

HUNTER FIRST CONTACT



A Chronicle Book for Hunter: The Reckoning®

Dr. Alexis Carrel
Rush-Copley Medical Center
2000 Ogden Avenue
Aurora IL 60504



Dear Agent Douglas:

I knew Carleton Van Wyk, and I must say it pains and annoys me to be dragged back into a situation I had thought (and ardently hoped) was finally behind me. Van Wyk worked here from 1987 to 1998. Apparently, he served competently in the Emergency Room. However, after a number of complaints from both staff and patients, he was supposedly transferred to the morgue, where he performed autopsies, biopsies and other forensic lab work. I started here in 1996. If you want copies of the grievance documents, I'm afraid you'll have to contact our legal department. However, there was never any question of him performing any extra-legal treatments or making any legally actionable decisions. It was, honestly, more a matter of personality.

He left Rush-Copley after an incident in the morgue. To this day, I am uncertain what happened. His inquest board let him go with a reprimand and censure. He was relieved of duties here but was allowed to retire at half benefits — benefits which, I believe, he receives to this day.

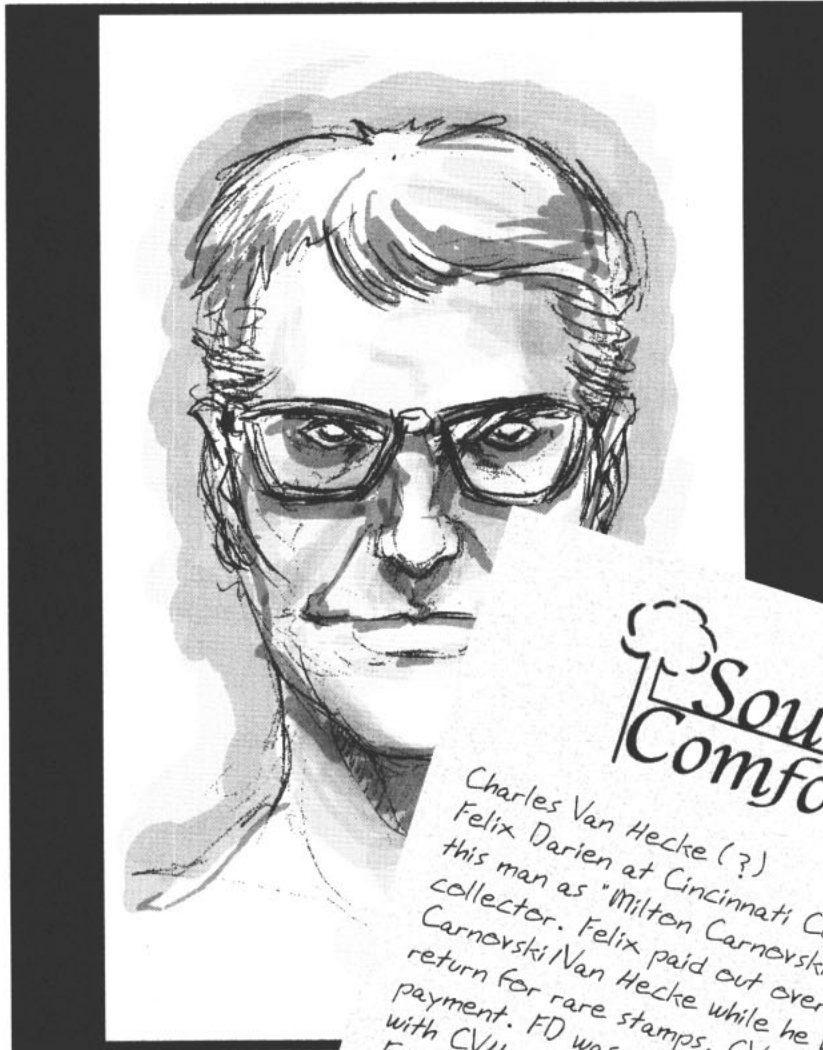
To be honest, I place the blame for this lapse upon my predecessor, Dr. Harold Franks. I don't think I betray any trust when I say Dr. Franks ran a loose ship. Only six months after the Van Wyk incident, he voluntarily left his position as Chief of Staff in order to enter a drug-rehabilitation program. There has been speculation that Van Wyk blackmailed Franks in order to retain his license and retirement benefits, but let me stress that I have no proof or evidence whatsoever to support such allegations.

After leaving Rush-Copley, I believe Van Wyk remained in the Chicago area for some time doing some sort of consultation work. I do not know where he currently resides. Nor do I know what he's been doing since leaving us.

While I am, of course, eager to extend any aid I can to legitimate law-enforcement personnel, I must stress that I am an extremely busy woman. I am willing to help you find this man if necessary, but let me state now my preference to be left out of this matter.

Dr. Alexis Carrel
Chief of Staff
Rush-Copley Medical Center

WANTED



Southern Comfort Inn

Charles Van Hecke (?)
Felix Darien at Cincinnati Coin and Stamp identified
this man as "Milton Carnovski." A high-rolling stamp
collector. Felix paid out over \$13,200 to
Carnovski/Van Hecke while he was in Cincinnati in
return for rare stamps. CVH insisted on cash
payment. FD was adamant that he had done business
with CVH during daylight.
Etta Eisner was this man's landlady and knew him as
"Carleton Van Wyk." "Real quiet, kept to himself."
Never noticed him getting bills in the name "Charles
Van Hecke."
Pharmacy at Cin. Catholic hosp. filled several large
chloral hydrate (sedative) prescriptions and one
for amphetamines to Dr. Van Wyk.
Cin. PD is going over his old apartment. Nothing so
far. Case is cold, trail is cold. No weird noises
from neighbors. No arrests. No complaints.

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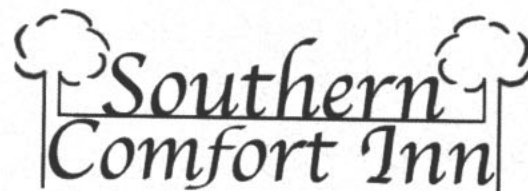
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Office of club owner Christoph	Phone Number	Minutes Used
	614-555-7804	2
Parmian.	614-555-8269	4
	614-555-7727 Esme Rogers	8
	614-555-1154 → - Blood Cult	5
	614-555-8269 Awareness	3
	614-555-5411 Network?	2
	614-555-3347 → Honey Mirgram	6
	614-555-8269 - P.D. says	15
	614-555-7727 call girl.	30
	614-555-8269	8
	614-555-7803	6
	614-555-7727	7
	614-555-8269	2

Charles Van Hecke
- last person to
page Kinniard. All
calls after sunset.



Duane Kinniard

Co-workers say Dk started acting 'funny' 'nervous' 'twitchy' in middle of June.

Esme Rogers says Dk began volunteering with BCAN at the end of June. Says he was just stuffing envelopes - seemed nervous.

June, Dk gets 'sword' i 'arrow' tattoo on arm.



July, phone calls start to Charles Van Hecke. CVH phone bills go to local P.O. Box 442, along with mail for "Carleton Van Wyk."

August, Psych. Dr. Laura Jensen loses license in connection to BCAN case with Allison Smalls. Smalls claimed she was kidnapped by Jensen and two men. Jensen refuses to name names.

September, Dk starts acting "pushy" "secretive" "full of himself" (co-workers) - buys expensive clothes, living beyond means but not on credit cards. Honey. Parmian admits to hiring Dk as a bouncer and paying under table. Willing to pay fine - not worth it. He's clean.

Today, Smalls identified photo of Dk as one of her kidnappers and Van Hecke sketch as the other.

Stamp Collector

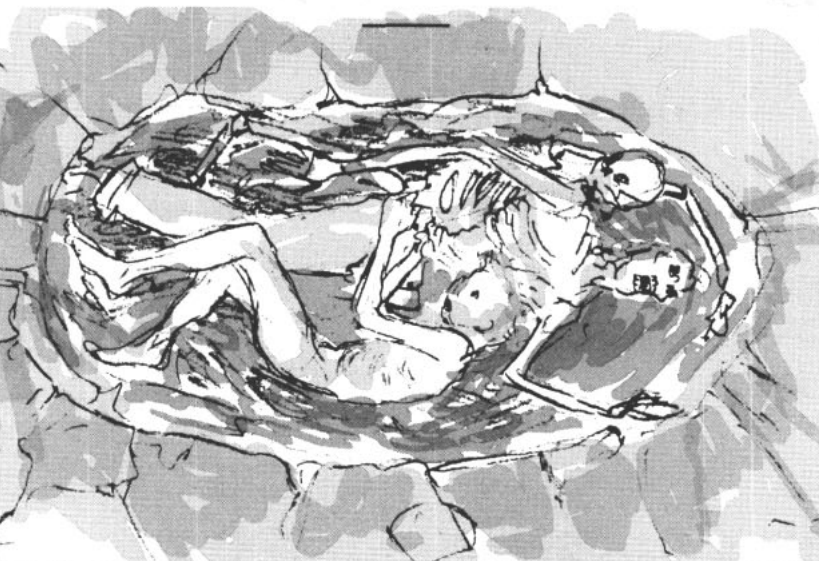


Numismatist's
Quarterly
Guide

NAME Carleton Van Wyk
FORMER DELIVERY ADDRESS P.O. Box 442
CITY Cincinnati STATE OH ZIP 45213
NEW DELIVERY ADDRESS P.O. Box 1446
CITY Oak Park STATE IL ZIP 60303
Payment Option _____
Payment enclosed. _____
Bill me later. _____
Renewal (attach label). X

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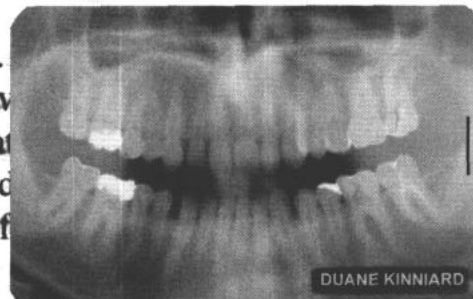
more recent
records from

the missing person Duane Kinniard came to my attention, I revised my estimate. The congruencies between the teeth of the corpse and the dental x-ray are far too close to leave reasonable doubt. (See attached report B-2 for a full explanation.) Even though the dates of his missing persons report don't fall within my original estimate, the match is too close to ignore. The corpse is Duane Kinniard.

Unfortunately, I can only speculate about the cause of death. Even through the corrosive effects of the quicklime, bone trauma — chips and notches — from life-threatening injuries would be clear. None are present. The hyoid bone is intact, so he probably wasn't strangled. There's a fine cut — almost a scratch — toward the center of the frontal bone, slightly to the left. Due to corruption from the quicklime, it's impossible to say if it was inflicted pre- or postmortem, and in any event it would not have been a lethal wound. Possibly someone cut him across the forehead with a small, light, sharp implement. The edges of the cut are fairly distorted by the accelerated decomposition, but it's not incongruous with a slash from a right-handed attacker. (See report B-3.)

He might have been smothered or poisoned, or he might have bled to death — there's not enough tissue left to tell. I would guess smothered (or drowned) first. Poisoning is a second guess, since it's less common. Exsanguination seems unlikely to me, given the lack of trauma to the bones. If he was restrained or sedated, delivering a fatal injury without marring the bones becomes more likely.

As for the third body, it's that of a Caucasian female. development, I'd estimate her age between 12 at the youngest (given that she was an early developer) and 16 at the oldest (given late development consistent with full nutrition. If she was malnourished, she'd be older, but she had healthy bones and no other signs of



DUANE KINNIARD

Interview transcript, M. Douglas, L. Jenson, I. Desgravo.

has confirmed that he worked with you at BCAN. Now, are you sure you don't want to reconsider your answer?

ID: I'd like to remind you, Agent Douglas, that my client is cooperating solely at her discretion and as a gesture of goodwill toward the FBI. I think such... third-degree tactics are uncalled for.

MD: I'm just trying to get the story straight. That's all.

LJ: You seem awfully sure that I worked closely with this Van Wyk person at BCAN. In fact, you seem to know so much that I'm not sure what I'm doing here.

MD: Ms. Jenson. I'm not your enemy. I'm just trying to find who killed your co-worker Kinniard. A lot points to Van Wyk. Do you think he did it?

LJ: Absolutely not.

MD: What makes you so sure? Were the two men close?

LJ: I wouldn't say close, no. They were colleagues, but I don't think there was a personal connection.

MD: Then what would — hypothetically — stop Dr. Van Wyk from killing Kinniard?

LJ: Other than common decency? Other than being on the same side? Other than his Hippocratic oath?

MD: Okay, how did these two wind up working for BCAN?

LJ: We don't like to pry into the personal histories of our volunteers. There's often... there are often sad stories and we don't want to open I guess they wanted to help people. How did you wind up working for the FBI?

Interview transcript, M. Douglas, L. Jenson, I. Desgravo.

MD: Was Van Wyk the other person who kidnapped Allison Smalls?

ID: I've advised my client not to discuss that matter.

MD: Did you ever have the sense that the two men were keeping secrets from you?

(Long pause.)

LJ: No, I guess not.

MD: You don't sound very sure.

LJ: If there were secrets, I wouldn't know them, would I?

MD: Doc... Ms. Jenson, given BCAN's claims about a nationwide "sanguinary subculture"... are you inclined to believe in the supernatural? In... vampires?

ID: Don't be ridiculous!

LJ: I believe... I believe the vampire myth has a pervasive influence on our culture. The menace of AIDS has only underscored and supported the symbolic power of blood. I believe the promises of power and... sensuality are extremely tempting to young minds. There are a lot of people out there who pretend to be vampires, or wish they were vampires, or think they are vampires. There are people who would kill you to drink your blood. I've met some of them. For all intents and purposes, they might as well be vampires.... But if you mean, "Do I believe in Dracula," the answer is no.

MD: Did Dr. Van Wyk?

WRESTLING FIRST CONTACT

By CARL BOWEN, ED HALL, JAMES MALISZEWSKI, PATRICK O'DUFFY,
LUCIEN SOULBAN AND GREG STOLZE

CREDITS

Authors: Carl Bowen, Ed Hall, James Maliszewski, Patrick O'Duffy, Lucien Soulban and Greg Stolze. World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen.

Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein•Hagen.

Developer: Ken Cliffe

Editor: Ed Hall

Devil's Advocate: Nick Brownlow

Hunter Roster Manager: John Meehan

Art Director: Pauline Benney

Layout and Typesetting: Pauline Benney

Interior Art: Guy Davis, Steve Ellis, Adam Lamas, Steve Prescott, J. Stowe and Drew Tucker

Front Cover Art: Durwin Talon

Front and Back Cover Design: Pauline Benney

WHITE WOLF HOCKEY SPECIAL THANKS

Chad "Today, I am a Man" Brown (#14, Wing), for getting his first goal.

Brian "Sucking Chest Wound" Glass (#84, Wing), for taking bruised ribs on behalf of the team. What good are those breathing strips now?

Matt "You Guys Suck" Milberger (#7, Wing), for launching a career as a motivational speaker.

Rich "Cameo" Thomas (#13, Defense), for flying down to make guest appearances and to hit girls.

Mike "Every time I think I'm out..." Tinney (#11, Goal), for resuming his old post between the posts.

Fred "He shoots..." Yelk (#56, Defense), for benching himself because of his own slap shot.



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, GA 30021
USA

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WILLOW FIRST CONTACT

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PROLOGUE: HUNTERS HUNTED

The man waiting and watching was heavysset. He had thick biceps, and his forearms were wreathed with veins. The rest of his body was softer. He had a slight potbelly and there was the beginning of a second chin under his round face.

He had wide, sad, brown eyes and a backpack at his feet. Inside it was a Beretta 9mm pistol.

He had heartburn and wished he'd brought antacids. Partly it was nerves. He was about to be confrontational, and he didn't like to do that. Partly it was two cups of black coffee, nursed for a long time, as he sat waiting, watching for Dr. Carleton Van Wyk.

He'd been waiting for a while and was tempted to get a newspaper, but he'd learned the hard way that you can't be distracted on a stakeout. A Chicago cop once told him that long surveillance could lead to a sort of trance — thinking of nothing, but perfectly alert.

The waiting man had never developed that skill. He drummed his fingers, tapped his foot impatiently, tore a napkin into small pieces and then rolled the pieces into balls. His mouth moved a little as he rehearsed what he planned to say. He wondered how the doctor would respond.

Then he saw Van Wyk rounding the corner, a bag of groceries in his hands. The doctor saw the heavysset man, too, almost at the same time. The waiting man surged to his feet, scooped up his backpack and walked purposefully toward the doctor before Van Wyk could enter his apartment building.

Van Wyk didn't try to get away. He paused by the door, a neutral, slightly curious, expression on his face.

"Oaken?" Van Wyk said.

"Are you screwing my wife?"

Van Wyk blinked, his jaw dropped, and then his whole body shook with astonished laughter.

✦ ✦ ✦

June Inoue had no idea she was being followed. Her pursuer didn't stand out in the crowd. June was alert, but not paranoid. The woman following her wasn't behaving oddly. She was just walking along the same street at the same time.

June's building had a sturdy front door with an automatic lock. The only way to open it was to use a key or to be buzzed in. June had a key. The woman behind her didn't. But she got in anyhow.

Like the building, June's apartment had a sturdy lock on the door. In fact, there were two — one in the doorknob and a deadbolt. June didn't notice that the latch failed to catch.

June usually put the deadbolt on before going to bed, but it was only 6:00 PM. It was still light out. She was tired and needed to go to the bathroom, so she didn't bother.

The other woman walked in confidently. She didn't look around, although she had never set foot in the apartment before. Hearing June in the bathroom, she stepped quickly and quietly into the kitchenette, opened a drawer and extracted a knife.

The smile on her face was grotesque, but no one was there to see it. She crouched down beside the cupboards.

When June came back into the living room, she walked right past the kitchenette. June didn't even see the other woman at first — she was focused on the TV remote atop the coffee table.

The intruder lunged and tackled June, pinning her against the wall in the hallway. June had time only to shriek before the knife sliced up under her jaw.

✦ ✦ ✦

"You're *living* with her. You really expect me to believe there's nothing going on?" Oaken's voice was suspicious, but his expression was unsure.

The doctor sighed. "I can only assure you that we are merely roommates," he said. "I sleep on the futon. Nothing of a sexual nature occurs, and I find it... profoundly unlikely that it ever will." He shrugged.

"Are you...? Aw, never mind."

"Am I 'gay'? No, but... the idea of coupling with Leaf is just not tenable. It would be like sleeping with my sister."

"Your sister, huh?"

Van Wyk looked down at his hands. "Oaken, I really don't want your groundless jealousy to hurt you, me or your wife. It's silly."

"Oh, 'silly'? I hear this guy has moved in with my wife, he's staying there all night. I see you hauling groceries back to the place. What am I supposed to think?"

The doctor nodded, not meeting Oaken's eyes. He opened his mouth, then shut it. Then opened it again.

"Oaken, your wife and I are engaged in a mission that is vital to humanity. What we discover might not only protect us personally, but may go far toward explaining mankind's place in the world. That is *important*." He leaned forward. "Compared to that, anything I might want or feel or even *need* is insignificant. Why would I jeopardize our mission with... mere animal urges?"

Oaken frowned. Van Wyk could tell he was unconvinced.

"There's more to it than that. Leaf... understands. Unlike anyone else I've worked with, she *understands*. She understands my mission. She understands *me*. And ultimately, *that* is why I avoid complicating our relationship with... physical entanglements."

"I'm not sure I follow."

"All right, uh... suppose you suddenly found yourself in Africa. No one around looks like you. No one speaks your language. No one understands your culture. Then, one day, you meet a fellow American. He can talk with you and explain things and understand what you mean. Would you attempt to seduce his wife?"

"Of course not."

"Of course not. Because the friendship matters more than any sexual encounter. Because it's your *only* friendship. You wouldn't risk it for anything." Van Wyk leaned forward. "Now do you understand why nothing has happened between us?"

"Okay... I believe you. I believe you wouldn't... but what if she...?"

Van Wyk chuckled mirthlessly.

"She won't," he said flatly. "Leaf is... distant. She has become very focused on the mission. Perhaps too much." He frowned. "In all honesty, I wish you would return to her. Her dissociation from her old life and her preoccupation with her new one, while reasonable given the importance of our task, seems... unhealthy sometimes. I'm not an expert, but..." He shrugged and looked confused — an expression Oaken had never seen on the doctor's face before.

"What are you saying? You think she's going crazy?"

"I think she's suffering from a lot of stress. I... well, I bring a lot of talents to our endeavor, but emotional warmth isn't one of them. I think she has needs that I can't fulfill." He coughed into his hand. "Would you consider returning to her?"

It was Oaken's turn to laugh without humor.

"Doc, I wasn't the one who filed for divorce. She kicked me out." He bit his lip. "You don't think you could... you know, talk to her? Get her to give me another chance?"

Before Van Wyk could reply, a hand came down on his shoulder — not hard, but firmly.

"Dr. Carleton Van Wyk?"

Both men turned to look at a short, stocky, blond woman standing behind the doctor. She held up an I.D.

"I'm Agent Douglas with the FBI. I'd like to ask you a few questions."

✦ ✦ ✦

Miranda Douglas had been with the FBI for 15 years and had worked in the Special Affairs Division for the last three. She'd seen her share of cool customers, but Carleton Van Wyk might be the chilliest for her money: unfailingly polite, mild, calm at all times. He seemed almost apologetic as he summoned his lawyer and then, in perfectly civilized tones, stonewalled every meaningful question she asked.

"He knows," she muttered to herself, watching him walk away. "He knows something."

"Talking to yourself?"

Douglas turned in surprise. "Woody?" she said. "What brings you here?"

"Ritualistic killing on the North Shore." Woody Miller was in his sixties and had been with SAD as long as any field agent Douglas knew. "Nasty stuff. The downstairs neighbor called the cops when blood soaked all the way through her ceiling. They didn't assign you here as my partner, did they?"

"No, I'm on a possible bleed-out from Ohio. Victim named Duane Kinniard. I was pretty sure the guy who just left was the one."

"And now you're not sure?"

"Well, you know... with a bleed-out you think V for Victory," she said, glancing reflexively over her shoulder. "But I nabbed him in broad daylight, so now I'm not so sure." She tilted her head. "Say, you're always reading up on this stuff. You mind taking a peek at some pictures of Kinniard's effects?"

✦ ✦ ✦

"How's Phillip?" Oaken asked.

Guadalupe Droin just shook her head. "Still breathin'. That's something, at least. The doctors say it's going to be a while before he can walk."

She had come to see Oaken at his new place. It was a one-room apartment near the spa where he worked, but there at least they could talk without worrying about her suspicious father and curious sister.

"I should go see him," Oaken said. "Maybe I can help. What about George?"

Lupe shook her head. "Searle's gettin' loco on us. He used to be all right, but lately, every time I talk to him..."

She just shook her head. "I don't think we can rely on him any more. He's not cut out for this."

"He got the call, like us. He can't be completely useless."

"I don't want to go over this again. Not everyone who gets picked can take it. Lots of people crack. You read the list!"

"Okay.... So, how are *you* doing, then?"

"I'm all right. Still bruised. Eight staples in my arm, but they'll be out soon. I didn't get hurt near as bad as Phil."

Oaken looked her over with a professional eye, reached out and gently tapped her back.

"Hey!" She growled.

"Hurts, huh? Here, lean forward."

"I'm all right."

"I do this for a living. I get 60 bucks an hour to give back rubs to rich people who want to show off on the tennis court. I can see you're locked up. Do you want to feel better or not?"

"I don't know...."

"Look, I handle dozens of bodies a week. I'm a professional — like a doctor or... a hairdresser. This isn't a come-on."

Grudgingly, Lupe turned. "Sixty dollars an hour?"

"Plus tips."

He put his hands on her shoulders and began to knead them.

"Jesus!" she shrieked.

"I think you've been storing some tension up here."

"Aw, *Christ* that hurts!"

"Just relax. You'll feel a lot better when I'm done."

Sure enough, she did.

"Sixty bucks an hour. I can see that."

"Here, drink this."

"What is it?"

"It's *water*," he said, exasperated. "I just moved a lot of built-up lactic acid from your muscles into your bloodstream. A couple glasses of water will help flush it out." She took the glass and drank. "Now. What was it you saw today?"

"A rider. I was driving and I saw it wearing this woman. It was one of those invisibles, I think. But ugly. Fuckin' ugly. Like something out of *Aliens*."

"Did you get the woman's name?"

"No. I followed it on the bus up to Wrigleyville, but when it was just me and her on a side street? She started circling the block. Like she thought I was tailing her. So I split."

"Not close enough to put smoke on her?"

"If I'da done that, I'da told you."

"Okay, okay... so how bad do you think this one is?"

"You hear on the radio about whatsername? June In-way? Got stabbed this morning? Well, that's near where I spotted the rider. About that time, too."

Oaken digested this information silently for a while.

"Do you think the two of us can handle it?" Oaken said.

"I don't know. Phil and I thought we could handle the last one." She turned. "Why? You know somebody?"



"I might."

Her eyes widened with realization. "Oh no. You're not talking about Leaf and that crazy doctor, are you? I told you..."

"Leaf could fix your arm — could fix Phil, too, if she knew about him."

"If he'd put up with her bullshit."

"Hey, she wasn't the one making conditions the last time."

"Those 'conditions' kept us alive."

"What about the doctor, then? He knows a lot. He might know something that could help us." Oaken looked squeamish for a moment. "I even... talked to him today."

"What? Jesus, you're turning into a ghost yourself — haunting your old wife."

"Hey! That's... not fair."

"Get over her. Especially if you want to work with her again."

They argued some more, but reached no conclusion.

Later, when Lupe was by herself and her arm really started to throb, she reconsidered. It was almost 8:00 when she reached for the phone.

✦ ✦ ✦

"The FBI? What did you tell them?" Leaf Pankowski's eyes were wide with shock and fear.

"Nothing, of course. Still, your association with me may prove dangerous. It would probably be better if I moved out."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'd be more afraid of one of the afflicted coming while you were gone." She chewed her lip, and out of habit stroked her neck where she used to wear a quartz necklace. "You don't suppose that this was... planned, do you?"

"You mean you think the afflicted have 'set us up,' as they say? It wouldn't surprise me a bit."

"There's that, I guess, but I meant... the Living Power." Her eyes seemed to focus somewhere off in the distance and her voice took on a reverent tone. "Perhaps the FBI was guided here so we could show them the truth," she said.

Van Wyk frowned. "That's one hypothesis, I suppose."

"You think I'm being flaky, don't you? But everyone says they led those two monsters onto the email list to give us valuable information. Why couldn't they bring us new allies, too?"

"No reason, other than they haven't done it before. But by the same token..." He sighed and sat. "I just don't know."

They were both quiet for a moment.

"What did they ask about?" Leaf said finally.

"Cincinnati."

It was almost 8:00 when the phone rang.

✦ ✦ ✦

Woody put the photos down. "This stuff from Kinniard's notes doesn't match at all with what I found at my murder scene. These circle and block figures? They're modern, from what I can tell. The stuff from Inoue's murder scene

was Sumerian and Attic Greek. I've got some guys from the University of Chicago looking at it."

Douglas sighed. "Yeah, well, having the two cases meet that neatly... too much to hope for, I guess. Thanks anyhow."

"Hold on! Just because Kinniard's doodles don't link to my case doesn't mean they're useless. I've seen something like them before." He turned to his bulky laptop and switched it on.

"You have?" Douglas felt a cool chill race down her spine. It wasn't unpleasant. It was exciting.

"I think so. I've got a file. It's thin, but they seem to have started with this pamphlet out of Georgia. Some nut-job claiming that 'evil forces' manipulate the media to keep people sedated — standard paranoid crap. But then similar symbols turned up on an anti-government tract about CIA mind control. This one on Kinniard's arm? A murder victim in Birmingham had the same thing scratched on the hood of his car. And this crosshairs with loops on the end? I've seen homeless kids in Florida clutching cardboard signs like that, praying for protection against 'Bloody Mary.'"

"Jesus Christ! So what are these signs? What do they mean?"

Woody shrugged. He tapped a few more keys. "Hey, you say your guy's an M.D., right? Well, these papers didn't have symbols on them, but they were found on Meyer Philbin's hard drive. He thought he'd deleted them, but he didn't defrag." Woody clucked his tongue. "Sloppy, sloppy, sloppy."

"Philbin.... Why's that name familiar?"

"Killed a woman in Green Bay. Led the police on a three-state manhunt. When they finally caught him, he had a symbol drawn on his chest in magic marker. He claimed the woman he killed was a vampire slave and that he killed her husband, too."

"I heard about that. The husband was supposed to be the vampire, right?"

"Yep." Woody glanced around. "Funny coincidence: Anemia cases reported in Green Bay are down five percent since then."

"That is... funny," Douglas said, distractedly. She was reading a document that started, "Description: Rots appear normal to ordinary sight. They are visible and tangible...."

"Did Philbin write this?"

"Probably not. The vocabulary is way beyond him. I've got no idea where it came from. But it sounds a lot like this other fragmentary printout we found in a burned-out apartment in Terra Haute...."

✦ ✦ ✦

The tension between Oaken and Leaf was palpably thick.

"So. Where's the doctor?" Lupe said at last.

"He's unable to attend, I'm afraid," Leaf said, keeping her eyes on her husband — or ex-husband, Lupe supposed.

"Too bad."

"You didn't seem disappointed when he left Chicago," Leaf said pointedly.

"Hey, as I recall, you were the one on the list calling him an evil sexist bigot."

"I've apologized," Leaf said without a trace of embarrassment. "The Living Power showed me the truth about him. Among others."

"Look," Oaken said, resigned. "You can say what you want about me, but Phil needs your help, okay?"

"I'm just a medium for the Power. You know that. All in need can have their fill."

Lupe had killed vampires and zombies and even a man she'd once admired, but something in Leaf's tone made her shudder. The other woman reminded Lupe of Hare Krishnas at the airport, vacantly patient and persistent as dogs after a bone.

