellow "avenger" really proves to be a militant redeemer or a distracted visionary. Sometimes the chosen aren't even sure of their own ideals until immersed completely in the hunt.

It's only after the imbued become fully devoted to or even obsessed with the hunt that their approaches to it become purposeful and refined. Some become determined to save monsters' souls. Others want to see them utterly destroyed. When this distillation is complete, the creeds as social classifications finally arise. Avenger recognizes Avenger and Innocent recognizes Innocent, all through the creeds' codified values, intentions and goals in the hunt.

When will hunters achieve such social structure? It could take months or years as the imbued struggle to understand themselves, and then each other. The fact that so many edges seem to be shared by the chosen of various perspectives and personalities doesn't help, either. However, when creeds as institutions are finally acknowledged, the hunt may finally gain the momentum it needs to overcome the supernatural, once and for all. Or perhaps such cumbersome and fractious divisions will be the hunt's undoing, as imbued fall to infighting and politics rather than upholding their higher purpose.

Ultimately, the course of your chronicle and your Storyteller's vision decide when the creeds become publicly recognized in your game. In the meantime, your Avenger's fully developed identity helps define his own society.

PERSPECTIVES

The opinions, theories, information and outlooks expressed in this book are presented primarily in three distinct "voices." These Avenger narrators typify the spectrum of personalities across the creed as a whole. Each of these people presents his or her own take on the origins, tactics, relations and ultimate fate of Avengers, and on hunters in general.

The creed and its members' views evolve constantly as Avengers try to define themselves in a world they no longer understand. With no other frame of reference, the chosen often resort to the ideas, virtues and philosophies they possessed before their transformation. No two Avengers have the same thoughts about their origins, for example. Thus, the questions the imbued ask of themselves and their world — not any specific belief system — best illustrate their individual and collective identity. After reading this book, you should have a sense of the drives and ambitions that inspire and motivate various Avengers. You should sense what initiates these people's ruthless campaign against monsters, and what influences their relations with other imbued. We also hope that you're inspired to fully develop your character's identity and beliefs, to make him just as compelling in his dogged pursuit of the hunt.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Hunter Book: *Avenger* broadens the World of Darkness as creed members perceive it and offers insights into the hunter psyche. It also offers new rules and powers for use by Avengers and possibly other creed members. This book can therefore help you better understand your character and elaborate upon her.

Chapter 1: Hunter Origins explores the nature of monsters, the Messengers and Avengers, and seeks to explain why the imbued receive their gift or curse.

Chapter 2: The Hunt covers Avengers' unique tactics and strategies in their constant struggle against the supernatural.

Chapter 3: Hunter Ties describes Avengers' relations with themselves and other creeds.

Chapter 4: Our Future presents the creed's attempt to define its purpose and destiny in the World of Darkness.

Chapter 5: New Rules offers more rules, edges and equipment for use by Avengers and perhaps by hunters of other creeds.

Chapter 6: Avengers at Large details newly imbued Avengers who are ready for play. The chapter also profiles creed members who have acquired reputations through word of mouth and the Internet.

LEXICON

As any new society or organization forms and grows, its members tend to use words or terms suited to the group's needs, intentions and identity. Such words help define the circle's purpose. The Avenger creed is no different. The following slang and phrases begin to see common use among warriors, particularly on the firelight email list. They may even catch on among other imbued. Avengers or hunters in general without exposure to such communications undoubtedly have their own terms, or they stumble on in the dark, alone and uninformed.

bruise: A ghoul, coined to describe the blue-black pallor sometimes revealed with second sight.

bullseye: A hunter who prefers to kill with sniper attacks.

crave: Used to describe a hunter's obsession with attacking a particular type of monster.

demo: A hunter with a predilection for working with explosives.

drone: A human who is ignorant of monsters and their influence.

dud: A bystander, someone who receives the call but fails to become a hunter.

echo: A member of a hunter personality cult.

fang: A vampire.

flicker: A shapechanger.

Jones: A hunter who has formed a cult of personality.

lobo: A shapechanger, usually a werewolf.

merlin: A warlock or witch.

put wood on: To kill, particularly vampires.

pyro: A hunter who tends to kill with fire.

rot: A general term for the undead.

shitkicker: A hunter inclined to engage in hand-to-hand combat, often using the Cleave edge.

smoke: To kill.

stub: A shambler.

wake-up: The act of becoming imbued.

wisp: A ghost or spirit.

SOURCE MATERIAL

There are all kinds of movies, books and comics available that capture the rage, determination and sometimes unbridled hatred of Avengers. Obviously, the following sources aren't about Avengers or fighting monsters, but some of their characters or subject matter come damn close. Just imagine monsters as the enemy.

Falling Down: Michael Douglas is awesome as an on-the-edge "regular guy" who keeps taking it on the chin in life till he snaps. That's when the shit really hits the fan, but now he's dishing it out. "It feels good to exercise your rights, doesn't it?"

Reservoir Dogs: This is the ultimate movie about regular guys who also happen to be total bad-asses. However, Mister Blond takes the cake as an Avenger out of control. Imagine that captured cop as a bruise and you're in business.

Scared Straight: Yeah, it's a weird '70s flick, but some of those inmates are fucked-up dudes. They'd be as quick to kill you for a buck as an Avenger would kill you for being a monster. Some of the harangues in this book seem awfully familiar....

Grosse Pointe Blank: If you take away the comedy, killing people as a lifestyle — and with a pen — gets pretty scary.

LA Confidential: Holy shit! If you could shatter a wood chair in your bare hands — just out of anger — you'd be an Avenger, too.

American History X: Curb stomp.



CHAPTER I: HUNTER ORIGINS

An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.

— Proverbs 29:27

WAKING UP TO THE NIGHTMARE

Subject: The Revolution Will Not be Televised

From: memphis68

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Everyone on this list and the main one keeps asking "Where did we come from. Why us? What are the monsters and how long have they been here?"

I know.

At least, I've known there were monsters since I was 13 years old.

I remember the gunshot, the air shaking with screams and dark fingers pointing to the sky, trying to reveal the source of an abomination, an inhuman creature that had killed all our dreams in a single moment.

I knew there were monsters. I just couldn't see them.

They've always been with us, since the dawn of time. Whenever human beings come together as a society, whenever we plant roots and grow toward a better future, the darkest parts of our nature come into play. Greed. Anger. Fear. We lash out at those we love, we grow tired and compromise our values, and we ultimately sink into corruption. Before we know it, all those great ideas we once had have been transformed into something petty. Why? Because they make it happen. They want us to stay weak and without hope, because it saps our strength and makes us easier to control.

I think the creatures I collectively call inhumanity ruled the Earth long before humankind, so long ago that not even ruins remain to mark their passing. Maybe they were a lot like us at first, but their dreams fell apart too and they declined into decadence and evil. There's nothing more fearsome than a soul

who has no hope, because it'll embrace anything to fill the void. We see it every day in the inner city.

The warlocks were the first. That age-old deal with the Devil, you know? When they found their hearts and minds weren't up to the demands of life, they sold out and corrupted themselves for the sake of power. But fear has a way of making the most horrible alternatives seem attractive. They wanted long life. They wanted the strength and vitality they never had. They wanted to control the world that made them so afraid. So they learned to steal one another's strength and add it to their own. They turned on one another like starving rats. Some became vampires, creatures empty of life except for what they could steal. Others simply became living dead — stubborn, petty souls trapped in decaying flesh. A few, a very few, chose the wisest course of all and emulated the beasts of the forest, surrendering themselves to the wild. But like the others, they were too grasping, like a drowning man pulling his savior down with him. They took their powers from the predators of the wood and became half-man, half-beast, always hungry for flesh, unable to control even their physical forms.

It's a sad story, but if it had ended there, the world would have been a much different place. Inhumanity was lost long before we came on the scene. They saw us in the cradle of Mesopotamia, saw the strength in our lean dark arms, and the vision gleaming brightly from our brow, and they saw in us everything that they were not. They loved us and hated us at the same time, as only a diseased heart could. And the further we spread, the more they coveted what we achieved.

We still have stories of those early times, but no one believes them anymore. They have deafened us to our deep memories and taught us to ridicule our ancestors' ways. Stories of monsters are not history anymore; they're myths. But what about the Greek gods, who

came to humans in the shapes of animals? What about the Minotaur or the Medusa? What about the Witch of Endor in the Bible, or the man possessed by a legion of evil spirits? What about the monster called Grendel and its terrible mother? Even Asian "myths" speak of animal spirits like kitsune and creatures apparently similar to vampires. Do you really think such common stories are a coincidence?

In the early days, inhumanity preyed on us openly, terrorizing the weak and fearful. But we fought them. There were hunters in those days, shaped by the times they lived in. Men like Perseus or the Jewish David or Beowulf. They had strength and power greater than their fellow men and they proved that the monsters could be slain. They were the first hunters and all of us today descend from them.

Our great failing was that we were too shortsighted. Too willing to put down the sword once the immediate evil was destroyed. There was no one with the foresight to recognize the monsters for what they were and launch a crusade to scour them from the Earth. We couldn't see past the bounds of our little villages and clans. So the monsters survived and their hate grew. If they couldn't have the glory that was "rightfully" theirs, if they couldn't make our world theirs, then they would share their world with us.

What is the quickest way to corrupt a man? Give him what he wants. Just like that. Slide it to him on a silver platter. Make it so easy that he can't help but ask for more. More and more, until he no longer knows any other way to get what he wants, and then his wants become needs. Then he's trapped. That's when he's capable of anything to fulfill his desires, no matter how depraved.

The monsters stopped fighting us and started helping us. Subtly, they put their unnatural powers at our disposal and shared "knowledge" with us. They made kings and led them to build great empires, addicting them to power. They soured us with guilt and turned it into prejudice. They dulled our minds with the pleasures of the flesh. Love became lust. Nobility became brutality. And when our ancestors saw what they had become, their joy turned to despair, which is the path to evil. They embraced the darkness because that was all they had left.

The cancer had taken root. Pretty soon no one could tell humans from monsters. The creatures had created the best of both worlds — for themselves.

THE MESSAGE

We should have seen what was coming when they nailed Christ to a tree.

I don't know about any "son of God," but Jesus was still a great man. He tried to remind us of what made us human: kindness, compassion, love. I don't think he heard a message from Heaven, just his heart. The problem was, he talked a little too openly and his vision was too far removed from the shape that society had been warped into. Jesus nearly undid the creatures' plan without ever knowing it. Looking back, I'm surprised the monsters didn't kill him a lot quicker.

People called Jesus the Messiah. He tried to share a message, all right, but what he was saying wasn't anything new. Just the opposite. He was trying to remind us of what we were like before the monsters got their claws into us.

The monsters wanted us to forget. That was their whole plan in a nutshell. Forget our better selves, forget what it was like to live without needs and fears. But Christ slipped through the cracks. He was everything we once were. He had powers no other man had. He was a hero reborn. But how did he rediscover the powers that the monsters had taken from us?

People don't ever really forget anything. Ever hear that? It's true. Scientists say we remember everything we experience

— it's just getting to those memories that's the problem. Somewhere deep inside every one of us is the blueprint for our ancient selves. Societies have been turned toward sterile science and soulless technology, and philosophy and religion have been pushed to the fringe because the monsters are trying to steer us away from our greatness, to keep us sick and weak. But deep down, way deep down in our subconscious, we know the truth, like an ancestral memory. This is not the way we are supposed to be. We are living a lie every day. There are monsters all around us, but we can't see them.

Sometimes, under the right circumstances, we can hear the call.

The words we hear come from inside us. They're the voices of our subconscious, trying to reconcile what we were with what we've become. The problem is that we've drifted so far from our origins that the truth, sadly, seems supernatural. We can no longer imagine that we could be capable of such glory by ourselves.

Jesus heard the voice of his subconscious and called it God, identifying it with the religion he knew as a boy. He couldn't help it. The monsters had put that idea into his head almost from birth — his and every other person's on the planet. Don't pay too much attention to what's going on around you — focus on some nebulous world to come.

You can also hear the message and still not get it right. That was as true then as it is today. Maybe it's your upbringing or your environment, but you can see the truth and not know what to do about it.

Christ misunderstood what he'd been shown. He thought he was preparing the way for a paradise to come, instead of waking us up to what we'd lost. When they came for him, he went like a lamb to the slaughter, thinking that Heaven waited, no matter what. The poor bastard. He even forgave them before he died. I bet they got a good laugh out of that one.

We won't make the same mistake Christ did.

WHAT ARE WE?

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: crusader17

Subject: Our Source

So many of these "origin theories" I've heard would make me laugh if they weren't symptomatic of just how much of a battle we have ahead of us. I'm not just talking about the obvious sides of the Hell War, us against the vampires and spirits and beast-men. I'm talking about the war inside our own skulls. That's the first territory we have to reclaim.

The 4 things* have colonized our minds. They don't just lurk in the sewers and out in the lonely woods. They've set up shop in our beliefs and ideas. All the authority we see them exert — on TV stations, banks, and of course on the government — is secondary.

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: crusader17

Subject: False Prophets

The book of John warns us that in the End Times there will be false prophets whose honeyed words will seek to turn the faithful from the work of the Lord.

Your humanistic witchery makes me sick, Memphis. I can't believe I once admired you.

I haven't forgotten that I owe you my life after that night in Albany. For that alone, I won't count you as an enemy. But don't cross paths with me again.

Make your peace with Christ the Savior, Memphis, while you still can.

That's all just a means to an end, and that end is simply this: *control*. They control what we see, what we learn and therefore what we believe. If you put enough violence on TV, soon no one will be shocked by violence. Enough hatred, backed by a pulsing bass beat, and pretty soon we're more occupied by our differences than our common humanity. It's the turn of the millennium and what have we got to show for it? Prejudice you can dance to!

We are living in evil times, and our enemies are nothing other than evil incarnate. Garbed in our skin, they walk among us in order to mold and shape us and make us more like them.

Then, along come us hunters.

Is it really so mysterious? Is it so strange, what we are?

We're the agents of God on Earth.

That's something no one wants to hear today. "We don't need *faith*, we have *irony*." "We don't need virtue, we have a new sport ute and some skis and a house in the suburbs." "We don't need values like courage and loyalty. Money and objects are good enough for us."

People are blind, foolish and crippled. They've been carefully taught to value only objects. As a result, they *become* objects. If you try to wake them up to anything more important, they *laugh* at you. Being good isn't cool. It's all a big joke to them, and most of us *were* them. Until we got a good look at the comedian, at least.

Now? I don't hear anyone laughing.

God showed us the truth, and the shocking thing is that so few of us can see it *even now*. Here, I'll spell it out like on Wheel of Fortune.

GOD S_{NT} S _{TO STOP TH_M}

It's that obvious, but you're all so conditioned by secular humanism that you can't see the pattern. "Awakening primal instincts?" Give me a break! I haven't seen any teenage blood sluts develop "primal instincts" when a vampire is set to tear open their necks. "Viruses stimulating our latent psychic potential?" That's like seeing a weather balloon, watching it crash, handling the silk, seeing "U.S. Weather Service" stenciled on the side and still insisting it's an alien space ship!

I don't necessarily think we're anything new, however. The Bible speaks of "mighty men" in days of old. I've knocked over monsters with thrown rocks — sound anything like David and Goliath? Don't we cast out devils like the disciples of old? See visions like the prophets? Heal illness like the saints?

This is not the first time human kind has acted in concert against the agents of Satan. The liberal left points to the Catholic Inquisition and declares it was all about greed and politics and anti-Semitism... but the only ones around who could say for sure are the monsters we hunt. I've heard feminists call Salem a "patriarchal gesture of femicide," but knowing what we know, isn't it simpler to think that it *was* just what it was *claimed to be*? Maybe the puritans *were* killing witches and the Prince of Lies has skillfully hidden the truth. After all, history is written by the winners.

To me, the greatest miracle is that God has seen fit to give these gifts to so many unbelievers. That's the biggest barrier. How could God entrust such power to such frail beings — and I include myself in that category. I know that my strength comes from the Lord. But that's always been His way. Back in Eden, He entrusted the greatest of secrets to humanity, who promptly soiled them. Even now, He offers the cup of salvation to those who would spit in it or knock it into the dust. But His grace and mercy are boundless, bottomless, and His love so great that even if all the energy of imbuing only saves one hunter soul that otherwise would be condemned, the investment is worth it to Him. His ways aren't ours. He isn't concerned with getting and spending and value and return on His investment. He'll give us the tools and hope that we choose to use them well.

Make no mistake, God wants us to choose. He could, of course, enforce His will, but then He'd be no better than his foes, our prey. What sort of universe would it be, filled with automatons grinding relentlessly down a predestined course? A grotesque puppet show, certainly unfit for a being of boundless virtue. No, we *must* have free

will. We must have the option to choose disbelief, disobedience and death. But He always stacks the game in our favor.

Read Genesis. It doesn't say, "If you disobey me, you'll suffer, you'll be sorry, you'll sweat and bleed and battle against nature that was once your servant." No, it says, "You'll die." But when we screwed it up, He relented, and He has given us cosmic breaks time and again, including sending His son to save us. Now we have another choice. We are shown the evil truth and given the weapons to battle it. It's an obvious choice, but still a choice. You can *finally* choose to see a loving and merciful God who's been there all along. Or you can look away. As always, it's up to you.

I know my choice.

WE THE CHOSEN

I remember the marches in Birmingham. I've got scars where a police dog bit my leg. I remember the dead look in the cop's eyes as he beat my father to the ground. But we kept on going, kept on protesting. _We shall overcome..._

We didn't know what else to do. The world needed changing, and we were going to do it, somehow.

You know what I mean? We've always been idealists, all of us. These days, that word's just another label to be laughed at — the symbol of the naïve and immature. It's not cool to have an ideal, a vision for the world. The world can't be changed, right?

That's what _they_ want us to think.

We always sensed that the world wasn't what it should be. We bristled at the corruption, the greed and the fear we saw around us. We knew deep down that it was not supposed to be this way. We couldn't go along with the rest. We couldn't fit in.

There were nights we would lie awake, with the frustration gnawing at our insides. The world was wrong and we had to change it if we were ever going to feel any peace. Some of us have felt that since childhood; others have come to it much later in life, but the restlessness is the key, the one thing all of us share.

We have gravitated to causes all our life, fallen in and out of countless crusades as we've tried to find some way to fight back. Equal rights, environmental rights, free speech, pro-life or pro-choice, anything that spoke to our discontent. Some of us felt called to be soldiers or policemen. Others became terrorists. The details didn't really matter. We were trying to get our hands around the throat of an invisible enemy we could sense all around us but never see.

That's why the wake-up is always violent for us. We're drawn to it like a lightning rod. After all those years of struggling blindly, we finally push through the last barriers. We finally get our wish.

Someone almost always dies. That's the final straw. The spilling of innocent blood.

For me, it was on the subway. I never took the subway, usually. By the time I got off shift at the Waldorf, it was too late for a woman to be catching the train to Harlem. It was a rainy night, really

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: willow12

Subject: Re: Our Source

Crusader17 wrote:

>Maybe the puritans *were* killing witches and the Prince of Lies has skillfully hidden

>the truth. After all, history is written by the winners.

Thank you, Travis Bickle. Next up, a man from the Church of Scientology will, for the low low price of \$500, explain that shamblers are actually outer space energy creatures from inside a volcano!

cold. I couldn't believe it wasn't snowing. There'd been a shooting outside my apartment the night before. Two boys died. I knew them both. I was thinking about two funerals, about why our young men couldn't seem to stop killing each other. My feet just started walking on their own, heading for the subway entrance. The old rage was coming back. I hadn't felt that angry in years, just sick with frustration. The whole world was going to hell, sliding a little bit faster every day. I just wanted to hit something.

There was one other person in the subway car with me. A young white girl, young enough to be my daughter. I sat about as far away from her as I could, not feeling much like talking. If she'd opened her mouth, there's no telling what I might have said in reply.

The homeless man came into the car from the end nearest the girl. He was a young black man in a ripped-up army coat and worn-out jeans. The sight of him just made me angrier. I thought about all the marches, all the blood, that day in Memphis when the best of us died. I thought about all I'd given up, throwing away my old life, my education, to fight for our rights, just so he could starve on the street.

Then I saw his eyes — dull and gray, like a corpse. His skin was suddenly the color of ashes. He smiled at me, a slow stretching of loose rotting lips, revealing broken shards of teeth. I couldn't speak, couldn't move until the thing turned and grabbed the white girl by the throat.

I'll remember that sight for the rest of my life. That picture of abomination. I suddenly understood what all those fingers had been pointing at, back in April of 1968. Dark fingers pointing at a monster in their midst.

The thing tore open the girl's throat. She kicked and jerked, and I remember the pleading look in her eyes. They were bright blue, like marbles.

I've carried a switchblade in my purse since 1973. I'd never had a reason to use it before. God knows what I must have looked like, a beat-down black woman in a housekeeper's uniform swinging a six-inch knife. But I tore that son of a bitch to pieces. The knife burned like a hot iron, and I felt like an avenging angel.

I've talked to others like us since then. The details are different, but the experience is the same. Nearly always the monster is a rot. There are worse things out there in the world, but nothing so wrong as the dead come back to life. It can't be reasoned with. It can't be held back. It can only be destroyed, beaten to pieces. The mind makes us confront these monsters first because it's the clearest way for us to understand how sick the world has become, and what we have to do to make it right again.

It's easy to get angry at others on the net who don't see things as clearly as we do. We have to remember that most of them haven't been fighting all their lives like we have, in one form or another. We were chosen long before we knew who the enemy really was.

TIME TO LIGHT A FIRE

It seems more of us are getting the wake-up every day. The worse things become on the streets, the sicker our society gets, the thinner the veil gets between us and the beasts. More and more of us are seeing the truth because I think things are coming to a head. The human race is getting driven toward a precipice. The monsters have been at it for hundreds of years, making us more and more like them. Pretty soon there won't be any turning back.

We don't have time to talk things over. We don't have time to think about other people's wants or needs. The house is on fire, and if we don't act fast, it's all going to burn to the ground. Defenseless people might get caught in the crossfire. We can't spare them any tears. Not everybody can be saved.



There has to be a reckoning. A silent revolution, breaking the monsters' hold on the world. We won't make the same mistakes as those who came before us. We don't have any illusions about what the enemy will do to us. And we won't stop with a single street, or a single city block, or even a single country. We're going to take back this Earth, one bloody step at a time, and Heaven help anybody who gets in our way.

Most of us are going to die. That's just the way it is. There are ten of them for every one of us, and they've had hundreds of years to learn how to protect themselves. Fuck it. We're all going to die sooner or later. I plan on taking as many of them with me as I can.

We won't be numbed by the evening news. We won't be sickened by the talk shows. We won't be deafened by the lies of the politicians. The revolution will not be televised.

Long live the revolution.

THE TRUTH IS HIDDEN

Subject: FWD: Situation Reports, November to January

From: soldier91

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Sunday, November 14: Tradewinds Motel, Reno, Nevada. 2320 hours local time.

The reports from Pattern 179 are bogus. There is no evidence of Messenger activity at Area 51. In fact, it looks like a big part of the base has been abandoned for several months. I was able to penetrate the site's outer perimeter and set up an observation post on a ridge with a good view of the test facilities. I didn't see any of the "luminous orbs" that Pattern 179 wrote about, or felt the telepathic "beacon" he said was there.

I don't want to say that the whole thing was a hoax. Pattern 179's story had all the right details, and it made so much sense. Maybe he made a mistake about the exact location. Unfortunately, he doesn't seem to be in Reno anymore. I can't find him anywhere.

Had another dream about the guys last night. I was back at the house in Mexico, trying to find my way out and they were standing all around me, pointing to a door I couldn't see. That's got to mean something, right? It's got to mean that I'm on the right track. The proof exists, if I can just figure out where to look.

MESSAGE FROM BEYOND

Tuesday, November 16: Tradewinds Motel, Reno, Nevada. 0315 hours local time.

Two more days and I still haven't found Pattern 179.

I did run into another hunter, a guy named Mack. He saw the sign on my bag and followed me as I walked around town. He wasn't very good at it. I spotted him pretty quick and pulled him into an alley when he got close. I thought he was one of them at first and was onto me. When he pointed at the mark I'd sewed on my bag, the tension eased a little.

Turns out he runs a used-car lot, but he's a soldier like the rest of us. He was getting set up to go after a pair of studs who'd been killing some of the local mafia boys. Mack asked me if I thought it would be better to wait and let the studs finish their business. They were monsters, sure, but they were only going after criminals. We argued back and forth about it at a bar, doing shots and trying to figure out how our lives got so fucked up.

There's gotta be a purpose to all this. Someone or something is showing the monsters to us and giving us these powers. Mack didn't have a clue. He said he was making it all up as he went along and trying to stay alive.

I told him it had to be aliens. Nothing else makes sense.

Mack gave me that look. I asked him how he got his wake-up.

He said his mother lived in a home near the edge of town. She was always calling and bitching about how she hated the place. I guess she and Mack didn't have the best relationship, and he had her put in the old folks home after his dad died a couple years ago. He wasn't proud of it, but that was the facts. Last month she stopped calling. At first he thought she'd finally settled

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Power to the People My Ass

Spare me the psycho-political bullshit, Memphis. It sounds to me like you're talking about something a lot bigger than putting wood on a bunch of leeches. A New World Order, maybe? I've heard stories about you, lady. You wouldn't happen to know anything about a riot over in Harlem last month, would you? A whole lot of pissed-off people yelling "kill the bloodsuckers" and going after any Jewish or Asian person they saw? Fifteen people died. The faces on the news didn't look much like monsters to me.

Revolutions have a way of turning on themselves, Memphis. Remember that.

In and he was going to get a little peace. Days passed, then weeks, which was weird. He decided to check on her — a first. He called the place a half-dozen times, but the nurse always said she couldn't come to the phone for one reason or another. Finally, he decided to just go there.

Something made him bring his pistol. He said he remembered how crazy it seemed, taking his gun down out of the hall closet, but he took it anyway.

There were only a couple cars in the lot when he got there. It was dark, and there was a storm coming. The building was dark, except for the lobby. When he got inside, everything was quiet — way too quiet. He said it felt like the inside of a grave.

A guy at the front desk gave him the run-around. He said the old folks had already gone to bed, even though it was still early. The attendant was acting really strange, not really looking Mack in the eye, and his voice was slurred, almost like he was talking in his sleep.

That's when it happened. There was a flash of lightning, in that moment, Mack saw down a hallway past the front desk. He said he saw black stains streaking the walls, like paint had been thrown around. The guy behind the desk knew Mack had seen it. He took a few steps back, kind of nervous, and his feet squeaked on the tile floor. Mack looked down and the guy's white shoes were covered with blood.

The attendant or whatever reached for him and Mack shot the guy. No hesitation. Mack pulled the gun from his waistband and shot the guy in the head. He went behind the counter and saw bloody footprints leading down the hall. That's when he heard the scream — an old woman's voice, pleading. It could have been his mother. Maybe she heard the shot. He ran down the hall, following the bloody footprints. The trail led to some doors. Lightning flashed again. He says he saw words written in shadow or blood across the wall.

THEY HIDE THEIR FACES BEHIND MASKS OF INNOCENCE.

He kicked the doors open. He said he had to keep moving. He was sure that if he stopped to think about what was happening, even for a second, he would have gone out of his mind.

There was an examination room on the other side, a place where residents were brought when they died. Mack wouldn't tell me all of what he found. All he would say was that his mother was there, along with several other people. She didn't look like herself at all, like something was wearing her skin.

He ran like hell, emptying the gun behind him. Lightning struck next to the building as he got to his car. He had a gas can in the trunk. The next day, the newspapers said the place had been hit by lightning and burned to the ground.

I asked why he was so determined to check up on his mother, and what made him take a gun. Mack kind of shrugged. He said he thought about that every night, but he didn't have any answers. Maybe it was his guardian angel.

No, I said. Guardian angels don't send someone into danger and tell them to pack a pistol. They're supposed to steer people clear of bad things.

He thought about that, then said that maybe God had sent him to kill the monsters. I said no way. When God wants a person to do something, he gives an order. Moses got his burning bush. Noah even got a plan for the ark.

The Messengers just open our eyes to the monsters and give us the chance to do something about it. No more, no less.

Mack said it sounded like some kind of test, like Job in the Bible.

Exactly. We're being tested. Not like Job though, because he was put through hell to see if he would lose faith. He wasn't given powers and told to kill monsters. So if God isn't doing it, who else would have the power to get into our heads and send us visions? Who else could give us superhuman powers?

Allens.

He looked at me uneasily, but I could tell he saw the truth. After a while, he said we should go looking for the rots.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

Thursday, November 18, Greyhound Bus Station, Fort Worth, Texas. 2125 hours local.

On my way to Galveston to help a fellow soldier eliminate the "Oil Field Killer." He says the creature is made of rotting skin and oil sludge. This could be the proof I need to back up my theory about the origin of monsters — and why we've been chosen to stop them.

Pollution is the unavoidable side effect of any industrialized society. Even going back as far as Rome, scientists have determined sources of serious global warming as a result of hundreds and hundreds of charcoal fires in established cities. The more advanced our tools and building materials become, the more exotic — and toxic — leftover waste becomes. Think about the chemicals our factories pump into lakes and rivers, or the poisons we bury in the ground.

Now add to that the deterioration of living conditions for most people in industrialized countries. Think about overcrowded cities and the plague of crime and drug use infecting inner cities. Think about all that human despair and misery, and what that must do to its surroundings. Sounds crazy? Can you remember a time when you went into a favorite store or restaurant, and some obnoxious asshole was in there making a scene?

Remember how it totally changed the atmosphere of the place, even after the guy left? That's the kind of thing I'm talking about.

The monsters are here because we made them. They are the ultimate expression of the pollution we're spewing into the world. Bloodsuckers might have begun as victims of a hemorrhagic virus that was mutated by pollutants, turning people into a new form of life. Rots could be the same way, driven by some kind of bacteria that resides in the thing's decaying brain.

Things came to a head back in the '40s, when we managed to split the atom. Since then, our technology has exploded at an increasing rate. Things are happening so fast we can't step back and consider the consequences of what we create. We're making more and more monsters every day. What happens when there are more of them than us?

The aliens know. They probably had the same problems when they were developing as a race and managed to overcome them. Maybe they want to contact us, but are afraid to until we learn how to control the monsters we've created. If our current technology has led to things like vampires and wotmen, imagine what we might spawn if we started working with alien technology?

So they're helping us the only way they know how. They're revealing the problem to selected people and giving us the tools to try and fix it. That's why they give us so much, but tell us so little. The responsibility and the maturity for cleaning up our world is ours alone. If we can't learn the lesson ourselves, no amount of lecturing will work. That's why they didn't just come down and tell us about each and every monster in the world. They could if they wanted to, but we have to be free to choose the right path. To learn from our mistakes and fight on, despite the deaths of friends and loved ones. We have to accept that we've been given a responsibility, and we have to honor it at all costs, even if it means forsaking other oaths or leading men to their deaths. What we're doing is for the sake of the world, for generations yet to come.

The monsters hide in the shadows and spread lies about us, calling us lunatics and murderers, deserters and traitors. One day the truth will come out and the world will see us for the saviors we really are.



THE SHARP END

Friday, November 19, Brock's Beer and Billiards, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936 hours local.

Military police showed up at the Greyhound station and started searching the buses. I hit the latrine before getting on board, otherwise they would have had me. Guess someone must still be looking out for me.

Money is running low. Hopefully I can hook up with someone like Mack in the city and get some help. Otherwise, I might have to steal what I need to continue operations. I hope it doesn't come to that.

Someone on hunter-net has started calling us on this list Avengers. I don't think that's necessarily true. We aren't out to avenge anything—we brought this all on ourselves, after all. Besides, I've heard some pretty sentimental stuff on this list, too. It makes more sense to think of us—the ones this list is intended for, anyway—as soldiers. People who are willing to put life and limb on the line to stop the enemy by whatever means necessary.

That's the common factor about us. Young or old, man or woman, we all understand that the monsters must be destroyed, and we're willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen. End of story. Everything else is just a matter of details.

Take the threads about the "burning ones," for instance. They're arguing about why some of us supposedly see ourselves surrounded in flames when we get the wake-up, and why most don't seem to. I've even heard some stupid shit about these fire people being "true" crusaders against evil, or how they have some special destiny. I didn't burn, Crusader 17 did, according to him. Does that make him better than me? I don't think so. He is certainly more devout than I am, and Christian belief is full of images like angels with flaming swords. But I think some of these people think they see themselves on fire because they expect to see flames. That could apply to everyone from fundamentalist preachers to environmental activists to equal right protestors. They see themselves that way because they see their mission or purpose that way—all self-righteous and indignant. It doesn't make them any better or worse than the rest of us. And while I do believe certain of us have been singled out with a special role to fulfill, it has more to do with bringing us all together than splitting us further apart.

What we have to remember is that there are other hunters out there who are just as committed as we are, but whose abilities and attitudes are different from ours. Obviously, their outlooks are important or the aliens would never have imbued them in the first place. I don't believe that these other hunters are failed warriors (or whatever you care to call us). The aliens are very careful in who they select. If they can't outright read our thoughts, they can certainly analyze our personalities as well as any therapist could. Take a hunter like Bookworm55 and all his weird ideas about trying to understand the monsters' viewpoint. If the aliens are smart enough to see that someone like Crusader 17 would dedicate the rest of his life to wiping the things out, they sure as hell could guess that Bookworm would be more interested in establishing a dialogue.

Maybe the aliens could make mistakes. There's no reason to expect them to be perfect. But why would they give these "mistakes" different powers or abilities that suited their different personalities?

See what I mean? There must be more to all this than just killing monsters. If that's all it were about, there wouldn't be any other hunters out here except us soldiers. There's a bigger picture we need to keep our eye on, instead of just muddling (or outright attacking) hunters who don't agree with us. If monsters and their actions were so easy to stop, we wouldn't need the Messengers at all, would we?

It all makes a lot of sense when you look at the imbued as different elements of an army.

An army's purpose is to confront and defeat the enemy. But not all the members of an army are rifle-carrying "grunts." There are medics who take care of the injured, engineers who create defensible positions and support the army's main effort, intelligence troops that determine priority targets, and so on. Without all of these supporting elements working together, the grunt can't do his job very well.

We're the killers, the sharp end of humanity's stick. We're focused on one thing only: killing monsters wherever we find them. If we can learn to integrate our efforts with other hunters, we can leave them to cover the details they do best, and let us concentrate on fighting the war. Over time, the more hands we can bring to bear on fighting the monsters, the more we might learn about one another and the plans the Messengers have for all mankind.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

Am I the only person here who is comfortable with the word "prey"? That's what these things are, to us. At least, that's what they're meant to be. Doctor119 talks about his "subjects" and Bookworm55 is so entangled that he refers to them by the names of their human disguises. But what we're really talking about here is our targets. No other interpretation makes sense. We were called, we were given the ability to see them as they are, and we were given power with which to smite them. It is the clear intent of the Heralds that we hunt down these creatures. We're not supposed to get to know them—if we were, wouldn't we be able to hear the voices of ghosts, as well as see their shapes? If we were meant to negotiate, why were we given powers to destroy? That's not very conducive to discussion. Bookworm55 seems to think we're meant to "align" ourselves with these monsters. But if that was our reason to be, why would the Messengers have shown us these creatures in their ugly, true forms?

Even as I type these words, I can imagine a reply from Bookworm. No doubt it will be couched in his normal rhetoric of self-pity, but it will come down to this: since our perceptions came from the Heralds, how do we know they're true?

We can't "know", of course. There is a certain amount of faith involved, but even more, it requires common sense. Perhaps what we perceive with the sight are not these creatures' "true" forms. So what? We know for sure that what we see "without" the sight is a "lie". They hide—even their staunchest supporters among us cannot deny that.

Why hide if they have nothing to fear from exposure? Why hide unless they "gain" something from concealment? I've seen them feed on blood and flesh. I've seen them leave a wake of carnage that gets blamed on "gangbangers" or "flash floods" or even "ball lightning." I've seen them get away with murder because they hide. I don't care what the truth is behind their masks. I don't care if they look like wolves or angels or something so horrible that any human would be struck mad to see it. I know them by their actions.

