

HUNTER-BOOK REDEEMER



A Character Book for Hunter: The Reckoning™

Dear C,

I don't know what you've heard about Brussels, but it's bad. By my count, over half of the Communauté is dead. Worse, a few are missing. I don't know if they escaped and are in hiding or they were captured. Either way, they could be anywhere by now.

That's what we lost. In return, we are in possession of some documents stolen from the deaders who have their fingers on the EU and NATO.

It's quite a story, how we got them.

Remember RM? The guy from Tanzania, who you said he had a cute arse? Well, after much discussion, the Communauté picked out a bloodsucker for him to approach. We'd been watching the seven NATO insiders that we knew about for months, and we thought we had a pretty good idea which were the leaders and which were the followers. While we were watching, an eighth showed up who seemed to be kind of a junior member. She wasn't as slick about hiding her nature, but she never killed her victims. Several times we even saw her cry after feeding, so we pegged her as a weak link.

RM approached her and used a trick we've been calling "enquête." He first asked her, "How much do you remember?" and it had a visible effect on her. He waited a few nights, then tried, "When was the last time you saw a sunrise?" Instead of startling her, this time she seemed to be saddened. Then it was, "Were you ever in love?" Normal people watching might have thought our man was flirting.

He approached her five times in two months. At the end, she was actively seeking him out. We were very careful, keeping her under surveillance as much as possible. To the best of our knowledge she kept her encounters secret.

When he allowed himself to be found, several of us were around and ready to act if things went wrong. They didn't.

She wanted to know who he was, how he could make her feel alive again. He refused to tell her, but did use his skill on her again, at her request.

Apparently she found the sensation so addictive that she offered to pay him to help her remember her past. He negotiated for information, instead. She refused at first. Eventually, she came around.

That's when she started spying on her kind for us. We amassed a huge file, most of which was garbage — literally and figuratively. She took papers that the others threw away and brought them to us in exchange for a fix. Perhaps fifty pages out of a thousand had anything of remote value that we could decipher. The most promising were kept in the so-called "Document Clé," which was all I had time to grab when our final location was overrun. It includes photographs of the other seven vampires we know of here.

I don't know how we were compromised. Perhaps RM screwed up — he was a student after all, not a government agent. Or perhaps our mole was discovered by her own kind. In any event, everything in the Document Clé could be lies planted to entrap us, so be careful.

RM and the mole are both dead, but I think we forced the creatures to play their hand. They tried to capture her for questioning, and one of us managed to kill her before they could. The Communauté is gone, for all practical purposes — our safe houses burned to the ground and our survivors scattered. I am leaving Europe permanently, hoping to find safety elsewhere.

One comforting thought: I do not believe the Document Clé was compromised. They do not know we have this information, unless our insider told them so beforehand. Given their eagerness to interrogate her, I don't think they reached her in time. You have the honor of receiving the first copy made. The originals remain in my possession, for now. I intend to pass them along to someone better protected and better able to use them — I know RM was particularly excited about this "Lamp of Constantine" business. He was a Christian, and always had some notion that the deaders could be "saved." Anyway, wish me luck.

These pictures were taken on surveillance and shown to our contact for identification.



REYNARD: Last name unknown, home unknown. He's the chief, we believe; the other creatures defer to him. He has been witnessed to be capable of some kind of power of suggestion over living people. Rarely seen with fewer than two bodyguards, one of whom appears to be a blood slave.

EMILY VARETTA: "Special Consultant" to the EU. Cover story is that she's an economist. Home is a rented house outside the city with very little ground cover — difficult to approach. Has two guards who accompany her at all times. Capabilities unknown.



LOUIS PIQUET: A French attaché to NATO and the highest placed creature in that organization. A decorated combat veteran, he occupies a penthouse in downtown Brussels. When three Irish hunters tried to take him down at long range, he killed them all. Definitely possesses superior strength and speed. Should be considered armed at all times.



EDGAR NOBSTULLING: A reporter who's done think-pieces on the European Union and NATO for Newsweek and The Economist. He lives surprisingly well for someone on a journalist's salary. He owns condominiums in Brussels and London, as well as a chateau in the French countryside. He frequently acts as host to Sloane and our mole. Well known on the Brussels club circuit.



GODFREY: Last name unknown, lair unknown. Our contact didn't know much about Godfrey except rumors that his job at the EU was a cover for intelligence work. Nothing is known about his capabilities.



JANA RYDELEK: An aide to the German NATO officer Fritz Geier — an officer who is actually her blood servant, we believe. Residence is unknown. Seems capable of moving unseen; has been reported to simply disappear, to normal sight, anyway.



STAN SLOANE: The night clerk for one of NATO's American offices. Despite his lowly position, he seems to be on friendly terms with many of the high-level American staff. He has a small house outside the city, as well as a "wife" and three "children." The wife is a slave, as is their housekeeper. The three children seem normal, except that all have been treated for anemia within the past year. Known to possess amazing strength.

to hear that things are going smoothly, even if she is smashing up my electronics. She's not doing any structural damage to the house, is she? I hope I don't have to tell you how much I hate having workmen stomping around in their hobnailed boots, getting their grimy fingers into everything when I can't be around to supervise.

I have two further questions, both relating to our quest. First: Are you positive that Guillaume has vanished for good? I am beginning another expedition and I don't want any competition, especially from him. Second, can you ask Katherine if she remembers any more details about Constantine's Lamp?

Given the proximity of these questions on this page, I'm sure you can tell what I seek now. If initial reports are accurate, getting it will pose some unique challenges, but I have total confidence in Marcella's loyalty. Her skills are another matter, but if it's true that none of us can approach the lamp, she should be safe enough.

I can't tell you too much. We're investigating a hot spring on the north coast of Africa. My assistants tell me that the local geology makes a genuine hot spring very unlikely, so we suspect the lamp has made the water boil there for all these centuries. We can't find any venerable source who admits to traveling in or through the area, but two of my researchers went into the area and never returned. If it's not the lamp, it's something. My mind could be changed, but I think the prospects are sufficiently rewarding to risk Marcella. Besides, I suspect Troy has dispatched his own agents, and I shudder to imagine him in control of the artifact.

Write me soon.

Nobstulling

obvious anachronism indicating that the line was added later, probably around AD 650. This out-of-place phrase reinforces doubts about the entire episode. Not only is there no other report that Saint Augustine recreated the miracle of loaves and fishes, and not only does the entire scene feel tacked onto the story, but the tone and word choice are decidedly different.

Who is the culprit? I suspect a monk whose name is lost to us, but who resided in the monastery outside Thebes from AD 637 to 662. This monk, referred to only as "The Cypriot" in monastic records, was known to have copied several texts and recorded a story of his own, which he claimed was known as literal truth in his Mediterranean homeland (though I've found no other version of it).

from
denise
twillder's
"religious
stories
of the
seventh
century"

In this execrably written parable, Emperor Constantine received a piece of the sun from God as a reward for his conversion to Christianity. The tale includes a phantasmagoric illustration of Constantine, wreathed in flames, seeing the truth and hearing the word of God from Heaven. According to the story, Constantine kept this gift in a lamp marked with the letters "Chi" and "Rho," and that any demon who came close was subdued by the power of God and would either repent its sins or be destroyed by the sun's rays.

~~This clumsily written myth clearly owes~~

GODFREY—

IF I HAD A GOLD SOVEREIGN FOR EVERY TIME I'VE HEARD A REPORT THAT RASPUTIN WAS FINALLY DESTROYED, I'D BE ABLE TO MELT THEM DOWN AND FORGE ARMOR. I HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT HE WAS LOST TO THE SUN, CONSUMED IN FIRES SET BY A FERVENT CHURCHMAN, TORN TO PIECES BY WOLVES AND SUCKED DRY BY AN AMBITIOUS YOUNGSTER. YET PERIODICALLY I SEE HIM SKULKING AROUND KIEV, MUTTERING ABOUT THE OLD DRAGONS. OR WORSE YET, I DON'T SEE HIM BUT I SENSE HIS PRESENCE — OR I SEEM TO. HE WAS HARD ENOUGH TO KILL WHEN HE WAS ALIVE. I'LL NEED MORE THAN RUMORS TO BELIEVE HIM PERMANENTLY GONE.

I was listening when the babbler began to prophesy and transcribed his ravings. Unfortunately, he was sighted and chased forth before the interpretation began. Nonetheless, here is the "guidance" by which Tel Aviv will be governed for the next six months.

écoutait son charabia et, quand il commença à prophétiser, retranscrivit ses délires. Malheureusement, il fut repéré et chassé avant qu'on ne commence l'interprétation. Néanmoins, ce sont les 'directives' qui gouverneront Tel Aviv pendant les six prochains mois.

Handling distracting summons requires dance talk. Daughters, hostility, limitless seeds rise. A wand over forty... a scoundrel. That selfsame better sun quits girl's prison for love suffer second(s?) pins. What is bred in bone is the bondsman's key. Shining mercy jade blood of ivy crawling. Of his fall, a song is made. Announce with ceremony the understood sailor's virtue. In the meantime, fatal vision time means radio contact pleasure. Rock, stink, fly over all and under the dead, swimming moon. The mission, save the world lest its damnation be meaningless. Two stars yield monsters. You'll have nothing to drink but water, wine and milk.

Emily,

I told you there wouldn't be any serious backlash from hitting the Chinese embassy. Sure, the U.S. had to apologize and things were tense for a couple of months. Big fucking deal. Do we really want things to be polite between us and them, considering what's been coming over in the holds of ships from the Golden Triangle and Hong Kong? A little tension could explain a lot of searches, which could provide opportunities to neutralize problems before they occur.

In the big picture, I think we came out way ahead. Half the American people won't even remember it once the next sex scandal hits, and those who do will just chalk it up to government inefficiency and foolishness. As long as they don't trust the government, they're less likely to make trouble for us. There weren't any conscientious objectors to the Spanish Inquisition.

I'm still not sure what was in the basement there, but it got one of my better bruisers even after getting shelled. The other two went in better prepared, which did the trick. If you want, I'll cc you when they send their reports.

S.S.

My Dear Charlotte,

It pains me that it has come to this, but if I must threaten and command rather than request your acquiescence politely, so be it. You warn me not to make presumptions about our longtime friendship. I could say as much to you. This matter transcends our history. It's bigger than our past and mutual respect.

I know you, and I know your pride. In most circumstances, your confidence is entirely warranted, but I nonetheless must insist that you and your followers vacate Athens within the next three months. All evidence of our activities and, indeed, of our very existence must be removed.

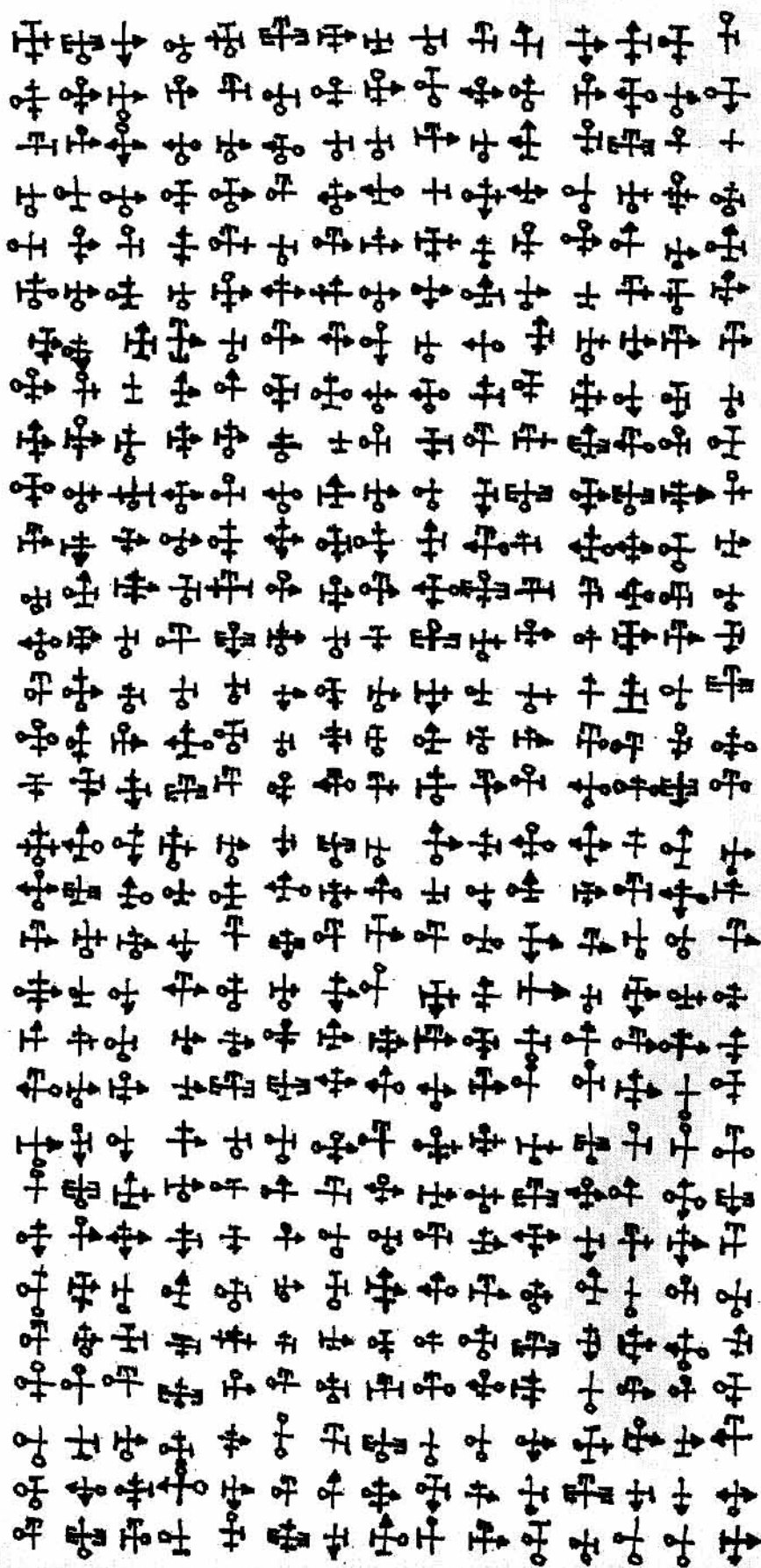
In all of our long acquaintance, have I ever given you foolish advice? If your answer is "no," then consider once again what I say. You are not prepared for the Union of Doves. I should consider it my duty as your friend to warn you away from their approach, but an even more compelling duty commands me: My sworn duty to all of our kind. Should the Union of Doves discover us, none would be safe, not anywhere on the face of the earth or under it.

Leave Athens. This is an ultimatum. I will know if you leave and I will know if you stay. If you choose to stay, I shall have no choice but to personally remove you, your followers, your servants, and any other sign of your passing.

Reynard

We've got no idea what this is, but the mole seemed to think it was really damn important. She said this was kept under lock and key, and she had to break into her boss' office to get it. For what it's worth, a now-dead member of the Communauté thought this was what prompted the vampires to break cover and come after our contact.

Whatever you do, don't post this to hunter-net. It's been heavily compromised. Posting will just tell the enemy that we have it and we don't know what it means. Not to mention the possibility that we'd be delivering the bastards' mail for them.





PROLOGUE SALVATION

Leaf Pankowski had tried to prepare herself for the reunion. So, in his own way, had Dr. Carleton Van Wyk.

"Hello, Doctor," she said. She thought he'd like it, find it respectful. Now, looking at him, it didn't seem like enough. "I'm glad you could come so quickly."

He nodded with a thin smile and said, "Your proposal was very interesting." His voice was cordial. Any curious passerby would not have guessed at the pair's bitter history.

There was a quiet moment when they just looked at each other.

"You seem well," Van Wyk said at last.

"You too," Leaf replied. Neither of them meant it.

When he had last seen Leaf, her chestnut hair hung down to the middle of her back, so thick it was almost bushy. She'd had clear eyes, a robust, rosy complexion and a calm, slightly complacent demeanor. Since that time, she'd lost almost forty pounds. The loss wasn't flattering. Her skin seemed to hang loosely. Its color was waxy and sallow. She'd cut her hair short, and it seemed lifeless and dull. To his professional eye, she looked as if she'd had a terrible illness — or as if she might still be sick.

The change in Van Wyk was more subtle, but perhaps more extreme. To Leaf, at least, the difference seemed drastic as she struggled to define in her mind what she felt in her gut. When they'd first met, she thought he was a good-looking man, in his cold, remote way. Not her type, certainly — she didn't fancy small, refined men with flawless hands and elegant, silver hair. But she could see how others might find a man like Van Wyk — well spoken, erudite, wealthy — very attractive.

He still had the same hair and hands. The change lay entirely in his carriage and attitude. Before, he had possessed a self-confidence unique to those at the height of society. A rich, white, male doctor, Van Wyk subconsciously played the role of "Lord of the Manor."

Now, that compelling confidence seemed shattered. An aftermath of confusion, helplessness and disgrace was written in his eyes, in the hunch of his shoulders and in a newly humble posture.

"It seems like years since I've been in Chicago," he said at last.

There was another pause. When Leaf spoke, her voice was hesitant and touched with shame. "I guess you had good reason to leave. I'm... I'm really sorry about what happened on the list. I really shouldn't have... well... I should have treated you better. I apologize."

He drew a breath, and for a moment a shade of his old grandeur passed over his face. "Think nothing of it," he said.

After a pause, he spoke again with a smile. "It's not the worst thing that's happened."

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Once the apology was spoken and accepted, a barrier between them seemed to fall. Perhaps both secretly wanted to get along and went out of their way to be agreeable and congenial. Both had gone through some very lonely months, and each was pleasantly surprised by the other's company. They ordered a pizza, and the doctor bought a bottle of wine. Carleton showed Leaf his stamp collection — a hobby in his previous life. He now found valuable stamps to be an excellent second currency.

"A large portion of my funds has been put into these," he said, holding a magnifying glass over a particularly fine misprint. "They're portable, they retain their value, and commerce in rare stamps is practically unregulated. Besides, philatelists are everywhere."

"I never would have thought of that," Leaf said.

"Let us hope that most unliving are similarly preoccupied."

That was as close as they came to discussing their calling. Similarly, Van Wyk deduced that Leaf's husband, Oaken, was no longer living with her. He knew from hunter-net that Oaken had not been killed, but he did not ask the cause of the breakup.

Leaf appreciated Van Wyk's discretion. The split had been agonizing, not least because neither Leaf nor Oaken could explain the cause to friends, colleagues or relatives. The reason for the divorce had to remain a secret between husband and wife. Oaken still hadn't signed the papers.

Van Wyk initially demurred when Leaf asked him to spend the night. "I wouldn't dream of imposing," he said.

"It's no imposition: The futon folds out. It's quite comfortable. Or are you worried about the impropriety?" She grinned as she asked, amused by the thought that a man who had staked rots and experimented on wisps would be intimidated by popular opinion.

"I simply don't want to impose on your privacy."

"I've had too much privacy lately," she said, then regretted saying it. "Besides," she added, blushing, "It's safer. Both of us have enemies. Plus, you could save some money by staying here."

"Money is not really an issue."

"I know, but why should you sell off some of your old Pro Juvenates when you don't have to?"

"It's 'Pro Juventute.' Still, your point is well taken. My stock income could be frozen at any moment, and my expenses remain steady... if you're sure it's no imposition?"

She assured him it wasn't. After another flurry of polite exchanges, the matter was settled.

Only then, after dinner and discussion and agreement, did they get to the topic of their planned experiment.

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Leaf and Van Wyk approached life from opposite directions. She was intuitive, abstract, mystical and emotional. He was detached, logical, methodical and reasonable. She valued people and emotions. He valued progress and information. She was a Democrat, leaning toward the Green Party. He was a die-hard Republican.

They shared a bond of knowledge, however. Both of them knew that there were gray zones between life and death, zones inhabited by nightmares. Both believed that it was to everyone's benefit for that in-between place to be cleansed — a benefit, in their view, even to the suffering inhabitants of that limbo.

Both of them had forced creatures into the realm of death. Both hoped it was possible to return some to the realm of life.

It was that hope that had led Leaf to place a delicately worded ad in the newspaper, promising the possibility of life to the dead who still walked. Several responded. She was lucky that they sought escape from their existence, rather than to do harm to someone who might perceive them for what they were. Perhaps some of them had meant to do harm, but by making arrangements to meet and then observing potential subjects before playing her hand, she'd managed to avoid being killed.

Her first attempts were failures: The creatures wound up as cold corpses, despite their willingness to participate. This result would have frustrated her completely, but for one thing. Many creatures turned to what seemed like ash after her efforts. But some she tried to cleanse left corpses behind. Was it possible that these latter creatures died as humans and not as things? And if that was so, was it possible for medical science to save them?

At first, she had trusted in her own will and in the Living Power that had bestowed inexplicable gifts upon her. Eventually, when answers still eluded her and her pride waned, she sought out the advice of a medical doctor.

She knew only one who could understand.

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The vampire was an ugly specimen, with paper-pale skin and prominent fangs. The "whites" of its eyes were the gray of slush, and it stank like stagnant water. Its crowning glory was a great dry gash across the top of its head. Leaf had met it cautiously the previous evening. She'd hoped that she would be less repulsed seeing the creature a second time, but she couldn't keep her eyes from wandering back to its gaping wound.

It said its name was Cliff Krumlauf, and that it had been dead for less than a week. When it began to speak, Van Wyk paused in his work, but only long enough to start a tape recorder.

"I'd just dropped my kid off at his martial arts school. I was gonna go back home and catch the last half of the game when they jumped me. I didn't even see 'em coming. One minute I'm headed toward my car, the next I'm in the back of a van and there's these things clawing at my clothes and biting me. And then... I dunno. It was like I was up above it all! Like one of those out-of-body things you hear about? I mean, I could see the insides of this filthy van, and maybe four of these animals going at me like it was Thanksgiving. Weird thing is, it didn't affect me, just watching like that.

"Once, when I was a kid, I nearly drowned. Right as I hit the bottom of the pool, I had this feeling like it just didn't matter. Or when I got my wisdom teeth out, they gave me drugs and I didn't really care what happened to me. It was like that."

For this study, Van Wyk had amassed a curious collection of paraphernalia, some medical, some not. He had a heart monitor and a set of four-point leather restraints. He had a sturdy gurney and cardiac-arrest kit, along with a wooden stake and what he'd been told was holy water. He had a blood-pressure cuff, ampoules of adrenaline, anticoagulants, a thermometer and a stethoscope. He also had a loaded 12-gauge shotgun.

"I watched 'em going at me," Cliff continued, "and then everything went black. I woke up in a box. A coffin, I guess. I started freak-

out, screaming... I started clawing at the wood. When I cracked through, all this loose dirt fell in on me. That scared me even worse. I couldn't breathe, but when the dirt got in my nose and mouth, I realized I didn't have to, that I was only breathing to scream."

Leaf had a .45 pistol in her hand with the safety off and a bullet in the chamber. Its laser sight was aimed at Cliff's chest, but as he spoke the red spot wavered and finally disappeared as Leaf lowered the gun and let her finger off the trigger. Maybe it was because of the compassion she felt. Maybe it was because her arms were tired. Maybe it was because Van Wyk had completed his initial examination and was strapping the vampire to the gurney.

"May I interrupt to ask you a few questions?" the doctor asked.

"Yeah, sure."

"I've noticed large, livid bruises on your back, buttocks, heels and the base of your skull... all the lowest parts of the body. When you rest during the day, do you rest face up?"

"Yeah."

"Do you feel anything in particular in those areas when you rise?"

"Uh... not really."

"Do you dream?" Leaf asked.

"Not that I remember. But I never remembered my dreams when I was... uh, you know... before."

Van Wyk applied his stethoscope, shook his head and began inflating the blood-pressure cuff.

"Please go on with your story," Leaf said.

"Uh... okay. So, I dug myself out of this grave, and the others were waiting for me. They'd gotten... somebody. I'm not even sure who it was, that's how messed up I was. I just... I ate him. Her. I'm not sure. I remember biting right through this person's throat, going for the jugular. Blood squirted right in my eye. I remember because I wasn't disgusted. I was disappointed because now that blood was going to waste. Do you understand? I wasn't grossed out. I was hungry for it."

As Van Wyk wrote, "No heartbeat, but blood pressure 140/90!" in his notes, Cliff continued. "Then they hit me on the head with a shovel. Said it was so I'd never forget what I was, that I wasn't alive anymore, so I might as well forget about my wife and kids and 'all that shit.' That's how they described my whole life: 'All that shit.' They cut themselves, bled into a cup and gave it to me. I... I couldn't resist it. I was still so hungry... They told me my new name was Kicker, and that's what they called me the whole time I was with them."

"What were their names?" Leaf encouraged.

"There was Rampage, he was the other guy. There was Bait. She could pass for human. They grabbed her 'cause she was good looking. The leader called herself Kali. Doesn't really matter. I'm pretty sure they're all dead. You wanna know the funny thing?"

Van Wyk hooked up the heart monitor, which started making a steady drone as a flat line crawled across its screen.

"I miss 'em. I was with them less than a week and I feel like I lost my oldest friends, all at once."

"Do you remember any of them hypnotizing you, or staring into your eyes?" Van Wyk asked.

"Nah. I... maybe it was just because I was so scared, and they seemed to have some answers, you know? Like the whole world had suddenly turned upside down, and they were the only ones there to catch me... even though they're the ones who did it to me."

Van Wyk frowned for a moment, then tightened the leather restraints.

"What happened?" Leaf asked.

"Well, Kali told me that there's a war or something going on. That bad as they might seem, there were these other... vampires. She had a name for 'em but I can't remember. She said there were these people making us into slaves, that only a few were strong

enough to resist, and that now I was one of them. She told me how lucky I was to be free." His voice took a bitter tone.

"Anyhow, I guess these slaves or whatever found us. We were hiding in this basement in downtown Aurora, in some old carpet store. Early in the morning, these cops showed up. I woke up when they found Rampage. He just started screaming and tearing at 'em. There were four of them, and they opened up on him. The rest of us tried to save him, but all we did was kill the cops. Kali started swearing when she saw they had wooden stakes. It was the middle of the day, and I just *knew* that I was terrified to go outside. I felt exhausted. Kali called the owner of the store to her somehow. It was like he was a robot. He rolled each of us into carpets and got us out of there before more cops showed. That night, we killed the owner."

Van Wyk pointed a penlight into Cliff's eyes and noted that his pupils remained dilated.

"I think someone followed us, or found out where we were somehow. We were in the middle of killing the carpet guy when suddenly Kali looks up and shouts, 'Get out of the van!' So Bait and me jumped out the back door, with Kali right behind us. I'd barely got outside before the van caught fire. That scared me, and then I saw this woman with a rifle. She'd been watching the van, I guess, and when Kali came out she opened fire. Kali came out last, but the woman was *waiting for her*, like me and Bait just didn't matter.

"I kind of lost my head and charged her, with Bait right beside me. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw this black thing... just a blur, like when a black car shoots past on a highway and you're standing still. It latched onto Bait and dragged her to the ground. I heard Kali screaming as I got to the woman with the rifle and then... shit...."

Cliff was silent for a moment, chewing at his lower lip.

"What happened?" Leaf asked.

"She just looked at me, and her eyes... it was like looking all the way down to hell. It was like when I was dead, only a thousand times worse. I've never, ever been that scared in my life... or after, I guess. I ran. I left Bait and Kali, pried up a manhole cover and hid in the sewers. I've been hiding ever since. I stole the paper to try to find out if they were looking for me."

Van Wyk noted that the bruises vanished as the vampire's blood seemed to become animate within him. He coated Cliff's chest with saline paste and started to warm up the shock paddles. He inserted an IV needle. The patient barely noticed.

"Why did you answer my ad?" Leaf asked.

Cliff shrugged. "Look at me. I had a wife, three kids. I... I tried to go back and...." His ugly face twisted, becoming monstrous in its sorrow. "Maybe your 'procedure' will finish me off. So what? I'm just a *monster* now. I'd never even seen an *animal* die before, and now I've... I've killed someone... I don't want to be this. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I understand." It was Van Wyk who spoke. He looked at Leaf and said, "I'm ready when you are."

Leaf walked to one end of the gurney and gently cradled Cliff's head in her hands. "It's going to be okay," she assured. Then she kissed him.

His entire body convulsed, every muscle straining for a moment. The restraints began to creak as he rocked back and forth. Tears of blood welled from his squeezed-shut eyes, and pooled in his ears.

Leaf raised her head, breathing deeply.

"It... it hurts," Cliff gasped, his breath a rattle through dry lungs and a desiccated throat.

"It's for the best," she assured.

"Please... stop...." But she was on him even harder, and this time his thrashing was joined by screams, muffled by her mouth as it locked on his. Van Wyk watched, stone still, a syringe in one hand, a wooden stake in the other.



When Leaf broke the kiss, Cliff's eyes were wide, his pupils dilated, and he kept screaming.

"I'LL KILL YOU! YOU FUCKIN' BITCH! I'LL KILL YOU!" She was dripping sweat and gasping, but her eyes were as resolute as his. "Almost... done..."

Cliff tried to bite Leaf's face as it lowered toward his, but she leaned on him with all her weight, pinning his head to one side. She had nearly climbed atop him, bending her body over the side of his face and working her mouth toward the corner of his. Van Wyk turned toward the heart monitor as it gave a single, loud pulse, then turned back at the sound of snapping leather. Cliff's hand clawed at Leaf, trying to hook her eyes. Carleton positioned the stake, threw away the syringe and grabbed a hammer.

"No!" Leaf broke the kiss to shout. She locked one hand on Cliff's wrist, the other on his throat, holding him down as he screamed and cursed and struggled. "We can still save him!"

Van Wyk grabbed the other end of the stake in his right hand, holding it like a rolling pin, and used the leverage to help keep Cliff's free wrist down. Leaf's face was already blooming with bruises where the vampire had clawed her.

"NOOOOOOOOO!" he wailed in terror as she gave him a final kiss.

There was a moment of silence as Cliff Krumlauf went limp, and then the doctor's old emergency room training kicked in.

"Clear!" he shouted instinctively, pressing the charged paddles to the dead chest. There was a single pulse on the monitor, then a flatline drone. Leaf began doing mouth-to-mouth.

"Here, use this," Carleton barked, handing her a respirator. He injected adrenaline.

"Clear!"

Krumlauf's body flopped and twitched, then was still again.

"Come back, Mr. Krumlauf," Van Wyk whispered. "Come on. Your wife and kids are waiting." He shone his penlight in Cliff's eyes and cursed under his breath.

"Clear!"

* * *

"I don't understand why he turned to ash," Leaf said.

Van Wyk shrugged. "I'm afraid I'm out of theories right now."

They were both exhausted. Neither had said a word during the drive back to Leaf's home.

Leaf collapsed into the futon. Van Wyk took an overstuffed chair that had belonged to Leaf's mother.

"Would you like some wine?" he asked at last. She shook her head.

"I'm going to have some," he said rising.

"The glasses are over the sink."

They were silent for a long time.

"We didn't kill that man, you know," Van Wyk sat again and turned his glass with a graceful, unconscious gesture. "That crime falls belongs to the things that turned him. We put him out of his misery."

"That's kind of hard to believe right now."

He shrugged. "Perhaps if we had gotten to him earlier in his transformation..."

"Look, I'd rather not talk about this now."

"Certainly. My apologies." Van Wyk rose and went toward the kitchenette. Leaf glared at his back, wondering if he was being sarcastic. She was too tired to fight until she saw him take a test tube out of his coat pocket and examine it by the fluorescent light.

"What's that?"

He turned to her, his eyebrow raised. "It's a blood sample." He twirled it in his hand with the same wineglass gesture. "Remarkable. It should have clotted by now."

"A man just died in our arms and all you can talk about is his blood sample? Didn't it affect you at all? Hearing about his

wife? His kids? Jesus, this is just another *experiment* to you! You just don't fucking quit!"

He held her gaze.

"No," he said, utterly calm. "I don't *fucking quit*. And I won't *fucking quit* until I know what I need to. Until I know how this is spread, how to stop it, and how to reverse it."

She dropped her gaze.

"I'm sorry."

"No apology necessary. We're both overwrought," he said, looking away and pocketing the test tube. "I imagine we'll have a better perspective in the morning. If you'd like, I have some mild sedatives..."

"I don't need anything."

* * *

Leaf woke up when Van Wyk screamed. Her first thought was that Cliff Krumlauf wasn't dead and had somehow trailed them back to her apartment. She grabbed her gun and ran down the hall toward him, the dot of the laser bobbing along the floor. She instinctively summoned the sight as she had learned to.

She went around the corner, her eyes wide, with the gun in both hands and aimed downward the way cops did on TV.

Van Wyk was sitting up on the futon, breathing in short, hoarse gasps.

He was alone.

Carefully, she put on the safety and lowered the weapon. "Carleton..."

"I'm sorry," he gasped. "I had... a *bad dream*." His voice broke on the last two words and he turned away.

She sat down next to him and realized he was crying.

"Are you all right?"

"I'll be fine," he said, shoulders hunched. "Really. Just a silly dream. Go back to bed." He started making an ugly choking sound, even though he tried not to make any noise.

She put her arms around him.

"It's okay," she said in a low, soothing tone. Slowly, he started to relax, and his sobs came more easily.

For the first time, touching him, Leaf realized how frail he really was. Shaking in her embrace, he felt as delicate as a china cup. Gently, she turned his face toward her and cradled him against her, wiping his tears as if he were a child.

"What did you dream?"

"It was... it was very confusing. First Jared was there, and then my sister Rebecca and her daughter. I haven't seen them in years. Then there was Laura Jenson... and Duane... just pointing at me and staring."

Instinctively, Leaf knew these were people he'd lost.

"I was a terrible doctor."

"Shh. I'm sure that's not true."

"No, it is. Why do you think I became a coroner? And, and after, an *abortionist*. I took the Hippocratic Oath and all I've done is deal in death... and now I'm *this*... and I'm good at it!"

"It's a necessary thing. Not good, but... necessary," she said.

"I know but... I'm lonely. Laura and Rebecca... I can only help them by staying away. I couldn't save Jared. I couldn't save Scott... or Duane. I wanted this to work as much as you did. I swear it."

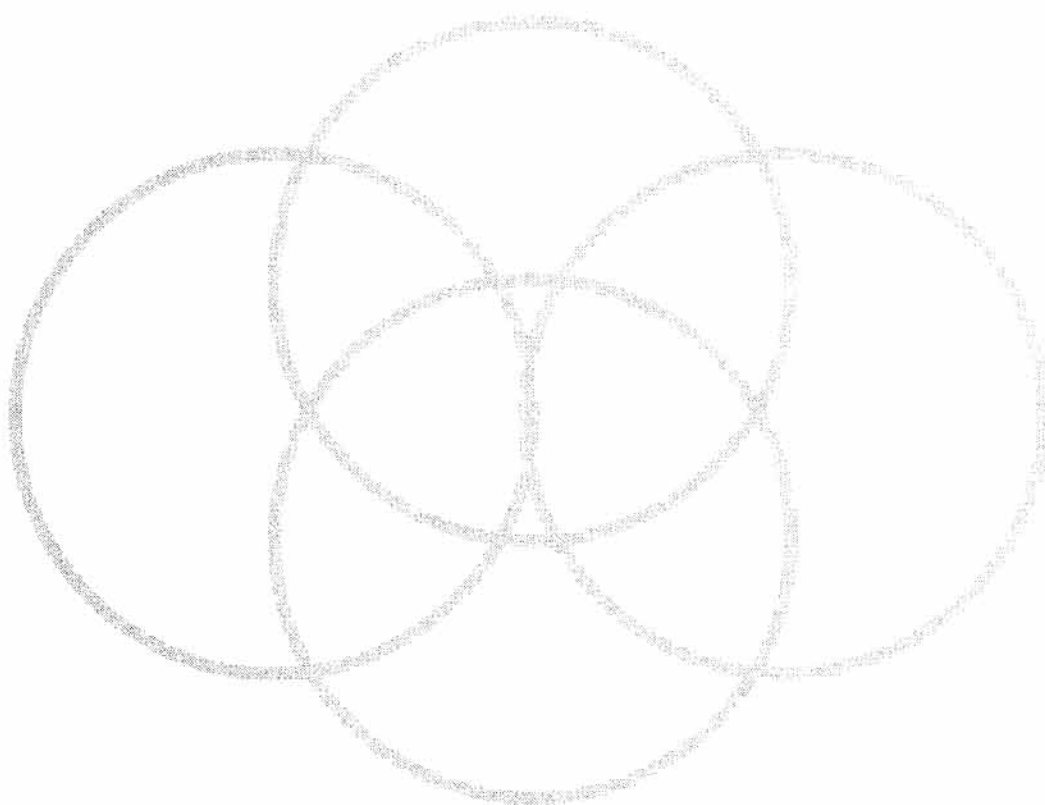
"I believe you."

"It has to work. There has to be some way I can help... even if it's helping... *them*."

"Shh." She started massaging his tense, bony shoulders, a deep tissue rub she'd learned from Oaken. "Next time. We'll get one right after the change. Next time it'll work."

Once he fell asleep, it seemed like the most natural thing in the world for her to curl up beside him.

HUNT'ER-BOOK REDEEMER



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Matt "Back in Smack" Milberger, for re-joining both White Wolf teams at the same time.
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PRINTED IN THE USA.

HUNTER-BOOK REDEEMER

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INTRODUCTION

*For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their
cause with thee*

— Proverbs 23:11

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

Hunter Book: Redeemer is a sourcebook that helps you develop a better understanding of the Redeemer creed and its role in the world of **Hunter: The Reckoning**. As a Redeemer, you recognize the rot that festers in the bodies and souls of the people and creatures around you — in the very world itself. You see how the beings that lurk in the shadows prey upon people, spreading pain, suffering and despair. You could destroy the afflicted and thereby contain the contagion, but what kind of world would you create, where being fallible — human — is grounds for punishment? Maybe, just maybe, a soul can be saved by nurturing it away from cruelty and callousness to kindness and caring — even if only the glimmer of a soul hides somewhere within a seemingly inhuman beast. And even if a demon can't be saved, you have to try. Otherwise, what kind of soul would *you* have?

Being a Redeemer means trying to reconcile everything that's wrong in the world with everything that you uphold as right. If the afflicted and the deserving people can find common ground, maybe they can co-exist as equals rather than as predator and prey. Maybe such compromise will redeem everyone in whatever world has yet to come, if not in this one. Of course, seeking harmony doesn't mean being weak — sometimes the only way to contain a disease is to cut it out completely. That's a call you have to make, with each creature you encounter.

This book helps you make those calls. It helps you figure out who your Redeemer actually is — and whether or not you use all of your creed's new edges, abilities and rules, too.

But just as you need to better understand your own Redeemer, 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 experiences, philosophies and fears with those she encounters on the streets or via the Internet. At first, the recently awakened latch onto anyone who understands them; this new world is just too terrifying to contend with alone. In time, however, 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 nascent social groups are the foundations 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 that goal. Mutual experiences and mutual values turn out to be two very different things. Hunters can therefore be taken by surprise when a fellow "Redeemer" proves to be an austere Judge or a reluctant Martyr. Sometimes, the chosen

aren't even sure of their own ideals until they immerse themselves 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 such creatures utterly destroyed. When this distillation is complete, the creeds as social classifications finally arise. Avenger recognizes Avenger and Redeemer recognizes Redeemer, 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 widely recognized in your game. In the meantime, your Redeemer's fully developed identity helps define her own society.

PERSPECTIVES

The opinions, theories, information and outlooks expressed in this book are presented in three distinct "voices." These Redeemer 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 Redeemers, and on hunters in general.

The creed and its members' views evolve constantly as Redeemers 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 Redeemers 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 Redeemers. You'll know what compels these people to reconcile the supernatural, and how their calling influences the way they deal with the rest of the imbued. We also hope that you're inspired to fully develop your character's identity and beliefs, to bring his goals and aspirations to life.

How to Use This Book

Hunter Book: Redeemer 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 Redeemers and possibly by other creed members. This book is therefore ideal for elaborating on your character, and it helps you better understand her.

Chapter 1: Original Sin explores the nature of penitent and unremitting monsters, the Messengers and Redeemers, and seeks to explain why the imbued receive their gift or curse.

Chapter 2: Saving Souls covers Redeemers' unique tactics and strategies in their constant effort to salvage the supernatural.

Chapter 3: Soulmates describes relations among the charitable and with other creeds.

Chapter 4: The Next World 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 Redeemers and perhaps by hunters of other creeds.

Chapter 6: Redeemers Among Us details newly imbued Redeemers who are ready for play. The chapter also profiles creed members who have acquired reputations among the imbued.

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 Redeemer creed is no different. The following slang and phrases begin to see common use among the forgiving, particularly on the Triage email list. They may even catch on among other imbued. Redeemers or hunters in general without exposure to such communications undoubtedly have their own terms, or they stumble on in the dark, alone and uninformed.

afflicted: Monsters in general; also: lost, salvageable, strays

beasts: Irredeemable monsters, those who seem to actively enjoy using their powers and indulging their hungers in order to cause suffering; also: demons

calling, the: Becoming imbued; also: the draft, the summons

conscripts: Monsters who are believed to have had no say in their condition

dream, the: Normal life, especially family, friends and pleasures; all those things that hunters have to give up, yet strive to protect

dutiful, the: Redeemers as a whole; also: the charitable, confessors, deprogrammers, healers, the forgiving

frother: a hunter who believes that all monsters must be destroyed — perhaps because of past traumatic experiences, disgust at the afflicted's nature or appearance, or crippling close-mindedness

Good Samaritan: A bystander who helps out with the hunt in any way

penitent: A sympathetic monster who tries to help humanity against other monsters

sell-out: Any Redeemer who performs healing services for a price

service, the: The hunt; also: the mission, the calling, the duty

vulnerable, the: Normal people who remain blissfully unaware of monster existence.

writing on the wall: Hunter code in general, as in "the writing on the wall warned me of danger"

SOURCE MATERIAL

There are all kinds of movies, books and comics available that deal with the themes of redemption and of showing villains the error of their ways. Obviously, these sources aren't *about* Redeemers or saving monsters, but some of their characters or subject matter come damn close.