Phil was a bricklayer from the south side. He raised an eyebrow when Leaf said she needed to apply crystals to his body's 'energy centers.' But when her lips pressed against him and he felt his splintered leg bones straighten, felt his sutured skin knit, felt the swelling shrink and the pain fade, his eyes widened.

"That... that was..."

Leaf gave him a gentle smile and nodded. Oaken barely caught her as she passed out.



Douglas found her second interrogation more rewarding. Van Wyk's frosty act fazed her at first, but she had his number this time. The more upset he was, the bigger the words he used and the calmer he became. Other people got flustered when a detective hit close to home. Van Wyk got more remote.

"Any special significance to the number 119?"

"None of which I'm aware."

"You want to tell me what a 'rot' is?"

"Any number of fungal or bacterial infections can be described with that term. It's usually an outbreak on the epidermis."

"What about a 'black-stain rot'?"

"I don't believe I've heard that phrase."

"Uh huh. Does this symbol look familiar?"

"Not in the least."

"How about this one?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Okay." She restrained a smile and got out the big guns. "What about this one?"

The design was worked around the rim of a clay bowl. She knew, as he did, that the bowl had been made by Leaf Pankowski.

"I believe that's one of my roommate's bowls. If there's any significance to those designs — other than their decorative function — I'm unaware of it."

Douglas had to be careful. Van Wyk's lawyer was there, and any crazy talk wouldn't be good for the mainstream FBI, which always looked askance at SAD's 'witch doctors.'

"I think these are the symbols of a particular group. Maybe something like a gang. Maybe a cult." She leaned in. "You know what gangs and cults do, don't you? They try to get new territory. They try to recruit followers. A lot of times, they attack anyone they think is an 'enemy.'"

"I'm afraid I'm ignorant of such things. I'm Episcopalian."

"Really." She straightened up and stepped back. "Well, this group seems to have been doing a lot of snooping around. They appear to have discovered information about... *crimes*... that we thought only the FBI knew about." She turned back to look at him. "Particularly one member called 'Doctor 119.'"

"Do you really think this person is a medical doctor? I understand a number of musicians have taken the title 'doctor' as part of their stage personae."

"Oh, I think this guy's an M.D. And I think his files could be very valuable to us, if we got a complete set. Maybe valuable enough to buy our trust... as long as he's not in too deep."

"You mean, as long as he's willing to... what's the charming phrase from the criminal demimonde? Oh yes, 'rat out' his colleagues?"

"Turning state's evidence is a popular way to get one's neck out of a noose. Even someone who killed a lathe operator and dumped him in a lime pit might get into Witness Protection, if he named enough names."

Van Wyk's face showed no expression whatsoever. His voice was flat, almost inhumanly toneless.

"I thought gangsters and cultists were well known for their loyalty. I wonder if this 'doctor' would make such a deal. But not knowing him, I suppose it's all academic. May I go now?"



"This is fucking great," Phil said, working his hands around a massive hammer like a child gripping a favorite toy. "They think my legs will be broken for months. X-rays, doctors — all that shit. I'm getting workman's comp, and I've got a perfect excuse: 'I was stuck in bed when that person got killed officer.'"

Phil was in the back seat of a BMW sedan. Lupe was at the wheel and Oaken was next to her.

The woman who'd killed June Inoue had no idea she was being followed, but even if she reported the BMW, it was "borrowed" from a parking lot run by Phil's cousin. The woman's name was Kate Eden, and she was getting close to home.

Lupe, Oaken and Phil had a solid plan. They meant to assault her in her residence and, with luck, finish her off. They'd done the like before. It was three to one, but still they were cautious, taking no chances.

Ten minutes later, Oaken and Lupe stumbled to the BMW, skidding on the blood that coated the soles of their shoes. Phil was dead, inside the building with Kate Eden.



Oaken called Leaf. She hung up on him and burst into tears. Van Wyk asked what was wrong and Leaf began ranting

about the blind prejudice of "her former husband," screaming about "willful misinterpretation of the Living Power" and "abuse of its blessings." It took Van Wyk 15 minutes to calm Leaf down enough for her to explain that Oaken, Lupe and someone named Phil had found Jane Inoue's killer. They had tried to destroy it, but it had killed Phil instead.

Van Wyk poured her a drink and called Oaken. The two men spoke for some time. Then Van Wyk spoke to Leaf gently but insistently for about half an hour.

Once all were in agreement, Van Wyk called Agent Douglas.



After her suspect called to invite her to learn the truth about his activities, Douglas was delighted. When he insisted that she stay on the line with him until he arrived to get her, she was smug. She simply spoke with him on the hotel phone while using her cell phone's text-message feature to instruct Woody to follow her.

When she saw that the people who accompanied Van Wyk all wore ski masks, Douglas was unsurprised. When Van Wyk spotted Woody, Douglas became uneasy. When the driver — a woman with a Latin accent — ditched Woody and her plainclothes tails, Douglas actually got nervous.

After they switched vehicles twice — losing the tail for good — she was afraid.

At the same time, she was fascinated by the argument that took place around her.

These four people appeared to have found Jane Inoue's killer in less than two days, while a joint FBI/ Chicago Police Department task force had gotten nowhere. They claimed the killer was a woman named Kate Eden.

From what Douglas gathered, the driver and the heavyset man were in favor of some sort of vigilante lynching, while Van Wyk and the other woman were in favor of some sort of treatment — or was it an exorcism?

"I still don't see what the cop's here for," the driver said.

"I suspect Agent Douglas knows about the afflicted in her own way," Van Wyk said and turned to her. "When you were investigating in Cincinnati, did you talk to a man called Christoph?"

"At the club? Of course."

"During the day?"

"He was unavailable then."

"How much of the interview do you remember?"

"I remember it all very clearly," Douglas said, but even as she said so she felt an uneasy twitch in her brain. Why didn't she want to think about Christoph too closely?

"She's in there," the driver said brusquely. They'd gone north and were parked on a street near the Cabrini Green housing project.

"How do you know?" Douglas asked.

The driver just shook her head. Even through the mask, Douglas could detect her condescension.

As the five of them left the dingy white panel truck, Douglas thought about making a break for it but knew

she couldn't. Even though she realized it was the smart thing to do, she had to see more.

Besides, Van Wyk hadn't even disarmed her. He honestly seemed to think she'd find some common cause with these vigilantes.

Douglas had not only a gun, but also a cell phone, a crucifix and a lot of experience dealing with religious delusions. She was confident that she was ready for what waited inside.

She was wrong.



The room was an abattoir. Kate Eden had found a new victim and was sitting in the middle of his remains, painting strange words on the floor and walls.

Douglas reacted first, drawing her weapon. The large woman from the car tried to strike Douglas' arm but was too late to keep the agent from pulling the trigger.

Nothing happened.

Kate stood, knife in one hand, paintbrush in the other. She threw the knife, but it flew... wrong. It moved like a bird, like it had a life of its own, slashing at the heavyset man and the doctor. Then Kate delicately selected a second knife from a neat line on the floor. The killer was ready to charge when the driver put out her hand and shouted "Keep back, bitch." The blood-smeared woman flew backward — not stepping but almost propelled, heels scraping the floor and leaving twin trails in the blood. She slammed up against the far wall.

Then the large woman screamed, "No!" as the big man from the car pulled a gun. Maybe the woman's scream stopped him from firing. Maybe it was the same inexplicable thing that had jammed Douglas' weapon.

The knife continued to strike like some bird of prey, never falling. It clipped the driver at the back of her head. As she stumbled, Kate came away from the wall. But the large man made a pushing gesture, and the blood-covered woman seemed pinned once again. Douglas could see her muscles straining against... nothing... as if this murderous butcher were the world's greatest mime.

"Doc..." the big man gasped, his face contorted.

"Stay where you are," the doctor said, glaring at Kate Eden.

Douglas finally found her tongue and announced, "Federal agent! You're under arrest!"

"Decay will have your souls!" Eden shrieked, her voice strangely low, and with a peculiar emphasis on the first word.

The driver produced a hammer and stepped quickly toward the blood-soaked woman.

"Drop the hammer!" Douglas said. When the driver ignored her, she tried to fire — again, with no effect.

The flying knife sheared into Douglas' wrist, and she dropped the gun in a burst of blood and pain.

As the driver raised her hammer, the large woman again shouted, "No!" She threw herself forward and embraced the murderer. The driver hesitated, yelling some curse in Spanish.

The big woman kissed the killer. Kate screamed and convulsed. She dropped to the floor, perfectly limp. And then something emerged from her body.

Douglas saw it only for a moment. It was black, cloudy, inhuman. Douglas' instincts screamed that it was dangerous — evil. It shone glistened, and it trembled like something ready to explode from its own rage and hatred. It screamed once — its voice no longer constrained by human vocal cords. The sound was a blasphemous blur that seemed to spread the room's blood and offal into obscene patterns. Douglas cowered like a rabbit cornered by a snake.

And then the thing was gone.

There was a moment of silence. The driver yelled "Shit!" in a loud, angry voice. The burly man stared at the heavy-set woman, who stroked Kate Eden's hair and whispered comforting things. Then the big woman stood and walked over to Douglas, who was still huddled on the floor, still clutching her useless gun.

"Do you see?" she asked. Then she crouched and kissed the agent, the odor of sweat from her damp ski mask perceptible even through the stink of death. The wound on Douglas' wrist closed up, as if the knife had never touched her.

✦ ✦ ✦

Several minutes later, Douglas, still shaking uncontrollably, found the will to stagger from the building. She vomited in the thin, weedy grass.

"You crazy fuckin' cunt!" The driver screamed, but not at Douglas. She was yelling at the other woman. "The bitch is playing in blood like a pig in shit and you still hold back!"

"She's free!" the other woman shouted back. "She's free now, isn't she? If you had your way, she'd be dead!"

"She'd be dead, and that *thing* might be gone, too! You think it's gonna take long to find a new body?"

"There's no proof that killing the host kills the parasite," the doctor said.

"No proof except they don't come back!"

"C'mon everybody," the large man said. "We saved this woman. Isn't that something?"

Kate Eden was kneeling on the grass, not far from Douglas. She was weeping uncontrollably and saying, "I didn't mean to," over and over again.

"Are you all right?" Van Wyk crouched by Douglas. She waved him back, still trying to understand what she'd seen.

"You ever jinx up one of us again and I'll kill you myself! You should'a been protecting *us*, not *it*!" The driver stood face-to-face with the other woman and yelled. The large man was trying to get between them and calm things down.

"You can protect yourself! She can't!" The big woman pointed at Kate, who was trying in vain to wipe blood from her hands.

"I think it would be best for everyone if Ms. Eden were incarcerated in some sort of psychiatric facility," Van Wyk said to Douglas. Looking at the killer, she couldn't argue.

"What happened to her?"

"She was controlled by... a being."

"Could that... thing... come back?"

"Yes, but if a particular host is imprisoned, it's unlikely to return to her."

Douglas nodded numbly, trying to take in everything she had heard — and seen.

Van Wyk looked around. Some people stared in confusion at the scene unfolding. "A crowd is gathering," he said. "I think we should go."

Douglas struggled to her feet.

"This part I can handle," the agent said.

Douglas pulled out her badge and held it aloft.

"Federal Agent. Move along. Everything's under control."

✦ ✦ ✦

Five days later, Douglas was at O'Hare Airport to escort Van Wyk through security. He was the object of a citywide manhunt. Douglas was running it. No one would suspect her of letting him go. She was currently the Bureau's favorite. She had single-handedly caught Kate Eden, the Wrigleyville Ripper.

Unfortunately for both Douglas and the doctor, she'd done her job too well. The case against Van Wyk for the murder of Duane Kinniard was too damning to cover up — especially when traces of Kinniard's blood were found at Van Wyk's old Cincinnati apartment.

"What's going to happen to Ms. Eden?"

"Institutionalized," Douglas said. Van Wyk nodded.

"Lea... er, one of my colleagues was hoping she might not be, given the circumstances."

The agent shook her head. "No way. Eden saw everything. She experienced it all. Thought she was... the one doing it. Maybe she wasn't crazy *before*," Douglas frowned hard. "She sure is now, though."

"Perhaps it's for the best. One more victim, but luckier than some."

"I'll do what I can for your people here," Douglas said. "But it isn't much."

"I appreciate that." His mouth twisted into a dry smile. "Some of my colleagues are impulsive. And some, I fear, are simply deranged. Don't lose sleep if the FBI captures some strange individuals. Sometimes, we're as bad as the creatures we pursue. Or worse."

"Tough row to hoe."

"I won't ask you to protect every one of us who gets arrested. But I will ask you this: Hide the connections. Protect us as a group... even if it means letting individuals go."

"I'll do what I can," she repeated. He nodded.

"Here," he said, handing her a leather binder. "This is for you."

After she'd watched him board the plane to London, Douglas opened her present. Neatly typed tabs broke the mass of papers into sections. Picking one at random, she opened to a chapter labeled "Flickers."



INTRODUCTION

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

— Isaiah 1:13

First Contact is not like “normal” Hunter supplements. Books for the game generally assume that the imbued are unaware of the larger truths about the World of Darkness and its otherworldly or evasive denizens. Individual chosen encounter solitary creatures — or perhaps a handful of them — and then realize that more lurk in the shadows of the everyday world, but they never fully perceive the breadth of the supernatural across the globe or grasp its enormity. All they can do is speculate on the ramifications of their own limited experience in fear.

It's possible, however, that hunters might discover that they're not alone in seeing monsters and knowing the truth. Other people, some mundane and others who are *more* than average Joes and Janes, also have an inkling about what lurks out there. These people typically belong to groups affiliated with longstanding religions or governments whose history or exploration has brought them into contact (or conflict) with the unknown and left them with a glimmer of reality. Over time that glimmer has become a flame, and these societies pursue ongoing research into the creatures of the night and ways of countering them.

The question is, how do the imbued and members of these organizations become aware of each other, meet and get along? For the most part, neither party achieves any of these relations. Hunters and aware agencies are simply too few, too paranoid and too protective to allow themselves to be noticed or discovered. After all, hunters and human agents manage to exist under the noses of the world's shadowy inhabitants, so it stands to reason that they largely escape one another's notice, too.

And yet, goals shared by hunters and operatives — such as investigating ghosts, gathering information about vampires or confronting the walking dead — can lead to agents and the imbued crossing paths. Maybe the imbued

perform online research and ask questions of someone who seems informed about the supernatural, or maybe they even believe such a person could be a fellow chosen, only to alert Internet-savvy operatives that strangely alert people are at work in the world. Or maybe aggressive imbued take direct action against a blood pawn who is being trailed by government agents. When the hunters kill that puppet, they might appear as a blip on some government's radar — and could even become the subject of a new study, one performed by a super-secret part of the bureaucracy.

Whether these parties can ever get along depends upon how similar their goals are, whether they can inherently trust anyone who isn't one of their own, and of course upon how diplomatic or violent their encounter is.

Ultimately, discovering the existence of mortal agencies that have awareness of the supernatural can be a blessing or a curse for the imbued. Knowing that someone else understands and can help in the face of overwhelming adversity means hope against the night exists. Being able to turn to someone other than fellow imbued for assistance or solace signals a possibility that all people might one day be wakened to the truth. Thus, there might really be a chance to inherit the earth. But then, if relations between such groups and the chosen go poorly or simply prove untenable, one more enemy is added to hunters' long list. And that entry might be the most dispiriting of all, as the opportunity for hope in finding like-minded people and possible allies is crushed beneath humanity's perennial and tragic failure to find common ground.

The possibility of hunters encountering informed mortal agencies at work makes this book somewhat of a speculative proposition. The approach taken in **First Contact** assumes that the imbued in *your game* are the ones who make “first contact.” And yet, the theme of your chronicle or the direction in which your Storyteller wants to go might not

accommodate such discovery or potential interaction. Maybe your hunters are meant to be alone against the night. Maybe they're supposed to stand or fall on their own, without anyone else's help — or hindrance — even that of other hunters. If that's true of your game, this book is more of a "what if" guide than a how-to manual. It shows and tells you how the imbued and mortal agencies *can* coincide, but its contents don't have to be considered de facto developments in the World of Darkness. Nor does this book actually have to be used until you and your game are ready.

YEAR OF THE HUNTER

Many of the human (and not so human) organizations detailed in these pages derive from other books available for World of Darkness gaming. Essentially, **First Contact** boils down those other references for your use with **Hunter**, so you don't have to track down a bunch of other rare sources (and then do a lot of interpretation on how these agencies interpret hunters). The following groups are explored as outlined below.

Chapter 1: The Inquisition details the covert Catholic movement led by the Society of Leopold in its pursuit of the supernatural throughout the modern world. This society is further detailed in the supplement entitled **The Inquisition**.

Chapter 2: Project Twilight covers secret government bureaus and branches that seek to deal with those truths about the world that bureaucracies have discovered — and covered up. Possibilities for such agencies are further explored in a resource called **Project Twilight**.

Chapter 3: The Arcanum investigates a small, insular society of occult investigators who delve into the unknown. They seek to amass information on what the supernatural has in store for the world and are detailed further in **Halls of the Arcanum**.

Chapter 4: The Dauntain reveals a bizarre sect of goblins that has turned against its own kind and embraced the mundane world. These renegades are perhaps the least — and paradoxically most — human of all possible hunter allies presented in this book, and are discussed fully in **The Autumn People**.

Chapter 5: Secret Societies looks at three small, highly covert groups that hunters could run afoul of: the Orphic Circle, the Benandanti and the NSA. These groups, of all presented in this book, could have goals most antithetical to hunters'. The cabals are detailed in various other books from **Mediums: Speakers with the Dead** to **Wraith: The Great War** to **Hunter's** own **The Walking Dead**.

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

This book is designed for use by both **Hunter** players and Storytellers. Players get to see what interaction with existing secret agencies that are aware of monsters' existence can be like, and can emulate the same in their games. Storytellers are given all the inside information needed to depict and run those same groups and societies, along with ideas about how relations with hunters can proceed or collapse.

We've taken pains to keep the most delicate information out of players' hands — the stuff that the imbued and therefore players shouldn't know. Storytellers get sections dedicated to them alone, all of which have titles prefaced with "Storyteller:." And yet, sometimes dedicating information to you Storytellers alone means splitting hairs or creating confusion for players who need some basic information about each group to understand what they read. As a result, some sensitive details about the Inquisition or the NSA, for example, do get leaked. If you absolutely want to keep your players in the dark about the agencies in this book, read the appropriate chapters before deciding whether your players can. That, or feel free to make changes to the groups you want to use so that what players read isn't gospel in your game, and so that players don't have to play dumb too much on their characters' behalf. And, of course, you can always brand this book off limits for your troupe, assuming that players won't sneak peeks anyway.

AGENT'S AND THE IMBUING

Various chapters here address the issue of whether members of organizations or cults that are aware of the supernatural can be imbued. Or, whether existing hunters can acquire any mystical tricks to which operatives might have access. The rule of thumb is that agents, operatives, cult members and bureau personnel *can't* be imbued. They're all people with pre-existing unnatural capabilities or with training and awareness of the supernatural world that predetermines their attitudes or outlooks on creatures (often in keeping with the party line). These capacities or prejudices automatically make such people ineligible for the imbuing. True, when the Messengers choose their own agents, they search for people whose lives and experiences have poised them to react to and deal with awareness of the supernatural. And yet, the Heralds select people who have absolutely no history with the otherworldly or connection to it so that these people's reactions are completely untainted, unjaded. The chosen react to the existence of monsters based on who they are, not on what they have been trained to do or on what magic they have already mastered. That way, the Heralds have untouched, unspoiled tools at their disposal.

The question of playing an agent as a bystander might also arise. That too is denied in the game's canon. The fact that someone is a bystander means that the Messengers selected her to become one of the imbued. The subject simply failed the test. By virtue of being put through her paces, the would-be hunter had to meet the Heralds' initial criteria for the imbuing. That means cabalists and operatives are denied outright.

Likewise, hunters who have been imbued cannot acquire or learn agencies' mystical capabilities. They might ally closely with the Inquisition, for example, but that doesn't make them eligible for inexplicable powers available to some people in that group. Being imbued makes a hunter incapable of acquiring any other kinds of strange capabilities thereafter. The Messengers' intervention in a hunter's life essentially makes her "pure" thereafter.

None of these proscriptions say that *you* absolutely can't allow agents or cultists to be imbued in *your* game, however. It's *your* game. Doing so, however, tends to undermine **Hunter's** common-man theme. A religious devotee of the Inquisition who already knows about and fights vampires, who has pre-existing miraculous capabilities, and who is imbued really isn't on par with a plumber who is shown the truth one night. The imbued Inquisitor is a *possibility*, but certainly overshadows any other "traditional" hunters in your game and may not lend himself to the same kind of roleplaying fun of coming cold to a hidden world.

Furthermore, a company man or cabalist who is imbued quickly learns that his new status and old affiliations probably don't reconcile. Mortal organizations that study or deal with the supernatural often labor under misunderstandings about the other side and base their assumptions and activities on those errors. Imbued agents quickly see the world for how it *really* is, beyond even what their superiors or colleagues recognize. Such awareness can lead to working "outside the box," against organizational doctrine or protocol. Can a government agent let a marauding poltergeist go, for example, simply because his bosses refuse to accept the existence of such beings? Yet, doing something about the spirit may seem like insubordination.

Being an imbued operative also means drawing unwanted attention from higher up the ladder. If the agent behaves strangely or performs inexplicable actions, she might seem like a turncoat. Maybe she's playing both sides of the fence or has made a deal with the Devil. Regardless of the truth, the hunter/agent probably winds up detained, if not quarantined and/ or the intended subject of an autopsy to learn what has happened to her. Not surprisingly, such personnel probably abandon their former careers, even if it means going rogue and becoming the subject of pursuit. Being a secret society member and one of the imbued means trying to live an inherently antithetical life. Roleplaying that life is your choice. But as always, the Storyteller has final say on whether organization personnel can be chosen in your chronicle.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Secret societies, covert government branches and underground monster-hunting sects are mainstays of fiction, movies and comics. We're fascinated by the idea of trained, alert people working behind the scenes to keep humanity safe from the forces of evil, whether those forces are alien, monstrous or also human. Any of the following sources can be inspiration for conspiratorial groups in your **Hunter** game. Just as a reader or an audience learns about such groups along with an uninformed protagonist, so do the imbued and their players learn about such groups as your chronicle unfolds. The covert organization is such a powerful cultural icon for us that all your players can understand, appreciate and enjoy it in your game.

The X-Files — Duh.

Ultraviolet — A British series about MI-5 agents hunting vampires.

The Silence of the Lambs — That scene in the prison, between Starling and Lecter, with Lecter behind panes of Plexiglas? Imagine Starling as a member of a secret government organization and Lecter as one of the imbued.

Mindhunter and *Journey into Darkness* — Nonfiction detailing the experiences of John Douglas, a pioneer of the FBI's serial crime investigative unit. Excellent for procedural ideas.

"Down, Satan!" — This Clive Barker short story depicts a vastly wealthy man's crisis of faith. His ill-advised notion is to force God's intercession in his life by creating an enormous infernalist temple. Shows just how frightening mortal cultists can be.

The Frighteners — This Peter Jackson-directed film is so WoD-ish it's scary. Give Michael J. Fox's protagonist a fennel sword for battling ghosts and he's damn near a Benandante.

The Fury — Almost forgotten, this over-the-top movie about telekinesis shows how far a secretive federal agency goes to bend individuals with paranormal powers to its own agenda. Good NSA atmosphere.

The Russia House — An underrated spy drama with a keen sense of morality. Basically, the Sean Connery character must choose between betraying the West or betraying someone he loves. Check this out for insight into the psyche of a covert operative.

The Ninth Gate — In this modern film noir, a rich collector of occult manuscripts hires a dealer of antique books to track down and purchase a mysterious and supposedly powerful tome for him. The lengths to which the collector is willing to go to get the book — and to which the book-dealer's rivals are willing to go to keep it out of his hands — are obsessive and frightening.

Sleepy Hollow — In this Tim Burton film set in post-colonial northeastern America, an unapologetic man of science comes to a small town to unravel an allegedly supernatural mystery, one that might cost him his sanity and his life.

Millennium — This short-lived television series revolves around a highly placed shadow conspiracy of men and women trying to prepare an unsuspecting world for a cataclysmic destiny at the end of the 20th century. The show didn't have much of a future once 1999 and 2000 had come and gone uneventfully, but it can still be seen in syndication.

Most of H.P. Lovecraft's short fiction evokes the powerless, overwhelmed feeling that the imbued and other mundane hunters are heir to. Just about all of the stories in Del Rey's collection *The Best of H.P. Lovecraft: Bloodcurdling Tales of Horror and the Macabre* are appropriate representations of refined men of learning trying to cope with bizarre, horrifying situations not of their own making. See especially "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Colour Out of Space," "The Dreams in the Witch-House," "The Dunwich Horror," "The Picture in the House" and "The Shadow Out of Time."



CHAPTER 1: THE INQUISITION

And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

— Deuteronomy 19:18-19

MALLEUS DEI: THE HAMMER OF GOD

Joshua Talbot sat quietly in his recliner, reading the latest issue of *The Economist* while the television murmured softly in the background. It was a rare evening, one spent in solitude and leisure, a communion with his often-ignored sense of humanity. Joshua hadn't enjoyed such luxury for a while. He felt a lazy stretch set in, and he smiled at nothing in particular. The phone shattered his reverie.

"Talbot?"

"Yeah, Jason. Everything all right?"

"Melissa's dead..."

"What?"

"And Anthony's gone apeshit. I couldn't stop him..."

"Slow down. What happened?"

"There's no time. Melissa's dead. The bastards killed her. Anthony's gone after them. We've got to stop him."

"Damn it, Jason, you're not making sense. Who killed Melissa? And where's Anthony gone?"

"To the church. To kill everyone."

✦ ✦ ✦

The Twickenham suburbs were quiet that night. Few cars drifted along the residential streets, and a lonely breeze cooled Joshua's skin while he hurried along the sidewalk. His steps clattered against the damp pavement, and echoed uncomfortably down the suburban alleys. Finally, he caught

sight of Jason's beat-up Land Rover and dropped into the passenger seat with hardly a pause.

"So, what's all this then?" Joshua asked, afraid and annoyed.

Jason's eyes were bloodshot and swollen. Had he been crying? Joshua wondered. Joshua had never known the man to express any such emotions before. His irritation bled away, and he sat there marveling at whatever event had made Jason so upset. Then he noticed the dark smudges on Jason's shirt that glistened under the windshield-muted streetlights.

Jason snorted hard and composed himself. "I spotted Anthony's car on a side-street a few minutes ago. He's already inside." Jason nodded in the direction of the Church of Saint Paul across the street. The place looked foreboding in the static mist, its steeple vanishing into the night. "We should go."

"What happened?" Joshua asked softly. "What are we up against?"

"I'm not sure," Jason admitted after a pause. "Anthony said he and Melissa were out for the evening, looking for targets."

Joshua cursed under his breath. None of his team was supposed to go out alone or without the support of at least two others, but Anthony never listened. He was too eager to hurt monsters (he called it "remedial violence"). And Melissa... Melissa loved Anthony too much.

"He..." Jason paused again, then continued bitterly, "He was livid. He said they heard muffled shots and yelling coming from an alley. They rushed in and found some blokes dressed all in black who were fighting a drinker. They were

being tossed around badly, so Anthony and Melissa jumped in. I guess no sooner did Melissa spew that decay than one of these blokes spun around and... he shot her several times.... I've never seen so much blood."

"Then what happened?" Joshua said gently.

"I think Anthony went nuts and... and attacked everyone he could lay his hands on. He said they were armed like M1-6, but they couldn't touch him. I think the drinker fled in the confusion, but Anthony tore through the rest of them with that chain he keeps. He said he killed them all. When he came to me, he was covered in blood. He carried Melissa in, asking me to save her. I couldn't.... I tried, but she was already dead."

"That's when Anthony said he'd make the bastards pay. He'd taken off their masks. He apparently recognized two of them from the area — bloody priests who live in the rectory behind the church," Jason said with another nod toward Saint Paul's. "He wanted me to go along. To help kill them for what they did to Melissa. I tried stopping him... told him to wait for you, but he knew you'd try to talk him out of it. He took off. That's when I called you." Jason sat quiet and sullen.

"You did the right thing. I need your help. We have to go in there and stop him."

Jason nodded.

"Did you get Serena or anyone else?"

"No," Jason said. "Everyone else was out."

Joshua nodded and then exited the car. Jason took a second to compose himself before joining his friend in the quiet night. The two jogged across the street and through the wet grass toward the church suspiciously.

✱ ✱ ✱

Joshua winced as his hard heels clicked and echoed off the polished floor and old stone walls of the church interior. He hadn't had time to grab the proper gear. He tried to ignore the butterflies in his stomach, the ones that made him feel like taking a crap. He hated the persistent anxiety that came with every encounter. Jason followed quietly, though Joshua suspected he felt guilty at defiling the church's sanctity, even if it wasn't his denomination. God's house was God's house. Both men stole glances at the stained-glass apostles looking silently down at them, but Joshua perceived no shred of malice or compassion in their brittle stares. Jason probably felt otherwise.

The two men had found the church's side door open, with scratches around the lock, but no sign of Anthony. In all likelihood, he'd gone straight for the adjoining rectory through a passage at the rear of the church, a route that had been visible outdoors.

Joshua hurried up the carpeted half-steps onto the altar platform as Jason trailed along like a dog's limp tail, robbed of vitality. Drawing a garish red curtain aside, they found the door to the rectory and a chair propped under the doorknob. The two men exchanged troubled glances and looked around the church one more time. Joshua focused hard on his surroundings, searching for some clue of any other presence.

Nothing.

"Are we too late?" Jason whispered.

"I don't know. Maybe Anthony came out again and wanted to block this route."

"Or...." Jason said.

"Or what?" Joshua said through gritted teeth.

"I don't know, but the possibility of 'or' worries me."

Joshua scowled and removed the chair carefully. A darkened hallway awaited them beyond the door. Joshua took point while Jason pulled out his flashlight, the lens of which was covered with a red translucent film. It provided subdued illumination without a bright, white beam that announced their presence. Jason had started using this trick after seeing it in a movie about the Vietnam War.