Goodness and purity have nothing to gain from secrecy. Only corruption hides itself away.

VAMPIRES

Doctor119's much-vaunted scientific detachment betrays him. He thinks there are two kinds of rats, the ones with the black stain and those without. He speculates that there's two strains of a similar virus causing the same "symptoms."

Doctor, the "black stain rats" are vampires. The black stain is nothing more or less than the visible sign of their inky sin.

These creatures are, I think, the obvious portent of the pending Armageddon. They are the masters, the ringleaders, the fountainhead from which all the other evils flow.

The vampire is the very image of the anti-Christ. Our Lord lived a life of poverty before He selflessly died for us, spilling His holy

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: hunter9

Subject: ET go home!

Give me a break, Soldier. Turn off the TV and hit the library. There are legends of vampires and werewolves going back thousands of years, a long time before recorded civilization. So your whole idea of "supernatural pollution" is a little lame.

Stop wasting bandwidth on the sci-fi movie of the week and stick to something useful, like how to get phosphorous-tipped bullets or weapons that don't break when we use our power on them.

blood so that we might have life eternal, free from sin. These vampires style themselves the lords of this world through their control of politics, media and banks. But where Christ died for us, they cheat death to rob us. Where Christ gave His blood, they steal ours. Where Christ offered eternal, perfect life, these beasts offer a prolonged, debased living-death. Where Christ came to remove sin, vampires offer a veritable buffet of iniquity.

I strongly suspect their origin lies with the Crucifixion. Perhaps the first of their number was Pontius Pilate, or one of the hypocrite scribes who condemned Our Lord. Perhaps there's some substance to the myth of the undying "wandering Jew."

I know that the Agnostics and unbelievers among you are now smirking up your sleeves and muttering your "post-modern" platitudes about how anything can be made to relate to anything else. Others will accuse me of conflating fact with myth. Before you judge me harshly, open your eyes. We all know that *facts* about vampires can save your life. By learning the *meaning* of these facts, you may find more facts to aid you in the hunt.

Fact: Vampires are destroyed by the sun.

Meaning: The sun represents Christ. When Christ was crucified, the sun went dark. Even "science" tells us that the sun gives life to the Earth and all that walk on it. That's why sunlight hurts vampires; they are death made flesh, just as Christ is life made flesh.

Fact: Vampires are killed by a stake through the heart.

Meaning: The wood of the stake represents the wood of the cross. The flesh of the vampire corresponds to Earth, to this physical world. The stolen blood that animates the body comes from we humans and stands for us — trapped in a world of sin and death until released by the cross.

Fact: Vampires exhibit animalistic features — the eyes of a cat, fur. I've even killed one that literally had a cloven hoof in place of its left foot!

Meaning: This is the outward sign of the Great Beast. Satan has always been associated with animals, going all the way back to the serpent in the garden. Human beings, being made in the image of God, have free will and can choose between evil and good. Satan and the other fallen have no such choice. Like animals, they do not have moral agency. Evil is their only choice.

SHAPECHANGERS

The origin of these creatures is less clear. While there are certainly many folklore stories about people taking the forms of animals in order to work mischief, there isn't a lot of Biblical precedent.

Vampires were once human, but I'm not sure shapeshifters ever were. Perhaps they're literally demons — fallen angels condemned to hide among humans when they can, and to wear the debased forms of beasts when they can't.

That said, there are many factors in common between vampires and shapechangers. Vampires have been observed changing into animals and displaying animal features. Both monsters display vast strength and speed, and both prey on humanity. Maybe shapeshifters are simply those vampires who have become strong enough to resist the damage of the sun, but I am inclined to think they are something different. For one thing, they seem to thrive in wild places, unlike vampires (who were once human and who must stay close to their human victims).

This affinity for unturned spaces makes perfect sense if these beings are indeed fallen angels. What, after all, was the crime that expelled Satan from Heaven? It was envy of human status and position. This planet was given to us to rule as we see fit (see Genesis 1:28-30). In seducing us away from obedience in Eden, Satan usurped our rightful place as rulers of the Earth. In the course of this seizure, he poisoned that which he stole, which is why wild places are dangerous and violent today, filled with illness and predatory animals. Who serves to protect these festering Satanic dens? Satan's fellow envious minions.

Make no mistake: Satan is lord of this world, and his beast-shaped seneschals defend the black hearts of the wild against any human

attempt to reclaim what is ours. I'm sure this list's liberal huckers will castigate me for what I'm about to say, but what if the shapeshifters are behind the so-called "Green" movement? After all, the doctrine that we should obey the planet (instead of the other way around) is not only anti-Bible, it's strongly linked to pagan religions like Wicca. Perhaps it's all a dodge — a clever ploy to get us to shun technology. Whatever your politics, you must admit that (next to the sword of faith) guns are the great levelers in the Hell War. It would be quite a coup indeed for our demonic enemies to trick us into giving up a tool for victory.

SHAMBLERS

Rats are the walking dead, expelled from the earth instead of lying peacefully. The obvious biblical parallel is Lazarus, but these are clearly as much a vile caricature of that inspirational story as vampires are a parody of Christ's death and resurrection. Certainly these creatures don't have anything good in mind when they stumble forth from the grave, generally with murderous intent. They universally seem to be souls who clung to some unfinished business — a connection to this world of corruption that was so strong they couldn't rise up to Heaven when they died. Like all sinners, they reject a perfect afterlife for the tawdry blandishments of this world. Only this time, it's *literal*. Instead of being dead souls in living bodies (a condition that I assure you is sadly common — possibly it's the norm), they reside in bodies as dead as their spirits.

Revelation predicts that the dead will rise (Revelation 20:12-13), but can it be that we're living in the End Times *now*? John of Patmos was assumed to be writing figuratively, and it's possible that we entered the time of prophecy too self-absorbed with our TV and pornography to even notice. Perhaps so few people were worthy of Rapture that when they vanished... their numbers weren't significant.

It's possible. It's just possible that we are God's scourge to cleanse the world in preparation for the new Jerusalem.

Or maybe Hell is simply full.

ROTS

While many of the walking dead are simply mindless, staggering drones, there is something of an "upper class" among them — the so-called "rots" who are neither mindless nor clumsy. There are many similarities between rats and vampires — enough that Doctor 119 has confused the two. But I think the differences are significant. Rats do not need to physically feed off the blood of humanity, and they are not vulnerable to sunlight. These are two major points of separation between them and the anti-Christ template of a vampire.

Oracle171 described her vision of these beings as divided spirits who've made a pact in order to walk the lands of the living. If she's right (and I have no reason to doubt her), what we may be looking at here is a classic Faustian bargain. Imagine a dying sinner. Without the grace of Christ's love, he cannot face eternity with equanimity. To him, there is no life beyond this one, so he naturally wishes to extend this as long

From: crystal23

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Soldier91 is right!

Keep your sarcasm to yourself, Hunter9. You just show your ignorance.

You can say Soldier is crazy, but the fact of the matter is he's the only voice on this list who's actually trying to get us to work together instead of forming all these petty cliques.

To be honest with you, I really don't care why we've become what we are. It doesn't change the fact that there are beings out there — creatures, people and chosen — preying on the defenseless. There isn't room here for politics or dissension. We have to come together.

as possible. On the point of death, when this soul is most vulnerable and desperate to remain attached to the body... *something* approaches him. Something tells him that he can return to the world, can tie up those loose ends, can put to rest that unfinished business. What sinner would resist? If the price is letting a spirit of the pit have use of his reanimated body on occasion... what of it? People have sold their souls for less, much less, than the chance to avenge themselves on a philandering spouse or corrupt business partner.

SPIRITS

A lot of people seem to believe that the invisible spirits we see are the ghosts of the living. I'm not totally convinced. I was always taught that when you died, you went to Heaven, Hell or Purgatory — sticking around the mortal realm was not an option. First Samuel 28 does, however, describe the infamous Witch of Endor calling up a spirit of the dead. In fact, the spirit she calls is one of the Lord's prophets, and he presumably was not uneasy in his grave. So, perhaps it's possible for the spirits of the dead to be brought back into this world. If this happens, one might want to look for a witch or warlock nearby as the cause, since I see no rationale for ghosts returning under their own power.

On the other hand, many of the spirits I've seen bear only a sketchy resemblance to humanity. Their human form is only sufficient to make their grotesque features all the more terrifying. I've seen spirits with tentacles, fangs — even wings. Why would I think such a thing was a dead spirit? It matches more closely the image of a demon or imp. Those spirits that claim to be the dead may only be making a play for our sympathies.

SORCERERS

Why do people need elaborate theories to explain the powers of these beings? I can explain it all to you, and without recourse to hand waving about "psychic powers." It's simple. Satan is the lord of this world. When humanity fell from grace through disobedience, the natural world was corrupted and came under the spell of the Corrupter.

When I see people with unnatural control of the world, I have no doubt in my mind the wellspring of that power. What you call "luck" is simply the subtle wiles of Satan, at work in a way he has had millennia to perfect.

I'll readily admit that my experience with black magicians is less extensive than that of others on the list, but let's examine some previous accounts.

Even Bookworm55, who numbers these beings as his friends, admits seeing his ally "Purple" use supernatural power to harass and steal. Traveler72 attests to seeing them torture and kill using rats and fire. The one I took out was involved in Satanic rites — I saw her out in the woods, leading a group of women in devious rituals, complete with pentagram, animal sacrifice and filthy nakedness. I suspect that if I hadn't intervened, those women would have eventually made their pact, signed the Black Book or whatever, and wound up with the mark of a devilish colluder.

As a word to the wise, I spotted a second "merlin" in Atlanta. I couldn't tell precisely what was wrong with him, simply that he was wrong — but he clearly was a priest. He sensed my gaze and knew that I had found him out. He fled. I followed, but the congregation rose at that moment to interfere. I haven't been able to find the hypocrite since. I'll send my relevant information to anyone who wants it, but be warned — there are whitened sepulchers that conceal gross iniquity behind their pleasing surface.

OTHERS

Reaper201 isn't the only one who's seen "one of a kind" enemies. Just recently, I came across something that didn't fall into the categories we've tried to establish — that didn't even come close.

It's in Arizona and I call it "The Name Eater." It's snowed into a small town. In a way, it seems to *be* the town. To the sight, the entire town

has a sort of fog over it. The people there are inside it, somehow partaking of it. Or maybe it is inside them. In any event, they're linked.

On the surface, the town seems fine. The people aren't resorting to cannibalism, they aren't mindless drones, they aren't deviants wallowing in sin. There's only one odd thing. They're forgetful.

It took me a week to catch on. (I stayed in a different, bigger town about 40 miles down the highway — I wasn't going to let my guard down around whatever it was.) The people there were forgetful, but in a strange, unanimous way. The example I saw was a fellow named (I think) Peter Sloane. When I first visited, I noticed that a few people seemed to have trouble remembering Peter Sloane's name. I wouldn't have even noticed, except that Sloane seemed so distraught and disturbed when the local butcher couldn't recall him.

The next day, even more people were having trouble remembering him — I asked specifically. When I visited him, he seemed pathetically grateful that I was even looking at him. I told him he could come away with me, but he was terrified at the very idea. I remember, he said that he would "fade away even faster if he wasn't there to remind people."

The third day, Sloane was running around in the streets naked, screaming his name. People were reacting about as you'd expect — running away, trying to get away from him. Finally, the police came and hauled him off. I went to the jail to talk to him, and the deputies said they'd never heard of him. I finally managed to get to see him and he was hysterical. He seemed very upset that the cops hadn't even bothered to change him. They just chucked him in the drunk tank to "sleep it off."

The next day, Peter Sloane was gone. No one remembered him at all. But they were having trouble remembering Judith Meeks' name.

There's no way to tell how many people the Name Eater has erased. A few in town seem to have an inkling that something's wrong — they can tell from inference where people have vanished. Empty houses. Abandoned businesses. No one remembers there ever being a plumber, though Meeks was sure she hadn't had to call out of town to get her toilet fixed. No one could remember who they elected sheriff. The whole police department was deputies.

I don't know what's happening there or why. Whatever the Name Eater is, creature or black magic or simply some malignant phenomenon, it seems to use its victims to victimize each other. I couldn't find a way to strike at it, isolate it or free people from it.

I left when I realized that people I'd been speaking to for three days had no idea who I was. I'd think that a stranger would stand out in a little place like that, but they didn't remember me at all.

The Name Eater may be the most disturbing thing I've seen since I was imbued. Anyone who wants to try to tackle the thing, contact me, but I think it's going to need a lot of study before it can be eradicated. Bookworm, you might be able to do some good here, unless you decide it's a wonderful thing when those people cease to exist.

Subject: Crusader's Name Eater

From: memphis68

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Crusader, did you ever see the post "Doctor's Report" or something like that? This doctor in Africa saw something that sounds kind of like what you describe — an influence covering a whole town. In his case, it was just making things easy for creatures... kind of like how some trees are immune to disease and serve as hosts, making other trees sick? I'll try to dig it up or find a reference for you. Maybe what you saw is a more mature version that doesn't need to use "lesser" creatures to do its dirty work.



CHAPTER 2: THE HUNT

*And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war
against thee, then thou shalt besiege it*
— Deuteronomy 20:12

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

There are as many different ways of going about the hunt as there are members on the list. You can take down a flicker from a variety of angles, but you can get killed for trying just as easy. The bottom line is, no matter how you approach the hunt there's a right way and a wrong way. The right way gets the job done, leaves you alive and makes one of them dead. The wrong way makes a mess, gets the wrong people hurt, reveals our existence at large and leaves you a corpse.

Now, far be it for me to tell you how to do your job; I have enough to worry about without being concerned for your skin. However, I've heard a lot of hot air and a lot of bragging on the list lately. Exchanging war stories in order to share information or boost morale is all well and good, but in the long run honesty and humility are better for us all. You may think you sound like a big man when you exaggerate your victories to us — claiming you bested a changer in strength or killed 10 vampires in a night — but step out of your ego's shadow and think about what those tall tales do. They spread false information. They give other hunters unmerited confidence. They can lead others to bad decisions and foolish confrontations, and there is little room for error in this endeavor. In the Hell War, your first mistake is all too often your last.

If it makes you feel good to win the admiration of newcomers with puffed-up stories of valor, consider this: They can't admire you any more when they're dead or broken by the enemy. If that isn't enough to inspire some humility, think on this: To those of us who know the real score, your attempt to look like a hero makes you a jackass.

I can't stress enough the need to approach the hunt realistically. Our prey are so well served by such vain self-aggrandizement

that it makes me wonder who's really entering these posts. We know the main list has been compromised in the past. If you've read something that sounds too good to be true, you may want to regard it as a clever piece of enemy propaganda.

Several people on the firelight list and the main one have asked me to share my tactics and give the benefits of my experience. I've been reluctant to do so for several reasons. If the list is compromised, I endanger myself by revealing my methods. Secondly, on a more personal note, I don't want to look vain or arrogant. That's why I initially refused. But now, the freight of foolishness on **our** list has led me to reconsider. I just have to hope that the advice I give helps the people who need it, instead of warning the beasts.

AWARENESS

The first step in killing monsters is identifying your target. This means a lot more than simply flicking on the sight and spotting something that doesn't belong. Like most of you, I've felt the urge to simply attack — to rid this blessed world of a cancer as quickly as possible. Many of us have even survived such impulsive acts, often while the Heralds were present. You can get away with it once, maybe twice if you're lucky and tough. But attacking blindly is a suicidal habit. Wrath is one of the seven deadly sins for a good reason. When going to strike the Devil, do not pick up the Devil's tools.

When you spot one of the hidden fiends, don't let on. About the only thing worse than letting a beast spot you when you make a blatant attack is letting a beast spot you when you **don't** make an attack. If you get "made" by one of the monsters, get away as fast as you can. Get backup if you know someone in your city. If you can, get someone else to extinguish the monster, because it **will** be ready for you.



Being spotted doesn't have to be a total disaster. If you've screwed up, you can still turn your perceived weakness into strength by acting as bait. A monster may underestimate you if you let yourself be seen, and may be overconfident as it tries to hunt you down. If you have backup, you can lead it into an ambush. But this tactic is very risky and should be tried only if you have implicit trust in your fellows.

All in all, it's better not to get spotted in the first place. Then you have time to stalk your prey. When following it, make sure you don't use the same vehicle (if possible). If you're stalking on foot, dress differently, wear a wig or dye your hair (the wash-out dyes are particularly useful), change your appearance with makeup—do whatever you can to present a different face to the beast.

If you don't have recourse to these tools or opportunities, there are other tricks. The simplest and most effective is teamwork. The more people you have trading off a tail, the less chance that any individual in the team will be spotted. Communication on a trail is useful, but it can also be a double-edged sword. Some creatures are just as tech-savvy as you and I. Secure your communications. Use code words and phrases. If possible, use phrases that have a double meaning. For instance, in one hunt, my partner and I tracked a rot through a shopping district. We easily communicated information with the ruse that we were shopping for our sister. Our prey was "the gift." "I'm looking for something in Nieman Marcus now.... Wait, I think I see something better across the way by the sunglasses store." Even if we were monitored, we would seem to be nothing more than average consumers.

Know thine enemy. Learning everything you can about that particular target is the first phase of a successful hunt. What does it look like? What kind of car does it drive? What are its habits? What does it habitually do?

Many of us have powers that are very useful for this element of the hunt. Take the smoky trail, for example. If you can place this upon the creature, you can trace its movements an hour after it passes by, drastically reducing your chances of being spotted. Deeper sight also seems extremely useful, though I would caution against relying on it too much. Even with the information it is supposed to provide, there is wide variation between monster types.

The longer you can afford to observe before striking, the less chance that you miss something crucial, and the greater the chance you spot a chink in your enemy's armor. Omit no detail. Anything could turn out to be significant later. I think the smartest thing Doctor119 does is keep a notebook on each of his "subjects."

SURPRISE

The ultimate purpose of the information you gather is to give you the element of surprise. You don't want to confront a given creature more than once. You want to set up a single, decisive encounter in which you maximize your advantages and minimize those of your prey. The single biggest factor contributing to this is surprise. A prepared monster is easily twice as dangerous, usually much more.

To put it quite simply, the key to surprise is attacking when your opponent does not expect it. Approach from a direction that lets you not be seen. Do the deed when there's no one around to hear.

One good tactic is the "cry wolf" approach. For example, let's assume your prey is protected by a sophisticated burglar alarm. Rather than try to circumvent it, find some subtle way to trip it. Set the alarm off, then go away. Alerted by the security system, guards will show up or the prey will prepare for battle—but find nothing. A thorough search ensues, to no avail. The ruckus is dismissed as a false alarm.

Wait a few hours. Trip it again. Repeat this process until the alarm is no longer alarming. I tripped a rot's motion-detecting perimeter alarm six times one day, and he eventually turned off the whole system. That night, I walked in unannounced, set his house on fire and ran him down with a truck when he fled through the back door.

You can also take a lesson from "Psycho" and attack when your target is preoccupied and distracted. Naturally, the fine art of creating a distraction can be of tremendous benefit here, but beware creating an *alarming* distraction. That only makes the creature alert. A boring or mundane distraction is far preferable. For example, a colleague and I discovered that a bloodsucker in Louisiana was in the habit of visiting the car wash every Friday night before going hunting. A simple ruse — posing as EPA functionaries there to inspect the caustic chemicals used — got us access. We hid behind the access door until we saw the vampire's BMW enter. Once it was covered with soap, it was a simple matter to get around to the sides and wedge the doors shut. The vampire was unaware until we put a sealed glass bottle of powdered sodium on the hood. As the vampire fumbled with the seat belt, I shot out the windshield. Then my partner fired into the jug, blasting sodium into the car's interior. By that point, the car wash was on the rinse cycle. For those who don't know, sodium reacts violently with water.

This little narrative illustrates the importance of planning. We had to be prepared to deal with the clerk at the gas station. We had to have a weapon that would be dangerous in the waterlogged setting of the car wash. And we had to make sure the cartridges in our pistols were sealed so that they would fire even when wet. It worked. The vampire never had a chance, because she never expected mortals to attack her at night, and because she never expected to burn to death in a car wash.

ISOLATION

Isolation can be as valuable as surprise — in some cases, more so. Smart and powerful creatures surround themselves with servants, and even the less powerful tend to band together for protection. Be like the wolf in the field: Isolate the weakest member of the herd and kill it off first. Continue picking off stragglers until the strongest is forced to face you alone.

A mastermind creature is often like the center of an onion. Layers of lesser lickspittles must be eliminated before you gain access. When peeling this onion, do it either quickly or very slowly. If you can take out all of a vampire's blood slaves in one morning, you'll be well prepared to fry their master in the light of afternoon. But this is not usually feasible, due to sheer numbers or to preparedness. In that case, you want to pick one off here or there, then leave the creature alone for a few weeks or even months. Let it think the first death was an isolated incident. Then take another or two, and fade back. Work on another beast for a while. Force your prey to take more steps to defend itself. If you're lucky, the creature becomes so preoccupied with immediate protection that it squanders its strength recruiting novices to protect it. Once you've stripped it of experienced bodyguards, you can make a clean sweep of the newcomers.

EXIT STRATEGY

Someone once said that failing to plan is like planning to fail. I'd like to add that failing to plan for failure compounds failure. In plain speaking, be ready to get out if things go wrong.

I don't recommend going solo unless you really know what you're doing, so I'm assuming there's a group. Have at least one spare vehicle to escape in, and make sure everyone has a key or knows where a key is hidden. Make sure there's gas. Make sure there's a backup gun and make sure it's hidden *well*. Plan a

rendezvous point. Rehearse how you're going to get there. Make sure you've got trash bags, the big strong kind, both in the car and on your person. That way an injured person won't spread forensic evidence all over the car. Be ready for injuries — bandages, towels, a tourniquet, sedatives and painkillers. Be ready for pursuit, too — vampires in particular can be dissuaded with fire. Be *very* careful with molotovs, though. They are unstable and can get you in serious trouble with the law.

Finally, have a story. Prepare it beforehand, practice it and be ready to alibi each other. Stick to it no matter what if the police start asking questions. Your story should explain any injuries that occur. Burns, bruises and cuts are much easier to justify than gunshots, of course — especially if you don't own the gun in question. The story I've used most often is the "hunting trip gone wrong." It can explain a wide variety of injuries.

"I told Ted not to pour gasoline on the campfire to get it going!"

"Ron was chopping up some wood for the fire when the axe head flew off and went right into Don's arm!"

"We were crossing a barbed wire fence when Jim's gun got tangled. It went off and hit Joe. The gun? We were in such a hurry to get Joe to the hospital that we just cut Jim's shoulder strap off and left it — we couldn't untangle it."

The story itself matters less than the unity of the tellers. Don't rehearse particular phrases, but agree on the general outlines. Cops generally don't want to investigate any more than they have to.

If, however, you get shot with a bullet that matches those found at a crime scene, get out of town fast. You should have fake identifications to show people, if that's possible.

THE LAW

In the eyes of the law, we are criminals. The "crimes" I've committed are probably sufficient to keep me imprisoned for the rest of my natural life, even without considering the elimination of blood slaves. Off the top of my head, there's arson, breaking and entering, several degrees of assault, flight across state lines, discharging firearms within city limits — not to mention violating state stalker laws.

From: gardener67

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Huh?

Hey gang, bet you weren't expecting to hear from me again, eh? I can't explain it myself. I thought I was totally fucked when I saw that the judge was a blood slave. I mean, I figured they'd rake me over the coals! But any time there was any evidence of the weird shit that happened — like the bloodsucker throwing cars around or bursting into flames when I dragged him into the sun — the judge threw out the evidence. He wound up lecturing the prosecuting attorney for being so sloppy, then made a big speech about how he thought I was probably guilty but had to be released in the interests of strict procedural justice!

So, I'm out on the street. My name is mud, but I'm free. I'm still kind of scared, though. While I was in my cell, the judge came to see me all alone. He looked really pissed off and said, "We're letting you go this time because you didn't kill anyone important, and because we can't legally nail you without revealing too much. But we'll get you. Don't ever doubt that."

I'm not saying this to brag about my "street flavor." I'm saying it to help you realize what you're going to have to do. Face reality: Obedience of the law of God makes it necessary to break the laws of man. Speaking for myself, I know which one always gets enforced in the end.

When one commits crimes, one must be prepared to deal with the law. The easiest way is to avoid the mess entirely by having no provable connection. If you can get into town, do the job without being seen, and get out without leaving forensic evidence, you have little to fear from the police. That's a tall order, of course — especially for people who refuse to give up their mundane security to act as God's soldiers. These "weekend warriors" are far more at risk from Satan's infiltrated "justice" system than those of us who have fully accepted the call. But even those who have chosen a particular area as their "turf" can take measures to protect themselves.

First off, avoid being seen. Unless your prey is nocturnal, hunt at night when you're less likely to be spotted, identified or (worst of all) captured on film. Disguise yourself — even things as simple as sunglasses and a wig are quite useful. Perhaps you've read of the "tattooed terror" in Florida — a murderous thug with a large yin-yang tattoo in the middle of his forehead? He's one of us, though I don't think he's on the list. His disguise is simple, but remarkably effective. When people see a big symbol in the middle of your face, that's all they remember — especially now that the tattoo itself has come to inspire fear. No witness has been able to coherently describe his face, his height or his eye color. The only thing that stays in their minds is his emblem. Naturally, the "tattoo" is completely removable.

The matter of eyewitnesses is not necessarily a problem, as the beasts' own "defensive coloration" can work against them. Drones who see a ghost or a demon's true form are likely to become so hysterical that they can't give any coherent testimony at all. Faced with such "Rashomon" circumstances, the police are often forced to give weight to *any* story that's consistent.

And yet, the best disguise in the world won't help you if you leave forensic evidence. Fingerprints are the most obvious problem, and gloves the most obvious answer. I like thin leather gloves. Some prefer rubber, which are disposable and arguably provide better protection against infection, but I dislike the tackiness and resistance. Some people go so far as to coat their palms and fingertips with rubber cement. This sounds good, but I'd be worried about a "second skin" of that type coming off at the worst possible time, leaving behind a perfect impression of the print. Doctor119, of course, has discussed surgical methods of removing fingerprints. That's well and good, but if you *do* get caught, a lack of prints is only going to make the police more certain they have a likely suspect.

Fingerprints are not the only forensic pitfall, nor even the worst. If you leave a fingerprint, that's only trouble if you're already in the fingerprint registry — if you've ever been in jail, the military or government service. Blood is worse. Fingerprints wipe off, but blood tends to seep, and if you go to a hospital for an injury, it's not terribly hard for them to match up the times and compare DNA. Hair and skin can be trouble, though it's much easier to think up excuses. Remember that hair and skin only place you at the scene at *some* time. Blood indicates that you were injured there, especially blood in quantity.

That's without going into footprints and tire tracks and clothing fibers. Rotate your tires often, rent cars under assumed names, buy lots of new shoes, or resole them if you wore them on a muddy day... There are countless things to consider, but mainly it boils down to being aware of your presence and your traces. Stick to well-trod areas where your footprints can vanish beneath countless others. Drive on main roads. Watch what you wear.

If worse comes to worst, it can be possible to escape through legal chicanery. I'm aware of one fellow in Glasgow who was apprehended after hacking the head off a shambler in broad daylight. At his arraignment for murder, he insisted on an autopsy of the "alleged victim." To the surprise and consternation of the court, the doctor unequivocally declared that the deceased had been dead for months before its supposed murder — that it had, in fact, been embalmed. The defense cobbled together some story about a gruesome prank and the defendant's "hysterical over-reaction." The court had little choice but to buy it.

After all, the alternative would simply be too bizarre to contemplate.

LONG-TERM PLANS

It's hard to have faith. When you walk by a grade school and see that our children are being educated by inhuman things, pursuing some unguessable agenda... when you see ghosts in a church, trying to distract the living from offering praise to the Lord... when you realize that they own your government, that they control what you know, that they influence what you *think*... and when you realize that most people would fight to keep things just the way they are... it's hard.

Sometimes I feel like all I'm doing is spitting on twigs in the middle of a forest fire. We can do our individual actions, we can save our own souls, we can resist... but I want more. I want a cleansing rain from Heaven to scythe away all the filth and corruption, to drown the hungry flames, once and for all. Even a world left in ashes — a world of filth — would be something to build off. We can build nothing now, not when *their* angry fire is turning more of our world to ash with each passing day.

We can win battles. But are we winning the war?

Some of you have proposed a great meeting and have gotten the expected rebukes. "Gather in one place and present a unified target? Are you mad?" This list is not the way to do it, but perhaps the symbols are. If we could meet as one giant inexorable force, we could act in the open. We could *prove* our claims were true, overwhelming the doers and shapechangers by sheer force of numbers. Together, we could make a noise too loud for them to silence — a noise so loud that it would finally wake up the rest of humanity.

If we could bring it into the open... realize Jared Shoemaker's dream... there would be no stopping us. The fangs could not hide, nor the spirits flee. Instead of striking from cover, we could boldly collect them, plucking them from their places of power, isolating them from their victims, cleansing the world of their menace.

Who's to say it can't happen? We just need a place to start.

I say Jerusalem. If we reclaim the Holy City, we can start to fight God's War outward from the heart of the world.

Who's with me?

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: willow12

Subject: Re: Long-term Plans

Crusader17 wrote:

>Instead of striking from cover, we could boldly collect them, plucking them from their

>places of power, isolating them from their victims, cleansing the world of their menace.

Kind of a "final solution," huh? I was wrong. This guy isn't Travis Bickle. He's Herman fucking Goering!

PERSONAL INTEGRITY

I've talked at length about the physical and tactical aspects of pursuing the hunt. Now I'd like to spare a moment for something we probably don't discuss as much as we should. It's not anything tangible, but I think it's probably the most important aspect of the hunt.

I'm talking about personal integrity.

God chose each of us, for whatever reason, for this mission. We were handpicked to fight this war. This knowledge should give us the strength to fight it with honor. It should see us through the dark times. It can, if we only accept it.

Some of you say I'm like a broken record, squawking out the same rusty hymn over and over. My reply is that if you listened to me, I'd stop repeating myself. We have all been offered a great gift — proof of God's existence and mercy! Yet only a fraction of us have embraced all the ramifications of what we've seen.

You may be able to call flame without a match or halt demons with a word or heal with a touch, but if you don't have faith, you've only been distracted by fireworks and special effects. Until you believe, you can never put on the whole armor of God and truly fight His war on two fronts — not only against the physical demons, but against the sin in our own hearts. Until we are pure, how can we purify the world? We can't. How can a corrupt being heal its own corruption? Again, we can't. But we don't have to. We have the power of God within us. If we accept it, we cannot fail. But know that as surely as the sun rises and sets, if we do not accept it, we can never succeed.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

If anybody's been watching CNN the last couple of hours, the "right-wing extremist" that the police shot in Duluth was one of us.

I told that dumb son of a bitch to quit his job, but he wouldn't listen. Thought it was the perfect cover, driving a truck all over the country. He could run down leads posted on the net, put wood on a fang or two, and get out of Dodge. Well, someone finally tied that big red Peterbilt to enough crime scenes to get the cops' attention. I bet the fangs didn't even have to lift a finger. They just sat back and let nature take its course.

You people need to get it through your heads that this isn't a fucking TV show. We can't keep on with our daily lives and go hunting monsters in our spare time. If you aren't absolutely committed to bringing these bastards down, then you're as good as dead. You and everyone you've ever cared about.

Remember that the monsters have had thousands of years to set the world up to their liking. We're literally living in enemy territory, every minute of every day. We've got a lot more in common with the Viet Cong or the IRA than your typical Great White Hunter, and you have to adjust your methods accordingly if you want to stay alive.

God, this takes me back to the '60s. All those eager young brothers thinking they could fight the Man but still go home to their beds every night. It doesn't work that way.

Listen up. I'm going to tell you the same I told them, all those years ago. The principles are the same ones that revolutionaries have used since ancient times. Follow them without hesitation, and you might live to see the final victory.

GET A GRIP

You live in a world ruled by monsters. They own the politicians, the badges and the banks. Everything you hear or see on the TV is what they want you to know. They are feeding the corruption in DC and the gangs in the inner cities. They haunt us, hunt us and herd us, and they've done it as long as recorded history.

Do you understand?

People don't have time to think during the wake-up. It's only later, when the adrenaline is gone and they're washing off someone else's blood that things start to sink in. They fought a monster. They beat the thing to pieces with a pipe! That kind of thing isn't supposed to happen. It can't be possible, yet they have the cuts and bruises to prove it. And that's when they start to lose their minds.

The monsters have been playing with our minds for hundreds of years, first using religion, then science. They made us believe in a world where they could not possibly exist, until the idea was as natural as breathing. But we learn the truth.

The thing is, it's not the fact that monsters exist, but the implications of that existence that turn people inside out. When a fundamental truth like that gets busted, the mind starts wondering about what other truths might also be wrong. A part of your mind starts doubting everything, even the smallest details. One guy I know in Long Island said it got so bad he spent four hours in his kitchen obsessing about whether or not the light really goes out when you shut the refrigerator door.

The problem is a little easier for us warriors to handle. We've always known the world was messed up in some fundamental way. In fact, for some of us, the existence of monsters is a relief because it gives us something tangible to strike at. That doesn't mean our minds aren't struggling to cope with reality, it just means that the conflict gets pushed deeper into our subconscious.

The danger is that our minds can have blind spots. A cop who becomes a crusader might never think about the police being controlled by the monsters. A part of his brain has latched onto that assumption as a shred of stability in an increasingly fucked-up world. Next thing he knows, his partner turns up as a bruise and he gets shot in the back during a domestic dispute.

Most of us are on the edge of sanity. I'll be the first to admit that there are times I wish I'd never learned the things I know. Everybody has to come to grips with the truth in their own way. Some people see it all in terms of religion, and that's fine as long as they don't go forcing their beliefs on everybody else. Some people blame it on aliens. Whatever. If it gives them the strength to hit the streets every night and go looking for the monsters, then more power to 'em. Like I said, it's easier for us warriors because most of us have been working on pet theories all our lives.

If you think you're a little bit crazy, then you're right. Don't try to pretend that the world hasn't turned upside-down or you're going to get blindsided. Make up whatever wild-ass rationale you need to get through the night and don't look back. Don't take anything for granted. You're not in Kansas anymore.

BURN YOUR BRIDGES

Anybody out there remember Stalker32? The man was stone cold, a demo who could make a bomb out of anything. Know how the fangs caught him? He bought two propane tanks at Wal-Mart using his credit card. We don't know exactly who did it, but someone recovered enough pieces of his last bomb to trace it back to the store. The bloodsuckers knew where he lived inside 48 hours. They were waiting for him when he got home from work the next night. They made him skin his wife and kids, then left him for the cops. He cut his own throat before the patrol cars arrived.

The enemy didn't take the world away from us by being stupid. The monsters, especially the fangs, are clever as hell, and they've got more resources than we could ever dream of. Even if they don't have their fingers in the local or federal police, they damn sure have the money to hire private investigators or top-notch information services. I've heard of hunters who use their own vehicles during raids, or who let their faces

be caught on surveillance cameras. One idiot even wore coveralls with his name and the logo of his garage on them! Sometimes we hunt and kill solitary monsters, but most of the time we deal with enemies that have loyal followers and allies. Even if we're successful and we destroy our target, there is always the chance that something is going to come looking for whoever pulled the trigger, if only for the sake of self-preservation.

Don't use anything on a hunt you can't get rid of immediately. Pay cash for weapons at pawn shops or get them on the street if you have the connections. If you need a vehicle, buy something cheap that you can ditch. Don't leave any shell casings at the scene of a hit. If it can't be avoided, drop the gun in the river as soon as possible. If you're going to do the deed with some kind of bomb, use the simplest, most common equipment available. Do not let the enemy see your face during a hit, and do not expose the operation to witnesses unless you are prepared to kill them as well.

If the monsters can find you, they will.

The smartest thing you can do is drop out of sight. Quit your job and clean out your accounts. A job is someplace where co-workers can recognize your face on the evening news, or where a monster can get your home address, social security number, even your bank account numbers. And if the enemy has serious connections (or you've made a big enough reputation with the cops), they can freeze your assets or steal them themselves. Either keep your money in your pocket or put it in another account, preferably under another name. If you've got a decent amount of savings, you can live off that for a while and operate pretty invisibly as long as you keep transactions in cash.