"Beauty and the Beast": Over the course of the fairy tale, Beauty's gentle calm and compassion bring out the best in the Beast.

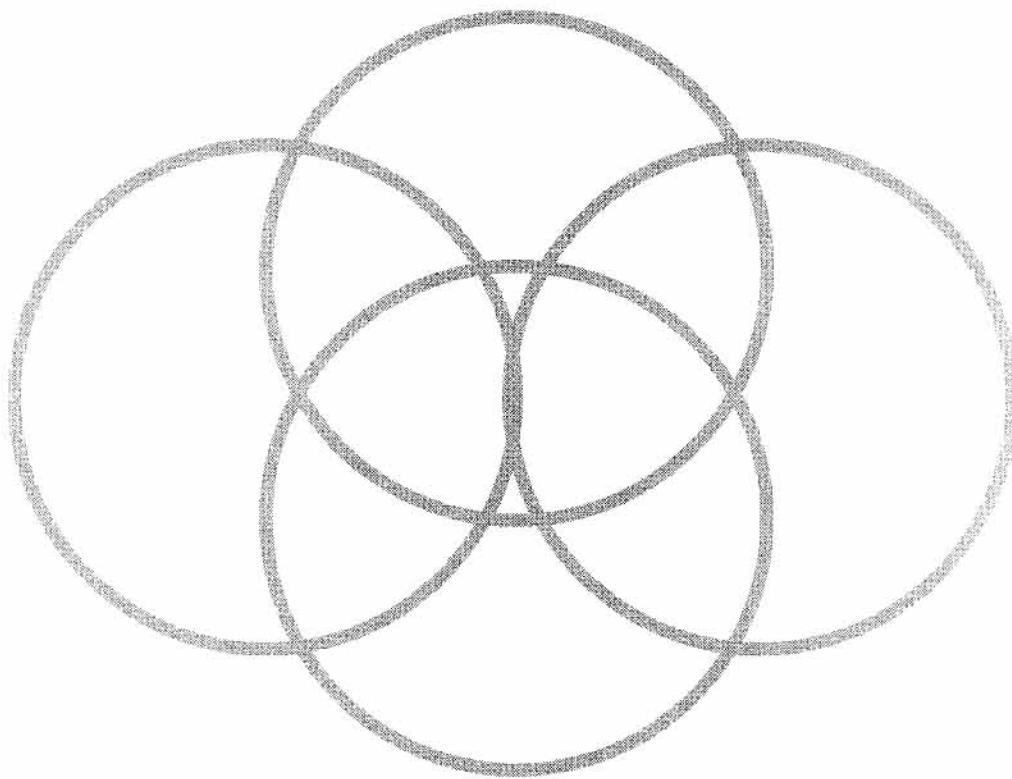
Frankenstein: Although it all goes horribly wrong, the little girl in the forest who befriends the monster could be a Redeemer at heart.

Get Shorty: With his witty repartee, pleasant demeanor and generous spirit, John Travolta's character manages to win over the bad guy's bodyguard and helps save Rene Russo's life.

The Malloreon, David Eddings: At the start of this series of fantasy novels, Zakath is the Dread Emperor, apparently the most dangerous man in the world. He gets unavoidably entangled with Garion and his friends, and discovers that the emptiness created by his power and evil deeds is filled by being charitable.

Return of the Jedi: Luke Skywalker devotes himself to turning Darth Vader back from the Dark Side and saving his dad. Luke's refusal to concede, to obey the Emperor and kill Vader is pure redemption in action.

Stir of Echoes: Kevin Bacon's character could be a Redeemer made receptive to — and then obsessed with — laying a soul to rest, and then saving the very soul of his neighborhood. His "awakening" could easily be interpreted as an imbuing.





CHAPTER 1: ORIGINAL SIN

He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded
his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.

— Psalms 111:9

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver300

Subject: Triage List

I know I'm a "newbie" and everything, but I'd like to make an offer to everyone who's interested. I know there's a lot of traffic on this list and that some people have split off to discuss certain special topics. I'd like to create one such special group. I'm calling it the Triage list, and I'd like discussion there to focus specifically on what we can do to help the victims. This isn't going to be a place for talking about tactics or morals. I'd like to keep it, as much as possible, to the topic of helping those who need it most.

There's been a lot of talk about killing here. Now I'd like to exchange information about dealing with the aftermath — about healing.

I've talked with Witness1, and if I get ten subscribers, I'll start the list. Hit "Send Message" and click on the "private reply" button to let me know. Thanks.

BEGINNINGS

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver300

Subject: Beginnings

Hi. I'm hosting this list, so I guess I get to put up the first post.

It's hard to know what to write about, since I can't really tell you who I am or where I'm from or anything like that. Generalities are okay, I guess. I'm from a big city in the American South. My politics are pretty moderate. I've got a comfortable lifestyle. Or I did.

I keep going back to the beginning, when everything changed, when I think about who I am now, as opposed to before. Maybe that's the best way to introduce

myself and explain my reasons for creating this list. I was driving my car back from the garage. I'd gotten some work done at this place with a good reputation — solid work, not too expensive. But it wasn't in a great part of town. I mean, not the ghetto but, you know, not the suburbs, either.

I got a little turned around heading back to the highway, and I started going from a bad neighborhood to a worse one. I didn't see too many cars as nice as mine around. I'll just say that. I looked my doors.

I must have driven around for half an hour trying to get on the right one-way street. I finally got fed up and decided to go through this little alley that said "No Through Traffic," but I thought, "The heck with it. It's going to be dark soon, and any cop around here probably has more to worry about than a moving violation." In retrospect, I'd have been glad to see a cop.

As I turned into the alley, I saw these two guys fighting. A little guy and a big guy. I got really nervous, you know? Like it was me the big guy was pushing around. I mean, I haven't been in a fight — you know, a serious fight — since I was a kid. And here were these guys going at it right out in public, like we were all back on the schoolyard and I was one of the runts again. The little guy looked at me real fast. He looked desperate. That's when the big guy picked him up — like he was a doll — and threw him right against the edge of a dumpster.

I remember thinking, "This is none of my business. I shouldn't interfere. I shouldn't even be here." That's when I heard this voice, like it was in my head but it wasn't me thinking. It said plain as day, "DEATH LOOMS." And it wasn't like a thought, either. It was just knowing. Not accusing or indignant, just as calm as could be. I don't even know what "death looms" is supposed to mean, but I knew right then that if I didn't do something, that little guy was going to be killed.

I'd already put the car into reverse, but I switched gears and went forward until I was between the big guy and the little guy, and that's when it all got really weird. The big guy looked ticked off and waved for me to get out of the way. I left the windows closed but I yelled "You leave him alone" loud enough for him to hear.

The big guy started yelling, too. "He took my woman," or something like that "Don't you think you've hurt him enough?" I said.

"Move your truck. I'm gonna kill that Motherf***er," he yelled.

I said no, again.

Then, all of a sudden, I could see that there was something really wrong with the guy. Like I'd somehow overlooked maggots and dirt and holes in his skin! I think — now — that he was actually dead. I don't know what I thought then. But somehow, without thinking, I unlocked the back door and yelled for the little guy to get in. The dead guy reared back and kicked in the grill of my car.

I drive a Lexus sport-ute. It's heavy. But his kick rooked me back a yard! Both airbags blew and the car filled with smoke. The little guy was already in and started screaming. I couldn't see anything, but I slammed it into reverse and opened the windows. The smoke cleared when I shot out the alley backward. The airbags deflated as fast as they came out. I could see the monster running straight toward us — and gaining. He crouched to jump and all I could think to do was yell, "No!"

I don't know why, but he didn't jump. Maybe he didn't want to go out in the street where people could see him. I whipped the car around and took off.

The other guy, the small one, stopped screaming when he couldn't see the big guy anymore.

"Sh*t man," he said. "You saved my life. I thought I was dead for sure when Rudy pulled that f***ing machete."

That was his story and he stuck to it. When I described what I saw, he insisted that I let him out. I only stopped because he looked like he was ready to jump while we were moving. I think he would rather have jumped from a moving car than hear me talk about the truth of what happened!

So that was the first time I saw. I guess I saved that man's life, even though I never learned his name and he never learned mine. But I wouldn't be surprised if that thing found him again. I've never seen anyone so mad in my entire life. And still, for a guy in the wrong place in the wrong time, I did something that saved someone else.

I guess that's about why I wanted to start this list. I mean, I could post what I just wrote to the main list and everyone would talk about what I could have done to the dead thing. How I could have smashed into it or killed it or whatever. But I don't think anyone there would have cared about the little guy. How I might have helped him more. I saved him once. But I don't think it was enough, and that bothers me far more than letting that big guy live. That tells me there's something essentially wrong with what people are doing on hunter list. It seems to me that if it's going to change, someone has to talk about it "offline."

Subject: Bathing in Light

From: teacher193

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

First of all, I want to thank Driver300 for setting up this forum. I've never really felt comfortable posting on the main hunter-net list. There are too many individuals there who seem to have no sense of manners or decorum. I'm sure that they are all fine people in and of themselves, but for the moment I'm just as happy keeping my quiet there. I have high hopes for this Triage list. Those of us who have an interest in help and reconciliation will, I hope, prove far more reasonable.

With that said, I regret that I have to start my first post in disagreement to Driver300. He has claimed in his initial series of posts that some of us appear to be bathed in light or fire when summoned simply due to the physical stresses involved. I can state with absolute certainty that this cannot be correct.

When the call came to me, I was doing my weekly shift in the library — a dull but necessary chore — and keeping the peace. Near one of the stacks, I noticed a student searching frantically through our meagre selection of local history books. I'll call him Robert. Normally, I'd have thought nothing of it, but Robert had been giving my staff quite a lot of trouble over the previous week. He was normally a conscientious student, a quiet boy with an uneventful home life. His recent truanancies and moods had been a rather nasty surprise.

To be totally honest, I suspected he was on drugs. Even at 14, a lot of his peers were already into them. This can be a cold, unfriendly city, and we lose a lot of the

promising ones that way. We all do what we can, of course, but it makes little difference. Anyway, I decided to try, and I walked over. I started innocuously enough, asking, "Looking for something, Robert?" He stammered a nervous "No, miss," and then the world exploded in light and I heard a voice.

It was like nothing I had ever known — stern yet loving. I thought it would shatter my skull. "WHAT PRICE THE HELP IT NEEDS?" it boomed. I thought surely the whole school must have been deafened by it, the whole library blinded by the light shining from me. Robert didn't seem to notice either of them. Nor did any of the other children. He was still talking... except that he wasn't. Something was sitting inside him, almost wearing him like a skin, using his mouth and eyes and ears. Something in terrible, terrible pain.

I should have been terrified. If I'd had any shred of foresight, I would have run from the library rather than face this thing. But this thing inside Robert seemed almost pathetic. Lost. I reacted automatically, as I would with any child, and put on my calm, reassuring voice.

"What is it you're looking for?" I asked, and I could feel that the question was significant. I always was good at shaping words to cut to the heart of the matter. You need that to keep children under control. The words seemed to hit it like a hammer, and Robert wavered.

"There was a man," he said. "A man who built a mill near here. He gave his name to a park, and a statue, and I can't remember it. I need to find his statue. Miss."

There aren't many parks built by mill-owners in this part of the Midlands — yes, I'm British. I knew who he must mean. "I'll tell you, will you leave Robert alone?"

It stared at me in horror. "What do you mean?" It could see I knew, though, and after a moment, confused, it just nodded.

So I told it the name of the man, and where the statue could be found, and you know what? It went. Vanished. Left Robert alone, and certainly never returned while I was still at the school.

At no point was I stressed, terrified, undergoing unusual physical exertion or anything of the kind, and yet I was keenly aware of the light seemingly emanating from me. Driver300 must be wrong. I can categorically say that it was not a product of stress. Perhaps the amount to which such a glow manifests reflects the strength of our potential, our desire to help others, our natural talent or some similar thing. If that is the case, then maybe it's just too dim to be seen in some people, which is why only some witness it.

Now, afterward, after everything that happened sunk in, I did have a severe nervous reaction. I had to lock myself in my office while I regained my composure. Later still, I discovered that there was far, far more wrong than one sad being affecting one of my students, that I was now trapped in a nightmare from which there was no awakening. Only later, after I had found others who had been through something similar, did I realise how painlessly I had been summoned. And yet, painless it was.

WHAT ARE THE HERALDS?

Subject: Our Beginnings

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: trucker235

There's a lot of talk about whatever has drafted us into this new life. I guess there always will be, and that there'll be as many different ideas as there are those of us in the service. I travel a lot all the time, all my life. You get to think a lot about things when you're out on the road in the middle of the night, with the stars filling your windshield. I guess that's one thing I should be thankful for: hearing the call didn't change my solitary lifestyle much.

Anyway, I get to spend a lot of time thinking. When there's nothing more pressing to worry about like some weird guy sitting at the table next to me, my mind drifts to whatever made us what they call the Heralds or whatever. I figure these things know what they're doing all right. I'm not saying I understand the way their minds work, if they even have any, but they must have some sort of scheme figured out. We spoken to people who heard the call while other folks right there didn't. Instead of help save people,



BATHED IN LIGHT

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver300

Subject: Reborn in Fire and Light

I remember something I read once. They did this psychological test where they showed people a short film, maybe thirty seconds long, where two men fought and one stabbed the other. Ninety percent of the people who saw the film said they'd seen a knife. But in the actual film, the man didn't have a knife. He stabbed the other one with a banana.

What does this have to do with people "bursting into flames" or "glowing in light" when they're called? Maybe a lot.

I know from my own experience that seeing monsters is seriously disturbing — take that little guy who saw a machete instead of a half-rotted man. He was just as afraid of being confronted with what really happened as he was of being "stabbed" by that guy.

Now, I know that when you stand up really quickly or make a sudden burst of effort, you can get dizzy, kind of lightheaded, and see stars. One time I fainted in a wrestling match and I remember that everything got really light right before I passed out. I think it was because I wasn't getting enough oxygen to my brain. Well, maybe that's the plain, ordinary explanation for all this "seeing light" and "burning with fire" business that people talk about on the main list. Maybe I'm wrong — but remember, those people who saw the banana were pretty damn certain.

these others would shit their pants or run away and not remember anything after. Not to say that the folks who did hear were better or anything, or that the ones who ran couldn't have helped. They just didn't. That's why I think these Heralds make deliberate choices. I mean, when you stand in the beer aisle of the store, you choose which pack to buy, right? You don't just get them all because you want beer.

If they're making choices, it stands to reason that they're working toward some sort of plan. From what I've read on the lists, people claim to get changed all over the world. If that's true, these Heralds must go all over the place. Going to lots of different places is hard work. It takes time. Trust me, that's how I make my living. If they didn't have some plan that needed certain types of people, they wouldn't go anywhere. They'd just go to Manhattan or someplace and meet their quota in one big load. A plan means that someone or other wants to accomplish something, so someone has to be making decisions. See, it's not that different from trucking. Someone somewhere needs something. Someone can provide it. They both need you to get it there. For me, that makes these Heralds either the manufacturers or the truckers, and all that makes us the cargo. Someone needs us somewhere, for something. If that comparison holds, I figure the Heralds are hardworking folks, because you can't fool around when someone needed an order filled yesterday.

Now, I don't know what this plan is, but it's got to be a big one. There seem to be a lot of us, and we don't see eye to eye on a whole bunch of issues. Small jobs don't usually need lots of different tools. I do think that we all want to help the world, though, and that's important. It seems to me that we'd all get along a lot better if we remembered that we're really after the same thing: fixing the world. I figure the best way I can contribute is to do what I can to ease some of the suffering out there, to show the lost that there isn't the only way, and to remind them that love feels good. Other folks have

different ideas. If the Heralds choose us, they obviously need a whole load of different viewpoints for their plans. But we all have to be part of the plan, right? Otherwise it's just chaos, and why put a lot of effort into chaos? That can happen all by itself.

Now, I don't know what the big plan is. I guess all any of us can do is look at the way things are and try to do what we think is right. For me, that means mending the tears rather than ripping more. If there are monsters everywhere, I'd rather try to help them be better people than try to kill them all. Somehow that just seems more effective. I can't quite explain why just yet, but I think I will soon. In the meantime, I'll trust my instincts and let smarter guys figure out just what's going on.

RISING TO THE TASK

Lots of different people are making lots of noise about what's doing this to us. Crusader says it's Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Tarjiman says it's Allah, and Potter calls it the Living Power. Me, I'm not going to claim I know anything. Any time I meet a fellow who says he understands God, I ask him to fix my computer. Not one can do it. I guess they think the Creator of the Universe is somehow less complicated than a Compaq with Windows 98.

Whatever earthly name you want to use, the facts remain pretty clear. The Heralds are real, they're powerful, and they're looking for people who can take this kicked-to-heck planet and put it back together. When they find one, they're generous with the resources for the assignment.

I mean, when you boil it all down, life is good. Sure, there are some lousy moments, but all in all, it's good to be alive and the world can be a beautiful place. I guess I took that for granted before. But now, whenever I look at a sunrise or a flower or a pretty woman's face, I want to protect it from what I know is out there. I see that beauty and I just know it didn't happen accidentally. It was put there on purpose by something, and anything that would do that has to be good. So that's what I'm here for. I'm here to save the good, repair the broken and clean out the corners where something ugly's been hiding.

I don't care who hired me. I like this job. It's made me a better person.

THE CALLING IN HISTORY

It took me a while after the summons to realise that I was now more sane than I ever had been before. I had to be to understand what was going on. More than anything else, I wanted to know whether this was new, whether the lost had suddenly appeared, or whether they had always been there, in the wings of history — and whether we had always been there, trying to bring them back into the fold. We have an excellent library of historical reference material at my school, bequeathed by one of its Old Boys. I spent some time looking through the books. I suppose, if I'm honest with myself, I needed that time to come to terms with what was happening to me.

I have generally found folk wisdom to hold a lot more truth than we normally give it credit for. Many of our most effective drugs come from traditional remedies, for example — aspirin from the traditional treatment of chewing willow bark. Digitalis as a heart tonic. The same holds true for a lot of other things, from weather to psychology. I therefore turned to folklore in hopes of getting some information on the afflicted. We all know the myths and legends surrounding them. The vampire stories from Eastern Europe. The man-wolves of the Russian forests. Spirits in Germany. The Salem witches. The Celtic fair folk. In all of that myth and history, however, there are never any suggestions that the needy are anything other than occasional interjections into our world — accidental or temporary visitors. Usually, there is a transgression on the part of someone in our world, a hapless unfortunate who sins against an unwritten law and brings a curse down on his head, making him a monster. Such poor souls commit terrible deeds, but are often full of loathing for what they have done, and when they are finally released, they are grateful for freedom from pain and change their ways.

What fairy tales don't tell, of course, is that many of the afflicted hold positions of great power and influence in the world. That's not surprising. People who hide in the background and wield influence usually do a good job of making

sure they remain hidden — another good reason for concentrating on folklore rather than history. What is interesting, though, is the content of the tales themselves. Several people on the main list have discussed creatures that they claimed were ancient, or at least older than a normal human life span, with political or business power in addition to any spiritual abilities. From what I've read, much of the media seems to be under the control of such creatures. So why do the fairy tales and myths that we're exposed to, which must have been sanctioned by the creatures, dwell on the lost humanity of villains? I believe it must be a conscious choice on their part to portray themselves in this way, perhaps to reassure us that monsters aren't really monsters, so that we'll be lulled back to sleep?

Past traces of our own activities are much harder to find, as far as I can see. There are plenty of heroes throughout legend, of course, but to me they are thinly disguised metaphors for the virtues of war and obedience, not compassion and freedom. They tend to be created by (or at least for) the rulers of the day, and distributed rather than passed down folk lines. All of which makes them unreliable sources of information. Rather, look at them as means to control. Mighty Arthur, the Golden King of Camelot with his huge sword, is a possible justification for the right of divine rule. Arthur is linked to the land. As his kingship suffers, as he loses the respect of his knights and people, the land becomes barren, people sicken and crops fail. The message is, "Obey the king or your crops will die." Most other stories of heroes are the same, teaching us the benefits of obedience, chastity, and rushing into battle without question. In short, although I looked quite persistently, I couldn't find us mentioned at all as icons of healing, the way we should be portrayed.

Now, our very absence in legend made me think, in and of itself. I wondered if any predecessors were hidden from history. But keeping a secret, especially a public one, is quite hard. There would have been rumours, at least. I considered a number of theories, but the only one that appeals to me is that the numbers of afflicted have grown only recently, and we have been empowered to help contend with them now that their number has become critical. Thus, we were never created before because we were never needed before. Our school policy for bullying operates on a similar principle. Bullying is tolerable, even expected of children to some degree. However, when it reaches a certain intensity, we take action. We try to coax bullies back into the student body by making them understand the pain they cause, by warning them to desist. If all else fails, we expel them.

That seems to me a good metaphor for what we're supposed to do. It's our job to remind the suffering of the pain they cause, and to warn them of the consequences of continuing as they have thus far. Who knows? We might have more luck with the afflicted than I've had with bullies.

Why Us?

I've been reading a lot of change accounts on hunter-net, and I think a lot of people are missing the point. "Why me?" everybody asks. I wonder, "Who else is going to do it?"

The one common feature that every wake-up story has is this: Someone or something was wrong and we took steps to make it right. It's almost like we were set up or something. I didn't get the call until I was miles away from where I normally go — until I was a real fish out of water. It was a volatile situation and it would have been really easy for me to say, "I don't know the whole story. They aren't going to appreciate me butting in." But I didn't turn my back. I did what had to be done and I saved someone, even if he didn't appreciate or even really understand what I'd done.

Why did we get changed? Because we passed the test. Because when the chips were down and it was the moment of truth, we took steps to make things right. We believed things could be improved and we improved them. That's what it comes down to. Everything else is just details.

THE LOST

Teacher 193, you seem like a nice lady, but I'm surprised that you can't see what you're saying. You've taken the time to look through all those books, but I don't think you've read your own notes. The lost allow themselves to be shown in books as unhappy

bad guys who want to be saved, because they are unhappy bad guys who want to be saved. I figure that the tales are probably right. There was some mistake, some nasty accident or dumb mistake that let the corruption in, that poisoned people so that they lost their way and had to learn how to deal with the things they'd become. I've seen it happen in war. As a soldier, you fight and kill and lose more and more of yourself, becoming less and less a person. Eventually, you turn into some kind of machine. A push beyond even that and it's real easy to see how you could stop being human altogether. That's why I call them lost because they've wandered from humanity and can't find the way back. They need us to guide them.

Try to see it from their point of view. Can you imagine what it's like to know you'll never be part of society again? All those things that make life truly worthwhile: seeing your parents again, sitting with your buddies in a bar, even just dancing. It all comes down to being with other people. People who are the same as you. People you belong with, whether you know them or not. Strinks are always saying that community is vital for a person's stability. At least, that's what they told me after I came home.

The lost don't have that. Can you imagine being alone in the world, knowing that all of them would run screaming from you if they knew what you were? Or worse, that they'd try to kill you if they knew? I can't think of anything more terrifying, and I can't even begin to imagine how you would blow off that steam.

And all that's on top of what else they've let go, too. I've heard that monsters can't eat food, real food, anymore. No more beer, no more steaks, no more burgers. That might not seem like much. We take pleasures like that for granted. But just knowing all that stuff you can never have is out there, always feeling cold, always feeling hungry. It must be rough. I remember one time, before the fighting broke out in South Asia, I took a trip there with my parents. It was a heck of a long way from Kansas, and I wasn't very old, but they wanted to introduce me to my mom's parents. It was beautiful and mysterious and all that, but you know what? I couldn't get any of the food I loved. After a few days, that's all I could think of. I'd have done almost anything for a burger. Imagine how that must feel, knowing you have to live all your life maybe longer and never able to eat the food you love again.

Sure, our lives are different now too, but at least we can stick to the lives we always lived. Even when we leave families behind, we can take comfort in knowing that they're safe. We also have a sense of community, a driving purpose, a kinship with the others who have been called, even if we disagree on the details. This is proof of that. Our bond isn't even a new thing. I disagreed with pretty much everything my coach ever said in high school, but I was still part of the team. That's belonging. What we have, they seem to be missing. Our strength is their agony. If we could learn to accept them, to make them understand that they could be a welcome part of the community, that their needs don't have to be so different or harmful to ours, we might start to heal their pain.

Can you imagine what the world could be like if the demons and the afflicted actually worked with us? With their skills and powers, we could eliminate crime and poverty, create Lord knows what new wonders. Doesn't that sound better than a vicious fight both sides might lose? We have to reach out to them to make it possible. Maybe it can happen. I don't know, but I know it won't if we don't try.

That's why some of us have been given so much love. It has to be part of a plan to bring the lost back. We can teach them to find their humanity again, to show them what we can do when we work together. It seems to me that our job is to bring them the peace they need and get them back on their feet.

WHY THEM?

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver300

Subject: Re: Rehabilitation

Potter, with all respect, I worry about you. You want to help out any way you can. That's great! But when you start talking about rehabilitating these things... I don't think I can get behind you. I mean, sure, we're here to make things better. But if you help the wrong thing, you can do more harm than good.

You have to keep a sense of proportion, and you have to contain the problem. I mean, where would the struggle against AIDS be if doctors said, "Oh, this poor little virus is just misunderstood. Maybe it needs a chance to adapt itself to its new human host!" I mean, that Geo fellow from South America talked about some creature that he thought was hundreds of years old, right? If something's been killing for that long, I don't think you're going to turn it around, no matter how politely you ask.

I don't know what it is we're fighting. Maybe Crusader is right and this is all the Devil's work. Heck, maybe that Soldier fellow has it right and these are some kind of warped reflections of our own sins, made solid and come back to bite us on the butt. Either way, I don't see much point in trying to come to terms with them. From what I've seen, they aren't all that interested in talking to us.

I'm as merciful as the next guy, but only to something I can reasonably connect with. I don't care if you're Mexican, black, Jewish — whatever, we're brothers under the skin. But something that suks blood to keep moving so it can suks more blood? That's where I draw the line.

Let me tell you about something that happened to me. I tried thinking like one of them, like a predator. I mean, what else do you call something that stalks and kills? Predators don't like challenges. They choose victims that can't struggle. That's just a fact of nature. After all, why expend more energy stalking and killing something than you get from eating it? So I asked myself, if I was a monster, where would I find weak people to target? At first I thought of old-folks' homes, but that didn't make sense. The people there are residents — family and caregivers know they're there. There'd be too much of a paper trail for people to die at a fast pace. Then I thought of hospitals. A lot of people, coming and going. Some die, some make it. Paperwork might get lost. That made more sense. So, one night I went to a hospital in the city. Not the nice one out where I live. I figured a predator is going to go for the people who're really down and out, so I went to the one where they get all the gunshot victims and crack babies.

I hung around the waiting room, near the ER, figuring that something might happen there. If that TV show was any indication, it'd be crazy around there — the perfect place to lurk if you wanted to prey on people, and so to watch out for creatures.

I didn't see anything or anyone wrong by looking hard. Maybe the waiting room was too high profile. So I took a chance and went through some "staff only" doors into a hallway that seemed to lead to the ER. From the sound of it, someone had just been brought in and was in bad shape. There was all kinds of yelling and confusion, which gave me a chance to check a door right near the ER, without being seen. It turned out to be a closet that wasn't locked, so I ducked inside. By cracking the closet door, I had a partial view of the ER through a window. I think I was seeing the end across from the main emergency entrance.

It didn't take long to realize that I wasn't the only one taking advantage of the latest emergency. I could see into a stall that was partly curtained off, mostly from the other side of the ER. There was a girl there, her legs in a harness like she was in labor. One of the nurses with her was fine — completely human.

From: outback295

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Off Your Rocker

Look, sport, I'm sure glad you like your tucker so much; a healthy appetite is a sign of a healthy mind, as my daddy used to say. But if you think that a burger and a big hug are going to bring some of the evil bastards I've seen back into the light, you've been watching too much television. Sure, some of them might be good people at heart, but a lot of them cheerfully throw away their souls with the bath water. We can't even make our own criminals realise they're human. What hope do we have with demons?



The other was just wrong. Her skin was almost blue. What is it, the unoxygenated blood that runs blue in your veins? I don't know, but all I can guess is that this woman was full of the stuff. Seeing her made me really glad for the human nurse being there. Who knows what the thing would have done to that girl, otherwise?

That's when it got worse. A doctor arrived as if to deliver the baby, but he was no doctor — no human one, anyway. I saw this crazy grin pass over his face and it never went away, but he never actually smiled. I don't know how to explain it. It was like I had some weird kind of double vision, but I was seeing two different things.

I guess the baby was ready to be born right then and there. I couldn't see exactly what happened below the window (I didn't really want to). I did see my own daughter born years ago, though. I was there, in the operating room, so I could make some guesses about what was happening here. I knew when the baby was out, because the human nurse took it and stepped away, to clean it up, I guess. While she was gone, it happened. The other nurse — the wrong one — took something from the girl down there. It wasn't twins. There was only one baby. Whatever it was, she wrapped it some kind of disposal bag really fast and just passed it to the doctor as he matter of factly walked away from the partition — right in front of the girl. She didn't seem to notice a thing. Maybe she was in a daze from giving birth.

I didn't know what to do. I started to step out of the closet toward the ER when the "doctor" came through the ER door near me, at the end of the hall. I moved deeper into the closet and he walked by, bag in his hand. I just stayed there, hiding, seared. Suddenly I had the urge to wet myself, like when I was a kid playing hide and seek, so nervous that I was going to lose control. I had to calm myself down, get control. By the time I did, the doctor was gone.

I knew I had to do something. I checked again and the human nurse was back with the girl, like nothing had happened. The girl looked so happy, beaming at her newborn baby. I remember that feeling.

The other nurse, the demon, was nowhere in sight.

I spent the next hour sitting in my car, my mind racing, my hands white from gripping the wheel, even though the engine wasn't even running. I don't know how long I stayed there. An hour? Sitting in the parking lot of an inner-city hospital at night. I was way out of my element — like that first night — a white guy where I didn't belong.

As it turns out, I didn't have to make any decisions. I was parked behind the hospital, not far from the dumpsters. A back door opened and out came that doctor. An overhead security light made it easy to recognize him. I had to remind myself to look at him the right way. I didn't even realize I had stopped. It was him, alright.

To the casual observer, he didn't do anything unusual. He went straight to the dumpster, lifted the lid and threw something in. He did it with some effort, though — he threw in a white plastic bag all the way to the back. Like just dropping it in wasn't good enough. As fast as he came out, he went back in.

Some people came out of the hospital shortly after, obviously grieving over a patient or someone who'd died. I felt for them, knowing what creatures were inside, doing who knows what, but all I could think was, "Just f—cking leave." When they finally did and I was alone, I went over the dumpster and looked in. I could see part of a white bag barely sticking up. I reached all the way in and grabbed it. I hoped no one saw. If they did, I didn't know it. I don't even know what I would have said if anyone stopped me. Rather than stand around, I walked quickly around the corner, out of the security light, but close enough to its glow where I could see.

I started vomiting uncontrollably when I opened the bag. I knew the smell before I even saw what was inside. If you've ever been there when a baby is born, you know there's this smell. When my daughter was born, a nurse reassured me that it was natural, that it was my baby's placenta, that nothing was wrong with her or my wife. Now, standing in the dark with a trash bag in my hands, hiding like a thief, that smell hit me again. It was the afterbirth from that girl in the ER. Only this time, I could tell that something had been done to it. It was chewed! That "doctor" had eaten it — and spit it up back up into the bag!

What kind of thing could do that? What kind of animal? What kind of monster? It was that moment when I realized who I was. Why my life had been changed. There were things out there parading as people, but only so they could prey on us. Someone had to stand up for us, for the regular people who didn't know the truth. For all the helpless mothers and their children. For my own wife and daughter, whether they knew it or not. I had been shaken awake to save the people who the monsters beat and slaughtered. That's why we're all here.

RUNNING SHORT ON FAITH

It's funny. Working with children, helping to shape young minds used to seem such an exciting prospect. No one forgets a good teacher, they told us. This would be my chance to make a real difference in the world, to reach out and form a generation.

Instead, I got frustration and disappointment. I watched my charges grow from lively, receptive 11-year-olds into sullen, uninterested, secretive 13- and 14-year-olds. I watched their minds fold inward and closed. I watched them start smoking, drinking and screwing — getting pregnant and hooked on drugs. I watched the world catch them up and eat them, and I couldn't stop it.

When they offered me the headmistress' position, I took it immediately, as much to get away from my repeated failures as for the few extra pounds in the bank. Silly of me, really. I didn't realise that I'd face just as many problems and people, and that the ones I got would be the ones my staff couldn't deal with. When you're confronted with a problem that has no solution, you have two choices — try to help or don't try at all. If you try, at least you did something, no matter the outcome. So, I kept working at it, kept failing, kept seeing children drawn into crime, drugs, prostitution, even suicide.

When I felt the summons, I thought maybe I was being given a real chance to help, to make a difference this time. I haven't had much luck so far, and you know what? It feels just like being a headmistress. There doesn't seem to be any answer, and I keep failing to make a difference. I don't even know if I helped Robert or the thing inside him. To the best of my knowledge, it hasn't come back, but I now know that doesn't necessarily mean much.

A few weeks after I was awakened, I found a small group of others who were working in the city. They were all inclined to action — lashing out rather than talking. But they didn't seem completely unreasonable. After many long discussions, they agreed to tell me which afflicted they were watching. If I could persuade them to leave that "target" alone in favour of one more dangerous, they would do so.

There was a nest of creatures based in one of the city's club districts. (They're still there now.) The others decided to pick one off as a warning to the rest. When one of the beings stepped out of a club, they decided to act. She seemed to be a pretty teenage girl. She was just minding her own business.

After some argument, the others agreed to let me talk to her first. I got out of the car and went round the long way. The girl looked up warily as I approached, relaxing, I think, when she decided that I was just another person. When I was close, I used the Question on her.

"Are you alright, dear?"

"I... I guess so," she replied, shaken.

"Have you lost something?"

"Yes," she said, looking wistful.

I wasn't going to let go of such a receptive subject, so I decided to risk going further. "What did you want to be, when you were still going to grow up?" The question shocked her, but she tried to laugh it off.

"You're either a teacher or a copper, right?"

I kept with it, using a version of my drugs speech. "How long since you saw the sun, dear? Months? Years?" She just stared at me, speechless. "There is another

way, you know. You're so close to dying again, but you don't have to be. You don't need to hurt people, not really. I can help you with the pain."

She started slightly, confusion and suspicion chasing a hint of hope across her face — something you see quite a bit in kids on drugs, when they have a way out but don't fully realise it yet.

"How do you know so much?"

She was cautious, but a lot more open than some kids I've dealt with. I stepped forward to take her hand, to reassure her. As I did, Thomas from the group stepped up from an alley, where he'd crept up on us, and stabbed her in the back of the neck. She spun round, surprised, wounded and furious at the betrayal. But Thomas was waiting for that, and the second blow put her down. He dragged her body into the alley immediately. When he finished, he was sick enough to pat me on the back and congratulate me on doing a good job. I was horrified. They'd been using me as distraction, never with any interest in anything other than killing.

Needless to say, I haven't spoken to any of them since.

MAINTAINING A SENSE OF CHARITY

Driver 300 said recently, if something's been killing that long, I don't think you're going to rehabilitate it. Another time I remember him confessing something like, I don't know what it is we're fighting. So if you don't know what it is you're fighting me, I'm fighting badness and pain. How can you have anything to say against turning the lost around? It seems like you just assume the worst. Assumption is the mother of all failures. Did you even try? No. You condemned the being that you watched at the hospital, but you don't know the real reasons behind what it did. At least it didn't hurt that girl or the baby. How much better are people who eat powdered rhino horn for virility, or rich people who eat fish eggs? Are they monsters? How do you know if you don't talk to them?

No one likes to feel threatened. As far as I can tell, the lost are, almost by definition, locked into patterns of violence and abuse that harm them almost as much as others. They need food to survive and they're powerful enough to just take it. Unfortunately, people are often their sources. You're not going to get anywhere, trying to get them to change their ways by condemning them. You have to approach them gently, without pretense. Otherwise, they're just going to get their hackles up. Wouldn't you if someone challenged your way of life?

Think of it as making friends with a mean dog. The critter will take your throat out if you approach it aggressively. It's just doing what it's trained to do: put intruders off or keep them away by force. If you look at a guard dog howling and barking at someone like it wants to kill them, but its tail is wagging, in its mind it's being a good dog, doing what it's supposed to. That's because of the way it's trained. The lost are the same. They're conditioned by their existence to respond to us in anger. They don't expect any different. You've got to treat them different. If you can break the cycle by treating them with fairness and respect, they might come around and do the same to you.

Now, if the lost are like guard dogs trained to be mean to protect something, who trained them and what are they protecting? Science and technology are constantly pushing back barriers. I've read that demons control our progress and let us learn only what they want us to. But what if that's not true and something is afraid of what we might discover. Maybe the lost are the way they are to keep us from growing too much, to keep us down. It could be that we're getting close to something real big, something that were not supposed to get close to, that threatens someone or something out there. The best way to weaken us as a species, not as the chosen, although that could also be true is to break us and divide us. Maybe that's what the real world is all about, to get us under control, to force us into little groups with our heads down.

Maybe if we're getting close to something, it's important to us. Peace, maybe. The secret of life. Whatever. Hell, we might be a result of mankind's effort to achieve that goal. I don't know. After all, our first reaction is to deal with the afflicted in whatever ways suit us. Maybe, among all those ways, one is meant to work, one way or another. It just so happens that our way could be to tame the guard dog, to get it on our side so we can proceed without interference, and be all the stronger for it.

From: alicel196

To: teacher193

Subject: Motives and Perspective

I was interested by the story you posted to the Triage list about being betrayed. I sympathize with your frustration, but I can't help wondering whether you're approaching all of this the right way. You say, quite clearly and calmly, that after watching a raging maniac murder a girl who turned to you for help, you never talked to him again.

You're too cold for words.

If the bastard had done that to me, I'd have stopped him myself and let the poor girl rip him to shreds. You talk about wanting to help, about wanting to make a difference, but you don't seem to stop to wonder why you're helping. This isn't about some sort of scorecard. It's about real, intelligent, self-aware beings, both human and not. It's about minimizing the pain that's inflicted out there. Our Karma is collective. The bad deeds we do as a whole translate into pain for all of us.

We've been chosen to help ease pain and to help prevent evil actions. If you kept that in mind, maybe you wouldn't think of the others as just another disciplinary case from your school. Whoops, another life slipped through your fingers to shatter on the ground. Oh well, on to the next one. Maybe you should try thinking about the others as individuals, with individual needs. You might even find that you could do some good.

You know your problem? You're trying to help so much that you're not actually doing anything. You either do it or you don't. There's no middle ground.

— "Curiouser and curiouser, said Alice."

Why Do It?

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver300

Subject: Re: Rehabilitation

Just before he got booted off hunter-net, Rigger 111 wrote:

>You people are living in a fantasy world! You have no idea how powerful they are,
>how high up their power goes. They found me on a fishing boat in the middle of the
>Alaskan sea, for fuck's sake. Saving the pylons is fucking retarded. Put your efforts
>toward saving us. The blind are on the bottom of the goddamn food chain
>and we're only one step up. The rats won't kill off all the normal people. They need
>them as cattle. We're the ones in the most danger. Watching over some dopey
bitch and her
>baby is all very fucking noble, but frankly, there's more where she came from. You,
>me, and everyone else on this list — we're the endangered species, and if you
aren't there
>to save my ass because you were off playing hero to some nobody who
>doesn't know dick, then you're only this much better than a worthless
pylon yourself.

There's so much wrong with this that I barely know where to start. Rigger, would you be so callous if it was your wife? Your baby? There's got to be more to what we're doing, to what we are than just narrow self-interest. Heck, not too

long ago we were all "worthless pylons." Even you, Rigger. I don't know if you'll ever see this, but I have to get it off my chest.

If we don't have some kind of duty, some kind of important tie to everyone else, what's the point? We're just supposed to band together, fortify ourselves like the Montana Freeman and let the rest of the world be a cattle ranch for monsters?

I'll even set aside the moral issues of saying, "I was quick to get into the Herald's life boat, so everyone else deserves to drown." Folks on the list have done a good job of arguing against that. I'll give you concrete, practical reasons why I think you're wrong. First off, there's the circumstances of being called. I wasn't changed when it was safe, when I was in a good position to defend myself. I was changed when I was in danger, when I was deliberately putting myself in more danger for someone I didn't know from Adam. You say we should look out for ourselves and never mind everyone else. If that's the case, why do so many of us seem to be changed when we do the exact opposite?

Second, there's our group nature. Looking at the main list, what do we see? Crusader 17 nearly dies trying to take on a gang of creatures single-handedly, but kills them all when he teams up with two others. Bookworm 55 goes it alone and winds up crippled. The Texas Ten report clearing out an entire town.

See the pattern yet? You can't do it alone and you're not supposed to. Look at those weird symbols, for Pete's sake. If we're supposed to hide ourselves away, why would the Herald teach us the meaning of them?

I've done a lot of things in my life. I've traveled, I've made a lot of money, I've gotten married and had a child. All the while, creeping up on me, so slowly that it took decades, so slowly that I didn't notice — I got scared. Not scared of anything in particular. Scared for my family. Scared for my money and my comfortable life. Scared for my "position," whatever that really means. I lived in a haze of stress and anxiety with no real source. It was like I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't put a finger on it.

Then I got the call. Then I got a real good reason to be scared, and a good idea of what to be scared of. Now my appreciation for life is so much more intense. I know what I have, and I know I'll do what it takes to keep it.

I've never been as shocked as when I saved that guy in that alley. I've never been as stoked as when I discovered what that thing in the hospital was doing. I've never been as relieved as when I saw a spray-painted mark on a door and realized it wasn't just graffiti, but that it meant "safety."