Walking softly but with deliberate pace, Joshua had time to study his surroundings. He noticed something sparkling on the floor and bent down. He found bits of shattered glass. Joshua pointed to the ceiling and whispered, "The light bulb's been broken." Some wires were pulled out and cut.

"Huh," Jason said.

Joshua moved for the door at the end of the corridor. It was unlocked. Joshua opened it a crack and peered through. The rectory hallway lay beyond. The lights were off, but the windows at the entrance and in some open rooms provided natural illumination. Joshua noticed that some of the light fixtures in here appeared to be missing bulbs as well. More wires dangled from the ceiling, but neither Joshua nor Jason could figure out why. The hunters moved on quietly, closed the door behind them and surveyed their surroundings.

The hallway, decorated with pictures of Christ and the Virgin Mary, extended to a kitchen. Seven doors along the hallway presumably led to different rooms, though two at the front bore nameplates. Both men could see, through an open archway, a sofa in a room adjacent to the kitchen. It was probably a lounge. Otherwise, only silence and shadow engulfed the Spartan rectory. Jason quietly stepped to a door with a nameplate and placed his hand lightly on the knob. It was locked. Jason pulled out his lock picks and fidgeted with the door for a few seconds before something clicked. Joshua smiled. Jason was improving.

The room was windowless and dark. Joshua followed Jason in and quietly closed the door behind him. Religious paraphernalia decorated the office. The centerpieces were a large desk and a well-stocked bookshelf. A carpet covered the floor, for which Joshua was grateful; he was afraid of making a racket.

The two hunters quietly rifled through the desk's innocuous contents before searching the rest of the room. Jason glanced quickly over the religious items on the wall while Joshua checked the bookcase.

"Hell," Jason whispered softly, "these are all pictures of torture. The father here has a real Inquisition fetish."

"Uh huh," Joshua whispered. He was preoccupied. "I think there's a room behind this thing." Joshua tried pulling at a corner of the bookshelf. It wouldn't budge. He felt strangely light-headed for a moment but overcame it by shaking his head.

Jason walked over. "What do you mean?" Now he looked a little pale as well.

Joshua pointed to the floor, but Jason's flashlight revealed nothing obvious. The floor was carpeted here, but with an inch-wide gap of underlying wood at the foot of the



bookcase. Joshua knelt down and pulled back the carpet. Jason saw scratch marks curving outward from the bookcase's base. The two men both pulled on the corner of the case, but it refused to budge.

"Hold on," Jason said, running his hands along the top of the bookcase where it met the wall. He grunted in satisfaction and fidgeted with something that popped open. "It was anchored to the wall."

This time, the shelf swiveled away from the wall easily to reveal a dark room beyond. Jason stepped forward but stumbled slightly, feeling weak and unsteady.

"Are you all right?" Joshua asked, rushing to support him. Jason nodded and waved him away.

"Sorry, just... not feeling splendid."

Joshua patted Jason on the shoulder. "We'll make this quick. You've had a rough night," Joshua said, keeping his growing nausea to himself. Joshua stepped into the room and gasped despite himself. He immediately felt dizzy. He struggled to study the room carefully. Jason joined him and stared in stunned silence. Automatic weapons covered one wall, while ammo boxes and gun parts littered a worktable. A giant map of London covered with variously colored pushpins and newspaper clippings adorned another wall next to a door, while the third wall held a shelving unit full of old, dusty books. Jason swept the flashlight across the books to reveal titles including *Apocalypse of St. John*, *Grimorium Verum*, *Malleus Maleficarum* and dozens on the Inquisition and on interpretation of the Bible. Hanging on the same wall was a tattered

banner that depicted a wooden cross with a bush on one side and a sword on the other. There was something written on the banner in Latin, but Joshua's head hurt just looking at it. He wavered. Everything was spinning.

"Bugger!" Jason gasped and coughed. "They don't have an Inquisition fetish. They think they are the bloody Inquisition!" Then he dropped to his knees, his strength flagging. The air smelled faintly of rotting meat, which accentuated Jason's nausea, but he resisted vomiting. Gas, he realized suddenly, but he was too disoriented to say anything.

Joshua steadied himself against a wall. "Something's not right" he muttered, coughing. Somewhere outside, they heard car doors slam, and people talking. He murmured again, almost panicking, and stumbled for the far door. Beyond was a set of stairs leading to an underground corridor. With every ounce of strength he had left, Joshua grabbed Jason, who was still kneeling, and dragged him along.

Joshua heard someone laughing near the front door. He pulled Jason down the stairs and along the corridor. They careened off the walls... up another set of stairs... another door... Joshua drove his shoulder into it... pain... again... once... twice... it broke open.... Jason and Joshua crashed to the concrete outside, gasping.... The cool air slapped them like water. They almost fell unconscious....

But the rectory's explosion awoke them.

They barely rolled away from the broken door before a gout of searing air spit out of the passageway like a cannon blast.

"Bloody Hell, Anthony!" was all Jason could muster.

ANATOMY OF FAITH

From the journal of Joshua Talbot, dated February 14th

It didn't have to come to this. Whoever ran that place is still sifting through the ruins of the church, and I regret their loss even with Melissa's death. We've both drawn blood. This is how wars start.

Near as I can gather, Anthony went in there and opened the kitchen gas main. He probably covered the leak with a wet cloth to absorb the odor that the gas company adds, so it took a while to spread. That's why Jason and I nearly fell unconscious after being there for so long. Slow build up. The bastard popped the light bulbs and cut wires to create open contacts. He figured if the gas didn't kill them, a single spark would do the trick. That's what happened to the poor bastards we heard coming home. I don't even know if they were part of all this. Anyway, if it hadn't been for that tunnel out the back of the church, Jason and I would be dead now too.

Everyone's working overtime on this fiasco. Serena's chasing information about the historical Inquisition, seeing as how nice they were to document their history. There was just too much weird stuff at that church to ignore some kind of connection. Jason is keeping an eye on the remains of the church to track anyone who frequents it. Jeff's working on the supernatural angle with SoS. I personally didn't want Paul involved given what happened the last time, but he's good for insights.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Joshua,

I'm going cross-eyed with this research. The Inquisition was bloody, and if these modern-day people are half the bastards their idols were, I'm not sure Anthony did the wrong thing. Here's what I've found.

The unofficial Inquisition began on a field outside Clermont, France in 1095, when Pope Urban II called for the first Crusade against Muslim-occupied Jerusalem. It was an Inquisition in everything but name, and it certainly inspired other attacks against local heretics like the French Cathars. The Cathars believed in reincarnation. Their real crime, however, was disagreeing with the Catholic Church. If the Cathars made a bigger mistake, it was making Dominic de Guzmán angry. He posthumously inspired the formation of the Dominican Order. When he was alive, he recognized the allure of the Cathars and used their tools against them. He administered an order of poor monks who rejected the materialism of the secular world, and who were highly educated (unlike the unschooled priests of the time). Dominic was spiritual leader for the eradication of the Cathar heresy.

The Dominicans were despised. These supposedly poor monks spied on people and proved adept at record keeping and intelligence gathering. No wonder Pope Gregory IX released a Papal Bull in 1233, decreeing that the Dominicans were responsible for eradicating all

heresy. From that point forward, the Dominicans became infamous for their practices, including the *auto-da-fé* (act of faith), in which they burned heretics, and the Papal-sanctioned use of torture. Note that the Inquisition's true target at this time was heresy and pagans, not witchcraft. Early in Inquisition history, it was illegal to believe in witches and sorcerers. Anyone who did had "lost his faith." Later, in 1484, the Pope reversed that decree, claiming witchcraft did exist. Anyone who didn't believe in magic or sorcerers denied the infallibility of the Pope, and was a heretic.

This reversal came about just in time for the Spanish Inquisition, a slaughter of midwives, Jews, Muslims and other innocents under General-Inquisitor Torquemada (that banner you described was their heraldic device BTW). This Inquisition was not accountable to the Catholic Church, but to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain (thanks to a Papal Bull from Pope Sixtus IV). The Spanish Inquisition lasted for 200 years, during which the Catholic Inquisition continued on its own, invigorated by books like the loathsome *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches, which justified the barbaric treatment of witches and even recommended various tortures). They attacked witchcraft, decimating entire villages based on rumors. Over 150 years, the Inquisition claimed to kill 30,000 witches.

Later, when new threats like Protestants and Reformists emerged, the Vatican sanctioned the creation of new Inquisitors who were smart and sophisticated enough to fight these heresies with equal intelligence (and who weren't as corrupt as the Dominicans, I suspect). Enter 16th Century stage left: The Jesuits. To spare the Jesuits the hatred the Dominicans received, the Inquisition became the "Holy Office," with duties aimed not so much at maintaining the purity of faith, but at ensuring the stability of the Church.

Over the years, the Holy Office focused less on wholesale condemnation, instead targeting anyone who threatened the status quo. That didn't mean it grew more agreeable in its old age, though. The Holy Office aimed its efforts at Protestants, Reformists, "magi" (Rosicrucians, Freemasons), scientists and anyone who eroded the power structure of the Catholic Church or who refuted Genesis. Fortunately, by that time the Church's power eroded under the weight of its own bulk. The United States was anti-Catholic while Germany and Britain became Protestant, creating havens for freethinkers who defied Church doctrine. Even Napoleon's rule shattered the Church's hold over Europe briefly, but that didn't stop the Holy Office from excommunicating, torturing and imprisoning 200,000 people in the fractured Papal States between 1823 and 1846.

Now, this is actual history, Joshua, not that Baigent and Leigh conspiracy crap that SoS loves to read. The Church acknowledges this bloody history, which leaves me wondering what it still denies.

The Inquisition (or Holy Office) faded slowly but never died. Popes tried restoring its original fervor numerous times with efforts like the Catholic Modernist Movement. That effort tried to create a cadre of highly educated and erudite priests trained in literary discourse to combat the erosion of scriptural orthodoxy and to promote the infallibility of the Vatican. These priests, however, were so well trained that they recognized the inconsistencies of the Bible and the all-too-human nature of the pope. Many left the program less certain of their faith than before, while others spoke out against the Church itself. This embarrassment was indicative of the Inquisition's death throes throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries.

Believe it or not, the Inquisition still exists, but under a different name. It became the Congregation of the Holy Office in 1908, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 1965. One quick but troubling side-note: there are rumors that the "Inquisition" has given up on the West and is making efforts to increase the Vatican's power by focusing on Third World countries throughout Africa, Asia and South America. Additionally, they seem intent on investigating sightings of the Virgin Mary for two possible reasons. The first is that such sightings are said to be heralds of the end of the world, while the second theory claims sightings indicate the end of Catholicism. The really interesting thing is that these theories derive from the "Third Prophecy of Fatima."

Fatima was a small village in France. During WWI, a young girl named Lúcia dos Santos, along with two cousins, supposedly saw the Virgin Mary three times. After becoming a Carmelite nun, Lúcia wrote down two of the prophecies but was too horrified to record a third. A priest convinced her to do so, and it was recorded in 1944. She sent it off to the Bishop of Leiria, who passed it on to the Holy Office because he didn't "dare" read it. The Holy Office did the same, however. They sent it to the Cardinal of Lisbon. At Lúcia's insistence, the letter wasn't to be opened until her death or until 1960, whichever came first. In 1957, with Lúcia still alive, the Holy Office recalled the letter to its care. After Pope John XXIII and Cardinal Ottaviani read it, they declared its contents a secret.

Until recently, Lúcia's third prophecy remained a mystery to all but popes and the prefect of the Holy Office. Nobody said anything. Apparently the contents frightened the Vatican. Any allusions to it were always evasive. Then, suddenly, Pope John Paul II released the third prophecy to the world, but the contents were rather anticlimactic given its history. Some people theorize that the Church released a forgery or watered down version of the truth, and the real thing is still being kept secret.

STORYTELLER: THE SOCIETY OF LEOPOLD

Although the Inquisition was involved in the war against heresy, the true vanguard of Christ's army

was the Society of Leopold. This small cabal was dedicated to rooting out and destroying supernatural creatures — and it still does in the modern day. Its spiritual figurehead, Leopold of Murnau, a Dominican Inquisitor, encountered and fought a vampire in the course of his duties for the "mundane" Inquisition. Following his battle, he convinced Pope Gregory IX to allow him special dispensation in pursuing the supernatural, creating the framework for the society that bears his name today.

Of course, the path from then till now was turbulent. With the general Inquisition's shift from purging heresies to tackling witchcraft in 1484, Pope Innocent VIII funded the loosely organized society, delineated a well-defined hierarchy and pushed it deeper into the shadows. The Vatican wanted an elite cadre of soldiers, well versed in scripture and strong of will, to fight those supernatural horrors too terrible for the normal Inquisition to face. The Society of Leopold served this role well, confronting the truths that good Catholics should never know.

The Society of Leopold served dutifully and fervently. As the world changed and developed, the society did too, but still it performed such practices as confronting targets and conducting torture to procure confessions. In 1908, Pope Pius X cut the society loose, allowing it independent operation with nominal ties to the Vatican. The group's numbers faltered and dropped late last century, forcing it to adopt progressive policies such as inducting women into its ranks, and creating a network of civilian supporters and spies. And yet, the millennial scare and recruitment in underdeveloped nations have resulted in a membership upswing. Unfortunately, the society faces new ills and woes the likes of which the current Inquisitor-General prayed he would never see.

STORYTELLER: THE HIERARCHY OF LEOPOLD

The 20th Century was unkind to the Society of Leopold, turning the once-esteemed group into an underground movement with limited income, influence and recruitment potential. The induction of women was a reflection of the times, and necessity forced the society to recruit secular members. Now, not everyone in the society is a person of the cloth. The ranks and their responsibilities are as follows, with the title "Inquisitor" applied to all members equally.

Tertiary — The rank of society inductee. A tertiary is not required to serve the Inquisition full time, or even to perform a combat role, but he does have limited access to the libraries of the Holy See.

Cenacle — Not a rank, but a small group of Inquisitors that operates together. A Cenaculum is their base of operations (such as a monastery or rectory), where some live and work.

Councilor — An experienced Inquisitor who has triumphed at some measurable task in the society's name. Such an individual is generally wise and experienced. Councilors sometimes come together as advisors

to form a synod when the Inquisition needs their insight and prudence.

Abbé — The Inquisitor responsible for the care and conduct of a Cenaculum.

Censor — An Inquisitor who investigates any fellow member accused of falling under the influence of the infernal. Collectively, they are the society's version of Internal Affairs and operate from the Office of the Censor.

Provincial — A rank offered to Abbés who manage a Cenaculum with exemplary proficiency. A Provincial is in charge of the society's activities within a geographic area. A Council of Provincials decides who serves as the next Inquisitor-General, much as the College of Cardinals chooses a new pope.

Inquisitor-General — The head of the society who remains in office for the duration of his (or her) life. To date, there have been two female Inquisitors-General.

THE INQUISITION TODAY

ParcelForce package to Joshua Talbot, sender unknown; dated February 23

Hi Joshua,

Sorry for the cloak & dagger routine, but I don't trust the Internet these days. It's far easier to courier this material since the opposition won't have time to create forgeries if they intercept it.

We've stepped in something deep and nasty thanks to Anthony, and we are dealing with the Inquisition. The Inquisition, as Serena would say. I've been keeping tabs on the destroyed church, taking photos and tracking a couple of important-looking people. Needless to say, that led nowhere. I was about to call you and tell you I had nothing when I received a package from Anthony (for some reason he still likes me). He sent copies of tapes he's made over the last week.

It isn't pretty. He somehow found an "Inquisitor" (he probably surveyed the bombsite like I did) and tortured information out of him. I can't blame Anthony for his anger, but after hearing this, I wanted to kill him. Still, he uncovered some information. I've included copies of the cassettes, but I'll provide you with the "highlights" if you don't want to listen to them. I wouldn't blame you. The information is sketchy and might even be false. But, we're working off assumptions, anyway.

- This so-called Inquisition we've discovered isn't affiliated with the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. It operates under something called the Society of Leopold, which supposedly has been fighting the supernatural secretly for centuries.

- The Society of Leopold appears to be several sects operating together out of a mutual sense of duty and devotion (much like us). They seem to have a hierarchy, but the specifics are vague.

- The society has been operating outside the Vatican for some time (plausible deniability, perhaps?), apparently like some holy networks cell. "What the Pope doesn't know won't hurt him."

- Now the good news, in a fashion. The Inquisition is in turmoil. They think the attack against the church was staged by a rival sect, so they don't know we did it. From my understanding, various sects comprising the Inquisition are fighting each other, to the point of sabotaging one another's efforts. The good news is we're safe for now. The bad news is, if we contact one faction we piss off the others.

Not much to go on, but Anthony's victim seemed strong-willed and gave up very little. We have to stop Anthony from taking any more revenge. Before this Inquisition catches him and they return the favor.

Jason

STORYTELLER: THE DISSENSION OF LEOPOLD

Recent years have proved troublesome for the Society of Leopold, a situation long in the making. After the society parted ways with the Vatican, it relied on unconventional recruitment policies to bolster its constantly flagging membership. It inducted women fully, a course the Vatican itself failed to implement, and allowed certain members to pursue and practice Christian mysticism in the form of theurgy or hedge magic. Both decisions have their share of detractors within the Inquisition and the Vatican. The Society of Leopold has managed to operate efficiently despite this underlying friction... until lately.

Pope John Paul II, a supporter of traditional values and conservative movements, increased the number of seats in the College of Cardinals from 111 to 166. Many feel he did so to ensure succession of another ultraconservative pope at the next conclave, but he also made cardinals of several strong Inquisition supporters. The Society of Leopold believes Pope John Paul II's hand-picked candidates may be part of an inner circle familiar with the Third Prophecy of Fatima. The society also believes, with good reason, that the next pope will not only support the organization, but will bring it back under the auspices of the Holy See. A few even suspect that the Inquisition will fall under the direction of the ardent *Opus Dei*, a floating diocese of Catholics answerable only to the Throne of St. Peter and whoever occupies it as Pope. Therein lies the problem.

The friction extant in the Inquisition recently broke the society down into several factions. Some welcome the conservative and almost cultlike mentality of *Opus Dei*, believing it heralds a new direction for the group. This lot wants to remove women and Christian mystics from their ranks and return to the "purity" of their legacy. Others simply want to purge the practitioners of theurgy. Regardless, most believe a return to the Vatican is imminent. A few see this move as a step backward and actively struggle against the possibility. In short, the Inquisition's sects fight among themselves, and that means hunters can expect a variety of reactions upon encountering the Society of Leopold. Some sects desperately need allies against what they perceive to be growing opposition to their presence, whereas others — ignorantly or accurately — see hunters as part of the downward spiral of the world.

SHIPS PASSING IN THE NIGHT

From: stella142

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Listen, I'm just looking for yes or no answers on this. Don't give me opinions. Give me facts. I don't want this degenerating into another flame war. Have any of you encountered agents of a religious body fighting the supernatural? If yes, tell me about it. If no, then please keep your uninformed opinions to yourself. I don't have time to wade through the shit or to be polite. People's lives are at stake.

From: crystal23

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Stella142, people's lives are always at stake. You've got no right to be rude. You may not like conjecture, but it presents you with avenues of investigation you might not have considered. We're in this together and that means we all have a say. Now, before you dismiss me, I have something that might interest you.

A few months back, I tangled with a shambler and was hurt pretty badly. I couldn't drive home in that shape, and I was packing too much gear to show up at a hospital. I don't know why, but I stumbled into some back alley to catch my breath. (Pain's like the cold sometimes. You

just want to sleep.) I hid between a stairwell and a dumpster before I finally fell unconscious. Next thing I know, there's a woman, a nun crouching next to me praying. I don't know what she was doing, but she had her hand on my chest and I felt better. I could see clearly in the darkness thanks to my gift, but there was something strange about her, like she had a soft glow. She opened her eyes and said something like, "I saw you fighting the beast. Where's your lance, sister?"

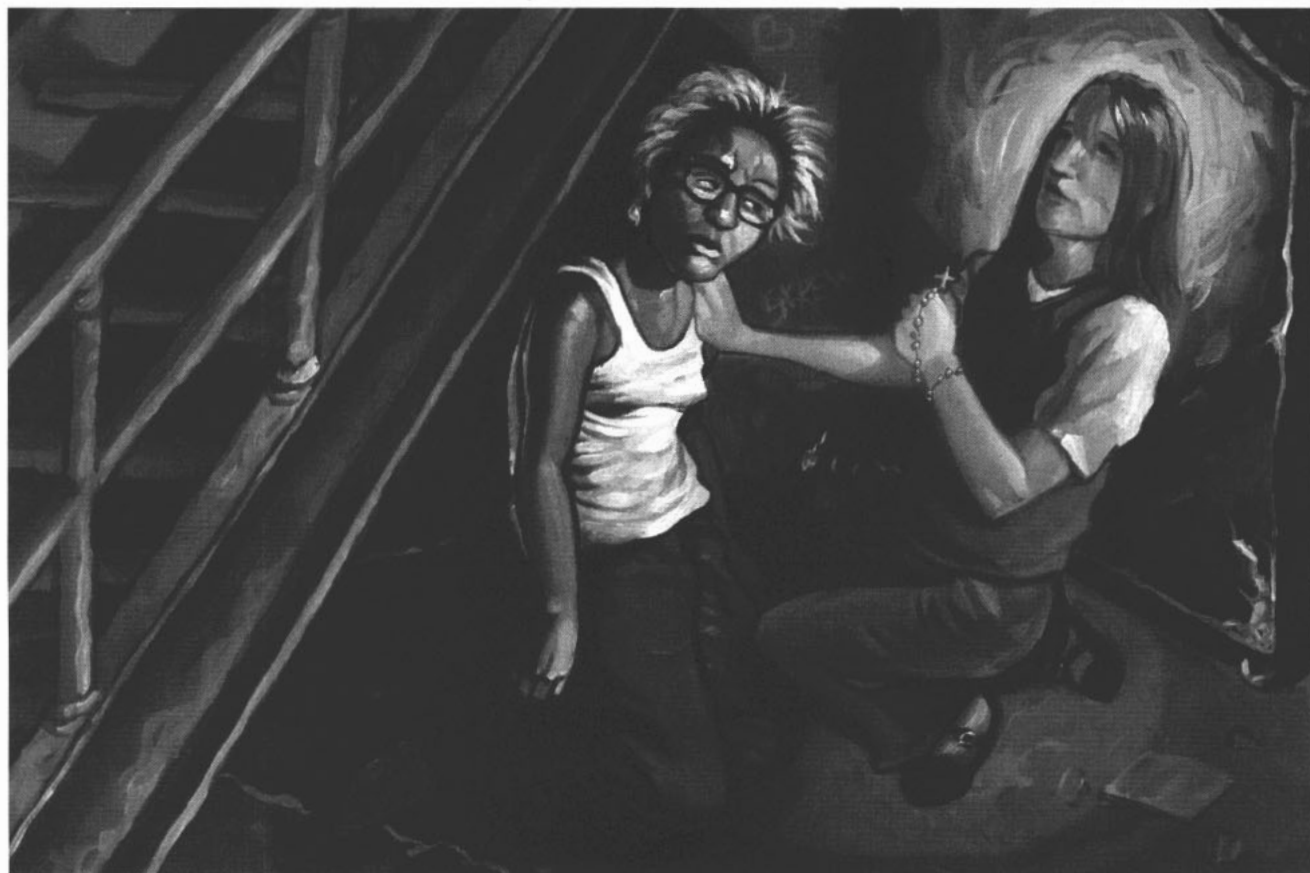
I was surprised. She seemed calm. Not even my weapons or gear fazed her. She acted like it was all natural. She panicked only when I asked, "Lance? Who are you?" She went wide-eyed like she'd said too much, and she high-tailed it out of there. I was still too weak to chase her, but I figure she worked at the local soup kitchen or women's shelter. I never bothered tracking her down because I was afraid I'd compromised myself as well. Still, I never felt anything untoward from her. She seemed at peace. Content. I don't think she could have hurt a fly.

From: stella142

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Crystal23, can you contact this nun without endangering yourself or betraying too much? I've spoken with a few other hunters who claim to have encountered priests and nuns who seemed in the know, but they didn't fare as well as you. I'd like to see if we can approach this agency on friendly terms. If we're right,



they may have been fighting the supernatural for centuries longer than any of us. We could use their help, or at the very least, we don't need them fighting us as well.

From: sixofswords29

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Don't be an idiot, Stella. Don't ask Crystal23 to risk life and limb to satisfy your curiosity. If this is anything like the historical Inquisition, they'll take one look at our powers and brand us bloody heretics, or worse. What separates us from witches and warlocks when we use our abilities? It made no difference when they targeted midwives during the Middle Ages, and when they killed M. We're no safer.

To bring the rest of you up to date on events, we had another encounter with the Inquisition. I wish I could say our meeting went as well as Crystal23's. A colleague operating within Stella142's group and I were following leads that might have brought us into contact with the Inquisition. We decided that if these agents knew the supernatural, including spirits, existed, then they might employ exorcists to banish them. Find an exorcist and theoretically we'd find the Inquisition. Rather than go through official Church channels and draw unnecessary attention, we questioned some of our Catholic friends to see if they'd heard of anyone performing exorcisms. Finally, we hit upon a "friend of a friend" situation in

which a Catholic priest had performed an exorcism for a family. We tracked him down.

Needless to say, our intended rendezvous did not go well. We waited outside the priest's church and followed him around, waiting to speak to him. The moment finally presented itself and I approached with my compatriot providing backup. I opened my faculties and tried to glimpse this man's present, past and future. He recoiled, as though my very action had slapped him in the face. He said we were possessed (!) and immediately held out his crucifix. That didn't faze us in the least, and he ran. We decided not to give chase since pursuing a frightened priest in public would have been in poor form. Regardless, we know where to find him again.

STORYTELLER: THE SONS OF TERTULLIAN

The Sons of Tertullian are among the most rabid and puritanical of the Inquisition's sects, claiming that anyone who speaks against God or His works must be possessed. The sons are also the Inquisition's premier exorcists and its forefront in the battle against spirits and demonic influence. Few Inquisitors have greater experience with the Underworld and ghosts than this lot. Unfortunately, their solution to casting out an offending spirit includes torturing its mortal host. If the person dies as a result, well, at least they saved his soul.

Given the sons' rather callous deployment of methods best left to medieval dungeons, it's hardly surprising that the modern Inquisition frowns upon their activities. Unfortunately, this sect may spearhead any war against hunters. For some reason, its members see hunters as possessed when the imbued use their edges. It's unknown whether this is because some otherworldly influence touches hunters when they use their capabilities, because of the Messengers' lingering presence, or because hunters might possess powers unbecoming God's grace.

Obviously, this reaction could taint any dealings the imbued have with the Society of Leopold. The Sons never willingly deal with hunters, no matter what the larger Inquisition's final stance is on the matter. Conversely, few hunters are likely to condone a Tertullian exorcist's use of torture to "save" a victim. Imagine how a meeting between imbued and the Sons might unfold if hunters were to stumble across an Inquisitor's "interrogation" session. The hunters would detect the possessing spirit, but would they allow the host to suffer? Yet, if the chosen intervene, the Sons might mistake the hunters for a possessed rescue party.

STORYTELLER: SISTERHOOD OF ST. CLAIRE

The Sisterhood of St. Claire began as an order of Franciscan nuns who demonstrated an ability to heal and perform medical miracles thanks to their faith and vow of absolute poverty. They served alongside the Inquisition until its reorganization in the 15th Century, when Pope Innocent VII incorporated them into the Society of Leopold. Since then, the Order of Poor Clares (as they're also known) has served the society purely in a support capacity as healers. Even now, members remain independent of the friction among the various sects and await the Vatican's impending decision on their fate. Given the sisterhood's acts of charity and illustrious service to the Inquisition, it's doubtful that the nuns will fall to any internal purge.

This Inquisition sect represents one of the easiest points of contact for hunters. Although the sisterhood rarely instigates communication with outsiders, members are approachable and less likely to betray the imbued to the Inquisition than are more fervent sect members... unless the sisters are given reason, of course. Neither do the nuns betray the society's secrets, however. They know they do not speak for the Inquisition and thus act only as intermediaries.

Subject: Re: God's Army
From: oracle171
To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Now things fall into place. I believe I have a story to recount as well, one I didn't know I possessed. One I won't possess until tomorrow or next week, so the angel says. I'll be helping homeless children when a blood-drinker comes for their purity. The angel bathes me in light, keeping the drinker at bay, but it will not be denied. Then, when all seems lost, a Trinity of saviors arrives to rescue the children. The angel showed me their deeds, but I mistook their holy gifts for magic. I thought they were wizards, not the right arm of God. They wielded plumes of fire like the wings of my angel. Now I understand it was magic blessed by Him, and that I must approach this Trinity and tell them who we are. I sense a likeness in them. They too are somehow pariahs in their work. Perhaps if I share our pain with them, they'll understand our similarities. Perhaps there is strength in our mutual plight. Salut mon petites, I have some children to find and my angel lights the way to them in song.

From: stella142
To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org
Subject: Re: God's Army

Does anyone know Oracle? Someone stop her from opening her gob!

From: sixofwords29
To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org
Subject: Re: God's Army

Stella142, since you're insistent on ignoring my private advice, allow me to share my thoughts with the list. Perhaps someone else can be the voice of reason and persuade you that your course is foolhardy. Both the Inquisition's history and our recent encounters with these chaps indicate that we don't want to involve ourselves with them. I doubt they'd even want to work with us or draw up some non-aggression pact. Why? Because this Inquisition doesn't appear to know who we are (I hope), and it would be less likely to stop and find out if we didn't attract its attention. If it is the authentic deal from the Cathar Heresy and Spain, in all likelihood it has been fighting for so long that it doesn't ask questions anymore.