Once the money runs out, you have two options. Take odd jobs here and there, like in warehouses or on construction crews where bosses don't ask too many questions for day labor. Or you can live off the land. By that I mean take money from the monsters themselves. Stubs sometimes have watches or other jewelry on their bodies, and I've seen fangs that lived like kings in fortified penthouses. I put wood on a vampire out in Rochester and sold his BMW on the street for five grand. That kind of thing doesn't happen every night, but you only need one or two hits like that to keep hunting for months.

The hardest thing we have to do is say goodbye to our loved ones. Never forget what happened to Stalker32. We don't have friends or family anymore, we have vulnerabilities. Anyone you've ever cared about can be used against you. There were rumors last month about a hunter who was putting false info on hunter-net because his sister had been taken by vampires. The next time you smoke a stub or drag a vampire into the sunlight, imagine having to do it to your own husband or son. We've got enough nightmares without having to deal with something like that.

I don't call this a revolution for nothing. This is a war, with all the horror that goes with it. Sacrifices must be made if we're going to win. We can only lead a normal life again when the last of the creatures is gone.

THE SILENT WAR

Everyone by now knows about Jared Shoemaker. A lot of people on the list will tell you he was a fool, but the fact is, every one of us has thought the same thing he did. If we could expose the monsters to the rest of humanity, we could just sit back and let the army take care of the rest. The beasts wouldn't stand a chance. Of course, as Shoemaker learned, it's not that simple.

Hell, even with everything that's happened to us, it's hard to accept a world full of monsters. Other people can't see them, no matter how hard they try. Even if we could convince them, how would they fight? Who would they shoot at? How the hell would we keep them from getting mind-controlled or wetting their pants in sheer terror?

The fact of the matter is, the rest of the human race is not equipped to defend itself anymore. Keep in mind that it took us years of passion and anger to wear away the blocks in our heads and let us touch our true natures. There's no way to do that on a large enough scale to make a difference. And without his own wake-up, the average pylon is just putty in the monsters' hands.

This is why we can't waste our time trying to show them something that they have no way of understanding. Anyone who tries winds up like Shoemaker — hustled off to jail, and later a convenient "accident" while trying to escape. For the same reason, we have to do everything we can to keep our hunts out of the public eye. What would they see, after all? A bunch of people trying to kill a normal-looking man or woman. They might call the police, try to help the "victim," or at the very least be able to provide police with descriptions of the attackers. I know a bullseye in Chicago who was stalking a lobo that for some reason spent time at the local park. Had a nice long shot set up, a good sight — and then some shoe salesman at lunch saw a reflection off the scope. Naturally, he lets out a yell and the lobo just disappears. The bullseye never got another chance.

The temptation is always in the back of your mind to force a monster to fight back in public and betray himself, but that kind of thing almost never works in our favor. Even if a monster tries something supernatural and there are witnesses, the mental block that hides monsters prevents gawkers from remembering anything very clearly. You, on the other hand, will be remembered very well. Avoid the temptation. Hit monsters in or around their lairs or lay a careful ambush in a fairly isolated place. It reduces complications and gives you more freedom to act.

A LIFE OF CRIME

I would be willing to bet that 90% or more of the world's criminal activity is owned and operated by monsters. Why? Because it's a source of money and power in every major city. With the right connections, it is easy for something like a fang to surround itself with a private army.

Thing is, a careful hunter can use the underworld for a lot of the same things. It's risky, but an effective way to finance and equip a hunt on very short notice, and with little chance of anything that the authorities can trace.

The hard part is making contact. If you already have a name on the street, using it has a price. On one hand, you've already got the reputation, so people will take you seriously. On the other hand, you are a known quantity. If you've got any kind of serious status, chances are the local beasts have checked you out in the past. If you need to make a name, my suggestion is to hit the streets where the action is and hook up with someone who's either dealing drugs or girls. Don't bother trying to buy the product; they'll think you're a cop. Offer to do them a favor. Ask them if they could use some protection. They might decide to put you on the spot and give you some really outlandish job. Take it, if you think you can pull it off. Nine times out of ten, they're going to ask you to go after another crook, probably a rival dealer or pimp. No big deal. If you're successful, you might even make off with whatever money the victim is carrying, and you've taken one less human parasite off the street.

Once you get the dealer's confidence, you're in. Get to know the streets. Learn who does what and for how much. Chances are you'll find plenty of prey while you're at it — mostly fangs. You'll have to pick and choose your targets carefully, but if hitting someone looks too risky, you can always post the info on the net and let someone else take the job while you maintain your cover.

The fact of the matter is, we become criminals and fugitives from the moment we kill our first monster. There's no reason not to take advantage of every opportunity open to us. I'm not saying

deal drugs or pimp whores. But our abilities, if used subtly, would put us in demand as soldiers and enforcers, generally going after other crooks. The monsters of the inner cities have gotten rich by pitting brother against brother. There's no reason we can't turn the tables and get ourselves rich. In fact, if we could set up our own organization, we could funnel guns and money to imbued all over the country. All we would need is a little manpower and some patience. New York would be a perfect place to start.

TURNING BACK THE TIDE

Monday, November 22. Shaka74's apartment, New Orleans, Louisiana. 2215 hours local

Tonight we're going out on a different kind of hunt. There's a crusader out there poisoning prostitutes, and we're going to stop him.

From what Shaka74 tells me, a lot of the bloodsuckers run prostitution rings here in the city, taking in runaways and addicts and keeping them as a kind of stable to feed themselves and their allies, plus making money on the side. Lately, the hookers are turning up dead. We've found out that one of us from out of town is giving them huge doses of thiazine, apparently in hopes of passing the drug to the monsters, then hitting the fangs while they're down for the count. I don't know if the plan works or not. I do know that it kills the poor kids who get the drug.

The test that the aliens have given us is subtle. The monsters exist through the psychic pollution we spew into the world. They breed from murder, hate and misery. We've been given the power to stop them, but to do that we've got to commit many of the same acts that caused the monsters to exist in the first place. The most important lesson we have to learn is not *what* to do with our powers but *how* and *when* to use them. We have to be responsible for everything we do.

The greatest strength — and weakness — of our kind is that we are so focused. When we lock onto a monster, we don't quit until it's dead. That kind of win-at-all-costs attitude sometimes leads to committing what some soldiers call "acts of expediency." Basically, it means we put our morals on a shelf for the sake of getting the job done. We can't allow that to happen. We have to stand for a higher code of conduct. By that I don't mean we wear a big Son of a Bitch chest. There need to be rules of warfare that keep us from losing sight of why we're fighting in the first place. Otherwise, we risk becoming exactly like them.

These are the rules I believe we must follow at all costs:

We will not endanger innocent lives. Our whole purpose is to protect humanity from monsters and their influence. As it stands right now, mankind and the monsters are locked in a spiral of violence and corruption. If our actions allow civilians to be killed or injured, we contribute to this spiral, we don't stop it.

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: cop90

Subject: First-Degree Murder

Memphis68 wrote:

>available. Do not let the enemy see your face during a hit, and do not expose the

>operation to witnesses unless you are prepared to kill them as well.

Just so everyone is clear on this, what Memphis is advocating is the cold-blooded murder of defenseless people — people who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We are not monsters. We will not allow ourselves to >become< monsters. Memphis, I swear to God, if you ever pull any shit like that in my city, I'll throw you in jail myself. The same goes for the rest of you. If you cross the line, you'll find me waiting on the other side.

We will not resort to crime against civilians to further our goals. I realize this is much easier said than done, but we can't make people suffer just so we can get the things we need. There are alternatives. I've eaten in soup kitchens and worn clothes donated to the homeless. Anything I pick up can be a weapon, from a pipe to a good piece of oak. The only time I ever stole anything was when I needed money in Fort Worth. I found a chicken hawk who'd latched onto some girl from Mississippi and followed them outside. He may not have been a monster, but he sure was doing his part to choke the world in fifth. Whoever he was selling these kids to, it made him a lot of money. I split it with the kid and put her back on the bus.

We will not use civilians in the hunt for any reason. Ever. They don't belong with us. All we do is get them killed. Don't ever make this mistake, because it will haunt you for the rest of your life. It's not their test. We should not put it off on them.

We will take care of our own. This shouldn't need explanation. We don't sacrifice people for "the cause," we don't abandon people to the monsters, and we use every means available to liberate captured hunters. We must remember our own humanity. We're all in this together, regardless of our beliefs. A call for help should always be answered.

Maybe you believe in all of these rules, maybe you don't. If the manifesto on the firelight website is any indication, we all have some serious opinions about how we hunt and why. The biggest strength of hunter-net is that it lets imbued from all over the world come together to communicate and share experiences. We should be able to hammer out a personal code that protects people but is still grounded in common sense.

That said, we have to accept responsibility for our fellow hunters and enforce this code when it's broken. Those of us with a strong drive to separate the guilty from the innocent should turn that drive into policing our own kind. I propose letting them review instances of crimes committed by the imbued, and letting them pass sentence, so long as the punishment fits the crime.

We might be forced to kill our comrades. I don't like the idea at all, but we have to stand for something, or everything we try to accomplish is just going to make the situation worse.

Shaka says it's time. When we find the poisoner, we'll tell him to leave the city and warn him that his actions are going to be spread on the net. If anyone reports poisonings occurring elsewhere, we'll have to take action.

I never dreamed that I might have to kill one of our own kind. But I'm not going to let us turn into them. No way in Hell.

COMBINED ARMS

Wednesday, December 22. Descent88's apartment, Nashville, TN. 0500 hours local

Haven't been able to write any reports for a while, but I've finally seen my theories put to the test, and they work. Hunters with different abilities and philosophies can work together as a team, and we're 10 times more effective than when we act alone. Were there disagreements? Yes, many of them. Were there arguments? Yes, sometimes at the worst possible times. But when it came right down to it, we made it all work.

Descent had made contact with a loose collection of hunters in the city, sharing information and occasionally working in pairs when they found themselves on the trail of the same beast. This time Descent had found what he believed to be a coven of warlocks operating in the area, and for the first time he was trying to put together a large group of imbued to go after them. He asked me to join in because the team needed warriors, and I had military experience.

There were five of us. Besides Descent and me there was a woman who was some kind of local artist, a young guy who had a lot of connections in the city and access to some serious money, and an older man who said he'd been a cop before the world turned upside-down. No one used their own names. We used colors. Instead, like in that gangster movie, Descent called himself Red. The woman was White. The rich guy was Brown. The ex-cop picked Blue, grinning like it was some sort of joke. I took Green. No one wanted "Yellow."

All we knew about the monsters was that several children had gone missing in the area. Descent thought warlocks were involved because a local farmer had reported seeing a bonfire in some woods at the edge of his property. The farmer called the cops, but by the time the police showed up, whoever had set it was long gone. They did find dozens of bare footprints in the dirt, though, and a patch of ground that was soaked with blood.

Descent thought a coven of merlins had taken the kids and were sacrificing them for some kind of ritual. Blue said he didn't see any evidence to support the idea. The kids could easily be runaways. White said it was possible that the blood the police found might have come from animals, or even if it was human, maybe it came from the warlocks themselves — no bodies were found, so who was to say they were killing anybody? Does anyone know about merlins having to kill people to use their powers?

We argued back and forth for hours. Blue looked so frustrated. I thought he might pack up and leave then and there. Finally, Brown, who hadn't said a word the entire time, suggested we at least go out and take a look at the site and see if we could find any clues ourselves. Since no one seemed willing to take charge, I stepped in and tried to set out some priorities: investigate the site, learn what we could, and if there were witches involved, we would go after them. Everyone agreed on that much, or at least they were too tired to argue any further.

We got to the area just after full light and looked around for clues. Blue had the most experience at that kind of thing. He said flat out that there was nothing. Then Brown started talking, almost to himself. In this weird kind of voice, he said he saw darkness, a blazing fire and people in robes chanting in a circle. They had a young boy — and one of the robed ones slit the boy's throat. They filled a cup with his blood and took turns drinking it, then carried off the body to a van and left.

Descent looked like he was going to be sick. We asked Brown how he knew all that. The guy just shrugged his shoulders, saying it was something the angels had given him. Blue looked pissed and I thought he might throw a punch, but White cut in and started asking for details about the cultists and their van. She talked Brown through it for almost 15 minutes, and managed to come up with most of a license number. Blue said he could check the number with the DMV. He was sure Brown would be wrong. Turns out he wasn't.

We got an address from the license plate and started watching this huge brick house in an old section of town. We saw a number of people come and go. Both White and I could see they were monsters.

Back at Descent's apartment, we tried to figure out the best way to kill the warlocks. That was when the fighting really got bad. Blue was all for stealing some dynamite from a construction site and blowing the whole place to shit. Descent and White jumped on him, one of them saying the children had to be rescued and the other telling him that we couldn't be sure all the warlocks were necessarily evil. I said flat out that they drank a kid's blood and deserved a bullet in the head.

Finally, Brown settled things, oddly enough. He said the only way we were going to be sure of anything was to get inside the house and see for ourselves. White calmed down after a bit and said she could get inside without being seen. We didn't know what the hell to make of that, but it was her skin.

No one had any idea how to kill a merlin. Bullets sounded fine to me, but Brown thought we had to spray them with salt or something like that, because he'd read somewhere that salt cancelled out magic. Blue and I went out to his car to get his guns, while Brown and Descent started pouring salt into a bunch of plastic bags.

We got to the house and White slipped out of the car. She took a cell phone with her and hid in the shadows near the porch. After a while, a car pulled up and a couple of warlocks got out. We watched as they went up the porch. White fell in behind them like she belonged there. No one said a word. We expected to hear her scream any minute.

Everybody jumped when Descent's phone rang. White was in the cellar. She'd found the kids. We told her to meet us at the back door and let us in.

Descent insisted we get to the kids to get them out. I checked the safety on the gun Blue gave me, and caught the look in his eye. In that moment, we quietly agreed what would be necessary if things went wrong.

Things started going to shit before we even got through the back door. Brown kept trying to push the bags of salt on us while Blue and I were trying to figure out the best way to sweep the kitchen and the rooms beyond. When White showed up to open the door, we all pretty much stumbled inside.

A guy came running into the kitchen, right past White. Brown yelled and threw a bag of salt in his face. The guy snarled — and started to changel.

We were fucked.

Subject: Screw You

From: memphis68

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Soldier, laws are for the enemy, you idiot. There are no rules in war. If you try to force them on me, you'll get a bullet in your head. Got it?

They weren't warlocks, they were flickers or something. The thing backhanded Blue across the room and Brown started yelling about silver or some shit even though that's for lobos — and this thing was no wolf. Descent threw out her hand and yelled something. I just start shooting. The monster staggered back and fell. I think I fumbled for another clip. It was like I was back in Mexico and we were all going to die.

White ran out of the room and I followed her. We wound up in a hall. One of the monsters ran right past her and knocked me on my ass. People were running and shooting all around me. This thing changed too and clawed the shit out of my chest. I screamed and the thing's head explodes. It never saw White coming.

By the time I got to my feet, we were the only ones in the hall. There was an open door leading to the basement, and a lot of screaming and gunshots coming up. When we got down there it was all over. Two more of the things were dead, and Blue looked like he'd been through a wood chipper. The kids were all okay, the monsters put hoods over their heads, so none of them saw our faces. We left them there and called the cops from the upstairs phone, then carried Blue back to the car. I figured the old guy wouldn't make it, but Descent put her hands on his injuries and said they would heal, making it almost sound like an order. Whatever it was, his bleeding stopped. By the time the cops showed up at the house, we were 10 miles away.

That was almost a week ago. Everyone has patched themselves up and gone their separate ways since. I figured that things might have gotten ugly over Brown's fuckup about the "merlins," but nobody said a thing. I think we were all grateful to be alive.

Everything nearly went to hell, but the point is, we got in there and saved those kids. Brown may have screwed up, but without his "vision," we never would have found the kids in the first place. Without White, I know for a fact that I would be dead right now. Just like Blue owes his life to Descent, it all proves that when we pool the forces that the aliens have given us, we can be unstoppable. Instead of ignoring one another by sticking to a single approach, we need to develop tactics that make the most out of our diverse abilities. Other hunters' powers are just as effective as our own, and sometimes theirs make ours stronger.

Like I've been saying all along, we're all pieces in a big puzzle. It's time to put them all together and see what we're capable of.

STRATEGY

Don't get this confused with tactics — tactics are specific actions you use to accomplish a goal, like putting a stake in a fang's chest or setting up a long-range shot on a flicker. I'm talking about strategy, something that nobody on this list seems to think matters. Strategy is how we carry out the hunt on a large scale, and that's something that soldiers seem to have some trouble understanding. We get so caught up in choreographing the kill that we fail to see it as just one move in an ongoing war. We've got to have objectives, a plan that keeps us strong and leaves them off-balance. There are some things you need to consider before you go out looking for prey.

PICK YOUR TARGETS

Don't go rushing full-bore at the first monster you see. You can't afford to be haphazard about this. What if the beast has got followers? What if he's part of some bigger group, and you're just going after some low-level flunkie? You've got to think about

these things, because if you don't work out all the angles on a kill, you dig your own grave. I understand that the longer you wait, the greater the chance that the bastard is going to go out and kill someone else. Keep this in mind: If you stick your neck out and get killed, who's going to take care of the other monsters out there, still stalking and killing people? We can't turn this into a war of attrition; the monsters will beat us, no question. I said it before and I'll say it again, this is war. Sacrifices have to be made. If a couple of drones have to die while you set up your hit, it's tragic, but it's worth it if the monster ends up dead and you're free to hunt the next one in line.

When you spot a monster, take your time. Scope the creature out. Follow it when it's hunting, if you can. Find out its habits and where it makes its lair. Watch to see if it has followers and identify their habits as well. If the beast has a phone, tap it. Learn who or what the creature interacts with. Is it part of a pack? Does it mess with human organizations, and if so, why? There are some hunters who believe that bloodsuckers have an alliance of their own. They definitely have an interest in making money and power, and one fang I hunted held controlling interest in a powerful company.

The point of all this study is to learn where the monster fits in the inhuman environment, and what the reaction might be once it's been killed. Will others try to find you and get revenge? Will the nature of its human disguise cause the police to aggressively investigate its death? I have identified a rot in New York, for example, who owns a powerful publishing firm and has a well-developed disguise as a philanthropist. The thing lives on a huge estate outside the city and has the cops eating out of its hand. I still can't figure out the best way to get to the creature without the law turning the city inside-out looking for me. If you're a hunter and you get arrested in NYC, you'll never make it to trial. Trust me on this one.

More importantly, if you're patient and watch closely, the creature might lead you to another, more powerful target. This doesn't happen as much with stubs or wisps, but merlins, fangs and lobos definitely have a kind of master-apprentice relationship. If we can identify and kill the leaders in a city, it might leave the rest that much easier to hunt down. Like I said, strategize. Ideally, it would be worth it just to sit back and stake out a town or city for up to a year, just gathering information and figuring out who runs who. Once you had all the details, you could call in as many hunters as you could reach and make a surprise attack, hitting all the key figures at once. Anybody remember the Tet Offensive in '68? Read up on it. That's a classic example of what I'm talking about.

Learn to prioritize. Don't jump at the first monster you see. Conversely, don't be one of those hunters who get a crave for one specific type of beast. Go after the ones that have the most capability to stop you and the other hunters in your area. That means fangs or warlocks, from my experience. Why? Because they're more organized and they have the most resources at their disposal. I've seen flickers in the city, but they don't seem much interested in anything going on outside their gangs. Wisps and stubs don't much think past what's right in front of them, so I'd save them for last.

If you think this sounds cold, you're damn right.

USE YOUR HEAD

Sometimes the best way to smoke a monster is to corner it in an alley and blow it to shit with a bunch of shotguns. That's definitely the exception to the rule, though. Most times the monster is too well protected or just flatly too dangerous to get that close. But you have an advantage, if you're careful. If you don't tip your hand and let the monster know



BRUCE 99

you're out there, you can find a way to outsmart it. Crusader may believe that guns are the great equalizer, but they're not. Brains are, and history has proven it time and time again. The monsters may have freakish powers, but the fact is, most of them were once human and they still think like human beings.

People develop habits. They develop routines, because it just makes life easier. Monsters, believe it or not, aren't any different. They stake out regular hunting grounds, go after a specific kind of prey or come and go from their lairs at specific times. Keep in mind that these creatures have been invisible and in charge for centuries. They aren't used to being hunted and their senses have gotten dulled. Use that to your advantage.

Take the fang I smoked in Rochester. Another rich guy, and used to his comforts. Typical bourgeois setup — big house, walled property, three puppets that kept the place clean and drove him around, and a couple of dogs to prowl around. Pretty tight setup. The fang was driven into the city every night, hit the art museums, then went to a private club to stalk. Some nights he met other fangs, some nights he didn't. He hung out in crowds and limited his time on the streets to a few seconds between car and building. Out in the city, he was always alert. His senses were incredible. The driver always stayed with the car, standing outside even in the rain to make sure no one got too close. He headed back to his lair a comfortable two hours before dawn and entered the cellar directly through a pair of steel-reinforced storm doors in the back.

So you ask me, where was the fang's weak spot?

After I'd watched the beast for almost a month, I worked out a plan. Near dark, I settled into a spot behind the back wall of the property, and waited for the fang to come out. He popped out of the cellar right on time and headed for the waiting car. I listened to the Beemer crunch down the gravel driveway, and I leapt the wall. Getting my 50-year-old ass up and over was the hardest part of the whole thing.

Dogs are dogs, even when they serve a fang. They followed the car up to the front gate. I ran like hell for the back door. I had two guns. One was a .45, the other was something called a lockpick gun. Law enforcement uses them when they need to get through a door in a hurry. The downside is it usually damages the lock, but I figured the fang wouldn't notice: He went in through the cellar door, remember?

I had the door open in a few seconds. From there it was just a matter of killing the servants in the house. That took a few minutes.

From that point, I had the rest of the night to do the job.

When the BMW showed up before dawn, I was watching from the kitchen. The car pulled up, just like clockwork, and the fang slid out like a snake. He looked well-fed and relaxed, and why not? He was back in the safety of his lair. While the servant put the car in the garage, I watched the beast go to the cellar doors, pull them open and disappear inside. From the kitchen, I heard the bastard slide the heavy bolts home from the inside, then a huge, hollow coughing sound as he went down the short steps into the cellar — and tripped the firebomb I'd left under the stairs.

Naturally the driver came running. Naturally, he couldn't get through the storm doors. He was so panicked he didn't stop to wonder why the back door wasn't locked. I shot him twice as he burst into the kitchen.

The dogs came after me as I headed for the garage. I had to shoot them both, the poor things.

What is the moral of this story? Everybody has their habits and their blind spots. Use them. Playing shitticker with a monster just gets you killed sooner or later.

DON'T HOLD BACK

I got lucky in Rochester. The fact of the matter is that there are no perfect plans. I could have gotten stuck up on that rear wall or the dogs might not have gone after the car. There's always something that can go wrong.

Sometimes pylons get in the way. You can't let that stop you.

Monsters have no problem with human shields. What does it matter to them? I've heard of fangs, even warlocks who got tipped to a hunter on their trail, and started keeping company with drones, figuring on a little extra insurance.

You have to remember that people are slaves. We used to be like them. They still exist in bondage, kept as cattle by the monsters. Sparing them so they can continue their slavery doesn't do them any favors. If they knew the truth of their existence, they would probably thank you.

If you have to think of them at all, think of them as martyrs. Every revolution has them. It's tragic, but their sacrifice gives us strength. They give our efforts meaning. Let them die so hundreds of others can live free.

I know that goes against everything society believes is right. Remember, monsters are the architects of society. They have put these ideas in our heads to weaken our resolve. They don't have a problem with ruthlessness. They sure as hell don't play by the rules. It's all a game to them, one they have been playing with us for hundreds of years. It's time to stop playing along.

Everything we've been taught growing up has been put in our heads for the purpose of making us easier to control. Let it go. Rise above it. Set our people free, even if it's in death. Then the monsters will know we aren't going to be stopped by anything.

SPECIFIC STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

With experience, we begin to recognize that the creatures we face have horrific powers — and Achilles heels. Of course, learning this at all means surviving to digest the lesson. Instead of being digested. At risk of compromising what advantage I have gained, I'll share what I've learned thus far in hopes that it will strengthen us as a whole. Be warned, though, that our knowledge of the beasts is far from comprehensive. We don't know enough to call a spade a spade, and that lack of information can get us killed in a heartbeat if we don't plan for success **and** failure.

SHAMBLERS

In some ways, shamblers are the simplest of our prey. I don't mean to imply that they're weak by any means — but while killing them requires effort, it's not necessarily **complicated**. The key to killing shamblers is simply damage. Lots and lots of damage.

Physical robustness is the hallmark of a shambler. Do not expect it to stop after a bullet through the heart, or even through the skull. They must be reduced to immobile parts before they stop, and that means getting up-close and dirty; being a "shitticker." Many creatures can, with some preparation, be snuffed from a distance. Not shamblers.

Their other great strength is numbers. You rarely find a lone shambler. They seem to rise in groups. Coupled with the need for proximity to get a solid kill, this makes them a sticky tactical wicket, indeed.

However, their strengths are far from insurmountable. They are offset by equally potent weaknesses, the most important being stupidity. They don't think much, so they are easy to trick. They are single-minded, so they're easy to lead — when you're their target.

My favorite tactic for shamblers is to lead them into a trap. This is not terribly complicated, since their single-mindedness tends to fixate on a common object — often an individual who

harm them in life. If you can get to this person, you can use her as irresistible bait. Shamblers will follow a "designated target" just about anywhere, never mind how illogical. Using this tactic, I've led them into car compactors, underneath cargo nets full of bricks, onto a boat that was then cast adrift — it would almost be comical if I hadn't seen the carnage they can wreak. (Be warned: They can't drown. After I sank the boat, they came out of the harbor half an hour later and left me with scars that I still have. Just because they aren't as clever as a nighthowler or strong as a skinchanger doesn't mean they can't kill you just as dead.)

If you can't lead a shambler pack into a trap or ambush, you may want to isolate individuals for disposal. One of our South American friends reports tremendous success with a low flung bola. It wraps around the shambler's legs and knocks it over, and the creature's native stupidity keeps it from freeing itself. Thus, the immobilized shambler is left behind while the pack moves on. This makes it fairly easy pickings.

By now you should have the idea: Don't confront a shambler pack head on. A direct assault is *their* preferred strategy. Maneuver them into areas where you can confuse, ambush and harass them. It takes a long time to wear one down, but if you concentrate on the arms and legs, you can render individual shamblers unable to attack until you come back and finish them at your leisure. (I personally like to shoot out their legs, then toss a bottle of gasoline on them and ignite it with a tracer bullet.)

While bullets don't simply stop a shambler (the way they put down human beings), they're not completely ineffective. Think of a shot to the chest as a delaying blow and you get the hang of it.

Rots

Rots are like lone-wolf shamblers, only with brains, perception and speed. As the icing on the cake, they take even *longer* to put down and they seem to be able to heal themselves at will. Be very, very careful.

The hard way to kill one is simply to deliver so much harm that you overwhelm its ability to recover. One person with a rifle is not up to the task.

Thankfully, rots generally act alone. This means it's much easier

to "gang up" on them. On the downside, since they can pass for human and are often found in the hearts of cities, an ambush has to be planned carefully to avoid police attention. If you opt to go the direct route, I recommend a network of two to three snipers with clear firing zones. Ideally, these snipers should be in different buildings, so that even if the rot pursues one, the other two are not threatened and are able to fire on it as it attacks.

After snipers open fire and weaken or distract the target, bring in some kind of Sunday punch. If you ambush it in the street, hit it with a large, fast, durable vehicle. (Make sure the vehicle is untraceable: A rot will leave a large dent in the hood, I assure you.) You have to have a good driver doing the ramming — unlike shamblers, rots are *fast*. Another way to finish it off is with a bomb of some type. A final option is to find some way to trap it. In one instance, a series of three shooters was able to drive a rot into a patch of Everglades quicksand. As it struggled toward shore, we were able to pepper it with shotgun blasts until it succumbed.

There is an alternative to overkill. It requires fewer people, but it's risky in its own way. Every rot seems to have a peculiar type of enforced sentimentality. As we've noted with ghosts, there seems to be some credence to the notion of a haunted chalice or cursed relic. Perhaps these items serve as talismans for their demonic pacts. In any event, rots, like ghosts, seem to draw strength from familiar objects and locations. Generally, rots have a prime object — the strongest link between their aborted half-life and the world of the living.

Descent88 claims that "kidnapping" this object and either destroying it or isolating the rot from it results in a steady degradation of the rot's physical form, ultimately destroying it in a week or two. Naturally, the rot is hardly sanguine about the loss of its link to the living world. In the two cases Descent has described, the rots would stop at *nothing* to recover their link. Furthermore, the links themselves seem to partake of a rot's supernatural robustness and are consequently



difficult to destroy. Nonetheless, it's far simpler to destroy a tough inanimate object than to destroy a tough rot that's trying to dismember you.

Descent has a good reputation, so I'm open to his claims, but I'd like to see them substantiated. Has anyone else had success with this approach?

If it is true, these objects could be rots' weakness. But like I said, this approach brings its own risks. Identifying the object requires close inspection of the rot, which is far riskier than long-range surveillance. Then there's the matter of seizing the object and avoiding the rot long enough for separation to terminate it.

Myself, I'll stick to guns and trucks. I know they work.

VAMPIRES

The vampire's greatest weakness is daylight. They fear fire and can be killed with a stake through the heart, but daylight reduces them to ash. It's a beautiful thing.

Other weaknesses you've heard of — inability to cross running water, crosses, roses, holy water — probably do not work. I've heard many faithless comments about how the failure of a cross "proves" that there's no God. To my thinking, it only proves that, for some, there's no faith. Perhaps holy water is only as good as the priest who creates it, and I've seen myself that the church is not impenetrable to these things. Furthermore, despite the testimony of Ripsaw101, I am quite confident that vampires *do* cast reflections in mirrors. Too bad: It would make our job easier if they could be spotted so simply.

Their strengths are legion. They are faster than us, stronger than us, they can break the wills of the unwary and they are tremendously resistant to injury. But their biggest advantage, I think, is their ability to create puppets.

The unholy bond between blood puppet and master seems to allow the slave to partake in the strength and endurance of the master. More importantly, it makes the slave utterly the creature of its master. I believe it is possible to wean puppets from their addiction — the alternative would deny free will, and if even vampires can renounce their evil, why not their servants? But it is a rare slave who forsakes this alliance.

Puppets protect their masters by day. That's why they're the key, because in daylight the vampire's strength and speed and power are nothing.

Vampires have daytime hideouts. Find the place, crack it open in the morning and you have all day to pry the creature out.

Another vampiric weakness is their predilection for vice. Good, decent people rarely become blood slaves (unless tricked into it, and even that gets the vampire an ambivalent servant at best). This means many puppets are criminals. Evidence given to an honest cop can do more to strip a vampire of his defenses than a month of hit-and-run harassment. But be careful: The police are their favored targets for blackmail, mind control and spiritual bondage.

Once a lair has been stripped of its blood slaves, there's a temptation to simply torch the place and be done with it. I recommend caution. Bloodsuckers don't seem to need to breathe, and the smarter among them often have a watery refuge to protect from just this sort of assault. They don't all sleep in coffins, either. I went through one lair to find a steel case in the basement. It had cameras mounted on its periphery and it must have weighed several tons, preventing us from hauling it out to apply industrial force to it. We contemplated encasing it in concrete, but were unable to procure any on short notice. So the best we could do was to take photos from the camera vantage points and arrange them in front of the lenses. Then we waited. The case opened at sunset and we were able to surprise the fiend within, who saw nothing

suspicious on its video monitors. After eradicating it, we had some time to examine its vault. The steel plate was 10 inches thick, and it had a timed lock within that had to be released by an internal latch. It was built to survive anything short of a major demolition effort.

SKINCHANGERS

In these beings we have, perhaps, our most potent foes. Robust as a rot, strong as a fang, able to walk by daylight and hide among humankind, flickers have exhibited a bewildering variety of powers. Their unpredictability makes them dangerous, indeed. Our only hope is to strike unpredictably, as well.

Their weakness is silver. Forget wolfsbane, the way to stop them is with silver, preferably bullets, preferably from a distance. Commercially made silver bullets are expensive, but worth every penny. If you can't get or afford them, I recommend getting a knife or other weapon filigreed with silver. A pure silver knife won't hold an edge long, but a weapon with a steel point and edge and silver filigree seems to offer the best of both worlds.

The other weakness of lobos is their human disguise. They're still tough in their borrowed shape, but they're nothing like the nightmare you face if they transform into the beast-headed giant. Once they get to that point, I recommend retreat unless you've got overwhelming force. You'll need it. In monstrous form, they can heal damage almost as quickly as you can inflict it with a *shotgun*.

What I suggest, then, is this. Locate the creature in its human form. Follow it and learn its habits. Get a good rifle with a scope and a tripod. If you have the money, get .50 M2 silver bullets made and go with a Barrett light fifty sniper rifle — but be aware that gun store owners are going to remember a guy who comes in asking for such pricey and esoteric equipment. If you can't afford silver bullets, I recommend the M1 Garand — decent range, it's semi-automatic and it fires a .30-06, a very common hunting round. Then just find a sniper perch with a good retreat route, and open up from surprise when they're in human shape. It is *essential* that you hit with your first shot, and it's equally important that you have the ability to keep firing at them after they hit the ground. I once fired at a flicker through its dining room window. When it fell it was behind a wall. In seconds it had transformed, undone my damage and was after me.

Continue to fire until it's dead. If you can't do that, run as soon as you can, and as far as you can.

SORCERERS

Sorcerers would seem to be the least of our worries. After all, as Willow12 says, they're only human, right?

Wrong. *We're* only human, and our powers seem to manifest in bewildering diversity. We're learning new things about ourselves every day, and we're the newcomers to the Hell War. Merlins have been around since the days of Simon Magus, at least. It's clear they've picked up a few tricks.

While not as strong as a skinchanger or tough as a rot, sorcerers have versatility on their side. I've seen them *find* fully loaded rifles discarded in garbage cans, *accidentally* ignite gas mains right in front of pursuers, and *luckily* stumble through highway traffic unscathed.

The keys to hunting sorcerers are preparation and reaction time. It is clear, even from Bookworm's tainted testimony, that the powers of witches are consciously directed. Therefore, one limit on their power is cognitive reaction time. If one man with a gun attacks a sorcerer, the warlock will make the gun break down, then give the man a brain hemorrhage. If six people surround a sorcerer and attack with a variety of weapons, the

resulting disorientation makes the sorcerer less likely to counter any particular attack.

While stalking a sorcerer with the esteemed Soldier91 a while ago, we were able to make excellent use of his military resources. Equipped with thermal-imaging goggles, we initiated the assault by firing several rounds of tear-gas grenades at the target. While the gas distracted him, we opened fire. While this should have been an easy kill (after all, our target was "only human"), things went wrong for us and right for him. First, the gas cartridges had "somehow got mixed up" so that we fired at him with smoke grenades. Next, our rifles began to jam and misfire, one after the other. We had managed to hit him a couple times, but both shots were "merely" flesh wounds.

From this, we learned to always be prepared. Assume that everything will go wrong. Have at least three guns, and make sure they've been thoroughly cleaned and loaded. Have a couple backup weapons for hand-to-hand. Your goal is to throw threat after threat, stimulus after stimulus at the merlin until his ability to react is overwhelmed. (Mythmaster10 has reported some successes with loud noises and strobe lights, incidentally.)

One thing you should **never** do is have one person shooting while another closes for shitkicking. In such situations, the odds of one of you hitting the other are far beyond even.

WISPS

There's a temptation to dismiss spirits as nuisances, just because they don't have physical bodies. This is wrong-headed and dangerous. If challenged or threatened, they can attack you in one of several ways.

- They can possess people and act through those bodies.

- They can attack through "poltergeist" effects.