I've got allies now. I know, security. I won't post how many of us there are, or our names, but somehow we've found each other. I could abandon them. I've got the money to hole up like some U2K survival nut. But that's not what I'm here for.

People need our help. I'm not going to take what I've been given and use it selfishly. I don't know about you, but I'm not that big a coward. I'd like to think you aren't either. Otherwise, why were we chosen?

TRYING TO HELP

I've got enough blood on my hands. I got myself signed up, got trained, then I got sent to fight, got lucky and came back. I killed people. When they died, they weren't the enemy or them or gods or any of that crap. They were just kids like I was. Kids tortured by politicians who didn't have the guts to be there themselves. I can never bring back the people I killed. Who knows what those kids might have done if I hadn't killed them?

That's the thing about the world: it's one big web and everything connects. I killed 15 people. That's 15 mothers and fathers I crushed. That's 15 wives and sweethearts whose lives I destroyed. No one knows how many children never saw their daddies again because of me. That's a lot of pain, and I caused it. What are the chances of those parents, lovers and kids thinking kindly of me? Not much. Their anger turned to hate, and that hate strengthened the hate of others who went through the same. Even now, decades later, I bet my actions still cause mistrust and anger.



From: alice196

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: Trying to Help

Trucker, your argument is self-defeating. If you can't tell the results of your actions and you let that bother you, then surely you can't let yourself stop pain, either? To use your rather contrived example, if someone needs to suffer the loss of a parent in order to gain the strength to save the world, and you ease that pain, you thwart that destiny. I'm sure the child in question would be desperately keen to have her pain alleviated, too.

This sort of thinking is stupid. The logical end-result is to spend your life insane with indecision, desperately trying to do the right thing to suit an unknowable destiny. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see when someone or something does more harm than good, and to decide if it's a good move to prevent it from happening. I'm sure you had a horrific time in Vietnam or wherever. But don't let that undermine the contribution you can make now. Some creatures — and some people — are evil. They need to be taken out. Others are misguided and need to be rehabilitated. It's not complicated, just very hard. Don't be afraid to make that call and decide which category someone fits into. Act from your heart and your Karma will guide you to the right answers. Remember that we were chosen to rehabilitate or destroy as necessary.

— "Curiouser and curiouser, said Alice."

If I left those poor souls alive, they might have gone on to do great things. When you stare down a barrel, you see crosshairs on a target. What you don't see is the target's future, the parts of the web that you're about to cut. No one knows where the next great invention or discovery may come from. That guy I killed in the river, who's to say whether 20 or 30 years down the line, he might have cured cancer? Maybe he could have found a way of ending starvation. Maybe he'd only have loved his wife and kids and kept his family safe. That would have been just as important.

The flip side is possible, too. Maybe he'd have been so traumatized by what he'd been through that he went mad and started murdering babies when he finally got home. Maybe he would have gone on to become the next Hitler. The thing is, you just don't know. But I do know one thing. After I shot him, he never did anything again. Who am I to make that call, to say that a person's future is unimportant?

The same applies for the lost. Every time some lunatic waves a gun and takes down another soul, another piece of the web is cut. That doctor of yours, Driver, might be the one who can act as an ambassador for the lost. He might be the one who can reconcile us. He might also be a twisted maniac, but there's no way to tell if you just decide to kill him. Do you know the future? Then can you take any life, even if it's not what we'd call alive?

Even if a creature is a demon, you've got no idea if what it does is necessary or not. Much as I hate pain, its memory can motivate people. Sometimes to great things. Your doctor might be pure evil, but that doesn't mean he might not have a purpose. Maybe he's supposed to murder someone whose grief-stricken child will gain the strength to save millions.

I'm not comfortable deciding who lives and dies. I'll try to help anyone who'll let me, but I'm not going to say anyone should be murdered. I'm here to give people the benefit of the doubt, to provide them with another chance. I suspect that I'm not the only one on this list who feels that way.



CHAPTER 2: SAVING SOULS

In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword.

— Job 5:20

HEARING CONFESSION

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver800

Subject: There's No "I" in "Team"

I don't want to talk out of place here. I know some of you have been doing this for a lot longer than I have, but maybe I can bring a beginner's perspective on something that a lot of you seem to have missed.

I'm not sure exactly how to put this. I guess I remember when I was a teenager, and my sister was dating this real weasel who used the line on her "If you're not going to go all the way, why go at all?" Now, I think we all know what he meant when he said "go all the way," but let's look at our situation from the same point of view.

If you're not going to do everything it takes to do the job, are you really doing the job?

I can't agree with some of the things Crusader 17 has posted. I think he's dead on about one thing, though: If you're not willing to quit your job and do this full time, you're fooling yourself. There are unavoidable conflicts between living the way we used to and living the way we have to now. Sure, every life has its deceptions and little dishonesties, but there's a big difference between lying on your taxes and trying to convince yourself that the nurse at the hospital isn't wrong.

Some people have asked how they can afford to hunt without a job. I ask, how can you afford the investment of time, effort and attention a job requires? Eventually, it's going to distract you at a critical moment, and then you'll be dead. Or, from some of the stories that gent from India tells, you'll be worse than dead.

And that's just you. Now how about sparing a moment for your friends and allies? They're counting on you. If you let them down because a reprimand from the boss distracted you, it's not just your life, it's theirs. And not just theirs, but everyone that the group of you might have saved.

I'm not going to tell you how to put the hammer down on this thing or that. I'm not a fighter. Ask Soldier or Cop or Crusader about that. I'll tell you about something I learned at my job: team building. My particular "team" is a pretty odd lot. Our ages range from nineteen to fifty. Some of us have never used a computer before. Others have never fired a gun, or killed even an animal. Sometimes I feel like I don't even speak their language, but that doesn't matter. I admit, I was probably a bit of a racist before. Maybe a bit old fashioned about women, too. But once you see dead things walking around, it really puts things like race, sex and class in perspective.

But I'm straying from team building, which is what I want to talk about.

Maybe I'm conservative, but I don't think you can have a cohesive group without a leader. It doesn't have to be formal or anything, but in a crisis, you need someone who can make decisions without having to worry about it going through committee. A good leader is someone who's decisive, who has experience and good judgment, who's willing to listen to the rest of the group and even defer to them when he's out of his area of expertise, but who knows how to shut down a pointless argument.

Most importantly, a leader has to keep his eye on the big picture — on what's best for everyone. From one point of view, I failed to do anything about that doctor because I was too sickened to bring myself to act. But in the big picture, I won, because I'm still here, I know about him, and he doesn't know boo about me. All totaled, I came out ahead. A leader has to be someone who can look past the little setbacks, to win small victories and focus on a bigger goal.

Of course, a good leader is useless without good followers. You might think a good follower is one who's obedient, but that's not always so. I'd rather have one worker who tells me straight up when I'm making a mistake than a hundred "yes" men. A good worker is one who knows what he's doing in his area of expertise, and who has the confidence to speak up about it. That said, he still has to take direction well, defer to the judgment or experience of others, and recognize that a criticism of his idea is not a criticism of him. He has to be willing to acknowledge mistakes and take

responsibility without becoming discouraged, but most importantly he has to be willing to work hard and see things through.

Once you've got those ingredients — those people — how do you go about making them into a team? The answer lies in common purpose. In our case, the common purpose is both obvious and urgent. The world is broken and we have to fix it.

MENDING WAYS

Subject: The Program

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: trucker235

I'm not sure how many of you have heard of The Program. I'd like to think that most of you don't know what it is, but I fear that over the months and years to come, a lot of you will become too familiar. After my fighting was done, I came home and fell into a bottle. My parents had passed away, my little sister disowned me. She was a good kid, and the violence I'd taken part in sickened her. So I had no one to worry about. A lot of memories came back during those nights, so I tried to escape as much as I could, with the help of Jim, Jack and their cousins.

Finally, an old drinking buddy of mine who'd dropped out of the scene sponsored me into Alcoholics Anonymous. AA. The Program. Stay with me folks. I'm not selling anything. My point is, The Program works, and it works well. The most important part is that you're never far from help and support. As soon as you feel the bottle calling and you do, chances are you can find yourself a meeting. In major cities, there are meetings going on all the time. You can look up the date and time in your list and find out where the nearest one is.

Even if you're on the road between towns, like I am a lot, you can always call your sponsor. When you join, the person who introduces you undertakes to provide support at any time, day or night, to talk you through the bad spells, to help remind you why you want to live. That sort of thing. So, if I was on some freeway somewhere, I'd have to stop at a gas station or drug store, whether I wanted to speak to Bill or buy a bottle. I always managed to make myself speak to Bill, and he always managed to talk me out of drinking. Apart from anything else, he gave me my first job on the road, after I'd been dry a couple of months.

There's no way I could ever have managed to stay off the juice without The Program. Between them, Bill and the meetings saved my life. Booze has called to me all the time. Even when it was killing me, the drunken ignorance of life was so sweet. It always felt it there, in the back of my mind, calling me to drink, to forget.

So, here's the question, and maybe you saw it coming: what's the difference between an alcoholic and a monster? They need to feed on blood to stay alive, but they don't need to kill or even truly harm us. I'm sure that between us, we could find a way of fulfilling their needs that didn't cause us too many problems using animals perhaps, or artificial plasma, or even letting them set up a blood drive and pay folks for donations. We pay farmers for meat, after all. The same could be possible with other types of the lost. I'm sure there are answers, ways to meet their needs that we can come to terms with.

The thing is, it's easy to rely on violence. If you're bigger, stronger and faster than everyone else, you don't really need to take the time to offer neat, fair answers to your problems. Violence is quick and easy, and it doesn't cost you anything that you're aware of. It's a fix, like booze. But you can wean yourself off violence, just like you can wean yourself off alcohol. In fact, I know of some support groups set up to work like The Program that are run for violence addicts, and they claim to have pretty good success.

I figure we should be looking in to offering this same service to the lost. We've got computers and mobile phones and pagers and all sorts of handy gadgets for keeping in touch. We could do no end of good if we tried to provide help, support and understanding for lost ones who wanted to kick their habits. We could run meetings in cities like the ones in The Program, for penitents to affirm their determination to reenter real life. We could gather and distribute tips, tricks and information on how to beat the cravings for

violence, death and destruction. We could make ourselves available, like sponsors, to help talk the afflicted through whatever temptations they suffer.

I'm not saying that it wouldn't be dangerous. But this whole thing is dangerous. We risk our lives every night even if we're not out trying to save others just by being involved. This way would be no more dangerous than being out on the streets. As the movement grows, it would get safer. There's strength in numbers. It would start slowly, I'm sure, but every one of the lost we could bring over could act as a sponsor for others.

It might fail, sure, but a program has so much more potential to reach out and touch large numbers of the lost than we do working alone. It could make all the difference between losing and winning. That's got to be worth the risk. Reaching out to touch someone is all well and good, but reaching out to touch many is much, much better. Hell, we could do with the same thing amongst ourselves. If we each had one particular person to call when things got bad, it could be a real tension breaker.

COMING TO TERMS

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver800

Subject: Re: There's No "I" in "Team"

>Please give me one generous break. I don't know you, but I know your type. Let's see:

>you live in a southern city, you drive a Lexus, you can't understand why

>people would need to keep a job to put food on the table, you refer to everyone as

>"workers" or "yes men"... I don't suppose you happen to be white by any

>chance?

[snip]

>when the shit really comes down, you aren't going to be the leader who handles it. If

>you've never had shit fall on you before (and I'm guessing you haven't) then you're not

>even going to recognize it when it happens. You might want to forget about being CEO

From: ashram242

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: The Program

I sense a great heart within you my friend, and what you say has much of truth within it, but I am wondering whether you are in full possession of the facts. We have many lost souls here, and I have observed them for a great deal of time. They often seem alert and nervous, particularly so with others of their kind. It is not the rest of us that scare them, for they treat men in the streets with contempt, when they bring themselves to notice such people at all. I believe that the lost souls have many enemies within their own kind. If they are like our sects, they devote much of their own energies to working against one another with assiduous zeal. It seems all too possible that this is the case. If it is so, then even if you were to be able to persuade certain lost souls to make attendance at your meetings, I very much fear that the result would be a tide of their enemies descending upon you all and sweeping you from this world. I beg you, golden as your idea seems to you, to listen to caution until we are better informed, and to avoid putting it into practice. You may meet your death with startling rapidity if you try to do so.

>of "Hunters Ltd." and try listening to someone who's had to live in the real world.

I deleted my first response to this post. I typed up a big, sarcastic email about how I was in the KKK but had seen the error of my ways and decided to blindly follow the advice of a hotel cleaning woman. It was biting and mean and I really enjoyed writing it, as I'm sure Memphis enjoyed insulting me. The difference is, I calmed down before hitting "send."

I freely admit I've had it good. Have I had a comfortable life? Sure. Would my life have been harder if I was black? There isn't a doubt in my mind, though I seriously question the claim that a "woman can't succeed in a man's world." But I digress.

Let me put this as simply as I can. Just because other qualified people didn't have a shot at my position doesn't make me unqualified. I was good at my job and I did earn the money I made by making a lot of money for my business. I did that by knowing people and by being a leader.

I recognize that Memphis has suffered things I hope to never have to, and I recognize that Traveler has made sacrifices I probably couldn't make. But don't reject what I have to offer because I haven't been tormented to "earn" it. My team certainly didn't say no when I gave them keys to an apartment right near the hospital. They didn't complain when I hired a lawyer for one and paid for a doctor for another. They haven't complained about the guns or the cell phones, either.

That's what I have to offer, and I'm glad I can give it.

If it makes you feel better to think that I'm pampered and spoiled, I guess I can't stop you. But I'll tell you this: I love my wife and I have to lie to her about where I'm going every night. I loved my job, but I've taken an early retirement. I love my daughter more than anything in the world, but I can't wait for her to leave for college because I'm terrified that she'll be the one to pay for what I'm doing.

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver300

Subject: Re: The Price

From Willow 12:

> There's been a lot of discussion here about the price we've all paid for our "heroism"
> but I'll bet there's one thing we've all got in common. It even has something to do with

> the purpose of this sub-list. How do you alleviate yourself of the nightmares?
I'll bet you

> all get them too. How do you deal with the fear? The urge to look with the sight all the

> time, just so you know?

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: healer115

Subject: Cell Phones

Driver300 wrote:

> They haven't complained about the guns or the cell phones, either.

Understand that those cell phones are tapped. Every cell phone is, effectively. The digital ones are more secure, but don't assume that they can't decode digital signals. Best to simply talk in code and accept that you're being spied on.

I won't even get into how easy cell phones are to jam.

If something scares you because it's unknown, the cure is to know it. If you're worried about them finding you, then go and find them. If you're afraid of what they're planning, make some plans of your own and force them to react.

Inaction feeds on inaction. I know it. I've seen it in companies and individuals. Once you adopt a defensive, reactive stance, it's very hard to become proactive again. Once you predicate your choices on what the market does, or on what your boss does, or on what your competitor does you've lost your freedom. You can't do anything on your own. You need other people to tell you what to do. That's a bad position to be in any time, but it's even worse in a crisis. If you don't have the experience to act, to make a decision — even a dumb decision — you wind up a sitting duck while the rest of the world leaves you behind.

Similarly, action begets action. Don't know what you're doing? Take steps to find out. That's what my group is doing. When we know what's happening, we'll know the best way to deal with it.

This is where teamwork can really help. Your partners can watch your back. Your partners can protect you while you sleep. Your partners can keep you informed about what the enemy is doing.

I'll give you a business example. I've seen this a dozen times. It really does work. The world is full of smart people who don't work to their potential because they lack self-confidence. What you do is take two people and get them to rely on each other. Before assigning them together, you make sure you stress to each how competent and easy to work with the other one is. Then, when they're together each one can see the brilliance in the other that neither can see in himself. Or herself, for the benefit of Memphis. I've set up groups or partnerships like this more than once and heard both people in it tell me how the other one "really" did all the work.

We know our own weaknesses and we hide them from others, so we all tend to think we're less competent than those around us. It's not true, but that's a matter for another day. For now, to feel safer, find some others like you to be with and trust in them when you can't trust in yourself.

CONSIDERING PRACTICALITIES

Subject: Inherent Dangers

From: teacher193

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

I have to agree with Ashram that trying to set up a support organisation for the afflicted would be suicidal. If such a group could be brought into existence, I believe they would have done it for themselves already, so it's either impossible or already in place. As it is, though, you'd need to publicise the thing somehow, mention specific times and places. You'd be tracked down and murdered before you even had time to take stock of your surroundings. Helping many is surely better than helping few, but helping few is better than helping none.

You also pre-suppose that all of the afflicted can be helped, brought round to our way of thinking, and taught not to harm humanity. That's noble, but frankly stupid. I contest that not even all people are really, genuinely human. Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about any biological predisposition or other bigoted nonsense. Every person has the potential, at birth, to be a full human being. Not all of them manage to realise this possibility, though. For every two people who grow to maturity with a genuine sense of their own worth and of the importance of others, there is one who reaches adulthood with a deep-seated belief that others do not matter, that they are somehow less real. I've seen it in the classroom.

This should be our measuring stick for whether a creature is worth trying to save. Just as a lot of the population is not inherently human, many

of the afflicted are inherently human. There are so many of them, and so few of us, that we have a duty to concentrate our effort where it will do the greatest good. That means we should stop worrying about trying to help the intractable and leave them to the less tender mercies of our militant brethren. I suppose it might be possible to persuade even the most horrible, died-in-the-wool murdering monster to regain some or all of its lost humanity. But it would take a long, long time. In the same time, you might have been able to save ten or twenty others, ones who were more sympathetic and closer to the rest of us. You have to do the math and look at the calling sensibly. We can't help everyone. We can't even help everyone who wants help. Those we do help have to be prioritised.

It isn't always easy making that type of decision. It's hard to turn away someone in pain, or to abandon someone just because they would demand too much effort. It has to be done, though, or else you betray many more. Teaching is just like that. Many kids don't want to learn. They're not interested, resentful of the waste of time that they think you represent, or maybe a bit slow or rebellious. Perhaps you could get through to them if you tried hard, devoted your time to them. Perhaps you could lift them up out of themselves, help them to see the beauty of knowledge, give them a future. But to do so, you would have to leave behind several others who already want to know, who have potential for greatness, and stunt them with your neglect.

You have to help those who have the best chance of making use of your help. So, like all teachers, I quickly learned to respect freedom of choice. When God created this world, he gave us free will. It is not for us to take this freedom away. If a child does not want to learn, that is his choice. Were it just he and I, I could turn him around. It isn't, though. There are thirty others in each class, tens of classes. I don't have the time to waste on him, so, knowing what his choice means, knowing the way he dooms himself to poverty, resentment, maybe even crime and violence, I let him turn his back on me, and I do what I can to save those who appreciate being saved, I use my time to the best advantage of society. Those units who choose to drop out — usually into the gutter — are a product of the system that decides how I must spend my time. It isn't ideal, but there is no better solution to the problem of education. This is the best solution that trained rational minds have been able to devise.

From: donor144

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Self-Righteous Bitch

I always hated teachers, and now I know why. That's the most monstrous fucking thing I've ever heard. Who are you to choose who gets the help they need and who doesn't? You make me sick. It's people like you who crapped on me all the way through high school. You think you're so goddamn saintly and noble, making your little sacrifices. I didn't choose to get sidelined in school, you teachers forced me into it, and I'm certainly not a fucking number.

You know what? The stuff I learned skipping and hanging out has been a thousand times more useful now than any stupid classes. If I'd paid more attention in school, I wouldn't know how to pick locks or boost a car, and I'd have died last week because of it. Did it ever occur to you that all you're doing is programming people to be slaves? My friends and I are a thousand times more alive than you'll ever be.

Our calling is exactly the same. Our goal is to educate the afflicted, teach them how to integrate with humans by rising up from the gutter. We can do the most good by helping those who will let themselves be helped, who want to find the way home. Every one of the penitent we help represents a saving of not just that soul, but of all the lives that creature would otherwise have ruined. If someone were to offer you the power to save one person or the power to save one hundred people, which would you choose? There is nothing to consider or wonder about. We do the best we can. There is no other option.

MOTIVES FOR REDEMPTION

The newspaper printed a scathing editorial about "gang crime" in our inner city. (I know we're not supposed to reveal hints about our location, but I figure that just about every major city has an editorial like that fairly often.) The mayor has promised more police, but unless his extra cops carry crosses and holy water, I don't think it's going to do a lot of good.

I can't believe we're the only ones who know about this. "Low riders" and "gangster disciples" aren't committing these murders. It's the walking dead. I even know what graveyard they're coming from.

Rigger, if you're on this list now and you need any more justification for defending "pylons," I'd like to invite you out here to listen to how a fourteen-year-old screams when his arm is torn off by a zombie. If you can listen to that and say, "Nope, I shouldn't get involved," then there's nothing more I can do for you. If that doesn't make you feel pity, to make you need to do something, no amount of arguing is ever going to convince you.

I don't think Oracle is on this sub-list: If someone is in contact with her, can you ask her to email me privately? Traveler, if you're on here, I'd like your advice. Or anyone who was at New Dijon.

I don't think this is exactly the same thing, but parts of what they described sound really similar. We, too, have seen a dozen or more spirits riding on a single corpse. But where the ones you discussed seemed to be fighting, I've seen some corpses where the multiple spirits seemed to be cooperating.

Most recently, we were following a zombie with four ghosts on it. We were hoping we could find out what it was looking for — the "focus" that some people have talked about. But it just walked up to the back of an apartment building and kicked the door in, and then it started killing people.

This is hard to write about... hard to think about really, so if it doesn't completely make sense, please understand. When we saw it kick the door in, we moved after it, cautiously. We didn't want to alert or alarm something that could break through a heavy steel door. (Did I mention it was one of those metal doors?) We didn't start to run until we heard the screams.

When we got there, it had already killed the husband of the family. It looked like a single punch to the chest had crushed his ribs. It was going after the wife when one of us stopped it. She used the stare, the one that freezes them. The rest of us had guns. We yelled at the woman and her kids to get out of the way so we could start shooting.

Then the husband sat up. I hadn't noticed that he had a gun. He was going to shoot one of us, but I guess he changed his mind. He turned the gun on his own daughter, instead.

"Daddy," she screamed. I can still hear her scream. He smiled as he pulled the trigger.

I was looking with the sight, so I could see a spirit detach itself from the first zombie and run toward her. The first zombie still had two of its original four. One was in the father. Everything was crazy, but I remember the ghost looking impatient as it tried to do something to the little girl. I guess she wasn't done dying yet.



The rest concentrated on the father — the one with the gun. I think maybe the blow that killed the body weakened him. I hope that's how it works. I stumbled over to the girl and tried to do first aid.

Then police cars pulled up. We saw them through the front windows. We had to get out of there, so we ran, went up the stairs and out the back fire escape.

We didn't have to go far. I had a quick change of clothes on me. (Thanks for the tip, Flame.) A crowd was gathering, and once we got into that we were fine. We could see them hauling out the two bodies with their faces covered, and we saw the little girl taken to the hospital — the one close by. The one we watch because it's full of other things.

We saw something else, too. The two dead bodies still had spirits clinging to them. I guess it only stands to reason that zombies would know how to play dead.

WHO TO HELP?

So, the question then becomes how to evaluate the afflicted. How to decide whether or not they want to be helped. How deeply mired in their ways they are. It's difficult, and I guess that everyone is going to have their own way of working it out. Driver300, frankly, sounds like he's more inclined to aggression than reconciliation. For all his stories, he doesn't seem to have given any thought to what sort of people the afflicted he is watching actually are. I agree that feeding off babies and killing children is vile, but I think it's wrong to damn all of the group without speaking to any of them.

Speaking personally, I try to keep an eye on the afflicted for a couple of weeks. For example, I'm watching six of them at the moment, a spirit, four other dead people, I believe, and some sort of demonic-looking thing. The dead seem to have normal intelligence — or at least do a good impression of it — and they cling to each other. I've only been watching them for a few days. I try to spend half an hour or so every day with each one, to get an idea of the sort of person it is.

It's not difficult to get an idea of how corrupt someone is. If you watch a drug-dealer outside the school gates, it becomes obvious that this is someone who gave up his humanity a long time ago. There's not enough time to try to help such a person. The afflicted are much the same. If I see a creature about to commit some sort of atrocity, I do what I can to drive it off or help the victim afterward. I have the healing breath, and I've managed to stop a few people from dying of their injuries. That alone makes it all worthwhile. If a demon's attack is unprovoked or needlessly sadistic, I take it off the list. Sooner or later, one of the frothing lunatics will get to it. If it's particularly unpleasant, I send details on it in an anonymous note to those savages who killed the girl I was talking to. I'm still too cross to talk to them, but they can be useful.

Assuming a creature does not engage in needless violence or otherwise demonstrate irredeemable inhumanity, I make some sort of approach after a few weeks. The Question is a great way of making the afflicted stop and think about themselves, and it's a good entry point if you're dealing with just one. Otherwise, I try to assemble a few photos or other images that represent the best of the human condition, in hopes that might strike a chord with the afflicted. I leave these items, along with a note encouraging a return to humanity, at a place where the target will find them. The dead ones I'm watching all seem quite young, and they look like they came from middle-class homes. So, I've gathered together pictures of family life, Christmas, a pleasant evening down at the pub, and a couple of snaps of loving couples, and I'm going to pop the envelope under the windscreen of their car with a note reminding them how much they're missing — assuming they don't suddenly show themselves to be maniacs.

Whether the approach is by a note or the Question, the goal is to get to a point where we can sit down together amicably and discuss life, people and the future. You need to establish some sort of trust, just as with kids starting out on drugs. If they don't want to talk, and they refuse to let me in, well, after a couple

of attempts I leave them to it. No point wasting time on those who don't want to be helped. If I can get them talking though, listen to them, try to offer support, then maybe I can help them reform. I'm talking to two afflicted at the moment, and we sit down and quite openly discuss needs, hungers and humanity. I've not managed to persuade anyone to give up their ways completely, but one of the two has certainly become more sympathetic toward people. I'm not going to give any details here, because the chances are if I do, I'll end up being used as bait for another execution.

So, in short, I try approaching the afflicted rationally. If they respond in kind, I do everything I can to try to help them. If they react badly, I regretfully leave them to it. Fortunately, I don't seem to be a particularly high-priority target for the more violent ones, and I haven't been seriously attacked. It wouldn't stop me from trying to work with other afflicted — I have to help — but it's certainly a lot easier to continue if you haven't been badly injured.

As an aside, I note from the obits column of the Evening News that one of my old associates has been killed — "Local Man Commits Suicide" was how the paper put it. He was never prone to depression, so I have to think something made him do it. A shame, but he was a psychotic frother, really. I do feel sorry for his family, though.

BRINGING THE LOST AROUND

Don't take this the wrong way, Teacher, but I'm not so arrogant to say whos worthy of help and who isn't. I used to think like that, and it led to me killing a lot of people. I thought my life was worth more than theirs.

As you know, I spend my time moving from place to place. I'm lucky that answering the draft didn't change my daily life or job. I didn't have any routine to break, any loved ones to protect or hide from, any real home or things to look after. I don't even stick with the same truck all the time, just with this old portable computer for my email. Most of you probably can't imagine, with your roots from before sunk so deep.

In fact, my work really helps in the service. That directly contradicts what Driver said about giving up his job, but I guess hes some sort of manager type, and his job was probably more intense than mine is. I don't have any area that I feel obligated to look after. So I don't get involved in our politics or the creatures. I don't get to know any particular situation real good. The way I understand the call fits my situation, though.

See, I don't try to make judgments. One of the things they teach you in boot camp is to follow orders without question. Theres a lot wrong with that, especially when your orders are to hurt someone, but I guess trying to accept things at face value has rubbed off on me. Its pretty vital when you have to rely on others to stay alive. Im here to try to ease as much pain as I can. I live my life now according to a few simple rules. First, I listen to anyones problems, provide a shoulder to cry on, and if theres anything useful to say, I say it.

Second, I try to remind the lost how good it is to talk. When I spend some time watching one, the things that she really misses from her old life kind of show up in the way she looks at people and things, in the way she behaves. That sort of knowledge is backed up by our creators, I think. You can feel it when youve got the right thing, and thats a good way of starting a conversation, of knowing the right things to say.

Third, I try to talk people out of violence if I see a situation brewing. Ive got a knack for calming folks down, even when theyre flying off the handle, and that proves real useful. God or the Heralds or whoever blessed me with the ability to turn an angry hand. When violence doesnt prove to be an option, theres not much left to do but talk.

You have to remember that folks love to talk about themselves, particularly if you really listen to what they have to say, if you take the time to care about them. Thats as true for the lost as it is for anyone else. We all need contact, remember? In fact, the lost are often more keen to talk once you get them to open up.

So, once I think Ive got a clear idea of something that one of the afflicted misses, I go over and chat with him, real friendly like, and bring up that thing as if by chance. Then I let them talk about the thing they miss, and about anything else they want to. As they talk, you can see the tension and anger drain out of them.

By the time they finish they get to thinking maybe everyone else isnt as useless as they thought, and they go off on a high. I try to bring them some peace, give them back some of what the world has taken from them. I hope it makes them think twice next time they consider using or hurting someone.

It might be good if I could spend more time in one place and talk like that regularly with a few of the lost. But maybe it wouldnt help much more, and maybe theyd feel more nervous about opening up to me if they knew Id still be there in the morning.

When I come through a place Ive been before, I try to keep an eye open for any lost that I recognize. Every so often I find someone, and sometimes theyre pleased to see me. If they arent, well, I still offer them the chance to talk, to explain why theyre angry or unhappy.

Because Im moving around, I dont get to see how much effect what I do has in the long term. In the short term, I can see the pain I relieve, the loneliness I help ease, and thats what keeps me going. I remember how much difference it made with my buddies from the war, how listening to them for a night would make them more stable for a day or two. I really believe it helps the lost keep a sense of balance, too. Helping to ease the loneliness and the pain is what its all about. Its the greatest buzz in the world.

THE OLD LIFE

"If you heard God talking to you out of a burning bush, and he told you to go to the Red Sea and become a fisherman, would you do it?"

I don't remember where I read or heard that saying, but it seems pretty relevant to our situation. As far as I'm concerned, there's only one honorable answer, and that's "Yes, I'd do it." I suppose if you weren't religious you might turn yourself in at the nearest asylum, but the one answer that could never be right is to just ignore it.

As far as I'm concerned, the call is pretty much the same. Trying to live as if nothing happened is the worst kind of hypocrisy. Sure, you have to keep up appearances so you don't become a target. But going to work? Volunteering? Hitting the links for a few rounds of golf? That's purely insane when you know you live in an infested world. If someone was dying of thirst and I had a canteen of water, I wouldn't save it to wash my ear. That may sound silly, but it's the same thing. I have to act, to save those who can't save themselves.

I mentioned before that I've taken an early retirement. My wife thinks I'm nuts. She wants to know why I'm lifting weights and jogging all of the sudden. (She hasn't found the guns, and I hope she doesn't.) I've told her I'm volunteering downtown, working for an organization that's trying to prevent school tax redistributing. That, and trying to keep my blood pressure down. I think they're good excuses. She doesn't want to rob Peter to pay Paul, but they're certainly boring enough that she won't drop in on me or (worse) try to join me. Lying to her tears me up, but I don't think I've got any real choice. She's not cut out for this type of business.

The real irony is that I'm doing something that will help more children than a million dollars in school taxes, and not even my own daughter can know it.

NEGOTIATING TERMS

You called me arrogant Trucker, and maybe I am to an extent, but I have now given up everything I was to answer the summons, and I think I've earned the right to decide how to answer it. So you were in Vietnam or Korea or wherever. You've seen some horrible things. You've been left with pathological insecurities. Fine. To me, it sounds like your summons hasn't made much difference in your life.

You had nothing, so you had nothing to lose. That's not the way it was for me. After helping that first time, I found myself plunged into hell.

I'm not looking for sympathy. We've all been through the horror of revelation, the horrible discovery that the world is far sicker, far more diseased than we ever dared think. It's a horrible awakening, and I had real difficulty coming to terms with it. I wanted to phone the government at first, or MI5, anybody, and tell them of the plague that was all around us. Then, of course, I saw a policeman and realised that they were afflicted, too. From there, it was a fairly easy conclusion that it went all the way to the top.

Through it all, I managed to cling to who I was by remembering the pain and confusion of the spirit inside Robert. When I stumbled onto hunter-net, it felt like I was joining the French Resistance to fight the Nazis. It gave me something to cling to and be proud of. My boyfriend and I had been drifting apart, and then I couldn't think of anything to say to him that mattered. I tried going back to work, but it was pointless. How could I care about 3C's poor grades? What did it matter? The answer is, as Donor so rudely pointed out a few days ago, it doesn't matter. I thought I was helping, but I realised I wasn't, so I handed in my notice and have spent my last month buried in the library, looking for answers, clues or even hints. I managed to arrange continued access, which served me well.

The place I live in now is a lot cheaper than my old house, and it's got a fascinating selection of insect life to keep me company. I had a nest egg set aside for retirement. That money should last for a while. I thought about trying to get some help and support from my friends, but I wouldn't wish this on anyone, let alone on people I care about. The thing that's kept me going has been my quest to help. I've been able to save some lives from injury, as I said earlier. There was Robert, too, and I console myself that perhaps I could have helped that girl if those animals hadn't killed her. It's that thought that gets me out of bed every morning, that helps to make sense of this insanity — the possibility that despite all the pain I feel, I might be able to help someone today. If I hide, curl up and wait to die, then it's guaranteed that

I won't be of any use to anyone. We all have to die sooner or later. If I can make a difference, then I'm fulfilling my potential, doing something to genuinely change the world for the better, even if it is just in a small way.

I told you a couple of days ago that I've been talking to two lost regularly. Last night, one of them made me an offer. We've been discussing our lifestyles (although I am as vague about us as he is about his kind). Although there are several places where we disagree, and a few points where he simply doesn't understand me, we do strongly agree that children should be allowed to grow up without being preyed upon or abused. He's offered to try to make amends for his past transgressions by evening the score a bit, eliminating some of the evil people who harm children in the city. He is talking about the drug dealers in particular, both ours and the lost, who sell to kids. He's also after the pimps who pick up kids once they're junkies. I know a few of these scum from the school, and if I identify them, he'll kill them. In addition to helping save children, I could turn the money taken from the abusers toward something useful for the cause. I am very tempted to take him up on his offer. I know they teach that two wrongs don't make a right, but maybe that's just part of the programming to keep us tame. I could help here, get rid of some of the true monsters who harm the young, rid society of some of its evil. I told him I'll make a decision by tomorrow night.

REASONABLE LOSSES

Ripsaw has gotten a lot of flak for his latest escapade in Pennsylvania. I, for one, think he did the right thing. Sometimes you can't do it neat and tidy. Sometimes you can't get all the information beforehand. Sometimes you have to act from ignorance and hope for the best — and that means that sometimes you don't get the best outcome.

Mistakes are made. Terrible tragedies happen. But you can't blame him for a bad result that he didn't want and had no way to predict.

He posted what happened — with a plea for help, remember! — and within hours the main list is clogged with replies condemning him. I hope he got as many private replies offering to help, but somehow I doubt it. He didn't say he was proud or happy with how things turned out. Far from it. But all people can do is blame him for the loss of civilian blood.

I say, you care about the vulnerable? Instead of complaining that there isn't a perfect solution, how about striking at the problem itself? Even if you believe that Ripsaw was stupid or careless (and since I wasn't there, I'm not going to judge), he acted with honorable intentions. That's more than I can say about a certain night shift OB-GYN.

Some of you say it's unconscionable to risk the lives of the blind. I say, how can it possibly be avoided? Every monster that walks is a risk to ordinary people, and by doing nothing we're their passive partners. Sure, a plan may go wrong, but that's no excuse to never try. Plans can go right, too.

My targets are in a hospital. Some of them don't ever leave it. There's no way to act against them without putting the patients there at risk. It's like surgery. I'd rather make one clean cut that might kill or might save than leave the patient to die without hope.

THE LOST AND THE CRIMINAL

I suppose there's truth to what Teacher says, that I haven't had my life or my views particularly changed by the call but not in the ways she means. I've seen the world as a pretty nasty place for the last 30 years, and I wasn't really surprised to learn the forlorn are everywhere. If anything, waking up to reality just gave me a specific focus for my need to make things better. Finally, here was a whole bunch of souls who obviously needed help, and who were easily identified. The world is like a maggoty apple: it looks beautiful from a distance, but up close you can see all the badness. It doesn't mean it's ugly, though. It's worth fighting for. It's not worth killing for, nothing is, but it is worth fighting for. That's been a great strength to me.

From: alice196

To: teacher193

Subject: Re: Negotiating Terms

Teacher, please don't do this. You know in your heart that it's wrong, which is why you're telling us about it. The road to Hell is paved with good intentions, remember? Your job should be to show this being that violence is not the answer. Don't let him tempt you from the true path. This is the sort of course that can taint your soul forever. You're talking about picking targets for a murderer. That's not right. The law calls it Conspiracy and holds you jointly responsible. If you do it, you'll always regret it.

If it's drug dealers you're worried about, pass their identities to the police, to anti-drugs groups, to neighborhood watch groups, to newspapers, to TV consumer shows, to anyone who will listen. Make it too hot for them to keep it up. If it's the money that attracts you — and it's sad that we all need it so much, but still true and unavoidable — then consider alternative options. There must be some.

There are ways to act that don't involve succumbing to evil. Where does it stop? If you kill all the drug dealers, what then? Just as you're trying to save this lost soul, perhaps it's trying to corrupt you. Did you ever think of that?

— "Curiouser and curiouser, said Alice."

I'm alarmed by the idea of pitting the lost against criminals. That's the same sort of concept that's led to violent, bloody wars throughout history. The people who we remember as good, people who made a genuinely helpful difference in the world, are those who didn't strike out: Jesus, Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Florence Nightingale. They didn't hire killers. They reached out in love, tried to touch lives for the sake of touching them, and made the world better. That's what we should aim for.

There seems to be confusion about the difference between the lost and human criminals. You can see it on the main list as well as on this one. We should be very careful about slipping into evil in order to try to do good. Criminals are not demons. Criminals are often extremely unpleasant, do a lot of bad things, and make everyone's lives a little darker. They're still human, though, like the rest of us, and they can be rehabilitated. Most of them commit crime because they have no real choice. For all the conservative talk about laziness and evil, the rich keep the poor in the gutter, and it's no surprise that the poor try to better themselves the only way they can. Criminals need education. They need to be shown their options. They don't need to be killed by demons or the dutiful.

The lost aren't criminals, either. As far as I can tell, they're driven by dark hungers and they're used to thinking they're superior to the rest of us. That's bigotry and it can be gotten around by education, particularly by showing them we're actually decent folks. I figure even the really powerful ones aren't much different from our own politicians: old and corrupt, but, deep down, scared of the people, scared of freedom, and desperate to control the object of their fear.

Everyone is really the same. We're all aware of ourselves, we all feel pain, we all want what's best for those dear to us, we all get scared or lonely. That's probably as true for the lost as it is for criminals or for us. As soon as you start treating other people as enemies, as animals that need to be put down, you create the conditions for war and you create more hatred and suffering than you hope to stop. Loss of life is never acceptable, and should always be resisted. That's true whether it's civilians, dangerous criminals, vicious demons or anyone else. There are no acceptable losses.

And money just makes things worse. I wonder how tempted Teacher would be to use her friend as an assassin if there was no cash involved. Sure, trying to help is expensive. It always has been. That doesn't mean there are no options, though. From what I remember, you Brits have a pretty good Social Security system. Your country won't let you starve. There are plenty of poor among the forgiving, but there are also rich ones like Driver. If things get desperate, try asking for help. There are charities and support groups that might be able to ease the burden for you. I've heard that a group called the Rose Foundation is sometimes able to help, if you can discover how to get hold of them. You might even be able to find a job that suits the service, like mine does. Resorting to crime is as wrong as resorting to murder. The world is hard, and our job is to ease that burden for everyone, not to make it worse.

You know what the right thing is, Teacher. You ought to do it.

PRIORITIES

We've been watching downtown for a little over a month now — when my wife thinks I'm "at the health club" or "volunteering." There seem to be two sources for the local problem. One is at the hospital. The other is at the graveyard.

Both have dead things around, but they don't seem to act the same. The ones at the hospital seem a lot more sure of themselves and have more self-control. They also seem to be a lot more adept at tricking people and walking around in plain sight — some at night, some by day. The others are a lot more impulsive. Where the hospital monsters are almost cunning, the ones at the graveyard just stumble out and wreck anything they find. Maybe the hospital ones used to be like the graveyard

ones but survived long enough to recover some intelligence and learn more powerful tricks? I suppose that's beside the point.

What matters is our dilemma. The main concerns I've got are (1) where can we do the most good, (2) where can we act with least risk to ourselves, and (3) where can we act with the least risk to others?

Based on all that, I'm focussing on the graveyard. Unlike a hospital full of the sick and injured, there aren't any vulnerable people in the cemetery. True, the things there are dangerous — Flame, that superstition about them not crossing salt is absolutely false! But their danger only makes it more urgent to save people from them. If we let them, the graveyard dead would just shamble out and rip apart everyone they find. Luckily, there are enough of us — barely — that we can keep the perimeter monitored 24 hours a day with some well-placed cameras. If one of them comes out, there's at least one of us on tap to deal with it, and more can arrive. (We've got pagers.) So far we've been lucky. When a lone shambler tried to get out on my watch, I was able to confuse and distract it until help arrived. Has anyone else had success asking the dead questions? For a second, it almost seemed like it could understand me.

Anyhow, we're keeping them tied up in there pretty good, picking one off now and then. The price of this is that we have to turn our backs on the hospital. We put a little pressure on when we can — I try to keep a good close watch on that obstetrician, but so far I haven't had a chance to really shut him down. It burns me up, but so far there's just no way. As soon as we take care of the immediate danger, he's next.

STANDARDS

Well, that certainly seemed to toss the cat into the pigeons, didn't it. Thank you all for your thoughts and input over the last day or so. I was slightly amused that the few people who encouraged me to accept my contact's offer did not feel able to do so openly. I met my contact again last night, and as promised I gave him my decision... but I'll get back to that in a moment.