It boils down to faith, the principal component of which people mistakenly think is belief. No. Faith, in its purest form means "not knowing." It's more than belief, it's a type of fanaticism that says, "My faith in God is so complete that I ask no questions of what I see. I only act." It's the same bloody logic that radical anti-abortionists use when they decry murder, yet have no compunctions about blowing up abortion clinics or killing doctors. It's that fine line between murder and fighting a crusade, and we ourselves walk that line every day. By the very nature of the Inquisition, they are faithful, which means whatever sources they rely upon

STORYTELLER: THE BRETHREN OF ALBERTUS

One sect at the heart of the Inquisition's internecine fighting is the Brethren of Albertus. Followers of the teachings of Albertus Magnus, members of this group practice the arts of Christian mysticism, better known as theurgy. Although they consider magic evil, they believe in fighting fire with fire. As one of the first sects to include women, this group has a sizeable female contingent, but its reliance on theurgy puts it at odds with other Society of Leopold factions.

Distrusted by many, the Brethren of Albertus were once required to register with the Office of the Censor to ensure that the theurgists never fell to demonic corruption. One among their most vocal critics was (and still is) the Order of St. Peter, whose initial criticism never extended further than theological discourse and debate. And yet, in anticipation of the Inquisition's return to the Vatican, the Order of St. Peter has actively advocated the renunciation and judgment of the Brethren in hopes of excluding them from the Holy See. Angered by growing intolerance and radical elements within the society, the Brethren lashed out in an act of defiance and destroyed the Office of the Censor's records concerning their membership (which could have been used against them). Thereafter, many Brethren immediately reported back to the Censors to show their support for Inquisition unity with hopes of solving the matter peacefully. A few, however, now operate independently and are open targets of the Order of St. Peter. These rogue Inquisitors seek allies, and hunters might just be the Godsend for which they pray. Whether Brethren might betray hunters to the Inquisition as scapegoats or manipulate them is another matter.

for guidance are good enough for them. If it's the Bible, we're in trouble. The Bible is the best source of one-sided arguments. If it works under the "Malleus Maleficarum" then we're dead, because at least the Bible preaches compassion and forgiveness. The "Malleus Maleficarum" probably teaches them how to question us, refute everything we say with circular reasoning, and condemn us through our own actions, no matter how meritorious.

So far, we've met this Inquisition on our own terms, but what if that changes? By drawing their attention, we risk a retaliatory strike or investigation. Can any of us honestly say we'd survive their "act of faith" (the process by which they used to try and eventually burn the accused)? We don't even know their criteria for judgment - whether it's anyone who displays powers or

anyone who isn't Catholic. No offense Stella, but I'm not willing to play guinea pig to satisfy your curiosity.

From: stella142

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Fine SoS, since you've decided to air our private arguments, let's put it all on the table. I recognize the need for proceeding slowly and carefully — gathering intelligence on this Inquisition. Unfortunately we don't have that luxury. A mutual acquaintance of ours is currently torturing and killing anyone he thinks is involved with this thing. If we're lucky, they'll kill him before realizing he's more than an average bloke. More likely, they'll capture him, torture him and discover he's part of something bigger. Once they realize we're here, they'll turn their attention on us! Why am I so certain? Because from my understanding, the Inquisition is having an internal tiff and the best way to get everyone back together and working on the same side is to present them with a new outside threat. Leaders do the same to shake their countries out of depressions or civil unrest, and I doubt the Inquisition would be so blind as to miss an opportunity to settle its affairs. That's why I'm so bloody eager to find and stop our mutual acquaintance before he buggers everything to hell! That's why I want to stop Oracle from spilling her guts. And that's why I'm tired of you acting like a frightened child. We will encounter the Inquisition, but we have to do it on *our* terms, when we're ready. Otherwise, if they force a confrontation, we'll be on the defensive and that's not a good position to start discussions. Or a war.

ParcelForce package to Joshua Talbot, sender unknown; dated March 8

Lovely speech on the list, my friend. You caught some flack for it, but I happen to agree with you. Anyway, I didn't waste a pretty quid to pat you on the back. I received another package from Anthony, and that confrontation you're worried about has happened. The short of it is, Anthony survived, although they hit him with some strike team. Here's a copy of his tape. I'll save you a couple of seconds and give you the gist of it.

Remember that poor sod Anthony tortured and killed? Anthony dumped the body at the guy's flat and waited to see who'd show up. After the police came and left, he saw three men sneak into this guy's place and rummage around for a while. From what little he saw, Anthony thinks they were searching for clues. He also says they knew what they were doing, like they were criminals or police themselves. He trailed one of them after they left the apartment and went their separate ways. I guess everything seemed normal at first. This bloke wandered around for a bit, driving places without talking to anyone, stopping off to eat. Then he got a call and drove off in a hurry. Anthony followed him to an abandoned warehouse lot, but quickly lost sight of him. He searched on foot, and that's when he says he felt a bit queer, like something wasn't right. Sure enough, the guy

had set an ambush. At least six people were waiting there with machine guns. He said if he hadn't felt funny, he would have walked right into it. He ran before they got him, but they gave a good chase.

As near as I can figure it, Anthony left the body at the flat but didn't disturb the furniture. They probably realized that someone killed their chum elsewhere and dumped the body back home. Nor did it take a genius to

STORYTELLER: GLADIUS DEI AND THE CONDOTIERRI

In contrast with the Society of Leopold's sects, which operate based upon core philosophies, it also has official divisions that serve the Inquisition as a whole. Upon recruiting members, these divisions often demand that recruits annul former ties to any sects, because their duties now transcend personal belief. Two such divisions are Gladius Dei and the Condotierri. (Instead of calling themselves cenacles, groups of Gladius Dei knights refer to themselves as lances.)

Gladius Dei and the Condotierri are paramilitary orders of the society. Both call upon ex-police or military extensively, and both train recruits in a variety of aspects from the special forces curriculum. This program includes fighting techniques (armed and unarmed), security measures, tactics and team operations, and mental and physical endurance regimens. Additionally, they teach theological discourse, and occult and supernatural lore to ensure that teams are as prepared as possible for whatever threat arises.

The only difference between the two divisions is that the Condotierri is an internal security force that protects the Inquisition and established cenacula from outside threats and intrusion. Its members are similar to the Vatican's Swiss Guard or to the White House's Secret Service. They protect a place, person or group of people, and they rarely engage in investigation or fieldwork.

Gladius Dei, or "Sword of God," is to the Condotierri what the Navy SEALs are to the Secret Service. Both groups are trained in a variety of combat techniques and field-related skills, but the modern knights of Gladius Dei constantly put their training to the test as a mission-oriented strike force that operates in small lances of three members, minimum. Not only is each member an elite soldier with dozens of successful sorties to his credit, but he also possesses a drive, fanaticism and faith that Dominic de Guzmán (founder of the Dominicans and the original Inquisition) would have admired. These agents' dedication is single-minded, but they're also arrogant and haughty about their accomplishments. They may be effective, but they aren't beloved.

realize that someone might be watching the place. If it was a setup from the get-go, they probably went their separate ways to see who was followed. Maybe once they figured it out, Anthony's target acted as a diversion while the others set a trap.

Here's the problem, or should I say problems?

1) Anthony had to leave his car behind, which means they probably have it now and know who he is.

2) He also used some of his tricks in front of them. He used that "London Fog" to escape (but claims one guy saw straight through it). He tried marking one so he could track them later, but that didn't take (which may mean this lot wasn't supernatural). The good news is that, according to him, a couple of them had that same shit-in-my-pants look people get when we use our gifts around them. Anthony thinks some of these guys aren't immune to it.

3) The team that ambushed Anthony was well armed and coordinated. They used machine guns to try and herd him. He thinks they were wearing body armor. They had military harnesses or rigging with gear, and balaclava masks like the SAS.

I have to say this doesn't bode well for us. If we want to salvage the situation, we have to reach Anthony before they do. He's on the run, but these people seem the sort to track him down on scent alone.

Jason

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

From: crystal23

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

I did it. I contacted the nun like you asked, Stella, and I'm alive to talk about it. I went back to the alley where I encountered her and worked my way out from there. It didn't take long to track her to a neighborhood shelter for battered women, so I posed as a woman in need. Before I could find the nun, I noticed that a woman sitting in the lounge was one of the "hidden." I watched her for a while before I realized that another nun was keeping an eye on her too. The hidden finally got up and left for the stairs. The other nun followed. I was about to do the same when somebody put a hand on my shoulder. It was my nun from the alley, with a stern looking Mother Superior behind her. I felt like I was back in private school.

"Let her go. Somebody's taking care of her," the nun said, and then added, "I was wondering when you'd show up. Should we fear you?" I shook my head because I couldn't say anything. The nun looked at her Mother Superior and said something to the effect of, "She doesn't recoil from my touch." That's when I went to the Mother Superior's office with the other nun in tow. We spoke for a while, but I can't say it was very constructive. We danced around each other's questions. After a couple of hours they even used the term

"Inquisition," so it looks like your hunch was right. I told them I was a hunter, but I didn't explain what that meant. Meanwhile, the Mother Superior kept trying to define me somehow, like my classification would change the way she'd treat me. The Mother Superior acted like a bitch, but at least the other nun was nice. She kept reassuring me, promising that they wouldn't harm me. They were more curious than anything else, though I have the impression they approached it from two different angles. Here's what I took away from the meeting:

The Inquisition has some people with gifts, too, but not all of them seem to have them. The nun's ability to heal me, and the way the Mother Superior always asked a question, then glanced at "my" nun like she was verifying my answers seemed to confirm that.

I don't know what criteria they have for their powers. What distinguishes an Inquisition member with these gifts from a warlock, or even us? Is it faith in Catholicism, a matter of conversion, or are their powers holy/divinely inspired?

They appear to know about shapechangers, warlocks and bloodsuckers, and seemed to dismiss those as possibilities about me! When the Mother Superior didn't seem satisfied about who I was, she asked about my faith and beliefs. She wasn't happy when I said I wasn't Catholic anymore.

When I asked about the creature in the lounge, the nun admitted they weren't sure what they were dealing with, only that these creatures appeared with frightening frequency. That could mean we have an ace up our sleeve. We may know more (what little of it) about the walking dead than they do. Maybe we can use that to negotiate.

They appear to have different factions if the nun and Mother Superior are any indication. That may mean they're like us, with different opinions and outlooks. I'm just not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing right now.

That's all I have for the moment, but I think we have some common ground. At the very least, we can possibly exchange information.

From: stella142

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

That's good to hear, Crystal. Thank you very much. There's no way I can repay you, but I won't ask you to subject yourself to further danger. If you feel comfortable meeting me, I can go to wherever you live and talk to the Inquisition myself. If you're not certain about that, you can relay the information through Bookworm55, whom I believe we both know and trust. He can act as your proxy.

From: sixofswords29

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Are you crazy, Stella? Why are you so eager to play the hero? Are you so guilt-ridden over A's actions that

you're willing to sacrifice yourself? This benefits nobody. Think man, why are you willing to travel across the world to attend your own execution?

From: stella142

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Because there's no way we can approach the Inquisition here, not after what A has done. They're after him. Did you know that? That means I have to track him down first and either ship him to another part of the world or kill him. Either way, I can't allow the Inquisition to find him and get our secrets from him. That includes protecting our identity and that of everyone I care about. Besides, what have I got to lose? I'm dying from terminal cancer and there's little any Inquisition can do about that except speed it up.

From: Jason Marshal

To: jtalbot@spyrone.net

Subject: No Choice

> I'm dying from terminal cancer and there's little any Inquisition

> can do about that except speed it up.

You bastard, don't you dare do this to us. We're in this together. We have been from the beginning and we will be till the end. Serena and I didn't save your arse from maniacs and ghosts to see you kill yourself this way. We know we can't change your mind often, but we can force your hand. I approached one the blokes I saw surveying the church and gave him a note saying we'd like to talk to them. We have a white flag meeting tomorrow. It's all of us or none of us, Joshua. I won't let you play martyr no matter how long you think you have left.

Subject: Re: God's Army

From: oracle171

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

C'est finis. I also spoke with these knights of God and they wish to speak with us. Perhaps even work together. It was as the angel said. My rescuers saw the light of my precious seraph and helped me drive away the blood-drinker. The street children ran as well, but I will see them again soon.

The knights and I spoke into the night, learning more of each other. There are still many secrets they keep to themselves, but they said they face the same enemies, and that makes us allies. Their numbers include exorcists and mediums who communicate with the dead. They sensed a great upheaval in the spirit realms, but remained quiet because of dissension within their own ranks. The Inquisition is troubled, but I do not know how. Some know of the great storm in Heaven while others are ignorant as to why more spirits flock across the threshold like ravens in flight. They recognize that God blesses us, but they say others among their kind are less understanding. They may perceive us as possessed or even demonic because of our blessings.

Before I left their company, the knights' parting words troubled me most. My angel frowned. He said some of the knights who are aware we exist, but who know nothing of us, are gathering information. These exorcists can use spirits and ghosts to spy on us.

STORYTELLER: THE DANGERS OF LEOPOLD

The greatest danger in cementing alliances with the Society of Leopold isn't any potential for underhanded machinations on their part. It is in how outsiders perceive a group with such a frighteningly brutal, bloody and fanatical past. The Inquisition has often relied on its reputation to strike fear in adversaries, but the fact is this notoriety also hampers people's dealings with the organization. Hunters might question how a society could adopt or retain the Inquisition's name if it doesn't embrace some of the movement's bloodiest ideologies. After all, one doesn't name a contemporary political organization the "Nazi Party" without intending an ideological statement.

The Inquisition may not be a progressive bastion, but neither is it Dominic de Guzmán or Torquemada's movement in the modern era. The society has had centuries to etch its philosophies into unyielding stone. But it has also survived by being tight-lipped and often brutal in the face of horrific danger, and the modern society's prime mandate isn't against people or religions, it's against the supernatural. The problem thus is in how it identifies hunters. If it believes the imbued are God-blessed mortals, then a slow and begrudging alliance might develop, with hunters and Inquisitors occasionally operating in tandem. If the Inquisition believes the imbued are nothing more than possessed slaves of demon (citing the existence of edges and a code that could be the modern equivalent of demonic tongues), the chosen have a new war on their hands. Indeed, a war made truly horrific by being a conflict of misperception. You therefore have full control over whether the Inquisition is a distrustful ally, a foe or a functional Big Brother.

Regardless of how relations develop, hunters resemble the Society of Leopold in its nascent years, though neither side is likely to acknowledge that similarity. The imbued struggle under a veil of ignorance about the world, much as Leopold's first followers did when they encountered the supernatural. The groups' similarities are also evident in both factions' determination to protect their secrets. Whenever the sides meet, they probably play their cards very close to the chest. After all, knowledge is power for hunters and Inquisitors alike, and a potential bargaining chip for favors and information. Therefore, the axiom about drawing blood from a stone should be standard operating procedure when it comes to establishing and maintaining mutual relations. If the Inquisition and hunters ever trust each other enough to cooperate, it probably comes after months — if not years — of frustrating and seemingly fruitless meetings.

STORYTELLER: THE FOLLY OF LEOPOLD

The Society of Leopold is also similar to the collective imbued in its varied and often conflicting explanations for the existence of monsters. The central problem facing the Inquisition is its many sects. In some instances, these collections of like-minded Inquisitors inherit saintly philosophy and thus attract large congregations. Other groups, however, are almost cultlike in numbers and beliefs. Such a variety of sects makes for an eclectic mix of approaches and theories about the supernatural, which sometimes hinders a potentially dangerous faction from growing too powerful.

The only commonalities the sects in general share are: their near-unanimous and unilateral war against the supernatural and their remarkable ignorance concerning the origins of the unearthly. The latter, however, is understandable given Inquisitors' inspiration.

The different sects draw their theories and knowledge from ancient religious works or from the journals/ actions of their namesakes. Fathers of the Good Death, for example, believe vampires are immortal spirits predating the Great Flood who survive by possessing corpses, whereas the Order of St. Michael believes the original corruption by the infernal is the heart of the supernatural hydra that plagues this world.

Such varying observation and awareness naturally leads to the question: Does the society know about the massive storm that rent the caul protecting this world from the next, and that sent so many spirits plummeting through? Only certain sects, including the Sons of Tertullian and the Brethren of Albertus, possess knowledge of this event. Given their underworld contacts and theurgical abilities, these groups have also suspected the existence of some kind of hunter for months now. The Sons have been impressing ghosts into service and using them as spies, whereas the Brethren rely on mundane methods such as planting bugs and tapping phone lines. Given hunters' innately paranoid and insular nature, both methods have provided precious little information. Fortunately, with the Inquisition's internal friction and the potential backlash against anyone practicing theurgy, any sects or practitioners in the know withhold information from one another in case they need it as leverage.

Perhaps key to any investigation of the imbued is cracking the strange code seemingly related to hunters. The Sons and Brethren have heard through ghosts of something akin to it, but these Inquisitors do not understand any such code's purpose. To them it is a Babel Tongue and possible proof of hunters' unearthly nature. The sons have thus far stopped short of capturing a hunter and torturing him for his secrets.

SECOND THOUGHTS

From: crystal23

To: hallelujah.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: God's Army

Great! I'm not sure whether Oracle's encounter was reassuring or frightening, but given my last two evenings, I'm leaning toward the latter. Stella142, if I were you, I'd reconsider your plan to visit the Inquisition here for a tete-a-tete. Something bothered me about my meeting at the women's shelter. At first I thought my savior nun and the Mother Superior were playing Good Penguin/Bad Penguin, but I couldn't shake the feeling that the friendly nun was trying to help me in subtle ways. Whenever I felt nervous, she touched my shoulder or arm and almost seemed to help comfort me. Even when I left, there was something in her eyes, like she wanted to tell me more but couldn't. Maybe I imagined it all, but the feeling was still there.

So, I watched the shelter and waited until the good nun came out. I followed her. When I was certain nobody was looking, I pulled her into an alley to talk. Oracle was right about these "knights." They're tight-lipped about their organization and agenda. The nun, I'll call her Emily, didn't want to betray her order or vows, but she said she represented a small minority of people actually trying to save supernatural creatures. The remainder of the Inquisition apparently deals from the hip: shoot first, perform last rites, burn the corpses, and then maybe ask questions. Emily claims to prefer to save sinners from sin, not destroy them for it. Unfortunately, her faction is not only small but also heretical by the Inquisition's standards. Emily wanted to warn me that we're in danger. Apparently their responses to outsiders are rarely favorable, and the Mother Superior's report was not complimentary. It seems the old bitch represents the interests of conservative elements.

Emily was willing to maintain discreet contact with me and try to help.

That said, avoid these people if you can. I suspect they'll double-cross you.

ALLIES OR ENEMIES?

From: stella142

To: bookworm55, sixofwords29

Subject: In case I don't make it

I'm not sure how the meeting will go, especially in light of Crystal23's warning. Jason and Serena insist on accompanying me, but if I refuse to go, they'll do it alone because they're afraid I'll run off and meet the Inquisition on my own. Bastards are right, too. They know me too well. They're forcing my hand, so we're in this together. Before we go, I'm purging my contact information from my computer and address book in case someone follows me back or breaks into my home. I'm sending everything I have to you for safekeeping, Paul.



STORYTELLER SIDEBAR: THE SANBENITO AND THE ORDER OF ST. PETER

The Inquisition's proverbial night and day are two sects called the Order of St. Peter and the Sanbenito. The Order of St. Peter takes its name from the very saint who defeated the warlock Simon Magus. Its interests lie in the persecution of wizards, witches and infernalists, though it recently expanded this mandate to include mortals with psychic abilities and anyone using theurgy. Naturally, members lead the charge to purify the society before its return to the Vatican, and they also serve as chief opposition to the Brethren of Albertus. Of late, the order's ranks have swelled, turning it into the *force majeure* among the Inquisition's sects. Even ex-members serving as Censors, in the Condotierri or in Gladius Dei still retain strong ties to the sect, affording them easy access into the Society of Leopold's supposedly neutral halls of power.

As a counterpoint (or, now the good news), the Sanbenito is a secret sect dating back to an event called the Florentine Heresy, when the society caught an Inquisitor named Raffaele Renzi offering salvation to the supernatural. The society burned him at the stake but could not silence his message of compassion and leniency. The Sanbenito follow Renzi's practice by trying to help instead of destroy. While their numbers are always small, considering the Inquisition believes them to be apostate, their ranks increase slowly amid the Inquisition's overall friction. Practitioners of theurgy and members of several other sects now find themselves on the fiery end of the Inquisition's torch, or question their own methods for the first time. Where they falter, the Sanbenito step in to help and recruit. The Sanbenito are the best contacts for hunters, since these Inquisitors recognize the imbued as people first and perhaps as blessed second.

Otherwise, I'll send you updates from independent terminals and fake email addresses. Don't respond to the emails. Don't leave any footprints. I'll create a new account with each email and close the previous one whenever I'm finished.

Remember me in your prayers.

Joshua

From: sleepy89@notmail.com

To: bookworm55, sixofwords29

Subject: First Meeting

I'm still not sure whether to be angry or touched by Jason and Serena's interference, but it did get results. We survived our first meeting with the Inquisition. I was grateful for Jason and Serena's presence. I was

concerned for their safety, so I ignored the Inquisition's intimidation tactics. Make no mistake about it, this Inquisition does bully people.

We met earlier today at the ruins of their destroyed church. Perhaps they were driving a point home, making us feel guilty and off-balance, or maybe it just possessed a certain symmetry (ends and beginnings). I don't threaten easily, though, especially with Jason and Serena at my side, and a few people are providing backup in the area. We met three Inquisitors, also with some support in the area, I'm sure. As we approached, the first words out of the lead one's mouth were: "So, one of your boys did this?" I nodded and offered our apologies before reminding him that they killed one of our own first. He didn't seem interested. We spent the first part of the meeting evading each other's questions. When we both realized the other wasn't offering any answers we wanted to hear, we moved on to the business at hand: Tracking down Anthony.

These Inquisitors are pushy bastards. They want things done their way, and carry off the Catholic school-master routine perfectly. They seemed unsettled that they couldn't identify us as supernatural or not, but for the sake of the meeting, they remained civil. They also insisted on handling the matter alone, demanding that we tell them what we knew before bugging off. If they are seven centuries old, they're probably used to handling things their way. I stood firm on the issue. I said we're responsible for Anthony's actions and we'd be there to bring him down. I also said that contacting them was a matter of good faith, to repair the damage between us. It went unspoken that I didn't want them torturing information from Anthony.

Finally, they agreed to meet again after they consulted with their superiors. We parted company and checked into a hotel. We're currently waiting for their email.

Joshua

From: grumpy102@notmail.com
To: bookworm55, sixofswords29
Subject: Second Meeting

The second meeting has come and gone. I think we reached some common ground, but it wasn't easy. The same bloke showed up at the church, this time in the company of an older priest calling himself Father Richlore. He spoke for the group's leaders, I supposed. Seems like they realized intimidation didn't work, so they opted for a softer touch. While I'm sure this Richlore could as easily have ordered our executions as shook our hands, he was personable and up-front.

Richlore admitted the Inquisition didn't know what to make of us and if they seemed intrusive, it was from curiosity and perhaps apprehension. Before dealing with us, they wanted to make sure we weren't monsters ourselves. Something about deals with devils and the road to hell. I said we were willing to cooperate in exchange for information about them. In the end, it came down to gentle questions. Either

of us could forego answering a question, but that meant we also lost the right to ask one. I'm paraphrasing, but here's how it went.

Richlore: What do you know of us? (Which took me by surprise). I said not much, simply that they're the Inquisition, possibly the same chaps who've been around for the last 700 years. I said nothing of their internal friction.

Me: What do you know about us? "Very little as well," he replied. We are apparently recent, displaying abilities they haven't encountered before. As near as they can tell, we're human in appearance and don't seem uncomfortable around holy places or people (whatever that means).

Richlore: What are you? I was careful answering this, because saying I didn't know who we are would have been invitation for closer scrutiny and suspicion. I didn't want to lie, either, so I told a partial truth: "We're people who recently discovered the presence of the supernatural. With that revelation came the ability to fight creatures and protect the defenseless from harm."

Me: Does your mandate cover the supernatural and heresies? "If you're asking do we still torture innocent people," he said, "then the answer is 'no.' We never did. We protect the innocent and root out the evil plaguing the world. Our targets are those of supernatural inclination, not the religious heresies of people."

From that point forward, many questions went unanswered. He asked: Where did your abilities come from? What is their scope? How many of you are there? Do you believe in God?

We also refused to submit to physicals.

They, of course, didn't answer questions concerning their numbers, their hierarchy or whether they've ever spared supernatural opponents. They also refused to tell us if they had any powers or gifts.

Finally, we parted company, although Richlore said he had enough information to speak to his superiors on our behalf. He was willing to sponsor us in a cooperative effort to track Anthony down.

Joshua

From: dopey15@notmail.com
To: bookworm55, sixofswords29
Subject: Third Meeting

Serena, Jason and myself had a long talk last night, and we came to an agreement that I'm sure the Inquisition won't be happy with. We met Richlore and his goon a third and final time this morning. We told them we thought it'd be best if we went our separate ways. With the Inquisition, Anthony's fate is either torture or death. While I detest what he's done and become, I can't hunt him down like an animal. It isn't in any of us to execute one of our own. We decided to handle Anthony alone, our way. If we can stop him from his vendetta and smuggle him out of London or even England so much the better.

We didn't tell Richlore all this, but I think he understood. In fact, I think he was going to tell us the Inquisition refused our offer to help stop Anthony. The goon, however, looked angry. I asked: "Would you let us punish one of your own if he attacked us?" All he said was, "Wasn't five of your friends who died, mate."

I think we're no better off now than when we started, but as Jason pointed out, at least they know we aren't corrupt — not all of us, anyway. We're probably expendable in the Inquisition's eyes. I don't think they'd take kindly to us sparing the supernatural, either. I know they wouldn't appreciate Oracle, Ticket, Hope or Nurse's POVs about the world. The fact is, and this saddens me, we have to stick together and handle our problems as a group. That means the Inquisition isn't our ally or enemy (yet). That doesn't mean we can't talk or rely on the occasional exception to the rule, but given speculation about their internal strife, it might be best if we steered clear of them until they resolve their own problems. If the allegations are true, we might just help the wrong side or the losing one (either of which would be bad).

You were partially right about this, Paul, but I don't think hiding is the answer. We need to gather information about these people so we'll be better armed and prepared the next time we meet. For now, Jason, Serena and I are off to find Anthony. I don't think the Inquisition's letting go of this. After that, maybe we can finally grieve for Melissa.

Joshua

STORYTELLER: THE WRATH OF LEOPOLD

As stated already, various reasons make unlikely the Inquisition's ever incorporating hunters into its fold. The very mystery surrounding the origin of the imbued is prohibition enough, not to mention the inherent distrust the society bears for anyone outside its ranks. This means that — at best — hunters probably never receive Inquisition aid or access to its resources beyond some information or a cooperative venture from time to time (if the effort works in the Inquisition's favor). Even then, these lending hands come at a cost, whether the Inquisition asks hunters to submit to a complete physical (including blood work), demands information concerning a specific adversary, requests greater insight into hunters' community or code, or requires assistance in bringing down a foe. At no time does the Inquisition allow hunters access to its extensive libraries or bases (including its main stronghold and walled community Monasterio di San Michele, outside Vatican City, or the Holy Trinity Church in Chicago's Wicker Park).

If this treatment of the imbued seems severe, it's because the Inquisition feels it has the most to lose. The society is not simply a religious movement combating the supernatural. It once operated (and probably will again) under the auspices of the Vatican, by secret mandate of the Holy See — the Pope himself. Were the group's exploits or true history to ever come under public scrutiny, the scandal would be unbearable, and

not just because the Papacy had hidden the truth from the world. The Pope and Vatican would appear foolish for believing in monsters, and dangerous for sanctioning the activities of an organization that might have tortured and killed people as recently as yesterday. Faith in the Pope, while slowly eroding under contemporary realities, could suffer terribly and damage the Vatican beyond repair. The Inquisition observes this truth with each mission and with each action. Is it surprising, then, that the Inquisition is secretive and doesn't trust outsiders who may not even share its faith?

That said, hunters walk a fine line with the Inquisition; the Society of Leopold is intolerant of mistakes or betrayal. It doesn't understand individual action over that of the whole, so hunters helping a supernatural creature or inadvertently interfering with agents are met with suspicion as individuals and with prejudice as a group. Whether such response leads to reprisals and an escalation of hostility on either side is a matter of the situation and your chronicle. Remember, however, that most wars begin because someone is spoiling for a fight. The catalyst is often inconsequential. If hunters ever threaten the society's secrets, become a public danger or target, attempt to betray the society to its enemies, or attack Inquisition strongholds, the Society of Leopold treats them as dangerous adversaries. That means stalking and killing them. Blackmail, frame jobs and betraying the imbued to other supernatural creatures are all tricks the Inquisition might consider unsavory and un-Christian. They believe their actions and agenda to be honorable, and would sooner capture, torture and dispense with an enemy than play games.

Open hostility with hunters might even result in the formation of a new sect, an offshoot of the Sons of Tertullian or the Order of St. Peter that makes it a personal crusade to wipe out the imbued. This new sect might name itself "The Lorica of St. Patrick," based on a prayer of the same name from that gentle saint.

*I summon today all these powers between me and evil,
Against every cruel merciless power that opposes my
body and soul,*

*Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of women and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.
Christ shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that reward may come to me in abundance.*

STORYTELLER: THE RESOURCES OF LEOPOLD

The Society of Leopold may wield greater resources than the imbued, but the group is not as rich as it once was. The Inquisition initially made its fortune from the confiscated possessions of the accused; whether judges found subjects innocent or guilty, the Church

kept their property. At the Grand Auto-da-fé of 1649 in Mexico, for example, where only one out of 109 people accused was burned at the stake, the Inquisition netted the contemporary equivalent of \$60,000,000 US. That doesn't include the resources confiscated from the tens of thousands accused and/or tried throughout Europe. Needless to say, the Society of Leopold partook of this wealth and draws on its nest egg to support itself today. Unfortunately, though the Vatican initially paid stipends to all Inquisition members, that practice ended when the Papacy cut ties with the society. Since then, agents have relied on rapidly dwindling accounts and on the charity of others. That means they can't afford 007-style gadgets to protect their privacy or to arm themselves.