- They can influence your emotions and trick you into foolish actions, or they can influence the emotions of those around you.

- They can create illusions that either imperil you directly or make you look crazy.

The direct solution would seem to be "kill them — again," but of all our prey they are the best equipped to flee a fight. After all, we have to go around walls. They can go through them and come back at a time of **their** choosing. If you possess one of those edges that lets you freeze them in place, there are still disposal problems. Specifically, they're invulnerable to almost all forms of conventional weapons. Some of our powers appear to work — if you have the right ones.

Regarding the long-running "kill the harmless possessed host" debate, I recommend against it for two reasons. One, killing defenseless people is bad. Two, it's not even a long-term solution. You can kill the host and watch the spirit discard the body like an old shoe. All killing the host does is get the spirit mad, and there are much easier ways to get the demon out. I have never seen a demon that would stay in possession of a body when it was useless and painful. Once a possessed body is restrained, the wisp usually leaves. If mere restraint is insufficient, then recourse to stricter stuff usually works. Apparently there's some basis to the idea of "beating the devil out of him."

Don't underestimate ghosts. Permanently invisible, they can be almost anywhere — even reading over your shoulder right now. Personally, I recommend the creation of a team of traveling imbued who do nothing but clean spirits off other hunters. If anyone with the capability to freeze a ghost and harm it wants to volunteer, contact me privately.

SUCCUBI

ProfessorGeol60 described the trouble he and his friend Hector had with one of these creatures. If anything, he may have understated the danger.

They may appear to be beautiful women, but let me assure you that these are perhaps the most dangerous threat crafted by the Prince of Darkness. A flicker may rip your head off and a rot may suck you dry, but in the end, that's only death. What succubi threaten is the loss of will. If you die fighting a vampire, you go to your reward. A succubi doesn't fight with tooth and nail, but with an enchanting glance and a whispered word. They conquer with a well-shaped limb and a puckered lip. The fate they promise is not death, but slavery.

Even to the sight, they appear beautiful, desirable. While the gifts of the Heralds provide some protection against the blatant influence of vampires and spirits, **it is less effective against succubi**. They can make you want them, against your will, against your judgment, and I have not yet discovered a trick that can easily free you. Only your own will and drive can free you from their clutches, and that is exactly what their charms and powers assault.

I would recommend attack from a distance, but even that is problematic, because they are hard to identify. To the sight, they look human, only **more** beautiful. By the time you're close enough to someone to realize she's a succubi, it may be too late. Her web may already have ensnared you.

The diabolical aspect of this is that romance and affection are natural. Any time any one of us meets an attractive woman, she could be just what she appears — or she could be one of these demonic whores, sent to lure us to the wrong side of the Hell War.

I can't offer much in the way of tactics against this assault. Attack full force as soon as you realize you've been influenced... but that assumes you realize it. The only way to do that is through constant vigilance.

Your only other defense is prayer.

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: willow12

Subject: Re: Succubi

Brace yourselves. You're about read words I thought I'd never type.

I agree with Crusader. He's a hyperactive freak on a lot of topics, but even a stopped clock is right twice a day. These bitches latch onto you and they do not let go until you're sucked dry of... well, whatever makes you yourself. I saw one drag down my best friend, and she got away with it because every time I saw her, I wasn't *_sure_* she was dangerous. As soon as I was out of her presence, I got more and more confident that she was on the dark side, or whatever, but looking into her eyes, I couldn't think anything bad about her. When she was done with Robbie, she turned on me, and I ran. I skipped town, scared shitless. I *_know_* what they can do.

They make you love them. Maybe if you're fucked up enough, jealous or abusive or something, you might be able to turn that love wrong enough to kill one. If you're a nice guy, though, I don't think you could ever get free.



CHAPTER 3:

HUNTER TIES

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

— Revelation 19:19

Right or wrong, we're all in this together. We are all one people, and this is the only planet we've got. The monsters are not going to give it up without a fight, and I'll be the first to say that we need all the help we can get.

And yet there are limits. Yes, all imbued need to work together, but as far as I'm concerned, if you aren't here to help me kill every last one of these beasts, you had best get the fuck out of my way.

GOING SOLO

We warriors have been loners all our lives. Old habits die hard, even now.

Most of us prefer to work alone, even if it's not the smartest course of action we could take. That's partly because we have a hard time counting on others, and partly because we don't like to be told what to do. The very qualities — anger, determination and idealism — that allowed us to rediscover our birthright are the same ones that isolate us from our brethren.

It's vital for every warrior to be able to admit when he's in over his head and ask for help. We can't afford to lose anyone just because he was too damn stubborn to get backup on an important hunt. By the same token, we don't need to go assembling an army for every stub we run across. For one thing, the minute you get a group of warriors in one place, the first thing they try to do is assert their authority. We suddenly end up with an army of four-star generals, and that just doesn't work. Also, the more people we get assembled in one place, the more conspicuous we are. We work best using stealth and surprise, and that's hard to pull off when you've got a van full of people, all telling you the best way to take care of a beast.

I personally won't call for any kind of assistance unless the target is both very powerful and very important. I'm starting to think that the vampire "philanthropist" is going to need a team to eliminate him. Bring in bullseyes from outside the area, overwhelm the guards and put wood on the fang in one big rush, then everybody disperses to their regular hunting grounds.

I've heard that there are some warriors out there who routinely operate in groups, preferring the extra firepower and teamwork. Most of these types tend to be ex-soldiers who had the concepts of working together beaten into them in boot camp. In cases like that, I can see where there'd be an established pecking order and one person who is the undisputed leader. Some of these groups border on personality cults, so I advise anyone who considers hooking up with one to think really hard about what their true objectives might be. We've all heard the stories about Flame61 and what she's up to in Turkey.

Personally, I couldn't see myself hanging my head and saying, "Yes, sir, no, sir, three bags full, sir." I think I'm pretty typical of our breed in that if I don't like the direction a team takes, I'm likely to break off and take care of the problem my way. That's just my nature, and I've found it's pretty common of our kind.

The problem is much worse when you start talking about hooking up with other hunters who fail to see the truth. My God, how can these people be so blind? If someone on the net posts a need for help in my area, I send them a quick offer. We do it my way or we don't do it at all. I don't have the time to waste on teaching these people common sense.

GETTING TOGETHER

I've only worked with a group of hunters three times. Twice it was with teams of real revolutionaries, and once it

was a mixed bag of bleeding-hearts and wide-eyed wonders. Any guesses which one was a disaster?

Everybody pretty much agrees that hunters are better off working as a group, but nobody can agree on how to make it happen. Nobody dares to set things up over the net. Who knows who might be listening? I know for a fact that the last fool who tried that for a hunt over in Detroit was never heard from again. Only someone who is really desperate or really stupid broadcasts where he is and what he's trying to do. Most times when our kind needs help on a hunt, we turn to those few imbued who we've met face to face at one time or another; people who we can at least be sure are who they say they are, and look like they could get the job done. (And don't even get me started on those "moderators.")

However, just because you may know a hunter or be aware of their reputation doesn't mean they're going to want to have anything to do with you. Ideally, all of us should realize that when it comes right down to it, bullshit ideas like race and religion don't matter. What matters is taking back what's ours. It doesn't always work that way, though. Some people are so dependent on stupid prejudices from before that they can't put them aside for the greater good. So far I haven't had any problem with anyone. Hell, me and Crusader have even worked together. But I've heard of situations that turned nasty when beliefs clashed. I've heard of revolutionaries who've been killed "by accident" or "sacrificed themselves" in battle, if you know what I mean.

The few times I needed help, I hooked up with some hardcore shooters I'd crossed paths with a couple of times in the city. I knew basically what territories they'd staked out, so I left signs in some noticeable places to ask for a rendezvous and waited for them to come to me if they were interested. They did, and I laid out what I was trying to do. Nobody wasted any time on small talk. Maybe it was because we were all afraid we might open our mouths and say something that would set each other off. Nobody offered their names, and that was all right by me.

Personally, I never approach another hunter unless I already have a plan worked out and know exactly what I want that person to do. I don't have time to listen to somebody else tell me how to kill a monster I've been stalking for weeks. Everybody's got their own way of doing things, but my viewpoint is that I need help, not opinions. I understand where other hunters want to cover their ass. I've got no problem with that. I lay everything out up front, and if they don't like it, they can walk away. So far, though, I've always managed to find at least one other person who's dedicated enough to put his ego aside and trust me to get the job done, and we go out and kill some monsters. When everything is over, we go our separate ways. It's a hell of a brotherhood, but it works, and that's all right by me.

CLUSTER FUCKS

By contrast, working with those other misguided types who call themselves hunters is a like a cross between the US Congress and a cattle stampede.

Not long after I got the wake-up, I took an invitation to hook up with a team that was hunting a fang down in Syracuse. At that point, I was grateful to be working with any hunter. I was still getting a handle on things, and had a lot left to learn about how to deal with the enemy. Well, I was the only warrior in the team. They picked me because they figured they might need someone who was good in a fight. Might need. What were they going to do, I asked, invite the thing over for tea?

Turns out, I was close. The leader of the group — I won't use names, because I think she's still over on hunter-net — thought she could save the bloodsucker! I told her she'd been watching too many damn movies. What was she going to do, tell

the thing to eat only bad people? Her other friends tried to shout me down. She'd obviously snowed them all long before I ever got there. Finally, I got tired of arguing with them and agreed to come along the night they confronted the creature.

One of the group offered to act as bait. I sat there gawking. She acted like she deserved to get bit. Well, she goes out there and gets the thing's attention, drawing it back to our van. They get to the door and another team member outside uses some push-away power to force the creature into the van. We all rush in after. It gets all pissed, but once it catches on that it can't get out (and that nobody is threatening it), it kind of calms down. Our illustrious leader offers it a seat. I asked if I could get it anything to drink. I'm not sure who gave me the nastier stare.

So they start having a dialogue with the thing. Who are you? Why do you feel the need to drink human blood? Can you drink animal blood? And the thing was playing with them, telling them everything they wanted to hear. How it was such a victim, and it really was sorry it had to do the things it did. Cry me a fucking river.

I finally couldn't take it anymore. It had them eating out of its hand. I think I remember saying something to the effect of, "Oh, shut the hell up," and putting my shotgun to its head. It was messy, but effective.

For a couple of minutes, I swear the rest of the group — my fellow hunters — were going to take a shot at me. Our fearless leader went apeshit, calling me a monster. I let her have it across the jaw with the shotgun and climbed out of the van. They could clean up the mess. I figured it was the least they could do.

I don't see myself ever working with non-revolutionaries again. If they weren't smart enough to realize what we were put on this Earth to do right at the beginning, they aren't likely to change their minds on account of anything I have to say. I don't have time to waste while they devote their energy to deciding guilt or innocence, protecting the drones or trying to save the enemy. Let them go to Hell in their own way.

DYING FOR THE CAUSE

While I'm on the subject of other chosen, let me clear something up for the record. I did not kill Eddie Morrell. I did not have him killed.

Did I send him to certain death? You could see it that way, I suppose.

This was one of the reasons the Black Panthers couldn't hack it back in the '60s. They crowed about revolution, but weren't able to make the hard choices necessary to achieve victory. They heard the word brother and thought we were talking about family. Not so. We were talking about a comrade in arms, someone who would fight beside them and lay down his life if necessary, an example for others to follow. The leadership never could look at their troops — because that's exactly what they were — and be ready to sacrifice them for a greater good. Sometimes generals must send their people off to certain death in order for others to succeed on different fronts.

Morrell was what some of us call a dud. He failed to break down those last barriers between his conditioning and his true self, getting the wake-up but failing to act at the moment of truth. But he had seen the monsters for what they were, and he wanted to assist in the revolution. All right, let's be practical for a minute. What could Morrell really accomplish? He couldn't resist many of the enemy's powers, and he had no powers of his own, just a willingness to fight. In a serious match against a fang or even a stub, he couldn't hold his own — hell, he couldn't even see them coming without help. He was a liability, for the most part.

I knew one way he could contribute, though. There was a fang I was hunting, a really clever sort who preferred to let

her followers go out and select her meals, then bring them into the safety of her lair. I offered Morrell the chance to play a vital role in destroying her. It was only a partial lie.

I took some time and learned what qualities the fang looked for in her prey, then started grooming Morrell for the part. He took to it with enthusiasm, grateful to be fighting the enemy. Once he was ready, we set him up in one of the areas where the bruises looked for prey. I fitted him with a hidden microphone and a couple of battery packs so he could get inside the lair and provide "intelligence" about its layout.

It took nearly a month, but the puppets finally bit. They took Morrell inside, and I listened carefully to everything he said and heard. No one thought to frisk him. Who would be so suicidal as to carry a gun into a vampire's lair?

Pretty soon I heard the vampire's voice. Sure enough, she mesmerized him almost at once. She toyed with him a bit, but didn't ask any pointed questions. I waited until I heard him cry out in pain.

One of the two squares hidden in Morrell's waistband was indeed a battery for the microphone. The other was a half-kilo of C-3 I'd stolen. Parts of the fang landed in the park outside her apartment building.

Did I send him to his death? Yes. Was his death in vain? No. Thanks to his sacrifice, a powerful monster was destroyed. Morrell wanted to fight, and I gave him the only chance that would have made any kind of difference against the monsters. I would do it again, if I had to.

This is not to say that I would do the same thing to another hunter. At least, not a fellow revolutionary. We are too few to be throwing our lives away for any reason. But if I were to be stuck in another situation with one of those monster sympathizers, I wouldn't hesitate. If the bleeding-hearts expect to suffer, I've got no problem fulfilling their wish. I can't stand their damn whining. The wide-eyed "open-minded" types like Bookworm strike me as damaged goods in the first place — nobody can be that much in denial without some serious mental problems.

Their ability to hide would make them good suicide bombers, though.

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Sunday, December 26, Lexington YMCA, Lexington, KY, 0400 hours local

Nobody has all the answers. We each have just a piece of it. That's probably the biggest lesson the aliens intended for us.

The path to freedom from the monsters isn't like a straight military campaign. We can't just confront the enemy in a set-piece battle and destroy them for all time. More monsters come into the world every day, because our way of life gives birth to them. Not only do we have to defeat them physically, but we have to heal the world's mental ills to prevent them from returning again and again.

The fact that the aliens gave each of us different and distinct powers to hunt the monsters is a message all its own. We have to look outside ourselves for the ultimate answers. We can guess at only a part of the solution. We need other ideas, other viewpoints, to make the whole thing work. To do that, we are going to have to outgrow our prejudices and fears. We will ultimately have to learn to live as one people and have compassion for one another if we're ever to be a civilization worthy of our interstellar mentors.

DIFFERENT FACETS OF HUMANITY

There are no "expendable" hunters. We are all vital parts of the crusade. There is a lot of back-biting and flames on the hunter lists, pointing out the flaws in each others' philosophies and attitudes. (Maybe there are protectors or optimists on their own lists, talking about us?) I don't claim there aren't problems. In fact, I expect them. The point is not to yell about it, but to find grounds for compromise and unity. All of us are individuals, selected by the aliens because our opinions and beliefs give us the ability to win the world back from the monsters. The fact that our viewpoints differ, sometimes radically, is a sign that

we all have to look beyond our individual agendas and recognize that every one of the imbued has been called because they have something valuable to contribute. Only by working together are we going to make a world where the monsters can no longer exist. We've been chosen to kill monsters. That's our role. Let's not try to force that task on the other imbued.

I have heard several "horror stories" of soldiers participating in disastrous hunts with teams comprised of hunters who had differing goals and beliefs. Well, ask yourself: Did the hunt go wrong because the other hunters made poor decisions, or because you didn't agree with their ideas, and actively sabotaged their efforts? Had you kept an open mind and tried to work within the framework of the team, you might have been successful.

We all have blind spots. The other imbued can see into parts of the problem that we can't. The problem is that if another hunter can't fit into the framework of our ideas and beliefs, we have a hard time trusting them. That is the real task that the aliens have set before us. Make that leap of faith and allow others to add their knowledge and viewpoint to your own. The fact of the matter is, without others to watch your back, sooner or later a monster is going to pull something out of its hat that you won't see coming, and it will kill you. If you can't trust someone to watch your back, someone who is focused on other aspects of the hunt, all you're doing is counting on luck and skill to get you through. Everyone's luck runs out sooner or later, and skill will only get you so far.

INTEGRATION

It's no accident that soldiers like us can have a hard time working with one another. I think we're intended to. I see our kind as being the foundation for integrated groups of hunters. Our determination and drive forces the other imbued ahead and focuses their efforts. I think we're the heart of hunter community, pushing it on. Without us and our strength, the cause is lost.

Ideally, we should be working in teams with hunters comprising a wide range of viewpoints and abilities, though I realize this is kind of impractical. At the very least, we should actively seek out other hunters who will balance our energy and drive, giving us a much-needed dose of perspective. The problems that other imbued have with us going to extreme lengths in the hunt could probably be prevented if we had others to offer advice.

What our kind needs are hunters with keen insight and compassionate natures who offer a counterpoint to our aggressive tendencies. We need to be directed, like any weapon, and used only in appropriate circumstances. If left to our own devices, we'll run wild, attacking any target of opportunity, sometimes leading to abuses and needless death. For us to be most effective, we have to learn to take our cues from others, or at least to consider their opinions before acting.

What I would like to see is a return to a universal presence on hunter-net, eliminating these divisive lists that have begun to form, even firelight. Warriors would then put out calls for enlistment in a team under their control, and gather the proper personnel to give a well-rounded mix of abilities and viewpoints. Yes, I did say that we would be in control. The problem with most

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: willow12

Subject: Works for Me

I'm all for this ideal Christ, if those other idiots had just listened to me in Mogadishu, we might have gotten out of there in one piece. The locals had been under the thumb of monsters for years. There was no way we were going to get them to switch sides just because a handful of white guys showed up and offered to help. If the others had listened to me and let me make an example out of a couple of the weaker fangs, we could have convinced at least some of the gangs. But the others were too timid. They paid with their lives. Only two of us got out, and I spent three months in a hospital in Nairobi.

Count me in, Soldier. With a little help, we can turn this whole thing around.

armies today is that the people on the ground who have to do the actual fighting don't get to decide the best way to do their jobs. I propose a force whereby the grunts in the field dictate how best to be supported in the attack. Once these teams are operational, we could use the net to link them and coordinate organized operations on a state- or even nationwide basis.

THE CREEDS

Several people on the net have asked me my opinion about the other imbued. I'll be honest: Not all of them are completely misguided. If a hunter is willing to work with me instead of trying to make me follow his lunatic agenda, then I have no problem working with him... and I can find a use for anyone's abilities.

Since I have been imbued I've managed to work with quite a few other hunters, and I've learned that they all bring useful and valuable viewpoints to bear on the hunt and our role in it. Each hunter complements another in individual ways. This includes the "duds," though many fail to count them as part of us.

ATTITUDES TOWARD DEFENDERS

I disagree with the attitude that those who defend are of "lesser station" than we who attack. In a chess game, is a rook less powerful than a bishop? Both have their uses. The best hammer in the world is of little help when you need a saw.

Rather than squabbling over meaningless notions of "status," we must instead strive to integrate our varied gifts into a coherent whole. Champions can push back a creature? Excellent. Let us team with them so we can strike with impunity from within the defensive perimeter. Let's work together to find ways to maneuver creatures into untenable positions.

But in a larger sense, we need to understand the protectors' *greater* purpose. What good is it to take that which you cannot hold? A victory quickly reversed is a poor sort of victory. Our duty as warriors is to reconquer the Earth that was stolen from us so many ages ago. Their duty is to garrison our reclaimed territory.

It's very simple. We take. They keep.

A lot of protectors have accused me of being callous in the past. I point out that the whole reason for my existence is to set my brothers and sisters free from inhuman slavery. I live, eat, sleep and breathe the liberation of humanity. I am not heartless by any means, and I grieve when lives are lost unnecessarily. But we cannot dedicate our powers to protecting people when the criminals are just going to get away and keep committing crimes. There are six billion people on the planet, and maybe a couple thousand of us. We can't save everybody. Self-proclaimed champions need to get that through their heads.

Yet, I do think their beliefs are admirable. Of all the other imbued, I think they are the best match for us. We can concentrate on killing the monsters, and they can back us up, taking care of anybody in the crossfire. They just have to learn that in war, people die. I don't presume to get in their business, and they shouldn't presume to get in mine. If there are any protectors out there reading this who are cool with that arrangement, email me ASAP. I would be glad to have your help.

Protectors are, in some ways, our better halves. They can show the compassion and caring to civilians that we can't afford to. Our enemies are so dangerous that we can't make allowances for people caught in the crossfire. Protectors are there to take up the challenge and keep our hunts careful and surgical, with the least amount of collateral damage. Again, we often get so focused on the hunt that we fail to think of the larger consequences of, say, collapsing a building to eliminate a nest of vampires. We focus on wiping out a pack of dangerous and powerful enemies, but we don't stop to consider what kind of damage flying debris might do to passersby. (Some on hunter-net would say we wouldn't care. As much as I hate to say it, we've brought that impression upon ourselves.) We get exasperated when effective plans are picked apart by conscientious protectors, but once again, if we think rationally

instead of emotionally, we can see that they are right to be concerned. We can't spread suffering just to destroy a monster or we just perpetuate the cycle.

Our abilities complement protectors: we lash out at the real enemy, while they devote their energies to protecting the helpless. We're two opposite but equal halves of the same coin, and we could stand to learn a lot from one another. Just as we can't allow ourselves to commit wanton acts of destruction, protectors can't be permitted to let teams waste time and energy in countless defensive engagements where they rush from danger spot to danger spot rescuing victims, yet letting the perpetrators get away. The only way to stop a criminal from committing crimes is to stop them by whatever means necessary.

When these two ideals are balanced, we can destroy the enemy in a precise, surgical manner, while minimizing civilian and hunter casualties. If we can learn to do that routinely, accepting compromise and respecting one another's viewpoints, the war is as good as won.

ATTITUDES TOWARD INNOCENTS

Oh, my God. These naive wonders amaze me. How can they see the monsters for what they are and not be repulsed? It pisses me off to no end that these "hunters" know the horrible things that the beasts do to people each and every day, yet they refuse to demand revenge. They say they want to keep an open mind. Well, last night I smoked a fang who was keeping a stable of young boys in a burnt-out apartment building. He would feed on a different one each night, and then spend the rest of the night forcing the kids to... amuse him. How would you interpret that? Was the son of a bitch just misunderstood? I can assure you I kept an open mind — I was open to all kinds of ways to wipe the fucker off the face of the Earth!

There are times I think Christ was a just another bleeding-heart, but really, I think he was one of these misguided fools. The lamb trying to understand the wolf. As far as I'm concerned, they're wasting the gifts they've received, and they're a danger to any right-thinking chosen who hooks up with them. Their ridiculous ideas will get everyone around them killed... or worse. Mark my words.

We are quick to dismiss these hunters as foolish or naive. The truth is, they're neither. These optimists are nothing more or less than hunters who are completely free from prejudice. What makes them threatening to us is that they force us to challenge our own prejudices and beliefs, which I think is their primary purpose.

Optimists also challenge the way in which we see the monsters. What if some of them can be changed? What if they were willing to try another path, if only someone would be willing to show them the way? On the surface, the idea sounds ridiculous, but frankly, who's to say it's not possible? The value of the optimists is that they make us think, even if their ideas aren't always useful. Surely everyone can agree that making assumptions about the enemy is a sure way to end up dead or corrupted.

Another important fact that we tend to forget when we dismiss optimists is that they're still imbued. They want to stop the monsters as much as we do, but are willing to consider different methods of doing so. Their ideas might seem unorthodox, but from time to time they can come up with insightful, brilliant ways of defeating monsters without raising a finger.

White told me about a vampire who had influence in the music industry. The creature was dangerous and well-protected. While she was gathering information on it, she learned that the fang had designs on a certain singer. Apparently a rival sought to ruin the woman, just to spite White's target. White spent some of her savings, bought a round-trip ticket to Maui, and arranged for the singer to "win an all-expenses-paid trip to Hawaii." With some fast-talking, she was able to get the singer on a plane in the course of a single day and eliminated any traces of the woman's departure. When the vampires awoke, the singer had vanished. By the time the singer returned to the city, the rots had gone to war. One was destroyed. The other (the spiteful enemy) was weakened to the point that White was able to kill it directly.

What optimists often lack is solid ground beneath their feet. Left to their own devices, they can waste time and energy chasing down endless theories. Our kind can be valuable to optimists by bringing their efforts back on track, focusing them on the battle and the best way to win it.



ATTITUDES TOWARD JUDGES

I can understand an urge to study our quarry. Understanding is necessary for the safest and most efficient extinction. I can also understand an urge to redeem our prey: that is kind, Christian and it recognizes the possibility of salvation even in the eleventh hour.

What I cannot understand is the arrogance it takes to stand forth and say, "I will judge them. I will decide who lives and who dies." This is hubris, my friend. They *all* must die.

Agents of the Highest Power have chosen us, and our proper place is to humbly do our duty. It is not to set ourselves up in pride, not to claim God's prerogative as our own! We cannot judge the damned. They have been judged already — and condemned. Would you set yourself as some court of appeals? Would you correct the oversights of *God Almighty*? It is blasphemy to the point of being ridiculous. You're like a flea who thinks he is the dog's master.

If one reasons from use, it seems clear that the distinct miracles we were given have purposes in a larger plan. You have the powers of discernment. Good for you. But that doesn't mean your purpose is to judge as *you* see fit. Perhaps you're the winnowing fan that separates those who will repent and therefore earn a merciful death, from those who remain obdurate and who earn a vengeful death. Don't presume that you have the right to mete out years and days of existence to these loathsome *things*. That is not doing your duty. That is shirking it.

If lawgivers didn't waste so much damn time on illusions of guilt and innocence, they would be excellent assets to the hunt. Their ability to detect monsters is invaluable, but I've never seen a group of people more tight-assed in my life. Those who sit in judgment tend to be stiff-necked and totally unwilling to subordinate their will for the greater good. If the directive doesn't come from their own lips, it's automatically suspect. Even in the rare cases of lawgivers who don't try to dictate every move of a hunter team, they still have the ability to make battle plans come to a screeching halt over some pointless technicality.

I will say that they are moral and respectable individuals, and I value that highly. But right now we just can't afford to be worrying about technicalities. We have enough to worry about, like the best way to kill a fang with a car bomb.

Our kind needs the tempering hand of justice to keep our anger in check. The rage and hatred we feel toward the enemy sometimes betrays us, causing us to lash out at the helpless and undeserving. We should always have justices in our midst, kind of like MPs, and we should trust their determination to mete punishment to those who deserve it.

I will be the first to admit that I sometimes disagree with a justice's decision, but every time I do it's on the basis of emotion, not reason. There are no truly "innocent" monsters, but the degree to which we must punish them must suit the scope of their crimes. If we are too harsh, if we harden our souls to cold cruelty, we risk becoming much like the creatures we have sworn to defeat. We end up poisoning the environment as badly as they do, and could one day create monsters worse than anything we currently face.

Justices must also be valued for their ability to rule on their fellow hunters with fairness and equality. No one is above the risks of corruption. No one is entirely immune to using their abilities for power, revenge or material gain. I heard of a group that robbed banks in Utah, ostensibly to fund their operations. It was a justice who eventually tracked down the individuals involved and determined that they were motivated more by greed than duty. The criminals were, sadly, killed in a series of confrontations with the justice, but nearly half the stolen money was returned to its rightful owners. Can you imagine what might have happened if no one had intervened and these crimes had continued? Our cause might have been corrupted from within, as more and more newly imbued hunters were lured into the prospects of easy money and power. We would have found ourselves fighting our fellow hunters every bit as much as the monsters!

Conversely, we as warriors act to balance these MPs from taking their role to excess. We can't afford an inquisition in our midst, where people with petty agendas can wreck our efforts with a couple of well-placed accusations. As soldiers, we serve to keep others in check and ensure that they use their powers accordingly. As long as both sides uphold their responsibilities, we can benefit from a fair and impartial system of law within and without our ranks.

ATTITUDES TOWARD MARTYRS

May I just say that you make me sick? Your piling self-pity is like a millstone around your neck, and it will drag you to Hell if you let it. "I feel bad when I kill corrupt humans." "My life has been wrecked by seeing the enemy." "My powers are killing me." "I, me, mine... who cares about you? You think *you* suffer? What about those children sucked dry by Satan's minions — or worse yet, those condemned to live enslaved, their wills broken by unnatural lust?"

You were called by *God*. You have been given a chance that generations of faithful have begged for — a mission from the Lord of Hosts. In doing God's will there can be nothing but salvation. Put aside your narrow, selfish, human viewpoint and trust in God's plan for you. God will provide. God will protect. A mere human lifetime is less than an eyeblink to the Eternal King, and it should be honor and joy enough for any man to advance God's plan — even at the price of suffering, loss and death.

It is a greater joy to die as God's slave than to live as the greatest of mere men.

Suck it up, people. That's what I have to say to these doom-and-gloom types. How people like this ever managed to get the wake-up is beyond me, but if the world can have wide-eyed wonders, I guess these losers aren't too far off the wall. What is there to feel guilty about? If someone tried to kill me, I wouldn't feel bad about defending myself. There is a big difference between using the enemy's tactics and actually embracing them. I go with what works. I hate it sometimes, but if it gets the job done, I don't hesitate. These people destroy a little bit of themselves with each monster they take out. It's insane. There are enough things out there trying to kill us without actively helping them along!

I will say that I have met some really hard-core bleeding-hearts, people who have taken the stance that by accepting the wake-up, they are already dead, so they're willing to do absolutely anything to destroy the enemy. When you're already dead, you have nothing to lose. These are some scary folks, but worth some respect. I admire their sacrifice, even if I can't work with them. When they go down, they'll pull everyone around down with them.

Hunters who believe in self-sacrifice recognize the lengths to which we must go to destroy the world's unnatural creatures. They are often compassionate and peaceful, and they darken their own souls to help their fellow humans live a better life. We criticize them a lot, but the truth is they have made a horrible choice for the best possible reasons, and we should respect instead of ridicule their pain.

These hunters remind us that our actions scar our souls. No one can look into the abyss for long without seeing the darkness inside themselves. It's kind of like that religious myth called *stigmata*. They wear the damage to their souls where everyone can see. It's not an attempt at pity, it's a warning for what's happening to us all, whether we want to acknowledge it or not.

We soldiers need the insights of these imbued more than any other, because we're the ones most likely to lose our humanity without ever knowing it. We're the ones most likely to lose our sanity after one too many battles. These hunters are always willing to give of themselves to help others. We cynically say it's a way of wallowing in self-pity and angst. I don't believe that's true, but what if it was? Would it make their gifts any less valuable? When they take on another's pain, is it any less meaningful? We as crusaders are so angry and bitter at the corruption of the world that we have no faith in the virtue of altruism, even when we see the blood with our own eyes. That's something these "losers" can teach us all. We could all stand to remember our humanity once in a while.

These hunters need us as much as we need them, but will deny it as much as we tend to. They need our courage and strength. They need our defiance in the face of terror to counterbalance their own urges of despair. They temper our heat, we warm their souls, though you would never hear them admit it. They need something to believe in and we can be that thing.

ATTITUDES TOWARD REDEEMERS

Ripsaw, don't be too hard on Doctor and Blessed for their hopes that our enemies can be "cured" — or, to use a better word,

saved. Nothing is beyond the power of God. I'd think we'd all realize that by now. A year ago, none of us could conjure fire, halt demons with a word or even see the predators who stalked us. Now that these things are possible, who are we to say that the redemption of a rot could never happen?

I honor and respect these people for their most Christ-like attempts to minister to the fallen. It is a kindness beyond my power. I'm sure they'll go to Heaven when they die.

Have you ever considered that this might be their function within the divine scheme? It's clear to me that we all have our separate purposes in the Hell War, and are blessed with the powers we need for our tasks. The task of the kindly ones is to offer salvation. It's not an easy redemption — look at Blessed's account of his deadly cure of the vampire woman. True death is the cost of redemption for these killers, and few will pay that price, but the chance is there for those who genuinely repent.

I do not envy these merciful people, but I respect them. They are in as much danger as any of us, offering kindness to serpents that bite their hands. I point their pity out to those who whine about the pain of the hunt. To these complainers I say look to the confessors. You could have their burden: the burden of kindness.

These people are more frustrating than the wide-eyed types, as far as I am concerned. We're dealing with monsters here, not wild animals. They can't be taught new tricks. They can't be persuaded to live in peace with the rest of us. If they could have done that they never would have enslaved us, would they? Trying to save the beasts only opens us up to exploitation and betrayal. We can't trust the enemy. They are masters of lies and deceit. By the same token, we can't trust these confessors. After that whole mess in Syracuse, I was afraid these hunters would sell us out to the monsters in the vain hope that they could be saved. Anytime there is a confessor in a team, you always have to wonder where her real loyalties lie.

The frustrating thing, of course, is that their abilities to heal are so incredibly valuable. We desperately need that at times. If there were confessors out there more concerned with taking care of their fellow hunters, I would keep one around in a heartbeat. But the problem with such compassion is that it's unpredictable and vulnerable to ruthless minds. These hunters have the potential to be traitors. Work with them at your own risk.

If the healers are right, there's hope for us all.

I've got a lot of admiration for anyone who thinks they can heal a fang. Even if they are dead wrong (and I'm sure they are), you have to admire someone who has the sheer balls to make the attempt. These hunters are the true saviors among the imbued, both in body and spirit and we need to understand that their ideas are just as valid as our own, even if our principles often conflict. After all, what if they really are right? Can we afford not to at least try to find out?

I understand where they're coming from. If monsters are the byproduct of human hate and misery, what happens if you combat that with healing and reconciliation? Would it change a monster's basic nature? Would it destroy them? Who knows? Either way, it's a seductive idea, for all the right reasons. Their actions might heal the whole world someday and usher in the new age. We owe it to them to provide all the support we can, within reason. The risk we face is a healer whose compassion has gotten in the way of his better judgment. He puts other hunters at risk in an attempt to save a monster. We have to be the ones who rein the healers in when they lose perspective. Even with the best of intentions, there is no substitute for a little healthy suspicion.

Healers tell us that it's never too late. Even for those of us who have given in to the corruptive touch of the monsters, there is still a way back to humanity. I've heard of healer teams that have dedicated themselves to rehabilitating bruises. They've only had a few successes so far, but think of those few people who have been saved, when all we would have done was destroy them. The implications are incredible when you think about it, especially when you consider how many of our best and brightest have become monsters' puppets. Not only do these "deprogrammers" save lives, but they learn more and more every day about roils and how to fight them.

It takes courage to put your life on the line to save someone who would just as soon kill you. We owe it to these people to support their attempts at every opportunity, and to protect them when the best of intentions go sour and true evil rears its ugly head. If the enemy wants to get its claws into them, it's going to have to go through us first.

ATTITUDES TOWARD VISIONARIES

When I hear talk about a "new way," I become very uncomfortable. I'm ambivalent. On one hand, it seems clear to me that the powers given to our self-styled "prophets" do indeed serve to gather information and provide insight into our prey. All well and good. But I see no evidence that these powers are meant to "bring us closer" to our enemies on any kind of emotional level. The point is to isolate weaknesses so that others can exploit them. It's not to develop empathy, sympathy or pity for creatures that have nothing but the ultimate perdition of humanity in mind.

Those who claim to have visions are in a dangerous position. I knew an engineer once. He was a peaceful man who hated war with a passion. He was offered a job by a company that made fighter jets, and he turned it down because of his beliefs. But he told me, "You have to understand that to an engineer, those planes were *beautiful*." Despite his disgust for their purpose, he could appreciate them deeply on another level.

That's when I fear prophets. When they become so preoccupied with their insights that they lose sight of the ultimate goal. Sometimes spies can almost become convinced that their cover is true. They pretend for too long and start to believe their own lies. Don't let this happen to you. Never forget that this is a war, and that the creature you study today must be killed some day. Perhaps not tomorrow or next week, but sooner is preferable to later. I cannot believe in compromise on this.