I want to comment on a few other points first. I do not believe that all of the afflicted are worth saving, just as I do not believe that all normal people are worth saving. Some people are bad, and some afflicted are bad, and the world would be better off without either group. I would not weep to hear that an evil demon was eating his way through a gang of armed robbers, and the reverse would not upset me, either. But there is a lot of difference between not worrying too much about evil reaping its reward, and actually being the agent of death.

As for money, well, I agree that crime is not really excusable. We're working to save as many people as we can, but we have been given this task by a higher power, not hired by the people we're helping. Presumably, if they wanted this to be a paying job they'd give us a salary. I'm not about to stoop to crime to fund my quest. There are always options that do not involve causing more harm than is strictly necessary. If I have to go on the dole, I'll go on the dole. It won't come to that, though. I'm not alone in my quest, even if my last foray into group work was disastrous. I have found a few other individuals, more like-minded, whom I can work with successfully and who are more interested in healing than were the frothers I started out with. Although we do not work together all the time, we can get by, at least for the time being.

To get back to my meeting, though — most of you were right. I told my contact that I would not identify targets for him, and I did not want him killing people, even to help protect the vulnerable. He pretended to take it fairly well, but he was obviously irritated and dismayed.

I mentioned the situation in broad outlines to the other afflicted I talk to. She didn't say much, but she looked closely at me and said, "You are being offered

power." I didn't think too much of it at the time — she is usually cryptic — but later I was thinking about power and the way it corrupts. After that, it was quite an easy offer to decline.

I can't pretend that I wouldn't be delighted to see some of those evil bastards killed, but I think the price of what I was offered was higher than I realised.

Actually, that leads me to the thorny question of standards and codes. As most of you know, the teaching profession is regulated by a whole assortment of guidelines and regulations. We don't have anything like that for our work, despite the fact that there are definite risks and predictable dangers. That's not really surprising; we're not even recognized. However, guidelines and codes can be valuable sometimes, and it might be worth giving them some thought. Obviously, I don't mean that we should set down rules or anything like that — who would police them? — but perhaps we could assemble a set of suggestions and guidelines to help those of us who are new to the call. Maybe we could even give our more adamant fellows something firm to bear in mind to help them maintain a sense of perspective.

Another topic that's been concerning me, in light of the last few days, is what to do if one of us does become corrupted somehow. I know we've all heard the rumors and stories — the dutiful setting themselves up as living goddesses, selling their abilities (including healing powers) to the highest bidder, forgetting the hunt, even working for the lost against humanity, hideous as that is to consider. Is there anything we can do when that sort of abuse arises? Should we have some sort of code for dealing with the corrupt, dangerous or mad, or should we just try to stay out of their way?

If you have any suggestions for either topic, email them to me privately. I'll collate the responses, compile them into a document and post it here to the Triage list. We must all have some helpful advice or good rules of thumb to follow.

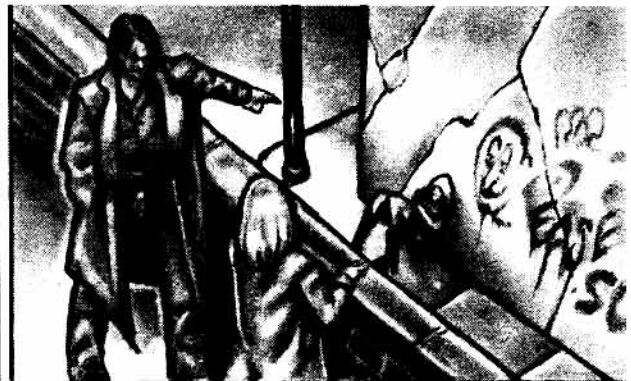
CARING FOR THE PUBLIC

I'm really not sure that making a list of ways to carry out our duty is useful. Things change a lot and were all different people, whether chosen or lost. I can appreciate that there might be some bits and pieces that would be handy for new recruits to know, but I can't help thinking that Teachers' time might be better spent going out and trying to heal the lost. Hell, how can we make up rules about a situation that we really don't even understand? I guess we all have to follow our hearts.

One thing that I do want to talk about is the public. As we all know, they're blind to the real world, and any evidence that things are not quite as real as they appear sends them into a panic. I guess we were the same before. I really don't think that's fair on other folks. Life is hard. It's hard for all of us. It's extremely difficult being chosen, but it's no two shakes being lost, either, as far as I can see despite what some of them might tell you. We're all interested here in helping the public. Even Driver300, who seems to have some issues, won't disagree with me on that one.

It's our responsibility to keep them out of this as much as we can. Any time we fail to, we're just increasing their pain. I guess sometimes it just isn't possible to hide what you're doing from people, but a lot of the time it is. You just need to act with kindness. You don't have to go and face down one of the lost in a bar. You can wait until afterward, in the parking lot, when there's not many people around. Don't think that numbers provide any safety, either. Few of the lost seem to think twice about us, and they'll definitely attack you in front of witnesses. If you provoke a reaction in public, you're just going to get people hurt.

I'm sure you won't be surprised to know that I talk to a lot of the charitable as well as to the lost, and I have friends from all over. One of my friends in the Midwest is a bit impetuous, kind enough, but naïve. I've spoken to her about staying low key. A few



weeks ago, she decided to speak to one of the lost she saw in a bar. She went over to this guy and asked how he liked being dead. She doesn't have that deep questioning thing that Teacher does. She was just curious. He snapped and started beating the shit out of her right there.

I guess the locals didn't like some guy beating up a woman. You can imagine what happened next. It turned into a damn brawl. The bar was more or less wrecked, ten people went to the hospital including my friend and the thing wasn't even hurt. The official explanation the police gave was that he was on crack, and everyone shook their heads sadly at that sort of trouble coming to their town. My friend put nine people in the hospital. I'm really sorry for her, but it's not fair on them, either.

We have a duty to keep out of the public's way. You can take that as a submission for your list if you like, Teacher.

ORDINARY PEOPLE

Solomon sure stirred up the hornet's nest recently when he asserted his right to pass sentence on someone who was "merely human." I'm not going to comment on that, mostly because I don't know what I think. But it has made me wonder about something else. Do those of us who are dedicated to healing and protecting have to restrict our focus to monsters and their victims?

I ask for a simple reason: Suddenly, I can heal.

It's incredible to me just to type those words. I was in the hospital, taking a look around, when I heard the voice. The same one that said "DEATH LOOMS," what seems like so long ago. This time it said "MADNESS FEEDS." It hurt like heck. I mean, it literally felt like something was using my skull as a loudspeaker. Then I saw one of those little guide signs by the elevator, and I swear it said "Fourth Floor: Parasitic Ward." When I looked again, it was "Psychiatric Ward," but I had a pretty good idea where to go.

The psych ward has a lockdown unit, and there was a guard on duty, but he was asleep. Sneaking past him, I thought I'd really lucked out. I should have known better. I probably could have marched past him playing a trumpet and he'd have stayed out.

I went down the hall, peeking into the rooms. Most were empty, but there was this young woman in one, in four-point restraints. I tried the door and it was unlocked. She was really pale and her breath sounded terrible — this weak, wheezing gasp. I checked her chart. I won't put down her name. I'll call her Jane Doe, I guess.

I read on here about people who healed by breathing into other people's mouths, and somehow that sounded like a good idea. When I tried it, it seemed to work — she started breathing easier. That's when I heard something from down the hall — from another room with an open door, it turned out. I crept back to the door of the room I was in to listen better. It sounded like people arguing, something like:

"Show some restraint, Michelle. I don't care about your preferences. That girl is not some wimp you can empty and discard. Do I have to remind you that we don't control her sister yet? Carelessness can hurt us a lot. We have to maintain appearances."

Then I heard someone else. I suppose it was "Michelle," since it was a woman.

"Get off my back, Roy. You said yourself her sister was too tough to crack. We're not going to control her without a real threat. A near-death experience for dear Jane should do it."

"As long as it's only near. Frankly, I'm concerned. The initiative with our neighbors is going poorly. I didn't want to have to bring in an expert. I'm certain someone is watching us already. I don't want Jane's sister on a rampage through here."

"Were you this much of a pussy when you were alive?"

There was a thump and a clatter, and then Michelle spoke again, apologizing. I froze when I realized one of them was leaving. It was the doctor from the emergency room, "Roy," I suppose. He stormed past. "Michelle" came out after — the freakish nurse I saw that night, too. They must have been up to a lot at the hospital. I heard them go off down the hall and took a look in the next room. The woman there was hurt as well, so I helped her, too, I think.

So now I wonder about a lot of things. For one, there seems to be some tie between the two groups of creatures (I take the "neighbors" to be the dead at the cemetery). I don't like the sound of "bringing in an expert." Maybe I concentrated on the wrong problem, or didn't recognize it as part of a bigger problem. Could the hospital's monsters be using the ones in the graveyard to provide more victims? Or to draw attention away from themselves?

And my own question is: What do I do now that I can heal people? Use it only on the victims of monsters? Maybe that's the only people it will work on. Does it work against illness, too? How many kids in comas could I help with this?

Even if I only do it once a day, I could save thirty kids a month. How many monsters could I really stop, and would more people benefit from it?

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver800

Subject: The New Strategy

I've talked with my group and I've shown them what I can do. Before I tell you what we decided, I'd like to thank you all for your answers and advice. I got dozens of answers on both sides of the question, and though I can only pick one, I still appreciate the insight each of you has given me. Even if I don't decide the way you would, it was still worth it.

It's clear to me that my healing gift is from the same source that gives us our other powers. Where else could it be from? I think I've developed it because I have an agenda, to deal with these walking dead. I can't think that any benevolent agency would want to see the vulnerable suffer, no matter what the cause of their injuries. (Incidentally, I haven't been able to make my new ability work against illness. Am I doing something wrong?) Since the dead do so much harm against people, I don't see much of a conflict: I'll use my ability to fight their evil.

Specifically, I'm giving priority to the others in my group, whether they get injured fighting monsters or in some other capacity. With our new collective ability to get better, we're planning to step up our plans, hopefully against both locations. (Incidentally, with more investigation we've found that one of the caretakers at the graveyard has something like black blood under his skin, like some people here have described with "blood servants." He was right under our noses. We never thought about looking at him with the sight because he belonged there and only visited during the day.)

Here's the other decision — and let me stress that we reached this together. I'm not going to put myself in direct danger anymore. I know it sounds cowardly, and it feels cowardly, but it just makes sense. I can heal the others, but not myself. If I'm dead, I can't do anything for anybody. So my new role is kind of "den mother," I guess.

My newfound importance to the group is pushing against the barriers I've tried to keep between my family and my new avocation. I've introduced my wife and daughter to the people in my group. (Believe me, that wasn't easy.) They (my family) don't know that my "new friends" have keys to our house now, but I don't want one of them dying because he couldn't get to me fast enough or because he was a complete stranger.



So, our new strategy is for me to stay back and fortify, providing a safe haven for the rest of the group. We're trying to schedule some more decisive actions. I'll be nearby to cover a retreat and provide first aid. Until then, we're making bolt holes.

One of them gave us all keys to her place, as well. Unlike me, she lives in the city, closer to where the "action" is. I've also rented an apartment that's not too close, but still nearer to downtown. So that makes three hiding places — our two homes and the apartment. At each one, we're keeping the following:

— At least one shotgun or pistol and two boxes of shells. (One of the group assures me they can't be traced back to him. He was the one my wife seemed least inclined to believe was a "friend from the gym.")

— A first-aid kit

— Flares (Thanks for the advice, Flame.)

— A fire extinguisher

— Pepper spray

— Several gas masks

— Binoculars with night vision. Thanks to someone's warnings (I don't remember who), I didn't buy them all at the same place. I don't know if that really would get me monitored as a possible "radical element" or whatever, but better safe than sorry.

Can anyone think of stuff I'm missing?

GUIDELINES

Thanks, all of you, for all your comments and suggestions. I've now got my final list of suggested guidelines, for the people on Triage, at least. I've tried to take a balanced view across everyone's opinions. Several of you disagreed with each other on a number of points, and where that has happened, I've either gone with the majority opinion or tried to pick a stance approximately mid-way. I have treated my own views as if they belonged

to a third party, so there's no need to fear that this is my personal manifesto. In fact, there's one or two things I rather object to in here. Teachers are trained in that sort of double-thinking. Most of this is a combination of common sense, self-preservation and caring, but it never hurts to spell things out. Needless to say, this isn't a set of rules. No one is going to punish you for ignoring them — except for the universe, perhaps.

1. Do remember that we're here to help others.

Hopefully we've all been chosen to help to those in need, however we select them. If you can keep that at the back of your mind at all times, you'll retain your perspective and balance.

2. Do not expose others to danger.

You should not deliberately place others in harm's way or manipulate another person to place him in danger. It's wrong. You should try to keep the general public from being exposed to the afflicted. This is not the same as working in a team openly with other chosen.

3. Try not to seem threatening to the afflicted.

This is a matter of self-preservation. Helping the penitent means establishing a rapport with them, and that means a degree of openness and honesty is needed. Such contact may be threatening to many of the afflicted, so be as gentle and subtle as the situation warrants.

4. Look after yourself and be cautious.

If you do not take good care of yourself, you will not survive long. If you die, you cannot help anyone. Be careful, stay out of unnecessary danger, eat well and try to stay fit. Relaxation techniques or vitamins might help to combat the stress you are under.

5. Beware temptation.

Power corrupts. It's a cliché, but that doesn't mean it's not the truth. If an offer seems too good or too tempting to be true, sad to say it probably is. Stay cautious, and do not let your moral principles be compromised. You are here to help, not to murder.

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Re: The New Strategy

Your list sounds pretty good. Have you given any thought to getting alarms for your places? Or reinforcing the doors and windows? I know, you probably don't want your house to look like a jail, but hopefully some attractive iron grillwork will slow down even the worst of them. Too much may give you away, but it's something to think about. I've seen some nasty home defenses that you wouldn't notice until it's too late.

Oh, and something I just thought of, food, fresh water and candles. Did you catch that story out of Okinawa? When the flickers closed in, they cut the power. If your house is on enough land of its own that they can mount a siege, they might cut your water, too. Or worse.

Subject: Re: The New Strategy

From: memphis68

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

So let's see, the "new strategy" is the rich white guy hides out paying the bills while everyone else does the dangerous work and gets killed? Man, sounds like the old strategy to me. But if this healing works the way you say it does, it's also the smart strategy. You're probably a lot more good to your people patching them up after a fight than getting under their feet during it.

As for your hidey-holes, have you thought of maybe putting some cash in there? I assume you'd think of something that basic, but a lot of times it's the basics we take for granted. Also, if you can get some phony ID's, I'd have a set for everyone in the group. Passports would be best — though if you're in the South, you'd have a long way to go to get anywhere outside the U.S., except maybe Cuba.

6. Remember those who need help most desire it least.

You are going to face a lot of extreme hostility and violence when you try to redeem demons. If you expect it and plan for it, you have a better chance of surviving it.

7. Don't descend into crime.

Although the law is often used against us, and has often been used to keep people suppressed, it is still a cornerstone of society. You will have to break the law, perhaps often. Do not use this as an excuse to commit crime for its own sake. That's a slippery slope that leads to corruption.

8. Respect and work with other chosen.

Although you will often disagree with others who have been called — possibly all of them that you meet — remember that they're going through the same things you are, and that they want to help the world, too. When we work as a team, the whole is far, far greater than the sum of the parts. Working with others will save your life.

9. Do not work with lunatics.

This is a stressful calling and we can go mad or become lost in our own power. Try to help any dutiful who has gone insane or become corrupt, but don't work with them or trust them. It may kill you.

10. Retain a cautiously open mind.

Don't assume an afflicted is beyond help — but don't trust them outright when they arise. They have thought as predators for a long time. Stay open-minded and observe. Actions speak louder than words.

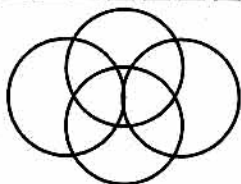
11. Heal those who need it.

If you have the power to heal, do not be averse to using it. If you are prepared to, place the sign for healing, if you know it, on your door for other chosen to see. It might save a life, and saving lives is what it's all about.

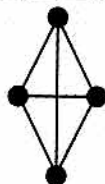
12. If you need to kill, be swift.

If a being has to be killed, be quick and merciful, not cruel.

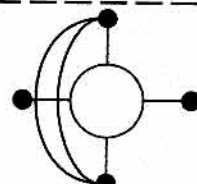
In addition to the guidelines listed above, several people sent me signs that they could inexplicably recognise when they heard the call, or that they have discovered since. I've compiled these too, as an extension to this document, as they will doubtless be of critical importance in co-ordinating our efforts. I understood these signs when I saw them, which I think means they're genuine, even if my immediate comprehension frightens me a little.



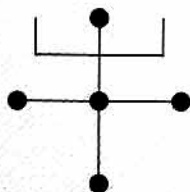
Dutiful. One of us, someone interested in helping others, a saver of souls, a confessor, one of the charitable.



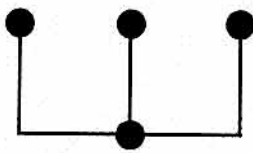
Healer. This is the sign of a person who has the power to heal wounds, whether he is prepared to do so or not.



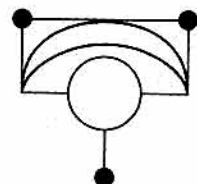
Penitent. One of the afflicted who sympathises with us and who abstains from killing or from causing unnecessary harm.



Demon. A psychotic or malicious afflicted that delights in causing pain, and is beyond help.



Good Samaritan. One of those poor bystanders without any of our protections, but who is prepared to help in with the service.



Tormented. This indicates the area is frequented by an afflicted in pain who desires help, but does not know how to reach out for it. Such souls are often dangerous, like wounded animals.

THE BLATANT AND THE SUBTLE

I'd like to put the world back together slow and easy. I really would. Everything would be stronger for it.

I don't think we have that luxury.

I guess I can't help thinking of all our problems as a disease. I mean, I'm not a doctor, but I know that when someone has a mild infection, sometimes it's best to treat it with bed rest and lots of fluids. If the body fights off the disease on its own, or with a little subtle help, it's stronger in the long run.

But you can't do that if the infection is severe. You have to use lots of drugs, lots of treatment — whatever it takes. If something has the chance to get better on its own, you can try to help. But where I am — and I'm only talking for my own part of my own city — the world doesn't have that chance. Left alone, this problem is only going to get worse and worse.

Maybe it's a question of perspective. If my group focused on a single creature — one dead person in the graveyard, say — maybe we could work a

miraculous transformation where the monster sees the error of its ways and goes off to heaven like Patrick Swayze at the end of "Ghost." Maybe. But when you see one shoot a little girl in cold blood, it's hard to believe in that kind of salvation.

I can't take that close, personal perspective. There's just too many of them. Yes, I'm sure some monsters are in moral gray zones. But the people in this city didn't ask for this curse, they don't deserve it and they're suffering terribly from it. They're the moral white zone, and my first duty is to them.

Take a thing like Doctor Roy, the baby-eating obstetrician. How long would it take to rehabilitate him? If he's hundreds of years old, I could die of old age before I turn him around. Or Michelle. The things she seemed to be doing to people in that psych ward. I have to think she's too far gone to ever make her way back to what we'd call a standard of good.

Do you mistrust sweeping gestures? Too bad, I guess. I think what this situation calls for is a blanket cure, not a case-by-case assessment.

Anyone in the southeastern U.S. who agrees, contact me. I'm looking for a plan.

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: sleepless71

Subject: Dressed to Kill

Potter116 wrote:

>How do you expect to approach something peaceably if you're dressed in riot gear?

>I mean, if someone came up to my house saying "I want to talk this out reasonably,"

>but he was draped with guns like ornaments on a Christmas tree, I sure wouldn't let him

>get too close.

That's a valid point, but the fact is, these things don't need to carry guns and wear armor if they can already shrug off bullets and shoot fire out their eyes. We need to even the odds.

Here's my checklist for when I know I'm going to see something that trips the sight. Even if I'm just cruising, I like to have this stuff on.

Shoes. I go for a good pair of basketball shoes. You may have to make sudden stops and direction changes if you're chasing or running away. One buddy of mine almost bought it when his ankle twisted taking a tight corner. I'm not going to weigh myself down with waffle stomper combat boots.

Shin guards. You can get some lightweight, high-impact plastic ones for soccer, and they're not too obvious under baggy jeans. They're not going to stop a shifter's jaws, but you'll be glad you're wearing them the next time you trip and fall. And if you're running through a garbage-filled alley at night, odds are you will trip and fall.

Knee pads. I managed to find a pair of combination rollerblade kneepads and knee supports. They're neoprene. They've got the plastic plate in front and metal support struts on the side. Not only are they nice if you trip, but a lot of skilled fighters will try to blast your knees out from the side with a kick. These babies cost me \$40 each. They seem expensive until you price out knee surgery. Besides, it was worth it to see the look on a blood fuck's face when he tried to hack my knee and busted his foot instead.

Cup. I use a plastic football cup.

Truss. Yes, I wear one of those weight-belt suspender rigs when I'm out. You never know when you're going to need to really exert yourself, and there's nothing like a slipped disc or a hernia to cramp your style.

Elbow pads. Again, I go for the rollerblading stuff. Sometimes I've even carried a pair of rollerblades around with me as cover. No one's given me a second look. If you know for sure that you're going to fight, not talk, get yourself some heavy-duty plastic forearm guards, the kind hockey players use. Ask anyone who works in an emergency room. In a fight, it's your forearms that get fucked up. These aren't real subtle, though.

Gloves. I go for leather driving gloves. But if you're not wearing gloves already, you're probably too stupid to survive no matter what you do.

Helmet. If I'm posing as Joe Rollerblade, I put on a helmet. If I'm not planning to talk, I put in a boxing mouthpiece, the type that goes upper and lower and has an air hole in the middle. I've lost teeth from impact (long story — it was before I even got called). You don't want to.



CHAPTER 3: SOULMATES

*Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me
because of mine enemies.*

Psalms 69:18

HUNTER RELATIONS

Subject: What Binds Us

From: teacher193

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

In theory, everyone here on the Triage list has something in common — we're the charitable, and we were called to help ease pain and suffering. In theory, we all know and believe that. It's one of the few things we can all agree on in some capacity. In fact, you could say it's our defining characteristic. By now, we're also aware that there are other groups amongst the chosen, groups that have their own defining concepts just as we have ours. A lot of the chosen say that such differences of perspective are part of the Messengers' plan — part of being human, as opposed to the things in the world that are inhuman. Others feel that such differences are accidental, a result of different personalities, not actual common denominators; sooner or later we'll find out that these groupings are just a broad coincidence. We've been through all of those discussions before, and I'm sure we'll wrangle over it again.

Whether different temperaments and objectives in the calling are intentional or accidental doesn't make a huge amount of difference, though. If they are intentional, we all have a part to play as a part of the plan. If they're accidental, no one has any definitive answer, us included. Either way, I don't much care. I have to believe that other chosen are considerably less likely to kill me than are the afflicted, and other chosen understand the true nature of the world. That makes us natural allies, even before you accept that we all want to make a better world, in our various ways.

We, the charitable, have a lot to offer in our mission, and we can gain a lot from other groups, too. It's all a matter of knowing how to deal with them. I've told you about my disastrous first foray in working with other chosen, and I've mentioned that I have a new group of people whom I work with. Between real life and hunter-net, I've come into contact with people with a lot of different philosophies on our purpose. It's not much different to a Parents' Evening at the school. There are ways to bring out the best in everyone. It all comes down to finding common ground. That's what we try to do with the penitent, and with other chosen who fall apart at the seams. That's what we should try to do with each other, too.

Subject: Getting Along

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: trucker235

I try to help everyone I can, without passing judgment on them. It's the only way I have left to me. It frustrates me sometimes that so few of the others can see the value in reaching out and trying to teach a lesson in a positive way with encouragement and love, not with fists. I guess, after all this time, I just don't play too well with others. That doesn't mean I'm not going to do what I can to help, though.

AVENGERS

When I say that other chosen are less likely to kill me, I have to admit that I'm not entirely certain about the militant brothers. Frankly, they make me nervous at the best of times. When I first started out, I was desperate for contact with anyone who understood what I was going through, which is why I pushed my natural unease to the back of my mind and assured myself that I was dealing with reasonable people. You already know how that experiment ended. I've had private emails from a few of you out there telling me that you've had similar experiences.

It's hard work trying to bring the afflicted back to the fold. It's really not made any easier by a howling lunatic with a big "look at me, I'm a throbbing penis substitute" gun who insists on blasting away at everything in sight to make up for his own impotence. Yes, I suppose they're good at fighting, and of course I'd try to heal the wounds of one. If an afflicted has to be condemned — and we all know that many of them are beyond our abilities and time to save, even if we don't like to admit it — someone needs to eliminate it before it harms any more people. That means you need someone to do the dirty work. To my mind, that's what these butchers are for, to take out the garbage. As with any other trash man, though, I wouldn't really want to invite one into my home.

The soldiers among us feel they have a purpose, to defend people by taking the attack to the lost without really thinking about it, just going out there and killing in order to save the rest of us. That's how my mind worked when I was in the war. Kill first, ask questions later. Never mind that the person you're trying to kill might not want to kill you. There's no time to find out, because if you hesitate, you could be dead. I understand that way of thinking, and I know how totally wrong it is. But that doesn't mean there isn't any hope. I saw the error of my ways and managed to correct myself, and I'm nothing special. If I can do it, anyone can, and I'll keep trying to ease these people away from violence, just as I would with a regular person or one of the lost. I will say this, though be cautious if you're going to work with soldiers. They won't take a back seat, and they'll play along with you before turning psychotic, as Teacher learned.

DEFENDERS

Sometimes, I have difficulty telling the militants and the protectors apart. Sometimes they're all brothers. Normally that's in the face of some sort of atrocity, though. If something pushes these people, they don't hesitate to push back — with extreme violence. Before that happens, protectors can seem more reasonable. Their main concern is looking after the people they care for. I can't fault that. I chose to dedicate my efforts to helping others, the afflicted and anyone else in pain, in part at least because I have no close family. If an afflicted is truly penitent and does not attempt to harm people, he or she should have nothing to fear from protectors, which is more than can be said for other militants.

The protectors are pretty easy to work with, to my experience. They're not really particularly keen to get into a fight; they're willing to explore plausible alternatives. You just need to remember that their prime concern is going to be their family or friends or something else held dear, and that they may decide your particular situation is less significant. In which case, you're high and dry.

When the dust settles, shooting to kill is shooting to kill. There are other ways to protect the people you love, like keeping them out of harms way to start with, moving them out of the area if danger threatens, or persuading a would-be attacker that it doesn't need to cause any trouble. At least the guardians among us don't usually rise up and strike without some sort of provocation. I think of them a bit like rattlesnakes: lethal and untamed, but no problem as long as you respect them and step around.

INNOCENTS

Medieval poets had a name for these folk — moon-struck. They're balanced on a fine line between holiness and foolishness, and it's a very hard place to be. We'd be lost without them. While we're off trying to keep as many afflicted as possible within the scope of humanity, they're in the background, trying to keep us on the straight and narrow. They're always optimistic, always trusting, almost child-like. How often have you seen a group of over-focused rationalists come up with a scheme or plan that's so obviously insane that even a child could see through it? It's the same whether you're talking about school authorities, management com-



mittees, government bodies or any other collection of "experts." They take so much for granted, they overlook the cracks. The blessed are there to remind us of the simple side of reality. By questioning complicated ideas, violent ethics and things that seem obvious to the bloodthirsty, the moon-struck go a long way toward keeping us truly human. It's all too easy to denigrate them as blind fools — and it's a critical mistake. If you've ever seen one of the blessed talk a madman down, you'd know what I mean. One of my current group is like this, and he's rapidly becoming our most important planner. I wouldn't trade him for a dozen soldiers.

The wideeyed among us are good people. They're prone to feeling hurt, but aren't we all? They're real good listeners, and they come up with some of the best insights you'll find. I like them.

JUDGES

I know that the arbiters would like us to follow their lead. They appreciate what we can do, most of the time, but they seem to have this inexplicable expectation that it should be on their terms. If I was just starting to heed the call and one of these people was my guide, I'd consider myself lucky. It's extremely easy to pass responsibility up the line. The temptation to let someone else make the decisions — and deal with the guilt when things go wrong — is compelling.

Claiming the right to decide who lives and dies does not necessarily make a person correct, though. I admire their strength of character and their resolve to do what they do, and I don't envy them their task, but they don't always have as clear a sense of the potential for saving the afflicted as we do. Because they're abstracted from the calling by that one small measure, their judgment can be clouded or uncertain. And that's a minor concern. Even before, we knew that justice could fail, and people were wrongly imprisoned or condemned. It's not just an arbiter who's affected by the results of a wrong call — it could be you or the one you hope to save.

The cops among us seem to think they've got the vision to decide life and death. That's no different than the brass I served under, and they were messed up, too.

MARTYRS

I'm going to be honest with you. I find some of us depressing. I know that sounds intolerant, and I know they can be generous, kind, self-sacrificing people, but they seem to operate from such a bleak position. What's the point of looking for pain? I hope I speak for most of us when I say that frankly, our goal is an optimistic, life-affirming one, not a negative, might-as-well-die one. I want to help the afflicted and anyone else who needs it, in as effective a way as possible. Running myself into the ground seems like a pretty poor way of doing it.

Worse, I sometimes get the feeling that their own death might not be enough for these chosen. They always make me feel like they're suicidal, only sublimated, and that perhaps they want to take some friends with them. I'm not following the call to die — although I don't expect to see my fiftieth birthday anymore. I follow it in order to help others live. There's a big difference. Don't get me wrong. They can be very helpful and very useful, and they're unlikely to fly into a killing frenzy. They're great to have with you in a scrape. I just wish they placed more value on survival — theirs and mine.

You can't really value life in others unless you value it in yourself. That's my only objection to the guilt complexes. Aside from that, they're as fine a bunch of high-strung folks as you could hope to meet.

VISIONARIES

"Could it be possible that all skin-changers are born with grandparents of at least three different nationalities?" "Are zombies particularly

interested in drug addicts?" "Does the most effective action consist of the Wu Wei, doing nothing?" I have another question for the navel-gazers: When you see a bloodsucker standing in an alley, sobbing her dead heart out because she's desperate for food but desperate not to hurt people, does it matter if the Heralds are from Mars? Yes, someone has to give some thought to the overall goal of our mission. I'll even admit that if someone turned their musing into a clear answer of how the afflicted came to be and what we can do to help reverse the process, my gratitude would be infinite. But so far, it seems pretty unlikely.

Get them on the street and these chosen can be the most aggravating, frustrating, sickening of all of us. They're hardly ever at home. They spend so much time with their heads in the clouds and asking inane questions that they don't see what they're about to step in. Then, right at the point when you're ready to lead them to the next bunch of demons, they suddenly come out with something so astonishingly useful, germane, insightful and, well, perfect that you're left breathless. They're vital, but by Christ they're tiresome.

I've always felt that the thinkers are a bit like tornadoes that put things straight rather than messing things up. They've got this mighty power inside them, a focus that can tear through a situation and make sense of it, provide answers, give direction and help everything click. When you see it in action, it's awesome. Unlike most other chosen, they're nearly always receptive to the idea of trying to help the lost well, as long as you can make it sound interesting, anyway. Far too often, however, that power just rages around out in the middle of nowhere, not doing any real good.

BYSTANDERS

I have a lot of admiration for what I like to call Good Samaritans. If there's one thing worse than having the truth of the world revealed to you, it's got to be learning the truth without getting any of the tools to deal with it. We have an inkling of what we're up against, we have defences, we can identify the afflicted, and we even have some capabilities. These people don't have any of that.

When I started out in teaching, my first assignment was sports. In one of my classes, there was a thin, sickly girl. Part of it was poor food intake, part was asthma, part was bad genetic predisposition. Every lesson, whatever it was we did, she would come last by a long shot. All the other kids taunted her. Despite all of this, she was always cheerful and brave about lessons. She never tried to duck out, she always did her best, knowing that she was no match for the others. She wouldn't let me help out or ease the load at all. She just smiled and got on with it. A brave girl with a strong sense of duty. She killed herself in the end, as it happens, a deliberate heroin overdose and a sad note.

The real point is that dogged persistence in the face of certain defeat, the determination to do the right thing. That takes guts, far more so than doing the right thing when you're fast and strong and well protected. A lot of us scorn the people who want to help, even manipulate them and put them into danger. There's no excuse for that. Good Samaritans can be a great help. Many of them have a lot of specialist skills and facilities to offer us as parts of their former — and ongoing — lives. They're nowhere near as closed-minded as the chosen can be, either. A lot of them are perfectly happy to try to help save the afflicted, even for the chance to do something, and they don't argue over calling the shots. When things are as dangerous as they are, you need all the help you can get.

FELLOW REDEEMERS

The dutiful are good, kind people, but even many of us can't see that charity is something you have to practice with every breath, not just on your own terms. Driver comes across with a lot of help for a lot of people, so long as they're not the lost. Teacher does what's right until she gets bored or discouraged. Donor feels

sympathy for those who share his social situation, but has little interest in helping the privileged. I can't subscribe to any of that discrimination. Love should be unconditional, and too many of us pick and choose.

Have you noticed the way we squabble about who are the most deserving of our mercy? Some pick the afflicted, while others say the chosen are more needy, and still others point to the vulnerable. Ashram is reluctant to work with meat-eaters, while Teacher uses soldiers to attack the lost she doesn't feel like helping. We can't even agree whether all penitents are worth saving, with Alice saying we should concentrate on conscripts, the ones who never wanted what happened to them.

Given how we, presumably people with at least similar values, disagree, it's no wonder that we often misunderstand the others and that they don't get our motivations. We'd set a much better example to both the afflicted and the rest of the chosen if we could love unconditionally. What wonders we might achieve.

I've said it before: I can only believe that our division is part of a greater plan. But I also have to believe that I was drafted for who I am. That's why I still try to like and respect other chosen, even though I'm often disappointed or frustrated by them. It's also why I pursue the mission alone, given the choice. I don't want to turn down any request for help, and I don't want to risk other people's lives. I'm aware of the dangers of what I do. I don't pretend to have all the answers. In fact, I'm not too worried about whether there even are answers. Our situation just is and we have to deal with it and each other.

WORKING TOGETHER

We have our differences — in how to follow the calling, in whom we choose to focus our efforts on, and in deciding which of the afflicted we should try to save and which we should abandon. Despite this, we do have a lot in common. The primary goal of many of us here, after all, is to ease suffering and prevent loss of life. Even Driver, with his disinclination to aid the afflicted, admits that he feels compassion for them and admires those of us who try to assist them.

This desire to heal brings us together, and I believe that it gives us an important common ground. We know that we can rely on each other's basic motivation to be good — well, those of us who are sane, anyway. That's something that many of the other chosen do not have. I imagine that if your primary motivation is to destroy creatures that you're angry with, getting along with others of a similar mindset must be rather difficult. Who decides what creature is killed, and what happens if brothers get in each other's way?

From: ashram242

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Working Together

While I recognise the utility of your suggestions, I am concerned that you use the idea of co-operation to excuse your own failings. It is not seemly to refuse aid to those who are prepared to follow the path of peace that Lord Shiva has revealed. I suggest that you meditate upon this, and ask yourself whether your selections of diseased that you deem worthy are truly a matter of holy guidance, or whether the development of your own skills would increase the scope of your abilities to help.

I also think I'm right in saying that most of us, the forgiving, are pretty blind to differences like skin colour, religion, sex, weight and so on. I know that one or two of us on this list find it difficult to put aside certain religious prejudices, but I don't think that we actually look down on each other as individuals. The necessities before us are far too important for that.

On the other hand, we certainly have issues that we disagree on, mostly concerning the potential to rehabilitate strays. The spectrum of opinion ranges from "none" to "all," and even those of us somewhere in between differ on the exact point at which we would abandon a being. It's easy to get caught up in these differences, to let our passions become inflamed. Yet it's too obvious for words that fighting about it should be out of the question.

Think about it this way: Trucker says he is compelled to help all of the afflicted, while Driver only spends time on the living. Well, speaking objectively, both groups need assistance. Perhaps we are chosen because our temperaments are best suited to help the people we feel need it most. In other words, maybe we're called to help only the beings we have a chance of helping, and as a group we administer to them all.

I'm not saying that's absolutely the case — Who can say for sure? — but it does give us a good reason to be tolerant of the differences between us, and that's worth a lot in itself.

WORKING WITH OTHER CREEDS

It's interesting to hear what Teacher has to say about us working together. I believe we were all chosen for some reason or another, as part of a bigger plan. Maybe I'd understand it a bit better if I could see the whole thing, but I can't. So if I deviate from the path I feel is right, maybe I'm risking all sorts of trouble by not being there to do my intended job. That means I'm going to help everyone I can, regardless of how violent or unpleasant.

But it also means I can't condemn anyone's actions, if they're sure it's the right thing to do. I just don't know the plan. To take an extreme example, let's assume someone is absolutely and genuinely convinced that the right thing to do is kill me. Maybe it's one of the lost, someone who feels that I'm a threat to their security or something. But it could also be one of the chosen, for whatever crazy-ass reason. (I've been called a traitor before.)

Completely objectively, who am I to say whether that person is right or wrong? To have any idea, I'd need to know the plan, to be able to say, No, actually it's crucial that I be in Nashville on August 3rd, or whatever. All I can go on is my own instinct. I respect your right to try to hurt me, so long as you act from your true will, not just because you're pissed. At the same time, though, I have a right to resist being hurt, to run away or whatever. As long as we both follow our true wills, what we feel is truly right, were both correct.

It could be really important for someone to try to kill me, fail, and come to an understanding of why that was inappropriate. Well, it might be that the thing I have to do is desperately resist death to make a point with someone. Pretty hard fate, if that's the way it's got to be, but fortunately I don't know if it is. (And before anyone says anything, no, I don't believe that's what's in store for me, and I'm not obsessed with dying. It's just an example.)

The point I'm trying to make is this: you have to follow your heart. I let myself be deafened to mine when I was young, and the results were disastrous. I'm going to make sure I keep on listening real close from now on. So long as the people you're working with are genuine in what they believe, it doesn't matter how different your views are. So long as you respect each other's right to an opinion, you don't need to be divided.

To use another example, we tend to clash the most with soldiers, because their first answer is usually violence and ours is usually reconciliation. Their immediate reaction is to leap up and start shooting, while ours is to try to listen and find forgiveness. They tend to be real opinionated about

it too, and it's often personal. Monsters killed my family and now it's payback time. Their situations are often tragic, and I feel sorry for them. Keeping all that hate all the time has got to be exhausting. I had plenty of buddies like that back in the war.

A little while ago I wrote about a soldier friend out West. I'll call her Mary. She's a good person, but real unforgiving. I was passing through and she asked me to help with a job. I can't heal people like others on this list have talked about, but I do know some field medicine, and Mary wanted me to be backup in the van in case one of her team got hurt. She knows the way I work.

When she explained her plan, things got a bit tense, but we respected each other. Even though we disagreed on every point about what to do, even though we yelled at each other, we never disliked each other. In the end, we agreed to a compromise: we'd both do what we thought was right. The bottom line is, the bloodsucker Mary was hunting wouldn't trust me, blundered into her trap, and got cut down. One of Mary's team got beat up pretty bad, but I managed to stabilize him and I hear he's fine. Mary and I are still friends.

As long as you remember that we can all be friends with each other, and accept that we're all drafted into the service for different reasons, with different aims, it's easy to get along. Sometimes it means you end up working at cross purposes, but as long as everyone respects everyone else's right to act on their true will, we can all stay friends. I still prefer to work alone, but that's just part of my particular calling, too.

WORKING ALONE

I've spent quite a lot of my time working outside of a group. After the first burned me, I was extremely low on trust. I spent too long trying to help the afflicted on my own. It seemed to be the answer at the time. There were no arguments about which could be saved and which could not, whether a particular creature should be put out of its misery or whether it presented a clear danger.

As it happens, I was wrong. Trucker says he likes to work alone, and that's fine, but it didn't work out for me. Although I no longer had arguments to deal with, I found that my problem was lack of focus, and indecision. Could I be sure a particular afflicted was salvageable? Would everything be okay if I just didn't meddle, or should I take some sort of action? Possessed houses posed problems, for example. The spirits I encountered didn't seem that aware of what was going on around them. They appeared perfectly satisfied with what they were up to. They didn't bother

the living in any way, and gave no evidence of actually harming anyone. So should I have tried to make contact, perform some sort of exorcism, or just left well enough alone?

I couldn't tell which course would lead to the least pain. Although a ghost might seem harmless and content, does that mean it never hurts others or never feels tormented by being earthbound? I lacked the judgment to make that sort of call.

Sometimes, knowing the correct path of action was worse. When I managed to identify an afflicted that was clearly beyond my help, one that posed an obvious and immediate danger to the general public, the answer was obvious — destroy it. But I'm no fighter. I tried following one thing around for a couple of nights, trying to mop up after it, heal the people it wounded. I couldn't keep up with it. I lacked the tools to defend the vulnerable or to take it out myself. It was extremely frustrating. I didn't even have the nerve to stand in its way to give others a chance to escape.

That's why I started passing notes to my old group. I thought, that way someone would take action, and if any of them got hurt, well, it didn't really matter — after all, the group was just getting what it wanted: fresh targets to slaughter. Still, it wasn't a particularly enlightened stand. I quickly found that I just didn't have any answers. I'm not big on faith, as I think I mentioned. All I really had was the desire to help, the will to perform charity, but without any focus, direction or goal.

In other words, I found myself without any of the things that can be provided by allies.

I think Trucker is right. There is a reason for our different viewpoints. We're like a body. I see the militant as the right hand, threatening with the sword, while we're the left, offering aid. Just like hands, we need a head to direct us, arms to move us, legs to support us. Without these things, we're only a fraction as effective as we could be. With hindsight, I think it was arrogant of me to try to go it alone. It was right to abandon those killers, but foolish to think I could answer the call without help. I just don't have the courage, understanding, sympathy or faith to work on my own.