The society reserves its highest level of protection for the Monasterio di San Michele. Its multi-tiered security network makes the headquarters nigh-impossible to break into. The defenses of other facilities might include security cameras, motion sensors or even laser "tripwires." No Inquisition cenaculum can afford technology on the level of pressure-pad alarms or thermal or auditory sensors.

The society can provide members with level-1 Resources. When it comes to missions, field equipment is still a little advanced by the standards of most North American imbued. Agents might have basic surveillance gear such as binoculars, bugs for tapping rooms or even a tracking device. Armaments can include a handgun with a couple of clips, holy water, a stake, a blessed cross or even a blade (sword or dagger). Otherwise, an Inquisitor is responsible for personal gear. Individuals serving the Office of the Censor might receive semi-automatic weaponry and a variety of gear including high-powered photo-telescopes and remote laptops. Condotierri and Gladius Dei lances are outfitted with nothing but the best. That can include body armor, armor-piercing and phosphorus rounds, fully automatic weapons, headset radios, thermal-imaging goggles and armored vans.

STORYTELLER: RULES FOR CRUSADES

The following capabilities and powers are specific to Inquisitors and are not recommended for imbued characters. In the grand scheme of things, hunters are frightened and have little grasp of the true world around them, and only a little control over events. The Inquisition, however, possesses an often-unwavering dedication and the support of a tested and enduring framework. Inquisitors' fears are often supplanted by duty. Hunters are untrained guerillas fighting a war that otherworldly beings have thrust upon them, whereas Inquisitors are soldiers who volunteered for their mission. They understand the ramifications of their decision. That acceptance blesses a small handful with innate or learned capacities termed Numina.

NOTE ON CREATING INQUISITORS

Storytellers may use the bystander character-creation process (see the **Hunter Players Guide**, pp. 53-61) to generate Inquisitors, with some notable exceptions to the rules. Conviction represents Faith, as discussed in the "Faith Provides" section, below. Additionally, given that some Inquisitors wield Numina, many of which mirror edges in function, you may consider assigning the Mercy, Vision, and Zeal Virtues instead of bystanders' Courage, Reason and Self-Control, but to a maximum rating of 5 instead of 10. That doesn't mean Inquisitors actually have these Virtues or any kind of edges, but borrowing the qualities makes Numina useful in existing **Hunter** terms. If you really want to cling to bystanders' "mundane" Virtues for use with Inquisitors, substitute Courage for Zeal, Reason for Vision and Self-Control for Mercy.

NUMINA

"Numina" is a catch-all term for those powers the Inquisition accepts as "sanctioned by the Divine." Such powers are weapons of faith and spirit, or the teachings of Christian mysticism to focus the will of God into set disciplines called theurgy. Essentially, the first kind is a matter of spirit, the other of magic. Because these two avenues have already been discussed in detail in **The Inquisition** and **Hunters Hunted** sourcebooks, this section offers a quick-and-dirty look at Numina for the benefit of **Hunter** Storytellers.

Individuals attuned to the Almighty and blessed with Numina appear normal to hunters' second sight until they draw upon their devotion. Their forms then seem to exude a nimbus of light, a halo reminiscent of ones often depicted around the Virgin Mary or Christ. Subjects seem "strange" or "unusual," but not necessarily "wrong." Second sight can convey more than just images, however. Inquisitors with high Numina (6 Faith or higher) can radiate a sense of calm, although some are truly cruel and tend to use their dedication to intimidate. It all depends on the impression you want to make on the players' characters. Normal people and hunters without second sight active perceive neither halos nor any calm or pressure that high Faith ratings can convey.

In game terms, Faith ratings are available to Inquisition members at character creation at a cost of two Background points for every level of the Trait. Faith costs seven freebie points per level at character creation, or current level x 10 in experience points to advance after play has begun.

Theurgy, however, is not specifically Faith-derived. It's a mixture of different belief structures amalgamated into Catholicism throughout the centuries. As such, practitioners appear normal in most circumstances — until they perform their rituals. Then, any number of effects can come into play depending on the rite's purpose. Individuals performing pure or beneficial rituals such as Via Medicamenti (healing) can be surrounded

by light. Ones interacting with nearby spirits might cause anyone with active second sight or observation edges to see ghosts around the caster. Again, the impression created all depends on how you want to portray Inquisitors in your game.

Theurgy is also available through Background points at character creation. Each point purchases one level in a specific Via, or magical path (whether Medicamenti, Ignis or Geniorum). Additional levels cost either three freebie points at character creation, or current level x 7 in experience points during play.

FAITH PROVIDES

Simply put, Inquisitors rely on Faith to guide and protect them from the supernatural "fear factor," which separates them from mundanes who freak out or forget encounters with monsters and hunters using edges. Inquisitors' Faith is not to be confused with True Faith, which is the pinnacle of belief and is discussed further in this section and in the **Hunter Players Guide**, p. 93.

Inquisitors are very human in their strengths and weaknesses, but their Faith, or belief in the Almighty, regardless of His or Her face, sets them apart from almost everyone else. Rather than knowing all the answers, it is believing so intensely that one doesn't even pose the question. Faith is not knowing. Faith is accepting. Faith is trusting. And, for the purposes of Inquisitors, Faith is their version of Conviction. Unlike hunters' Conviction, to which myriad abilities are attached, Faith has more limitations.

Most full-fledged Inquisitors start with 2 Faith, but this is merely a measure of their beliefs and offers little benefit against monsters. Inquisitors at this level are rarely field agents. They fill support roles (as researchers, neighborhood spies, secretaries) to help the society function smoothly. These people have the Religious Devotion Merit (**Hunter Players Guide**, p. 110).

Those Inquisitors with 4 or 5 Faith can shrug off the effects of the supernatural haze that blinds mortals, and they even remember such encounters without freaking out, as per Conviction's self-control (**Hunter**, p. 134).

Inquisitors with 6 or 7 Faith are "the beatific": sages and living saints. They are all but worshipped by the Inquisition and destined to wield great power within its ranks as individuals truly blessed by God. They are agents of the Almighty, gaining the 3-point Merit: The Sight (see the **Hunter Players Guide**, p. 57), or the benefits of second sight's "perception" (**Hunter**, pp. 132-133). These people also possess an effect that works for all intents and purposes like the Radiate edge (**Hunter**, p. 149). Wielding any of these capabilities is a conscious decision on the part of one of the beatific. Activating them requires a moment to gather one's wits, to say a prayer or to "remember" the Lord's love.

Inquisitors with 8 or 9 Faith gain the remainder of Conviction's self-control advantages (beyond those conveyed by a rating of 4 or 5; **Hunter**, p. 134): resistance to body, mind and emotion control. These people

can also bless others (Faith roll, difficulty 8), with results ranging from a temporary one-point Willpower increase to conferring as many as three additional dice on the next dodge or soak roll made. Inquisitors with a rating of 9 Faith can perform miraculous healing (Faith roll, difficulty 8 when dealing with bashing damage, 9 with lethal damage). Each success heals one health level, although a healer may opt to absorb an injury into herself, thus removing all damage inflicted to a subject in a single attack. This technique lowers the difficulty of the attempt by one, and can heal several health levels, but at a potentially terminal personal price. Someone who has been killed cannot be restored to life by use of this power. Performing faith healing costs three Faith points. A subject can be blessed or receive faith healing only once per week.

Only the rarest of the rare have a Faith rating of 10, and those who do are blessed with True Faith. At this level, the Inquisitor can perform genuine miracles. Miracles are true acts of God, feats beyond the rational. An Inquisitor can heal diseases and terminal illnesses, drive ghosts and spirits from a possessed host, consecrate holy ground, banish demons and convert people by changing their very Natures. Although taxing on the Inquisitor, these deeds are limitless in scope, as long as they adhere to some religious framework or personal ethos. Because one has a better chance of finding a black pearl in an oyster platter on one's birthday than of discovering someone else with True Faith, however, introduce a miracle worker only as a plot device, not as a random encounter. A simple rule of thumb is that someone with 6 Faith no longer operates in the field. The hierarchy promotes her, removing her from danger. Anyone blessed with 8 Faith or higher works for the Vatican in some underdeveloped country to convert the indigenous population through missionary work and acts of charity. In short, hunters almost never encounter persons of truly high Faith.

All powers that derive from Inquisitors' Faith rating are cumulative as one gains a higher rating. Powers used persist throughout the scene in which they're activated. Each of them costs one Faith point to use, unless stated otherwise.

WAYS OF THEURGY

Theurgy is Christian mysticism with mixed roots older than the Inquisition itself, be it Chaldean angel magic, derivatives of Christian kabbalism or even pagan rituals that leaked into Catholic lore (the way Catholicism incorporated Easter and its pagan rites of fertility and springtime). In contrast with sorcery practiced by magi, however, theurgy is hedge magic. Unlike other supernatural capabilities that are effective or accomplished immediately, practitioners of theurgy must use either rituals or foci to cast their spells. Some rituals therefore require time and preparation with prayer or meditation, whereas others need concentration or an object such as a cross or a rosary to channel a spell.

The various theurgical paths are called *via*, with levels ranked from one to five. To streamline the effects, the following selections correspond to hunter edges and work in much the same way. If you want to factor a theurgist's relative skill level into a spell's effectiveness, reduce the difficulty of the edge for skilled casters, or reduce an effect's degree of success as you see fit to indicate inexperience.

Theurgists can possess Faith scores, with all the related benefits, as other devoted Inquisitors can, but practitioners of theurgy don't perform their rituals with Faith. They spend Willpower to cast spells, instead. Theurgists' Faith rating is usually no higher than 6.

Via Medicamenti

This path is one of healing, allowing a Theurgist to alleviate ailments, illnesses and bashing damage (not lethal). It costs one Willpower to cast and functions like *Respire* (Hunter, p. 153), except that mouth-to-mouth contact is not necessary. It cannot be used to harm monsters, and the caster needs some medical knowledge (Medicine 1 at the very least) to use it. Rating in this path normally indicates the casters' proficiency in healing wounds, starting with minor ailments all the way up to trauma such as broken bones. A subject cannot be treated with this path more than once per day.

Via Ignis

One of the few effects that does not require rituals, this instantly spell conjures normal-looking flame under the caster's control. The effect costs one Willpower point to use and functions like *Burn* (Hunter, p. 159), but is centered on the caster's hand or on a weapon. The theurgist can strike targets and burn them in addition to any brawling or melee damage inflicted. Rating in this path indicates the number of additional dice inflicted by the fire (one die at level one, two dice at level two, and so on). The fire continues to burn a struck target, but drops one damage die each turn after contact until extinguished (assuming the victim doesn't put himself out). A conjured fire remains in its creator's "possession" for the remainder of the scene, unless willed out of existence.

Via Genorium and Via Necromentiae

These paths have no true counterparts among hunters, but neither is a capability used in the field. Via Genorium allows a theurgist to summon, bind and dismiss spirits and to protect herself against them; Via Necromentiae allows for contacting and banishing of the dead (including possessing spirits). In many ways, portions of these abilities mirror *Insinuate* (Hunter, p. 152), *Ward* (p. 157), *Burden* (p. 161) and *Bluster* (p. 152). Truthfully, though, Storytellers should use these paths as plot devices as they cannot affect hunters directly. Both require extensive preparation to use effectively, and their sole targets are ghosts, spirits and demons.

Via Oraculi

Usable only after meditation and prayer, this path allows the caster to glimpse the past or future. Akin to the Visionary edges *Foresee* (Hunter, p. 155) and *Delve* (p. 156), Via Oraculi can be used to see over significant time spans. Ratings in this path range from witnessing events a month in the past or two weeks into the future, to ones 100 years in the past or 50 years into the future. The further one tries to see, the higher the difficulty, usually ranging from 6 to 9. As with all things, however, this spell does not offer answers, only hints and glimpses. No such divination is ever clear-cut or handily defined. Whether any theurgist would ever share insights or discoveries about the past or future with hunters is up to the Inquisitor in question, and you.

PERSONA DEI

The following individuals represent the polar natures of the Inquisition, from its softest touch to its sharpest blade. These people also have reasons (charitable or otherwise) to contact or interact with the imbued.

ANDREA MYSTUL, BREYHREN OF ALBERYUS THEURGIST

Andrea was a promising university student when the Society of Leopold approached her. She was already involved in the campus ministry and had organized several pro-Catholic rallies at her school, including anti-abortion and anti-gay demonstrations. Designated by the local priest for initiation, she eagerly joined the organization's information network and helped keep the society informed about unusual events on campus, even though her recruiter never explained what "unusual" entailed. She quickly discovered the existence of monsters, however, when a vampire attacked her, drank her blood and tried to will her to forget the incident.

Rather than report the assault to campus security, Andrea went directly to her priest, relaying the information to him in a calm and controlled manner. She



was cool under pressure, despite her recent trauma, and provided an accurate description of the attacker. Impressed by her control, the priest sponsored her as a full member and inducted her into the mysteries of his own sect, the Brethren of Albertus.

Although Andrea has been with the society only for the last three years as a tertiary, she is as devoted as any veteran. Her chief loyalties, however, extend first to her sponsor and to the Brethren, as evidenced by her willingness to join the "Albertus Heresy." She has little training as a theurgist, but her eagerness to impress her mentor gives her the drive to succeed. She is currently part of a cell in contact with the imbued. While she distrusts these so-called hunters, she knows her sect needs allies (and possibly scapegoats) if it is to weather the coming storm. She has no desire to rebel against the Inquisition but does so believing the society will eventually recognize its error when it realizes the organization cannot continue without the Brethren. Until then, hunters are pawns who help level the playing field.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics (Catholic Church) 2, Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Finance 1, Firearms 1, Investigation 2, Leadership 2, Occult 3, Performance 1, Politics 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 2, Mentor 3, Resources 1

Numina: Via Ignis 2

Mercy: 2, **Vision:** 4, **Zeal:** 3, **Faith:** 4, **Willpower:** 5

SISTER EMILY, SANBENITO SYMPATHIZER

Some faithful say they heard God's call and answered it, but Sister Emily believes she was born into His service. She has flashes of her own birth, and she distinctly remembers a trumpet's clarion call and the glowing face of an angel above the doctor's shoulder. Even her mother admits she was born with little pain and was a content baby. As a child, Emily's imaginary friends bore the names Michael, Raphael, Ezekiel and Gabriel, and she always saw the sculpted cherubs smiling at her during Mass.

Emily felt an affinity for the Church, so upon graduation she joined the Order of Poor Clares as a nun and went on to perform missionary work in Africa and India. Despite the hardship, she loved her job. Helping people brought her a solace and sense of satisfaction unlike anything else she had ever felt. Of course, while living among the destitute she also encountered creatures that never appeared quite right. At first she mistook them for afflicted people, but eventually she discovered their nature as "monsters." Their presence never frightened her, however, and she always ministered to them as if they were human. Unfortunately, one evening in the slums of Calcutta she was forced to confront a hideous beast that fed off destitute street



women, and she managed to drive it away with a blinding flash of her own beneficence. The local priests quickly suppressed word of the incident, and Emily found herself courted by the Inquisition.

Although Emily disagreed with the society's objectives and methods, something told her that her destiny lay on its path. She joined, but has since become involved with the Sanbenito in saving monsters rather than destroying them. Still, only recently — when she encountered her first hunter in an alley near her women's shelter — did she come to understand what had prompted her to join the Society of Leopold. Emily feels that her path is somehow connected to these hunters, though not as an Inquisitor. Her role remains vague, but some hunters' willingness to spare opponents intrigues her. Little does Emily realize that through these people, she may well adopt a new system of conduct, administering to the supernatural as a missionary and becoming the first saint of monsters. She may even herald a new direction for the Inquisition... if the society's torches don't consume her first.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception (Discerning) 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics (Catholic Church) 3, Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Dodge 1, Empathy (Emotions) 5, Intuition (Inspirational Flashes) 4, Linguistics 1, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Subterfuge 1

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 2, Destiny 4, Mentor 2

Numina: Via Medicamenti 3

Mercy: 5, **Vision:** 4, **Zeal:** 2, **Faith:** 6, **Willpower:** 6

SEBASTIAN HARDTHROPE, GLADIUS DEI ABBÉ

As an avatar of the inquisition's enthusiasm, Sebastian Hardthrope represents the best of what the organization offers. He's a religious man, but practical to

a stubborn fault. As a former member of the Order of St. Peter, Abbé Hardthrope now commands a Gladius Dei lance (one the society's best-trained groups). His exterior a quilt of scar tissue, he's a living war story, a testimony to his years of frontline service. Given the life expectancy of men and women in his career, the 34-year-old Inquisitor is practically venerable and a legend among his peers.

If Abbé Hardthrope's scowl seems more harsh than usual these days, it's because he has a new worry in these "hunters." They're unlike anything he has encountered before, and the Inquisitor-General wants him personally to conduct fact-finding research concerning their numbers, strengths and agenda — and as quietly as possible. Abbé Hardthrope is familiar with subtlety, but he acknowledges that it isn't his forte. He's more acquainted with using his fists or a gun than he is with asking questions. Instead, he must peel the skin back from this enigma without cutting into the onion. Not an easy path, but Abbé Hardthrope was never a fan of the "easy" way out. Unfortunately, while he is capable of reporting his finding with unbiased observations, he already distrusts the imbued. One of them may have tortured a member of the society and bombed a church, and he isn't likely to forgive those offenses. If the judgment of one is an indictment of them all, so be it. Abbé Hardthrope hasn't survived this long by questioning the intentions of each enemy.

Attributes: Strength (Unmovable) 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Tough as Hell) 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception (Detail-Oriented) 4, Intelligence 3, Wits (Level-Headed) 4



Abilities: Academics (Catholic Church) 4, Alertness (Hearing and Sight) 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3, Demolitions 1, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Firearms (Solid-Slug Guns) 4, Intimidation 3, Intuition 1, Investigation 1, Leadership 3, Linguistics 1, Melee 1, Occult (Infernalism) 4, Security 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Arsenal 3, Contacts 2, Influence 2, Resources 1

Numina: None

Mercy: 2, **Vision:** 2, **Zeal:** 5, **Faith:** 5, **Willpower:** 9



CHAPTER 2:

PROJECT 'TWILIGHT'

O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall.

— Genesis 49:6

They picked up Lanny for drunk driving. He'd spent the better part of the last two months drinking — not answering the phone, not going out on jobs. Just sitting in his apartment knocking back Jim Beam, hearing the click of the mine over and over in his head. It was his own damn fault that he'd gone to a bar rather than stay at home. Now he'd probably lose his license.

But instead, they let him stew in the drunk tank, and then they let the feds talk to him.

The bourbon buzz was long gone. Lanny was just tired and morose. But he wasn't so tired, so stupid, that he didn't think, What the fuck? Why was he being taken from the tank and sent to a private cell — and why were there two agents standing alongside the bunk, waiting for him?

"Have a seat, Mister Landers," the woman said, motioning him toward a folding chair. As Lanny sat, they flashed their IDs. The man was Agent Warwick, the woman Agent Dhurvasula (though she didn't look Indian or anything). The cards sure looked official, with FBI seals, signatures and little pictures — but shit, they could have been Mickey Mouse Club memberships for all Lanny knew. The cards said that the feds were attached to "SAD." As far as Lanny was concerned, he was the only sad sack in the room.

"So, uh... what's this all about? Did I run over your dog or somethin'?"

No laughs, no smiles. Dhurvasula pulled out a file and leafed through it.

"No, looks like just a plain, old DUI. But we thought we'd ask a few questions while you were in the neighborhood."

"Questions? About what?" Lanny wished Curt were here. He'd know how to handle this. But of course, Curt wasn't available anymore.

"Let's just start with the preliminaries, okay? Earl Trevor Landers, a.k.a. 'Lanny,' correct?"

"Uh... everyone just calls me Lanny. Not like it's an fake name or nothin'."

"Sure. Now, let's just check your address...."

It took her five minutes to pull his entire life out of the folder. Where he lived. Where he went to school 10 years ago. His other DUI offenses. What he had for breakfast. Every fucking thing. The only gap was Kathy. Sure, they knew who she was. They knew when she died. But they didn't know what killed her. It figures, Lanny thought. They know everything except what matters.

Dhurvasula shut the folder. "So all that's accurate, Mister Landers?"

"Yeah, sure. But back up, okay? What the fuck.... Sorry. 'Scuse me.... What's all this about? I mean, okay, I was over the limit. I admit it. But what's that got to do with the FBI? What you want with me?"

"You're right, Lanny. You don't mind if I call you Lanny, do you?" She didn't wait for an answer. "The FBI doesn't get involved in crimes like drunk driving. We're interested in bigger stuff: kidnapping, organized crime, domestic terrorism. Six-o'clock-news crime."

"Subversive activities." Warwick spoke for the first time. Lanny found himself disliking the male agent for no good reason, and Lanny's temper — his ever-reliable bad temper — began to stir.

"Yeah, I read about some of that shit. You feds tried to pin a lot of shit on Reverend King back in the day. Infiltratin' agents into the Nation of Islam — all that entrapment shit. That what this is about? You need a brother to blame for somethin'?"

"Give it a rest, Lanny," Dhurvasula said. "You're not Malcolm X. You're just a house painter from El Paso. That's not what we're here about."

"So why are you here? What the fuck do you want me to say?"

She leaned forward. "Tell us about Ciudad Juarez," she said, not unkindly. "Tell us about the vampires."

Just like that, she said it.

Lanny's pulse leaped, and he realized he was locked in here with them. They had guns. He didn't know whether they were human. He squeezed his eyes shut, tried to get his bearings, tried to balance the panic and

anger for a moment. When he opened his eyes, the agents looked the same. No decaying flesh. No fangs. No mottled veins. They were human, same as him. And maybe, he thought, that meant they were like him. Maybe they were special.

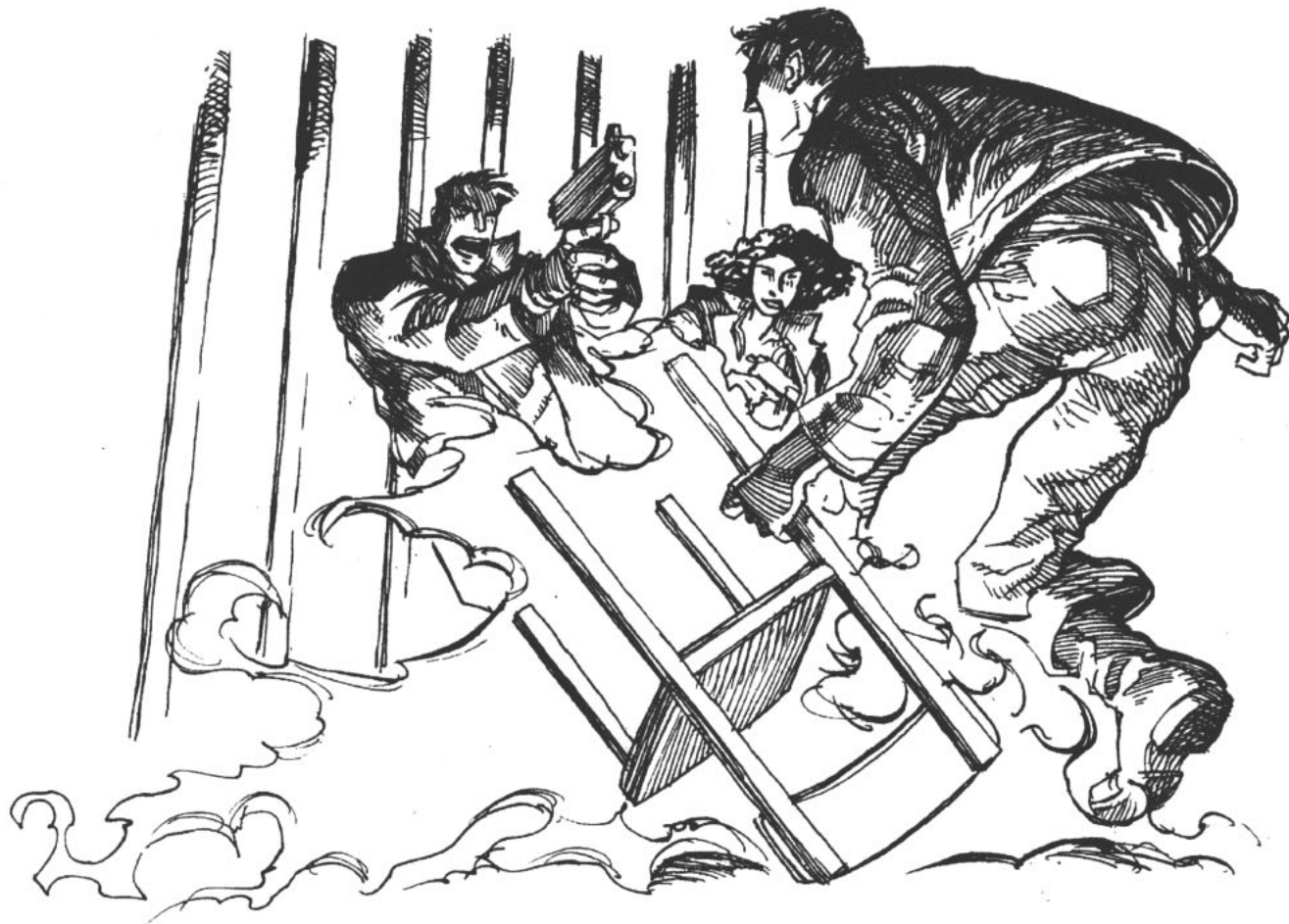
"Uh... what's a see-oo-dad? That some kind of Mexican food?"

Dhurvasula sighed. "Lanny, you're a piss-poor liar. We know you were there. We found your fingerprints all over what was left of the compound. We also know some people in a town called Brinsburg who recognized your photo, but we'll save that for later."

Lanny tried to think. "Yeah, okay, I was there. But, you just said it... I mean, you know what was there! You... you gotta know what was going on!"

She shook her head. "We found a lot of things there. 'Blood-cult paraphernalia,' as the saying goes. Some guns, some Army land mines." If she saw him start at that last word, she gave no sign. "One interesting item was a skull with very pronounced canines — but unfortunately, that evidence decayed after being in sunlight for a few moments. So we're pretty interested in getting a first-hand account of things. Which is where you come in."

Something was wrong. If these two were special, why were they giving him the third degree?



"You're in a lot of trouble, Lanny. Make no mistake. We want to know everything your little gang was doing in Ciudad Juarez — and in Brinsburg. What faction are you working for? How long has this been going on? How many people did you kill?"

"People?" Lanny whispered.

"We dug seven bodies out of that compound," Warwick growled. "How many more did you and your blood-drinking buddies kill?"

The next thing Lanny knew, there were two guns pointed dead at his chest, and his mouth was full of the coppery taste of adrenaline. The folding chair in his clenched fists smoldered with the force of his anger. The bed between the two feds was smashed in half. The agents were backed against the wall, and through the haze of his rage, Lanny could see that they were frightened. They had never seen a man use the Power before.

They weren't like him at all.

"You think I'm one of them?" he screamed. "You motherfuckers! You think I'm a fucking monster? Fuck you!"

"Drop the weapon!" Dhurvasula yelled. "Put your weapon down or we will fire!"

Lanny flung the warping chair to the floor, not giving a rat's ass about the guns. "You fucking morons. I can't believe you think I'm one of them! They killed my friends! They killed my wife!"

"Calm down, Landers, or we will shoot!"

Lanny rushed forward, fast, right into Dhurvasula's face, too close for either of the agents to shoot. "Go to Hell, lady! Fuck you and your dickhead partner! You don't know shit and you don't deserve to know shit!"

Dhurvasula tried to back away, but couldn't. Lanny could smell her fear. The same fear Kathy must have felt when the deaders killed her. The thought drained the anger out of him, made him feel embarrassed, like he was the one in the wrong. He lurched back to the cell door.

"Fuck all this shit. You wanna charge me with something, do it. You wanna pull my license for drunk driving, do it. But I ain't got shit to say to you. You charge me or you let me go."

They let him go. The cops didn't even bother with the DUI. They just gave him his keys and wallet. On the front seat of his Dodge, Lanny found a card with Dhurvasula's name and a phone number. He crushed it and threw it in the ashtray.

On the drive back home, he pulled the card out of the ashtray and stuck it in his pocket.

✦ ✦ ✦

The apartment was cold and empty, same as always, but now it felt even less like a refuge. Had it been searched? Did the feds plant bugs? There was a car parked across the street with someone in it. Were they watching him? Had they always been watching?

Lanny wanted a drink, but he forced himself to make do with an instant coffee, and he tried to think. There was a

message on his machine from Curt, the same as the last four. He was out of the hospital and in a wheelchair, and he wanted to meet, wanted Lanny to call him, wanted to get the Texas Ten up and running again.

Funny. Curt was supposed to be the smart one. But if he was so smart, why was he too stupid to know the Texas Ten were dead and buried? Even Lanny was smart enough to know that.

The coffee tasted like shit, but he made himself another. Did they have a bug on the phone? Did they know about Curt? Probably. But they must have decided to lean on Lanny first, because he wasn't that bright. Because they figured they could trick and intimidate him. Fuck them. He wasn't smart, but he wasn't stupid and he wasn't weak.

"Yeah, but if I'm so strong, how come I couldn't save the others at Ciudad Juarez?" He thought.

Anthony was dead. Ramona was dead. Gina was dead — and shit, Gina was just a kid. Curt was a paraplegic. Lanny hadn't seen Toby or Irene since the day after it happened. Mr. Payphone hadn't been in touch, either. Javier seemed okay, but maybe he was hiding the truth. And Reeve was still crazy.

Ciudad Juarez destroyed them. Sure, they took out the leech and the cult. Big fucking deal. Lanny always figured it'd be enough to take out the monsters. He didn't much care if he went down in the process. But they followed his lead at the compound. Went in guns blazing. And a mine blasted three friends into bloody bits.

Every night, he heard the click as the mine armed, and knew he should have been the one to die. Not Anthony. Not Ramona. Especially not Gina.

Lanny took a shower to wash off the stink of the drunk tank, had a third coffee and thought. So the government knows something. Not everything, but something. They know about monsters. They know about blood junkies and leeches. They know about Brinsburg. But they don't know about us, the blessed, the ones with the Power. They didn't know what Lanny could do. But they'd probably find out if they kept watching.