The most obvious example of this is, of course, Bookworm55. I respect the data he's gathered, but there is no doubt in my mind that he has lost his perspective. His prejudice shines in his own words. Even the temptress who crippled him still gets a kind word! It is plain to me that these creatures have him spellbound. Even his ally "Purple," who seems so innocuous, is first met through theft.

Bookworm, don't hate me for telling you the truth. You need to cut yourself off from these things until you regain your perspective. You've lost your way. Don't lose your soul on top of it — or your life.

Okay, I admit, I can't figure these people out. They're excellent sources of information about the enemy, I mean excellent, but at the same time they seem to spend more time worrying about the bigger picture than the immediate, life-threatening details. You would think that with all they know about beasts, they would be a little more concerned with pulling off the hunt and getting out with a whole skin.

I guess it's safe to say that they make me a little uneasy, always asking so many questions. I mean, what's there to understand? The monsters are the enemy and must be destroyed. I have yet to find a navel-gazer who didn't agree with this, at least in principle. But when they go off into la-la land and get that strange look in their eye, I can't help but worry about what they're thinking.

As long as you can keep them focused on the job at hand, you can't ask for a better comrade. "Knowing is half the battle." It's a cliché, but it's true. Maybe it's more than half. The trick is getting them to ask only the questions you want answered. I haven't figured out how to do that yet. But I don't have a problem working with them as long as they give me the info I want, when I want it.

I've heard lots of people on hunter-net ask where this is all heading. It seems to me that there are people among us who are like army rangers or pathfinders. They study the situation, look for problems and scout them out before the rest of us march in. The difference is, our rangers study the whole war, almost before it even breaks out.

I think our pathfinders see more than we do during the wake-up. I think they get a glimpse of something big, but it fades like a dream after the first moments of the imbuing. After that, they constantly try to work out the meaning of what they saw. Whatever it is they face, it's even bigger than the creature before them, or bigger than almost any creature faced later, because that initial vision haunts them thereafter. It's like they're trying to figure out who and what they — and we — are, and what's in store for the future.

When pathfinders share their insights, they can be incredible sources of information about the enemy and its activities. The price of this intelligence is a constant stream of questions and interpretations of situations and events. These imbued almost never seem to accept events at face value, looking for further meaning, even when a monster's claws mean imminent death. We don't need to know every angle of a problem to attack it, but some pathfinders do.

Rangers are valuable to the hunt because they challenge our interpretations of events. They make us look at things from different perspectives. Sometimes their observations are foolish or pointless. Other times they teach us a great deal. Brown was the first hunter I know who speculated that different types of monsters might actually prey on one another, or at least fight for hunting grounds or territory. If that's true, we might get the monsters to do our work for us. Even if their theories don't always pan out, a pathfinder can be an excellent sounding board for our own thoughts: a devil's advocate whose opinion we can trust to be unbiased.

Perhaps all the stargazing will pay off one day. Pathfinders seem to think ahead and maybe plan for the day that the monsters are defeated. Where will we go from there? How will we shepherd humanity to its eventual destiny with the aliens? Better yet, what will become of us once the monsters are beaten? Brown speculated that the monsters will always be here to some degree, and hunters will always be needed to keep them in check. Maybe he's right, but personally I hope not.

Our kind are the here and now, the counterpoint to the pathfinders' obsession with ideas and speculation. We need to focus them, like the optimists, on the task at hand. If we can keep their minds on the details that matter, we all can benefit from their theories.

ATTITUDES TOWARD BYSTANDERS

Rigger111, your word choice clearly shows your disdain for those who heard the call and who were initially afraid. You call them failures and "duds" and contempt drips from each word in your message. Clearly you think you could never be as they are — that you could never feel the paralyzing grip of fear?

Don't be so sure. Pride goes before the fall, my friend.

You were confronted with evil and you acted, and for that you should be commended. But that doesn't mean those who failed should be condemned. It is a greater bravery for them to continue to fight, to struggle to redeem their previous inaction. There is nothing for us in God's word if not second chances — the second chance given to Adam, to King David and to all of us through Christ Jesus. If a man who stumbled once returns to the fight, he should be admired and welcomed, not cast aside as worthless. It is easier, I think, for those of us who have the blessings and protection of the Heralds to be "heroes" in the Hell War. We are armed. Those who join our side without such protection are more vulnerable by far. Instead of our contempt, they deserve our respect and protection, for they have seen the darkness and have *no* protection, and they face the battle anyway. That faith and courage is vast. I can only hope to measure up.

I feel sorry for those people who can't quite accept the wake-up. Most of them remember their experience with the monsters, and they live with the guilt of their inaction every moment afterward. I know exactly how that feels, and I can sympathize. Many of these people seek us out afterward, trying to find ways to contribute. Some are useful in that they have money or connections that can be exploited to continue the hunt. I have heard of one such person in California who is quietly backing several different hunters across the state. My attitude is that they deserve our understanding and our respect. It's hard enough for us to go after the enemy — imagine doing it

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org
 From: crusader17
 Subject: Re: Expendable Youth

Trucker, you're upset that your partner died, and rightly so. It's always painful when people leave you, especially people you rely on. But you have to realize that Walker has gone on to a better place.

Don't torment yourself. You say you feel guilty because you survived. But isn't that what Walker wanted? Your life honors her sacrifice. As long as you're alive, fighting in the Hell War, her death continues to increase in importance. Every monster you kill, every demon you destroy makes her sacrifice more valid. But even without you, her death is important. Dying to destroy these creatures is the greatest sacrifice any of us can make. Remember the Good Book, "There is no greater love, than to give up one's life for a friend." She walked with Christ, dying to save all humankind.

You also say you feel selfish — that when you think of her, you find yourself thinking of the things she could do for you. Isn't that natural? When you think of her protecting you, helping you, saving you — aren't those all expressions of her love for you? I believe in a happy afterlife. I *have* to. If I didn't, I'd go mad or sink back into depression. I believe with all my heart that she is in perfect bliss right now. You don't need to pity her or feel bad for her. You feel bad for yourself because you're suffering from the loss of her. That's ordinary. We mourn that way because we're imperfect and short-sighted. Know what? It's okay. God loves us anyway.

Finally, you say you feel despair over the tactics of the Heralds. "It's almost as if they *designed* some of us as martyrs to die in the pursuit of the Most Dangerous."

Well, what if they did? You see this as appalling and depressing, but your view is not that of God. Remember God's words to Job — "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?"

I think dying for the cause was the only salvation for Walker. Her own posts indicated her confusion, fear and uncertainty. Perhaps if she'd survived she would have come to doubt and would have died in sin, instead of in glorious virtue. Maybe giving her that choice was the kindest thing the Heralds could have done.

She's not the only one, either. Make no mistake, had God chosen He could have given us all the ability to kill our enemies with a glance. He could simply have washed them from the Earth with a second deluge. But He made it hard for us, so that we could have the opportunity for true virtue, the chance to truly be like Christ. I suspect that those who are given powers of sacrifice are all destined to either die as heroes of the Hell War or to surrender in utter shame.

Naturally, I wouldn't post this theory on the main list. I doubt that many are ready to hear it. But... doesn't it explain a lot?

stark naked. I have a lot of respect for anyone willing to do that, and I will be happy to accept whatever help they can offer. The best part about these people is that they hold hunters in such high regard that they are easily led, and can serve as a valuable support network for our operations. Do not turn them away for any reason. They can all be useful at one time or another.

I don't see the "duds" as failed hunters. I think the aliens created them intentionally to serve a vital function in the overall campaign. Their lack of ability naturally forces them to the sidelines of the battle, and this puts them in the role of silent witnesses, even historians. In a way, they believe in what we're doing and are eager to help in any way they can. Their lives have been profoundly changed, and I think they are the first examples of the new generation: our ambassadors to the rest of the world when the battle is won and Earth must take its first hesitant steps toward contacting our alien benefactors.

There is a hint in these people of the challenge we will face one day. They are like us, yet weaker than us. Can we put aside our powers and let them take the lead, helping shepherd the rest of mankind toward understanding? It will perhaps be the ultimate test of all we have experienced, the ultimate challenge to our maturity as leaders.

If a "dud" seeks us out and offers us help, we should accept with humility. This is an act of courage greater than what the Messengers require of us, and we should give them the respect they deserve. We should take the time and effort to answer questions and help them understand the truth about the world they live in, because one day they, not us, will have the fate of the world in their hands.

ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHER AVENGERS

I'm disturbed and even frightened by the dissent and arrogance I see here. The idea of a separate mailing list for those of us with similar perspectives seemed like a good idea at first, but now I'm not so sure. I thought the purpose of splitting off on our own like this was to discuss the finer points and tactics of our unique blessings, without wasting the time and attention of our fellow imbued (although I see them piping up amongst us, anyway). More than that, I hoped that this list would provide greater solidarity and fellowship among warriors. Instead, I see tendencies that might separate us from the main body of the others.

Wrath, you should be ashamed! Your smug insistence that we are the "natural leaders" of our kind not only reeks of the sin of pride, it has absolutely no basis in observable fact. If anything, our powers suit us best to be point men, the first attackers in the breach — not the generals and master planners. If anyone is selected by the Heralds to lead, it's probably the justices, even though I fear their purpose is misread by their own membership. (I don't think their perception powers were given so they could decide whether to kill or not, but to prioritize among targets of differing threat. But that's really off topic.)

I don't think any one group was chosen by the Heralds to specifically lead. If there was supposed to be a clear, obvious leader, none of us would doubt it. Me, I doubt plenty. We're all supposed to work together. Declaring that one group is "the strongest" or "the most blessed" or "the chosen leaders" is only going to play into the hands of our enemies, who've already divided and conquered most of the human race!

What can I say? We're the only hope this world has. Somehow, we're going to have to learn to look past our differences if we're ever going to get together and really make the revolution a reality. After all, this list is intended for us, the imbued who seem to understand each other and what it's all about.

It's all ideology. To be who and what we are, we have to stand for something. Without that, we're nothing but a bunch of hard-nosed killers. But belief cuts both ways. The tighter we hold to our causes, the stronger we are. Look at Crusader. The brother doesn't look like a stone-cold killer; it's his faith that gives him his power. It's an illusion, sure, but that



doesn't matter. It works. But the downside is that the more hard-core the warrior, the more exclusionary he is. He won't fight beside heathens. Or women. Or blacks. These people's strength isolates them at a point when we need them most.

And on the other end of the spectrum you have revolutionaries who want to include everybody. Fact is, there are other warriors out there who do more harm to us than good. We don't have the time or energy to put up with their bullshit. It's that simple. This kind of avenger is just as committed as everybody else, and I bet they will eventually come around once they've been burned once or twice. I just hope they survive the experience.

What we need are true believers, people who are willing to see this thing through and at the very least set aside their differences until after we've won back our home. I'd like to think I'm one of those people. If you play straight with me, I'll play straight with you. You stick to the job at hand, and I've got your back, no matter what. If you'll go to hell and back to take a monster down, I'll be right there with you.

Count on it.

Right now, our ranks are composed of a collection of opinionated loners. I hope that will soon be a thing of the past.

I know I'm not alone in my beliefs. There are other soldiers out there who see the need for cooperation and teamwork, and are capable of setting aside their own philosophies for a common goal. If we can start putting together integrated teams like I have proposed, maybe we can start to convince the rest. Nothing is quite as persuasive as success.

Most soldiers are simply too stubborn and single-minded to take advice or instruction from others, no matter who they are. I respect Memphis68 for her uncompromising determination, but the fact of the matter is that no one can do it alone. We can't work with one another for long before conflicting styles and egos rub each other the wrong way. If we can't work with our own kind, who else is there? I hope that over time, people like Memphis will see the

Subject: Spare me your fucking pity

From: memphis68

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Boy, it sure makes my old bones all tingly to think you're hoping and praying I see the light and join you on your bullshit crusade. Spare me your pity. I've got corns older than you. I know how this world works a lot better than you ever could, with your white-bread background and your TV sensibilities. It doesn't take a genius to see how you and your bleeding-heart buddies are trying to drive our struggle into the ground. If you want to leave the list and head back over to hunter-net, be my guest. Be sure to say hi to all the vampires creeping around over there.

simple logic in seeking out more compatible imbued, even if it means swallowing some pride.

I have less hope for the truly hard-core types among us. I admire Crusader 17, and I'd work with him again in a heartbeat, but he is one of that breed whose personality and beliefs cannot admit the validity of anyone else's viewpoint. It's his way or the highway. If we can't condone some of his attitudes, we can at least respect his integrity. We should always make a place for him and others like him in our councils, so to speak, but if he is determined to live and die by his ideals, it really isn't for us to try to stop him. We just have to remember that the essence of the aliens' message is growth and maturity. Hunters whose minds and personalities are inflexible toward others will be forced to go it alone. I hate to say it, but one day the monsters will get them instead of the other way around. We will remember their names and their sacrifice, and hope to learn the lesson of their loss.

Growth and change are never painless.



CHAPTER 4: OUR FUTURE

For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

— Isaiah 9:5

Everyone asks questions about our existence: Why were we created? What are we supposed to do? What is our purpose? The obvious answers lie in the short term and are clear to warriors such as ourselves: To destroy the world's monsters. However, fighting battles suggests there is a war being waged. The greatest questions we can ask of ourselves as avengers in that struggle are: What is our fate in the war for humanity and the world, and can we win?

Ask these questions often enough of yourself, and survive enough days and nights of this miserable existence and you begin to form your own answers. For me, it's all plain. We are here to create a return to a better time. An older, wiser time when everyone lived in peace. We are here to fight a revolution in people's minds, and to open them to the power and possibilities locked inside. This is about killing the nightmares. This is about liberation. This is about a return to an Old World Order, the very oldest of them all.

Our ultimate purpose is not written in stone. It's a choice we make with the powers we've been given, and the conviction we feel in our hearts. Haven't we as life-long warriors felt that this world was wrong, _tainted_ somehow? Haven't we paid the price for our beliefs, sacrificing everything for the sake of our principles? I'll tell you right now that I may not agree with all of you out there, but you are my brothers and sisters in the struggle (yes, even you Soldier91), and I respect you for your courage to stand up for what you believe in. You've all been through hell and kept on going, and that says a lot about you.

We have awakened to the lie our fathers and forefathers have lived. This knowledge and the power it bestows carries an implicit responsibility to use it for the betterment of others. We have a mission to cleanse this world of the forces that control it, so our loved ones can live in a better world, a place of real equality and opportunity, free from beings that seek to prey on us. It's that simple and that difficult, and it could take all our lives to complete. Many of us may never live to see it become a reality. That's okay. If I fall, I know there will be others to take my place.

If we are ever going to succeed, we have to harden ourselves to the realities of this struggle. We warriors have to put our compassion and pity aside. We have to harden our hearts to feelings of loneliness and despair. We must be

prepared to make sacrifices, and we must accept it if and when the loss of life must be our own. This is a war we have to fight alone, and we can't falter, no matter how painful the price. Hopefully, our example will convince the rest of the chosen that our way is the right one. We cannot and will not force them to accept the truth. They have to come to it themselves.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PLAN

The struggle to free Earth from inhuman domination can be broken down into three basic steps:

The liberation of government, industry and media from inhuman control. At present, our ability to take the battle to the monsters is seriously hampered by the fact that they possess all the major centers of control in modern society. They make and enforce the laws, control our livelihoods, and dictate what information we receive and how we receive it. These are the primary tools by which the monsters are able to condition successive generations into blindness and meekness. The first stages of the revolution should be to locate the creatures that exercise influence in these areas and destroy them as quickly and efficiently as possible. This is to include any and all human soulless who willingly assist or collaborate with the monsters for their own self-interest or personal gain. Once this step has been accomplished, we can use these instruments of influence to open cities to hunter activity and begin a careful re-education of the general public.

Mobilize human assets to assist in a worldwide hunt. Once we have established firm control over national governments, we could place the regular armed forces and police at our disposal, to root out any and all remaining monsters. The general public could be deputized to report on unusual or suspicious activities among neighbors, assisting in the search-and-destroy effort. Ultimately, any known or suspected sympathizers or individuals who profited from inhuman domination would be gathered for a trial by their peers to determine guilt or innocence. Depending on their crimes, such individuals would be put to death or sentenced for a period of time to a re-education or work facility.

Establish an interim government. Once the present struggle has ended, the members of our kind will have to form an interim government

to shepherd humanity through the difficult period of awakening and reorganization. Until such time as the human race is ready to establish a government that is not built on previous inhuman-influenced models, we will be required to safeguard the public's interests and protect them from the threat of any new nonhuman incursions. Bystanders, having passed appropriate loyalty tests, would be allowed to assist in the interim government in a supporting role.

This plan draws on tried and true historical models, and allows us to focus our efforts in the most efficient manner. Of course, none of this is going to happen overnight. Completing the first step alone could take years, but once it's accomplished, the rest would likely fall into place quickly.

OUR FUTURE IN THE NEW WORLD

As stated in the plan, our roles will be far from over, even if we one day exterminate the forces of inhumanity. The human race will still need us in the form of protectors and guides to help shape a new society. Don't kid yourself — when the monsters are gone, we could be looking at serious worldwide chaos. Think of how dependent we've become on monster authority and influence. What human beings still actually control anything anymore? Once we have swept away all the forces of law and order, we're going to have to move fast to get our own people in place. The duds might be very useful for this. Depending on how events progress over the next few years, we might be able to groom select individuals to serve as our functionaries in the new government.

I realize that there will be resistance at first, but here's a chance to make Jared Shoemaker's dream a reality. Without monsters in control of the police and media, we can reveal ourselves publicly without fear of being censored or imprisoned. Once the people see them for what they are, we can drag out some captured monsters and execute them publicly. I imagine that seeing someone burst into flames at the touch of sunlight would be pretty persuasive.

The duds can handle day-to-day affairs while we concentrate on the final push to finish the beasts, once and for all. The dangerous part is the possibility that some monsters might have figured out a way to hide members of their own kind — literal " sleeper agents " that could go dormant for decades until we lost our vigilance — then begin to rebuild. That's why we'd have to depend on the populace to alert us to any signs of inhuman activity.

By this point, the rest of the world will be looking to us for guidance. We must not fail them. We'll have to purge any and all evidence of inhuman taint from society, so they can't take root in our minds ever again. I hate to say it, but that might also lead to placing our fellow imbued on trial for anti-human activities. Under the circumstances, I believe we can even turn to the lawgivers to oversee this effort. It seems like the perfect position for them, and might help mend fences with other hunters.

I realize these seem like drastic steps, but remember that we have to undo thousands of years of conditioning in a relatively short time. There's no way of knowing how long it will take for the rest of the human race to work its way through all of the blocks put in place by the monsters; certainly several generations. In the meantime, we are going to have to rule with justice, fairness and decisiveness.

THE MASTER PLAN

Do you want to hear **my** dream for the Hell War? Very well. I want to see an army of imbued meeting in Jerusalem on the same day. United under our God-given banners, we march openly in the streets and clean the Holy City of any filth we find. When Jerusalem is secured, we move on throughout the Middle East — Egypt next, if it's the cesspit that Jaeger described. City by city, a righteous army too powerful for any creature to stop.

Yes, I want to be out in the open. Jared Shoemaker was killed for trying to tell the truth, but he was one man — not a multitude. I want to see us spread through Asia, Africa and Europe, gaining new recruits with each victory — imbued or not, I don't care — until the forces of Hell realize their

Subject: The Hunter-Monster Dialectic

From: dzidat155

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Forgive me if I perceive a great many similarities between your modest plan and the revolutionary ideals of mainland China's party ancestors. If I may, please allow me to share an observation.

In China, those of us whom you call the imbued see our struggle not as a battle with ancient, devious enemies, but as a means of restoring the balance of energies that has been upset in recent times by the effects of the revolution. Where Chairman Mao claimed to bring the people together in harmony and equality, his descendants are said to have upset the balance by insisting on discordant foreign capitalism and industry. In the conflict of energies, the balance is supposedly upset. Whether this is true or not, I do not know, but we suffer a plague of great monsters. Whatever the effect that bred the monsters, it has also induced an opposite effect, so that we hunters can seek to restore the level of energies that made the East great.

Please accept this advice when considering your plans. Revolution, whether industrial or communist, is change. From the end of one cycle of unrest, new challenges always arise.

slaves have cast off their shoddes. I'd like to see every skinchanger chained in silver, every vampire dragged into the sun. I want laws against these creatures. I want social structures to expel them from their hiding places. I want them eradicated like the plague they are. I want to cleanse the Earth so thoroughly that the forces of Satan are left with no safe refuge.

I don't think I'll get what I want.

What stands in our way? Chosen and armed by God, what **could** stand in our way? Only one thing. Only ourselves. Only our greatest strength and our greatest weakness — our free will.

We have been handed the tools and given the option of using them selfishly, using them short-sightedly, ignoring them — or using them to re-forge ourselves as champions of God.

We've all seen people who ignore the call, and there are increasing rumors about imbued who've sold out to the other side. But fighting the good fight — that's the right thing to do, isn't it? Cleaning up our little corner of the world?

It's better than nothing, but the pride that keeps you focussed on your own level is the Devil's weapon against us. Free will gives our actions meaning. Without it, we're just pawns in the hands of a petty God. But even with free will, there is only one righteous action we can take, and that is to **give up** our freedom to serve God. We can do the right thing, and in doing so become freer than any mere agency could make us, but we can't. We choose the narrowest freedom — freedom of choice — and ignore freedom from sin.

Is it any wonder that the forces of evil in America have cloaked their iniquity with the phrase "pro-choice"? It's our addiction to choice, **meaningless** choice, that damns us all. As long as we are slaves to choice, we can win battles... but we'll never win the war.

WEAKNESSES

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: crusader17

Subject: RE: Might Makes Right

The most recent post by Wrath is the most sickening thing I've read on this list. I thought Potter's self-pity was disgusting, and Bookworm55's willingness to be duped was appalling, but Wrath, your contempt for decency and humanity takes the cake. I was willing to overlook it when

From: traveler72

Subject: RE: RE: Might Makes Right

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Crusader17 wrote:

>Every arrogant one of us who says, "My way is the only way. I alone know what's right.

>If you won't do it my way, I'll take my ball and go home," is a triumph for the other side.

>I suggest that Wrath be removed from this list

Shit, you like the Bible, don't you? How about this quote: "Before you take the mote from your neighbor's eye, pull the plank out of your own."

you referred to the non-imbuéd as "sheep," and I've tolerated your vulgarity, but your anaristic fantasy about a world run by avengers for our own benefit is too much to bear. Don't you realize that this kind of hubris is what got Satan kicked out of Heaven? (Oh, wait, you don't believe in God, despite the evidence of your senses. Adding arrogance to your stupidity merely compounds your foolishness.)

We have been given our gifts, not to enslave, but to serve. Yet, so many of us are blind to our purpose. We get lost reveling in our power and in doing so neglect our responsibilities. Can't you see that this plays into our enemies' hands? Every arrogant one of us who says, "My way is the only way. I alone know what's right. If you won't do it my way, I'll take my ball and go home," is a triumph for the other side.

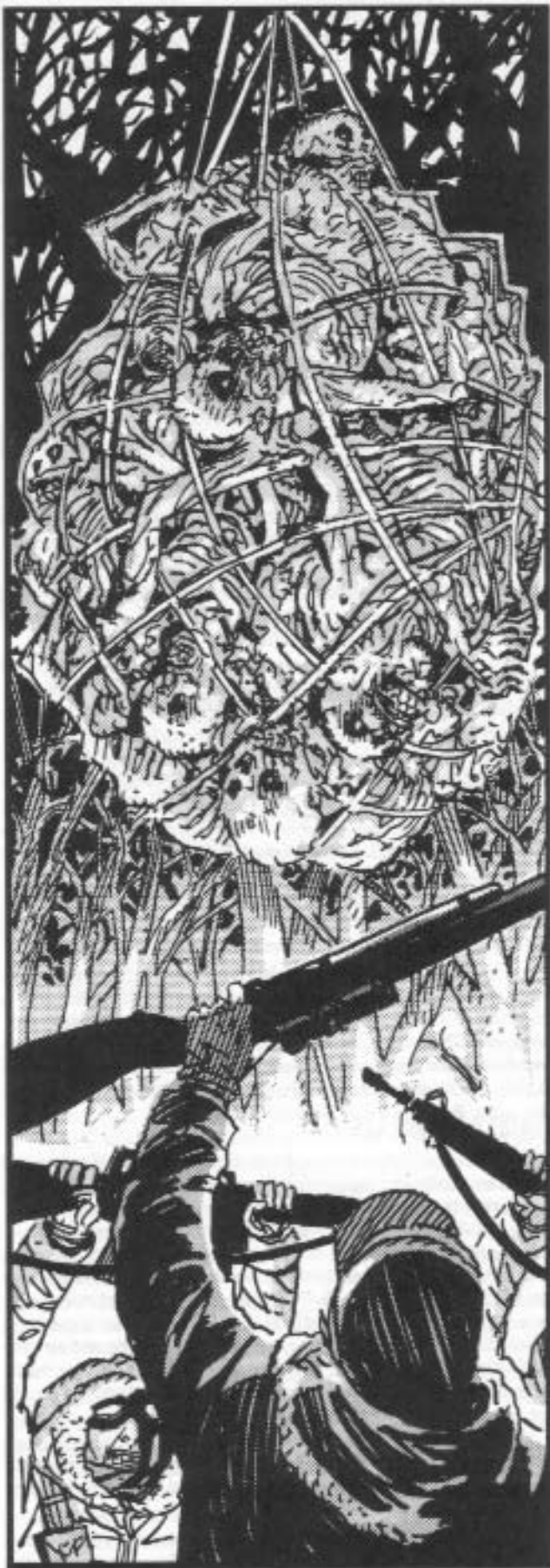
I suggest that Wrath be removed from this list before his toxic ideas can infect any impressionable minds. I don't want to be a party, even passively, to his pride and downfall.

HUNTER CULTS

The more time that passes, the more we hear reports of revolutionaries with groups of devoted supporters who are normal people, individuals whose loyalty borders on fanaticism. These cults are practically private armies of vigilantes or mercenaries who buy into a hunter's charisma and ideals. Some among us have a lot of practice making public speeches and trying to win others over to their point of view. In this harsh world, it's easy to see how our powers and a little charisma could go a long way to building a devoted following. Some of these cults seem fairly idealistic, like those Vindicated Faith people. Others seem to be the beginnings of petty kingdoms, like Flame61's. Good or bad, these cults should serve to caution all of us about our responsibilities to the people. Our powers give us a great deal of indirect influence over others, and we have to use that influence carefully. When the time comes, we'll need that influence to convince humanity about the monsters, but it will need to be done for the good of everyone as a whole, not for individual gain.

If you think this kind of thing only happens in other countries, think again. There are stories of someone in the Appalachians who goes by the name Father Moses. He's been running around, winning over entire towns with a mixture of hellfire, brimstone and monster killing. They give him food, clothes, even cars to continue his mission. Lately he's supposedly upped his fee, demanding homes and the "services" of local women. There are rumors that he has a dream of founding a "New Canaan" in the mountains, free of monsters and any other outside influence he doesn't approve of. A group of federal investigators went up to serve a warrant for kidnapping on a man who fit Father Moses' description. Supposedly, they never returned.

When the time comes, Joneses like Father Moses are going to be tough to deal with, but we're going to have to force them to give up their influence for the good of all. If not, what's to stop any other hunter from carving out his own little state. I sure as hell won't stand for it. Right now, we've got bigger problems to deal with, but these cults are definitely going to be an issue for the future. My suggestion



to everyone: If you happen to witness what you think is the beginning of one of these groups, nip it in the bud, even if it means you have to kill somebody. The longer we give them, the harder it's going to be to pull them out by the roots, and the more people who will end up dead.

I strongly question the wisdom of allowing Flame61 onto this private list. I have grave misgivings about her hubris, her approach and her ultimate plans. She has not been honest or forthright with us. Who knows what she's doing way over there in Istanbul? I suspect she's hiding something, and the elements of her program that she *isn't* hiding alarm me enough.

She's set herself up as a "goddess" and seems to regard her followers as nothing but cannon fodder. While regrettable sacrifices may have to be made in the Hell War, I do not believe in *tricking* people with *lies* about religion, then sending them off to die without the salvation of Christ.

On a tactical level, I readily admit that her "army" is impressive. But I refuse to compromise with blasphemy, even to fight a greater one.

We need to control her somehow. I don't believe the Heralds would pick someone without it being part of the plan, and it hasn't escaped me that moving her forces to the Holy City would be far easier than bringing people and material all the way from the U.S. She needs to be shown the true path, but until that happens, I vote that we leave her off this list. If she remains obdurate in her heresy, she'll do enough damage on the mainstream hunter-net.

The ironic thing about these groups is that they show we can inspire and organize people to follow us into battle, but for some reason we can't seem to see past our pride when it comes to other hunters.

These cults and their "Jones" leaders are a danger both as a temptation to other soldiers with ambition and because they mean creating organizations without seeking hunters of other philosophies. I'm sure these leaders believe they form a fighting force to combat the enemy on more effective terms. The problem is that their recruits are civilians and the occasional awestruck dud victims sent ahead to bog down a monster while the real hunter positions himself for the kill. Ultimately, it's an act of cowardice that any true soldier would be ashamed to take part in. When these followers are not used to stop a monster's teeth and claws, they're used to terrorize other civilians, allowing the Jones to become a supernatural thug, extorting money and favors as "tribute" from the helpless. There are reports of crusaders establishing themselves as "warlords" in such diverse places as Rwanda and Bosnia, all organized on more or less the same lines. The brutality they sow will corrupt the landscape as effectively as any monster could, and will ultimately turn the locals against the imbued in general.

This could be the one great test we take toward working together. Surely we can all see the need to dig these vipers out of our midst for the good of everyone. This could be our first real step at exorcising our inner demons and showing responsibility for one another's actions. The perfect choice to lead us would be Cop90, someone everybody seems to respect. If enough people will contact me privately to support such an expedition, I'll take it on myself to approach Cop90 and ask for help.

SAINTS AMONG US

It's natural that a struggle as important as this one would breed true believers, hunters who have become so dedicated to the cause that they become... something more. I've heard of revolutionaries so filled with passion that they can touch on powers most of us have never experienced. They breathe a cloud of sooty fog from their mouths to conceal their movements, or sometimes possess amazing speed and strength. Their devotion to the hunt makes ours pale in comparison. We should hold these individuals up as a shining ideal of what we can achieve, if our motives are pure and we stay dedicated to the struggle. Who knows what we might eventually accomplish if these men and women are any indication? The world we look to inherit seems full of amazing possibilities.

What worries me, however, is when these saintly individuals grasp for too much power too quickly. The one truly potent revolutionary I have met seemed... strained by his dedication.

Okay, let's not beat around the bush. He was crazy.

It seems like the more determined one of us is to destroy the monsters, the more power he can obtain. But the more obsessed he

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

From: dictatrix11

Subject: Kill the unbelievers

Turn the police and the army loose on the country. Root out the monsters and kill them before the people's eyes. Send spies and informers through the towns to turn in anyone who is disloyal. What will become of these people? A bullet to the head and a mass grave, I expect.

We have seen this all before in Bosnia. The media called it "ethnic cleansing." It's genocide, pure and simple. You sound as though anyone who does not believe in your vision is a monster, in name if not in deed. Will their executions be public as well? I expect not. That might give them a chance to denounce you in front of spectators.

All the monsters we have seen were brought by Serbs. The families they have murdered will not stay in their graves, and there are vampires loose in the countryside, breaking into homes and slaughtering whole families.

I want nothing of your old world, Memphis. I want my own world back.

becomes and the greater his power, the less human he is. It's as if these few people exist for nothing except the hunt, taking no notice of their surroundings, loved ones or much of anything not directly related to killing monsters. I thought I was dedicated, but my God, this man was like a machine. No fear, no hesitation, no instinct for survival. I once saw him hold a fang inside a burning building until it was almost completely consumed. Then he just walked out with his hair and clothes burnt up. He brushed himself off and walked away without a second look.

I'm the last person to turn down a weapon, and I have incredible admiration for anyone who can achieve that kind of dedication. However, we need to watch these saints very carefully. Who knows what they might decide to do with that power one day? What if one of them forms a human following of his own? He might not even be aware he's doing it. And how would we stop him?

I guess what I'm trying to say is that these people might one day become more of a liability than a benefit. What will they do when they have no more monsters to fight? Will they go on a rampage? Will they turn on us? It's possible. Anything's possible. We might have to destroy them before they can destroy us. I don't like the idea at all, but we might not have any alternative.

Power corrupts, as they say — maybe even power like our own. We might see the birth of a whole new generation of monsters, ones that could handle us like children.

On the polar opposite of the cult leaders are those warriors who have become so dedicated to the hunt that they've achieved a higher state of focus, learned to access powers beyond anything the rest of us possess. And yet at the same time, they've retreated even further into themselves, as if they had to sacrifice their individuality, their identity, in order to reach this higher existence.

A lot of people have heard the stories of these exceptionally dedicated soldiers and come to the conclusion that they've somehow lost their minds in the quest for power. I haven't met someone so potent, but I wonder if what some see as non-human is just a higher level of awareness that seems insane because it's so foreign to us.

If it is insanity at the expense of power, maybe it's an object lesson for us, the age-old notion of moderation. Perhaps it's a safeguard built into the process to keep extremists from pushing themselves too far. Kind of like a mental fuse; if we push ourselves past a certain point, we melt down.

Whatever the truth may be, the fact is that we as soldiers cannot afford to put ourselves in a place where we can no longer be of any use to our fellow imbued. Even if we look to a higher state of existence, it's a mistake to shut ourselves off from the very people we try to help.

It all comes back to responsibility for our abilities and purpose. The pursuit of power for its own sake is ultimately more destructive than productive. We have to have a goal firmly in mind, a set of values that will tell us when enough is enough, and that we have the tools we need to accomplish the task.

As for those who've already taken that step into the unknown - whatever they may have become - they are still our fellow soldiers, and we should watch over them as closely as any other. If they were to become so foreign to the rest of us that they were no longer human at all, we might find ourselves forced to put them down for the good of all hunters rather than risk them turning on civilians. I hope it doesn't come to that but we have to be prepared.

PULLING BACK FROM THE BRINK

Friday, January 21, Stop-and-Start Market, somewhere off I-66 in Kentucky, 2200 hours local.

We have been given a message for the good of all mankind. The aliens have seen the human race drowning in the filth of its own making, and they feel pity for us. So that we might survive and grow to become good and decent people, they have chosen special ones from all across the world and presented us with the knowledge that, if heeded, would ultimately set us all free. This knowledge, like any great revelation, has the power to liberate or destroy. If we misuse it, we'll become as bad or worse than the creatures we've been chosen to fight, and we'll see the end of the human race in our time. Perhaps the aliens meant that as a parting gift. If we can't see past our poisons to clean up our act, maybe it's better to put us out of our misery.

I don't claim to have all the answers. There are still a lot of hurdles to be cleared before the imbued can all come together to begin seriously working on the problem. I do believe that our role as crusaders is to be the guardians and protectors of humanity, the soldiers who confront the evil seeds we've sown across the world. We've been given the gifts of defiance and determination, to walk unafraid into the darkest of places and fight what we find there. With the other chosen behind us, we can face any opponent and break their hold over us. We're here to be the front line in a battle that will change the very spirit of the human race. If we win, there'll be no limit to what we can achieve.

What will happen once the battle is over? I think hunters will have to remain to watch over the Earth, to make sure that no one forgets the sacrifices we made. All it would take is a few well-meaning souls to start the cycle again, to begin building and testing and researching without regard for the effects on the human landscape, and the cycle would begin all over. I don't see our powers as being any less necessary once the monsters are gone. I guess the hunters that remain will become more policemen than soldiers, always on the lookout for danger areas. There are worse ways to make a living, I suppose.

If we are careful, we'll grow to the stage that the aliens await, and they'll make contact. Sometimes I dream about what that will be like, with the skies filled with lights and everyone looking up in wonder. Sometimes I dream that the guys are there, and they understand, at last, why I took them to Mexico and why they died there. I dream that they forgive me and everything is okay.