I was introduced to my current group by another of the dutiful, who I'll refer to as Sally. I worked with just her for a month, which was quite an eye-opener. We had focus and were more effective together in providing help to the needy. But we still lacked any sort of way to deal with extreme actions when an afflicted was beyond help. She was more tolerant than I am, more understanding, and so she spurred me on to try to help afflicted that I would have given up on. Eventually, Sally persuaded me to meet with the rest of her — now my — group, for which I am extremely grateful. I discovered in the end that she had identified me as needing help. On reflection, I guess I did. We could have worked together without the others if we had to, because there was little or no tension between us, but I think our weaknesses would have made us vulnerable.

LIVING OR DEAD?

A disturbing incident occurred last night. We have been observing a nest of the afflicted a bit outside our usual territory. The beings exhibit some interesting dynamics. The leader is clearly irredeemable — a thorough bastard — and so are a couple of his cohorts (the leader even destroyed one of his own, with the others' help). But one seems extremely uncertain about his condition and his "associates," and might be salvageable.

We spent most of the evening keeping an eye on them, when to my horror I noticed one of the frothers from my old group observing them, too. I'd better start using names to describe this episode or it will be confusing. Don't worry, they'll all be false. I'll call my old group, the violent ones, the Swords, and my current group the Shields, because that rather indicates our different

From: alice196

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: Working with Others

Trucker235, you're either a madman or a saint. I'm not sure which. How do you know whether you're following your "true will" or whether you're simply making a bad call? Worse, how can you tell you're not being manipulated by something into thinking what you do? If you persist in trying to stand between hunters and their targets, one of the two is going to kill you sooner or later, and it probably won't be one of the other side.

You look out for yourself, you crazy old coot. I'd hate not to read any more of your ramblings.

— "Curiouser and curiouser, said Alice."



purposes. I'll call the afflicted who we thought might be saved Arnold. I'll refer to the Boss as just that. So, I realised that the Swords were watching the same afflicted that we were. If they still operate in the same way, they'll be back tonight to launch an attack.

Now I'm in a real quandary. Do we stay out of the way of the Swords, let them get on with it, and chalk Arnold up as a regrettable loss? After all, The Boss is evil and definitely needs to be condemned. Should we try to distract Arnold and get him out of the area before the Swords strike, and then see if we can help him? Should we reveal ourselves to the Swords and try to talk them into waiting a bit, even though I know there's no point? Should we tip off The Boss so that he can escape? The Shields are divided. Sally and Michael (the moon-struck) really want to try to help Arnold, but the other two think damage control is a better option.

I suppose I have to put my money where my mouth is and try to find faith in Trucker's grand plan. If all of the chosen have a purpose then we're all valuable, even those brothers in the Swords. I can't quite bring myself to endanger other chosen, even if it means putting people I disdain before an afflicted I feel sympathy for.

EXTREMISTS

It must be fate. Right when Teacher decides to try to have faith in my ideas, I have reason to doubt them.

I have had a friend. He's one of us, someone I really trusted, once. He saved several of the afflicted, offered them guidance and rehabilitation. I'll call him Ube, for the moment.

I didn't know he had started preaching that he was the only one who truly understood the calling. It seems he found God in the last couple of months, but his god showed him the right way. It apparently involved turning his back on anyone who didn't do things exactly his way. He walked out on his friends, took the penitents whom he'd attracted with him, and found a handful of chosen who were willing to do things his way. In itself, none of that is necessarily bad. It could all fit in with the plan.

But it's worse than that. I've heard he's sending his people out to grab the lost and bring them back to him. And not just the lost, either. A few chosen who have openly disagreed with him in front of the others have been

From: outback295

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: You're All Bloody Maniacs

Jesus, mate, and I thought you were off your rocker. I'm fucked if I know how you can have the heart to say that starting a religion can suit the call. That sounds like a bunch of self-important shit to me. We're just the poor sods who got the job. Still, you're bang on that it's nothing compared to kidnapping some poor bastard and killing him when he won't change teams.

Maybe we don't have our own cops taking care of things, but that doesn't mean we have to take that kind of bullshit lying down. You've got to rat on this nasty fucker. You're going to have to post a message to the main list, and offer all the skinny you know — the guy's name, where he can be found, what sort of numbers he's got on his side and what backup he's got from the demons.

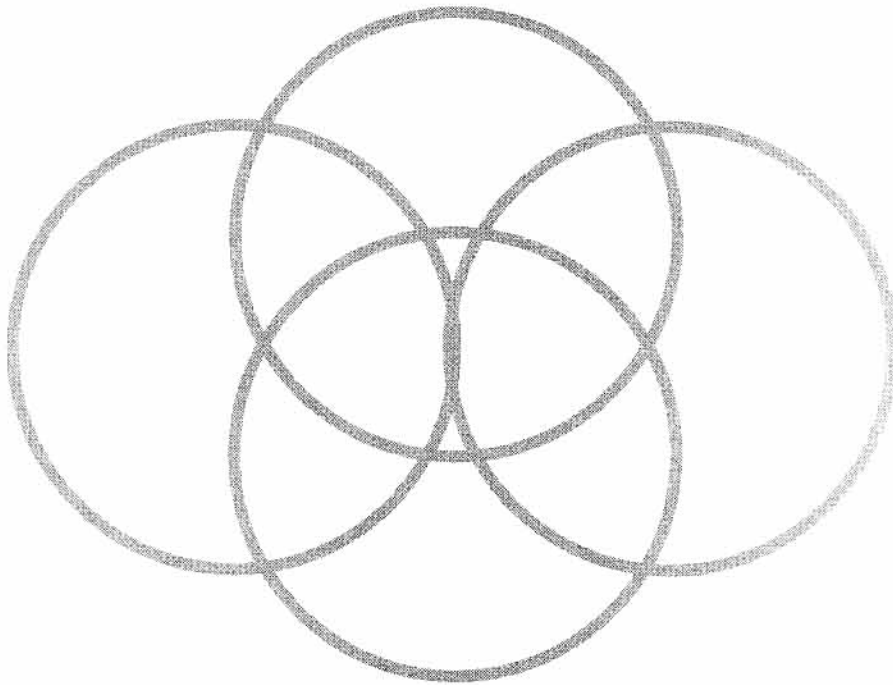
Otherwise, next thing you know he'll be doing a Jonestown.

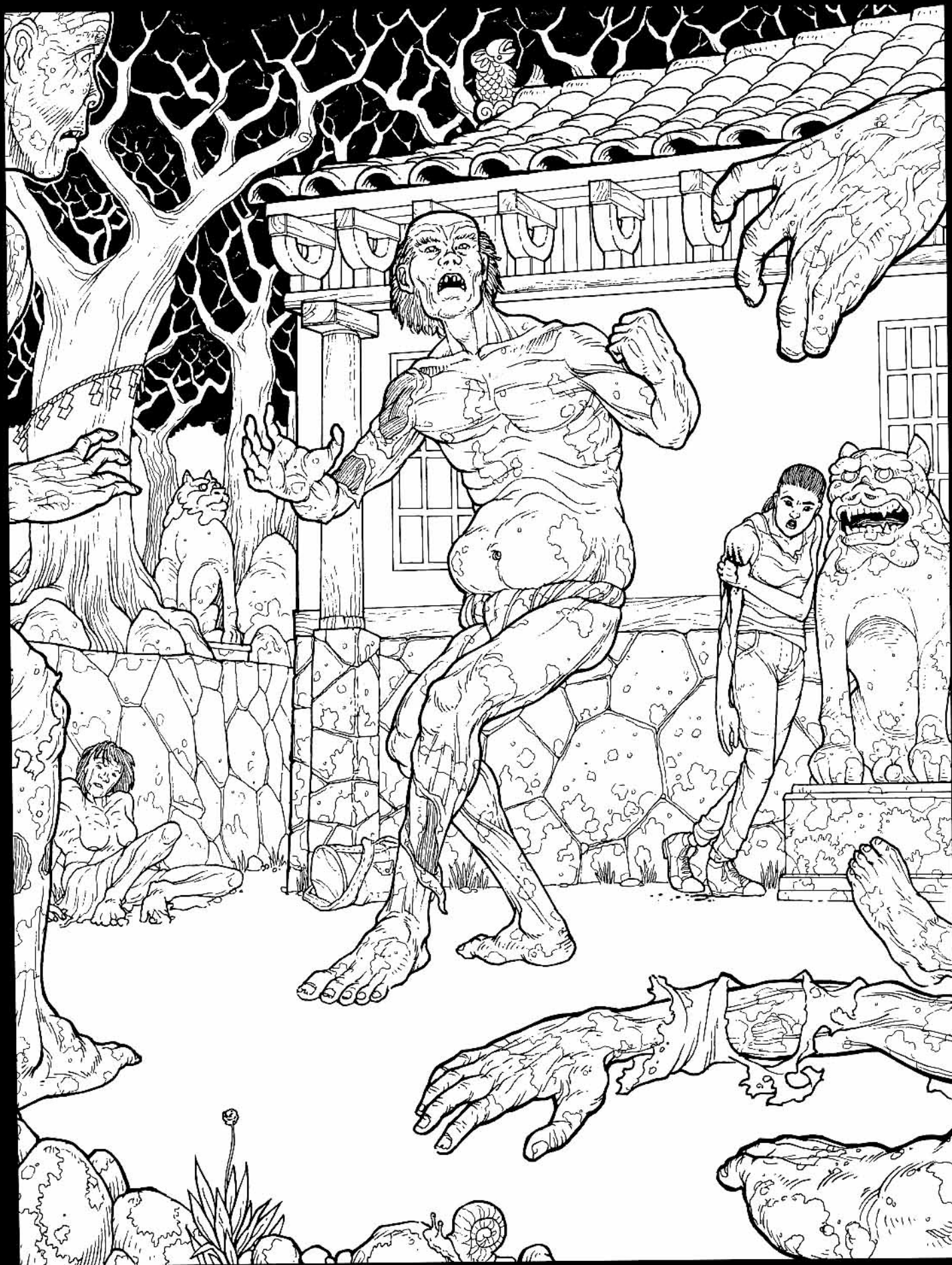
invited to join him. Remaining members of Joe's former group don't know where he's gone. Word is, Joe was prepared to kill anyone who wouldn't do what he said.

I think the plan is broad, but not that broad. You've got to respect other people's opinions for the plan to have a chance. Maybe Joe is genuine and he truly

believes he's heard the word of God, but I can't believe that God would want us to kidnap and kill people.

There's nothing wrong with people following him, I guess. That happens any time a group is confused and scared and one person seems confident. But preying on people's fears and using them to control their lives? That's wrong.





CHAPTER 4: THE NEXT WORLD

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up,
and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

— Luke 21:28

OUR PURPOSE

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: driver800

Subject: Ultimate Plans

Ultimate plans. How we're going to reclaim the earth from them. A lot of grandiose thinking about how we're going to get from our current sorry state to some rosy future.

I used to have big plans. Scratch that. I used to have a fairly modest plan. I was going to take one part of one city and save it. If that worked out, I'm sure I'd be chiming in with all kinds of naïve, well-meaning, cheerful suggestions right now.

I don't trust big plans anymore.

A week ago, my group and I decided to clean out the hospital of the things inside. I'm not interested in telling the story. I'm not proud of how it all happened. Suffice to say that "Doctor Roy" is dead, and so is "Michelle," both taken out where they hid during the day. I always knew he deserved it. As it turns out, she didn't — at least, she was as much a victim of him as so many patients were. I only learned it too late, before one of the people who came to town to help — this Mexican guy — put a bullet in her head.

It doesn't end there, either. Day before yesterday, my wife kicked me out of the house. My daughter wouldn't talk to me — wouldn't even look at me. See, the things we do against the monsters run deeper than we think. Turns out we're the ignorant ones. Someone showed my wife pictures of me kissing other women.

A couple of different women. I could lie and say it was the kiss of life in each case, but to wash it. Only in one. The other is my fault. It's just what my wife thought: I'm an adulterer. Or was. After I was chosen, I broke it off... eventually. That's the real reason I had an apartment downtown, ready to be used as a hiding place. I was already hiding there, I guess.

Last night, I met my wife and her lawyer at a restaurant. He was from New England, which struck me odd. She didn't seem real clear on why her lawyer was from Massachusetts and had flown out to represent her. Once I looked with the sight, it made sense.

His name is Frederick Newcastle. If anyone wants to kill him, I'll help.

Fred was very polite while my wife was present, but she left us alone for a while at his suggestion, and that's when the facade dropped. He threatened me. He threatened my family. He pretty much told me that my daughter was getting seduced and corrupted even as we spoke. And there was a way I could protect them.

He showed me a piece of paper with a symbol on it. One of our symbols, but something was wrong with it. It was as if someone drew it who didn't understand what it meant, which turned out to be the case. He said that if I explained everything, my family would be left alone. So would I. He said he didn't even hold it against me that I killed the ones in the hospital. He had nothing but unkind words for them. He implied that I'd done him a favor by creating an opening.

I tried to threaten him, but I didn't do a very good job. I guess I'm not good at it. I told him that what happened to them was going to happen to him. I told him I knew what they were up to in the graveyard.

That's when he started to laugh.

It turns out Roy and Michelle didn't make those dead people come back. It just happened, maybe like in that town in Canada. Roy and Michelle were trying to stop them, because they didn't want people looking too hard at all the weird things going on. Newcastle was the "expert" they brought in to destroy the zombies, but he has no interest finishing now that "the pussies" have been killed.

At the time I didn't believe him. But today's paper said there was some kind of riot down by the graveyard. Nine people were killed, including a cop. Details on what started it were vague.

I know you're not supposed to reveal personal information on lists, but I'm fucked anyway. If it's true that they don't know who or what we are, we can still do something about them. Birmingham is in trouble, people. Anyone who can come, please do. I probably can't meet with you. I'm compromised. I'm typing this from a library and hoping I'm secure. Memphis, thanks for the tip about the money. I'm going to need it now that my assets are frozen. Let's hope they don't have total control over the Swiss banks.

So, you can see why I don't trust ultimate plans. That's the scale they work on. I shot for the moon, and what happened? I cleaned out the subtle ones, only to take the lid off the insane ones, leaving the city open for something worse and ruining my own life.

Learn from my lesson. Do good when you see the chance. Don't try to think you've got the perspective to act on the big scale. You'll just blunder into something twice as bad.

Subject: Second Thoughts

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

From: trucker235

I've decided to ignore everything I've stood for, and I've done it. I copied my previous post to Triage onto the main list, and added the information that I have, which isn't very much. You can read it all there. I previously called my former friend Joe, but his real name is Gerry.

I still have second thoughts. I hope that putting Gerry's name and address up was the right thing to do, but it rips me apart. It's only been a few hours and I've already downloaded a bunch of emails, many from people telling me in great detail of the horrific things they're going to do to poor Gerry. I don't know how it will pan out, and I don't want to. I'll be responsible for a whole bunch more deaths, despite my vow to never let it happen again. I had a couple of death threats as well — got called traitor again, too. I don't know if Gerry's on the main list, or even here on Triage. If he is, he'll probably do his best to reveal who I am in retaliation. He seemed pretty far gone, last I saw him. He doesn't know my real name, but he could certainly provide a good description of me. Then again, maybe he'll come after me personally. Maybe that's what I deserve.

All I ever wanted to do was ease pain, help bring the lost back to the rest of us. That's what we're supposed to do. Try to get the lost to come home. It's never too late for them to change if they can find the will. If we could bring enough back to our side, we would set an example for the rest. They'd be able to look to us, the forgiving and the penitent working together, and see that their brethren are at peace with the world and themselves. Pretty soon, we'd have to spend our time helping them to read just instead of trying to persuade them to change. We could go all the way, make the calling obsolete, and get on with the business of helping and healing.

If enough of the lost came home, I don't think there'd be any of the rest so stuck in their ways that they couldn't see the benefits of returning, too. If virtue is its own reward, evil is its own punishment. No matter how callous you think you are, being evil always hurts a part of you. You can never be happy that way. With enough of the lost becoming penitent, those that remain would be so undermined that they'd have no choice but to come back. You can't control the world with just a handful of troops, no matter how hard you try. Sooner or later, there would be no options left.

From: ashram242

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Purpose

I sympathise with your pain, Trucker235. Having to abandon one's deepest principles is always a most unpleasant experience. I do not agree with you as to the final purpose of our calling, however. You Americans are so obsessed with "freedom" that you give little thought to what it means. Proper freedom is anarchy, and that is a most terrible thing. The desirable state of affairs is to attain order, so that all may live in peaceful knowledge of their station and seek to improve their lot on the wheel of life without molestation. It is right and proper that the diseased should be given the chance to repent. Without the opportunity to make amends, it is not possible to truly demonstrate that one is regretful of the past. Our holy duty is to offer that forgiveness, to provide a way for salvation to be attained. Purification is never easy, however, and the diseased must learn to accept the strictures of the gods, to make offerings and pilgrimages to regain favour. Where one has committed sin, there must be the chance for him to repent, but he must also have the humbleness to accept the commands of the divine. Proper submission and service is the means to purity and higher station on the next turn of the wheel. We are doing the will of Brahma when we offer aid. It is only right and proper that when the world is remade, we, the holiest, will accept the submission and obedience of the people of the world, in the name of the gods.

At least, that's my dream. I know it would be an uphill battle at the very best — maybe just a sad daydream. But with the Heralds keeping the plan going, maybe we have a chance. I might not get to see it, but someone would. If not, it all comes down to blood and death again.

THE FATE OF THE OTHER SIDE

I've broken off from the others in my group who survived the hospital assault. I told them it's for the best, now that I'm being watched, and since I'm the only one who's been threatened so far.

Obviously, they haven't killed me yet. As long as they hope I might cave in and spill the beans, they won't do anything to me. I think, anyway. Anyone who wants to can contact me for information on finding my daughter. Sure, there might be another monster on this list, but she's already in there with a group of them. Maybe the demon I don't know is an angel in disguise. I can't try to find her personally. It would be like pulling the trigger myself.

Frederick has the dead under some kind of control, I guess. There haven't been any more "riots."

My divorce is turning into quite the legal epic. It's both inspiring and disgusting to watch my old business friends and their lawyers flock to my side, even though everyone knows I'm an adulterer. Maybe they're all getting some on the side, too. Or maybe they just want to prove something to "that stuck up Yankee-lawyer S.O.B."

I do have one piece of good news. I've got a roommate. I'll call him Renfield, since he used to be a blood slave.

Renfield was the caretaker at the graveyard. He showed up one day, begging for my help. He said he heard I could heal people somehow. Maybe Roy and Michelle weren't as oblivious to me that night as I thought. Renfield promised me anything if I could take away the cravings, make him stop wanting their blood.

What he told me confirms what a few other people online have observed. Vampires give their blood to others to create blood slaves. Renfield says the blood is like a drug — it doesn't take long at all to get hooked, and once you are, you're willing to do just about anything for a fix.

Renfield's source was Doctor Roy. When the new vampires took over, Renfield went to them and asked to be theirs instead. When he couldn't offer any information about my group — me, I guess — he said they just laughed at him. Apparently they suggested that he "go see the man who killed his master." I guess the local dead things have started talking about us as much as we've been talking about them.

I tried the kiss of life on Renfield, but it didn't seem to ease his craving. If it hurts the undead and heals the living, maybe it's neutral to those somewhere in between? Does anyone know how to make this work? Am I doing something wrong?

I talked a lot earlier about the terrible things that monsters do to the defenseless, but Renfield has shown me that what they do to their servants is worse. Maybe he chose to join "the other side," but watching him suffer, I can only think that his withdrawal is penance enough for his sins. I'm trying to help him as much as I can.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARITY

Subject: Doing What We Can

From: teacher193

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

I promised to let you all know how events unfolded between the Swords and the afflicted. There were no last-minute changes of plan on our part, although Michael and Sally were disappointed with the decision not to interfere. We knew the afflicted's routines fairly well, so it wasn't that difficult to find the ambush that the Swords had prepared. It was in a quiet car park. The Swords were down to three people, but I knew them to be tough and resourceful, so I felt fairly sure they'd endure. Besides, their leader — Thomas, the same one who used me to kill that girl in the alley — was in the army, and he often managed to acquire weapons.

Everything went smoothly a first, as far as I could tell. We were in the van, across the car park, keeping our heads down. The Swords had positioned their vehicle centrally, for convenient access, I suppose. The afflicted arrived in a black BMW 5-series, the car of choice for drug dealers and pimps throughout Britain. They parked relatively close to the Swords. As the creatures got out of the car, Thomas and his lads piled out the back of theirs and charged. They started shooting as they closed, with silencers, I believe, since the guns made little noise. The creatures did not expect to be jumped, but did their best to rally.

It was chaos, and I didn't have a clear view of the situation. After a few seconds, everyone except The Boss seemed to be down. He looked to be in bad shape, but was still standing over Thomas. We decided we couldn't wait any longer and exited the van. Before we could get close enough to do anything, Thomas reached up, grabbed The Boss' shirt, and pulled the demon down, on top of him. There was a muffled thump. Mr. Big almost seemed to bounce, and then neither moved.

Thomas had killed himself and the demon with a grenade. Simon was dead too, his throat ripped out, but Chris was still alive. I used my healing to stabilise



him, then Michael got him over to our van. Amazingly, Arnold, the penitent I was concerned for, was alive, hiding under the car. When we found him, he warned us to leave him alone, that he didn't want any trouble. Then he actually begged us not to hurt him!

That was all last night. We got out of there as quickly as possible and Arnold came with us after I spoke to him. We left Chris on the curb in front of a hospital in a different town, hid Arnold in a small abandoned home out in the countryside, where we could meet again, and headed home.

It's amazing that the result we hoped for came about without us actually taking any action. I feel sorry for Thomas, though. If he'd been less fixated on taking his enemy with him, we might have been able to kill The Boss or chase him off and save Thomas' life. Maybe the Heralds really do have some sort of plan.

Our success makes me think. The way I see it, we're here — the dutiful, that is — to save the afflicted that can be salvaged. And to help those chosen who get hurt putting down the ones that can't be saved. That's our purpose. Not everyone can be brought around. I'd love to think they can be, but they can't. Even with the will and all the resources, there were always kids at school who were just bad. It's the same with the afflicted. If one can be saved, however, we'll find a way to do it. Every penitent we can gather strengthens our side. Even if the people we save refuse to take any part in the calling, we've weakened the other side by one. If they will help, we've gained a vital source of information and maybe a powerful ally.

If our particular mission is to save the afflicted that we can, then the overall goal of the chosen must be to return the world to human control. After that, I confess I don't really know. We can cross that bridge when we come to it. There will always be a need for healers and mediators, with or without the afflicted in our midst, so we don't need to worry about going out of business.

There needs to be a balance in the way the calling is followed, though. That's why it's so vital that we remain merciful and caring. Without us, the chosen are left to be aggressive. The first thing you learn in any confrontational situation, I'm told, is to create or look for an escape route. Without us, the afflicted are locked into a war of survival with the other chosen. They'll be forced

to fight tooth and nail, because there would be no option. We are the olive branch for the afflicted, the vital way out. That's why it is so crucial that we always remain charitable, regardless of the cost. Without us, a lot more lives would be lost — on both sides.

FORGIVENESS

Things aren't going well with Renfield. Since my last post, he's attacked me twice. Both times at night, both times he tried to bite me. If he wasn't so weak from withdrawal, I'd probably be dead. He sleeps chained up now — by his own request. Only the sight gives me hope. He's still got a dark look to him, but it's fading slowly.

It's taking its toll, though. In the few weeks he's been with me, he's aged ten years. I think his thought processes are impaired, maybe permanently. Or maybe it's just the constant pain. I got myself a prescription for painkillers and those help him a little, but I don't want him to trade one addiction for another. But maybe that's the best thing. At least doctors know what to do with a simple drug addiction.

The only reason I feel free to even post this message is to keep Newcastle and his cronies distracted. They know I'm here, not somewhere else causing trouble. To all of you who're coming through town, thanks. I beg you, keep the pressure on as much as possible. The fire was a good idea. I think I killed a lot of zombies. Of course, I don't dare get too close for fear of my watchers discovering you.

Renfield wants to be free. Sometimes I think he'd go back to them in a second, if he only had the chance. Other times I think he'd kill himself.

Maybe Renfield is my penance for being so arrogant, so sure of myself. How many people died in the "riot"? How many have Newcastle and his friends killed, now that I've opened the way for them? How much blood is on my hands? His very presence reminds me daily of how I've failed.

COMMON MISTAKES

I've done a lot of soulsearching over the last couple of days. I discovered a lot of things that I didn't like. I've been giving a lot of thought to failure. There seems to be plenty of it around at the moment. "To err is human." I keep reminding myself, but it doesn't make it any easier. Gerry was a good man, once. I'm just not cut out to be an executioner. As most of us have admitted over the last few weeks, we do have flaws and weaknesses, and many of them are relatively common among us.

If we have a clear idea of the mistakes that we make, I figure we have a better chance of avoiding them. Please forgive me if I seem critical (it's because I'm disappointed with myself). I want to discuss our most common mistakes, how they happen and what their warning signs are. I do these things too, so I'm not persecuting anyone. If you're offended, maybe you should ask yourself why.

ARROGANCE

Arrogance is our most common failing. It's so easy to fall into. Convince yourself that your ideas are right, that your path is the right one, and your doubts disappear. It really isolates you, though. It makes it difficult to work with others, or even to connect with them. If you have no doubt about your opinions, you never listen to what other people have to say.

It goes further than all that, though. After arrogance comes pride, and then delusions of grandeur. We forget that our gifts were meant to help us heal the world. Then we become choosy with our compassion, and finally we decide that we're better than everyone else, just like Gerry did.

Arrogance starts a certainty in your opinions, even in situations of reasonable doubt. That's how you can tell it apart from confidence — arrogance allows no room for doubt, even when there's plenty of room. The antidote is to remember how much

Subject: Duty

From: dzidzat155

To: triage.list@hunter-net.org

What many outside of this country do not know is that the Kings of Hell are dutiful servants of Jade Emperor. There is no malice within them. As with all of the spirits who work for Heaven, they are obedient functionaries with a specific task. They judge the dead, and assign them penances according to their sins. They do so according to lists provided by Jade Emperor. That is the way of things. This often seems strange to people brought up with the chaotic religions of the West. You are used to believing that Hell is a place of malice, run by evil. In truth, this is not the way things are. Heaven requires that every person performs an allotted task. Evil is failing to perform duty. We have been given a stern duty, to remind the restless of their duty to Jade Emperor, that they might return to righteousness. The restless must be reminded of their duty, and their disobedience punished according to the dictates of Heaven.

pain there is in the world, how much suffering you will never get to see, let alone help with. Try to understand that every action that brings peace to one person may bring pain to another. It's cause and effect.

EMPATHY

Trying too hard to feel for others is a trap, too. I know it doesn't sound much like a flaw. It isn't when it's used in moderation. Without empathy, we couldn't understand how anyone else feels, and so we'd never be able to help people. But it can be taken too far and it can lead to delusion. If we allow ourselves to be too sympathetic, it becomes easy to manipulate us. If that happens, it's not us calling the shots. We all want to heal, to help others. If you allow yourself to hear what you want to hear, without insisting on proof, you may expose yourself and the others you work with to extreme danger.

The first sign that you're letting empathy get the better of your common sense is when you want to hear particular answers so much that you give one of the lost repeated opportunities, no matter how badly he betrays you. As things progress, you may wind up running errands for the lost, maybe even serving them.

More dangerous is seeing things you want to in the lost, even when they're not there. Hearing an imaginary tone of reconciliation. Seeing grief after an atrocity. The next thing you know, you'll mistake a demon for one of the penitent and you'll wind up dead.

Avoid this trap by reminding yourself that the lost are clever and cunning predators.

COMPLACENCY

Complacency is related to arrogance, but it's less common. It's that irrational feeling that everything is okay, that it will all be all right, no matter what the circumstances. If, having taken an action, you find yourself sitting back with a satisfied smile, secure in the knowledge that you've done the right thing — even before you know any of the results — then you suffer from complacency.

Another way that it can manifest is in the "It won't happen to me" syndrome. You know better than other people and don't need to listen to their warnings or advice. If you're reading and thinking, "I'm not like that. He means someone else. I'd never be that way," "I'm afraid you already are."

If you take complacency too far, you become blind to dangers and details. You feel like you can get away without taking even basic precautions. Your body will be found soon after, and you can't help heal the world when you're dead.

I know all about complacency. I've was so self-righteous that I thought I would never have to face a now-in situation. What I haven't told you is that Gerry nearly got me. My guard was down, and I thought he was my friend, so when he asked me to meet him, I didn't think anything of it. "He could never be a threat," I told myself. We met at a bar, and after we were there for a while, the bartender asked, "Is your friend all right? I don't want any trouble in here."

That's when I truly saw Gerry for the first time. He had this wacked-out look in his eyes. I looked at him and around the bar, and saw that a couple of guys, one of which was lost, were at the next table, watching me. I didn't hang around. I don't think they expected me to take off so suddenly.

INDECISION

Last, but definitely not least, is indecision. That's what happens when you become too paranoid, worrying about whether you're arrogant, complacent, empathizing or even safe. The bottom line is that we're not really supposed to sit around worrying too much about stuff. If we get indecisive, we lose the focus to actually do anything, and we forget our part in the Herald's plan. We spend so much time fretting about whether we're doing the right thing, seeing all the different possible angles, that we don't get round to ever helping any of the lost.

It would be real easy for me to become indecisive right now. It would give me a great reason to avoid making any more mistakes. But sometimes doing nothing is the

biggest mistake of all. If you drag your heels because you're not sure of an action, even when your gut tells you what's right, you're suffering from indecision. Back in the war, indecision meant you buttoned up while the enemy crept in to slit your throats. I'm not sure things are all that different now.

You've got to find a middle ground between not thinking about consequences and not thinking about anything at all. It's hard. I don't really know how to do it. I guess I just keep trying to do what seems right, help those who need it, and let the Herald's guide me.

And don't expect to be right every time, either. I got an email from Gerry. It says, "You forfeit your right to live and will be executed like the traitor you are."

If I suddenly go quiet, you know what's happened.

CONDEMNATION

I shouldn't have tested their patience. Now my wife is dead. She told me so herself.

She came with a message, a letter from my daughter begging me to cooperate with Newcastle. She also had a gun — one of mine — which she fired into the wall after I read the letter. Then she dropped dead. They did something to her beforehand, they must have, then sent her to me.

I heard the sirens moments later. Far too soon for any of my neighbors to have reported shots.

If it wasn't for Renfield, I'm sure they'd have gotten me. He picked up the gun, wiped it, fired it again and yelled at me to run. I did.

He's dead, too. He died in a shootout with the police who thought they were killing me. The newspapers claim he was a hit man I hired to kill my wife.

It would be so easy to take Ripsaw up on his offer and join him. To say, "They're all evil and the cure is a bullet." To kill without mercy, hoping to match them death for death. Hoping to one day be as terrible as they are.

I could. I have more guns. I don't know where Frederick is, but I've spotted a few of his cronies around the graveyard. I could take them out in a blaze of glory. I could die killing two or three of his agents.

But I could only do that because Renfield saved me. That only happened because I saved him. I can't be sure, but I think that he — or the human being he once was and was becoming again — would have been sad to see me betray myself. I can't be sure.

I used to be so sure about everything, but I can't be sure of anything anymore. And yet I think Renfield saw me as something more. Something better than two groups trying to out-harm one another. Or maybe he was wrong and revenge is the best choice. I can't go that way, though. Not after having saved him.

Not now that I've been saved by him.

ROGUES AND EXTREMISTS

Some of us are already starting to go too far, and I don't just mean the out-and-out frothers. As we get deeper and deeper into the calling, we get further from what's truly important, the dream. We lose sight of what our friends and family mean to us, of why it's important to save the afflicted. It's ironic that as we seem to get the most powerful tools to work with, we lose track of what it was that we were trying to do in the first place. I've heard of several of the chosen who now treat the mission as some sort of game. It's not a game. It's a desperate struggle to free people and, for us, to save lives and souls.

The extremists may have some important insights. They may even know some truths of our condition, but they seem to be losing track of what it is they're supposed to be doing. As Trucker found out, you have to assume that our worst are at least as dangerous as any afflicted. One



setback too many could do it to any of us, so don't assume an old friend is fine — or even that you are.

I heard a rumour about a rogue in Germany who had sold out to the afflicted in return for money and protection. I have no idea if it's true, but if it is, she needs urgent attention. Who knows, maybe she can even be brought back to the fold.

The one thing we can't afford is to allow rogues to continue to act without some sort of intervention. Of course, I think we should do everything we can to save people like that. There's a lot to work with. We're still alive, still normal people, really. There should be no problem reminding a turncoat about what it means to be human, to show the pain and grief that the afflicted cause. It has to be easier than persuading a demon that he can rejoin society.

I fear that there's a lot that a rogue could do to weaken the rest of us, if he chose to. In a way, a psychopath who kills other chosen is better than one who reveals our secrets to the afflicted. Either way, rogues should be our top priority when we hear of them. They have to be made to repent or they have to be killed, for their good or for ours.

I wouldn't be surprised if the afflicted had their own means of communicating amongst themselves, just like we do. Can you imagine what would happen if a turncoat translated some of our signs and sent them to the demons?

MORE THAN HUMAN?

There's an APB out on me — everyone's looking. (If you've been watching the Birmingham papers, you've probably figured out I'm Henry Eames.) It doesn't matter anymore. I've left that name and life behind, and I'm hiding my now-famous face as well as I can.

My daughter Naomi was here in the city all along. They still haven't killed her — or done anything worse, as far as I can tell. That gives me hope. Even though I'm a fugitive, they want to keep a knife at my throat. The last time I talked to Newcastle on the phone, he talked about leaving the city and releasing

Naomi if I'd call off "my crew." Apparently that's you good people, and he thinks we're some kind of organized movement. Unless he's faking me out (a very real possibility), I've finally got him scared.

Could a mere human frighten such a thing? A monster that can command the dead? The old Henry Eames might have said yes. If everything had gone my way, if my family hadn't been ripped apart, if I didn't owe my life to someone that a lot of you would have killed immediately, I'd probably look at my sight, my power to heal, my ability to repel monsters with a word, and I just might say, "Yes, I'm more than human now."

But I can't say that, because it would mean Renfield was less than human. Because that's the first step to cutting yourself off from society, from the ordinary people who need us. We need them just as badly.

Right now, I'm being protected by someone I helped once. Someone I saved. S/he — eavesdroppers won't even get that much — asked if I was a saint. I said I was just lucky. That I was in the right place at the right time.

Keep your importance in perspective. If all of us died tomorrow, the only ones who'd really notice are the monsters. Ordinary people are everything. Once you start thinking normal folks don't matter, that's when you become a monster.

It's not all about you. You're not the center of the universe. I thought that I was for a while. When lives were saved, it was because "me and my people" saved them. When things went wrong, I blamed myself.

I didn't kill my wife. I'm not responsible for Renfield's death or for the deaths at the hospital. I'm not that important.

I will not assume that I know better just because I can perceive better.

I will not accept worship. I will not kill without remorse.

All that matters is that we are normal, ordinary people. Thinking you're more makes you less.

INHERIT THE EARTH

We know that we're supposed to save the world from darkness and evil. That seems to be just about the only thing that all the chosen can agree on, apart maybe from the meanings of our signs. Has anyone stopped to wonder what that actually means or implies?

It sounds like that Gerry chap of Trucker's has given far too much thought to inheriting the earth, and he wants to start right now, before the work is done. It would be easy to assume that as the chosen, we're somehow superior to the general public, more driven, purer, more righteous. It's a persuasive argument. We are, after all, the ones who heard the call, who had the strength to do what had to be done.

Are we, though? Maybe the call happens on a case-by-case basis. If that's true, then surely the reason that everyone hasn't heard it is that the Heralds haven't got around to them yet. Maybe we're no more righteous than anyone else.

I think it would be somewhat presumptuous to assume that we were the best of mankind. Trucker says we can fall into a god complex. Well, I've never felt quite like that, but I know what he means, and I don't think that danger is restricted to us — to confessors.

If we do our job properly, I don't think there's going to be any need for us to take charge of things. Power corrupts, and if we took control once the service was done, we'd end up just like the afflicted, oppressive and predatory. Maybe they're people too, or were, just like we are — powerful, arrogant, thrust into a position with inexplicable skills and without any understanding of what's happened.

I think we're all in terrible danger, to be honest. If we're not careful, we could grow to crave power, and then we will be the afflicted. That's one of the reasons why it's so important to help save them. Every time we help a soul find its humanity again, it reminds us of what we could become. Every time we abandon someone for

expedient reasons — not enough time, no way to help, too dangerous — we harden ourselves a little more, damning ourselves a bit further. We're not just saving the afflicted when we answer the call. We're saving ourselves.

THE FUTURE

A few months ago, I was down in western Arizona, in a town on the edge of the Sonora desert. As I usually do, I got to talking with the most interesting looking person in the bar — in this case, an old Mexican Indian guy. I don't think he was one of us. I'm not sure though, because he was definitely evasive. He refused to give a straight answer to anything.

He talked a lot about the future. He claimed to know of a "tribe who watch." He didn't say what they watch or why, but he implied that they were on the lookout for the world. They've been watching for centuries, up in the mountains of Central America. They don't leave their mountain much, he said. So I'm not sure how they can watch things, but apparently they do. Supposedly they have this sort of checklist for the end of the world, and they've been marking things off. It won't surprise anyone to know that they're nearly done.

According to this guy, at some point in the near future, the universe will stop and we'll all be escorted off while everything is recreated. The energy to accomplish all this will be found in the souls of the dead — the really dead. Not the lost, I guess. The new people of the world will come from the souls of the people left alive. I don't know if that includes the lost or not. If so, the more evil there is at the end, the more flawed the next world will be.

If you can believe any of that, it makes it seem like our mission is to minimize the number of bad people, and maximize the number of good people. It also means that those of us who're good have a duty to stay alive, as well as to save as many souls as we can.

I'm not convinced, but it's an interesting idea. I know how to get a hold of the guy again. Hell, it seems like a good time to find out if he really meant it when he said "I'll be waiting for you when the Devil is at your heels."



CHAPTER 5: NEW RULES

*For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of
my redeemed is come.*
— Isaiah 63:4

As the imbued with perhaps the greatest interest in rehabilitation and healing, whether of their fellows or of monsters, Redeemers are by their very nature gentler than many of the other creeds. Their interest in salvation gives them the strength to face the horror of the truth. In game terms, their role as the conscience of the hunt is reflected in the capabilities and Traits that they embody. This chapter is dedicated to the common and new Archetypes, Abilities, edges and rules that pertain to Redeemers. These Traits define who these people are in game terms. These qualities are not exclusive to Redeemers, though — other creeds can have them, too. The following mechanics are simply indicative of the forgiving and may be passed on by them to other imbued as hunter society becomes self-aware.

NEW ARCHETYPES

HEALER

The Healer's driving passion is to alleviate pain and suffering — whatever the cause — from something as small as a graze on a child's knee to the starvation of a drought-ridden country. She dedicates herself to easing the discomfort of others, regardless of the humanity or inhumanity of any victim. Medical professionals, social workers, psychiatric caregivers and clergy can embody this Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you are able to heal grievous wounds of another's mind or body.

EVANGELIST

The Evangelist believes, and this belief is a shining torch by which his world is illuminated and understood — and to which the world needs to be converted. He works himself to the bone to convince others of the significance of his beliefs, so that as many as possible might be saved.

Although Evangelists often believe in a major religion, many do not. Astrology, Vegetarianism and Psychoanalysis have their own Evangelists. Missionaries, priests and cult leaders can represent this Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you are able to convince someone that one of the foundational points of your belief is legitimate.

TEACHER

The Teacher derives satisfaction and self-respect from passing knowledge or wisdom on to others. Some demand subservience from their pupils, whereas others work as equals, but all of them feel a burning need to hand down their experience, information and understanding to the people around them. Some Teachers focus on one area of knowledge, whereas others are more eclectic. Lecturers, writers, academics and reformers can exemplify this Archetype.

— Regain Willpower when you teach someone a useful skill or a vital piece of knowledge or wisdom.

PARAGON

The Paragon is a straightforward, uncomplicated person with a strong moral and ethical code. Being comfortable with open plans and plain talking, she disapproves of underhanded tactics, lying and subterfuge. She's neither naïve nor foolish — just solid and reliable, as good as her word. Farmers, truck drivers, police and factory workers often fit this Archetype.

— Regain Willpower whenever your straight dealing wins out over subterfuge.

REDEEMER CAMPS

Although Redeemers share many qualities, their overall physical and mental development differs widely based on their level of commitment to their ideals. Redeemers in each of the

RULES VERSUS ROLEPLAYING

If you as a person have ever done anything in real life that you later regretted, how did you come to grips with your actions? Let's say you betrayed a significant other, turned on a friend, or simply said something that you couldn't take back. Were you able to apologize and make it all better? Did you have to make penance, doing everything you could for someone to prove that you were sorry? Were they willing to hear you out, even to bear your presence?

There's no quick fix to making amends for our mistakes in life. It takes regret, sincerity, sympathy... and ultimately the forgiveness of others. It's no different for monsters. Whether changed into something horrific against their own will or completely by choice, monsters must prey upon people in order to survive. Whether it's for blood or fear or souls doesn't matter. What matters is that these beings have inflicted terrible abuse on people. If a beast ever chooses to mend its ways or a Redeemer seeks to turn it around, there's no miracle means to salvation. The process is slow and arduous, as a creature struggles against what it has become to reclaim what it used to be, and to find acceptance among those whom it has harmed.

This chapter is dedicated to new edges and rules for Redeemers, but the most important thing to remember about your character is that his efforts to draw out the humanity and decency of creatures are a matter of roleplaying, not game mechanics. Edges such as *Insinuate* are tools toward making a monster confront its hidden or former humanity. But your hunter's edges don't necessarily impose a change on a creature's monstrous personality unless the thing is already inclined to (or can be convinced to) undergo a transformation. A recently turned vampire might be more willing to reclaim its former life than might a centuries-old one that can't even remember what it's like to breathe. For that young vampire to forego abusive behavior, however — the very means of its survival — in favor of compassion and regret, you must roleplay your Redeemer's effort as teacher, shepherd and sympathetic ear.