And then what? Maybe they'll decide we're just like the monsters. The thought was enough to get the red pumping in Lanny's vision again, but he fought it down. There wasn't anything he could hit, nothing he could kill to make himself feel better.

If I tell them, they'll think I'm a freak — or a weapon. If we fight them, they'll kill us.

Fuck it. He poured the remains of his coffee down the sink and threw back a shot. He stood over the sink, staring at nothing, and took more time with his second drink.

He still wasn't sure what he was doing when he dialed the number, and wasn't sure what he was going to say when the phone clicked as someone answered.

"Agent Dhurvasula."

"Yeah, this is Earl Landers. What do you want to know?"

WHAT IS PROJECT TWILIGHT?

Try as they might, the various supernatural entities of the World of Darkness can't keep themselves secret all the time. In many countries, governments become aware that *something* is out there. They do their best to learn more, and — if possible — fight back. Drawing on their established intelligence and security organizations, these governments can create agencies to investigate the paranormal, to solve supernatural crimes and to make a little more sense of the true world.

People in the know refer to these various agencies collectively as "Project Twilight" — a variety of groups with a common goal to investigate the supernatural. But it's a misleading term, because it implies that these groups are allied and coordinated, that they co-operate and interact as parts of a whole. In fact, these "twilight agencies" all act independently. In most cases, they aren't even aware that there are other groups pursuing the same ends in different nations. Each agency is an island, a small group of investigators working in secret and isolation — usually underfunded, ignored by its parent governmental body, and doing its best against overwhelming and often incomprehensible foes.

Indeed, twilight agencies are a lot like the imbued in all these regards.

Whereas the other chapters of this book explore a single group in detail, we can't do that here because any such description would deal with only a single agency. Instead, the aim of this chapter is to assist you in developing and portraying your *own* twilight agencies, ones that fill the needs and style of your chronicle. Once you come up with an agency that works for your game, you can decide how it interacts with the imbued, and whether it becomes an ally or an enemy to hunters.

WHY?

Of course, the first thing you have to do is ask *why* you want to introduce a twilight agency to your chronicle? There are many different reasons for doing so, including (but not limited to):

Complexity. While you can run a perfectly entertaining chronicle that focuses solely on hunting the supernatural, there's fun to be had by adding more elements to the mix. Interaction with a twilight agency can be used as a break from "conventional" hunting. If the agency investigates the same monsters that the imbued do, competition is created. If the agency protects some creatures from the imbued, uncertainty about the organization's motives and opportunities for roleplaying are created.

Allies. Hunters usually struggle for money, are desperate for information, and search for hope against the unknown. A twilight agency can provide all of these to a certain extent by being an institution on which hunters may call, and it gives you a way to assist hunters when the difficulty level of your chronicle is high.

Enemies. Conversely, you can use an agency as an enemy for hunters. If the imbued break laws, blow up buildings or generally act without restraint, you can use the agency's threat to encourage them to be subtle. You can also develop a sort of rivalry rather than enmity, with the hunters and the agency trying to beat each other in a race to find and deal with the supernatural.

Contrast. On a metaphorical level, a twilight agency acts as a good counterpart to the imbued. Hunters are usually mundane people with normal backgrounds, forced into inexplicable circumstances. Agents can be exceptional individuals who've undergone rigorous training. Hunters have supernatural abilities, whereas agents usually don't — but agents have resources and backing that hunters can only dream of. By using an agency as an example of what the imbued *aren't*, you encourage the players to develop a concept of what their characters *are*.

DEFINING A TWILIGHT AGENCY

Once you decide to include a twilight agency in your **Hunter** game, the next step is to design a group that fits the needs of your chronicle. It isn't necessary to define the agency in exacting detail, at least not at first, because your chronicle isn't about Project Twilight. It's about the imbued, specifically the players' characters. All you need do is sketch the agency in broad strokes. Establish just enough detail to let you use the group as an interesting plot element, not as the focus of events.

There are perhaps dozens of different twilight agencies throughout the World of Darkness, all focusing on supernatural activities within their own borders. These groups are all very different. An American agency doesn't have the same methods or goals as a group of Indonesian Muslims. Despite these differences, however, there are enough similarities between organizations that you can define any twilight agency by considering a few primary points.

PARENT ORGANIZATION

No nation in the World of Darkness operates an official "Department of the Supernatural." No twilight agency simply exists as its own entity. Instead, all such groups are offshoots or subsets of larger agencies, branches largely ignored or even ridiculed by colleagues in parent groups.

Most twilight agencies are born from "domestic intelligence" or "domestic security" groups. These are organizations such as the American FBI or British MI-5 — intelligence groups concerned with issues at home, not abroad. These organizations usually focus on crimes that have ramifications on a national level — drug smuggling, organized crime, kidnappings and serial killings. Depending on the amount of freedom and turmoil in the country, domestic intelligence groups might also focus on terrorist activities, insurgency and/or political "crimes."

Why are these the typical parent groups of twilight agencies? Because these groups investigate serious or

unusual crimes — the kinds that sometimes have a supernatural element. It takes just one sloppy vampire mixed up in an otherwise normal arms-smuggling case for the powers that be to potentially realize there are monsters out there, and that they need to learn more.

DOMESTIC SECURITY AGENCIES

Most nations have a domestic intelligence group of some sort, and some countries have several. The following organizations would all be suitable parent groups for a twilight agency. Obviously, this list is just a place to start. Once you decide on your parent organization, you may want to do further research to find out more about a specific group.

Many of these agencies coordinate their efforts through Interpol. One place to start looking for more details on each organization is www.interpol.com.

Argentina — Federal Police

Australia — Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO); Federal Police

Canada — Canadian Security Intelligence Service; Royal Canadian Mounted Police

China — First Bureau of the Ministry of State Security

Cuba — Military Counterintelligence Department of the Ministry of Revolutionary Armed Forces

Egypt — State Security Service

France — Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST); Renseignement Generaux

Germany — Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), or Federal Office of Criminal Investigation

Great Britain — MI-5 (also known as the Security Service)

India — Intelligence Bureau

Italy — Democratic Information and Security Service; Carabinieri Corps

Israel — General Security Service (Shin Bet); National Police

Japan — Public Security Investigation Agency

New Zealand — Security Intelligence Service

Pakistan — Intelligence Bureau

South Africa — National Intelligence Agency; South African Police Service (A public "occult crimes unit" actually exists within the Police Service, but it's quite possible that a second, more secretive group exists as well.)

Spain — Centro Superior de Informacion de la Defensa (CESID)

Switzerland — Federal Police

Russia — Federal Security Service

United States of America — Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Department of Justice

Another reason that national security groups encompass twilight agencies is that paranormal problems are by and large perceived as internal problems. If a government becomes aware of international supernatural activity, it might direct an espionage agency to deal with the issue, but such situations can also be left for other nations to deal with themselves.

In some rare cases, twilight agencies are born from a different kind of parent organization, such as the military or a specialized research department. These agencies may have very different goals and methods than the "average" twilight group. Domestic security agencies provide opportunities for both action and research. But if you want a twilight society with an unusual style, consider a more specialized parent.

Take a special division of the US Army, for example. It probably focuses more on destroying the supernatural than on investigating it. Agents may have access to heavy weapons, and could have a shoot-first-screw-the-questions attitude. If they run into a problem they can't blow up, they might be in over their heads.

Or consider a covert branch of the Chinese secret police that's charged with eliminating supernatural influence over political dissidence. This group has good intelligence and many police powers, but also a less aggressive stance. It may prefer infiltrating the Falun Gong movement and arresting members over looking for monsters.

Once you decide on a parent organization, consider how the twilight agency formed from the parent. This kind of back story and history isn't important for the day-to-day operations of your agency, or for running the group as a part of your chronicle, but you may find that it helps to flesh out the agency's methods and knowledge. See "The Special Affairs Department," below, for an example of such a group and how it might have formed.

STRUCTURE

Once you decide where your twilight agency comes from, you need to determine its structure — its size, hierarchies and how it fits into its parent organization.

BIG OR SMALL?

Actually, a better question would be "Small or very small?" As sub-groups of larger organizations, twilight agencies are usually small enough to be overlooked, but ideally still large enough to deal with several assignments at the same time. Some minor agencies might have only one or two members; such a group is likely to be a secret alliance of dedicated agents rather than a formal body.

Most twilight agencies have two or three dozen agents working for them, along with a number of support personnel (researchers, doctors, and perhaps even receptionists and janitors). Any more than this and an agency becomes unwieldy and visible. Such a group is supposed to be small enough to be overlooked in a larger faction's budget and facilities.

Another advantage to a small group is security. Twilight agencies may suspect the dangers of infiltration by the supernatural — possession, mind control or just moral corruption. In a small group, everyone probably knows everyone else. If an agent acts strangely, vanishes for a few weeks or loses her edge, fellow agents may notice and take steps to make sure everything is under control and the staff is kept pure.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

Any group with more than two or three members has various levels of command and responsibility. Above field agents are administrators, and above them is a leader or director (or two). Above and beyond leaders of an agency are the heads of the parent organization, and the heads of government over them.

Thanks to the hierarchy, agents typically answer to their superiors for all activities (whereas the imbued answer to no one). As government employees, agents have to comply with whatever laws and restrictions their superiors impose. In most Western nations, these are the same restrictions that police officers abide by — agents need warrants to arrest people and to search private locales, documented evidence to prove cases, and explanations for any violence or gunplay. In countries with fewer or more restrictive civil rights, agents may have more freedom and fewer responsibilities, but they're still accountable to their superiors on some level; they can never act with total impunity.

Determining your group's structure lets you decide how it operates. A group with stringent controls and rules could be cautious and meticulous. It might not move against a possible paranormal entity without plenty of information, warrants and backup. A loose, small group might have a more freewheeling and improvisational style, with autonomous agents who pursue leads in their own way. Decide on the formation of the group you want, and use that concept to gauge how it carries out its objectives.

GOALS, METHODS AND STYLE

Although all twilight agencies have roughly the same goal — investigating the supernatural — they still vary widely in *why* they pursue that goal, the ends to which they put the information they gather, and the ways in which they go about achieving their goal.

Again, you don't need to waste time detailing an agency's priorities and procedures to a fine degree. You can outline the salient points just by deciding about the group's attitude on the following principles.

Active versus reactive. Does your agency actively seek out information, hunt down leads and try to investigate the supernatural 24/7? Or does it wait until a case with a supernatural element comes across its desk, work that case and then wait for another one to come along?

Physical versus cerebral. What is your group's general response to the supernatural? Is its policy to "destroy all monsters," doing its best to wage war against the para-

KEEPING SECRETS

So, if the government — any government — has evidence that the supernatural exists, why doesn't it reveal the truth to the world? A few reasons are likely.

They don't believe it themselves. The average twilight agency is the "kook division" of an organization that otherwise has very large issues to address. The agents in this offshoot get the bizarre cases, the alien abductions and Bigfoot sightings — cases that the larger organization doesn't take seriously in the first place. No one in command thinks this stuff is real — and agents who try to present "evidence" that monsters are real are likely to be patronized and ignored at best, fired or sent away for psychiatric examination at worst. Under such circumstances, agents usually keep quiet and just do their jobs.

They believe it, others won't. Even if the decision-makers in the government believe the agency's evidence, that doesn't mean other governments — or the public — will. Making public claims about the supernatural would seriously damage a nation's credibility, and the people would probably have the bureaucrats responsible removed from office. It benefits everyone in the government to keep it to themselves and keep gathering evidence until no one can argue with the facts.

Secrets are weapons. If you know the truth, and your political opponents don't, your government has the advantage. It might be worth struggling under a veil of secrecy if it gives you a weapon to use against other countries, or against enemies within your own country. If you know there are rapacious werewolves in the hill country, but the rebels don't, you'll smile when the renegades set up their base on the monsters' doorstep.

Knowing too much can get you killed. Any halfway competent twilight agency eventually comes to realize that supernatural creatures have infiltrated the government, the military and all the other power structures of the world. They may tolerate your agency's existence as long as you don't become inconvenient. They may even appreciate your efforts against their enemies. But if you get too visible or noisy, they'll stamp you out before you can endanger their existence.

To date, no government or twilight agency has "gone public" with what it knows. In some cases, agencies even help keep things covered up so that the public won't learn the truth. They may not like it, but agents learn that's just the way the world works.

normal? Or is it content simply to collate information and gather data, without making any judgments about the creatures or events investigated?

Insular versus overt. While all twilight groups keep a low profile, they vary on how openly they act in the field. Does your agency keep quiet on missions, take all the tasks on itself and operate only at night? Or does it solicit help from local authorities and use whatever skills others can lend to the operation?

Agencies usually range somewhere between the extremes in all three of these areas. Once you decide where your agency falls, combining your answers determines how it operates. A group that is largely active, physical and insular could be like the classic “men in black” of UFO folklore. They go out looking for trouble, operate alone and secretly, and their aim is to shut down or destroy supernatural activities. A group that is active, cerebral and overt might also investigate cases and activity, but its reaction might be simply to understand or maybe even ally with the supernatural. It might also be quite prepared to enlist the help of the police and citizenry in whatever locale it finds itself.

The above three core attitudes also shape how your agency reacts when it first encounters the imbued (see “Close Encounters,” below).

KNOWLEDGE

If your agency is remotely capable, it has probably compiled information on the supernatural and various paranormal events. You don’t need to work out just what it knows about such matters; details aren’t important. All that matters is how much it knows *compared to the imbued*.

More. A well-informed, well-established group may know much more about the supernatural than hunters do. That puts it at an advantage in any kind of relationship with the chosen (see “Establishing a Relationship,” below). Your organization can trade information for favors or help when it needs to.

Less. Although the imbued are new to the World of Darkness, some have collected an impressive body of information about creatures — whether accurate or not — and it’s possible that a group of hunters (especially a group using hunter-net) could know more than a given twilight agency. This status gives the hunters the edge in any relationship.

Mixed. This is the “average” state of affairs. Your agency is likely to know more than the imbued about some aspects of the supernatural, but less about other aspects. A cerebral group might have a lot of theoretical knowledge, but little practical experience in dealing with monsters. Or a group could specialize in one area (say, about vampires or monstrous influences in organized crime) but know little outside its focus.

Also consider that your agency might be *wrong* about what it “knows.” Evidence of the supernatural is usually vague and easy to misinterpret. If your group never encounters a werewolf in an urban area, it may

conclude that the creatures never enter such places. If the hunters have the right information, the agency might be grateful for the correction — or might reject the hunters’ explanation and become suspicious of the imbued for trying to “trick” them. On the other hand, the hunters may accept the agency’s theories — and then land in really hot water when they learn the hard way that werewolves lurk in cities, too.

You don’t need to pin down specifics of what your group knows right now. You can decide what it knows and how accurate it is once the agency assumes an increasing role in your chronicle. Right now, gauging what your group knows and doesn’t know helps you determine its attitude toward new data and how it interacts with the imbued.

STORYTELLER: SELF-AWARENESS

Of course, there’s one thing the hunters are bound to more know more about than *any* agency, and that’s themselves. At least, that’s the attitude an agency probably takes, and it isn’t likely to accept ignorance from the imbued, no matter how genuine those claims might be.

Agencies are *very* curious about hunters. The way the chosen respond to this curiosity has a strong influence on their relationship with an agency. Forthcoming imbued may confess their uncertainty. More manipulative or sneaky hunters may give explanations for themselves that are partially or completely untrue.

As Storyteller, step into your agency’s shoes and consider hunters’ claims. Does it believe the imbued are ignorant — or does it assume it’s being lied to and treat hunters with even more suspicion? Does your group accept a bogus explanation and act upon it, or does it investigate further and realize it’s being lied to? How does the organization react if it learns that hunters really *don’t* know the truth? Does it take pity on these “foundlings” or become worried about how secretive and unpredictable the imbued are? What does your cell do to discover the truth: ask questions, interrogate captured monsters, perform experiments on captured hunters?

The question of just *what* the imbued are is an important one for most **Hunter** chronicles. Once an agency gets involved, it’s likely to become a significant theme in your game.

AGENTS

The field operatives of your agency are the face and “personality” of the group. Players and their characters will make decisions about the group based primarily on the individual agents who are met.

Most agents are recruited from the parent organization, which probably has stringent requirements for operatives. Think about what the parent group looks for in its agents, and about what it trains them to do. The FBI, for example, acquires college graduates with degrees relevant to investigation and law enforcement. It has standards of health and fitness, and it trains agents in firearms and tactics. A more political

organization might not care as much about skills and qualifications. It might want people who are loyal to a specific party or ideal, and who can then be trained in whatever skills are required. Agents directed into the twilight sub-department would then be taught whatever new skills are deemed important, depending on the agency's goals or methods.

As a rule, agents are more highly trained and skilled than the imbued. The "average" hunter is an ordinary person thrust into extraordinary circumstances. Twilight agents start out as extraordinary people who come to terms with extraordinary circumstances. Agents probably have ratings of at least 2 or 3 in all the Traits the agency feels are important, and may have scores as high as 4 or 5 in exceptional cases.

You should also decide on a single word or phrase that captures the "standard" mindset of the agency's operatives. This doesn't mean all agents think or act the same; they're individuals, not robots. But the agency instills its operatives with a set of values and rules, and you can use that foundation to establish their "basic personality." Are agents aggressive, approachable or distant? Inquisitive or impassive? Contemptuous of "civilians," or do they earnestly try to make the world a better place? Just think up one common trait at this point. Later, when you introduce agents into your chronicle, you can decide how each deviates from this "standard" principle.

STORYTELLER: PSYCHIC DETECTIVES AND SUPER-SPIES

By and large, twilight agents are normal human beings — highly skilled, well-equipped government operatives, but normal nonetheless (as opposed to hunters, who could be called "mundane"). They fill a niche of sorts in the World of Darkness — evidence that you might be able to stand against the supernatural without special powers, as long as you have plenty of resources to back you up.

And yet, as Storyteller, you might want to tinker with this formula by giving agents some kind of paranormal capabilities. Plenty of variations might work: Russian psychic operatives, Chinese super martial-artists or spies with high-tech gadgets. These types of operatives have all been used in fiction to good effect.

The problem with these concepts, however, is that they're more "cinematic" and outrageous than the "mundane" Hunter style. Using such paranormal agents may make your chronicle less grounded in reality, pushing it out of the horror genre and more into action-adventure.

There's also the point that twilight agents are, in a way, the flip side of the imbued. Hunters are normal people with extraordinary abilities; agents are extraordinary people with normal abilities. By making agents more unusual, they lose that thematic contrast to the imbued, and your players may find them less interesting as a result.

Having said that, it's your chronicle, and if you want to use paranormal agents, you should. Here are

some ideas on how to add unusual powers to "standard" twilight agents.

Keep it low-powered. An agent's supernatural powers should still be considerably weaker than the abilities of the imbued. Your chronicle is about the players' characters, after all, and the players will feel overshadowed if agent cast members are superior to their characters in every respect. In particular, don't create agents who can mimic the power of second sight — the ability to see monsters and immunity from their controlling powers. Second sight is perhaps hunters' most powerful weapon, and it's unique to the imbued; not even paranormal agents should be able to see and protect themselves to this degree.

Keep it subtle. Agent abilities are likely to be things like classic "psychic powers" — telepathy, clairvoyance, low-level telekinesis. Agents shouldn't be able to fly or shoot fireballs from their hands. Those kinds of outré powers are the stuff of superhero comics, not horror/investigation stories.

Natural or unnatural? Decide whether agents' powers register as "monstrous" to second sight. Obviously, if a power comes from a monstrous source (such as drinking vampire blood), it's perceived as such. But what about psychic powers, which may be "natural" in origin? No matter what, second sight reveals paranormal agents as "strange" or "off," just as it can wizards and witches. You should also decide what kinds of clues are revealed about agents when observed with edges such as *Illuminate*, *Discern* and *Witness*. Psychics might have slightly enlarged heads. Genetically augmented agents might have overdeveloped muscles or too-regular features. It's up to the characters to decide how they respond to such subtle signs of abnormality. They may decide that psychics aren't the enemy, or they may chalk them up as another kind of creature.

No rules are provided here for something as optional and unusual as agent powers. Instead, have a look at some of the supernatural powers in the *Hunter* rulebook (Chapter 9) or in the *Hunter Storytellers Companion*. Some of the minor abilities of ghosts, vampires and warlocks work equally well as psychic powers or the like, with a little tinkering to make them more "human." Such abilities would be fueled by agents' Willpower. One or two powers would be fine for making a "psychic-detective" agent.

One other useful ability might be the capacity to actually see edges in action. As noted in the *Hunter* rulebook (p. 145), normal people become confused and forgetful when they see a hunter use an edge. They rationalize the experience away and don't realize that an unusual capability was exhibited. Perhaps some exceptional agents can keep their heads when exposed to edges — not to the same extent as the imbued can, of course, but they realize that an abnormal activity was performed, even if they're a little hazy on the details. This sort of limited immunity might not even qualify as

a “power.” You might decide that some agents have enough Willpower and training simply to stay level-headed at all times. This capacity might extend to protecting the agent against the similar confusion caused by werewolves and ghosts — or it might not; every agent is different. Decide what best fits your chronicle and the concept of your agents.

RESOURCES

This is where agents come into their own and have a huge advantage over the imbued. An agent isn’t a solitary hunter — she has the weight of her government behind her. She has available to her help from numerous other agencies and departments, has the best and most up-to-date computers and equipment, and has access to an enormous budget. By contrast, some imbued hunters live under bridges and scavenge food from dumpsters.

Representing the resources of agents is easy — that’s what Backgrounds are for. Twilight agents normally have high ratings in Allies and Contacts (sources of information), Arsenal (access to government property and equipment) and Influence (control over law enforcement and government employees). Whereas agents can have a personal Resources rating of 3, they can operate as if they have Resources 4 or even 5 (depending upon agency budgets and expense accounts). Such leeway doesn’t mean agents can throw money at any problem. Being accountable to higher authorities usually means having to justify every expense and action. Still, it gives agency personnel a terrific advantage over the imbued and makes up for agents’ lack of supernatural capabilities.

Although agents have access to high-tech equipment, that doesn’t mean they use unusual devices or gadgets. Theirs is the realm of Scully and Mulder, not James Bond. For the most part, the amazing gadgets of fiction remain fictional. Instead, agencies use top-of-the-line equipment, including devices that might not be available to the public — they have Cray supercomputers and night-vision goggles, while the imbued have to use iMacs and flashlights.

Having said that, you may wish to give your agency a few unusual items such as Kirlian cameras (which can photograph ghosts and auras) or silver-nitrate spray guns that injure werewolves. If you want to use such items, use them sparingly; don’t make them standard issue. These tools are special ones that normally stay at headquarters, and agents can gain access to them only in exceptional circumstances.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Having thought about all the concepts that define your twilight agency, you should now have a general vision of the department you want to use in your chronicle. Further details — long-term goals, rules and regulations, interactions with the supernatural — can be developed after you introduce the group to your chronicle.

The next step is to write up an agent character or two, and then decide how to get him or her involved with the players’ characters.

THE SPECIAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT (SAD)

Here’s a sample twilight agency, suitable for most **Hunter** chronicles, developed using the methods described in this chapter.

The Special Affairs Department is a subdivision of the American FBI. Its mandate is to investigate “bizarre occult-style crimes.” Any incident that involves a hint of the unusual or paranormal — whether a corpse drained of blood, a serial killer who follows the Zodiac or a Bigfoot sighting — falls under SAD’s jurisdiction. It might not investigate every case, especially if the occult connection is tenuous or obviously meaningless — but it follows up more than 95 percent of such cases.

SAD is aware that supernatural/paranormal entities and events are real, and it has collated supporting evidence over the 50 years it has been in operation. Nonetheless, it keeps quiet about the supernatural. Division leaders feel that keeping a low profile and solving crimes is more important than sticking out their necks and being ridiculed. This secretiveness means that many “normal” FBI agents do not even know of SAD’s existence. Most who do, including the Bureau’s leaders, dismiss it as the “crank squad” that gets stuck dealing with lunatics and weirdoes. The FBI mostly ignores SAD, and that suits SAD just fine.

Structure: SAD consists of about 20 field agents, three or four administrators and leaders, and a varied support staff of about a dozen. SAD agents are all fully qualified FBI field agents. Some of them joined SAD after suffering some exposure to the supernatural. Others were placed there as a demotion or punishment, and a few actually volunteered in search of a challenge.

As a division of the FBI, SAD is held to all the bureau’s rules and restrictions. Agents cannot enter a suspect’s home or place a wiretap without cause — and a warrant. They must respect a subject’s civil rights at all times, although this rule is relaxed for creatures such as zombies, which aren’t considered “people” by the government. Agents must justify any unusual actions and file reports after every investigation, and they are crucified if they endanger the public or act irresponsibly.

Methods: SAD is somewhat reactive, moderately cerebral and largely overt. Agents don’t tend to go out looking for new cases. The department may keep a case open, however, and investigate tangents and offshoots for some time before the case is closed. Its focus is on solving crimes, not slaying monsters. In many cases, entities that aren’t actually guilty of a crime are left alone or are cultivated as contacts and possible allies. Because SAD agents are also FBI agents, they normally act openly when pursuing a case. They don’t mention their specific interests but do present credentials and use local police and authorities as resources.

Knowledge: SAD is somewhat informed about the supernatural and probably knows more than most imbued. Its primary focus is on vampires; it knows a lot about leeches, although its information is patchy and often inaccurate. The department is less informed about shapechangers, ghosts and spirits; knowledge on these beings is at about the same level as that of the imbued, with enough variance to make exchanging notes useful for both groups. SAD knows very little about warlocks and isn't aware of the existence of nightmares and other, rarer entities.

Agents: SAD agents are highly intelligent, college-educated and skilled in a variety of disciplines including criminology, psychology, firearms and tactics. The "average" agent has the following Traits:

Attributes: Perception, Intelligence, Wits and Stamina of 3 or more.

Abilities: A rating of 3 or more in a specialty Knowledge — Investigation, Law, Research or Science. They tend to have at least another 10 dots in various Knowledges (minimum of 1 in Occult), at least 10 dots in appropriate Skills (minimum of 1 in Firearms), and at least 6 dots in Talents (minimum of 1 in Brawl).

Backgrounds: A minimum rating of 3 apiece in Arsenal, Contacts, Influence and Resources. Experienced agents also have ratings in Allies and Exposure.

Willpower: At least 5.

The "default personality" of SAD agents is *professional*. They are highly trained, extremely competent law enforcement experts, and also representatives of the US government. They dress, speak and act like consummate professionals at almost all times and let the official mask slip only rarely. Experienced agents are more likely to loosen up at times; they've been around long enough to know that the world won't end if they reveal a personality or have a beer with a contact.

No SAD agents possess any kind of paranormal capabilities. They're normal humans, through and through. Some experienced agents might be *resistant* to the confusion caused by imbued edges. They certainly wouldn't be *immune* to it, but they realize that a hunter does *something* unnatural.

Resources: SAD agents have access to a vast array of equipment and tools. In particular, they have a lot of powerful computers and access to extensive databases of information. Standard-issue equipment includes a sidearm, bulletproof vest (to be used only in emergencies), handcuffs, powerful laptop, cell phone and a car. More specialized equipment — helicopters, heavy weaponry, forensic laboratories — can be obtained, but only when warranted. SAD does not have access to unusual or super-science equipment.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Everything starts somewhere, with a single event. A twilight agency doesn't just magically find out that the imbued exist. Each agency has to encounter hunters at some point before it can learn about them.

The best way for that to happen in your chronicle is for an agent to meet the players' characters. After all, those characters are the focus of your game, the most important people in your story. The initial encounter sets the tone for all future meetings, and you can use it to influence meetings with other imbued groups on hunter-net or elsewhere in the chronicle.

Before the encounter takes place, neither side — hunters nor agents — knows of the existence of the other. It's certainly possible that a character might suspect that such agencies are around, but she can't be sure. For the agent's part, no one has ever heard of the imbued before.

STORYTELLER: SETTING THE ACTION OFFSTAGE

Rather than have the players' characters be the first imbued to encounter your agency, you may decide you want such a meeting to occur before with *other* hunters *elsewhere* in your game world. Agents meet a different group of imbued, somewhere else in the country or world, and that meeting influences how the agents react to the characters.

Why do it this way? You may want agents to have a certain attitude toward the players' characters — to be predisposed to treat them as allies or enemies. Thus, you skip past the "establish relationship" story by deciding yourself what the relationship is. The players' characters can then try to change agents' opinion, if they like — or do so accidentally if things don't go well.

Running things this way certainly works, but it's not quite as much fun for the players. They no longer take an active role in the development of hunter-agent relations. They're put into a more passive role. You get more control, but only by taking it from the players. Don't start things out this way lightly. Put some thought into it before you cut straight to the chase.

THE FIRST GLIMPSE

Two kinds of stories suit an initial meeting between hunter and agent — *aftermath* and *coincidence*.

In an aftermath story, agents investigate an incident caused by the imbued. Players' characters are notorious for blowing things up. At some point in your chronicle, there's bound to be an incident that's publicly visible and somewhat unusual. The twilight agency notices and sends people in to investigate. They find evidence that leads to the imbued, and the characters must decide how to react to strangers asking questions about them.

In a coincidence story, the agents and hunters just happen to be tracking down the same creature or are

working toward goals that bring them together. They might both start from the same place (such as investigating a suspicious nightclub fire) or from different ends (the hunters investigate the fire while agents track down vampiric involvement in drug dealing).

On the whole, the aftermath storyline is “better” for a first meeting because it puts the focus squarely on the players’ characters. They’re the objects of attention. They’re the ones who have to decide how to respond to the agents. In a coincidence story, the monster is the focus as both sides try to learn more about it. The characters’ response to the agents is influenced primarily by the agents’ attitude toward the monster. Coincidence stories are better suited to chronicles that focus on action, because they involve less of a moral choice on hunters’ part. Aftermath stories require characters to make hard decisions about how to treat agents and are more fitting for horror-focused or character-intensive chronicles.