STONES IN THE ROAD

The last few days, I've been reading a lot of the messages on this list thinking about the problems that we have to overcome if we're going to achieve the unity we need to win this war. We have to find a way to bring our own kind together first, because no one is going to follow us if we can't get our own house in order. We've got to learn to conquer our intolerance and insecurity problems. We as soldiers refuse to let someone else dictate our actions. We can't work with anyone who will not automatically accept our views as the correct ones. How will we persuade people like Crusader 17 to see that the strict ideals he follows do not necessarily have to belong to anyone else for the purposes of working together in the hunt?

We are our own worst enemies. The world has to meet us on our terms, not the other way around. Maybe, deep down, it's our revenge for being forced to live on the fringe for so many years. People have brushed us aside as freaks, and now they have to come crawling before we'll give them the time of day. We are better than that, I know it. When it comes down to it, all of us can see the monsters as the real enemy. No matter how proud and stiff-necked we act, I think all of us know deep down that we can't do it alone. But we're afraid to ask for help. We're too proud.

And then there's our rage. It gives us strength, but it blinds us to so many things. How many times have we slapped aside a helping hand because we

Subject: The End of the World

From: jaguar251

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org

Soldier91:

Greetings from Mexico. I have been reading your interesting posts and wanted to share with you a similar legend in my homeland. Here, the ancient Mayans had many beliefs of man-beasts and blood worship, and yet they also worshipped great gods who lived in the sky. It is said in the Mayan calendar that very soon now the Earth will be destroyed in fire, then remade by the gods to start a new cycle of living.

Your ideas remind me of this old tale. Could it be that this next world is the same as the one you envision? That the sky gods of the Mayans are the aliens as you describe them, and the old Mayan kings, who were descended from the gods, were actually people such as ourselves? Could it be that this world has died and been reborn many, many times, and that the battle between hunter and monster is the fire that consumes it? Please email me and tell me your thoughts. If I am correct then we have very little time left to bring all of the crusaders together and fulfill the wishes of the gods.

were too pissed to think straight? Do that often enough and no one will offer a hand again.

There are times I think we "avengers" are in danger of becoming just another bunch of monsters for the rest to deal with. We're prone to extremism, especially when it comes to violence. That sort of thing is seductive. Once you start killing even monsters, pretty soon you get a taste for it. Before you know it, it's as natural as breathing. Eventually, even the worst crimes become just an exercise in technique, a means to an end. Is this how the first monsters began, years and years ago?

I think we can work our way out of this trap, but it isn't going to be easy. It's going to start with one warrior turning to another and looking out for him, talking him through the rages and showing him alternatives to his actions. We have to learn to be our brother's keeper. Kind of like a guardian angel.

We can overcome the weaknesses that divide us. We have to or everything else will have been for nothing.

THE NEW AGE

Once the monsters are beaten back, what then?

I think our era as leaders of the chosen will be over, as we'll all move into a new era of redeeming the Earth. This doesn't mean we'll no longer be needed, only that after the battle, there will be new challenges. My guess is that the mantle will pass to the healers, who will have to step in and begin the long task of mending humanity's scarred psyche and drying up the sources of corruption that gave birth to monsters in the first place. During this period, the "duds" will come into their own, acting as ambassadors to the rest of the human race. After the healers, the pathfinders will have their turn, guiding Earth's civilizations into a more responsible course of progress and prosperity, a more controlled form of growth that will respect the physical and spiritual environment and leave no opportunity to spawn another plague. Through it all, the imbued will have to remain out of the limelight, acting as advisors and protectors, but letting humanity make its decisions - and mistakes. If we were too closely involved as leaders, they would always look to us for answers in difficult times, and they would never learn to stand on their own.

Eventually, once all the battles and rebuilding is past, the pathfinders will finish their task and will step aside for the bright-eyed optimists, who will have waited patiently and quietly on the sidelines all that time. Drawing on the experiences of the past, but open-minded about our future existence, they will take their place just as the aliens decide that the time has come to make contact, elevating us to our place as celestial peers. When that time comes, I think we will finally be able to put aside our powers. The human race will have outgrown its need for people like us, and we can go on to lead normal lives in a world we helped create.

I hope I live to see it.



CHAPTER 5:

NEW RULES

The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.

— Job 17:9

As the pre-eminent warriors among the imbued, Avengers are people with passionate and idealistic viewpoints. Their intense commitment to their beliefs gives them the courage to fight the horrors of the night. In game terms, these aggressive and confrontational identities are reflected in the Traits and special capabilities that Avengers possess and develop. This chapter is dedicated to the common and new Archetypes, Abilities, Backgrounds, edges and rules that apply to Avengers. These unique Traits define who these people are. This does not mean to say that these qualities are exclusive to Avengers — other creed members can have them, too. The following mechanics are simply indicative of the wrathful and are probably passed on by them to other imbued as hunter society becomes self-aware.

NEW ARCHETYPES

CRUSADER

The Crusader has a vision for making the world a better place, be it through something as vast and sweeping as democratic reform or as pedestrian as eliminating jaywalkers from city streets. These individuals live their ideals instead of merely preaching them, hoping to effect change by actions and examples. Social activists, young politicians, rookie cops and junior reporters often exemplify this Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when your actions inspire others to adopt your beliefs.

DEMAGOGUE

The Demagogue affects the world around her by inciting people based on commonly held prejudices, fears or traditions. She achieves influence by drawing upon people's emotions and then inciting a reaction

based on those sentiments, creating a self-image as a charismatic, passionate leader. Demagogues are found among politicians, religious leaders and media figures.

— Regain Willpower when you convince others to act by preying upon their fears or dislikes.

SOLDIER

The Soldier not only gets through difficult situations with competence and determination, but he sees his compatriots through as well, keeping their morale up and their minds focused on the task at hand. These people aren't necessarily military types. Any person with the strength of will to face adversity with a calm, unshakeable resolve and still have the interests of their comrades at heart can embody this Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when your actions serve to sustain your team through difficult or adverse conditions.

VIGILANTE

The Vigilante has no faith in the laws of the land, preferring to take matters into his own hands and seek revenge. When confronted by what is clearly an offense against himself or another (even a stranger), the Vigilante confronts and punishes the offender, taking care to make the penalty suit the crime. Vigilantes can be found among social activists, cynical cops and religious figures.

— Regain Willpower when you successfully strike back at a person or organization that has wronged you or someone you know.

AVENGER CAMPS

Although Avengers share many qualities, their overall physical and mental development differs widely based on level of commitment (some would say fanatical devotion) to

their ideals. Avengers in each of the three typical "camps" — hardcore, moderate and progressive — typically exhibit a range of Archetypes, Abilities and Backgrounds that reflect their particular outlook on the world.

HARDCORE

Hardcore Avengers bend the world to fit their own ideals, not the other way around. People and institutions that run counter to these values are fundamentally wrong and must be converted or destroyed. There is no middle ground.

The hardcore Avenger is typically a passionate and opinionated speaker, railing against the world to convert it to the One True Way or perish. His primary goal is to swell the ranks of the crusade so that when the time comes for action there is an army of the righteous to remake the world in its image.

Hardcore therefore place a high priority on Social Attributes, favoring Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance, in that order. Physical Traits are next in preference; when words fail, action is the only alternative. These fanatics place equal emphasis on Strength, Stamina and Dexterity, seeking to be ready for any challenge. Mental Traits are least favored. Who needs reason when one has faith?

In terms of Abilities, hardcore Avengers generally favor natural Talents, particularly Expression, Leadership and Intimidation. Skills come a close second, especially Crafts, Demolitions and Firearms. Knowledges to any significant degree are uncommon, but sometimes include Academics, Occult or Politics.

Backgrounds desired by hardcore Avengers can include Arsenal, Destiny and occasionally low levels of Cult (see p.67).

MODERATE

Where the hardcore are fiery-eyed and uncompromising in their beliefs, moderate Avengers are more pragmatic in the cause of good versus evil. Different people have every right to hold different beliefs, so long as the end result is the same — evil is wrong and must be stopped. Moderate Avengers are just as committed to destroying monsters as their hardcore brethren are, but are more willing to work with other Zealots whose ideals might not coincide with theirs.

Moderate Avengers are solid, outspoken types who are more inclined to act personally on their outrage as opposed to dragging others into it. Their Attributes are the most flexible of the three camps, with equal emphasis on Physical, Social and Mental. It doesn't take a particular characteristic to make a moderate Avenger, just a willingness to confront evil and kill it when possible.

Moderate Avengers tend to favor a fairly broad base of Abilities, weighted toward a mix of Talents and Skills that reflect the Avenger's profession and interests. Knowledges tend to be straightforward and business-like, such as Law, Medicine or Politics.

Almost any Background is useful to a mainstream Avenger, but favored ones include Allies, Contacts and Resources.

PROGRESSIVE

"Progressive" is something of a misnomer for anyone who fits the bill of an Avenger, but it's useful to describe the polar opposite of the hardcore fanatic. The progressive sees things in the world he recognizes as wrong, but is willing to investigate any and all avenues of how to attack the problem. More inclusive than moderate Avengers, the progressive actively courts the opinions and input of others, even members of other creeds. This does not mean, however, that the progressive is averse to kicking a down door and wading into a room with a blazing machete.

Progressive Avengers, recognizing the value of varied sources of information and insight, are much more cerebral than their hardcore counterparts. Mental Attributes are most favored, with a toss-up between Physical and Social in second place, depending on the Avenger's origins and inclinations. Some progressive Avengers come from the ranks of academia, while others are military personnel.

A wide range of Knowledges are most favored by progressive Avengers, then Skills and finally native Talents along the lines of Alertness, Awareness and Intuition.

Backgrounds that are useful to progressive Avengers include Allies, Bystanders and Resources.

TRAITS

The following new Abilities and Backgrounds are likely to belong to Avenger characters, but aren't necessarily exclusive to them. Members of other creeds may possess these Traits. The Storyteller should approve such "poaching" before your chronicle begins, though, to ensure that all players' characters are unique.

TALENTS

MIGHT

"Lucy," Rick said, trying to keep his voice calm. "Hon, you're going to have to let go of my hand and grab my legs." He looked down. Big mistake. He and Lucy were six stories up. When she fell out the window, he didn't think, he just lunged after her, grabbing for her with one hand and trying to snag something with the other. He'd succeeded at both but that meant they were dangling from — A phone cable? A power line? — 60 feet above the concrete.

"Lucy, I'm gonna need both hands to get us back." He could do a one-handed chin-up. Standing on the ground, he might even be able to lift Lucy one-handed. But no way could he do a one-handed chin-up with her holding on.

"Lucy, would you let go of my fucking hand?" She sobbed, but didn't move. Rick grimaced, wrapped his legs around her and tried to pry his hand from her grip.

Might is a Talent for moving mass with muscle. Generally, it means your character has trained his body into a state of advanced buffitude. That, or he does so much manual labor that muscle has developed naturally.

This Trait does not improve a hunter's capacity to damage people with Brawl or Melee attacks, and it doesn't really do him

much good in combat (unless he tries to lift something heavy or break something hard). It is good for increasing Strength when using the Encumbrance, Jumping, Lifting/ Breaking, Opening/ Closing or Throwing rules (*Hunter*, pp. 182-184). You can add dots of Might to Strength (and maybe even to your Strength + Athletics pool, if the Storyteller agrees), but only when performing such static feats of brawn.

Might has an important limit, though. You cannot have more dots in this Talent than you have dots in Strength. Someone with one dot of Strength simply doesn't have the bulk to support more than one dot in this Trait, and should probably send away to Charles Atlas.

- Novice: "I'm going more for tone than mass." You have some decent muscle definition.
- Practiced: "I love the manly smell of my weight belt in the morning." Your neck is vanishing.
- Competent: "Watch me crack this walnut with my bicep." You routinely rack every station on the Nautilus.
- Expert: "Watch me crack this walnut with my abs." You qualify as "muscle bound," and no one kicks sand in your face — ever.
- Master: "Yeah, I was Mr. Universe '97. Could have been '98 and '99, but the hair removal was a real hassle." Lucrative protein-drink endorsements are yours for the asking.

Possessed by: Jocks, Narcissists, Manual Laborers, Personal Trainers

Specialties: Clean and Jerk, Massive Arms, Ripping Phonebooks, Smash

FAST DRAW

"We can talk this over." Big Wally grinned, showing a gold tooth. "Have a drink."

"I don't touch alcohol," Bharati replied, her face like stone. "Get to business."

"All right. Business is my business, after all... I don't like the leeches any more than you do. I don't like to pay their cut. I don't like burying my boys after they get bled dry, but... the bloodsuckers are good for business...."

"So you're going to side with the enemy? I just want to hear you say it."

"Lady, you sure you don't want a drink? You could fuckin' use one."

"Alcohol is a crutch for those who cannot confront their own cowardice."

Big Wally flushed. In an instant it was clear from his eyes how he'd survived Atlanta's cutthroat rackets. "You fuckin' bitch," he snarled, reaching — and then he froze. His hand was halfway across his vest. Bharati had drawn a pistol, reached across the table and planted the barrel half an inch from his left eye. The gun was as steady as her voice: "Alcohol also dulls the reflexes."

Your character is good at getting a gun (or knife or a pair of needle-nose pliers) ready for a fight in a hurry. For each dot you take in Fast Draw, you can roll another die during the

initiative segment of combat. Do not add the results of all die rolls together! Rather, pick the highest single die to use as your initiative roll. If you decide to do anything besides attack with the weapon drawn, reduce your initiative by four and do something different with your combat action (changing your mind in the middle of combat is not a good idea).

- Novice: Jimmy Stewart in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*
- Practiced: Gary Cooper in *High Noon*
- Competent: Charles Bronson in *Once Upon a Time in the West*
- Expert: Clint Eastwood in *Fistful of Dollars*
- Master: John Wayne in *The Shootist*

Possessed by: Firearm Aficionados, Police, Gang-bangers, Western Fans

Specialties: Shoulder Holster, Ankle Holster, Knife in Pocket

SKILLS

CONSTRUCTION

A tiny grin played on Gino's face as he pulled his truck up to the mansion gate. Two frowning men strode toward him, waving their arms. Gino flicked on the sight. Yep.

"I think you've got the wrong address, buddy."

"This 126 Ashton Way?" Gino asked.

"Yeah."

"Well, I got me a work order from... Dunsim? Something about cracks in the foundation."

The guard's glare of suspicion was leavened with discomfort. "There must be some mistake."

Gino sighed. "Look, I got the work order right here, okay? Miss Dunsim is gonna pay me for hauling my ass out here whether I examine the foundation or not. If you let me in, she gets something for her money. It's all the same to me if that foundation cracks until you can see daylight through it, but I'd like a chance to do my job."

The notion of daylight in the basement seemed to make up the guards' minds. They unlocked the gate. Thirty minutes later, they were dead in a pool of their own blood, as Gino set fire to the coffin in the mansion's basement.

"Yeah, Ol' Miss Dunsim's gonna pay all right," he muttered. The little smile cracked again.

Whereas the Crafts Ability is used to build and repair items — cars, toasters, even small structures — this Skill is slanted toward actually building, maintaining and repairing houses and buildings. If your character has three or more dots, he's probably a professional or former professional. In any event, the Ability to build a house, strip mall or police station also confers the necessary insights into tearing one down. Construction can therefore be used interchangeably with Demolitions when it comes to knocking down buildings, assuming the right equipment is at hand, whether it be explosives or a bulldozer. However, unlike Demolitions, this Skill cannot be used to construct explosives. It won't let you build a bomb, but it will let you stick it in the right place to do maximum damage to a structure.

- Novice: Tim Allen
- Practiced: You know your way around Home Depot.
- Competent: You can tell the difference between metric and standard hex nuts.
- Expert: You need two separate places to store your tools.
- Master: Bob Villa asks you for pointers.

Possessed by: Contractors, Builders, Migrant Workers, Rednecks

Specialties: Repairs, Homes, Corporate Structures, High-Rises, Bridges

KNOWLEDGES

BODY CONTROL

"Okay," Roy said with a sigh, "I'll show you this one more time." He relaxed and took five deep breaths. He then produced a needle that was several inches long and calmly stuck it through his forearm. Iris just stared, shaking her head.

"Even after seeing it, I can't figure out the trick."

"After seeing it so many times, I can't see why you don't believe me. It's not a trick!"

The average human being exerts little true control over his or her body. Even athletes with superb coordination cannot usually master the autonomic functions. People who make a special study, however, can eventually bring supposedly unconscious functions under control. Such disciplined souls can cause their pupils to widen,

can slow their heartbeat during a crisis, and can even stop bleeding or enter a coma voluntarily.

Roll Wits + Body Control, difficulty 8, when your character uses this Knowledge in a crisis. Roll Intelligence + Body Control, difficulty 7, in a calm situation. Particularly challenging feats require multiple successes (as explained below).

Successes Feat

Required

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Withdraw Testicles: Strikes to the groin do not cause debilitating pain in men for the rest of the scene. |
| 1 | Hold Breath: Your character may hold his is. This effect is not cumulative if more than one success is rolled or the effect is attempted repeatedly in the same scene. |
| 2 | Tolerate Heat: All damage that your character suffers from fire or dangerously high temperatures is reduced by one point for the rest of the scene. This effect is not cumulative if more than two successes are rolled or the effect is attempted repeatedly in the same scene. |
| 2 | Transcend Pain: Dice-pool penalties from injuries are reduced by one for the remainder of the scene. This effect is not cumulative if more than two successes are rolled or the effect is attempted repeatedly in the same scene. |



3 Slow Bleeding and Breathing: If your character has been reduced to the Wounded level through lethal damage, performing this feat means another health level is lost every two hours of bleeding, instead of every hour. Each success after the third means another hour without blood-loss damage (so four successes reduce health-level loss to one every three hours). However, each success past the initial three also reduces your character's Dexterity by one. If Dexterity drops to zero your character is immobilized and blood loss can be slowed no further.

4 Death Trance: Your character enters a death like coma. Only advanced medical equipment can determine that he is still alive. While in this state, your character requires far less oxygen than normal, he does not lose any health levels due to bleeding (even if lethal damage exceeds Wounded), and the effects of poisons in his bloodstream are delayed until he wakes up. Unfortunately, this technique isn't an exact science; your hunter can't choose when to snap out of it. The effect lasts anywhere from an hour to two days, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Note that not all effects can be performed in a scene because a high number of successes is achieved in a single effort. If your character seeks to slow his breathing (three successes), he doesn't automatically get the benefits of effects, such as heat tolerance, that are gained with fewer successes. Those effects must be rolled for separately in other actions. Likewise, rolling four successes in an effort to hold breath doesn't throw your character into a coma.

- Student: Ninjas and sumo wrestlers aren't the only ones who can tuck them back in.
- College: Walking barefoot over blacktops, beaches or hot coals doesn't phase you.
- Masters: You control your adrenaline rushes.
- Doctorate: Escape artists envy your calm.
- Scholar: You could suddenly wake up in a morgue.

Possessed by: Yogis, Fakirs, Dervishes, Shamans, Master Martial Artists

Specialties: Any of the feats listed above.

BACKGROUNDS

BERSERK

As she roared down at him, Wendell could see purple clots of dead blood shifting beneath her pallid skin. Her visage was all the more grotesque next to the thing's foppish velvet coat.

"So this — this is the terror of the night? Crusader 17, the sword of God? I expected some fearsome Adonis, not a sawed-off runt with Coke-bottle glasses. God has pretty piss-poor taste in agents."

Wendell could feel that prickly, uncomfortable sensation running across the surface of his body. For a moment, he was back on the playground being pushed down, stood flushed with shame in the dean's office, stood again before the judge. It was like every other time he tried to stay calm... and failed.

She leaned in and her clear, sweet voice floated at him on a wave of charnel breath.

"Your God can kiss my ass."

All his life, Wendell wondered why a loving, merciful God had cursed him with such a violent temper.

Now he knew.

Your character has some unresolved issues festering away in his subconscious. When someone pushes his buttons just right, his temper boils over. Maybe your character freaks out when people mock his stutter. Maybe he can't stand to see a woman abused. Maybe questioning his sexuality is intolerable. Whatever it is, when he's exposed to that stimulus, you must make a successful Willpower roll, or your character lashes out violently at the offender.

If you fail the Willpower roll (or you decide that your character goes with the urge), he can perform one action of epinephrine-fueled ultraviolence. The next time he hits someone, add his rating in Berserk to the damage pool, before the target soaks. This bonus doesn't apply to firearm or missile attacks, but it could possibly be added to Strength in a single feat, such as snapping handcuffs or crushing a wooden chair.

This frothing madness has its price, though. Your character suffers bashing damage in his utter disregard for his own safety. The health levels lost depend on how many dots he has in this Background. Such damage can be soaked with Stamina and with any armor that's applicable (Storyteller's discretion; armor may not help protect hands bruised in a merciless beating).

Rating Levels of Bashing Damage

1-2	One
3-4	Two
5	Three

Your character can go berserk only once per scene. It's impossible to go "partially berserk" by using only some dots in hopes of suffering less bashing damage. Berserk is all or nothing.

- No one messed with you on the playground after that first incident.
- Your self-control count rarely makes it to "10."
- You've worked as a bouncer just for the chances to vent.
- You've probably done time for assault.
- "Mr. McGee, don't make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."

CULT

"Behold..." bellowed the high priest. "Behold the Voice of God come among us! Behold the Metatron!"

There were only five people in the dingy basement. The "altar" had been built by an inexperienced carpenter only the week before, the candles were mismatched, and the so-called "Voice

of God" was a 19-year-old dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. And yet, the air was thick with belief and heavy with anticipation.

Two months ago, he'd just been Ronnie. He hadn't really believed in God, hadn't even really thought much about religion. He was embarrassed the first time they met, even after he'd felt the Flames, heard the Voice, seen the Truth. But now it was all starting to feel natural...

You've become the focus of a new religion. Maybe they think you're God, or at least his voice on Earth. Either way, some people look to you to explain their life, offer guidance and ensure salvation.

When creating your character's cult, keep in mind that people who follow new religions — even ones started by leaders who are capable of apparent "miracles" — are unlikely to have a big stake in the status quo. Movers and shakers, the intelligentsia and people in any position of authority don't get there by bowing down to the first would-be messiah who comes along. Your cultists are probably losers, misfits and dropouts with little to lose. But as long as you protect them and give them something to believe in, they reward you with what little they have to offer. Your character may draw upon his cult for assistance, goods, services or money. The Storyteller decides how far followers are willing to go by way of help.

Unlike Allies, supporters gained through Cult may witness your character's powers in use and may be exposed to the hunt without losing faith or being driven off. Indeed, such displays and knowledge may be what attracts these people.

- Two proselytizing believers, remarkable only for their faith.
- Four followers, one of whom may be a little less hapless than the others — almost a normal person.
- Six followers. One is exceptional in some way — smarter, richer or more dangerous than the average person.
- Eight followers. One is extraordinary — a cut above the *hoi polloi* and maybe even a bystander.
- Ten followers, and a leader — your right-hand — who has the skills and belief to recruit more members.

PAWN

Larissa dodged through the dusty halls and corridors, chasing down the ghost. It had lost her in the stockyards and on Halloween, but tonight she was determined to destroy it. Her chain was in hand and she could see the flames dripping off it, even if no one else could.

She rounded a corner and there was the spirit, standing by an open window, looking out over the city. She wondered if it could survive the fall. It seemed to wonder the same thing.

It held out its hands, entreating, pleading, but she knew better. The chain arced through the air and through the spirit, igniting the ghost-flesh. The only sound that could be heard was the whistle of the links; the ghost's screams and cries were inaudible. It leapt out the window in desperation.

Only when Larissa turned did she see its parting message, crawling across the wall, written with the bodies of roaches and spiders.

You are hers.

The good news is, you've got some help when it comes to hunting down paranormal creatures. The bad news is, your benefactor wants you to eliminate its rivals. Every easy kill it sets up for you cements its power. Your monstrous patron helps you find prey indirectly and may even haul your balls out of the fire if you do something stupid. But the minute you become a threat, all the powers that protect you will turn on you. The Storyteller decides if and when your character's benefactor aids him, and when he crosses the line against it.

- Your "master" is more smart than powerful. You're its best pawn, and it might even have to play you personally.
- You have attracted the attention of a modestly powerful creature. It has at least one or two other catspaws, roughly as powerful as you (though maybe not in the same way).
- You're one of many pawns in the mastermind's game, so it can probably keep you at a safe distance. It can offer you some protection from other creatures and the police — as long as some other power player doesn't back them.
- Learning even the name and nature of your icy manipulator is an epic task. It can covertly supply you with money, weapons and political leverage — as long as it decides you're valuable.
- You're just one shiny cog in a vast and probably ancient machine. The powers that propel you may be the hidden rulers of your city — if not your state.

THE HIGH COST OF COMMITMENT

The anger and sense of outrage that drives most Avengers is a double-edged sword. Their implacable hatred pushes them, fueled as they are by their Zeal, to wield increasingly fearsome powers to ever greater heights in the war against monsters. Of all creeds, however, Avengers can rise in Virtue quickly. They tend to eschew the Virtues and edges of the other creeds as distracting or useless for their purposes. Thus, Avengers can gain Zeal fast and burn out just as readily, their minds and very humanity strained beyond the limits of endurance by the imperatives of the hunt. All stereotypes begin with a grain of truth, and visions of wild-eyed, irresistible Avengers wading fearlessly into their prey are the stuff of urban legend.

SPENDING CONVICTION

Many Avengers see no point in holding anything back. It's all or nothing, whether they're hand to hand with a lobo or laying a Trail on an escaping walker. They tend to risk their Conviction at every available opportunity, angling for that extra margin of success that will get the job done right the first time. Hunting monsters rarely offers second chances. When they hit 10 Conviction, only very serious circumstances, such as standing at the threshold of a monster's lair, prevents most Avengers from trading in for another Virtue point.

REGAINING CONVICTION

The wrathful find their commitment to the hunt invigorated when they successfully wreak vengeance upon their prey. They lose their fire when forced to abandon a hunt or back down in the face of a foe. The following actions apply specifically to Avengers in terms of gaining and losing Conviction. As always, the Storyteller has final say about how Conviction points are gained through character actions. Each of these deeds should confer no more than one Conviction point per game session. Indeed, one point may be all that a character gains by pulling off several of these actions in a single chapter.

- Gain a point of Conviction when leading hunters of other creeds in the successful destruction of a monster.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Avenger defeats a physically superior monster in personal hand-to-hand combat.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Avenger outwits a monster in a way that directly leads to its destruction (tricking a canny vampire into an ambush, for instance).
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Avenger withstands an overwhelming attack by a monster and emerges unscathed ("God is with me, for my cause is just!").
- (Optional) Lose a point of Conviction if your Avenger flees an attacking monster.
- (Optional) Lose a point of Conviction if your Avenger's foe withstands his overwhelming attack and emerges unscathed.

ALLOCATING VIRTUE POINTS

It's no surprise that Avengers prioritize their powers in terms of combat ability. Edges stemming from use of Mercy are largely considered a waste of time (although some Avengers swear by the Innocents' capacity to hide in plain sight). Zeal is almost always the Virtue of choice, invested primarily in Vengeance, but occasionally in Judgment for access to perceptive powers. Avengers who manifest Defender edges are sometimes scorned as timid souls who don't fully trust in their fighting abilities.

THE PRICE OF EXCEPTIONAL VIRTUE

As any hunter progresses along her chosen path, the terrible strain of the hunt and the horrors the imbued witness slowly but surely wear away at her identity and sanity. What's more, when one of the imbued attains high Virtue level, her all-consuming dedication to the hunt erodes her basic humanity, making her increasingly incomprehensible, enigmatic, unapproachable or perhaps alien to even her closest companions.

All hunters develop derangements when their Virtue scores reach 7 or higher, but Avengers can start to show warning signs of their increasing mental erosion at lower Zeal levels. These "lesser" effects are separate and distinct from full-fledged derangements, reflecting the horrific stresses of long, terrifying hunts. ("Lesser" ailments are optional and may be applied as your troupe sees fit.)

Examples of such conditions include:

• **The Thousand-Yard Stare.** By the time most Avengers attain 5 Zeal, the horrors witnessed on countless hunts leave an indelible mark on the psyche, expressed in a bleak, battle-weary stare. Your character's glare grants a +1 bonus to Intimidation rolls, but also imposes a +1 difficulty to Social rolls involving eye contact.

• **The Aura of a Killer.** Once many Avengers attain 6 Zeal, they turn their workshops or homes into abattoirs, filled with grisly trophies from victims, gruesome weapons, and perhaps even a recently kidnapped foe, left to die slowly or to be tortured night after night. Death becomes a constant and welcome companion, and your character's voice, expression and body language bespeak barely restrained violence. Add +1 to Intimidation rolls, but also +1 to the difficulties of all other Social rolls.

NEW DERANGEMENTS

Because of their mindsets and attitudes toward the hunt, Avengers can manifest types of derangements unique to their creed.

ARCHANGEL COMPLEX

Certain Avengers who become so obsessed with the hunt and the destruction of the enemy develop a specific sort of megalomania; they imagine they have ascended to the level of the Messengers. These "archangels" believe they have been granted authority over other imbued and have the right to mete out punishment to those whom the Avengers believe fall short of the Heralds' ideals. What those ideals are is up to you, based on your character's identity and delusion.

One function of this complex lends the archangel a compelling presence, granting a +2 bonus to all Social rolls involving other Avengers. An archangel expects deference and unconditional loyalty from any and all Avengers that he encounters, and probably uses his commanding aura to browbeat them into pursuing his current agenda. In addition, your character takes it upon himself to test the loyalty and dedication of any hunters whom he encounters, especially other Avengers. If he finds a subject wanting, he does not hesitate to punish or even attempt to destroy his fellow imbued. Your archangel character might stay his hand at the expense of a Willpower point, but the spared subject had best seek safety before your hunter changes his mind.

COMPULSIVE-AGGRESSIVE

Hunters, especially Avengers, are forced to exist in a world of staggeringly brutal violence from which seems impossible to escape. Day-to-day exposure to horrific scenes, compounded with an obsessive desire to destroy the perpetrators, causes your character to lose his social and moral perspective on violence. Naked aggression becomes his primary mode of social interaction.

A compulsive-aggressive individual's nature forces him to react to social situations in a confrontational and violent manner. Any social interaction becomes an attempt at intimidation, by



default. Any Social rolls automatically become Intimidation rolls. If the roll is botched, your character is consumed with rage and attacks the subject, using whatever weapon is immediately available. Your Avenger can avoid making such rolls for a scene with the expenditure of a Willpower point.

DISSOCIATION

While some Avengers lose themselves in the storm of violence they help create, others become so inured to the risk of life and limb that it loses meaning. These people dissociate themselves completely from physical and emotional concerns. Dissociative Avengers are little more than killing machines, almost devoid of humanity or identity. Their voices, when they speak at all, sound distant and disturbingly nonchalant, as though they were commenting on a television show as opposed to a life-and-death situation.

Dissociative Avengers react to the hunt and its horrors with a detachment better reserved for video games. They don't acknowledge the risks inherent to a situation, so they are fearless to the point of being suicidal. They are not above physically holding monsters inside burning buildings to ensure their destruction, or allowing an enemy to land a blow in order to gain an opening and land a killing shot.

Dissociative Avengers may take no defensive actions whatsoever in combat, nor may they balk at any task on the grounds of personal risk. One interesting benefit is that they apparently feel little or no pain while doing battle with the enemy. All wound penalties suffered *during* combat (not, say, suffered due to illness) are reduced by one.

A WRETCHED EXISTENCE

Remember, too, that Avengers can develop mental ailments outside the "official" Virtue system. Conditions and derangements can take hold due to particularly traumatic experiences, such as having to destroy the walking corpse of a friend, or simply by the loss of a day-to-day "normal" life. High Virtue rating is not the only means to delusions and hysteria.

The Storyteller can decide if your character ever suffers an experience-induced complex, based on the events of the story. You may also decide that your character falls victim to these effects, based on her encounters and hardships.

Mental difficulties, whether the result of high Virtue or gut-wrenching trauma, might be treated or even alleviated. It usually means dropping out of the hunt altogether, spending Willpower repeatedly to maintain self-control, and confronting the source of your character's problem or seeking some kind of help. Of course, constantly witnessing the depredations of monsters and striving to do nothing in response rarely allows for rehabilitation.

EDGES

There's a great deal of debate about the nature of different hunter types, and about the origins of their various powers. Hunter social groups and the edges available to them are confusing, not only because edges are rarely restricted to particular circles or philosophies, but because the same edges can manifest in different ways. One Avenger's use of Cleave

may not be apparent until her golf club splits, while the power may appear as a smoking baseball bat in the hands of another.

It comes as little surprise then, that some hunters' edges have never been seen before by others — even when all involved take the same approach to the hunt. Smolder is a common Vengeance edge because it's useful for stalking and escaping from monsters — two things the wrathful tend to need to do. However, some Avengers are so confrontation-oriented that they frequently need the capacity to exceed their normal limits. These hunters could develop a unique edge known as Fuel, a power that hasn't been seen by their brethren.

In other cases, cultural differences among Avengers seem to result in various and specialized powers. The Muse of Flame edge, for instance, was first developed in Spain. A hunter prayed for guidance before a rack of votive candles. As he stared at the flames, he noticed them bow unnaturally toward a confessional, warning of an impending ambush.

The following new edges are characteristic of Avengers' wrath and passion. However, they're available to hunters of all creeds. As "alternative" edges are more frequently described during hunter interaction and on hunter-net, mind's are opened to new possibilities and more people tend to develop these powers.

• IMPACT

Most Avengers aren't lucky enough to have deadly firepower at hand when they first face the Things That Ought Not Be. Because they initially attack with hand weapons — pool skimmers, snow shovels, beer bottles — they tend to develop Cleave, the power to enhance melee weapons. Cleave is far more common than Impact, but those Avengers who happen to have a throwing object at hand when they're imbued can develop this edge, instead. Impact also occurs among Avengers who are for whatever reason kept at a distance from a thing during the imbuing — say the creature appears on an opposite subway platform, just as a train approaches. Other hunters can develop this power later in their "careers," seemingly by the Heralds' decree to help them survive by conducting the hunt from a distance.

The hunter simply throws whatever item is available to him, and a target — whether supernatural, human or a mundane object — can be damaged severely. The item used must be capable of inflicting harm naturally unto itself, such as a knife or rock. Throwing a wadded-up piece of paper confers no benefits, because it's not inherently damaging.

Hunters and supernatural creatures may see a thrown object ablaze if your character is radical in his fervor for the hunt or in his philosophies about life and the world in general. For most wielders of this edge, a thrown object simply seems warm to the touch, and may vibrate with life of its own. Normal people see nothing unique about the weapon, but they do see the overt attack.

Once an object is thrown, it typically breaks or becomes irretrievably lodged in the target; it cannot be gathered and thrown again or used for any other purpose.

Avengers have experimented with this capability on firearms to no additional effect. However, one or two wrathful claim to "hurl" their rage at targets without throwing anything at all!

System: Your character empowers a thrown weapon or item to become considerably more dangerous. The item must have a damage rating of Strength +1 or higher unto itself for this power to have effect. See the rulebook's Melee Weapons Chart, p. 198, for approximations of weapons' damage ratings. (This power has no effect on bullets, arrows and crossbows. Nor are explosives such as grenades modified; only thrown weapons that do damage through impact are improved.)

The throwing rules (*Hunter*, p. 185) indicate how far an object can be propelled. Roll Dexterity + Athletics to hit a target. Add +2 damage to any inflicted, and treat all damage as lethal, no matter what is normally appropriate for the item used. Impact attacks can harm immaterial beings or normal people and objects. When Conviction is risked on Impact, the extra dice are added to a single attack dice pool; any subsequent successes are added to the damage dice pool.

• • MUSE OF FLAME

Trailing a specific monster is all very well and good, but sometimes it's useful to know when they're coming for you. Muse of Flame can provide an early warning of approaching creatures, and can be used to track them, as well. Armando Diaz, a professor of English living in Madrid, was the first known hunter to develop this power, and he coined its rather literary name.

The biggest drawback to Muse of Flame is that its user must look at an open flame. Anything from a match to a campfire to a burning house will do. When the hunter looks at the fire and "invokes the muse," the flames bend to point in the direction of the nearest supernatural creature. It may not be the most powerful or the most dangerous, just the most physically proximate.