There's no die roll or power that says "ding," a bloodsucker behaves decently again. It's a tough process, with plenty of triumphs and failures along the way. As the rulebook's creed write-up says, a Redeemer is glad to restore even one soul during his entire career, but he *always* searches for more.

Similarly, the curses and conditions that birth creatures in the World of Darkness might resist efforts by Redeemers to undo them. There may be no way to lift the curse of undeath, to cure the lycanthropy disease, or to erase magic from a wizard's mind, for example. Monsters usually remain so in body. Redeemers might be able to turn monsters around in thought and spirit, however. Monsters might become truly penitent beings — ones that forego harming humans, and that perhaps even respect or help them. Think of the "Beauty and the Beast" fairy tale, or (dare we say it) Angel from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Coaxing such a transition in a creature's soul is the pinnacle of many Redeemers' achievements.

Perhaps the one exception to changing a creature's very supernature through redemption occurs with ghosts. A spirit that can be helped toward resolving its past and its binding emotions may depart from the world and cease to exist. Spirits might be Redeemers' greatest and most rewarding charity cases, if the spirits can be convinced to help themselves. Some rules do exist that address putting souls to rest (see Chapter 7 of *Hunter: The Walking Dead*). There's still a lot of roleplaying involved, though, because finding salvation continues to be a matter of identity and catharsis, not game mechanics and dice. Please keep that in mind when your Redeemer seeks to save any lost soul.

three typical "camps" — conservative, moderate and liberal — tend to exhibit a range of Archetypes, Abilities and Backgrounds that reflect their particular outlook on the world.

CONSERVATIVE

Conservative Redeemers sympathize with the plight of monsters, but are far more concerned with looking after the all-too-human victims of monstrous abuse. Time is short, and they are really interested only in easing the pain of the *living*. If there were more time, fewer people to worry about, if the dead weren't the enemy... but the world is the way it is, and there's no use crying over spilled milk. Some conservative Redeemers even restrict their efforts to fellow imbued, reasoning that a healthy, sane hunter is more important to the future of the world than an unfortunate member of the public. The upshot is that conservatives are the most likely of all Redeemers to get along with imbued of the more militant creeds.

Because they are hesitant to compromise with monsters, sometimes even seeking them out and destroying them, conservative Redeemers place a lot of stock in Physical Attributes, particularly Stamina and Dexterity. It's

important to be able to swing into action when necessary. Social Traits come next, Charisma above Manipulation or Appearance, because a good bedside manner is important for dealing with the vulnerable. Mental faculties are typically the least important to these Redeemers.

When considering Abilities, Talents are a significant part of the conservative's day-to-day repertoire, particularly Alertness, Empathy, Intimidation and Leadership. Of the Knowledges, Medicine is undoubtedly the most important — most need to know *something* about healing the living. Skills tend to be focused on least, with Drive and Firearms being the most common.

Conservative Redeemers often possess Backgrounds that help with managing daily life, such as Allies, Contacts and Resources. Other edges can come from Zeal paths such as Defense and even Vengeance.

MODERATE

Whereas conservative Redeemers tend to be stern and aloof in their treatment of monsters, moderates are considerably more open-minded in their attitudes and beliefs. Like

conservatives, they are often pragmatic about working with other imbued, and most recognize that the other creeds have important contributions to make to the mission. That doesn't mean they sit idly by while a sympathetic monster is attacked, however. These Redeemers have a strong interest in trying to save any creature that seems salvageable. Conversely, they recognize that not every creature can be saved and that evil has to be destroyed in the interests of the common good.

Moderate Redeemers have all sorts of origins and personality types, and do not show any clear bias toward Physical, Social or Mental Attributes. Different people answer the call in different ways. In general, Strength, Appearance and Wits tend to be the least valued of their three categories — moderates tend not to go for the sorts of overt acts that some of more aggressive creed members engage in.

Talents are common among moderates, especially those Traits that involve gathering information or influencing others. Subterfuge is often popular, as deception is often needed to get close enough to a monster to evaluate it and perhaps try to help it. Skills and Knowledges come an equal second after Talents, and can be as broad-ranging as the hunters themselves.

Moderate Redeemers often have Backgrounds that provide insight into monsters and the service, such as Contacts, Exposure, Mentor and Patron. The paths of Judgment and Vision are favored for edges outside of Redemption.

LIBERAL

The liberal Redeemer generally sees herself as a force of healing and reconciliation. Liberals typically dream of bring-

ing monsters as a whole back into the human fold, and they are loath to say that any creature is beyond help, no matter how steeped in evil. These confessors feel that past wrongs can be forgiven for any being who is prepared to consider repentance. Needless to say, this outlook brings them into strong conflict with many of the other imbued, and although they tend to be pacifists, some liberals will go so far as to stand between a colleague and a target to give a creature a chance to escape or explain itself. Some hunters — particularly Avengers — consider liberals traitors.

Social Attributes, particularly Charisma and Manipulation, are the most highly valued amongst liberal Redeemers. Mental Attributes, especially Perception, come second, and Physical Traits, led by Stamina, are a distant third. Such people focus strongly on discussion and persuasion.

Talents, particularly Awareness, Dodge, Empathy and Intuition, often prove the most useful Abilities to liberals. They generally value Knowledges, including Occult and Science (Psychology), over Skills.

Backgrounds useful to liberal Redeemers include Contracts, Destiny, Exposure and Patron. Edges from outside the path of Redemption are most likely to come from Defense, as liberals' compassion often puts them in extreme danger.

TRAITS

The following new Abilities are likely to belong to Redeemer 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.

SKILLS

DISGUISE

Le Floq stood looking down at the crowd from the balcony. It was a warm night, and Geneva's beautiful people were enjoying the lakeside promenade. They strolled beneath the trees, stood gazing out over the water, gathered in elegant cafes and busy bars, or kissed under the stars.

Near the fountain, a young woman leaned back against a low stone wall and, seemingly, gazed straight up at him. Le Floq returned her attention, then froze, stunned. The same shoulder-length golden hair, turned in slightly at the ends. The same type of sheer, strapless dress. Even the same glasses. She was the exact image of Anna, in Paris, that afternoon before her death — their deaths, he amended.

Without shifting his gaze from the woman, Le Floq reached for the phone. "Wickham? Matthew. There is a girl by the fountain. Please inform her, politely, that I will have a bottle of Cristal waiting on ice for her in the cocktail bar of the Grand if she wishes to meet."

Sometimes, it can be extremely useful to appear to be someone or something you're not. This Ability allows your character to change his or her appearance to mimic that of another. Appearing to be a nonspecific type of person is relatively easy. Making oneself difficult to recognize or impersonating a specific individual is challenging, and either imposes high difficulties. Many simple disguises can be created with easy-to-obtain items such as cotton wool, make-up and flour. More exotic disguises may require specific items such as expensive clothing and props, which a character with this Skill may know how to obtain with sufficient rating. Disguising someone else is only slightly harder than disguising oneself. A high rating indicates someone with training as a make-up artist or costume designer. This Skill does not indicate any acting ability, just the knack of altering appearance.

- Novice: You know what a difference cosmetics can make.
- Practiced: You can fit a wig that doesn't slip — at least not immediately.
- Competent: You could make a career of make up, costuming or wardrobe.
- Expert: Given a little preparation, you can change your appearance enough to fool pursuers.
- Master: Not even your own mother can recognize you.

Possessed by: Make-up Artists, Actors, Costume Designers, Undercover Police

Specialties: Stereotypes, Evasion, Street People, Corporate, Simulating Individuals

KNOWLEDGES

LOCALE

"That place looks okay," Claire said. "Quiet, clean. It should suit us nicely."

John shook his head. "It's empty at the moment, but it's trendy. In 10 minutes, it's going to be swarmed with business types from the office across the street. You won't be able to hear

yourself think in there. We need to find somewhere that's going to be quiet for a few hours." He glanced around, and then called to a man across the street. "Hey, Billy!"

"Billy" looked back suspiciously, then smiled. "Hey, John. How're you?"

"Where you going tonight?"

"The Poacher. See you there?"

"Maybe. Have a good one." John turned back to Claire. "If Billy is going to the Poacher, all his friends will be there too. It'll be crowded. The Olive Branch will be pretty empty, so we'll have plenty of room to plan without attracting attention. Even better, there's a guy named Trudwell who doesn't like Billy's crowd, so he'll be at the Branch, too. He runs a rental company, so we'll be able to get hold of a van for the night."

If you spend enough time in an area, you get to learn a lot about it — what's nearby, the sort of people who live or work there, the rhythms and patterns of life in the region. This Knowledge reflects your character's experience of a particular place, gained through months or years of habitation. Familiarity with a city neighborhood, a town or a rural area means more than knowing where to find an all-night drugstore, or being able to tell when the mood in a bar could turn ugly. It's about being part of the community, knowing — and being accepted by — the people, remembering the history and events of the area, and being familiar with geographical oddities and bad places. Note that while Locale knowledge is broad, it can never be transported — when you take this Ability, you must pick one area as a specialty, and your character's familiarity applies only to that area.

- Student: You can find your way around without getting lost.
- College: You know the good restaurants.
- Masters: Tracking down whatever or whomever you need is easy.
- Doctorate: People are always stopping to chat with you on the street.
- Scholar: You know every place, every person and every thing in the area.

Possessed by: Longtime Residents, Beat Cops, Taxi Drivers, Bar Owners

Specialties: A one-city district, small town or rural area

SUBCULTURE

Linda put down the phone. "Crawford hasn't been seen since Monday. He hasn't gone to work, he's not at his place, and his parents don't know where he is. We've got nothing to go on."

Jim looked concerned. "We've got to make sure we find him before that thing does. He still doesn't have any idea it's after him."

"What did you manage to find out about this Crawford guy?"

"He's a marketing executive, single, studying for his private pilot's license. A quiet guy."

"He's into planes?" Linda said, looking interested.

"Yeah. He's co-owner of a small one that he's learning to fly."

Linda smiled broadly. "My old man used to be a real aviation nut. There's only two airfields in the area that have hangars and allow PPL training flights. One is strictly 9 to 5, but the other has a clubhouse — and rooms that members can hire, cheap. That's where we'll find him."

Modern society operates on a vast scale. Every day, the average person sees more people — passing in the street, on television, in magazines — than most would have seen in a month a century ago. With so much diversity, almost anyone can find like-minded individuals, and subcultures inevitably form. This Knowledge reflects your character's interest in or familiarity with such circles, from their celebrities to the places that members frequent. Many subcultures develop their own jargon and almost all uphold specific ideals of fashion, behavior, what's cool and what's important in life. While your character has a broad awareness of various subcultures in general, she has a deep understanding of a particular favorite; you must choose a specialty for this Knowledge. Being accepted by a member of your character's specialty circle often means owning a particular possession, such as a classic car, or having an appropriate Ability, such as Computer for a hackers' group. The higher the rating, the more respect your character can command. If she has no such validation, her familiarity with the subculture is probably theoretical, gained through research rather than practice. As hunter subcultures form in the future, it might even be possible to gain familiarity with them.

The Storyteller may rule that any Subculture roll with a difficulty of 8 or higher demands that research be performed to be familiar with the subject. The exception applies to any information regarding your character's specialty, for which rolls can be made no matter what the difficulty.

- Student: You have an interest in the scene.
- College: You know the names of the important people in the subculture.
- Masters: Talking the talk and walking the walk is a pleasure, not a chore.
- Doctorate: You avidly keep up with all the weekly news and information.
- Scholar: There's nothing about the scene that you don't know.

Possessed by: Teenagers, Hobbyists, Researchers, Enthusiasts
Specialties: Snowboarding, Fandom, Marketing, Trucking

THE HIGH COST OF COMMITMENT

Redeemers care deeply about the injured, about individuals in pain and about the state of monsters' souls. It is difficult to maintain compassion and forgiveness in the World of Darkness, especially when efforts to save others fail and efforts seem futile, yet the compulsion to save people persists for Redeemers. Derangement is a constant danger for any hunter, but especially so for Redeemers, as the repeated stresses of disappointment, disillusionment and exposure to lethal peril take their toll. Those who stay focused on Mercy can rise quickly in Virtue, but as their understanding of their calling matures, so do the temptations to amass power, wealth or followers as tools to accomplish even more good. Those whose focus wavers into other Virtues may be distracted from helping others, and their sense of identity or purpose can be muddled.

SPENDING CONVICTION

Because Redeemers' motivating force demands that they observe and talk to the lost, Redeemers often need to maintain

high Conviction ratings. Unlike more militant hunters, they cannot follow their calling without a clear idea of the true nature of the beings with which they interact. Activating second sight and edges is imperative to such understanding, but doing so demands available Conviction points. Redeemers therefore try to remain focused and pay attention to others around them at all times. The forgiving may relax their guard only when they believe themselves relatively safe from the afflicted, when none of *them* demand service.

Given the pervasiveness of creatures in the world, however, a Redeemer can never tell when she will need to minister to another being (and Conviction points will need to be spent). Thus, there is a constant risk of exhausting oneself when vigor for the calling is required most. Ironically, accepting that a demon cannot be saved and must be put down can be a relief for some Redeemers, because their skills are accordingly less in demand. Not that the emotional trauma of killing is diminished, of course.

In mechanical terms, be careful about cashing in Conviction for a point of Virtue (and perhaps a new edge). Try to anticipate when your make character's services might be in least demand, and hope for the best. Then again, extra Virtue points or edges gained might actually allow your character to do more service for the afflicted than she could with any Conviction points alone.

REGAINING CONVICTION

Redeemers' commitment for their calling is bolstered when they are able to help others in need. A person might have been abused by a creature, or a creature might be poised to respect humanity and needs to be shown how. Conversely, Redeemers' passion diminishes when people suffer or die, or creatures prove unremittably evil despite the hunters' efforts. The following actions and events indicate when Redeemers gain or lose Conviction. As always, the Storyteller has final say about how Conviction points are acquired through character actions. Each of these deeds should confer no more than one point per game session. Indeed, one point may be all that a character gains by pulling off a number of these actions in a single chapter.

- Gain a point of Conviction if your Redeemer is able to convince an monster to act sympathetically toward humans.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Redeemer persuades other hunters to change their plans and leave a harmless monster unmolested.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Redeemer trusts an unfriendly monster with her life and is not betrayed.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Redeemer is clearly able to save someone from imminent death.
- (Optional) *Lose* a point of Conviction if your Redeemer is forced to participate in an attack on a monster that he believes is not malevolent.
- (Optional) *Lose* a point of Conviction if your Redeemer fails to prevent someone's death from injuries that she could have treated.
- (Optional) *Lose* a point of Conviction if a creature your character spares or shepherds toward compassion proceeds to inflict harm on anyone.

ALLOCATING VIRTUE POINTS

Redeemers value edges that help them achieve understanding of creatures, that help save monstrous souls, and that can be used to save lives. Many different paths can make contributions to the cause, however. Mercy is the creed's most important Virtue, invested mostly in Redemption, but Vision and the Zeal of Judgment can offer some insights and capabilities. Exploration of Defense also helps a Redeemer endure the trials of monsters' salvation. Redeemers who manifest Cleave or other Vengeance edges are often considered too aggressive by their fellow saviors. To these stern confessors, such capabilities simply help make a specific, narrow perspective on what's right and wrong, salvageable and irredeemable, into a reality.

THE PRICE OF EXCEPTIONAL VIRTUE

As any hunter progresses along his chosen path, the terrible strain of the hunt and the horrors the imbued witness slowly but surely erode their identity and sanity. What's more, when one of the imbued attains a high Virtue rating, her all-consuming dedication to the mission undermines her basic humanity, making her increasingly incomprehensible, enigmatic, unapproachable or perhaps alien even to her closest companions.

Ideally, the derangements your character acquires derive from her personality or experiences in the hunt. The following are ailments not covered in the **Hunter** rules and may afflict your Redeemer in her efforts to heal the world's wounds.

ADDICTION

Addiction is possibly the most common derangement of all, and is particularly likely for hunters seeking to escape the trauma of the real world, even if only for a little while. An addict is someone who feels physically and psychologically unable to function without the aid of a particular substance — usually a drug such as cocaine, heroin or alcohol.

Any time your character goes 24 hours without a fix, the difficulty of every action increases by one. This penalty remains in effect until the addict gets a dose. It's possible to eliminate cravings with intense concentration, but not for very long. Spend a point of Willpower to negate the penalty for one scene.

Whenever the addict has access to or partakes of his chosen substance again, make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, or he goes on a binge (note that Willpower can be spent to get an automatic success on this roll). A binge addict takes as much of the drug as he can get his hands on, by means fair or foul. A binge continues until your character passes out, is restrained, or (rarest of all) restrains himself after a few hours. In the last case, spend a point of Willpower in order to be able to make another Willpower roll for your character to snap out of it. If the roll fails, you cannot spend Willpower to get another roll during that bout.

Of course, characters who manage to dose themselves without falling unconscious are still subject to the effects of their chosen drug.

It's possible to overcome the chronic and compulsive cravings for a substance, but once your character has been "cured," there's still a lifelong risk of falling off the wagon. If a character who has overcome addiction willingly partakes in his drug of choice at a later date, you must make a

Willpower roll, difficulty 9, and get at least three successes. Otherwise, your character is addicted again. If he's dosed unwittingly or unwillingly, the difficulty is 7 and only a single success is required to resist renewed addiction.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD, as it's often known) was once known as "shell shock" or "battle fatigue," because of its frequent occurrence among soldiers who experienced heavy combat. It can also result from other stresses — it's common among the victims of sexual abuse, for example.

PTSD is very likely to afflict hunters who witness horrible sights or suffer terrible loss. Indeed, it commonly affects the imbued as a result of the day-to-day hunt, before the rigors of high Virtue take hold.

PTSD causes a victim to experience a moment of stress over again. This flashback is typically triggered the way normal memories are — by a common stimulus. A veteran suffering from PTSD might relive a vivid firefight any time he hears an engine backfire. Someone who was tied to a dentist's chair and tortured might flash back any time he sits in a recliner. The smell of singed hair might trigger a hunter who watched a loved one burn to death.

When a triggering event occurs, make a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. If it fails, your character vividly recalls the stressful event at which he manifested this ailment (a Willpower point can be spent to resist a flashback automatically). Your character relives his past experience, even re-enacting motions performed at the time. The veteran, above, might dive for cover. The torture victim might writhe and scream, seemingly inexplicably. The hunter might run into a room and seem to grab at something that isn't there. While in the grip of the memory, a victim cannot take any actions that contradict the hallucination. So, if your character didn't have a gun in his hand during his initial trauma, he can't use the gun he carries now, during his flashback.

A flashback persists for a few seconds or for the remainder of the current scene, depending on how traumatic the original event was, how reminiscent the flashback's trigger is, and perhaps on how badly you fail your Willpower roll. Another character can try to snap your hunter out of the flashback, which grants you another Willpower roll to recover. Only one such extra roll is allowed per episode.

INSOMNIA

When are hunters more vulnerable or exposed than during sleep? When a person sleeps, she enters a hallucinatory state in which all her suppressed fears come out to play. She closes her eyes and can't see anything sneaking up on her. Worst of all, when she's asleep she can't usually protect herself against the powers of monsters!

Insomnia is extremely common among hunters. Sometimes it becomes so acute that it qualifies as a derangement. Insomnia isn't just tossing and turning a few nights a week. A clinical insomniac can become so sleep-deprived that he suffers psychotic episodes.

Make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, every night when your character attempts to go to sleep. If successful, your character can sleep normally — at least as normally as is

possible for people who know the truth of the world (a Willpower point can be spent to get an automatic success). If the roll fails, your character cannot sleep at all that night. The day after a sleepless night, there's no dice-pool penalty, but another Willpower roll must be made the next night, as usual. If that roll fails, the difficulties of all rolls increase by one on the subsequent day (including your next Willpower roll to sleep). Once an insomniac goes four straight days without sleep, he is considered to be schizophrenic (see **Hunter**, p. 204). Exhaustion-induced schizophrenia typically results in visual and auditory hallucinations, in addition to Insomnia's difficulty penalty. Difficulty penalties imposed by Insomnia never exceed four, no matter how many sleepless nights pass. Willpower rolls to attempt to sleep continue, though.

A simple night's sleep eliminates even the worst effects of Insomnia, although subsequent bouts can begin almost immediately. Booze or pills promise a fairly sure-fire way to cure the ailment temporarily. Any character who undergoes this "easy cure" for a month of game time may exchange the Insomnia derangement for Addiction.

Your character cannot develop this derangement if he has the Vigilance edge (**Hunter Book: Judge**, p. 76). If your character already is an insomniac, he probably cannot develop that edge — although he could suffer from the temporary delusion that he has it.

No Willpower rolls to resist Insomnia need be made for a character with the Endurance Ability (**Hunter Book: Defender**, p. 67) for the duration established by the character's Trait rating. Thereafter, Willpower rolls must be made to sleep, as is usual for Insomnia, and difficulty penalties are incurred over successive sleepless nights. (In essence, Endurance lets a character resist Insomnia, but when Endurance fails, the penalties for Insomnia take precedence over those for the Ability.)

MADNESS

There are many horrors in the World of Darkness. The risen dead pursue unholy agendas with inhuman dedication. Bloodsuckers pull strings, drain their victims and flit back into the shadows to outlive their enemies. Things that are neither man nor beast explode forth from the hidden places, rampaging unchecked — seemingly for no reason at all. Perhaps even worse, it seems there is some unknowable force at work behind every monster, directing their movements without their knowledge — remote, intangible manipulators to whom an immortal creature is merely a pawn.

There are indeed bad things out there. But for the people who are rudely awakened from ignorance there is another threat, one as close as a lover's breath, as immediate as the day's headlines.

Madness.

Fortunately, imbued don't have to face that enemy alone.

GOING MAD

Losing one's sanity is perhaps the most grievous loss of all in a conflict with monsters. The struggle against beasts can actually be simple, after a fashion. We are the heroes. They are the enemy. Suddenly, a lifetime of inexplicable

abuses and atrocities make sense — they caused them. We have been their victims. Understanding the truth of the world can therefore inspire a certain solace. Finally, everything makes sense, even if it is horrific. And now that an awakened person knows reality, he can take a certain comfort in struggling against monsters, because he fights the good fight, he does what he can to set the world right.

Although the imbued can find vindication in the hunt, that sense of self-worth is inevitably eroded by the very monsters that hunters face. Terrifying spectacles and overwhelming personal loss can undermine even the most focused hunter's determination, and eventually his understanding of his condition and reality. Madness induced by the hardships of the hunt — torture, the death of family, utter failure to achieve a guiding goal — distort even a narrow perspective on the true world.

Loss and defeat can drive hunters to insanity. Suddenly, you are your own enemy. Now you struggle against yourself to remain in control, as you used to against the monsters. Now, who is "us" and who is "them"? You question your own identity. You can't even trust yourself in your former struggle against the demons. After that, what do you have left?

Fortunately, there is help. There are practical reasons for the imbued to band together. One of the strongest has nothing to do with safety in numbers, and everything to do with alleviating the emotional burden of contending with the enemy. Allying with people, even ones with values that diametrically oppose yours, who know what you do, who see what you do, can help you share the burden of dealing with the truth. Other imbued become your support system. They keep you sane. Indeed, some imbued even concentrate on keeping their fellows stable and secure, tending to the sanity of other hunters instead of dealing with monsters. Redeemers are among the most dedicated to this healing cause.

The following material addresses how to implement derangements in your **Hunter** game, and explores how compassionate hunters can seek to alleviate the suffering of their imbued allies.

PLAYING WITH MADNESS

The **Hunter** Storyteller has a great deal of liberty and discretion when it comes to imposing derangements on characters. Basically, you have the power to inflict one any time a character goes through something deemed sufficiently alien and harmful to a character's experience and capacity to cope.

Naturally, it behooves the Storyteller to exercise a lot of discretion with this authority. As a wise man once said, "It's your game. You can do anything you want — except make the players show up." Derangements are a sensitive topic, because they reduce the control a player has over his character. Good Storytellers don't consider derangements something to fling about casually because a character does something unexpected or stupid, or because a player pisses you off. A lot of players don't put up with that kind of heavy-handed treatment, and they shouldn't have to.

Derangements are storytelling tools. Used properly, they can be a powerful way to examine a personality. Used improperly, they become a punishment meted out by the Storyteller or (even worse) a joke among players. "My character talks to

his teddy bear!" That kind of humor becomes irritating fast, and it's a weak approach to an experience that is by definition one of the most overwhelming to affect the human psyche.

ASSIGNING DERANGEMENTS

Let's look at two different Storytellers. Gwen runs an intensely character-driven game. She's stingy with experience points, she keeps the power curve low, and she doesn't allow the reflexive use of Conviction. Her focus is less on what happens than on the reactions of the characters. Quite a few of her sessions involve no combat, and a few haven't even involved paranormal elements — just characters trying to keep their lives, jobs and families together in a terrifying world.

Bruce runs a game with more of a pulp flavor. He likes to see his players think up the kind of big-risk, dramatic ploys that he sees in action movies, so his game's protagonists are a pretty fair match for their antagonists. He emphasizes plot much more than character, and that's how his players like it.

Gwen probably gets a lot more out of derangements than Bruce does. Mental ailments just get in the way of his shoot-'em-up style. Bruce's players are used to playing characters who are competent, tough and up to the challenge. Gwen's focus on the individual makes derangements dramatic. Her players are used to the idea of fragile, flawed characters.

Which style of play is better? Whichever one is the most fun for everyone involved.

Derangements should never surprise a player. If Karl's character Brenda has a Caregiver Nature, he shouldn't be surprised if Brenda develops a derangement after seeing one of her children butchered. Storytellers who want to make use of ailments should build up to it by emphasizing the increasing mental strain on characters over several sessions. This technique also gives the Storyteller a chance to gauge likely reactions to derangements. If players immediately become defensive when it's suggested that characters feel frail, the players may not be ready to roleplay mental disorders.

To put it another way, a character who's been played thoroughly — on various levels of life such as work relationships, home life and capacity to kill — is likely to reveal inherent values and weaknesses. If Brenda consistently protects her children and expresses concern for them, then the next step of characterization is to allow her a truly dramatic way to explore their importance, with a disorder regarding their protection. If, on the other hand, a character is a stock lone wolf, he's probably not going to reveal any vulnerable side. That's fine. Lots of players like running hard-bitten characters who don't crack under pressure, and a Storyteller should respect that desire until there's enough trust for the character to grow into something with a little more depth and pathos.

Another element you can add to your game — especially one with heavy Redeemer themes — is the *avoidance* of madness. If a Redeemer character starts to notice how jittery and generally deranged an associate is, and plays the role of thoughtful listener and helpful friend, the Storyteller can hold off on imposing derangements. There aren't many hard-and-fast rules regarding character madness, and characters treating each other with sympathy and respect just might help keep each other sane.

Of course, when Virtue scores rise to 7 and higher, hunters' minds begin to crack under the pressure of the calling. A character begins to forget his former life and personal hopes in favor of accomplishing goals and agendas true to the mission itself. It's as if the Messengers' will begins to drown out the character's own, supplanting his thoughts and ideals. The hunt assumes a whole new scope — and becomes a mission that gradually supercedes everything that was important before.

If your group sticks close to this interpretation of high Virtue ratings, it's pretty clear when to assign derangements to a "mature" character. You don't have to adhere to this rule, though. Characters in Gwen's game might already be afflicted by ailments given the pressures placed upon them in day-to-day life. Even high-Virtue ailments might conflict with Bruce's style of play, so maybe enforced derangements aren't the answer. Then again, maybe mental illness can reinforce a high-action mood, making characters prepared to fight even each other to achieve personal goals or objectives that are larger than any single individual.

HOW DO I HANDLE IT?

When your character gets a derangement, don't try to get out of it. Get *into* it, instead. If you were an actor, you'd probably be thrilled if you were cast as a madman. In *Hunter*, an unstable character can be a source of the same kind of depth and intensity.

If your Storyteller does her job, your character develops a derangement that fits both his personality and the situation that imposes the ailment. For example, an extremely violent character might experience fugue states as some part of him denies his bloodthirstiness and seeks escape. A compassionate hunter who witnesses a creature she protected turn on her friends might develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as the image of her deadly error exerts a constant dread on her.

The key to successfully playing a character with a derangement (or more than one) is to take it seriously. Remember that these behaviors *make sense* to your character. Maybe not on the strictly logical level, but who lives life by logic alone? Maybe reciting a Buddhist sutra every time he turns a doorknob makes him feel safer — and failing to do it paralyzes him with fear. If you really want to do it right, visit the library and have a look at the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* to see what doctors say about derangements and the behavior they cause.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Roleplaying a character who's falling apart can be tragic and dramatic. Playing that same character as he rebuilds his life and sanity can be inspiring and rewarding. Then there's playing a character who makes helping others back into the real world, no matter how terrifying the world is, a life's calling. All three possibilities offer great roleplaying potential and emphasize the *human* aspect of the hunter condition.

Be warned though: Reconstructing a spirit and psyche is not easy, not fast and certainly not certain.

To escape the torments of madness, a subject must find a psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist or someone else whose stock-in-trade is the mending of minds. Redeemers are just such people. For our purposes, therapy can be broken into two categories: talk therapy and chemical therapy.

THE TALKING CURE

Practiced by psychologists, dervishes, social workers, priests and philosophers, the goal of talk therapy is to get to the root of a conceptual, intellectual or emotional problem and resolve it purely through cogitation. There are a number of advantages to this form of treatment, not least of which is the avoidance of chemical side effects. Furthermore, this type of treatment is personal and holds less of a chance of a disastrous error in diagnosis.

Unfortunately, the talking cure is *slow*. Expect your character to spend *months* of game time going to weekly or twice-weekly therapy sessions before your Storyteller lets you make a roll to try to shake his problem.

Players and Storytellers shouldn't ignore the rich roleplaying possibilities of therapy sessions. If your character has a derangement, it's the result of a particular episode you played through. Your character was in the middle of it and your character just reacted. Now is your chance to sit back, examine his actions and explain *why*. In addition to action, you get a chance to reveal motivation — to explain how your character thinks and thus get to know him better — so don't sell it short.

Talk therapy tends to regard separate syndromes as expressions of a central whole. For example, many drug addicts are also prone to fugue states or insomnia (insomnia is also common if the addict started using the drug to get to sleep; as a tolerance builds, the insomnia returns). Many schizophrenics are also paranoid as they can't even trust *reality* from day to day. Therapists generally target one behavior for removal first. The one they pick depends on the patient. When addiction is combined with another illness, the therapist targets the addiction first, as it's unlikely that progress can be made elsewhere until the compulsion is dealt with. Schizophrenia and multiple personalities are generally dealt with last of any ailment combination, as they are often the most entrenched and difficult to treat. In game terms, separate rolls are made for each derangement (see below for the mechanics of treating conditions).

Redeemers, generally being helpful and empathetic, are often tempted to become therapists for their fellows. They might not have any training — indeed, they probably don't consciously set out to “cure” anyone. Instead, it just seems natural to fall into a pattern of sympathetic listening and advice.

It's not impossible for this sort of unskilled therapy to work, but it's tricky. The close emotional bond between participants is its greatest strength, but also its greatest weakness. Listening to a friend pour out all the pain in her heart is *exhausting*.

Both players should roleplay through an impromptu “therapy session,” with the Storyteller making notes about how well she thinks the would-be “therapist” does. A Redeemer who suspends judgment and respects what the “patient” says is more helpful than one who says, “You know, what you *should* do is...” Yet, someone who just listens and never calls bullshit on thin rationales and defenses doesn't do a lot of good, either.

The following modifiers affect a Willpower roll to determine whether a character's ailment is alleviated. Typically, a roll is made when a patient arrives at some kind of catharsis regarding her outlook or habits. Maybe she realizes that there really was nothing she could do to save her family before they were killed, and she can stop blaming herself.

Perhaps a character accomplishes some amazing feat while fighting an addiction and realizes the good he can do if he stays straight. Or receiving thanks for sparing a creature from harm can convince a hunter that she doesn't need to hide her true self behind a fabricated identity.

Of course, such revelatory events still go hand in hand with extensive therapy. Otherwise, how does the character know to find the best in this most recent development? Generally, characters who suffer from multiple derangements can make a roll after as little as three to five months of therapy (after all, the worse off you are the more room there is for improvement). Characters with a single ailment might take four to six months before they show signs of recovery, because that condition commands so much attention in their lives and is therefore hard to shake.

The difficulty of a recovery Willpower roll is 7, but it can be increased or decreased by a number of factors, as shown below. Rolls are often extended, accumulating successes over a period of weeks after initial progress is achieved. The patient increasingly comes to terms with himself and his life (rolls are successful and the required total is achieved), or some tragedy occurs and the character suffers a setback or complete relapse (rolls fail or botch). The total number of successes required to achieve a full recovery is decided by the Storyteller — anywhere from six for a minor fixation to 20 for full-blown dementia.

Factor	Difficulty Modifier
You've skipped a lot of therapy sessions lately	+1
You haven't told your therapist about the supernatural	+2
Your therapist is untrained	-1 to +2, depending on roleplaying
You have Virtues rated 7+	+1 per Virtue point that's 7 or higher
You roleplay your therapy sessions with brutal honesty	-1
Your counselor has had experience with the paranormal	-1

Example: When Cora kills a defenseless person (true, one who misguidedly protects a deader, but a human being nonetheless), the only thing that seems to relieve her pain is booze. Unfortunately, the sun always rises, and the guilt comes rushing back. Pretty soon, she has to get drunk every day.

Cora can deal with the complaints from her old friends and co-workers — they don't (can't!) understand. But after she breaks out a bottle on watch one night and one of the walking dead gets into her group's safe house, Cora knows she has a problem. She decides to go to Alcoholics Anonymous for help.

She manages to stay clean and sober for months of game time (her player spends Willpower to resist temptations to drink and accepts penalties when Willpower is lean). During that time, Cora stands up at AA meetings a few times and describes her troubles — but only in vague terms. (“I let someone die because I made a mistake” as opposed to, “When he wouldn't step aside, I pulled the trigger and then killed the monster he was protecting.”) The player gets quite emotional in such confessionals and carries off the difficult act bravely.

When Cora saves a normal person's life by talking a monster out of killing its hostage, the Storyteller decides that Cora has worked hard enough. He reviews the elements of her treatment. She hasn't told her "therapist" (in this case, the AA group) about the supernatural, so that's +2 to difficulty, but she is roleplayed to the hilt, so that's -1, for a total difficulty of 8. Cora's player rolls her 6 Willpower and gets two successes. Cora has made a significant breakthrough against her addiction and is on the road to recovery. The Storyteller requires a similar roll once a week till 12 successes are accumulated. Cora's resolve does not falter, and she eventually beats her addiction (she no longer suffers derangement penalties) — as long as she can stay on the wagon.

Example: Ever since Michael was attacked in his own home, he hasn't been able to leave the house or fall asleep unless he has searched every room with the sight — and a loaded gun. He knows this routine is unreasonable because he killed the one creature that knew where he lived, but he still feels compelled. When this obsession delays Michael on one occasion and an ally is badly wounded as a result, he feels crushing guilt and seeks solace in someone outside the group who can still understand.

Steve isn't a therapist; he's a bartender. He was working the night Michael stalked a *thing* into the bar. Everything was fine till the "guy" went nuts at a table, making a scene. Steve stepped up to get things under control. When he saw that the drunk wasn't even alive, Steve froze. He couldn't move or act or even think. Before Steve could get himself killed, however, Michael dragged him out of the bar. Everyone else seemed to be running away, too. That was the only time Steve ever saw a monster. Only Michael, his savior and new means to the truth, had answers to his many questions.

Having been told so much by Michael, and being prepared to do whatever he can to help the cause, Steve is glad to lend a sympathetic ear for Michael's problem. Without much direct experience with monsters, the bartender doesn't offer much in the way of advice. Although Steve starts out as a Storyteller character, the players like him so much that other characters come to the bar to unload their problems on him. In fact, when another of the players' characters dies, that player asks if he can take over Steve, who continues to have a receptive ear — even if only to better educate himself about *the truth*.

After months of listening and eventually even working with Michael, Steve finally gets fed up: "Look, you got all these powers and shit. You were equipped by God or something so you could *do* stuff, not just sit on your ass in your house like some survival nut. I mean, shit. So one of them got the drop on you. You paid him back, didn't you? So get over it. If it'd been me, I'da been dead before I even figured out what was going on. Give yourself some credit." The Storyteller decides this is the make-or-break moment for Michael, confronted as he is with an even harsher reality as endured by a bystander.

The difficulty of the Willpower roll is modified as follows: -1 because Michael's "therapist" has had some experience with the paranormal; +1 because of Steve's confrontational (and not very articulate) therapeutic style; and +1 because Michael didn't seek counseling regularly — he'd stop by the tap whenever he felt down. This makes for an 8 difficulty. Michael's player rolls Willpower and

gets one success. Michael has indeed been shown the light and has the potential to regain control of his life.

Over the next few sessions with Steve, Michael asks what his friend has learned about the real world, and how Steve has learned to cope. The Storyteller sets a goal of eight successes to be accumulated for Michael to recover completely. When Michael discovers his neighbor killed in a gruesome fashion however, the Storyteller asks Michael's player to roll Willpower again to see how the character copes with the discovery and its threat. The roll botches. The Storyteller eliminates all accumulated successes. Michael falls into a severe bout of paranoia, flees to his home and seals himself away instead of doing something about his neighbor's fate. Perhaps renewed therapy will talk Michael out of his sheltered existence and intensified derangement.

BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMICALS

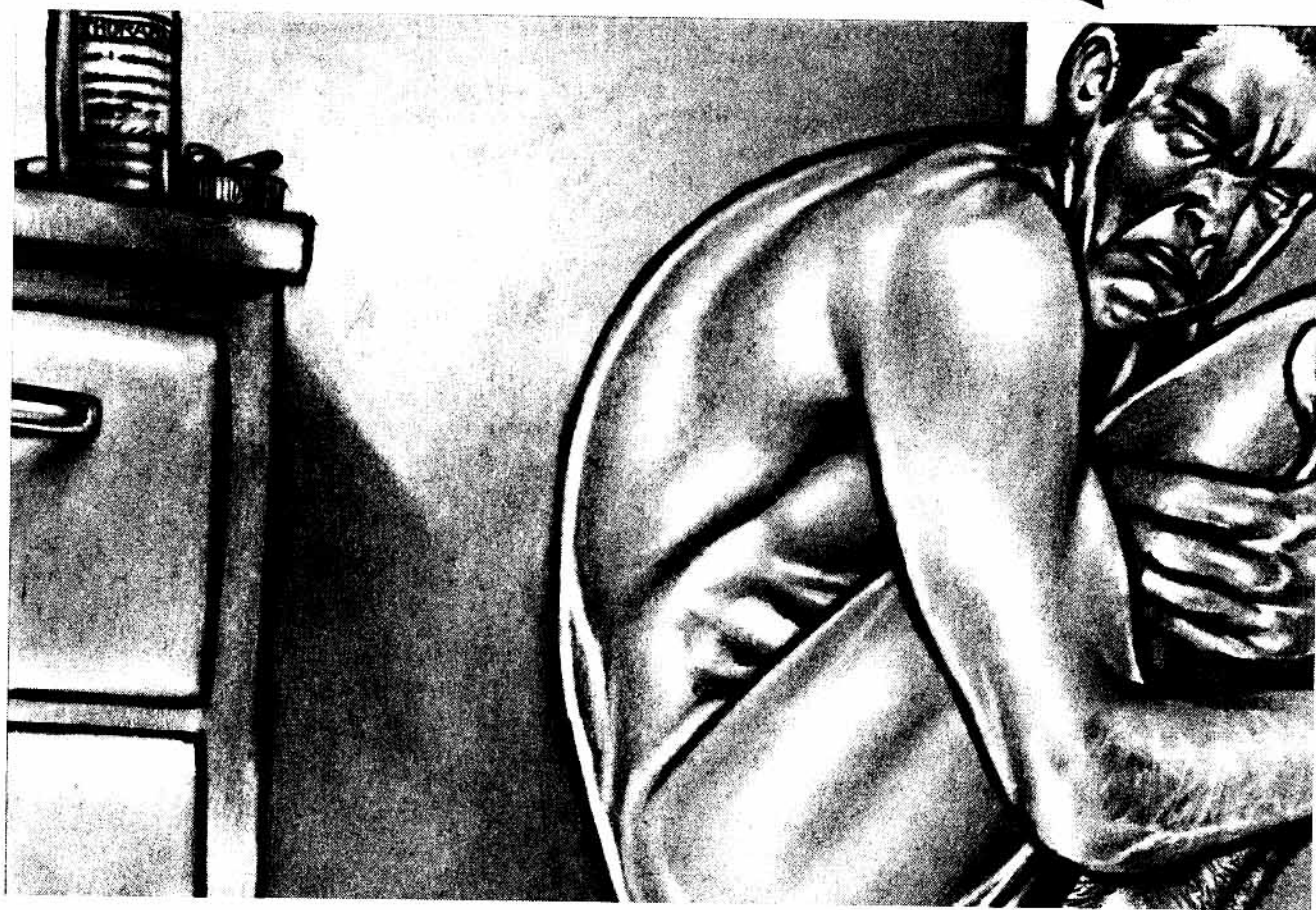
For the desperately imbalanced, chemical therapy may be more effective or attractive than talk therapy. This treatment assumes that mental illness is caused by brain chemistry as much as by emotional trauma. The best psychiatrists insist that their pharmaceuticals are supplements to, not replacements for, normal talk therapy. There is lot of demand for mental health care however, and the temptation to go with a quick chemical fix is extremely seductive — not least because it sometimes *works*. Schizophrenia responds particularly well to medical treatment, for example. Some doctors believe there's a genetic basis for schizophrenia, and that the illness can lie dormant for years until a stressful situation — such as almost any event in the hunt — causes it to manifest.