No matter what story you use to introduce agents, those people eventually learn of the existence of the imbued, and vice versa. This discovery could be subtle (agents observe hunters from afar and take photos) or blatant (the hunters burst through the front door while agents kick in the back door). Either way, they should meet before the end of the story — at which point, it’s time to determine how each reacts to the other.

REACTIONS

So now the imbued and the agents have met. How do they react to each other?

Naturally enough, an agent’s response is based on her personality, the directives of her agency and on the behavior of the imbued. Remember, your agent has no way of knowing hunters’ true nature. Even if she had some way of detecting supernatural creatures/ powers, the imbued probably wouldn’t register as such. As far as she’s concerned, the characters constitute a group of civilians mixed up in paranormal affairs.

A paranoid or cautious agent might presume that hunters are supernatural nonetheless. Plenty of creatures appear to be normal humans. This conclusion might also be made if the hunters betray specialized knowledge (such as the habits of vampires). If the agent witnesses an edge in use, she probably doesn’t understand what’s going on — or might, if that’s how you want to handle things.

If the agent decides that the characters are supernatural entities of some sort, her response hinges mainly on her agency’s attitude toward such beings. An aggressive agent from a monster-slaying group may open fire or attempt to arrest the characters. A more cerebral agent is likely to keep her distance and try to gather more information. If the agent decides that the hunters are normal humans, she’s still going to be concerned about their involvement in paranormal affairs. A fairly overt agent might flash her government credentials and

To: Gerald Osbourne

From: Iris Dhurvasula

Attachments: report01/13/03.doc

Subject: Report on El Paso Investigations

Director:

Attached is my report on the situation here in El Paso. I’ve conducted three interviews with Landers and attempted to collate what he’s told me into coherent form.

To summarize, Landers and his group don’t seem to be servants of vampires. Frankly, I don’t know what they are. They don’t match up with anything I’ve encountered, and I can’t find anything similar in the databases. They’ve got abilities I can’t quantify at this point. But apart from that, they seem to be completely normal civilians. Boring, even.

My current plan is to push Landers to introduce me to the rest of his group. There are problems with that approach, though. From the sound of it, the entire purpose of this group is to hunt down and exterminate paranormal entities. Landers seems blasé about the ethical and legal ramifications of such actions, but I can’t afford to be. I want to get more information, but if you want me to pull back, I will.

One last thing. Would it be possible to reassign Warwick? He and Landers have definitely developed some animosity, and I think it’s starting to impede the course of the investigation. At this point, we need Landers content and happy — not least because I think he could do some serious damage if he got angry.

Please contact me as soon as you’ve gone over the report.

Agent Dhurvasula

demand answers. A secretive agent may observe the imbued and try to come up with a theory about them.

Obviously, the players decide how their characters react to agents, but it’s not hard to make a few predictions. The group is unlikely to welcome an outsider with open arms, even if she seems to be on the “same side.” Hunters tend toward paranoia at the best of times, and a government agent nosing around is likely to make them worried and defensive. If the agent is aggressive or has any paranormal abilities that register to second sight, things could get very ugly. At best, the hunters are probably warily optimistic about the stranger. At worst, they might need to dispose of a body.

And then, there’s one other element that can be involved in this first meeting — the supernatural.

Obviously, a coincidence story involves confronting a monster at some point. An aftermath story can also involve some "conventional" hunting. The imbued can be following their quarry while an agent follows them.

Both sides can react to each other based on how the other deals with creatures. An agent's attitude toward a specific being is guided by her agency's policies, her own personality and by what the creature does. It's easier to be blasé about a harmless witch than about a serial-killing monstrosity. The players' characters, of course, have their own attitudes (indeed, often different attitudes within the same group). A fairly cerebral agent might see a group of aggressive hunters as dangerous vigilantes if they attack monsters on sight. The same agent is likely to file away a compassionate group as upright citizens. Similarly, a monster-hunting agent could see fervent hunters as like-minded patriots, and the forgiving as weaklings (maybe even traitors, depending on how political the agency is).

STORYTELLER: I THINK SHE'S DEAD

If the initial meeting goes badly, it's entirely possible that the agent might end up dead. This is Very Bad News

for the characters. Governments react poorly to the murder of their official agents and pull out all the stops to find and punish the killers. If you run an "us-versus-the-world" sort of chronicle in which the characters are hunted and hounded on all sides as they struggle against the supernatural, the death of an agent might be just what you want to increase the already high tension. If your game is meant to be less bleak, this sort of disaster can seriously damage the chronicle, as the chosen live life on the run, hunted by the police and other authorities. Most of the usual features of the chronicle — dealing with the supernatural and interacting with established cast members — is diminished or even eliminated. The focus becomes working 24 hours a day to avoid capture. And because capture is almost inevitable, it's likely that your chronicle ends with the hunters either killed or thrown into prison for life.

Unless you want a game in which things go from bad to worst, try to avoid getting an agent killed in her initial encounter. Ideally, the hunters don't shoot first and ask questions later. Even if they do, smart agents don't go looking for fights, and they back away from danger if possible. Your endangered agent probably doesn't form



a very good opinion of the hunters, but that's better than having the whole group arrested and executed in the next session.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Don't just have agents and hunters pass like ships in the night and form impressions based on a single brief encounter — unless, of course, that's the kind of rushed event you want.

It's best to give the characters a chance to sit down and actually *talk* to an agent for awhile, to let each side find out more about the other. The agent probably plays her cards close to her chest, and the imbued undoubtedly do the same. Both sides should finish the encounter with at least a sketchy idea about the other, however.

As a rule of thumb, the characters should realize that the government runs a "department of the supernatural," even if they don't know the details. They should also have a rough idea of the agency's attitude and the capabilities of its agents. Don't feed them too much information. Just give them the bare essentials and let them come to their own conclusions. If they make erroneous assumptions (such as deciding that a monster-neutral group is probably controlled by the supernatural), that's okay. It makes the game more interesting in future sessions when the characters act on those assumptions.

Your agent probably wants to know three things — who the hunters are, what they are and what involvement they have with the supernatural. Whatever the characters tell her goes into a report of some kind, along with any conclusions the agent herself draws. If you think it fits your character, put some faulty or biased conclusions into the mix. Again, such misunderstandings put an interesting spin on future encounters.

It's unlikely that the agent encourages the characters to contact her later, unless the first encounter goes very well. If the hunters know which government agency she works for, they might be able to track her down, depending on how secretive the agency is. For her part, the agent probably has access to most governmental databases. If she wants to contact the hunters, she can have addresses and phone numbers at her fingertips within minutes.

Both sides should leave this initial encounter with impressions and incomplete information. They know a little about each other, but they want to know more. Neither side should feel confident about categorizing the other as friend or foe. That's something they have to think about in the future, and to work out in the next phase of the chronicle.

ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP

After the initial meeting, the characters are left to get on with their lives and with hunting. They might discuss the agency and the ramifications of their meet-

ing, and even develop some theories about the agency's motives and nature. But all that probably takes a back seat to their "normal" activities at some point. Not so for the agency. It spends a lot of time deciding what happens next.

OPENING THE FILE

Twilight agencies are organized, and they don't act without knowing *exactly* what they're doing. In the days and weeks following the initial encounter with the imbued, your agency devotes a large proportion of its time, energy and budget to collating data, making decisions and deciding on a policy.

It's no effort at all for the agency to collect all official information on the hunters — criminal records, social security numbers, addresses and phone numbers. Anything recorded on a computer, every trace the hunters have made in their lives, is available to the organization. It takes the group longer to gather evidence and data regarding the characters' hunting activities — things such as fingerprints, police reports, interviews with associates, and any other clues gleaned from the scenes of incidents or attacks. The agency *does* gather whatever information it needs, though. The only question is how long that takes.

Once your group has as much information as it can get, the agency uses that material to try to answer what it considers important questions.

To: Iris Dhurvasula
From: Gerald Osbourne
Subject: El Paso Case
 Agent Dhurvasula:

I've gone over your report and discussed the case with my colleagues. We agree that this is important. We also agree that you need to return from El Paso for debriefing immediately. Whatever Landers and his affiliates are, we need to develop a plan and fully evaluate all data before proceeding. Having you contact the other side with a group of civilians is not an option. I want you and Warwick back in Washington by Tuesday. We'll keep monitoring Landers and company through local authorities. If they do anything, we'll know about it.

These people worry me, Agent Dhurvasula. At best, they're civilians with little regard for the laws they break or for the damage they do. At worst, they might be some new breed of servitor or even paranormal Davidians. It's not safe there. Come back so we can work out what to do next. Rest assured, I'm leaving you in charge of the case.

Osbourne

What are the imbued? The agency seeks to come up with a coherent theory of what the imbued could be, and how they fit into the organization's understanding of the supernatural. There's no way your group comes up with the right answer. No agency knows about the Messengers or the emergence of the imbued. Rather, it develops a theory that fits its knowledge, and that reflects the society's primary focus. A group that's mostly concerned with vampires might classify the imbued as a form of ghoul. If the department has a strongly negative attitude toward the supernatural, that stance colors its eventual decision about the imbued.

What do they want? Twilight agencies are used to conspiracies and intrigue. They may be disinclined to accept that the characters hunt monsters because "it's the right thing to do." They look for other, more selfish reasons. They may decide that hunters are pawns of other supernatural powers, or perhaps members of a cult or revolutionary group. They zero in on any "blips" in characters' origins — membership in a political party, criminal records — and integrate that information into their theory about hunters' purpose.

Are there more of them? If the characters mention that there are other imbued, this question is already answered. If not, the agency may look into any other incidents, trying to determine if other hunters are out there. If the group decides that the characters are an isolated phenomenon, it isn't as concerned about a spreading menace. If the department thinks the characters are part of a larger conspiracy or organized movement, hunters become a much more pressing problem.

Are they a threat? This question is key and is the one the agency concerns itself with most. Even if the agency decides that the hunters aren't an enemy who must be taken down, it is still concerned about whether the imbued could become a danger to the agency and the government. At this early stage, the organization is unlikely to label the imbued as dangerous (unless the characters made a very bad first impression), but the characters are marked for surveillance. Even if the agency is sympathetic toward the hunters, it holds them at arm's length until it knows *everything*.

Each encounter with the imbued from this point forward gives the agency more information — and more grounds on which to make a final decision about how to treat the characters. At this stage, the agency puts some tentative policies regarding the imbued into place: how to treat them and what to do if a case involves them. The agent who made first contact with the characters probably remains involved, and may even be placed in charge of an ongoing investigation.

The case file on the imbued is definitely kept open.

STORYTELLER: MAKING THE WRONG CONNECTION

The *Hunter* "meta-plot," as detailed in other sourcebooks, tells how a great disaster in the afterlife led to a vast influx of ghosts, spirits and walking dead into the world. The imbued came into existence at

the same time, and although their existence is not necessarily related directly to this event, there is a connection of sorts.

Many twilight agencies know something about ghosts and the afterworld, and some *may* know about the disaster and its repercussions. Even those agencies that don't know the details may have noticed a huge rise in ghost appearances, "poltergeist activity" and, of course, the emergence of the walking dead. Now the imbued have appeared, and at roughly the same time....

It's possible that an agency assumes there's a connection between the imbued and the spirits of the dead. Hell, a few of the imbued on hunter-net have wondered, themselves. Without more data, many agencies might decide the imbued are mediums, possessed by ghosts or something similar. They're wrong, of course, but how are they to know that?

For many agencies, the apparent timing of afterworld activity and hunters' appearance is simply coincidental. It may affect some of their dealings with the imbued, but only to a minor degree. If your agency has a particular policy about ghosts and the next world, however, then it probably extends that policy to cover hunters. And if that policy is "forcible exorcism" or the like, then the chances of a friendly alliance between the two groups aren't good.

Agencies might concoct any number of other erroneous theories to explain the imbued, depending on their knowledge of the supernatural. How about a mass awakening of pseudo-warlocks caused by the disaster in the afterworld? Mentally unstable psychics whose abilities have been activated by foreign governments? Subjects of experimentation and bizarre implants by aliens? Think of a theory that makes sense for your agency and have agents follow through on it (such as doing autopsies on dead hunters to find those "alien implants").

MEANWHILE...

While the agency has been collating notes and having meetings, the players' characters have been chewing things over as well. You can't force them into an opinion on your organization, but you've already influenced them by the way you portrayed agents in the first encounter. For example, if you played a by-the-book fed who wanted to arrest the imbued for interfering in a government investigation, the hunters are undoubtedly wary and suspicious of the agency. If she was sympathetic and approachable, they might see the agency as a possible ally. The hunters base their attitudes on the agent's personality and methods. If you want to encourage a particular attitude, play your character accordingly.

Encourage the players (and their characters) to talk about the first encounter, to think about the existence of the agency, and to come up with some ideas about what to do the next time they meet. The imbued might find great relief in knowing that they're not alone in their plight. Or they may be terrified to learn that the

government is watching them. Determined hunters might try to contact the agency and force a meeting on their own terms. You decide how such a forced issue turns out. In general, agencies aren't very interested in answering to civilians. They prefer to ask the questions. Let the characters stew for a while before bringing the agency back for a second chapter.

SECOND CONTACT (AND BEYOND)

The next encounter with the agency might again be the result of an aftermath or coincidence story. Most likely, it is a deliberate contact. Either party might decide to reach the other for some reason — to learn more, to force a confrontation or to ask for help. This last possibility is perhaps the most interesting, because it puts the two groups on the same level — equals in a struggle against the supernatural.

Characters might ask the agency for assistance for a variety of reasons — an enemy that's too powerful to handle alone, a problem that affects the whole country, a need for information that they simply can't fulfill themselves. Your agency is probably reluctant to give assistance unless it benefits somehow. That might mean a trade of information, a debt to be called in later, or simply a chance to gather more data on the imbued. No matter what, the agency is still bound by its regulations and ethics. It doesn't provide hunters with equipment or classified information. Neither does it help them break any laws.

Why would the agency ask hunters for help? Probably because the imbued are free to act in ways that agents cannot. The players' characters can (and usually do) bend laws with impunity, and they are prepared to break them when necessary. The imbued can be a deniable weapon or tool — and as a bonus, using them provides the agency with more data.

The primary "face" of the agency in this period of the relationship should be the agent who was featured in the first encounter. That person provides continuity and a personality with whom the characters and players can connect. Don't be afraid to feature new cast members — this helps show the various facets of the agency — but keep the original agent in the foreground.

Each new encounter with the agency should "raise the stakes." It should push interaction between the hunters and the agency to a new level. Bigger threats, different challenges, new information. A meeting with the agent should never feel predictable or safe. This is the "teething phase," when both parties are wary and cautious of each other. Make each new encounter reach a new level of importance, and provide new information.

For example, let's assume SAD meets a group of imbued. The first encounter, in which both the hunters and SAD chase a warlock, ends fairly amicably. Each group learns that the other exists, but that's about all. A few months later, they meet again. This time, the imbued try to eliminate a federal witness who's also a

vampire, and SAD protects her. From this encounter, SAD learns that the hunters are part of a larger network. The imbued learn how far SAD's influence extends, and that they aren't always after the same goals. The third encounter has SAD and the chosen allying to investigate a citywide explosion of walking dead, a mission that requires the imbued to spend a lot of time with organization operatives. This case is more important than the previous two, with major repercussions; due to the proximity of the agents and imbued, they learn much more about one another, and start developing relationships. This near-friendship makes things harder in the next encounter, when the hunters realize that they're being manipulated by SAD to investigate a fringe cult in the desert. And so on. Each new meeting builds on the one before, but takes things in a different direction. Nothing stays static or predictable, and the hunters (and players) never take the agency for granted.

You might want to consider what happens "off-stage" during this period, as well — whether the agency makes contact with other hunter groups. If so, think about what general opinion the agency forms from those encounters, and whether it contradicts or complements the impression the player's characters created. By the same token, the characters might inform other imbued groups (if they know of any) about the agency, and the larger "hunter community" may begin forming impressions of its own. Keep the focus on your troupe at all times, of course. But if you introduce hunter-net and imbued Storyteller characters into your game, don't be afraid to use them to build up the agency as a group that could affect *all* hunters.

MAKING A DECISION

Once you've run a few stories involving your agency, it's time to bring things to a head. The agency has gathered all the information it can, made all the deals it's comfortable with, and come up with a theory about what the imbued are. Similarly, the hunters have probably become somewhat accustomed to the agency (although hopefully not to the point of being blasé), and may believe they know where they stand with it. Now it's time to make the tough decision — whether the agency classifies the imbued as enemies or allies. The agency needs to consider two questions.

What are the benefits of allying with the imbued? Your agency doesn't "team-up" with a ragtag group of civilians without damn good reason. A good one is deniability. The imbued can be useful to the agency by taking on problems it isn't legally empowered to handle. Another is knowledge. If the group knows less than the hunters do about the supernatural, it can pick the characters' brains to help close old cases and to fill out its databases.

What are the drawbacks of fighting the imbued? Classifying the imbued as a threat opens up a lot of problems for the agency. A whole world of hunters exists out there, and they talk amongst themselves. They have

To: All SAD Agents
 From: Gerald Osbourne
 Attachments: type9data.doc
 Subject: Type 9 Entities
 Priority: High

To All Field Agents:

As you should already know, we've been developing a set of guidelines and policies regarding the entities we've labeled "Type 9" individuals. Those guidelines have been finalized, and the attached document gives full details.

To summarize, T9 entities are the self-declared "monster hunters" whom a few agents have encountered. These individuals are otherwise normal civilians who spontaneously develop paranormal abilities, as well as a compulsion to eliminate other paranormal entities. Full breakdowns of each encounter the department has had with these entities, as well as the best data we have on their abilities, is available.

If you encounter one or more of these entities in the course of an investigation, make contact if at all possible. Do not fully integrate them into the investigation, but try to establish some rapport. Make sure that you obtain names and other details, so that we can build profiles and background files. We need data, people — and if that means fraternizing with these people, so be it. In particular, we need bodies for full autopsies. If any are eliminated by other paranormal entities, call it in immediately so we can claim the deceased for analysis.

These guidelines are confidential. If you encounter T9's, do not reveal SAD policies to them under any circumstances. Never forget that however normal they seem, T9's may not be human and are not to be trusted.

Osbourne

incomprehensible abilities and a willingness to fight for what they believe in. Fighting a single vampire serial killer is one thing. Fighting a nationwide army of guerillas is another.

For the pragmatic agency, the reasons aren't as important as the consequences: what it has to gain and what it has to lose. It's entirely possible that an agency already hostile toward the imbued would warily make them allies, simply because it's too dangerous to struggle against them. The agency has a job to do, and it'll do that job; personal feelings are a luxury.

The characters should ask themselves the same questions at this point, although their answers are easier. Making an enemy of the government is a dangerous step, and one that usually ends in tragedy. Still, depending on how previous encounters have

developed, the hunters may feel that it's the only choice. More likely, they try to make allies of the agency — and hopefully the agency seeks the same.

WHERE TO NOW?

Once the "honeymoon" is over, it's time to cement the relationship between your agency and the imbued. In this phase of the chronicle, you establish the status quo and set the tone for the foreseeable future, while still allowing yourself room to make changes in case you want to take a new direction.

You've decided whether the agency is going to treat the imbued as friends or foes. Let's look at what that choice means.

ALLIES

"Allies" is, perhaps, a misnomer. Your agency, being an arm of the government, can never be a friend to the imbued — a group of supernatural vigilantes and civilians. But a wary alliance can be entered, one in which the imbued are held at arm's length and treated with caution, yet still helped and supported.

As mentioned earlier, the agency assists the imbued if there's something in it for the bureaucracy. It skews the relationship to get as much benefit from the hunters as possible, while having to return as little support as it can get away with. The imbued are never trusted but can be a useful tool, and the agency is smart enough to keep its tools in good working condition.

What do the imbued get from the relationship? It's easier to say what they *don't* get — weapons, money, official sanction, access to classified data, assistance in breaking laws. That leaves mostly information and encouragement. The agency might share some information from its databases, such as the names and addresses of known blood slaves in a city, or previous supernatural incidents at the state senate building. It might allow the imbued to participate in an investigation (within limits). Hunters might assist agents by using second sight and edges, thus aiding in the capture of a cannibalistic serial killer. The agency might even turn a blind eye to some hunter activities, such as squelching investigations into the burning down of a haunted house. There's also the less tangible bonus for hunters: knowing that they aren't alone in their efforts, that someone understands, and that they may be avenged if they're defeated.

For this small investment, the agency has access to a deniable and quite effective "task force" of hunters. Even an agency that's largely cerebral and unconcerned about destroying the supernatural may open cases that mandate a "terminal solution." Rather than get blood on its own hands, it can leak the data to the imbued and sit back while the "freelancers" take care of the problem.

Remember, too, that there's a difference between your agency and an *agent*. Individual agents, particularly the one whom the characters first encountered,

may be prepared to do more for the hunters. This person still isn't free to join in the hunt, guns blazing, but she may be prepared to bend regulations and lend more aid to the group than her organization normally allows. She plays a dangerous game and is in trouble if she's discovered. Hunters who abuse this kind of relationship find it blows up in their faces before long. They might become the agent's patsies, or she may be forced to betray them on her organization's behalf to save her own ass.

STORYTELLER: IMBUED AGENTS

Once you introduce a twilight agency into your campaign, it's almost inevitable that one of your players will want to play an agent who's imbued. It's the best of both worlds — the experience and skills of an agent mixed with second sight and the capabilities of the chosen. There's a good enough reason to say "no" right there — a character who's good at *everything* will overshadow more limited (and believable) characters in the same group. But there are other problems with the idea beyond play balance.

No agency would ever recruit an imbued hunter as an agent. Twilight agencies recruit from their parent agencies, not from civilians at large. The FBI won't hire a house painter just because he can swing a tire iron like nobody's business. That's not how the real world works. It doesn't matter how friendly the imbued are with your agency. They simply won't be asked to join.

That still leaves the possibility of a twilight agent being imbued. There's no real problem with this idea, *per se*. The agent is still a normal human being, and any run-in with the supernatural might attract the attention of the Messengers. It's still unlikely, though. Only a very small proportion of individuals who encounter the supernatural get imbued, and (apart from the whole action versus inaction thing) there's no reason why the Messengers would select an agent over anyone else at the scene of a supernatural incident.

If an agent is chosen, that's hardly the end of the story. Not even a friendly agency trusts the hunter/operative — he's the follower of an unknown power and has unquantified abilities. Having an agent become imbued is almost as bad as having one defect to another government. He's a likely spy in the ranks, unknowable and untrustworthy. The newly imbued agent is liable to find himself examined, interrogated and ostracized from the rest of the organization. It's quite possible that he'll be fired and stripped of all privileges. In the case of a more aggressive agency with little regard for civil rights, the hunter/operative might be imprisoned (or worse). If he tries to hide his new status, he might get away with it for a while — but once he's found out, he'll be in even more trouble for deceiving his superiors.

So frankly, the answer is "no." There are no imbued agents. There *might* be imbued ex-agents, and they might also be a more workable choice for character status — a little more skilled than most hunters, but

without access to government powers or equipment. Even so, it's a stretch and again gets away from the mundane style suggested for **Hunter** characters. So don't hesitate to turn down a player if you're uncomfortable with the idea.

(Actually, one imbued agent shows up in the **Hunter** supplements, a hunter-net poster who is also an NSA operative. Of course, the NSA (p. 132) isn't quite the same as a twilight agency, and the hunter in question survives by hiding his true nature from his superiors. So don't feel obliged to include imbued agents in your troupe on the basis of one Storyteller character.)

ENEMIES

If your twilight agency decides that the imbued are a problem in need of being neutralized, the hunters are in trouble. With more manpower, more resources and official sanction for its action, the agency can outmatch the hunters in everything but raw "miraculous" ability. If the agency wants to arrest the characters, it can turn up with squads of police and tactical support. If it wants to eliminate the threat permanently, then there's not a lot the characters can do to fight back. They're screwed.

But screwing your players isn't much fun for them or you, and it's detrimental to the health of your chronicle. Having an agency declare all-out war on the imbued might lead to a fun, *Fugitive*-style story or two, but it puts a limit on how much further your chronicle can go believably. If you cast your agency as an enemy, it's probably best to go for a "Cold War" sort of situation.

Therein, the agency decides that the imbued are a threat but elects not to neutralize them immediately. Your department might not consider them a *serious* problem; they're only a few vigilantes with minor powers, after all. Or, fighting the imbued would be too great a strain on the group. It has only a small number of agents, and more immediate and serious problems exist, such as vampires on the loose. Winning a guerilla war is a long-term objective, and a draining one. Better to dwell on cases that can yield more immediate, concrete results.

But this stance doesn't mean that your agency ignores the imbued, just that it doesn't tackle them directly. The characters better get used to being monitored on a regular basis. Their files are forwarded to local authorities who put the chosen on their "usual suspects" lists. Just as the police keep tabs on known felons in an area, the hunters are the first ones suspected of any violent crimes or suspicious incidents. The agency might also use its power to affect a character's job or career, political position or social standing. This approach fosters a slow war of attrition, rather than out-and-out conflict, and the agency can be a thorn in the side of any imbued against whom it has a grudge. Some players will actually find this treatment *more* aggravating than having their characters arrested and imprisoned, but it still allows for an effective — if complicated — hunting career.

Now, even if your agency declares the imbued to be enemies, individual operatives might nevertheless help the characters if they can. This is why it helps to make friends with agent cast members whom the hunters meet. That personal connection might be enough to get a secret ally in the enemy camp. The agent isn't able to wave her hand and get the hunters out of any predicament, but she might be able to help in small ways: information, warnings or maybe even deflecting the worst of the agency's fury on rare occasions. As before, asking too much of such an ally backfires. The agent can only do so much, and she'll be treated as a traitor and punished if discovered by her superiors.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE WORLD?

Thus far, we've focused on how your agency relates to the players' characters, and with good reason. But a wider community of hunters exists, both in the characters' home country and across the world. Other hunters are affected by the impression the characters make upon your agency, and any eventual alliance or enmity touches all of the chosen.

If the agency allies with the imbued as a whole, that's a fairly big change to your game's setting. Now, all hunters in the chronicle's "home country" can depend upon assistance and backup when they need it, giving them a nationwide advantage against the forces of darkness. Hunters from other nations are probably envious, and may try to get the attention of their own national twilight groups. Some of those attempts are bound to end badly. There's also a danger of local hunters getting cocky and overconfident now that they have assistance. If the imbued become too visible and too successful, monsters may treat them as a real threat and make a concerted effort to stamp them out. Taking things to this level changes the tone of your chronicle significantly, and you should think about the consequences before proceeding.

A more likely — and more controllable — situation involves the agency making alliances here and there with particular groups of hunters. This approach keeps things more localized and changes the "canon" setting only slightly. It might also lead to suspicions and factions arising within the hunter community. Hunter groups without agency contacts could become envious or distrustful of groups with aid, and be resistant to sharing information or help. And hunter-net has plenty of paranoid loners who'll rant ominously about Waco and Ruby Ridge and proclaim to everyone that the agency and allied hunters have become the enemy.

If your agency decides that the imbued are a unilateral threat, the stakes are raised across the country. Imbued groups become paranoid about their visibility to the government. Some do their best to vanish, whereas aggressive groups may call for action



THE NEW RECRUIT

Javier Gonzago never intended to join a secret, unnamed division of Cuba's Military Counterintelligence Department. He was just glad that his party loyalty and his father's political connections were able to secure him a position as a standing agent.

On one early case, Gonzago thought he was tracking a people-smuggler who exported Cubans to America for money. To his horror, he realized that the "smuggler" was in fact imprisoning his clients and feeding off them. In a fit of righteous indignation, Javier destroyed the creature (and, unfortunately, many of its captives) with dynamite and automatic weaponry. When word of his actions reached his superiors, he found himself assigned to the MCD's unofficial monster-hunting squad.

Gonzago is a thug, but a reasonably likeable thug. He believes in Communism, Castro and protecting his country from evil monsters. What he lacks in intelligence, he makes up for in enthusiasm and loyalty. His superiors value him as an effective soldier. They don't yet trust him to act without orders or direct supervision.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Tough) 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Demolitions 2, Dodge 1, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Law 1, Melee 2, Politics 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Arsenal 4, Contacts 2, Resources 3
Willpower: 4

Equipment: Sunglasses, jeep, guns and other weaponry



against the authorities and their operatives. Rebelions and guerilla wars start this way, and it's an ugly and dangerous path. A few hundred driven individuals across the country can hurt a government, but it's unlikely that they can win a war. This kind of conflict probably raises the visibility of the imbued, but might actually make them less effective against the supernatural, as more groups divert their attention to fighting the agency. Other groups might stay hidden, going to ground — but again, doing so distracts them from their real work. This is a fairly grim route a chronicle to take, but it can be a lot of fun for troupes that like tragic stories.

No matter what, your chronicle should stay focused on your troupe. Use events in the larger community as back story to your game, as a way to develop tone and larger plotlines, and to push the chronicle in new directions. But any significant events, especially ones that modify the status quo, should happen to the players' characters, not to some other group of hunters.

THE LONG VIEW

You've developed the relationship between your twilight agency and the imbued. Where do you go from here?

You don't have to go anywhere, of course. You can keep the agency in the background and use it only for the occasional story. You don't want to overuse it lest your troupe become blasé about the department. An occasional appearance or involvement in the chronicle is enough.

You might want to move things in a different direction after a while, however. You may decide you're not comfortable with the status quo, particularly if the tone of the chronicle has moved away from

THE FIELD AGENT

Iris Dhurvasula is an experienced field agent with SAD. When she realized that the FBI offered limited opportunities for women, she chose a niche in the "kook squad." She didn't know about SAD's true mission and didn't believe any of it when she was first told. A few years later, having seen a lot of strange and terrible things, she's now a reliable agent with considerable knowledge of the supernatural.

Recently, Dhurvasula began investigating the destruction of a compound in Ciudad Juarez, just across the Texas border, where what are believed to be remains of a vampire were found. Her investigation led her to Earl Landers, an imbued man in El Paso whom she originally believed to be a ghoul. She still doesn't know what to make of Lanny or his colleagues, but she suspects this case could be the one that moves her up the department ladder.