Occasionally, Muse of Flame has been known to activate itself. Diaz's first experience with this power warned him of an ambush in a church. As he describes it, he was simply "open to the spirit" and it spoke to him through the flames — not with words, but with a sense of unnatural danger.

If a hunter is close to a fire, the flames may spontaneously act as a pointer, without the imbued's intent. More than one Avenger has eluded ambush when she noticed her lighter flame bending into the wind.

System: If the hunter consciously uses Muse of Flame and looks into a fire for sign of the enemy, roll Perception + Zeal, difficulty 5. If the roll succeeds, the flame perceptibly bends in the direction of the closest prey. If the power activates spontaneously, the difficulty of understanding the fire's message is 7. The Storyteller may opt to roll for a player in either case, keeping him on his toes as to the validity of a perceived creature, if any at all. A fire continues to point in the direction of the nearest supernatural creature for 10 minutes for each

success achieved on the roll. After that time, the power fades and cannot be used again by the character in the same scene, as if the Messengers have made their statement, regardless of how enigmatic. If the Avenger enters the subject's vicinity and some duration of the power remains, the fire indicates the next closest subject. It does not continue to point toward the first creature, even if she is still the closest monster nearby. If a directing fire is ever extinguished prematurely, such as by wind or rain, this power cannot be activated again the scene.

Generally speaking, this edge detects only creatures within a 10-mile radius. It usually doesn't activate spontaneously unless a creature is within one mile. Of course, it requires an open flame in either case. It detects normal humans who have received supernatural powers from monsters, such as a vampire's blood slave. This edge does not detect other imbued.

This power's unnatural effects on fire are not perceptible to normal people, supernatural creatures or to hunters who do not have this power active. The user alone, and any other hunter who also activates this edge, sees flames "blow" in impossible directions. If the user becomes Incapacitated, the effect terminates.

••• FUEL

Avengers are perhaps the most straightforward of the creeds. Many see no moral dilemma in their condition; they aren't confounded by ethical gray areas. There's right and wrong and little between.

Because of this simplicity, it's easy for some Avengers to blur the lines between "self" and "mission." A Redeemer or Judge may live a split life — being a good parent and provider by day, and hunting monsters by night. The most fervent of Avengers may draw no distinction between who they are and what the Messengers compel them to do. Their original personalities are subsumed by their perceived duties. This course can be dangerous. It leads to extreme behavior very quickly. But such dedication can also be a strength as it turns personal belief into power. Such Avengers' absolute faith in the cause gives them reserves of strength that can see them through dangerous failures or that can spur them on to incredible successes.

System: Once per scene, you can convert a single point of Willpower into a single point of Conviction, or vice versa. However, this exchange can't be performed casually. Your character must be in danger or under some form of duress before the conversion can be made. This pressure can be overt and obvious, such as the approach of a horde of rots, or it can relate to your character's identity, such as facing a dead spouse, even one newly risen and comparatively weak. In other words, players can't use this edge to churn up tons of Conviction in order to gain higher Virtues. The Storyteller is final arbiter on when it's permissible to use Fuel. The Storyteller may even agree to allow more than one point to be exchanged in a scene if the danger faced or fear experienced is appropriately extreme, such as in the case of facing the undead spouse, above. No more than three points should ever be converted at one time, though.

As no roll is made with this power, Conviction cannot be risked in its use. The conversion is considered a reflexive action (see *Hunter*, p. 167); it does not intrude upon other actions performed in the turn.

••• FIREWALK

"You're gonna love this shit," Murray said as he doused himself with gasoline. "Get ready to see some scared fuckin' vampires."

Truly observant hunters have noticed that certain kinds of hunters are associated with different elements of the natural world. In the case of Avengers (and other Zeal-based creeds), the element is fire. This edge makes that metaphorical affinity concrete. Specifically, an Avenger who can Firewalk takes less damage from fire (flames, not guns). High temperatures do not harm the hunter. This doesn't mean he could sit under a space-shuttle launch or survive being dropped into molten steel, but anything short of industrial-grade temperatures is unlikely to do damage.

The few known Avengers to wield this power describe it like standing in the eye of a hurricane; they can see the danger around them, but they don't suffer its full force — if anything at all.

System: Spend a point of Conviction. Anytime your character is exposed to flame for the remainder of the scene, damage suffered per turn is reduced by his Stamina rating. Such protection doesn't usually extend to the hunter's clothes, possessions or any supernatural creature he might hold while aflame.

As no rolls are made with this power, Conviction cannot be risked in its use. It costs an action to activate this power and steel oneself to flames; fire damage is inflicted normally if contact is made before the edge can be activated. The power's protection is lost if a hunter is ever reduced to Incapacitated by any harm when still in contact with flames.

••••• HARPOON

Novice Avengers have a problem with monsters attacking them, but experienced ones have an entirely different problem: Monsters often flee. Sure, Trail is good for finding them again, but it's better to simply keep them in place so they can be terminated. Extremist Avengers remark — when they speak sensibly — that this power is a special gift from the Messengers, allowing these hunters to fulfill their obsession with the hunt.

To the user, other imbued and supernatural creatures, Harpoon looks like a burning spear. The Avenger can hurl it into the body of a nearby creature, even a ghost or a possessing spirit. Once a monster's been hit, it's stuck — the avenger feels an invisible bond to the target. To get away, the monster has to rip itself free of the hunter's weapon. (Apparently hunters and normal people, including possession victims, are unaffected by this weapon; it passes through them harmlessly.)

The one hunter known to possess this edge — a taxi driver in Byelorussia — drives up to his prey on the street, spears them, then drives away. To normal people in the vicinity, it looks like he makes a gesture at someone on the street, right before that person has some sort of horrible seizure.

System: To plant Harpoon, spend two Conviction and roll Dexterity + Athletics, usually difficulty 6. Range equals your character's Zeal in yards. Harpoon inflicts Strength +2 lethal damage on impact, and creates a tie between hunter and prey that persists for Zeal in turns. The length of this bond equals the distance between attacker and target. It gets no longer.

If the prey tries to break free, roll the competitors' Willpower in a resisted action, difficulty 6. If the prey gets more successes, it becomes free, but harms itself in the process. (Roll the creature's own Strength as a lethal damage pool.)

If you get more Willpower successes, the target is still stuck and must face your Avenger's wrath. The link between hunter and prey persists until the prey breaks free, renders the hunter Incapacitated, the duration of the bond expires or the monster is destroyed.

Your hunter can escalate this contest simply by exceeding the bond's radius. In the case of the cab driver mentioned above, he steps on the gas. Make resisted Strength rolls (or whatever is appropriate) to determine whether the harpooned creature is dragged. If an Avenger can use this power to drag a creature behind a moving vehicle, the Storyteller decides how much damage the trip inflicts. A good rule of thumb is two dice of lethal damage for every 10 mph, per turn. This could be a lot less on ice or a lot more on gravel.

Example: Yevgeny drags a werewolf behind his cab. On his first turn, he gets up to 20 mph. The lethal damage pool is four dice. In its action, the werewolf tries to free itself. Its 7 Willpower is rolled against Yevgeny's 8. Yevgeny wins, so the creature continues to be dragged.

Next turn, Yevgeny gets initiative and revs the cab up to 40 mph. Eight dice are rolled for dragging damage. The shapechanger tries to break free again and fails.

Yevgeny is driving in the city, so he doesn't dare take his car over 40 (or about 70 kph in his country). He gets initiative again and does his eight dice of dragging damage to the creature. The desperate shapechanger makes a tremendous effort to free itself; a Willpower point is spent to ensure success. As it happens, Yevgeny gets a poor Willpower roll and the werewolf rips the harpoon out. Unfortunately for the shapechanger, this means its own 5 Strength is rolled as a lethal damage pool against itself.

The werewolf is reeling and badly injured in the subsequent turn, when Yevgeny rams it and hits it with another Harpoon.

All damage from Harpoon occurs as internal burns, which can leave a coroner scratching her head. "Death by electrocution" is the most likely conclusion.

If Conviction is risked in a Harpoon roll, it must be in the initial attack roll to establish a bond. Any successes achieved after the first are added to the Harpoon damage pool.

DID THE EARTH MOVE FOR YOU?

The average hunter understands very well the physical inequities that make the "mano-a-monster" approach counterproductive. At least, the average hunter who sur-

vives a month past imbuing does. Consequently, when an Avenger learns that "There's a vampire holed up in the old Moreland house!" the common reaction is not, "Gee, I'd better sneak in under cover of darkness, wooden stake in hand." A much more common response is to look around for a bomb, a bulldozer or a big damn truck.

HOUSE AND FORTRESS

If you want to destroy a structure, the most pertinent question is simply, "How tough is the building?" In the interest of keeping things simple, the mechanic for simulating home destruction is based on the Storyteller combat system. Specifically:

- Buildings have "health levels," just as humans (and vampires and werewolves and so on) do. They represent how much stress a building can take before it collapses. These are not on a human scale! You can "injure" a building only with the forces described below — big explosives, fire or repeated heavy impact.

- Buildings do not soak damage. If you hit the building, you roll, you do damage. That's it.

- Some buildings have more than 10 health levels, whereas others have fewer.

There's no initiative, obviously. To wreck a building, roll your character's appropriate Ability, probably Demolitions or Construction (see p. 65 for the latter). Instead of adding an Attribute to create a pool, add dice appropriate to the equipment available to your character — lots of dice if she has a panel truck full of C-4, not so many if all he has is a liter bottle full of gasoline (dice contributed by wrecking tools are listed later in this chapter). The difficulty is usually 6 if your character has all day to plant bombs or position wrecking balls. Trying to smash a building under duress — while being shot at by a half-dozen ghouls, or SWAT team members, or ghouled SWAT team members, for that matter — the difficulty rises to 8. Each success you roll does a level of damage to the structure.

It may take your character more than one turn to knock down Castle Dracula, of course. Rather than bog you down with exact timing rules for every permutation of force, the Storyteller should use common sense to figure out how long it takes to move your hunter's backhoe to the other side of a house, for example.

A botch can mean almost anything: Equipment is damaged or destroyed, hindering or halting all further destruction attempts; the building comes down around your character's ears; or his wrecking ball gets wedged under a load-bearing wall, actually reinforcing the structure for the time being.

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

By far, the most cost-effective home-wrecking tool is fire. Given time and dry weather, one pack of matches can reduce the grandest mansion to a heap of ashen rubble. Of course, time and weather are two (of many) things no hunter can count on.

DISCLAIMER

This is a work of fiction in which people blow up only the undead enemies of humanity. It's intended as an entertainment for those who know the difference between reality and fantasy. Do not blow up or burn down any real buildings. Thank you.

Here are rules for burning down the enemy's lair. There's usually an initial flare up — caused when the bomb goes off, the loose wiring touches the insulation or when the cigarette hits the pillow. The size of this initial fire yields a pool of dice. A big fire gets a lot of dice, a small fire gets few. You can add a relevant Ability (such as Demolitions or Construction) to make the initial fire bigger, but only if your character has an opportunity to choose the fire's location and spread around some accelerants.

Common sense applies, as always. Fire doesn't do much against an iron fence or a concrete pillbox.

A roll that comes up with no successes indicates that the fire has died. A botch means the fire has spread unpredictably and either threatens the arsonist or has him surrounded completely.

The damage dice listed for a flame source (along with any relevant Demolitions or Construction dice) form the "fire pool." Once you've figured out how big the pool is, roll it approximately every 15 minutes of game time to represent ongoing burning.

The flammability of the materials involved and the fire source used combine to indicate difficulty. A material that burns quickly, such as straw in a barn, lowers the number, perhaps as low as 4. A source of high combustibility, such as a flamethrower, also lowers difficulty. Meanwhile, a concrete bunker or a book of matches make for a higher difficulty, maybe 8. The Storyteller decides fire-pool difficulties based on the circumstances.

Remember that fire is not static. Hitting a pile of oil-soaked rags can double the size of a conflagration, while running out of fuel or oxygen can shrink it instantly. Every time you roll a 1 on a fire-pool die, you immediately remove one success die from the current roll, and that lost die is not used in the next roll. However, for each success you roll after the first, you add another die to the pool the next time you roll.

Example: Let's say you have a fire pool of eight dice. You get four successes, but also roll two 1s. Two of your successes are taken away from this roll due to the 1s suffered. Those two dice are also normally removed from the next fire roll you make. You're left with two successes. The extra success after the first is added to the next roll you make, for a total loss of one die in your subsequent roll, leaving you with seven. The Storyteller explains that the predominantly concrete structure dampens your fire somewhat.

Other developments can reduce your fire pool, as well. Each fire truck that shows up reduces it by two every 15 minutes, and any firefighters prevent the fire from growing (successes achieved in one roll are not applied to your

Structure	"Health Levels"
Shack, outhouse, garden shed	1
Wrought-iron fence, greenhouse	2
Small cabin	3
Split-level ranch	5
Large, wood-frame house	6
Brick or stone house	8
Solidly built mansion	11-15
Concrete bunker, bomb shelter	15-30
Skyscraper	10-15 per floor

subsequent roll). If a building has a good sprinkler system (or if you scheduled your character's arson on a rainy day), your dice pool starts out two dice smaller, automatically. A building with a really advanced fire-prevention system can reduce your fire pool by three or four dice, right off the top.

BANG FOR THE BUCK

Note: The following system is a simplified version of Hunter's Explosives rules. The mechanics here are useful for destroying structures, whereas the "official" ones are geared toward harming people and monsters.

Fire is fine, if you're patient. But many hunters prefer the instant gratification of something that goes "boom."

The explosives rules are pretty simple. The size of your device determines your initial dice pool, and you add either Demolitions or Construction, if you have them and they apply. If you have time to take a thoughtful stroll around and plant your pipe bomb, the difficulty of the roll is 6. If you're planting a bomb while pinned down by hostile gunfire, the difficulty is 8. If you're throwing it out of a truck as you drive by, the difficulty is 9. Each success does a level of structural damage.

Flame Source	Damage Dice
Cleave, book of matches	
on upholstery, Molotov cocktail	1
Barrel of gasoline	2*
Flamethrower	3
Napalm bomb	4*
Napalm air strike	8*
Tanker truck full of flammable chemicals	10**

*These also do explosive damage to the structure (see Bang for the Buck, below). Damage dice from those sources do not go into the fire pool, if you want to be fussy. Or you can just ignore their "extra" damage.

**Naturally, if you drive the truck into the house you get impact damage, too. This bonus doesn't go into the fire pool, though. (See Demolition Man, below.)

Explosive Device	Damage Dice
Grenade, barrel of gasoline	1
Pipe bomb, one stick of dynamite	2
Napalm bomb	3
Rocket launcher, napalm air strike	4
Pound of C-4	5
Half-ton of industrial fertilizer	10

Many of these explosives can also start fires. See *Burning Down the House* for systems regarding infernos.

Blowing up buildings is a tricky process, of course. A roll with no successes usually indicates a dud fuse or some other failure to go bang. A botch usually means the your character miscalculated and dropped a large chunk of masonry on himself.

DEMOLITION MAN

Of course, many buildings collapse without resort to dramatic, action-movie tactics. Someone with access to a backhoe and a condemnation order can knock down that old haunted house — and not even draw a glance from the ATF or FBI!

Demolishing a structure works a lot like explosives. Start with a dice pool based on the wrecking gear used (listed below), then add either Demolitions or Construction, whichever is appropriate. If your character works at a leisurely pace, the difficulty is 6. If something's trying to eat her head at the same time, it's 8.

Wrecking equipment is usually pretty reliable. Then again, there's nothing really "usual" about trying to use it during a firefight. A failed roll indicates that your equipment has stalled out. If you botch, the tractor-trailer has jack-knifed or your hunter has been hit by her own wrecking ball.

TERRIBLE SWIFT SWORD

The Avenger's capacity to create a deadly weapon from nearly any available object is the creed's hallmark and perhaps its most efficient and lethal edge. Cleave has a downside, though — the Avenger's furious energies ultimately consume the object, causing it to shatter if the hunter's concentration fails. A hunter in Pennsylvania who was a steelworker *before* took an interest in what caused his anger to consume the weapons he used. After several months of experimentation, he discovered a method to create arms that could sustain Cleave energies indefinitely.

At present, only a handful of Avengers know how to make these weapons. However, as more hunters — and Avengers in particular — meet, the fine points of creating these weapons spread. The Internet is an important means of spreading word of these innovations, but ultimately fails to allow people to create tools impervious to Cleave; the process must be taught personally and carefully, passed directly from one Avenger to the next.

Thus far, no one besides Avengers has tried to rival the original creator's designs. Although imbued of other creeds may possess Cleave, whether they can handcraft weapons resistant to the edge is unknown. (It is, in fact, impossible for members of other creeds to accomplish this feat of craftsmanship, unless the Storyteller decrees otherwise. Of course, the only way to learn this is to try and fail, perhaps under the most dangerous of circumstances.)

METHOD

The secret to Cleave-resistant weapons, the steelworker learned, lay in the hunter himself, not in the item or its materials. The powers he had been given were, he knew, gifts from God; it stood to reason that his tools had to be worthy of that same blessing. Harkening to the days when his grandfather crafted horseshoes and plowshares with hammer and anvil, the steelworker believed that tools churned out by a monster-dominated world were inherently inferior to an ax or staff created with the strength of a God-fearing man.

What followed was a laborious process of craftsmanship and prayer. The hunter selected the finest grade raw ore he could find, asking for guidance as he beat out its impurities and added charcoal to the fire to make a resilient carbon steel. Weeks turned into months as he labored meticulously on a blade, shaping it with care and devotion. The weapon snapped twice in the final stages, weakened by imperceptible impurities. The Avenger simply began again.

After nearly six months of effort, he was successful. The short heavy blade never rusted, never dulled and never broke, no matter how many times the hunter filled it with his righteous fury. The process had limitations, though. Despite numerous attempts, the creator was never able to make such a weapon for another imbued. If another warrior intended to have such a weapon, it seemed that he had to craft it himself; it was a gift that had to be earned, not bought or received.

Local wrathful learned of their comrade's creation and traveled to his home to learn his techniques. The knowledge has spread by word of mouth since, even after the steelworker's death months ago, leaving a legacy to help carry the fight forward. No one knows how many of these weapons exist, but the number is certainly very small.

Earthmoving Equipment	Damage Dice
Large pickup truck	1*
Backhoe	2-5
Bulldozer	3-6
Tractor-trailer	4*
Wrecking ball	4-10
Crane	6-15

*Ramming this vehicle into a building at top speed squeezes out an additional two to three dice — but the vehicle, not to mention your character, is wrecked.

An Avenger in Vermont recently reported that the technique isn't exclusive to metal items. Wooden weapons such as a staff or club can also be made to withstand Cleave. The process is similar and just as time-consuming. The prospective weapon must be made of "living" wood. That is, it has to be taken from a living, healthy tree. It must then be cured and shaped by hand and proper devotion.

Certain fundamentalist hunters have used these weapons to argue the divine nature of the call. And yet, Memphis68, an avowed agnostic, claims that she has made her own baseball bat, and it works just fine.

SYSTEM

Creating one of these enhanced weapons is a time- and labor-intensive task. The nature of the construction requires that the wielder be the one to create the item, making a bond with the weapon that allows it to channel his rage. The nature of this bond varies with each creator. Some see it as a religious "baptism" for the tool. Others discover that the creative process helps them focus and control their anger. Ones who find or make no personal investment in the creation of such a tool fail to create the intended weapon. An Avenger who follows the process half-heartedly, who performs shoddy workmanship or who rushes learns only too late that his creation cannot resist Cleave's energies. Ultimately, you should explain your character's rationale for creating a weapon, and justify the faith or determination he invests into it. The Storyteller decides whether

such an effort is in keeping with your character's identity, and whether sufficient care is taken.)

To shape a metal weapon, your character must have access to a forge, an anvil and blacksmith's hammers; in the case of a wooden weapon, a lathe and carpenter's tools are needed. Purchasing the equipment requires the equivalent of 2 Resources. Depending on the size of the weapon to be made, your Avenger must also purchase five to 10 pounds of raw ore. For wooden weapons, 2 Crafts must be used to select the proper wood from a living tree.

Hand-forging steel is both an art and a science; heating the metal to the proper temperature (and being able to recognize it when attained) requires at least 3 Crafts, with a focus in metalworking. When the ore is at the proper temperature, the hard, blistering labor of working the metal begins, as it is hammered over and over again to work out any impurities or flaws. It is possible for an onlooker with a sufficient Crafts skill to monitor the forging process, but the intended user of the blade must do the actual work, requiring at least 2 Crafts. Wood weapons must be carved, etched, smoothed and polished by hand, and then cured, all of which requires at least 2 Crafts in woodworking. If a weapon with metal and wood parts is created, 3 Crafts is required, although only one actual focus is necessary, usually metalworking.

During either process, the creator invests his Conviction into the material. The total number of Conviction necessary depends on the size of the weapon:



Naturally, the creation process is lengthy. The Conviction required is set aside as a pool, recorded in the margin of your character's sheet or by the Storyteller. Simply decide when you intend to divert some of your character's Conviction to his project, and remove the designated number of points from your character's current Conviction score. These allocated points are now unavailable to you. In the game world, they represent time spent in search of the ideal materials required for your Avenger's creation, time spent searching for and learning from an instructor, or time spent achieving the Crafts rating required.

If Conviction is set aside a point at a time, your character invests minutes or a few hours at a time to his search. If high numbers of points are set aside, your character spends many hours or days in search of instruction, components and tools. You decide how severely your character depletes his Conviction score at any given time. Dedicating several points to a project at one time could leave him vulnerable to supernatural attack. Alternatively, allocating a few points at a time draws out the creation process. The first course could be self-destructive, the second ineffectual. Your character's course is determined by his needs.

Once the required number of Conviction points is accumulated and the required Crafts score is achieved, the actual creation process begins. Make a single Perception + Crafts roll, difficulty 8. Each success adds a die to your character's Strength, up to the maximum listed on the chart, to determine the weapon's permanent damage pool. For example, if your character forges a sword and gets one success, his sword has a damage pool of Strength +1. Rolling Perception + Crafts and getting three successes makes for a Strength +3 damage pool. This rating does not take into account the normal +2 damage bonus gained by using Cleave (note that with an exceptional roll, it's possible to produce a high-quality weapon that exceeds a weapon's normal damage capabilities, as listed in the *Hunter* rulebook).

Completing the hands-on stage of the project takes at least one month for each success achieved on your Perception + Crafts roll, longer if the Storyteller decides the project is particularly large or complex. Your character's Conviction points are invested at this stage, representing his personal, spiritual and emotional investment. Because

this process is so demanding, no hunter can ever create and possess more than one enhanced weapon at a time.

If your Perception + Crafts roll fails, the weapon develops an imperfection during creation, your character's attention is distracted or the process goes slightly awry. Roll Perception + Crafts again and add one month to the creation time indicated by the second roll. If creation rolls continue to fail, each adds one month to the duration of the creation process. The Storyteller may decide that your Avenger's effort fails utterly if three consecutive failures are rolled.

If you botch a Crafts roll, the weapon breaks completely during construction. The creative process must begin all over again. Half of the Conviction points set aside for the project are lost and must be replaced before your character may try again.

You cannot elect to re-roll Perception + Crafts if the result isn't as high as desired. The result is what your character is capable of, and he lacks the will and inspiration to try again. Nor can you spend a point of Willpower to gain an automatic success in your roll; Willpower has no impact on Conviction-based phenomena. Finally, extra Conviction points from your character's current pool cannot be risked in your Perception + Crafts roll, as if making an invested edge roll.

Weapons created with this process do not break when used with Cleave. In addition, metal weapons retain their sharpness and are immune to rust and corrosion. Wooden weapons are exceptionally durable, similar to fire-hardened material. These weapons are not invulnerable to damage, though. A blade can still be warped or melted by extreme heat, or any item can be snapped by a creature with remarkable strength. The Storyteller decrees when such a tragedy occurs.

Weapons crafted for personal use do not retain their resistance to Cleave when wielded by other hunters. Sure, another person can pick up your club and start swinging without breaking it. Yet, if another hunter, whether Avenger or not, activates Cleave with that tool, the object breaks permanently in a number of turns equal to its damage bonus (three turns for a Strength +3 sword, for example), according to the Cleave rules for normal weapons. Even if the created weapon is set aside before it shatters, it permanently loses one of its damage modifiers for each turn that it's

wielded in the wrong hands. If the item's total damage modifier is reduced to zero (a Strength +2 dagger is swung by the wrong Avenger for two turns), the weapon is still ruined. Not even a Zeal roll on the part of the wielder can avert this ruin.

Note: There is currently no equivalent creation process for weapons used with the Impact edge.

Weapon Type	Conviction Required	Maximum Damage Dice
Stake	5	Strength +1
Club, Baseball Bat	10	Strength +3
Knife	15	Strength +2
Hatchet	20	Strength +3
Sword	25	Strength +3
Fire Ax	30	Strength +4



CHAPTER 6: AVENGERS AT LARGE

To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

— Deuteronomy 32:35

CERTAIN KINDS OF PEOPLE TYPIFY THE AVENGER PERSONALITY AND IDENTITY: STRAIGHT FORWARD, DETERMINED, OBSESSIVE AND RASH. THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERS EMBODY THOSE QUALITIES. THEY'RE INTENDED AS ROLE MODELS FOR YOUR OWN CHARACTER CREATION, OR YOU CAN ADD COLOR AND DETAIL TO THEIR PROFILES AND MAKE THEM YOUR OWN.

ALL AMERICAN

*Either we're a fucking brotherhood or it's all crap!
It can't be half way!*

Prelude: You'd always heard rumors about the Pi Deltas. They were the kind of guys who gave fraternities a bad name. You knew they hazed, they paddled, and you knew some girls wouldn't go to their parties — ever — but some of them seemed okay and you let yourself hope that the rumors were exaggerated. You kept your nose out of it and tried to set a good example.

That wasn't hard. After all, your frat — Kappa Gamma Tau — wasn't that way. Sure, you and the guys drank a lot and you gave the pledges some shit, but nothing brutal. Everyone came willingly. Kappa Gamma had good grades, a good record of public service and girls weren't afraid to come to your parties. Not like the Pi Deltas. Especially after Wendy died.

There was a bad rumor about Wendy Stephenson — that she was strangled to death with her own panties by one of the Pi Deltas at a mixer. But the coroner ruled it an accident and the police didn't do anything. You figured it was all over.

Then she came back. You were at the annual Kappa Gamma/Pi Delta Tug-O-War and Wendy Stephenson stumbled up the road and made a beeline for Glen Cole, Pi Delta pledge master. That's when you heard a voice: "THE DEAD MUST NOT RISE."

People panicked all around you, and you knew somehow that she wouldn't stop with Cole. Only you, one of the Pi Deltas and a girl from the sidelines — who wasn't even a sorority sister — did anything. The three of you couldn't save Glen, but you managed to stop Wendy.

As with her "first" death, events got swept under the rug. Some of your brothers wanted to forget all about it and pretend it never happened, but when you faced them, a couple admitted that they'd heard "a voice," too. They just didn't do anything.

You've started hearing more weird stories about your campus, stories about things being "conveniently forgotten." Now you want to find out the truth — with your brothers or without them.

Concept: You didn't join a fraternity just to drink beer and party. You believe that brotherhood, mutual loyalty and assistance mean something. You want to make a difference and you're certain that you can.

Roleplaying Hints: Be confident and caring, but macho. You honestly believe that you can fix all this crap. In other words, you're naïve, you're in over your head and you have no idea of the scope of the problem you now face.

Equipment: Red Trans Am with vanity plates, blue jeans, sweatshirt and baseball cap



HUNTER-BOOK AVENGER

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Director
DEMEANOR: Gallant
CONCEPT: Big Man on Campus

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Zeal
CREED: Vengeance
STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength (Weight Lifter) ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina (Play Through Pain) ●●●●●

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

MENTAL

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●
Intuition ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

SKILLS

Animal Ken ●●●●●
Crafts ●●●●●
Demolitions ●●●●●
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ●●●●●
Firearms ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Performance ●●●●●
Security ●●●●●
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival ●●●●●
Technology ●●●●●

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ●●●●●
Bureaucracy ●●●●●
Computer ●●●●●
Finance ●●●●●
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ●●●●●
Linguistics (Spanish) ●●●●●
Medicine ●●●●●
Occult ●●●●●
Politics ●●●●●
Research ●●●●●
Science ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Bystanders ●●●●●
Allies ●●●●●
Resources ●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●

EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Cleave Vengeance	●●●●●	●●●●●	
Ward Defense	●●●●●	●●●●●	
		●●●●●	
		●●●●●	
		●●●●●	
		●●●●●	

VIRTUES

Mercy	Vision	Zeal
Score	Score	Score
1 ●	1 ○	1 ● X
2 ○	2 ○	2 ● X
3 ○	3 ○	3 ○
4 ○	4 ○	4 ○
5 ○	5 ○	5 ○
6 ○	6 ○	6 ○
7 ○	7 ○	7 ○
8 ○	8 ○	8 ○
9 ○	9 ○	9 ○
10 ○	10 ○	10 ○

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

BOUNTY HUNTER

Don't try to run, you son of a bitch. You'll just die tired.

Prelude: You've known about monsters all your life. Your father made sure of that.

He was a small-time hustler and car thief, and when he hit the whisky he could be a mean. The nights he came home, you hid in your room and listened to the shouts, to the beatings he gave your mother. You swore that when you grew up, you'd never let anyone get away with that kind of thing.

As soon as you reached 18, you applied to the police academy. You graduated with honors. Full of fire and bold ideals, you hit the streets. In a few short years, you learned just how little power a badge really carried. Sure, you could catch crooks, but they wouldn't stay caught. They'd make bail and skip town, get off on a technicality or simply walk for the slightest frustrating reason. It made you sick. Finally, one night at a local bar, you ran into a man you'd arrested *that morning* for beating his wife and child. He was drunk and you were off duty, so he tried to pick a fight. He went to the hospital with his hands so badly broken that they would never work right again. You were dismissed from the force. It was probably the best thing that have happened to you.

Desperate for money, you fell into the next best line of work: investigation and bounty hunting. Less rules, no problems with jurisdiction, and if the scumbags resisted, that was their problem. Sometimes you had to kill the really bad ones — murderers and rapists were dangerous people, after all, and you had to defend yourself. The look of fear on punks' faces when they knew their luck had run out made it all worthwhile.

Then came the night in that trailer park outside Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

You'd been chasing the guy for a long time. He'd been arrested in Georgia for assaulting a woman, but he made bail and skipped. After four weeks, you tracked him to a trailer

park where he'd shackled up with some waitress. Just after midnight, you pulled on your gloves, grabbed your gun and a 12-inch Maglite, and hoped the bastard would put up a fight.

While you were still outside the trailer, you heard the sounds of a scuffle. Then, the whole mobile home began to shake. The lights went out inside. All the old nightmares came back to you as you entered.

Blood was everywhere. The glow from the Maglite picked out glistening red throughout the ruined interior. Then the light revealed a muscular, gray-furred body.

The thing was huge, its muscular frame hunched over against the trailer's low ceiling. It turned its yellow eyes on you, and its fanged mouth smiled. *Smiled.* Like it expected you to take one look and shit your pants.

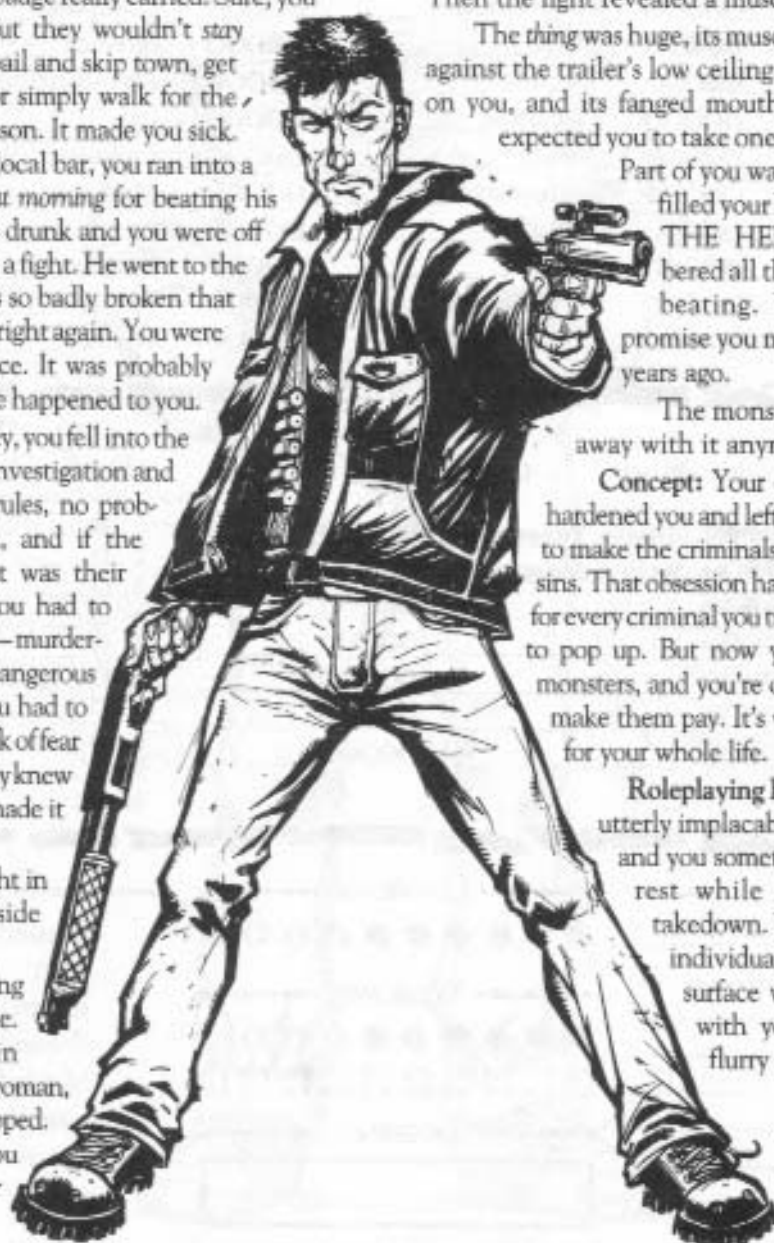
Part of you wanted to, but then a voice filled your head: "IT PREYS UPON THE HELPLESS." You remembered all those nights of yelling and beating. You remembered that promise you made to yourself, all those years ago.

The monsters weren't going to get away with it anymore.

Concept: Your early life of victimization hardened you and left you with a burning desire to make the criminals of the world pay for their sins. That obsession has led to a lonely, angry life; for every criminal you track down, two more seem to pop up. But now you know about the real monsters, and you're on a mission from God to make them pay. It's what you've been waiting for your whole life.

Roleplaying Hints: You're patient and utterly implacable when you work a case, and you sometimes go for days without rest while planning a monster's takedown. Usually a quiet, brooding individual, your anger boils to the surface when you're face to face with your prey, resulting in a flurry of brutal violence.

Equipment: Colt .45 semiautomatic pistol, shotgun, black coat, beat up old Range Rover



HUNTER-BOOK AVENGER

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Survivor
DEMEANOR: Rogue
CONCEPT: Frustrated Do-Gooder

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Zeal
CREED: Vengeance
STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity (Dulok Hands) ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

MENTAL

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ○○○○○
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intimidation ●●●●●
Intuition ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

SKILLS

Animal Ken ○○○○○
Crafts ○○○○○
Demolitions ○○○○○
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●●●●
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ○○○○○
Security ●●●●●
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ○○○○○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○○○○○
Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Computer ○○○○○
Finance ○○○○○
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ●●●●●
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○
Research ●●●●●
Science ○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ●●●●●
Arsenal ●●●●●
Contacts ●●●●●
Resources ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

NAME

Cleave Vengeance
Trail Vengeance

EDGES

CREED

LEVEL

TRIGGER

●●●●●

●●●●●

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○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

○○○○○

VIRTUES

Mercy

Score Start

1 0

2 0

3 0

4 0

5 0

6 0

7 0

8 0

9 0

10 0

Vision

Score Start

1 0

2 0

3 0

4 0

5 0

6 0

7 0

8 0

9 0

10 0

Zeal

Score Start

1 ● X

2 ● X

3 ● X

4 0

5 0

6 0

7 0

8 0

9 0

10 0

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

CONTRACTOR

Nice lair. Know what would happen if we took out that load-bearing wall?