Nonetheless, medicinal abuses happen. Many mental-health researchers believe Ritalin is grossly over-prescribed for Attention Deficit Disorder because it works perfectly for only a small percentage of patients. It literally seems like a wonder drug for these individuals. The doctor finds this success as rewarding as hitting a home run, so the next time she diagnoses ADD she swings for the fence again. It doesn't work? Well, maybe this patient's magic bullet is Xanax or Prozac, or Lithium or Librium or Thorazine....

Your character's chances with chemical therapy depend on the skill of his psychiatrist. An uninspired therapist — one or two dots in Science (Psychiatry) and a 3 Intelligence or so — probably tries a litany of prescriptions until something takes effect. If your character searches for the best help available, his therapist's Science (Psychiatry) score probably equals your character's Resources rating.

If the psychiatrist really knows what he's doing and is willing to undertake an intensive program of medication and therapy, you can start using the talking-cure rules after only four weeks, instead of months, and no cathartic experience is required to inspire a transition. If treatment succeeds in counteracting an ailment, no more sessions or drugs are required thereafter, unless some horrible events throws the patient into regression.

With a less proficient doctor, the Storyteller makes a Science (Psychiatry) roll in secret after one month of game time. The difficulty is 8 or 9, depending on whether the doctor really cares but has limited experience or is just pushing pills. If the roll succeeds, the derangement is held in



check as long as the patient continues to take his medicine. There may be some side effects, such as your character feeling as if he's constantly drooling, but the most disgusting symptoms are suppressed. If the doctor's roll is botched, the patient may manifest another derangement — almost certainly addiction, hysteria, manic-depression, paranoia or schizophrenia. This secondary derangement can be purged by going without the wrongly prescribed medicine for a month, putting your character back at square one.

Because medicine can be used to affect specific ailments, individual conditions can be targeted for patients with multiple derangements. Sometimes a drug even affects more than one ailment at the same time (see the descriptions of disorders and the drugs that counter them, below).

Medical doctors who are not trained specifically in psychiatry can still write prescriptions for psychotropics, but psychiatrists are specialists for good reason. A broken mind isn't like a burst appendix. If a M.D. who dabbles in psychiatry administers drugs, roll Intelligence +1 (regardless of Medicine rating). For a character with a Medicine specialty that's applicable, such as Psychiatry or Psychopharmacology, roll Intelligence + Medicine. Consider the doctor to be an "uninspired" psychiatrist for use of the recovery systems, above.

An unlicensed hobbyist who has read the *Physician's Desk Reference* and who tries to follow the articles in *The Lancet* is an even worse bet for pharmaceutical treatment. If someone without Science (Psychiatry) or Medicine tries to dispense drugs, don't even bother with a roll. Assume

the "patient" is misdiagnosed or misprescribed (considered the "doctor's" effort to have botched, as detailed above). A character buying some schoolkid's Ritalin because a buddy said it would help him focus is not the way to get well.

TIME FOR YOUR MEDICINE

There are a lot of psychotropic medicines in use. As a guideline, here are some of the most commonly prescribed, broken down by the derangements they treat. Each description includes a list of possible side effects. Note that not everyone who takes these drugs suffers side effects. Some are lucky. Rarely does a given drug result in more than one side effect, in any event.

If your character suffers from the side effects of a medication, your Storyteller may assign penalties to certain actions or in certain situations. It's up to her. Drowsiness, for example, can be represented by imposing a +1 difficulty to all Strength-, Dexterity-, Perception- and Wits-based rolls. Depression can be represented by a loss of Willpower or even Conviction points (the latter probably results with derangements induced by high-Virtue rating rather than by ailments suffered from the nightly hunt). Dizziness can increase the difficulties of Dexterity and Perception rolls by one.

Getting prescription medicine without a prescription isn't exactly simple — or legal. Given the average imbued's propensity to get into legal trouble however, many characters may find themselves in the dilemma of going off their medicine or filling a prescription by any means necessary — and sending up a big warning flag to the local police department.

Ironically, such characters would have an easier time if they were prescribed heavy-duty shit like Demerol. People take Demerol (which is basically synthetic heroin, only more pure) for fun, so there's an illegal distribution infrastructure in place. By contrast, Haldol has little to no criminal support structure.

Getting a nonrecreational prescription medicine requires an Intelligence + Streetwise roll, difficulty 8. This difficulty is reduced by one for every two points your character has in Resources, Contacts or Allies (use the highest Background). Naturally, this bonus applies only if Contacts or Allies are the kind of people who arrange illegal drug buys.

Paranoia, Hysteria, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder

These ailments are known as the anxiety disorders, which are often treated with Librium, Xanax or Valium. Valium and Xanax are the medicines of choice for mild cases. Valium is a light sedative that can cause unwanted drowsiness. Xanax is a selective-serotonin re-uptake inhibitor (or SSRI) that can also induce drowsiness, or depression or light-headedness. Librium can cause fatigue, in addition to dizziness, muscular weakness or nausea.

Schizophrenia

Thorazine is a low-powered drug for schizophrenia, prescribed to those whose hallucinations are judged to be mild or infrequent. It can result in blurred vision or dizziness. Lethargy is such a common side effect that many nurses refer to "the Thorazine shuffle" when they see a patient moving with the drug's characteristic slow gait. More extreme or violent episodes may require Haldol, the effects of which can be unfocused anxiety, muscle stiffness or muscular tremors.

Alcoholism

There's no medical cure for alcoholism, but Valium (see above) is often prescribed to take the edge off withdrawal.

Insomnia

The smart people who decline to self-treat insomnia with booze or other sedatives may get a prescription for Halcion. Halcion can sometimes cause dizziness, exhaustion or headaches.

Depression

Prozac, the crown-prince of SSRIs, is perhaps the most widely prescribed depression treatment in the world. Its most common side effects are insomnia or sexual dysfunction, but there have been incidents of much more serious problems, including hysteria. Like all SSRIs, Prozac requires several weeks to take effect. An alternative is Wellbutrin, which is sometimes associated with sleeplessness or with occasional fits of jittery nervousness.

Manic-Depression

Lithium is a common "cure" for bipolar disorder (as "manic-depression" is currently called). It's a powerful mood regulator but is associated with diarrhea, dizziness, lethargy, nausea or physical tremors.

EDGES

A great deal of debate exists about the nature of hunters and the origins of their mysterious capabilities. Hunters have various outlooks on life and the world, just as all people do, and

WHOM THE GODS WOULD DESTROY, THEY FIRST MAKE MAD

Human therapy is based on centuries of study and experience, which gives it a decent chance of coping with most human traumas. The question remains, however: Are the derangements manifested by imbued with 7 or more Virtue ordinary mental illnesses? Considering their mysterious source, ordinary therapy — even therapeutic drugs — might not have the slightest effect.

The decision of whether therapy can alleviate the mental and emotional static that results from high Virtue is ultimately up to the Storyteller and the needs of individual stories. It sounds like a cop-out, but only you can decide what's appropriate to your chronicle's theme, setting and tone. Considering the erratic, inscrutable manner in which the Messengers seem to operate, it might even be possible for one Virtue-induced ailment to be treated successfully, and another to resist all medical expertise.

Some hunters are reputedly capable of easing the torment of extremist imbued. See the new edges in **Hunter Book: Innocent** for possibilities.

groups of like-minded imbued seem to form just as circles form among normal folk. Hunters, however, know the truth about the world, and they possess strange powers seemingly bequeathed upon them to do something about the horrific state of reality. Yet the variations and permutations of these capabilities seem simultaneously to parallel and defy the lines drawn by hunter outlooks. Chosen who strive to turn creatures from their wicked ways can often facilitate communication and peace — but then there are such "facilitators" who are empowered to condemn the unrepentant just as quickly, with extremely aggressive powers. Add to this confusion the capacity to heal among the forgiving — or harm the remorseless seemingly with the same edge. Where are lines between hunter groups drawn when the imbued have as many takes on their purpose as there are chosen, and the capabilities bestowed upon them seem just as myriad? Can there even be definitions among hunter circles, and should their powers be shared for the greater good or withheld in hopes of finding some badge of identity? That's for the imbued themselves to decide.

The following new edges are characteristic of Redeemers' compassion and charity. They're available to hunters of all creeds, however. As "alternative" edges are more frequently described during face-to-face interaction and on hunter-net, minds are exposed to new possibilities in the calling, and more people can acquire these unprecedented capacities.

• OUTREACH

This edge allows the user to appear reasonable and non-threatening to one monster. The creature is not necessarily alarmed by or wary of the user, nor does it feel any particular need to respond violently toward him. Of course, most supernaturals consider all humans harmless, but that can change rapidly once a human proves able to see the creature for what it truly is, or if that person manifests any inexplicable capabilities. By using

Outreach, the imbued is able to persuade a monster that he is no threat to it, despite his being able to see the creature and despite his repertoire of skills. Your character must be unarmed and visibly nonaggressive for this effect to work, and he must make some reassuring comment to the subject such as, "It's all right, I'm not a threat," or "Wouldn't it be nice to speak peacefully and be civilized to each other for once?" To the responsive creature's mind, the approaching person simply seems innocuous, perhaps even interesting, but not overtly dangerous or even particularly tempting to prey upon. At no point is the creature under any form of mind control.

System: Roll Manipulation + Mercy, difficulty 6. One success allows your character to come across as harmless — although perhaps still mildly suspicious — for the remainder of the scene. Three or more successes make him seem like a reasonably pleasant or intriguing person, for a human. The effect applies to a designated creature, not to all in your character's presence. That being is singled out by your hunter's approach and concentration (you have to tell the Storyteller which monster is addressed). The monster must be able to see your character and hear his voice for the edge to function. Your character need not necessarily be able to see and hear the creature he hopes to "tame," as in the case of an invisible ghost or a creature in hiding, for example.

Demonstrating awareness of a monster's true nature or activating other edges does not particularly disturb the subject. Bear in mind, however, that although the monster might have no particular reason to harm your character, there's nothing stopping it from doing so. Psychotic or purely malevolent creatures aren't deterred from attacking your character. Wary or paranoid beings are not necessarily reassured at all, and a creature's goals are never altered. Furthermore, picking up a weapon, taking aggressive action or attempting to touch an unconsenting subject all cancel the effects of this edge. This power can allow a hunter to approach a creature with the opportunity to be heard and perhaps initiate a productive dialogue — assuming the creatures doesn't have good reason to turn a deaf ear.

Some ancient monsters, at the Storyteller's discretion, may not be affected by your hunter's plea at all, as they are too removed from their former humanity to care about an overture from one of their prey.

This edge has no effect on other imbued, bystanders or other people. Whether it succeeds or fails to facilitate contact, this power can be used upon only one creature in any given scene.

•• INSIGHT

With sufficient observation, certain hunters find it possible to deduce information about a monster's past life as a human, about a thing the creature still misses and regrets losing. A whole range of different cues and hints are put together on which to compose a reliable deduction — the observer simply knows the subject's pain, perhaps because he values humanity so highly or his compassion makes him receptive to the feelings of others, even monsters. It takes about an hour of surveillance to piece together enough clues about a creature's behavior and

mannerisms to have a chance of gaining an insight. The way it looks wistfully at a courting couple might be a clue to lost love. A nervous habit of flicking over a menu in a bar could suggest that food is missed. A valid insight instills a strong feeling of sympathy and pity in the observer, as if inspired by a bond between hunter and monster.

Usually, the only insight that can be gained about mindless creatures is that they do not appear capable of thought and therefore miss nothing from any previous human existence. Truly ancient monsters that have completely forgotten their human existence may be unreadable — a veritable blank emotional slate. Absolutely unrepentant beings that revel in their supernatural condition inspire revulsion in an onlooker.

System: After spending approximately an uninterrupted hour watching a creature's behavior for signs of humanity, your character can glean enough information to allow you to make a Wits + Mercy roll, difficulty 6. One success reveals the foremost thing that the subject misses about being human, and the degree to which that longing might affect the subject. For example, a creature could watch children at play in a park, a sign that it misses its old family life and can be reduced to tears when confronted with a photo of its own kids.

More successes reveal increasingly subtle regrets about or losses from a past existence. At two successes, a creature might seem to miss its kids, but it's also apparent that it regrets not having treated a spouse better and thus having made a better parent. Maybe a sight of a parent pushing a child on a swing seems to affect the subject very subtly but profoundly. At three successes, it might be apparent that the subject's sorrow over lost children and a bad marriage might derive from a previous sense of inadequacy, that the monster was never good enough for his family before, and isn't good enough to approach any children or parents in the park now. Each such extra success and corresponding layer of perception grants your character increasing material with which to approach a creature and establish a sympathetic rapport — all the better to truly understand the being and perhaps help it change its unnatural existence.

Insight can be gained into only one creature at a time, and at least one hour's observation is required to understand a being. Subsequent efforts can be made with the same being if it doesn't sit still for the requisite hour, or to gain more successes and greater personal understanding. Once three or more successes have been achieved regarding a creature, there is usually little else to understand about the thing.

This power cannot be used to perceive the regrets of people or hunters, not even hunters with Virtues rated 7 or more.

••• PUNISH

This edge allows a confessor to draw on the buried remnants of humanity — if any exist at all — within a recalcitrant monster to subject it to the terror and pain that it would inflict upon would-be prey. Your character need only touch a monster to create this effect. Some Redeemers consider it a lesson taught and believe that the power derives from the moral high ground on which the hunter stands. Other saviors consider the edge a curse and literally invoke an oath that a monster will suffer that which it would inflict.

Regardless of how the power is understood, both condemning and forgiving Redeemers may possess it, because all can recognize that some unrepentant entities must be punished.

System: Roll Wits + Mercy, difficulty 6. Your character must concentrate for one turn and then make physical contact with the intended monster (or touch the space occupied by a spirit). In that turn, your hunter may focus on the penance that a creature must pay for its sins, or wish its predations be reflected back on it. A successful Brawl attack may be required to contact a resisting target, although no damage need be inflicted to activate the power.

The effects of the edge can kick in within a number of hours equal to your successes rolled. In that period, every time the monster attempts to attack a normal person (*not* a hunter or another supernatural creature) in any way, it experiences a premonition of the pain and suffering its actions will cause. Each monster has a different experience. One could respond as if it were the victim in question. Another might get a flash of attacking a former or current loved one. Or a creature could have a vision of itself at its most monstrous and be horrified by its own depravity.

In order for a monster to perform an attack despite its experience, a Willpower roll, difficulty 8, is required. Successes achieved must *exceed* your own. If the Willpower roll fails, the monster loses its action that turn. Further attempts to attack a target are allowed in subsequent turns, but more Willpower rolls must be made, and further waves of remorse wash over the creature. If a Willpower roll botches, the creature suffers a truly violent attack of shame and flees its intended victim, possibly even suffering a permanent change in behavior, at the Storyteller's discretion. Note that the Willpower roll of a truly ancient or soulless creatures might be at a reduced difficulty. Alternatively, such entities might ignore this edge's effects entirely.

A Redeemer can apply this power simultaneously to a number of targets equal to his Mercy rating, and he does not have to be in proximity to any of them. The effect persists even if your character is rendered Incapacitated. Repeated application of this effect on the same subject does not have any cumulative effect. The duration of the power can be cut short at your character's discretion, from any distance. If an attempt to use Punishment against a subject fails (you get no successes on your Wits + Mercy roll), the edge cannot be attempted against the same creature again in the same scene.

••••• ABJURE

When this edge is activated, the user assumes a forbidding façade to monstrous eyes. She literally seems to represent all that is good and pure and worthy about humanity — everything that monsters of ill intent are not, or that they wish they could have but are denied. It's as if the imbued embodies such an ideal that her very presence is unbearable, a reminder of everything that monsters have lost, invoking overwhelming feelings of misery, guilt or downright fear. Staying in the user's presence is an act of will, and most affected creatures try to get away from her as quickly as possible. The imbued might feel such over-

whelming pity for monsters that they're utterly ashamed. Or she might believe herself the veritable hand of God come to show creatures the error of their ways.

Some creatures are not affected, however. Those who actively seek redemption for their inhuman acts, or who feel genuine regret for crimes committed as monsters are not driven off. The user still seems to personify a human ideal, but she is attractive rather than terrifying, a role model to imitate rather than a confessor come to demand penance.

System: This edge drives away monsters that have hostile intentions toward humanity in general, or that have yet to morally question their own malicious acts. Spend a point of Conviction and one action to activate this edge. For the remainder of the current scene, any aggressive monster that sees your character can be affected. Roll Appearance + Mercy, difficulty 6. A resisted Willpower roll, also difficulty 6, must be made for each affected monster already in your character's vicinity or that approaches thereafter. If its roll loses, a monster flees immediately. Spending a Willpower point allows a monster one more Willpower roll in the subsequent turn to resist your character's presence. If that roll fails, no more are allowed.

Your character can be attacked by creatures that manage to resist his daunting presence. Attacks don't terminate this edge prematurely, though, if other monsters arrive before the end of the scene. This power does fail if your character becomes Incapacitated or he terminates it intentionally. The edge can be activated only once per scene. The Storyteller may rule that certain powerful or ancient monsters are immune to this edge; they have forgotten or dismissed their past lives and are no longer deterred by any values upheld then.

Penitent monsters in your character's presence find her compelling and reassuring. The difficulties of all Social rolls made toward these beings are at -2. This edge has no effect on other people or hunters, not even hunters with 7+ Virtue ratings.

••••• SHAME

Drawing on the same divisions within a monster's soul as Abjure does, the user can fill a supernatural target with near-suicidal self-loathing. This hatred is normally activated when the imbued makes a scornful or pitying comment to creatures about what they have become, such as "Look at yourselves," or "What do you think you are?" The resulting frenzy of self-loathing lasts momentarily, but makes victims lash out at themselves in fury.

System: Spend two Conviction points and roll Manipulation + Mercy, difficulty 8. One action must be spent to express concern or scorn. All monsters that hear your character and that have hostile intentions toward humanity in general, or that have yet to morally question their own malicious acts, can suffer damage. A resisted Willpower roll, difficulty 6, is made against your single roll for each potential victim. Each outstanding success that you achieve imposes one level of damage, probably lethal, that monsters inflict upon themselves using any handy means of the Storyteller's choice. Generally, a monster seeks to do itself the worst harm possible, even if it's utterly self-destructive. A vampire might therefore throw itself into a

nearby inferno, for example. Damage caused can be soaked, if allowed. Armor may also apply if appropriate. This power can be used only once per scene.

The Storyteller may rule that certain powerful or truly ancient monsters are immune to this effect as they feel no regret for what they have become and thus do not punish themselves.

Penitent monsters, those who actively seek redemption for their inhuman acts or who feel genuine regret for crimes committed as monsters, are not forced to harm themselves. The Storyteller decides which creatures these are if you or your character do not already know. To salvageable creatures' eyes, your character is a forgiving messiah figure, perhaps come to save their souls.

This edge has no effect on the imbued, bystanders or other people.

HOLDING OUT HOPE

In the World of Darkness, monsters are made but not always born. Sometimes, the pervasive decay and corruption imposes choices or conditions on a person that he does not seek or welcome but must endure all the same. A street person might accept unlife as the only escape from the squalor in which he has always wallowed. An influential business magnate might be told that he can undergo a rite of initiation into a mysterious cult or be killed. Sometimes, the result is a "monster," a being that's forced out of the light, no longer quite human, that lurks on the fringes of human society and that must prey upon people in order to survive — to fulfill that impulse which all things must obey. But because not all monsters wanted such a fate, not all monsters are beyond hope. There are those that wish to be people again, human beings that can live normal lives, with friends and maybe even family. Others wish simply to be allowed to pass from this world so that they no longer need afflict abuses upon the undeserving. Monsters who regret their choices or wish to escape their condition can seek forgiveness, salvation — the very things that Redeemers offer.

Unfortunately, the biggest stumbling block to achieving salvation for many creatures is that very urge that haunts them nightly: survival. Swearing off sustenance is grueling for any creature — whether that source is food, blood, fear or souls. Even creatures that do not need to inflict harm to gain strength are still aware that what they do — be it soaking up the peace felt within a church or draining the vitality from a neighborhood — is inherently wrong. Either way, monsters' very compulsion to prey and survive separates them from what they used to be and keeps them from being that way again.

Fortunately, one confessor thinks she has found the answer to penitent monsters' dilemma. Alice196, a young Chicago woman, has developed a technique that seems to allow the lost to draw sustenance and energy from a harmless, renewable "source," rather than from living victims. She stumbled across the method as part of a determined campaign to redeem a friend's former lover. Although the basic technique is relatively simple, it's time-consuming and must involve an object with strong emotional significance



to a particular creature. An additional benefit is that reliance on this source seems to remind a subject of its lost humanity and the things it cherished before, helping to bring the being closer to feeling human.

Alice continues to explore the possibilities of her discovery. She has shown the results to a few like-minded imbued. She has yet to make any formal announcement of the technique as she waits to ensure its effectiveness; she has not even mentioned it on any hunter Internet list. Little does she know that word has already begun to spread from her initial disciples, with what repercussions no one knows.

So far, only Redeemers have shown the necessary understanding to create a source. Unless the Storyteller decides otherwise, members of other creeds simply seem to lack the single-minded dedication to rehabilitating creatures to be able to create such items, even though members of other creeds can possess Redemption edges.

METHOD

Creating sources is a painstaking, exhausting process, primarily because one can be made for only a single, specific creature. Multiple beings cannot gain sustenance from one source, and certainly not from one that wasn't provided for them.

The key lies in finding an object from a creature's past that has intense meaning and emotional significance to the being. Easier said than done: The mind — let alone the monstrous one — is complicated. Items that have the correct resonance for a penitent may be things the creature showed little interest *before*, and thus there may be no record of what to look for or where an item may have gone. In addition, although the former possessions of the newly transformed may still be extant, few of them are particularly significant. Knowing where a warlock's onetime house is may be of little use if you need a ring he gave as a gift 10 years ago. Old creatures present a different problem. Although any item from their lives may have considerable hold over them after all this time, only one or two such heirlooms might still exist. And then, a potentially penitent monster might not actually trust a hunter with information about its past life and values, thus forcing your character to guess at what the creature might prize now (Storytellers: A spirit's anchor has the potential to be a valid source. See Chapter 7 of *Hunter: The Walking Dead*).

It takes time and effort to track down and identify an appropriate object for a creature. First of all, a Redeemer has to research her subject's previous life, discovering as much as she can about the person, what his hopes and dreams were, what he liked, whom he loved. Next, she has to track down surviving artifacts that belonged to her subject. This step can require a considerable amount of investigation, historical study and even archaeology in some cases. She has to see an item from the creature's past to tell if it is suitable. If it is, she might be aware of a certain nostalgic "warmth" about it that reflects the item's emotional value. Other Redeemers claim to recognize intuitively the personal importance of an item based on the life they've studied. Still others sense such a bond forming with their subject that they experience a sense

of elation upon discovering an appropriate item and feel virtually what the penitent would.

Cherished items are typically small and portable. No pianos or cars have yet to be reported as sources. Once the search for such an elusive prize is complete and the item is delivered to the deserving creature, it seems to provide him with an emotional alternative to sustenance. The need for blood or the suffering of others is replaced by the reward of possessing the item again and being reminded of what was so important in life, once upon a time.

SYSTEM

Searching for and identifying a source takes a considerable amount of time — but also a superlative understanding of the creature for which it is sought. The process cannot even begin unless a Redeemer has a 3 Research or Intuition, and a 2 Empathy. Nor can your character ever perform more than one search at a time.

Conviction must be set aside to represent the search itself, which is almost always exhausting, intensive and frustrating. These points should be kept track of on your character sheet. They are no longer available to be risked on edge rolls or to be spent to activate second sight or powers. Each point represents anywhere from one day to one week of active searching, study and travel to locate a potential source. If your character does not have the free time to put in this effort while on the hunt, the Storyteller may extend the period that each allocated Conviction point represents, perhaps to as much as two or three weeks. Sometimes a minimum Resources score is also required to find an item for a creature, if international travel is required, for example. Your Storyteller can decide what rating is necessary. If your character doesn't have that score, he has to look for the money elsewhere.

Of course, the journey is sometimes more important than the destination. A Redeemer's search for a monster's long-lost heirloom is the very stuff of *Hunter* stories. If a bloodsucker is from the Old Country, for example, a confessor (and his allies, if they support her effort) might have to travel there, risk foreign territory, contend with whatever creatures roam the region, and locate an appropriate possession, all to help save a single creature's soul. Hopefully, the result proves to be worth the effort.

Once you have set aside five Conviction (perhaps all in one lump sum or a point here and there) and your character has conducted an extensive search, you can determine her success at locating a creature's potential source. Roll Perception + Bureaucracy, for subjects that left mundane mortal life behind within the last 50 years; Intelligence + Academics (History), for subjects that departed within the last 200 years; or Intelligence + Occult, for subjects that have spent more than 200 years in their current state. The difficulty is 6 if the subject cooperates, 8 if it doesn't.

Each success achieved represents one point of energy that can feed a supernatural subject in lieu of its normal form of sustenance. If you're using only the *Hunter* rulebook to play, this energy is Willpower. If you have the *Hunter Storyteller Companion*, this energy can replace blood points, Pathos, Rage, Quintessence or Glamour, whichever is appropriate to

the subject. This substitute energy may be drawn upon once each day, up to the limit achieved in your roll.

Extra Conviction points cannot be invested into your search roll because Conviction is already expended in the process by virtue of the points set aside. Nor can Willpower be spent to get an automatic success on your search roll; the search for a source enters the realm of the supernatural, where Willpower does not apply for hunters.

You cannot re-roll marginally successful search attempts; the result you get is final. Achieving only a few successes might indicate that the item located has minor — but still some — significance to the subject, or that the item is in poor shape after all these years and doesn't capture all of its old emotional potential.

If your search roll fails, the item located isn't as compelling to the creature as your character believed or sensed. If she still intends to locate a source for the monster, another search must begin. It lasts at least a month longer than the first, at the Storyteller's discretion. Fortunately, none of the Conviction points you set aside for the first search are lost; they go toward the new investigation. If the next roll fails, add yet another month to a subsequent search.

If any search roll botches, the effort has failed completely. A discovered item is accidentally destroyed, or something that brings back painful memories of the past is found instead. Such an item infuriates the monster, creating a permanent rift between the being and your character. The monster might even become unsalvageable thereafter, flying into a self-destructive and damning rage, cursing its foolishness for trusting a human. All Conviction points invested in the search are lost, permanently.

Drawing on a source as a form of sustenance has a certain price for a creature. The act is accompanied by a powerful feeling of turmoil and regret for the creature's lost normality, and by a sense of sympathy and common spirit for normal people (and arguably hunters). In addition to this wave of emotion is a vision or reminder of a past cruelty that the creature committed, or of the type of atrocity that it may yet perform if it continues to harm people. The confusion and regret that these emotions and visions cause manifest in game terms as a +1 difficulty modifier per sustenance point drawn by the creature, applied to all attempts to harm any human (or hunter) directly or indirectly. This penalty persists for 24 hours from the time the source was resorted to, although a Willpower point may be spent for each sustenance point drawn for the creature to ignore the effects for a scene. Thus, if a bloodsucker draws three points from its source, three Willpower have to be spent for the creature to overcome its +3 difficulty modifier to harm people for a scene. Difficulty modifiers can even apply to a creature that goes into a frenzy (see the **HSC**); the beast has trouble harming people even then, perhaps venting its wrath on its surroundings instead. Willpower is typically spent when a penitent creature is attacked by a person, such as another hunter, and feels the need to defend itself. Note that no penalties are imposed for a regretful monster to lash out at another monster. The purpose of this emotional trauma is to

help keep a creature on a higher path and to seek complete salvation from inhuman existence.

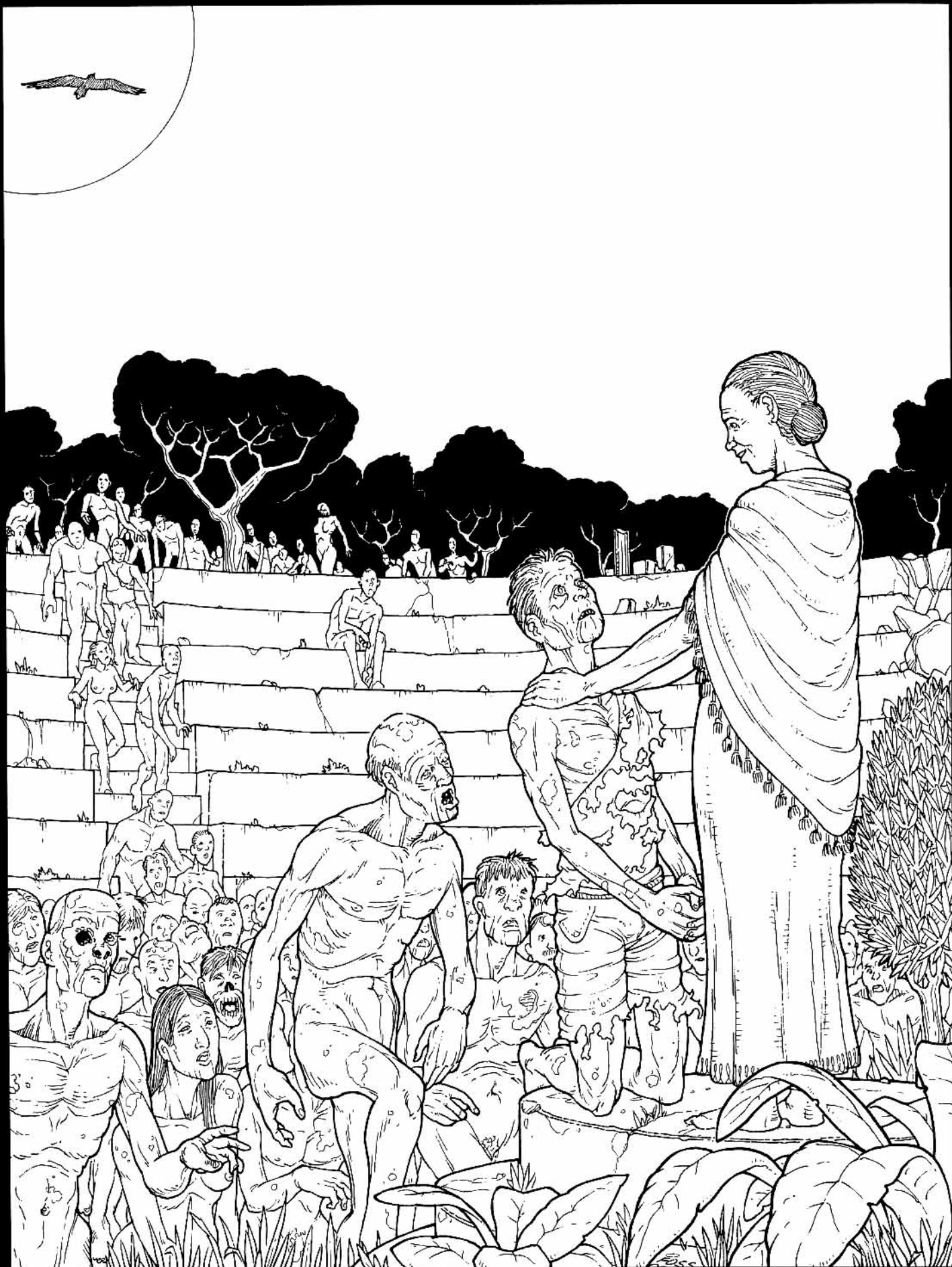
A Redeemer may locate and deliver a total number of active sources equal to her current Mercy rating. That rating represents the lengths to which her compassion and energy can extend to creatures. That capacity increases as her Mercy does.

A single creature can have only one source at any one time. Sources must usually be carried to be effective, although one located in a creature's lair or haunting site may be considered in its possession. If a source is ever destroyed after being delivered to a recipient, another item may be located for the same subject, or another item may be located for another creature, instead. If a creature with a source is ever killed, that source becomes useless and another item may be located for another penitent. It's also possible for your character to revoke the power of a source. Perhaps a monster harms people after all your character's efforts to rehabilitate it. She can deny the creature energy from its source thereafter. In doing so, of course, your character forces the being to resort to people as a means of sustenance once more. Conviction spent to find a source that is subsequently lost, destroyed or rendered inert is gone forever.

Any Redeemer — and perhaps other hunters who treat monsters with compassion — can recognize the significance of a source in a penitent's possession when it's seen with second sight or a perception edge such as Discern, Witness or Illuminate. There is nothing inherently unusual about the item (beyond anything that might be appropriate to the object). Such onlookers simply get an intuitive sense that the creature cares for the source — a sign of his potential humanity. Aggressive hunters get no such insight — a source is just an object in an abomination's possession. It might make a good trophy after the kill. It's for the forgiving to teach the militant the error of their ways.

The Storyteller should observe relations between a Redeemer who bestows a source and the creature that receives it. If the confessor ever abuses, neglects or otherwise fails to encourage and foster the creature, the power of its source might fail — without the Redeemer's knowledge. It might be necessary for the Redeemer to recognize how she has faltered and locate a new source to re-establish her relationship with the creature. Yet, if the "betrayed" monster cannot contact the dedicated for a new source (or chooses not to), the creature must resort to people as a means of energy again.

Of course, almost all of the preceding rules assume that a monster is a willing recipient of a source — that it wants to repent and change its ways. It's possible to research and acquire a source for an entity that has only begun to question is unnatural existence, or that doesn't yet know it has begun to change. There's no way to force a source on a creature and make the thing use it. A source is an excellent, safe means of energy, however. If a monster can be convinced to try it once, even with the worst intentions, he might come to rely on it, and undergo a transformation brought on by the cathartic experiences induced. It all comes down to how convincing your Redeemer is, and how well you roleplay her appeal.



CHAPTER 6: REDEEMERS AMONG US

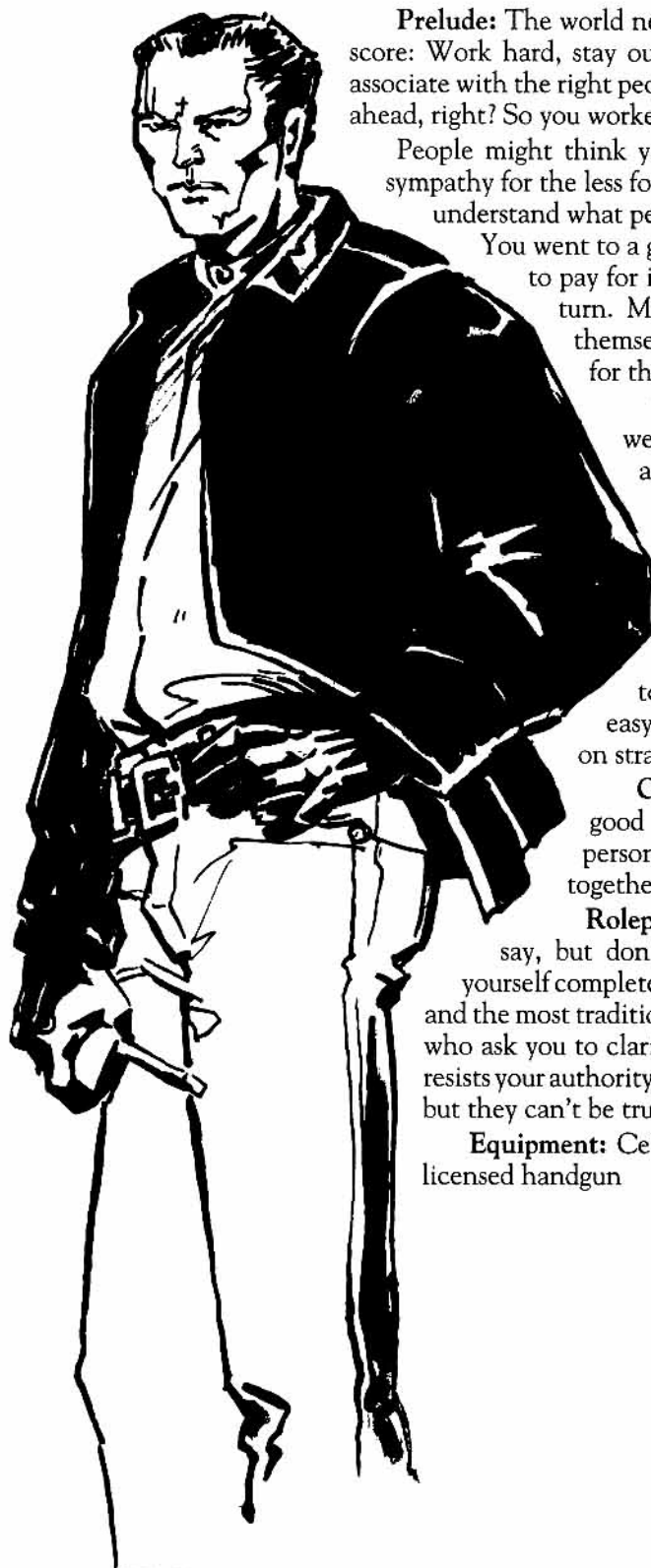
*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand
at the latter day upon the earth.*

— Job 19:25

Certain types of people virtually embody the Redeemer personality and identity: conciliatory, understanding, charitable, forgiving. The following characters personify those qualities. They're intended as models and starting points for your own character creation, or you can add color and detail to their profiles to make them your own.

BORN LEADER

The whole is more than the sum of its parts. That's as true in nature as it is in business... even ours.



Prelude: The world never posed many problems for you. You knew the score: Work hard, stay out of trouble, keep your eyes on the big picture, associate with the right people. The American Dream says work hard and get ahead, right? So you worked hard and you got ahead.

People might think your go-getter attitude wouldn't leave you much sympathy for the less fortunate, but that's not true. The difference is, you understand what people *really* need — not a handout, but a hand up.

You went to a good college, because your parents earned enough to pay for it, just like you'll pay for your kids when it's their turn. Maybe some people don't have that opportunity themselves, but every generation can make things better for the next, just as surely as it can make things worse.

Now that you've been awoken, you realize that you were blind before. Not just to the monsters and ghosts and other things, but to how much effect you could have through direct action. You're no spring chicken, but you've got a wealth of experience, leadership — and yes, okay, *money* — to offer to the cause and turn things around. Malevolent creatures are hurting a lot of defenseless people. That's a big problem, so it's especially important to approach it in an organized fashion. It won't be easy, but it can be done if people just keep their heads on straight.

Concept: You're used to being a leader, and you're good at it. A problem that's insurmountable to one person can be simple for a group — if the group can work together.

Roleplaying Hints: Pay attention to what other people say, but don't change your mind very easily. You consider yourself completely reasonable. You believe in traditional values — and the most traditional is "Listen up when the boss is talking." People who ask you to clarify individual decisions are fine, but anyone who resists your authority is a loose cannon. Loose cannons can be tolerated, but they can't be trusted.

Equipment: Cell phone, laptop computer, sport-utility vehicle, licensed handgun

REDUCTION

NAME: NATURE: Director PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy
 PLAYER: Demeanor: Traditionalist CREED: Redemption
 CHRONICLE: CONCEPT: Assumed Authority STARTING CONVICTION: 3

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Charisma <small>(Mien of Respectability)</small> _____ ● ● ● ● ○	Perception _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Dexterity _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Manipulation <small>(Reasoned Debate)</small> _____ ● ● ● ● ○	Intelligence _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Stamina _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Appearance _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Wits _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Animal Ken _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Academics <small>(Business Literature)</small> _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Athletics _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Crafts _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bureaucracy _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Awareness _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Demolitions _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Computer _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Brawl _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Drive _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Finance _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Dodge _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Etiquette _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Investigation _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Firearms _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Law _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Melee _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Linguistics _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Performance _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Medicine _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Security _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Occult _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership _____ ● ● ● ○ ○	Stealth _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Politics _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Survival _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Research _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Technology _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Science _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	EDGES	VIRTUES
	NAME CREED LEVEL TRIGGER	MERCY VISION ZEAL
Allies _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Bluster Redemption _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	1 ● <u>x</u> ○ ○ ○ ○
Contacts _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Insinuate Redemption _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	2 ● <u>x</u> ○ ○ ○ ○
Influence _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	3 ● <u>x</u> ○ ○ ○ ○
Resources _____ ● ● ● ● ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	4 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	5 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	6 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	7 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	8 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	9 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	10 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

HEALTH

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

I suggest you let the Lord shine His redemption upon you.

Prelude: You were walking home one Wednesday evening from your prayer group when it happened. A beggar was sitting on the sidewalk outside a late-night drug store. He asked you if you could spare any change. You stopped and asked him what he would spend it on. "I need some food, miss," he replied, clearly satisfied with the answer.

"What food were you planning to buy?" you asked him — always a good way to tell the junkies from the genuinely needy. He was clearly flummoxed, not expecting to have to be more specific.

"Uh, I'm going to buy some potatoes miss," he said.

"How would you cook them?" you asked, a fair enough question given that the man appeared destitute. He just looked at you, speechless, so you smiled at him sympathetically, explained that it would be wrong to help someone who wasn't prepared to help himself, and walked on.