Prelude: You never could understand why people had to make their lives so complicated. To you, things were simple and straightforward. A man was born, got an education, got a good job, found a wife and had a family he could grow old with. Some people were good, others evil. For good people to live their lives, evil had to be beaten whenever it reared its ugly head. And that was how you lived your life. Not as flashy as others, maybe, but it got the job done. You worked with your hands and built homes for a living, and made honest money in the bargain.

All that changed with a news report on a rainy summer night.

You heard it first the radio in your car. Three kids from your very own neighborhood were missing, kidnapped during a sleepover while the parents watched TV just downstairs. No one could understand how it could happen in such a quiet, decent part of town.

There were police cars everywhere as you neared home. People were standing together in groups, talking fearfully. Even the houses in their little quarter-acre lots seemed to huddle against one another in the darkness. You noticed the new couple who had moved in last week standing on their porch. As you passed, they waved hesitantly. Suddenly, the voice on the radio said very clearly, "THEY SERVE THE UNLIVING." It startled you so badly you nearly ran over the Andersons.

Later, you couldn't sleep. You dreamed of the children, running through darkened halls, trying to get away from something with pale, cold, corpse-like hands.

You woke at 3 AM in a cold sweat. Outside, one police car lingered, but the officer inside slept. The reporters had packed it in altogether. But there were lights on behind the curtains in the house across the street. The newcomers were still awake. For some reason, the realization made your blood run cold.

The next think you knew, you were crossing the street, shirtless, with a baseball bat in your hands.

Not knowing what else to do, you went up and knocked. Decent people didn't creep through the bushes and peep in neighbors' windows.

No one answered, but you heard a muffled cry. It sounded like a child. You smashed the door's narrow window and let yourself in.

The door to the cellar was wide open. You met the man of the house as he came up the stairs. His hands and face were streaked with blood. You didn't say a word. What was there to say? The bat caught him in the chin and sent him tumbling back down.

The creature in the cellar put up a fight, but the sight of the bloodless bodies of children filled you with... not rage, but a cold determination. The wooden bat hissed and crackled as it struck the thing, and you realized then that you had received a message. Evil was loose in the world and it had to be destroyed.

What else was a good man to do?

Concept: You are a simple, straightforward person, a stand-up guy who, in other circumstances, would have lived a boring, productive, but happy life. You understand the message as a job that's been given to you for no other reason than you are a basically good person, and good people must fight evil.

Roleplaying Hints: You are friendly, outgoing and generous, and believe in clear-cut distinctions between good and evil. Evil must be destroyed. It's as simple and obvious as the sun rising and setting. You don't think too much about the message and what it means. What's the point? It wouldn't change the fact that there are monsters out there.

Equipment: Extensive tool set; jeans; work boots; flannel shirt; huge, dirty pickup truck



HUNTER-BOOK

AVENGER

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Architect
DEMEANOR: Architect
CONCEPT: A Good Man

PRIMARY VIRTUE: zeal
CREED: vengeance
STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength 00000
Dexterity 00000
Stamina (wireless) 00000

SOCIAL

Charisma 00000
Manipulation 00000
Appearance 00000

MENTAL

Perception 00000
Intelligence 00000
Wits 00000

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness 00000
Athletics 00000
Awareness 00000
Brawl 00000
Dodge 00000
Empathy 00000
Expression 00000
Intimidation 00000
Intuition 00000
Leadership 00000
Streetwise 00000
Subterfuge 00000

SKILLS

Animal Ken 00000
Construction 00000
Demolitions 00000
Drive 00000
Etiquette 00000
Firearms 00000
Melee 00000
Performance 00000
Security 00000
Stealth 00000
Survival 00000
Technology 00000

KNOWLEDGES

Academics 00000
Bureaucracy 00000
Computer 00000
Finance 00000
Investigation 00000
Law 00000
Linguistics 00000
Medicine 00000
Occult 00000
Politics 00000
Research 00000
Science 00000

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

	NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Arsenal	00000	Cleave Vengeance	00000	
Contacts	00000	Discern Judgment	00000	
Destiny	00000		00000	
Resources	00000		00000	
	00000		00000	
	00000		00000	
	00000		00000	

EDGES

VIRTUES

	Mercy	Vision	Zeal
	Score	Score	Score
1	0	0	1
2	0	0	2
3	0	0	3
4	0	0	4
5	0	0	5
6	0	0	6
7	0	0	7
8	0	0	8
9	0	0	9
10	0	0	10

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Yes sir. It's taken care of. I understand, sir. Have I ever failed you?

OPERATIVE

Prelude: First came school, where you were a good kid — not a good student, but you did as you were told. Your father said the army was the only way a poor boy from the provinces could get ahead, so in you went. The army had guns, which you liked, and they liked you because you followed orders. You obeyed every command with unthinking loyalty, which was your ticket to very interesting training with another “department.”

Your job was simple. Your commander gave you a name, a photo, a surveillance dossier — and you made that person die. Sometimes, you'd do it “cowboy” — messy and brash, and you'd wing a few other people in the house (or restaurant or church), just to send a message. Other times, you'd do it sly — making it look like a robbery gone bad, a car wreck or a drug overdose.

You've killed a lot of people. It bothered you at first, and you had to keep reminding yourself that these bastards were enemies of your home — de-

vious subversives who would kill you and everyone you loved, then wipe off the blood on your flag.

After a while, it stopped bothering you. It didn't even bother you when you realized that “everyone you loved” didn't have any meaning anymore. You were a machine, and you just continued on doing what you were told.

Then one day, you and several other operatives were taking out an entrenched nest of subversive drug traffickers (that's what you were told they were, anyway). So you kicked in the door and were getting ready to lay down some suppressive fire when you heard this voice in your head: “YOU ARE THE AGENT OF OPPRESSION,” it said. Suddenly, you saw that your fellow operatives were... things. Not people, they were just bags of bones and dripping blood, and they were drooling while they shot up the “smugglers” — and the smugglers were ordinary folks, just like you.

So you mowed down your companions and torched the whole place. You went back to your section chief to tell him all about it — then you saw that he was one too. He was a thing. Many of the high brass in your organization were, and they'd been using you to carry out some murderous pogrom against ordinary people.

You've stayed quiet. They don't suspect yet. But they're growing nervous, because someone is carving through their operation, methodically eliminating the figures at the top.

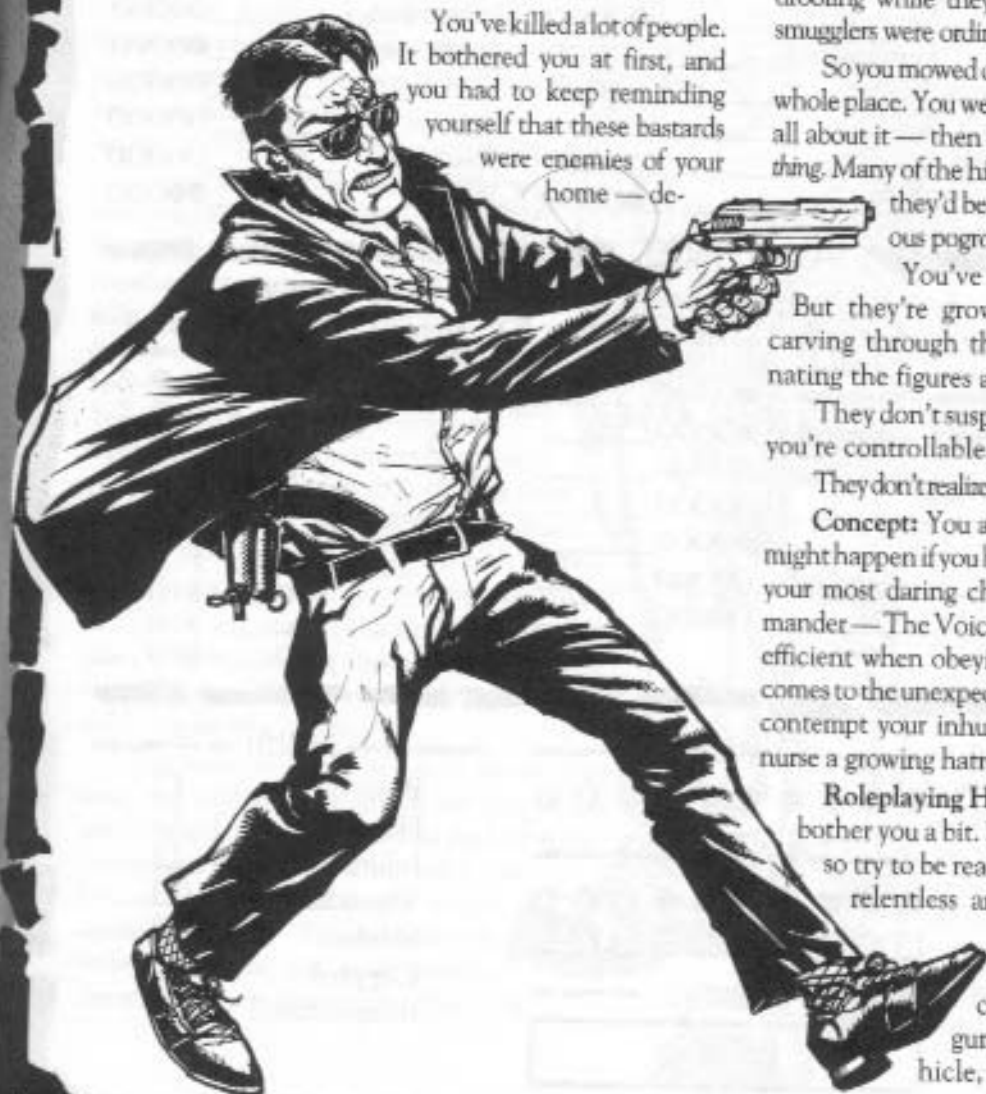
They don't suspect you. As far as they're concerned, you're controllable, docile, stupid.

They don't realize you take orders from a higher power now.

Concept: You always followed orders, afraid of what might happen if you had to make your own decisions. Now, your most daring choice has been to back a new commander — The Voice — against the old. You're cautiously efficient when obeying orders, and uninventive when it comes to the unexpected. You've only recently realized the contempt your inhuman masters have for you, and you nurse a growing hatred in response.

Roleplaying Hints: Blood, guts and violence don't bother you a bit. Looking foolish or unprepared does, so try to be ready for anything. You're methodical, relentless and usually impersonal about your business.

Equipment: Desert Eagle .50 caliber AE pistol, MP5 submachine gun, several passports, unmarked vehicle, dark clothes



HUNTER-BOOK

AVENGER

NAME:

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: conformist

DEMEANOR: Rebel

CONCEPT: Trained Killer

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Zeal

CREED: vengeance

STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength 00000
Dexterity (Hair Trigger) 00000
Stamina 00000

SOCIAL

Charisma 00000
Manipulation 00000
Appearance 00000

MENTAL

Perception 00000
Intelligence 00000
Wits 00000

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness 00000
Athletics 00000
Awareness 00000
Brawl 00000
Dodge 00000
Empathy 00000
Expression 00000
Intimidation 00000
Intuition 00000
Leadership 00000
Streetwise 00000
Subterfuge 00000

SKILLS

Animal Ken 00000
Crafts 00000
Demolitions 00000
Drive 00000
Etiquette 00000
Firearms 00000
Melee 00000
Performance 00000
Security 00000
Stealth 00000
Survival 00000
Technology 00000

KNOWLEDGES

Academics 00000
Bureaucracy 00000
Computer 00000
Finance 00000
Investigation 00000
Law 00000
Linguistics 00000
Medicine 00000
Occult 00000
Politics 00000
Research 00000
Science 00000

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Arsenal 00000
Contacts 00000
Exposure 00000
Patron 00000
Resources 00000
00000
00000

NAME

Impact Vengeance
Trail Vengeance

EDGES

CREED LEVEL TRIGGER

00000 00000

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VIRTUES

Mercy

Score Spent

1 0

2 0

3 0

4 0

5 0

6 0

7 0

8 0

9 0

10 0

Vision

Score Spent

1 0

2 0

3 0

4 0

5 0

6 0

7 0

8 0

9 0

10 0

Zeal

Score Spent

1 0

2 0

3 0

4 0

5 0

6 0

7 0

8 0

9 0

10 0

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

WILLPOWER

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

EXPERIENCE

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

HEALTH

Bruised 0

Hurt -1 0

Injured -1 0

Wounded -2 0

Mauled -2 0

Crippled -5 0

Incapacitated 0

Hey, Dracula! My friend asked you a question. You either tell us where this "master" of yours is or I'm gonna dip your ass in wax and light you like a candle!

Prelude: You were raised to follow in the footsteps of your father and uncles as a soldier in the Family. Your boss and his associates were old-school mobsters made in the same mold as Capone and Gotti, and fighting a losing battle against the new generation of street gangs and triads. The old days of the godfathers were over, but your family held onto its territory like a stubborn bulldog, taking a piece out of anyone who got too close.

Then came the offer from a new player in town, a man who called himself Thorn. He moved in and demanded control of most of the action. Your boss refused to deal. The Family didn't bow down to anybody. If Thorn wanted to muscle in, he'd best be willing to bleed to do it. Of course, that was the way things were done. Your boss was willing to work out an alliance of sorts, but no one went to the table on the first offer. He sat back and waited for Thorn's inevitable counter offer.

You were there the night it arrived.

Something made you hang around that evening in the kitchen of the old house, talking with a few other soldiers about how things might go once Thorn had arranged a deal with the boss. You remember laughing at a joke somebody made, then reaching for your cup. When you brought it to your lips, the drink tasted hot and coppery. You looked down. It was brimming with blood. Before you could throw it away, you heard

a voice, almost inside your head: "HAVE NO BROOK WITH DARKNESS."

That was when the front door exploded and the screaming started.

Thorn had sent only one man. One soldier, but he moved like a bloody wind, tearing the others to pieces. The boss himself died, pleading, as you burst into his study. The vampire looked up at you and laughed.

It wasn't laughing a minute later, with a chair leg sticking out of its chest.

If it's war the monsters want, it's war they're gonna get.

Concept: You were groomed to be a wiseguy in the old sense, mindful of your personal honor and willing to ice somebody in a heartbeat. When the monsters killed your boss and the rest of the Family, there was no other course than to declare war on them. All of them. Nobody ever accused you of doing anything halfway.

Roleplaying Hints: You are brash and impulsive, capable of murder over a simple offense. You've got a loud mouth and a vicious temper, but loyalty means everything to you, and your word is your bond. If you owe someone a debt, you would go to Hell and back to repay it.

Equipment: 9mm semiautomatic pistol, expensive clothes, sunglasses



HUNTER-BOOK

AVENGER

NAME:

NATURE: traditionalist

PRIMARY VIRTUE: zeal

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR: bravo

CREED: vengeance

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: Good fella

STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity (gunslinger) ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

MENTAL

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ●●●●●
Fast Draw ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●
Intuition ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

SKILLS

Animal Ken ●●●●●
Crafts ●●●●●
Demolitions ●●●●●
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ●●●●●
Firearms ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Performance ●●●●●
Security ●●●●●
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival ●●●●●
Technology ●●●●●

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ●●●●●
Bureaucracy ●●●●●
Computer ●●●●●
Finance ●●●●●
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ●●●●●
Linguistics ●●●●●
Medicine ●●●●●
Occult ●●●●●
Politics ●●●●●
Research ●●●●●
Science ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

	NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Arsenal	●●●●●	cleave	Vengeance	●●●●●
Contacts	●●●●●	foresee	visionary	●●●●●
Destiny	●●●●●			●●●●●
Resources	●●●●●			●●●●●
	●●●●●			●●●●●
	●●●●●			●●●●●
	●●●●●			●●●●●

EDGES

VIRTUES

	Mercy	Vision	Zeal
	Scale	Scale	Scale
1	0	1 ● X	1 ● X
2	0	2 0	2 ●
3	0	3 0	3 0
4	0	4 0	4 0
5	0	5 0	5 0
6	0	6 0	6 0
7	0	7 0	7 0
8	0	8 0	8 0
9	0	9 0	9 0
10	0	10 0	10 0

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

PROMINENT AVENGERS

The following people are famous or infamous Avengers, at least in hunters' small circles. Stories of their exploits are spread by word of mouth and on the Internet. So whether they're genuine or inflated by the rumor mill is uncertain. These people tend to be vaunted by fellow Avengers as exemplars of the creed, and are typically held at arm's length by members of other creeds. However, some of these people's actions and stories are too extreme even for other wrathful to condone or stomach. Meeting one of these hunters in the flesh is simultaneously inspirational and intimidating.

PEDRO CORTAZ

Cortez is not on hunter-net, but he became known there from the postings of his ally and colleague Traveler72. Now, he's well known among hunters across the United States — where he, like Traveler, often shows up to aid fellow hunters in times of need.

Pedro is a migrant laborer — he owns a rickety van and follows the harvest across the nation, working by day and hunting by night. Imbued he's helped describe him as a fearless, almost suicidal, hunter of spectacular (probably supernatural) physical prowess and uncompromising pride. Although dirt poor, he refuses to accept charity from anyone,



even his fellow imbued. Cortez would rather see his children go hungry than be beholden. He wants to send a message to all the rots, invisibles and flickers out there. He wants them to know their days are numbered, and his bravado expresses itself through direct, physical confrontation.

Hunter-net usually greets descriptions of his valor with incredulity. It seems a miracle that he hasn't been killed yet. Even more miraculous, his family has not (yet) suffered reprisals from the enemy.

His efforts may even be working. Some hunters have noticed that their cities' beasts seem to lay low during harvest season.

PROFILE

Pedro doesn't have much, but what he has is all his own. He owes nothing to anyone, and he prides himself that no one can call him debtor. He is a deeply proud man, refusing to acknowledge anyone — or anything — as his better. Others may have more wealth or knowledge or property — but he is the master of his own fate, and he answers only to himself.

Attributes: Strength (Pounding People) 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Work All Day) 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 1, Animal Ken 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Crafts 1, Dodge 3, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Leadership 2, Melee 3, Might 3, Streetwise 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Resources 1

Edges: (Vengeance) Cleave, Trail, Fuel; (Martyrdom) Demand, Witness

Zeal: 6, **Mercy:** 3, **Conviction:** 8, **Willpower:** 8

WENDELL DELBURTON, AKA CRUSADER17

Crusader17 is known on hunter-net as a hammer-head, a diehard, a remorseless, relentless killer who lets nothing get in his way — not bloodsuckers, not skinchangers, not even common sense. A loner, he rarely hooks up with other hunters. When he does, however, he insists on doing things his way. In this case, "his way" means spending weeks or even months setting up a single burst of violence that reaches surreal levels. What he lacks in bravado, he more than makes up for in scope and frequency. He often stalks up to a dozen of them at once, tightly scheduling each demise. It's said that in Houston, he destroyed three rots in 24 hours — working solo.

The few hunters he's worked with think he's either the greatest among them — or something even sicker and more depraved than their enemy.

Delburton's posts make his evangelical Christian beliefs crystal clear. To him, there's only Good and Evil. Anything that seems ambiguous is an illusion crafted by Satanic wiles to confuse those who would insist on following "merely human" ethics.



Crusader17's posts have implied that even before becoming imbued, he traveled the U.S. "doing the Lord's work." Based on his rabidly pro-life sig file ("The ongoing murder of the unborn is the American Holocaust"), some readers have speculated that his taste for killing extended to clinic workers. But of course, there's no way to be sure.

Even if it is true... can the imbued afford to cast out a fighter of such determination and skill?

PROFILE

Following his dishonorable discharge from the U.S. Air Force, Wendell's mother died, leaving him all of her money in a trust fund. It's not a large income, but it was enough to make the payments on his van. It's enough to keep him fed and armed, and that's all he needs.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity (Sniper Fire) 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits (Reacting to Unexpected Danger) 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 2, Investigation 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Security 3, Streetwise 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arsenal 2, Berserk 5, Contacts 2, Resources 2

Edges: (Vengeance) Impact, Trail, Smolder; (Defense) Ward, Rejuvenate

Zeal: 9, **Conviction:** 5, **Willpower:** 6

FANG FU CHEN

Fang Fu Chen is an attractive, talented and extremely volatile singer in the nightclubs of Hong Kong. She's known for being incandescently beautiful — and also for clawing out the eye of a triad boss when he wouldn't take no for an answer. She was the leading attraction at an expensive but shady bar called the Cigarette Club, before it burned to the ground. (Ironically, that.)

Even before being imbued, Fang could take care of herself. She'd taken arrogance to a whole new level — in large part because her beauty, talent and prestige seemed to warrant it. She talked the talk, but even more, she walked the walk.

Now, she's still involved in the Hong Kong underground, but she deigns to grace a stage with her presence only infrequently. The night the C Club burned, a gang war ignited between One-Eye Yung (her would-be paramour) and Big Daddy Zhao (Yung's main rival, and Fu Chen's sometime-protector). Spicing up the mix was a man who looked remarkably like Demon Jimmy Fong, who was a hit man for Big Daddy and Fang's lover at the time he got iced by One-Eye's thugs months earlier. From the towers of Mongkok to the streets of Wanchai, rumors buzz. Some say, now that there's open war between Yung and Zhao, Fu Chen can no longer count on Zhao's protection. Some say Demon



Jimmy is back from the grave, looking for love — and revenge. Some say Fu Chen has become trapped between the two warring triads, one using her as a pawn and the other as a lure. Some say she's the one doing the manipulating, and that Zhao and Yung are only the most superficial level of a game that stretches back thousands of years, across continents and even into the realms of the demon dead. Most say she's just looking out for herself, the way she always has.

CORAZON MARRON

Corazon is the matriarch of an extensive, fecund and decidedly shady family of Brazilian farmers. The Marrons may not be rich or well educated, but there's a damn lot of them and they're notorious for three inflexible things. One, no Marron backs down from a fight. Two, although there's plenty of bickering among the cousins, the family bands together if an "outsider" makes trouble for one of its own. Three, at least half the family income derives from growing marijuana. Anyone who disturbs the third usually runs smack dab into the first two.

The Marrons claim their family was at the forefront of a Caribbean slave revolution that ousted the white masters, and that they themselves were forced to leave the islands because of the envy and politicking of other inferior families. They're a proud bunch, and if you talk to them when they're drunk or stoned enough, they

might tell you that one day they'll return to their homeland and reclaim their lost wealth.

Currently, the family doesn't have much, but they get by. They farm, they drink, they fight, and they carried on a long-time feud with the inbred Coutinho family.

One day, when Corazon and three of her sons were at the local market, three Coutinhos waltzed by, and the Marrons realized one of them was a monster that had to be destroyed.

Violence between the Marrons and the Coutinhos was never uncommon, but deaths were rare and never came three at a time. That was just the beginning. Corazon and her sons had been armed by the saints (or so she said) in order to rub the Coutinhos off the face of the Earth. Attacking by surprise, they did just that. Three Coutinho creatures and close to a dozen of their human relatives were killed in one day, and most of the few who escaped were hunted down within a week. The official verdict was a mass homicide/ suicide. Said Sheriff Cristobal Marron, "You know what those Coutinho folks were like. Not to speak ill of the dead, but they weren't quite 'right.'"

The bank foreclosed on the Coutinho farm and the Marrons bought it, as instructed by the saints. The saints speak to Corazon almost every week, and they prepare her for the next onslaught of monsters. She knows they're coming. So do her sons. But for now, humans rule their valley.

JOHN O'MALLEY, AKA COP90

O'Malley is a tall, broad-shouldered man with the blood of five generations of Irish cops in his veins. Like his father, O'Malley joined the Chicago police force right out of school. Before long, he was a patrol officer in the city's 15th precinct, working some of the bleakest and most violent streets. Unlike many of his peers, O'Malley's idealism wasn't blunted or sullied by the failings of the legal system or by relentless corruption. As a beat cop, he busted drug users at traffic stops or outside clubs. When it became obvious that he was just attacking the symptoms instead of the disease, he set his sights higher and went after the dealers. That meant working long hours and weekends to get promoted and earn more authority, and so he did, despite the distance it created between himself and his family.

He was a human cyclone, relentless and implacable, climbing over or busting through every obstacle in his path. By the time he was 27, O'Malley had been wounded three times in the line of duty and was one of the most decorated officers on the force. His marriage was falling apart, and his son was a stranger to him, but John barely noticed, caught up completely in his crusade.

At 32, O'Malley was in the big leagues, a lieutenant in the narcotics division who was tasked to go after the high-level drug traffickers and kingpins. That was when his relentless efforts uncovered Donald Pendergrass, one of





Chicago's social elite who, incredibly, was also a major player in the city's heroin trade. Pendergrass was resourceful and extremely clever, insulated behind many layers of cutouts and underlings, but O'Malley went after him with everything he had. He spent the next three years building a case against Pendergrass, never imagining that the drug kingpin might be taking steps against him.

Everything started to fall apart when Internal Affairs handed down an indictment against O'Malley's father, accusing the elder policeman of accepting bribes and protection money from organized crime. O'Malley's father protested loudly, claiming he was being set up. John stood by his father throughout the brutal court battle and was there when the guilty verdict came down. Two days later, John's father committed suicide in his cell under mysterious circumstances.

Three months later, as O'Malley was still struggling to come to grips with his father's death, he got word that his son Tom had been arrested for heroin possession. The force took care of its own, and the arrest was hushed up, but O'Malley's career was dealt a crippling blow. Tom was put into rehab, and the doctors estimated that he'd been on smack for almost a year, right under his father's nose. O'Malley's wife left him two days later.

With his world crumbling down around him, O'Malley tried to fight on, doggedly pursuing his inves-

tigation and devoting what time he had to Tom's rehabilitation. In between, he drank. Pretty soon, it took a quart of rye just to get through the day. O'Malley's superiors started to talk about his early retirement. His work was suffering, and the Pendergrass case was all but closed. Then one night, long past 12, he came home to find his son's body stretched out on the floor. The needle was still in his arm. The heroin he'd gotten had been almost pure, enough to stop his heart within seconds.

Someone had purposely given Tom the heroin. O'Malley was sure of it. His son had been improving. That was when he finally began to suspect that everything he'd suffered had nothing to do with a capricious God, but with the workings of a powerful and well-connected man. Pendergrass had ruined O'Malley's life for no other reason than to keep his own worthless hide out of prison. That night, O'Malley swore there would be a reckoning, no matter what. He had nothing left to lose.

He gave the investigation everything he had. John ate when he could, slept only when he had to and did whatever was necessary to make Pendergrass' people cough up evidence about their boss. When his wife's attorney served the divorce papers, he signed them and handed them right back without a word. She was part of a life he no longer knew.

A year later, O'Malley got enough for an indictment and a warrant for Donald Pendergrass' arrest. Accompanied by a small army of police, he arrived at Pendergrass' residence to take the criminal to jail. They barged past all the bodyguards and servants; O'Malley felt like a whirlwind, his time come round at last. But there, standing on the mansion's main staircase, the policeman locked eyes with Donald Pendergrass and realized just how much of a fool he'd been.

Donald Pendergrass was dead. O'Malley saw the man's pale skin, lined with blue-black veins. When the thing smiled, he revealed long, blood-slicked fangs. He was a monster, the stuff of nightmares, with an expression of ancient disdain. O'Malley looked into those eyes and knew down to his soul that nothing on Earth could stop Donald Pendergrass.

Except him.

O'Malley took Pendergrass downtown in his own car. The monster sat handcuffed in the back seat and boasted that he wouldn't be in the station for more than 15 minutes. His lawyers would rip O'Malley's case to pieces, then he'd leave the country for a relaxing vacation in France. The creature offered his condolences about O'Malley's father. In his opinion, the man had been innocent all along. Then Pendergrass asked about John's son. O'Malley and the convoy behind him cruised to a stop at a red light. Hefting the police flashlight from the passenger seat, he caved in the monster's face with a sizzling sound. Pendergrass died and crumbled to dust, and John O'Malley was reborn.

O'Malley thought quickly and a few blocks later veered his car into a rampway stanchion. When the

ambulance arrived, his story was that the suspect had somehow slipped free of his handcuffs and reached across the seat to grab the wheel. They crashed, and Pendergrass fled into the night as O'Malley sat stunned. With a van full of cop witnesses who had seen the suspect go into the car (even though they hadn't seen him exit it), what other explanation could there be?

Instead of being tormented by inner demons, O'Malley now hunts them mercilessly on Chicago's streets. His experience and outspoken manner on hunter-net have earned him considerable respect and status with the emerging hunter community. He has become the *de facto* spokesman for the burgeoning Avenger creed.

PROFILE

Attributes: Strength (Athletic Build) 4, Dexterity (Quick Hands) 4, Stamina (Workaholic) 5, Charisma (Transfixing Gaze) 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception (Sharp-Eyed) 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness (Ambush) 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy (City Hall) 4, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Dodge 2, Drive 3, Fast Draw 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation (Criminal Records) 4, Law 3, Leadership 2, Firearms (Pistol) 4, Melee 2, Research 2, Security 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4

Backgrounds: Arsenal 3, Contacts 3, Resources 2

Edges: (Vengeance) Cleave, Trail; (Judgment) Discern, Burden

Zeal: 6, **Conviction:** 8, **Willpower:** 8

POE

Poe is not a good man. He was imbued in a Belgian maximum-security prison, where he was serving terms for smuggling, assault, mayhem and second-degree murder. He suffered the wake-up in the prison yard, along with an arsonist, a burglar/rapist, two prison guards — and the warden.

The dynamics among the six remain complex, to say the least. The guards and warden were used to seeing the convicts as the enemy — ruthless thugs who had to be kept in line. Now, they are presented with a new enemy, against whose inhuman measure mere criminals are saintly.

All six agree that something has to be done about the things. Poe and his colleagues certainly have the skills. Furthermore, with a little collusion from the warden and the guards, the convicts have the perfect alibi to conduct the hunt without suspicion.

Poe has no delusions about his circumstances. He knows the warden views him as an expendable pawn in a chess match against the forces of Hell. Whenever he is snuck out of the prison for a "mission," he knows the guards watch him closely, and he knows they'll kill him if he tries to escape. But every mission he undertakes is a chance to breathe free, to sleep and rise when he



wants, to eat good food and to shower in private. It's a chance to live, and that's good enough for Poe.

On his most recent and most dangerous mission — erasing a NATO strategist — Poe had the opportunity to leave one of his fellow hunters to die. Specifically, he could have abandoned one of the guards, a loutish fellow named Henri. For some reason, Poe saved the man — even though abandoning Henri could well have given him a chance to escape.

Poe's not sure what happened. Part of him thinks it was a simple convict reflex, to get the guard on his side. Other times, he suspects the same force that imbued him guided his actions in that instance. But it's just barely possible that Poe has uncovered a long-hidden vein of decency.

JENNIFER VIDASANIA, AKA FLAME61

Like Corazon Marron in Brazil, Jennifer Vidisania is at the center of a group of loyal, dedicated individuals. Unlike the Marrons, however, Vidisania's followers opt to follow her out of belief, not out of family loyalty.

A native of the U.S., Vidisania traveled to Istanbul with a specific aim in mind. She planned to take advantage of rich, gullible tourists and rope them into a phony New Age church. She never suspected that any of the occult claptrap she spouted might turn out to be true.



She now believes that the gods have a sense of humor and have chosen to pervert the selfish goals of a nonbeliever to achieve their own goals. Of course, no true seeker could discern the inexpressible will of Heaven. Only a fool like her with no sense of the real importance of her task could manage to stumble across it.

Styling herself the "Flame of Heaven," Vidisania preaches a doctrine of impending Apocalypse. The world is gearing up for a final war, and she intends for her followers to be ready.

While her initial plan for her church involved a great deal more peace, love and material comfort, Vidisania's perception of paranormal predators has shifted her course decidedly to the right. She now preaches a militant doctrine, backed by violent miracles (such as showing her followers proof that vampires evaporate in sunlight). In addition to her imbued powers, she bolsters belief through more conventional methods — sleep deprivation, isolation and indoctrination. Her base outside Istanbul is a fortified camp, where her glassy-eyed believers spiral deeper into the revealed faith. She has nearly 20 people in her church, several of whom have surrendered all their worldly possessions "for the common good."

Vidisania currently is considering contacting the Russian mob to acquire rifles, flamethrowers, rocket launchers — and maybe even a tank or two.

STEVEN WILLIAMS, AKA SOLDIER91

Steven Williams was a young infantryman stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. He was working his way through a four-year stint when the Messengers spoke to him. On leave in nearby Killeen, he and several friends were drinking beer in a neighborhood bar when Williams spied a very pale, middle-aged man talking to an attractive young girl. Williams watched the girl's eyes become unfocused and her expression go flat. The man stood to leave, and the girl followed. Over their heads, a neon beer sign flared red: "MURDERER." Williams shook his head, disbelieving. When he looked again, the sign was normal once more.

Not sure what to think, Williams gathered his friends and headed into the parking lot. Back in the shadows, they saw the man bent over the girl. Williams shouted and the man looked up. Blood ran down his chin and fangs gleamed faintly in the moonlight. The "man" was a monster.

Williams and his friends attacked the creature. It tossed them around like rag dolls, laughing coldly, and then disappeared into the darkness. When the soldiers recovered, the girl's body was gone, whisked away by the creature. Questioning his buddies, Williams learned that no one else had seen the man for what he really was, but they certainly knew that *something* bad had happened. And with no body, there was nothing to take to the police.



Undaunted, Williams went back into the bar and asked questions. The man was a local and well known, an oil tycoon who lived on a ranch with a bunch of servants. He had a reputation for coming in and leaving with the ladies from time to time. Going to the police wouldn't help. The man owned the police. The smartest thing he and his friends could do would be to head back to base and forget the whole thing.

Williams took half the advice. He and his friends went back to base — and returned shortly after dawn, ready for war.

The vampire's servants were well prepared, but not for a squad of soldiers armed with automatic weapons. The intruders fought their way into the monster's lair and dragged the creature out into the sunlight. Afterward, Williams' buddies wanted nothing more than to get back to their everyday lives and forget about the whole horrible incident, but Steven couldn't let go. That moment in the parking lot had transformed him, and he learned all he could about stories and rumored sightings across Texas. Eventually, he found his way onto hunter-net.

It was on the net that Williams heard about a vampire in Mexico. Supposedly a powerful creature, it resided just across the border in a walled hacienda surrounded by guards, and it had its fingers in everything from drug-trafficking to guns to sweatshop slavery. Williams announced to the net that he was going after the thing. A few other hunters, including a salesman who called himself Traveler72, agreed to go along.

Williams approached the guys, his buddies in the squad. They wanted no part in any other freakish episode,

but Williams was adamant. They had been shown the vampire for a reason, he declared, and he meant to see things through to the end. Finally, he talked his friends into accompanying him armed to the teeth across the border. They were going to play it smart this time. No more confronting the creature in its lair. They brought enough charges to blow the building straight to Hell.

This time was different — they walked into a trap. The team was ambushed outside the hacienda by a horde of puppets and brought inside. Williams was forced to watch as his friends were tortured for information.

The only thing that saved him was a hunter Williams had never even met, a lurker who had seen Williams' plans on the net and decided to cover their backs in his own way. A bullet shattered one of the hacienda's windows, letting in the burning desert sunlight. The monsters shrieked in pain and surprise, and Williams made his break. In the chaos, he got himself free and stumbled in terror through the darkened hacienda. Screams of the dead and dying filled the air. When he finally found the explosives they'd brought, he set the fuses and prepared to die with his buddies. But something changed his mind. In retrospect, he believes that the ghosts of his friends told him to run. He stumbled from the house moments before it blew to bits. Later, he learned that Traveler72 was the only other to escape.

Torn by guilt and haunted by the deaths of the guys, Williams went AWOL and began to travel the country to unravel the mystery of the Messengers and his imbuings. Only when he has fulfilled the task that the Messengers have set him, he feels, can he atone for the deaths of his friends.