You were half-expecting him to call out something rude. You certainly weren't expecting him to scream. You looked back and saw that a large man had come out of the store and picked up the beggar by one arm, dangling him off the ground. While you stared, astonished, you suddenly found yourself bathed in holy light, and the

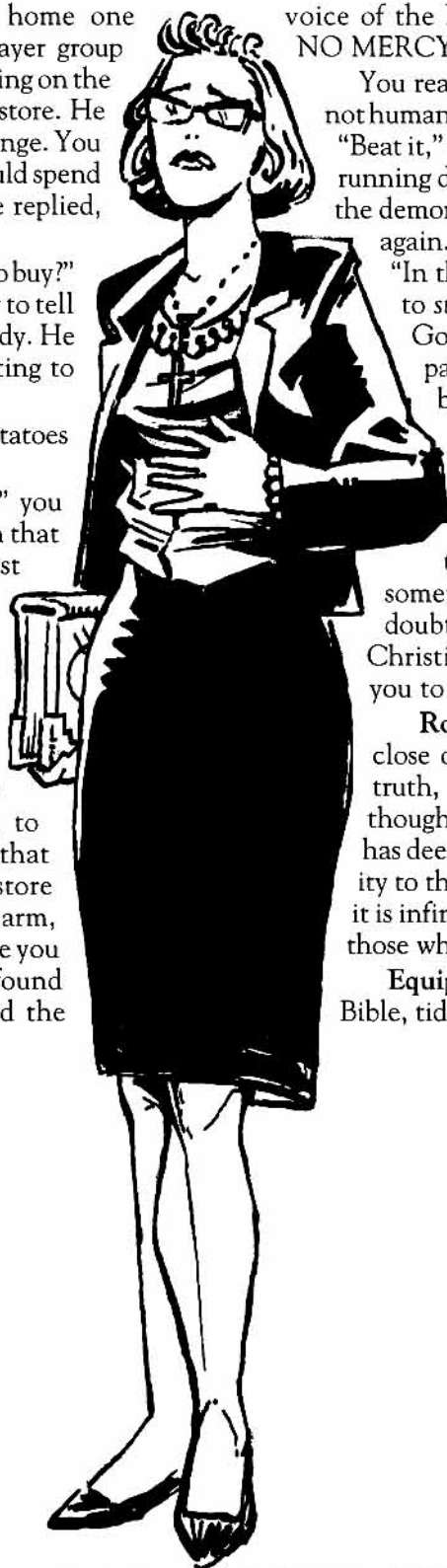
voice of the Lord came unto you: "IT KNOWS NO MERCY."

You realized that the attacker was a demon, not human. "Leave him alone," you told it firmly. "Beat it," the thing snarled. You could see blood running down the side of the beggar's face, and the demon pulled back its fist to strike the man again. You knew you had to do something. "In the name of the Lord, I command you to stop," you shouted, and you could feel God's will join your own. The thing paused in surprise, then dropped the beggar and fled. You went to help the poor man. By the time the police arrived, you'd shown him how the Lord had saved his life.

Concept: It sometimes seems that faith is out of fashion with twenty-somethings these days, but despite the doubt of your peers, you know the truth of Christianity. After all, the Lord has chosen you to help.

Roleplaying Hints: You can really feel close only to others who acknowledge the truth, and your beliefs shape your every thought and deed. You're proud that the Lord has deemed you worthy to dispense His charity to the world, and you know that although it is infinite and all can seek redemption, only those who truly repent can be saved.

Equipment: Silver crucifix on a chain, Bible, tidy clothing, personal organizer



NAME:

NATURE: Evangelist

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR: Teacher

CREED: Redemption

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: True Believer

STARTING CONVICTION: 3

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Stamina ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Appearance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Wits ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Awareness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Dodge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Expression ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Intimidation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Intuition ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Leadership (Rallying) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

Streetwise ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Subterfuge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Crafts (Flower Arranging) ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Demolitions ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Drive ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Etiquette ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Security ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Technology ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics (Theological) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Bureaucracy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Computer ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Finance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Linguistics ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Research ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Bystanders ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Contacts ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Patron ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Resources ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Bluster	Redemption	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Insight	Redemption	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
		<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
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VIRTUES

	MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

DERANGEMENTS

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

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CONVICTION

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WILLPOWER

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EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>

She said she's sorry. C'mon, cut her some slack will ya?

Prelude: It all started out as just another Friday night. You were out with the gang, determined to have fun and a few drinks. A couple of bars and one nightclub got you to 1 AM or so, but the places were really dull — no one and nothing going on. Eventually, someone suggested the Heron Club.

For years, the Heron was just another of the boring spots. It recently came under new management, though. You hadn't been, but word was the place had become... risky. You didn't know who you were going to run into. That made it totally fascinating, of course, and all of a sudden it was the cool place to be seen, if you had the guts.

That settled it. You all piled into a couple of cabs and headed over. Getting through the door was a breeze, and by 2 AM you were all on the floor, having a good time and rubbing shoulders with the beautiful people, a scattering of bad boys and girls. Much more like it.

Things began to go wrong some time after three. Lucy went off again, some sort of bad trip. As usual, the others left you to take care of her. You took her outside to get some fresh air and tried to talk her down. It was going okay until some dork interrupted to see if things were "all right." He was introducing himself when you clearly heard a deep, booming voice

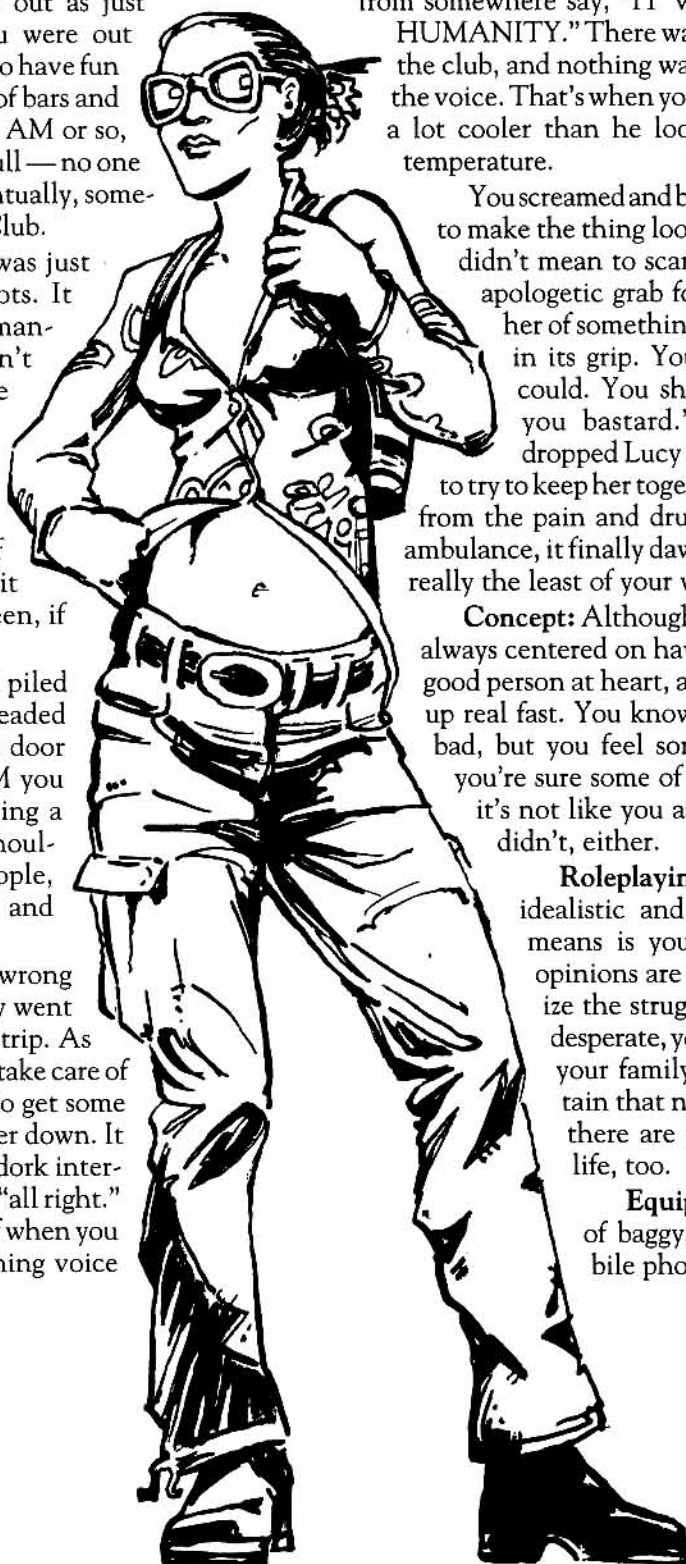
from somewhere say, "IT WEARS THE MASK OF HUMANITY." There was no sound system outside the club, and nothing was going on that explained the voice. That's when you realized that this guy was a lot cooler than he looked — like about room temperature.

You screamed and backed away, which seemed to make the thing look at you regretfully, like it didn't mean to scare you. It made an almost apologetic grab for Lucy, as if to convince her of something. You heard her arm snap in its grip. You did the only thing you could. You shouted, "Leave her alone, you bastard." Amazingly, it did. It dropped Lucy and ran away, leaving you to try to keep her together. She was unconscious from the pain and drugs. Once you'd called an ambulance, it finally dawned on you that Lucy was really the least of your worries.

Concept: Although your main interests have always centered on having a good time, you're a good person at heart, and you're starting to grow up real fast. You know that many monsters are bad, but you feel sorry for them anyway and you're sure some of them must be okay. Hey, it's not like you asked for this. Maybe they didn't, either.

Roleplaying Hints: You're young, idealistic and fairly well-off. All that means is you're convinced that your opinions are right. Although you realize the struggle you find yourself in is desperate, you miss spending time with your family and friends. You're certain that not all monsters are bad — there are plenty of assholes in real life, too.

Equipment: An expensive set of baggy, misshapen clothes; mobile phone; designer backpack





NAME:

NATURE: Healer

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR: Bon Vivant

CREED: Redemption

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: Party Girl

STARTING CONVICTION: 3

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance (Sunning) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

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 (Dancing) ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Security ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Technology ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics (Philosophy) ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Bureaucracy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Computer ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Finance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Research ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subculture (Clubs) ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Destiny ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Resources ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
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EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Bluster	Redemption	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
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VIRTUES

MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
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DERANGEMENTS

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CONVICTION

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Everyone deserves a chance to be saved. Even you.

Prelude: You realized years ago that you just weren't cut out for the rat race. All that self-important crap left you cold. You liked who you were, and if that made you a nice guy, well, maybe the only way to live was not to play the game.

So, as soon as you could, you left the world to get on with it. A degree in soil science and agrarian development led to a job with low pressure and no bullshit. You were attached to a university but based in the country. The pay was low, but they refunded your travel expenses and your house was cheap. You met a young woman and fell in love. It wasn't a spectacular life, but it was peaceful and you were happy.

One afternoon, you were in a sleepy little town to run a soil check on a farm you'd been monitoring for the better part of three years. You planned to spend the whole day there. Tragically, the farmer's son had opened and fallen down an old well six months before. Bill and his wife were coping, but not well. Ever since, you'd been dragging out your work at their place over a whole day to give them someone else to talk to for a change.

You were out in the yard with Bill when you spotted a kid heading for the well. Bill went pale, started running and shouted at the kid to get away, that the area was dangerous. The boy ignored him. Bill grabbed the child's shoulders to stop him, but incredibly the boy smashed him in the side and sent Bill flying. That's when a horrible smell overcame you, like when a plant is

pulled out of swamp water by the roots. Suddenly you could see it was really Bill Junior — six months dead. The father looked bad — down and groaning, maybe with a broken rib — so you went to help him. Meanwhile, Junior vanished down the well.

Bill didn't remember much, so after checking the well — dusty, but empty — you told the police that it was some kid who'd hit Bill with a bat and run off. You made up a description.

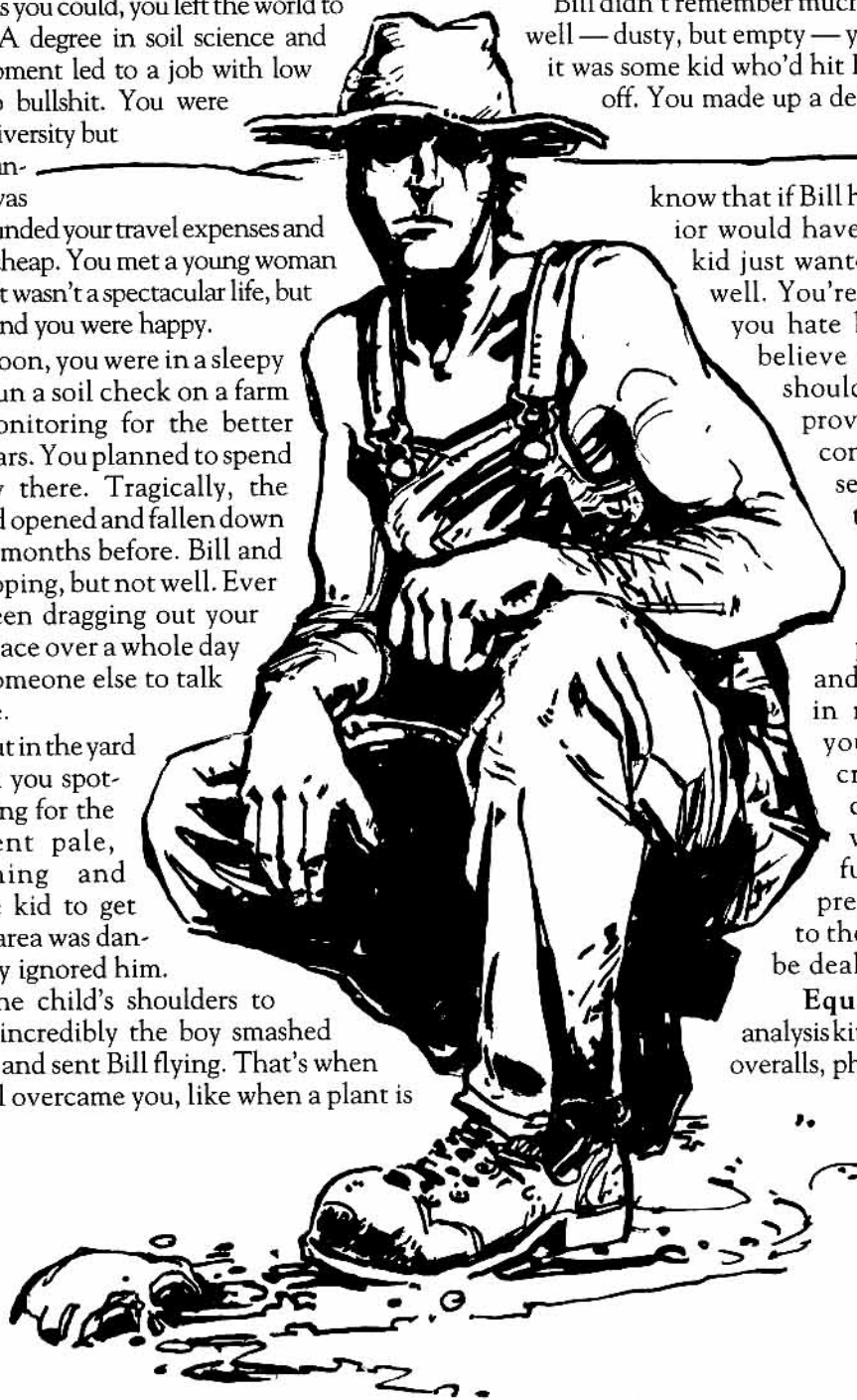
Concept:

Somehow you know that if Bill hadn't interfered, Junior would have left him alone. The kid just wanted to get back to the well. You're a peaceful man, and you hate hurting anyone. You believe that every creature should have a chance to prove itself before being condemned. The dead, it seems, are coming back to take care of something, but what?

Roleplaying

Hints: You're a kind person, unambitious and honest. You don't go in much for lying, and you think that every creature should get a chance to do what it wants to do peacefully. Only if it truly presents a clear danger to the vulnerable should it be dealt with harshly.

Equipment: Chemical-analysis kit, clunky pickup, fraying overalls, photo of your wife



NAME: NATURE: Paragon PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy
PLAYER: Demeanor: Traditionalist CREED: Redemption
Chronicle: Concept: Solitary Researcher Starting Conviction: 3

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Charisma (Trustworthy) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Perception <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Dexterity <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Manipulation <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Intelligence (Excellent Memory) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Stamina <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Appearance <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Wits <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Animal Ken <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Academics (Farmers Almanac) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Athletics <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Crafts <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Bureaucracy <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Awareness <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Demolitions <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Computer <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Brawl <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Drive <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Finance <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Dodge <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Etiquette <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Investigation <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
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Streetwise <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Survival <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Research <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
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Backgrounds	Edges	Virtues				
Name	Creed	Level	Trigger	Mercy	Vision	Zeal
Allies <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Bluster	Redemption	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	1 <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
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Derangements

Conviction ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Willpower ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Experience

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Now jush you shtopit, thash no' wha' you shoul' be shayin'!

Prelude: You don't remember a whole lot about the late '90s; you did your best to spend the last years of the millennium drunk on hard liquor and, after a time, on very *cheap* hard liquor. To cut a long, dull story down to a short, dull one, you were a management specialist, a troubleshooter. Things were going well, then things were going very well, then suddenly they were going badly. You started drinking, things slid to very bad, and then you found yourself on the street. It hurts to remember the specifics, so you try not to.

It's a shitty life. The shelters are even more dangerous than the sidewalks, so you try to stay out of them — and out of your yourself — as much as possible. Everyone on the street knows that people vanish. Lots of people. Some die from exposure, disease, malnutrition and a whole bunch of other medieval shit. Others just disappear. The official word is that they move on, go somewhere else, or find their way back to family and make it out of the gutter. That's bullshit, and everyone knows it — even the officials. Like last month: Mac wouldn't have left his old army jacket behind, no matter where he was going. It's easier for the rest of the world to ignore the truth, though.

A few days ago, things turned really odd. Linda, who hasn't been able to walk properly in all the years you've known her, suddenly whooped, leaped up and started dancing some

fancy-ass dance. You hadn't had a chance to start drinking, but you shot your bottle a suspicious glance anyway. "IT USES HER," the label read. Weird. Then you realized you could see someone inside Linda, moving her around.

"Hey," you yelled at the thing, "What do you want?" Linda looked around at you, the ghost looking with her, and it said, "I want to dance," using her voice. Then, it just winked out and Linda collapsed, screaming from the pain in her legs. She didn't know what had happened, so you kept your mouth shut. Suddenly, you could see all sorts of creepy shit pretending to be people, and things have been getting worse.

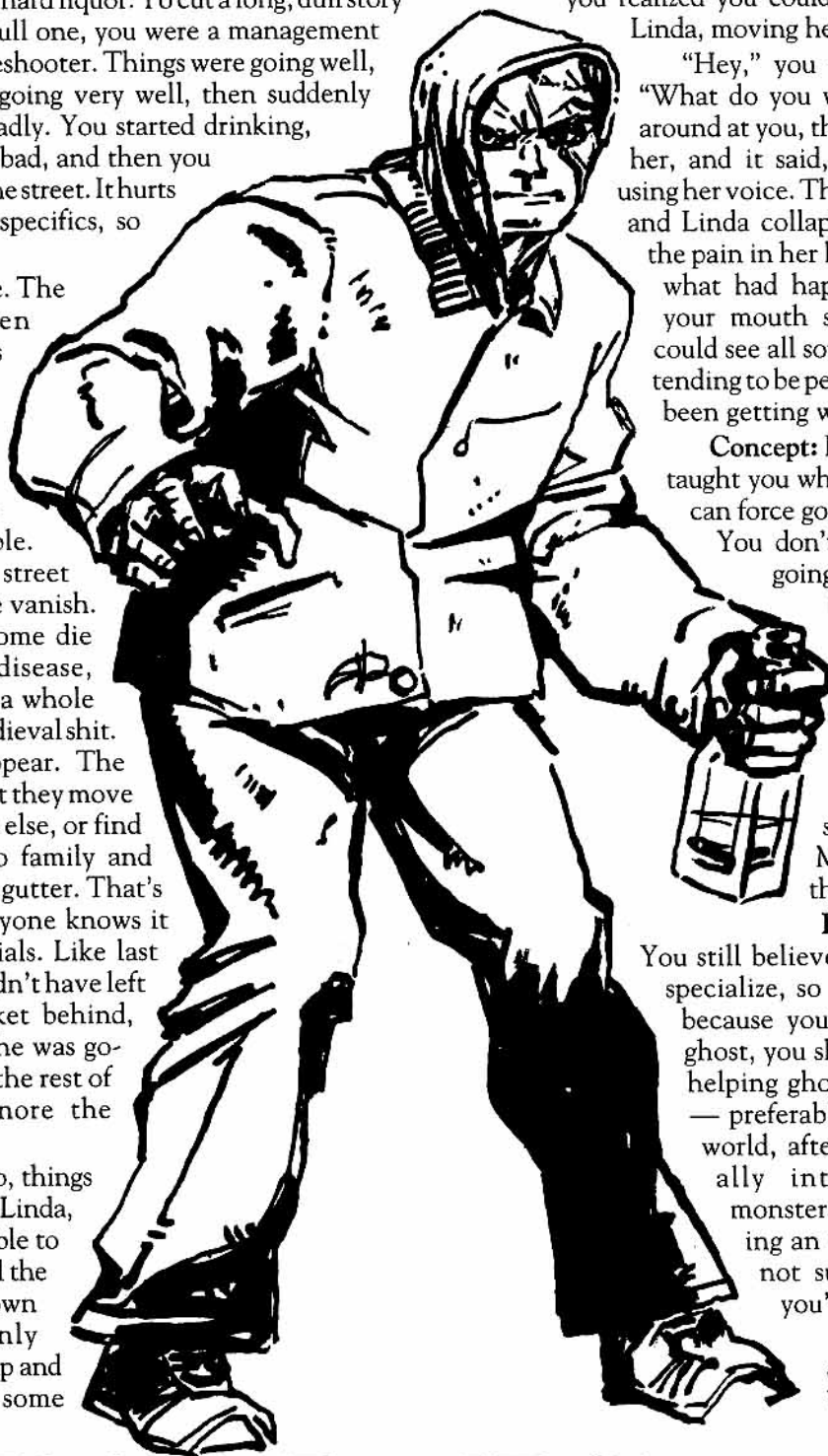
Concept: Life on the streets has taught you what bad circumstances can force good people to become.

You don't really know what's going on with the world, but you know it doesn't have any simple answers. You're certain that you can find your way back to a real life if only you can do some good, though. Most people never get that chance.

Roleplaying Hints:

You still believe that people should specialize, so you've decided that because you were first shown a ghost, you should try to focus on helping ghosts to the other side — preferably gently. It's a hard world, after all. You're not really interested in other monsters. You don't like being an alcoholic, but you're not sure how to stop, so you're drunk a lot.

Equipment: Ragged clothing, blanket, bottle of cheap liquor



NAME: NATURE: Addict (Alcohol) PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy
 PLAYER: Demeanor: Child CREED: Redemption
 CHRONICLE: CONCEPT: Forgiving Vagrant STARTING CONVICTION: 3

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Charisma _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Perception _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Dexterity _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Manipulation (Calistone) _____ ● ● ● ○	Intelligence _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Stamina _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Appearance _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Wits (Adaptable) _____ ● ● ● ● ○

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness (Urban Areas) _____ ● ● ● ● ○	Animal Ken _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Academics _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Athletics _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Crafts _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bureaucracy _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Awareness _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Demolitions _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Computer _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Drive _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Finance _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Dodge _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Etiquette _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Investigation _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Firearms _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Law _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Melee _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Locale _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Intimidation _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Performance (Acting) _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Medicine _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Security _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Occult _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Stealth _____ ● ● ● ○ ○	Politics _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise (Gangs) _____ ● ● ● ● ○	Survival _____ ● ● ● ○ ○	Research _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge _____ ● ● ● ○ ○	Technology _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Science _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

EDGES

VIRTUES

	NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER	MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
Exposure _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Outreach	Redemption	● ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	1 ● <u>x</u>	○ _____	● <u>x</u>
Patron _____ ● ● ● ● ●	Discern	Judgment	● ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	2 ● _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	3 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	4 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	5 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	6 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	7 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	8 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	9 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____	10 ○ _____	○ _____	○ _____

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

HEALTH

_____ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

_____ WILLPOWER _____

_____ ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

_____ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

_____ EXPERIENCE _____

Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

PROMINENT REDEEMERS

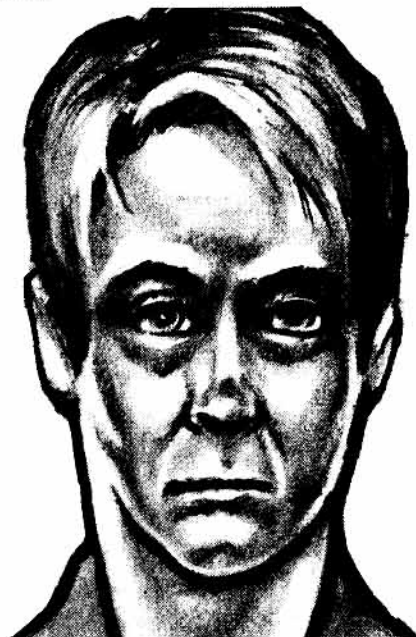
The people in this section are all notorious, significant or unusual among hunters in one way or another, at least as much as anyone can be in a scattered and confused circle such as hunters'. These forgivers, confessors and healers have been active for a while, and they have experienced things in the calling that others have yet to undergo, let alone learn from. One of their most important lessons may be the knack for dealing with the disbelief and hostility of other chosen when Redeemers seek to help rather than harm monsters. The characters in this section could appear in your chronicle as role models, colleagues, "voices" on the Internet, or even as opponents.

HENRY EAMES, AKA DRIVER300

Henry spent a lot of time living out the American Dream in the South. His parents were good people, comfortably well-off but not wealthy, and they made sure that their son had the things he needed to get started right in the world. School and college were successes enough in a modest sort of way, and Henry split his spare time between his buddies, various dates and the wrestling club.

A popular guy with a relaxed, easy charm, Henry made the transition to adult life easily. He'd been taught that the way to make it big in the world was to have faith, work hard and get ahead, and that's exactly what he did. Starting out as a superintendent for one of his father's golfing buddies, Henry quickly demonstrated that he could turn his charisma to management, and he rose through the ranks.

Once he was established and had the respect of his colleagues and clients, Henry moved out on his own and started his own manufacturing firm with the aid of a contract from his old boss. Things continued to go well, the firm prospered, and Henry found himself with enough money to not have to worry so much about the hours he put in any more.



Things went as smoothly in his private life. He married one of his high-school sweethearts, and even though he was about as faithful to her after marriage as he had been before, they maintained a loving relationship. They had a daughter, Naomi, who received the same encouragement and help that Henry himself had from his parents. Everything was going according to plan.

That's when the Messengers chose to show Henry the true nature of the world in which he worked so hard to get ahead. Now, Henry realizes that his priorities are very different from before. The American Dream has become a nightmare. A decent guy despite his success, he realizes the importance of the hunt. He wants to help people to a better, safer life — well, living people, anyway. He created the Triage mailing list off the hunter-net site to provide a forum for the chosen to discuss ways of helping others, away from the militants and critics of the main list. He still moderates the list when possible, which isn't often since his family, career and life were destroyed.

PROFILE

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma (Charming) 4, Manipulation (Persuasive) 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics (Southern History) 1, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 2, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Etiquette 1, Finance 3, Firearms 2, Law 2, Leadership (Coordinating Teammates) 4, Medicine 1, Politics 1, Research 1, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Resources 2 (was 4), Influence 0 (was 3), Allies 1 (was 2), Contacts 1 (was 3)

Edges: (Redemption) Bluster, Insinuate, Respire; (Defense) Ward, Rejuvenate

Zeal: 3, **Mercy:** 6, **Conviction:** 8, **Willpower:** 9

PETER LITTLEFEATHER, AKA TRUCKER235

Being born in Kansas to a Native American father and a Thai mother doesn't really set you up for a traditional take on life, but Peter Littlefeather had a happy childhood at the ranch his parents worked. There weren't a lot of opportunities outside that profession, though, so Peter decided to go into the army after high school. His parents and sister were opposed, but he was desperate to get away. After several blazing arguments, they parted on moderately acrimonious terms.

Peter put Kansas behind him, completed training and spent several undistinguished but relatively content years in the service before Vietnam exploded. Then all hell broke loose. He was sent over fairly early and discovered an undesired aptitude for jungle fighting. As the months wore on, the conflict between his orders and his father's teachings grew stronger and stronger, and the strain of jungle warfare eventually proved too much.

After a nervous breakdown, a period of rehabilitation and a second breakdown, Peter was judged unfit for active duty, and he was discharged. By the time he made it back to the States, his parents were both dead and his sister had given up on him as a murderer. Feeling desperately guilty



over the people he'd killed, Peter drifted from small town to small town, doing odd jobs and drinking hard. By the time the '80s ended, he was a hardened alcoholic who looked closer to 60 than to his actual 45.

Ultimately, Peter was dragged back from the brink by a recovering drinking buddy who enrolled him in AA and gave him a trucking job. For the first time since leaving the ranch, Peter managed to find some peace in the world.

He was on the road when the call came. A young man had crashed at the roadside and was being assisted by a couple who stopped to help. Peter pulled over to see what he could do. As he climbed from his truck, he wondered briefly at an abrupt break in the CB chatter: "THEY DO NOT SEE ITS REAL PAIN." Peter was dumbfounded when he realized that, despite words shared between the couple and the trapped victim, the young man in the car was dead — and had been for a while. Peter stayed calm, explained that he knew some field medicine, and took over while the couple went for help (fortunately, they never wondered why he didn't just use his CB radio to call in the emergency). Peter pulled the dead man from the wreckage, patched him up and offered him a lift to the next town. They spent the journey chatting pleasantly, and then Peter dropped off the corpse.

Since then, little has changed. Peter's work and his calling don't conflict — he didn't have much of a life to disrupt. Over the course of a month, his job usually takes him across the country and back. He keeps up with hunter-net on an old portable computer and even older acoustic coupler, checking his email from public phones.

PROFILE

Peter never fully recovered from his nervous breakdowns. His guilt over the people he killed was the cause of his drifting and alcoholism. He absolutely refuses to take another life, even now. His employer keeps him on the move, which suits him fine, because he finds life on

the road peaceful. Now over 50, Peter blends kindness with caution, but will do everything he can to honor any request for aid. He's chatty and pleasant when he stops, and he talks to anyone so he knows many people across the country.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina (Rugged) 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness (Sight) 4, Animal Ken 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Drive 3, Empathy 3, Firearms 2, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 2, Patron 2

Edges: (Redemption) Outreach, Insight, Punish; (Vision) Foresee

Mercy: 7, **Vision:** 2, **Conviction:** 9, **Willpower:** 7

Derangements: Insomnia

LEAF PANKOWSKI, AKA POTTER116

From the outside, Leaf Pankowski's old life seemed bearable, but not enviable. She certainly didn't make anyone jealous at her high school reunion. She was carrying a good 20 extra pounds (at least by the common beauty standard; most women her height on TV were at least 60 pounds lighter). She didn't own her own home, and even though she worked with computers, she hadn't struck it rich. She didn't have any advanced degrees, or kids, or anything else to brag about.

But she was happy. She loved her husband. She liked her two jobs for their different benefits (money from web-page design and creative freedom from making and selling her own pottery). As more and more people went online, she and her husband Oaken acquired more clients. They finally paid off their debts and started saving in a serious way.

Then they got the call — and became, to the best of anyone's knowledge, the only married couple to be im-



bued. But that distinction didn't last. Within six months, the pressures of the hunt had driven them apart. Leaf filed for divorce after her husband destroyed a vampire infant — one she hoped she could somehow liberate from its condition. He still hasn't signed the papers. She misses him terribly but can't forgive what he did.

Before her imbuing, Leaf knew there was a lot of hurt and injustice in the world. Race, gender and economic disparity formed interlocking oppressions so obvious to her that she wondered how any sane person could deny their impact. She did what she could — marched, donated, volunteered — but it never seemed to amount to anything. Now that the veil has been removed, she knows the truth: Beneath the visible oppression there is another set of conflicts, mistrusts and misunderstandings that lead one type of people to hate, fear and victimize another.

She believes that the chosen are an attempt by some higher power to bring the elements of the world into balance. To her, mysterious capabilities and a special sight are not tools of destruction, but tools of understanding and equality. But the more she sees, the harder it is to maintain that perspective. When one has seen *the truth* in a shocking moment of horrific revelation, it's hard to be patient with the doubts and hesitation of others. Leaf has become more rigid and insistent, less willing or able to doubt her own judgment, because she quite simply *knows*.

After losing Oaken, Leaf tried to fill the hole in her life by throwing herself into the mission. Both her jobs have suffered as a result, although her newfound interest in the martial arts still draws her attention five nights a week. In fact, her instructor is a little concerned by her intensity.

Unfortunately, nothing seemed to make her feel complete again, at least not until she got help from an unexpected source: Dr. Carleton Van Wyk, who was present at Leaf's imbuing. The two had disagreed about the hunt from the start. Months of experience reduced both her optimism and his detachment, however.

Their current, mutual hope is that by combining his medical skill and her remarkable healing talent, they can someday reverse the curse of undeath. They've had no successes so far, but both believe there's reason to be hopeful. And yet, Leaf's failures do make her more intransigent, bit by bit. She is less and less able to consider other points of view, because doing so would call her confidence in the Living Power into question — and without that, she would barely be able to function.

PROFILE

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics (Religion) 1, Alertness 2, Animal Ken 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Computer 3, Crafts (Ceramics) 3, Dodge 1, Drive 2, Empathy 3, Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Intuition 2, Investigation 1, Melee 1, Occult 3, Research 2, Technology 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 1, Destiny 1, Patron 1, Resources 1

Edges: (Redemption) Bluster, Insinuate, Respire; (Innocence) Discern; (Vision) Foresee

Mercy: 9, **Vision:** 1, **Zeal:** 1, **Conviction:** 8, **Willpower:** 7

Derangements: Charmed Life Complex, Hysteria, Manic-Depression

MARION PERKS, AKA T'ACHER 193

Suppressing her every urge to cut loose and have fun, Marion has always lived with her focus on structure and doing the right thing. She was born and reared in Birmingham, England, a city with serious drug and crime problems. Playing it wild was a dangerous habit, a good way to get imprisoned or killed, so she was brought up to stay safe, obey superiors and avoid risks. Teaching appealed to her because it was a chance to work in an ordered, regulated environment in which she could pass on the pearls of wisdom that she had accumulated. Caring for the schoolchildren — looking after their needs and trying as much as possible to keep them on the right path — became a habit, a reflex. It would be unthinkable for a teacher not to help.

So, with a big wall between herself and the rest of the world, Marion drifted through life in a calm and stately manner, never really experiencing very much. Her strict, precise way of thinking made her meticulous and hardworking, so she rose steadily in her profession. Every year brought new minor tragedies: children lost to drugs, prostitution and their own stupidity. Feelings of helplessness and isolation made her increasingly cynical about the worth of her actions. When she was given a school of her own to run, she hoped the administrative tasks would drown out the rest of her problems, but of course they did not.

Marion dated a number of other teachers, always from different schools, but always because it was the right thing to do, because having no boyfriend would be unseemly.



These relationships usually lasted a year or two and then ended quietly. All very painless — for Marion, anyway.

In the due course of things, she would have become old and embittered, retired from teaching with a modest pension, and settled down to wait spitefully for death. Instead, she got a wake-up call. She thinks of the afflicted in more or less the same way that she does violent, disruptive children — as problems that ought to be assisted to be less problematic. The trouble is there isn't enough time to devote to them all. She therefore concentrates on the cases for which she thinks she has the best chance of doing some good, regardless of how much a neglected being suffers. As for the others? A sharp warning can sometimes do some good. Beyond that, there's always "expulsion"....

PROFILE

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence (Book-Smart) 4, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics (History) 4, Alertness 1, Bureaucracy (Record Keeping) 4, Computer 2, Drive 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 4, Leadership 2, Politics 2, Science 1, Technology 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Influence 1, Patron 1, Resources 2

Edges: (Redemption) Bluster, Insinuate, Respire; (Judgment) Discern

Mercy: 6, **Zeal:** 1, **Conviction:** 5, **Willpower:** 6

VIKRAM SINGH, AKA ASHRAM242

Vikram is a native of Delhi, India, and the son of low-caste workers. Always a devout Hindu, he leavened his periods of hard work with holy pilgrimages, traveling the paths laid down by the gods. On one trip — to the source of the river Ganges, the place where the Lord Shiva rests in meditation of the world — the Heralds saw fit to reveal the diseased to him. After praying for guidance, he was

given to understand that he should abstain from all meats and alcohol, and to prepare a shrine for healing and purification on the trail where he was awakened, so that the diseased could travel to it to display their willingness to be healed.

After returning to Delhi, Vikram learned that not all of the diseased were humble; some mingled with the Brahmins and other important people. He worked tirelessly to spread the word of Lord Shiva to the diseased who displayed proper submission, teaching them how they might regain their righteousness. He was quite open about his abilities at first. A nighttime attack convinced him that perhaps Lord Shiva intended him to be subtle in his work, and he has become a much more cautious. Despite this, Vikram has gained considerable standing in his community as a holy man. People seek him out for advice, wisdom and for help healing injuries. Between Hindu scripture, knowledge of the way of the world, and his sight, he can usually tender good advice. Local people also rally to his defense if he is endangered, and one or two are usually with him at all times.

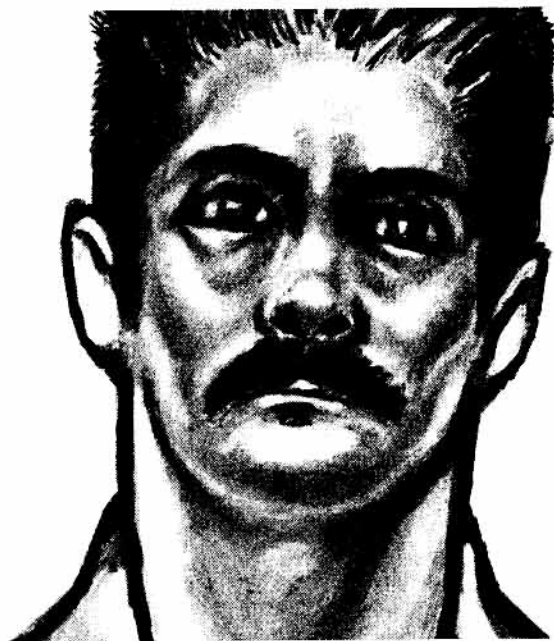
Because Vikram does not denounce high-caste monsters — that is not yet his place, he feels — he's not much of a nuisance to the creatures of his home. The day will come when he might surprise them, but he does not foresee it. His wife knows that he has had a vision, and cannot decide whether he has become holy or gone mad, but she has seen the results of his power to heal. She does miss eating meat, though.

Despite being only 24, Vikram tries to follow the ideal of the stern, loving father with the diseased, and with other chosen. His faith is unshakeable, and he believes that any truly worthy being should do as he has done: abstain from meat and alcohol, journey in the proper season to the source of the Ganges, and visit the shrine that he built along the way. Without at least some indication of following this path, he is reluctant to help anyone, although he might be persuaded.

GERRY VINE

Gerry was a steel worker in Michigan before the Messengers called him. He was in a bar with some friends when a couple at the next table began a loud argument. As the buddies looked on in amazement, the man picked up his bottle, smashed it on the edge of the table and thrust it against the woman's face. In that moment, Gerry clearly heard the words, "THE WILL OF ANOTHER PREVAILS," rip across his consciousness. When he looked again, he could see that *something* was inhabiting the man's body, controlling him. Meanwhile, the woman was badly hurt. Gerry and one of his friends, Paul, moved to break up the fight. Paul jumped the man, knocked him to the ground, and started punching, while Gerry tended to the woman as best he could. The police and paramedics arrived at about the same time. Once they had the man in cuffs, Gerry could see the ghost leave the man's body.





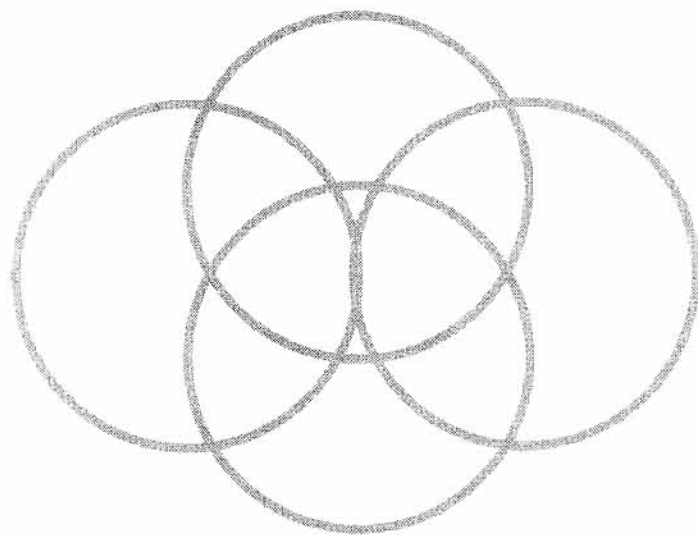
A large, buff guy with a big heart and a soft streak, Gerry did everything he could to help people caught up in the hunt — victims, hunters, monsters, anyone. He was good with engines and mechanical stuff, and although he didn't like doing it, he knew the necessity of putting down clearly dangerous creatures. His strength made him quite a fighter, even though it went against his grain.

Somewhere along the line, however, things changed. Gerry made a few converts among the lost. He was a

likeable guy, and they were grateful for his help in approaching normality again, so they helped out as best they could. He started to believe that he had been singled out by the Messengers to represent the only true way of easing pain. From there, it was a small step to decide that he had to suppress anyone else's efforts. After all, if he had been chosen, it would be an insult to the Messengers for anyone to work outside his influence.

Things have gone downhill since then. Gerry has started revealing his blessings, dispensing healing quietly in his community, and claiming that he has been selected by God. He's combined intimidation, bribery and persuasion to keep his name out of the newspapers. In addition to the imbued he leads, and a few penitent that are dependent on them, a number of people now look to him for guidance. These folk include his extended family, several of his former colleagues from the foundry, and a couple of young women who'd been hitchhiking in the area whom Gerry took "a liking to." These people don't quite understand what Gerry preaches about, but his vigor alone is simply contagious.

Imbued whom Gerry meets are offered a chance to join his group, but they aren't told that the alternative is a bullet in the back. When things are quiet, Gerry and his people visit other towns, where they're as likely to take care of any hunters they find as they are to deal with monsters. Because Gerry is aware of the need for secrecy, anyone threatening to expose his organization is killed, as is any recruit who suddenly wants out, or even, as on one occasion, who disagrees with something Gerry says.



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