Like other SAD agents, Dhurvasula is a consummate law-enforcement professional. She does tend toward flippancy at times, especially when dealing with suspects. It can disarm them slightly, and she can use their surprise to her advantage. Dhurvasula is ambitious and cynical, but is a decent human being. She joined the FBI because she wanted to help people.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence (Shrewd) 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 2, Drive 2, Empathy 3, Firearms 2, Law 3, Investigation (Paperwork) 4, Occult 2, Research 2, Security 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2, Technology 2

Backgrounds: Arsenal 3, Contacts 4, Exposure 2, Influence 3, Resources 3

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Black suit, sunglasses, automatic pistol, cell phone, laptop, handcuffs, bulletproof vest, car

its starting point. You may want to push things further. You may want to pull them back and regain more control.

Here, the initial sketchiness of your agency comes in handy. Every element you define strongly early on is hard to modify or eliminate later. Loose details, on the other hand, can be changed easily. Leave enough wiggle room in your agency's description to allow for some sweeping and subtle changes. Here are a few ideas for new stories that can change the characters' relationship with your organization.



Under new management. Agencies are government departments and are prone to all the usual shakeups — changes in policy, leaders and politics. A new division head or administration may reverse previous stances, such as deciding the imbued are now threats instead of allies. A subtler shift might be in the core attitudes of the group — an overt group becoming more secretive and political, or a cerebral group adopting more of a seek-and-destroy mentality.

Secret agendas. Who's really in charge of the agency? Supernatural forces influence many governments. What if the hunters discover that the agency really answers to a group of vampires and has been feeding the monsters information against their enemies? For a variation on this twist, more mundane forms of corruption could be at work. Maybe the agency's leader betrays the department to a foreign government, and the characters are victimized by that enemy power just as much as agents are.

This time it's personal. Even large government agencies are made up of individuals, and those people

THE DEPARTMENT LEADER

Sir Ian Lennox is the head of Division Six, MI-5's "bizarre incident" investigative unit. Lennox worked his way up the chain of command, starting his career as a field agent back in the 1970s. Through hard work — and use of his minor psychic abilities — Lennox rose through the ranks until receiving his command (and knighthood) in the early '90s.

Three years ago, however, Sir Ian started receiving new orders. He's being blackmailed by a group of vampires that has amassed evidence of his selling state secrets to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Terrified of being disgraced and losing his position, Lennox has secretly turned Division Six into the vampires' private information-gathering service, and any agent who gets too close to the truth is silenced.

Lennox's psychic abilities are known only to a few Division Six agents and to his superiors. No one knows why he was born with such capabilities, although family rumors speak of a Gypsy blessing (or curse) laid upon an ancestor in the Middle Ages. Sir Ian doesn't really care *where* his abilities come from. He simply accepts them as another way of getting whatever he wants.

Sir Ian is a distinguished gentleman in his 60s, cast in the very proper British mold (think M from the earlier James Bond films). He's refined, polite and quite likeable. He's also a ruthless bastard who'll stop at nothing to get what he wants. He feels guilty about selling out Division Six to the enemy and would welcome an opportunity to escape monster control. But if he has to betray his country to save his hide, he'll do so without hesitation.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation (Calculating) 5, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence (Learned) 4, Wits (Cunning) 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy (Official Channels) 5, Empathy 2, Etiquette (British Peerage) 4, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Leadership (Command) 4, Occult (English Folklore) 4, Politics 3, Security 2, Subterfuge (Cover-ups) 4

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Exposure 3, Fame 1, Influence 4, Resources 5

Powers: Detach, Disorientation, Twisted Whispers, Twitch

Willpower: 9

Equipment: Large personal fortune, manor house, trophy wife, bodyguards

Notes: Sir Ian's psychic abilities are based on powers in Chapter 1 of the *Hunter Storytellers Companion* (pp. 15-19). He activates them by spending Willpower. None of these abilities affects hunters who have Conviction's defenses active. He is largely unaffected by the supernatural confusion caused by hunters, shapechangers and other entities. Second sight reveals him to be slightly strange, in a similar fashion to warlocks, but not as hideous, monstrous or inhuman.

have their own lives and problems. The hunters' agent-contact may come to them asking for a personal favor, or to betray the agency. If they refuse, they make a personal enemy who could poison their relationship with the organization as a whole. If the characters agree, the "favor" might land them in even more trouble.

Who do you trust? As the first group to make contact with the agency, the characters have a special relationship with it (whether positive or negative). What if other imbued groups are treated differently? If the characters get better treatment than other imbued, the characters may inadvertently make enemies among their own kind and have to choose where their loyalties lie. Alternatively, the agency may favor other

imbued over the characters, leading to paranoia on the part of the characters and perhaps to hostility toward other chosen.

Remember that your chronicle is not about Project Twilight. It's about the imbued, specifically the players' characters. Don't make every story about the agency. Don't have it in the background all the time. An occasional intrusion, a veiled threat, a rare helping hand — such appearances keep the agency fresh and interesting without drawing the spotlight off the players' characters. They know they aren't alone, and that's the important thing. The agency is your resource. Use it sparingly and to good effect, and it should enhance and lend variety to your chronicle.



CHAPTER 3:

THE ARCANUM

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you
the truth?

— Galatians 4:16

THE INTRUDER IN THE DARKNESS

The rattle-clack of keystrokes on the specially designed Braille keyboard drowned out much of the background noise. The soft strains of instrumental bluegrass music on the stereo drowned out even more. And yet, Stephen knew he had heard something. He finished typing a sentence and leaned back in his wooden chair. Without turning his head, he reached backward and clicked off the stereo. The sudden silence was a fuzzy, deafening shroud for a second before Stephen's sensitive ears adjusted and attuned to the sounds of his still, dark house.

He dismissed the sound of his breathing and heartbeat. There was the light creak of his chair as he shifted position. There was the electronic whine of his CPU tower under his desk. There was the hum of the air conditioner. There was the tick of the hall clock. There were about a half-dozen crickets fighting for first chair outside. There was the ever-present rumble of traffic from the highway, louder now because all the trees that had once stood between the road and the house had been cut down to make way for new development. These sounds, which always surrounded him, reported in one by one. Stephen noted each and listened further. He waited for the sound that was out of place.

Stephen didn't hear the sound again, but he thought he knew what it was. Although he hadn't heard its like in all the months since his wife had been attacked — since he'd let her get hurt by that thing — it was familiar. It was the creak of a floorboard in the hallway. The creak of a footstep, made

by someone who was trying to be quiet. Someone was sneaking around in his house.

Stephen was frozen, gripping the arms of his chair. Icy spasms ran up the back of his neck, and his stomach turned. The creaky part of the hallway floor was about halfway between his room and the kitchen, in front of the door to the basement. He hadn't heard footsteps at the far end of the hallway, but now that he'd turned off his music and stopped typing, he could hear the soft scuff of shoes on the hall carpet. The footsteps were light and slow — cautious, perhaps, after having disturbed the silence — but they came surely on. The steps paused at the end of the hallway just outside the door to Stephen's office, between it and the door to his bedroom. Both doors were closed, and whoever was out there seemed indecisive about how to proceed.

It was far too late in the evening for visitors. Stephen wasn't expecting anyone until the end of the week. That was when his aunt came to clean up the place and take him to sit beside his wife at the hospital. But even though she had a key, she always rang the bell twice to let him know she was there. The few close contacts he invited over also knew to ring the bell. Was this a burglar? Some homeless squatter looking for a warm place to hole up? A psychopath on the run from the police? Worse?

The last possibility — which irrational fear demanded was the only likely one — paralyzed Stephen. Since his wife had been attacked, he'd been playing a dangerous game over the Internet and by phone. He'd been researching incidents of supernatural violence in the tri-state area and then turning



evidence over to the hunter-net mailing list. Hoping to make up for what he had let happen to his wife, he devoted tireless effort to helping others deal with the monsters that preyed upon the defenseless. He'd been unexpectedly successful thus far, but the tenacious fear that something was waiting to snap him up would not let him rest. Now, it seemed something had come to do just that.

Despite his rigid grip on his chair, Stephen couldn't stop his hands from shaking. He was supposed to be safe here. All his doors were locked and chained. All the locks on his windows were long since painted over. He'd armed his expensive security system more than two hours ago. How the hell had someone gotten in without him knowing it? How was such a thing even possible? And why the hell wasn't the intruder already—

Before the panicked thought could play itself out, Stephen heard the door to his bedroom open across the hall. He heard the light switch click and footsteps move into the room. What did the bastard want? Was he looking for something specific or just looking around? Did he expect Stephen to be asleep in there, vulnerable and unaware of what was happening? Was he looking at the empty bed right now, glancing at the open door to the empty bathroom, and figuring out where Stephen must be? Was he turning in this direction even now?

Stephen gulped down a lump that had risen in his throat, and fought down a nervous cough. If he tried to get out of his chair, he'd make a noise and give himself away. If he sat still, he'd be right there facing the door when it opened to whoever — whatever — had broken in. He didn't even have any-

where to hide; his desk was nothing more than a folding table decked with computer equipment, an AM-FM radio, a short wave radio and a police-band scanner.

The footsteps came back into the hallway, and Stephen heard someone turn the doorknob to his office with maddening deliberation. When the bolt cleared the plate, the intruder slowly pushed the door inward, which made the hinges whine. Just open it, Stephen thought, growing desperate. Just rush in, you son of a bitch. Stop torturing me.

But the door swung the rest of the way just as slowly. The intruder stood silent, no doubt peering into the dark room, and then turned on the light. When it happened, Stephen heard a gasp. After that, nothing else happened. No footsteps retreated. The intruder only stood where he was, breathing heavily in surprise. Stephen could smell the faint after-scent of old cigarette smoke wafting off the person's clothes.

"Who's there?" Stephen called out, not liking how high and fragile his voice sounded. Stephen took the intruder's silence as a sign of fear, which bolstered his own absent courage — a little. "Answer me, damn it."

"Mister Lambert?" the person said. "Stephen Lambert?"

The voice was old and ragged, but not ageless or anachronistic. It had the scratchy quality of a middle-aged man who'd been smoking unfiltered cigarettes for more than half his life. It also had a flat nasal quality to it that made Lambert sound like Lahm-bet.

"Who are you?" Stephen demanded. "Don't come any closer."

"Don't be afraid," the man said. "I'm not here to hurt you."

"How did you get in here?"

"Don't panic. You don't know me, but I know who you are. You call yourself Moderator87."

"How do you know that?" Stephen asked, thinking. Just say you read it on the list. Just say, "The list," and I'll believe you.

"An associate of mine told me," the intruder said. He leaned against the creaking doorframe. "He also gave me your address. I'm sorry to break in on you like this, but I knew you wouldn't agree to meet me if I called or emailed."

"You're Goddamn right," Stephen said, trying to muster real anger behind his words, rather than just panic. "I should call the police."

"Relax," the intruder said. "I'm with the police. Well, actually, I'm a special investigator who works with the Chicago police investigating 'unusual crimes.'"

"Bullshit."

"All right," the intruder said, his voice carrying the inflection of a smirk. "It's not actually the police, but I gave it a shot. I am a special investigator, though."

"What do you want?" Stephen said. The stranger's presence in the doorway transfixed Stephen, keeping him riveted to his chair. The man made the entire room feel alien and forbidding.

"I need you to listen to something. I got it from someone you know... or knew. John O'Malley."

"John O'Malley's dead," Stephen said.

"I know," the intruder said. "I was away on business, out of the country, and I only just found out."

"What is this about?" Stephen asked. "How do you know John? Who are you?"

"John and I occasionally worked together in Chicago, investigating... unusual crimes. "After John dealt with Donald Pendergrass."

Stephen almost relaxed when the intruder said that. Stephen knew all about John O'Malley and Donald Pendergrass. Under the handle Cop90, John told Stephen about his imbuing and the way he'd killed Donald Pendergrass, a bloodsucker.

"What does that have to do with me?" Stephen said, trying to keep his guard up. He didn't have any of the special gifts that John and others described. Stephen believed he had missed his chance. All he had to protect himself was his healthy skepticism, his judge of character and his own senses.

"John trusted you," the intruder said. "He believed in you. He told me you were one of the most informed and dedicated posters on 'the list.' Whatever that is."

"So?"

"So, he gave me your address — which he says you gave him — and told me to bring you a tape if anything ever happened to him. He also trusted me."

"So what's on this tape?" Stephen asked, trying to hold onto his skepticism, but feeling it slip away. "What am I supposed to do with it?"

"I've already taken care of part of what he wants done. He wanted me to find out what got to him, and to get the information to you. According to the tape, he wants you to get that information to 'the right people.' Apparently, people who can do something about the thing that killed him."

"Even though he's dead... he still wants revenge?"

"That's the idea. I brought the tape so you wouldn't have to take my word for it. I planned to leave it somewhere you'd be likely to find it. I didn't think you were here."

"Put it on the table," Stephen said, finally allowing himself to relax his death grip.

The intruder did as he was told and returned to his spot by the door. Stephen felt across the surface of his desk and found the hand-warm tape recorder perched at the corner. He found and pushed the "play" button.

"Another one of these damn tapes," John O'Malley said in a rough, strong voice, shattering the tense silence. "Stephen, I hope you never hear this one — just like I say every time — but I know you're going to hear one someday. If this is the one... shit.... Two days ago, a little worm named Harry Winston called me about his wife. She's like us, but she's dead. Something killed her."

Stephen jabbed the "stop" button on the recorder and made a tight, angry fist around the little portable. "It's him," he whispered.

"So you're satisfied?" the intruder asked. "My notes are recorded at the end. I've been away from home for a while and have a lot to take care of. I'll be in touch this week if you have any questions."

"Wait, I—"

"I can't," the intruder said, turning into the hall.

"At least tell me who the hell you are," Stephen demanded, half rising from his seat.

"I'll contact you using the name Jebediah Brown. It isn't my name, but it's how you'll know me. I'll be in touch. You should have someone fix the damage I did to your alarm. It isn't safe to let it go."

With that, the stranger continued down the hall and out through the kitchen door. Stephen was alone again in silence and darkness. After several long minutes, he reached again for the tape player.

WHAT IS THE ARCANUM?

Originally released as a supplement for **Mage: The Ascension**, the sourcebook **Halls of the Arcanum** introduced a new secret society for use by players and Storytellers. Since then, references to that society, the Arcanum, have appeared in various White Wolf books, including **Hunter's** core rulebook. Here, at last, we provide guidance on how to use the organization in **Hunter** stories as an antagonist, a cagey ally or an inscrutable observer of the imbued. But first, a refresher on just what the Arcanum is all about.

HISTORY IN BRIEF

The secret society known as the Arcanum was founded in England in the late 1800s. It formed under the direction of a mysterious and wealthy scholar who had long maintained a morbid curiosity about the supernatural world. Bizarre occult knowledge fascinated him, and he let no opportunity to collect it escape him. The scope of what he recognized as supernatural,

but still did not understand, dwarfed what little he had managed to make sense of. He could tell that disparate aspects of the supernatural somehow fit together, but he could not comprehend enough to figure out how. He therefore contacted other similarly motivated researchers and investigators whom he met through the Western world's most prestigious universities. He promised to fund these fellows' research into the unexplained if they shared their discoveries. Facing derision and lacking support among more respectable academicians, a handful of individuals agreed to meet their would-be benefactor at his secluded manor.

The group developed a system for conceiving the world's supernatural mysteries and dividing them into five distinct categories. These included miracles and magic worked by human hands, stories of spirits, folk tales about men who could change their shape, legends of the fae, and stories about the walking dead. Each researcher assumed responsibility for gathering data regarding a particular category, and they would meet regularly to discuss their findings and keep their patron apprised. They also resolved to keep their findings secret from other scientists, scholars and the public at large. They did so mostly out of awareness that no one took such studies seriously, but also because their benefactor agreed to subsidize only the pure pursuit of knowledge. Getting outsiders involved, he insisted, tainted that effort with jaded perceptions and false expectations.

The scholars called their secret organization the Arcanum and set to work. With the founder's backing and the subtle direction of his expressed curiosity, they chased hints and scraps of strange lore all over the Western world. In time, they recruited new researchers to cover more ground and to keep their perspective fresh. They expanded their base of operations beyond the confines of their benefactor's manor and established lodges, chapter houses and libraries in regions that were more convenient to their fields of study. As years passed, some of the more influential founding members relocated permanently to cities on the East Coast of the United States (in and around the New England area), where the second-largest and best-stocked chapter house was built.

The society's growth and success did not please its founder, however. As the search for arcane knowledge became more organized and fruitful, certain horrifying possibilities came to light. These discoveries could not be denied or forgotten. Mankind was neither alone nor supreme in the world. Fell *things* of unimaginable power lurked in the darkness, manipulating and culling humanity, and guiding its destiny to their own sinister designs. These malign entities could not be new to the world, considering how secure and powerful many of them seemed. Somehow, these unknown masters existed alongside and amid the very men and women they controlled, yet no one seemed to be aware of their presence.

What was perhaps worst of all was the fact that no one even seemed *able* to recognize the dire events that

took place. Contact with the diabolical conspirators either ended in a victim's death or it drove the poor witness mad with fright. Even those few Arcanum scholars who managed to make firsthand contact with any supernatural creatures could bear only impotent witness as their sanity and erudition eroded. Some deteriorated in short order. Others clutched at what coherent thoughts they could salvage and kept working for years, despite the horror that gnawed at them.

Shortly after the dawn of 20th century, the Arcanum founder himself began to go mad. With the last of his strength and sound faculties, he called together his most prolific researchers, who also suffered from extreme exposure to the supernatural. He revealed the full extent of the hidden entities' plans for humanity, at least as far as he could perceive — every note and every overheard conversation since establishing the Arcanum. As the founder understood it, this grand design was staggering in its complexity and inclusiveness, and all who heard it fell mute with terror. He claimed that it banished his wits and robbed him of sleep merely to speak it aloud, and he begged those to whom he told it to swear never to repeat it in its entirety again while he lived.

This revelation confirmed so many of his scholars' most morbid fears and suppositions that they all agreed to do as he demanded. They further decided that they would neither enlighten their lesser researchers nor make any of what they had learned available to the public. After all, if not even their highly disciplined minds could process this incredible information, the numbed minds of the uneducated masses would surely break. If any layman were even to believe such stuff, he would surely go mad, just as so many unfortunate Arcanum scholars had already. Furthermore, mere speculation on what the unseen predators would do to anyone who tried to reveal their existence wrenched the arcanists' stomachs with dread.

Shortly after the founder's devastating revelation, the Arcanum's foremost American chapter house (located in Boston) was burned to the ground by unknown means. Some scholars suspected that the founder ordered the place destroyed for the good of blissfully ignorant researchers. Some hoped the fire was destructive vandalism or a sad accident. Yet, most researchers (enlightened and otherwise) agreed that the loss was a warning about (or a reprimand for) getting too close to what "man was not meant to know."

The Arcanum still exists today, stolidly refusing to disband, despite the fear and madness of many members. Arcanists continue to gather and stockpile information in secret, although mounting evidence suggests that the unseen creatures about whom the founder spoke have noticed them. Yet, these scholars cannot give up, because the oldest and most painfully enlightened survivors know something dreadfully important. Even though the founder and his contemporaries have long since died, he spoke of a time when the unseen would rise and wreak untold

havoc on the world. The nature of what horror these monsters will unleash and their reasons for doing so have been lost or forgotten, but the remaining scholars of the Arcanum know one thing:

The founder's predicted time of destruction is now.

STRUCTURE

The hierarchy of the Arcanum is basically the same today as it was in the beginning. An executive committee of aged barristers and retired researchers serves as the joint executor of the founder's estate and manages the enormous trust that he established. This committee oversees all funds that subsidize Arcanum activities and authorizes any official paperwork (such as passports or certifications of diplomatic status) that traveling arcanists may need. Operating out of a central foundation house, this group also collects and stores reports that come from the heads of the national chapter houses. The executives preserve this information at a secure library near London known as the Axis Mundi. The nominal leader of the committee holds the honorary title of grand chancellor. He does not normally render his opinion on Arcanum matters unless his fellow executives are deadlocked. He does, however, suffer the unfortunate burden of trying to arrange and decipher the vast amount of information that comes to the Axis Mundi from across the world. While the Arcanum's grand chancellor is expected to be intimately familiar with the labyrinth of lore that is available at the library — in hopes of making him able to anticipate mankind's unseen enemies — he endangers his sanity more and more every day.

Beneath the executive committee are the chapter houses, each of which is run by an aged arcanist with a long and distinguished record of accomplishments in his field of study. These scholars, known as house presidents or chancellors, coordinate the major activities of the local colonies beneath them, and pass on funding requests to the executive committee. Presidential offices experience a high turnover; these souls are responsible for collating the wide array of reports and predictions from all the arcanists beneath them. Presidents are therefore directly exposed to an array of information that the Arcanum collects (perhaps even the grand chancellor's exposure is less immediately harmful for being less specific in nature). These presidents meet with the grand chancellor once a year in London to assemble their information as best they can before storing copies of their records in the Axis Mundi. The Arcanum currently supports chapter houses in Jerusalem, the British Isles, Europe, the Americas, Africa, the Far East and Australia.

The smallest units of the Arcanum's structure are known simply as colonies. A colony is a smaller version of a chapter house, representing a city, state or an even larger geographical region, depending on how active the Arcanum is in a given area. The head of a colony

coordinates the activities of his investigators, handles their funding requests and organizes their finished reports for collation by the president above him. It is at this level and the chapter-house level that new Arcanum members are recruited, initiated and trained. Scholars and investigators tend to work according to the agendas of their local chapter houses.

Individual arcanists come together in focused groups known as lodges. These groups carry out investigations; the presidents consider research too dangerous to be performed by individuals. Outside their lodges, Arcanum scholars might also belong to crosscutting factions known as colleges. These groups represent the five basic fields of supernatural study that the Arcanum originally formed to investigate.

GOALS

The Arcanum's goals have evolved significantly since its founding in the late 19th century. At first, the society came together merely to feed and satisfy the curiosity of its founder. As the founder learned more about the true nature of the supernatural, he urged his fellows to direct their efforts toward confirming his fearful and increasingly less rational suspicions. Following his revelation and the Boston fire of 1910, the organization used every tool and resource at its disposal to hide its existence. Considering the nature of what arcanists had uncovered and the connections that the founder made before his death in 1914, the scholars thought it best to protect themselves. Yet, at no time did the Arcanum cease its pursuit of occult knowledge.

Today, the act of gathering information has become desperate. Although the details were blurred by the founder's madness (or were as yet undiscovered at that time), he predicted that humanity's unseen enemies planned something sinister after the millennium. No one knows what or exactly when this event will occur, but the most informed and enlightened arcanists cannot in good conscience let it take the world unawares. The search for clues to this event's timing is frantic as scholars look for information that will prove to the unenlightened masses that some terrible danger lurks.

In fact, this sense of desperation has affected the disposition of many young scholars. While "observation," "distance" and "preparation" are the watchwords of most members, some bold researchers have added the word "action" to the mantra. These progressive up-and-comers choose not to wait while their mentors and elders plod, ponder and debate events that may or may not even take place. These "radicals" can't wait for people to *become* ready to accept the occult. They intend to *make* humanity ready to accept it. Once the world understands what danger lurks, these brave scholars hope to take the lead in helping the populace defend itself.

The trouble with achieving these goals, however, lies in taking the first step. The challenge for modern arcanists is finding a way to prove that their assertions

are true in a way that humanity can not only understand, but will even believe. And they must do so before they are driven mad themselves by what they know.

METHODS

Most of the Arcanum's legwork takes place at the colony and chapter-house level, and is carried out by dedicated lodges of cooperating scholars. Librarians and historians pore over local newspaper archives, civil records and folklore collections in search of possible supernatural phenomena. Other investigators pull strings with local police to gain access to criminal confessions, records concerning unsolved mysteries and suspiciously abnormal or anomalous reports. When these investigators discover potential evidence of supernatural activity, they notify field researchers in their lodge. These people gather firsthand information through interviews, personal tours and even electronic surveillance. Lodge members then draw conclusions based on what information is gathered and send their conclusions to the heads of the local chapter house.

Arcanists' methods are neither particularly high tech nor absolutely conclusive, but they are expected to conduct themselves as respectably and scientifically as possible. Although they are sworn to keep the existence of their society secret, many have made a name for themselves working with local police as consultants on cult-related crimes. Some approach the news media as experts on the paranormal. Still others aid desperate psychiatrists trying to treat patients who claim to have paranormal afflictions. A rare few Arcanum scholars even offer to help private citizens who have no other recourse when the supernatural affects their daily lives.

Meanwhile, the insurgent faction of progressive young scholars does its own work under and around that of the more respected, conservative intelligentsia. While the progressives understand the need to keep the existence of the Arcanum secret, they do exactly the opposite with information about the supernatural. They seek to publicize unexplainable phenomena on television shows, special-interest radio programs, in books and via the Internet. The hope is that a broad range of media exposure will take awareness of the supernatural out of the fringes of modern cultural perception and make it part of the mainstream consciousness. Yet, while these progressives are moderately successful in stirring interest in (and awareness of) the supernatural, many arcanists consider their methods risky and likely to attract the wrong sort of attention.

The methods that progressives use can certainly prove critics' concern correct. Whereas many conservatives are content to investigate after the fact and from a distance, progressives stick their heads into the lion's mouth. They seek out current, active hauntings in hopes of gaining hard evidence of what's going on. They study bizarre, unexplained cattle mutilations by venturing into the surrounding woods with only a camera and a flashlight. And, perhaps worst of all, they seek out

supernatural beings directly in hopes of gaining firsthand knowledge of such creatures' origins, capabilities and desires. Surely such activities can only bring supernatural attention directly on the society.

THEMES

The main themes of Arcanum stories are similar to those of **Hunter**. Ideally, Arcanum scholars want to enable the meek (i.e., humanity) to inherit the earth from supernatural enemies. Some arcanists want to see this goal achieved sooner than others. Using the Arcanum in a **Hunter** story can express the idea that knowledge is power. Although most Arcanum scholars are loath to put much of their information to use directly against man's enemies, any hint or clue that they pass on to the imbued can provide hunters with a much-needed advantage against inhuman predators.

The theme that the Arcanum most clearly exemplifies, however, is how dangerous just a little bit of the truth can be. Although Arcanum scholars are better than the average person at uncovering and stirring up supernatural trouble, they have no edges or second sight to protect them once they do. And most monsters despise being spied upon.

MEETING IN DARKNESS

First impressions are instrumental among the imbued, and among the monsters and people they meet. The specific events that take place when hunters and Arcanum scholars meet are up to you and your players to decide, but the following are some possibilities.

FIRST CONTACT

Initial meetings are almost always accidental. Most hunters are either too obsessed with their seemingly assigned imperatives or too stunned by a new and dangerous world to realize that the Arcanum exists, much less to seek out its members. Meanwhile, the appearance of the chosen is too recent a phenomenon for arcanists to have studied it in any detail. Although scholars have long been aware that certain driven (or simply insane) people occasionally seek out and deal with monsters, the means by which the imbued do so as a movement is unknown to them. In fact, those few researchers who uncover clues about hunters' handiwork tend to misinterpret them as the results of witchcraft or bizarre coincidences.

CONTACT WITH HUNTERS

Arcanum scholars can be the first to notice hunters when both investigate the same occurrence. While viewing surveillance footage of a supposedly haunted house, a scholar might notice the same car as its occupants case the place over several nights, or just happen to catch a group of strangers sneaking into or out of the house. Scholars who act as private investigators or as police crime-scene consultants might notice the same onlookers at the sites of potentially supernatural crimes.

These strange observers might even rave about monsters or malign beings to anyone who will listen.

Arcanum scholars who work with (or as) psychiatrists have potential to encounter hunters. A truly unfortunate hunter could be institutionalized because he claims to hear disembodied voices or see monsters. Gossip about such a strange patient might make it back to an attentive psychiatrist, who could interview the patient in hopes that what he says bears some kernel of enlightened truth. While most such stories are the ravings of madmen, arcanists could find that committed hunters are actually quite sane and better informed about the world's nature than any person has any business to be.

Arcanists who make their living as lawyers or legal assistants (most of whom are skilled investigators and researchers in their own right) may come into contact with hunters but not realize it at first. Hunters can be arrested and put on trial for destruction of property, assault and even murder. An arcanist/lawyer might find that much of what a hunter says (which seems either insane or fabricated to mundane authorities) confirms what the society knows about some unexplained phenomenon. Should the scholar choose to believe the hunter, the arcanist could win a valuable resource by conducting further interviews.

CONTACT WITH SCHOLARS

Hunters actually become aware of Arcanum scholars only in rare circumstances. Imbued who believe that forewarned is forearmed in dealing with the supernatural might cross paths with arcanists while conducting investigations. A hunter could look through obscure county records to learn who owns a house suspected to

be a vampire's lair, only to find that someone has recently had access to the same documents. After a few more hours of searching other resources, the character might realize that *every* document he'd hoped would be useful has been referenced or checked out. Perhaps by bribing a civil servant, the hunter could learn who used the material and where that person might be found. The character may suspect that this person is somehow in league with the vampire, but personal contact could prove otherwise.

Some hunters might make contact with Arcanum scholars unwittingly via the Internet. Digging about online through library directories, folklore search engines or genealogical archives can prove fruitful on the hunt, as can corresponding with the people who created such resources. Some creators might be Arcanum scholars who put up a site for use by their peers. An imbued investigator might even assume, based on a site's seemingly *informed* content, that the site manager is one of the chosen. A tentative dialogue might result.

Sometimes, hunters who are particularly perceptive (or paranoid) notice researchers going about their work. If a hunter has escaped from (or caused) a gruesome supernatural event, and secretly returns to the scene of the crime, he might notice a civilian investigator working with the police. This person might appear to look for and recognize details that mundane police do not, such as odd wounds on a body, traces of animal fur or even ambient electricity in the air. Or a hunter might bump into a scholar at a library and not think twice about it until she realizes that she has seen the fellow in the newspaper, expounding on unsolved mysteries or strange events. An adventuresome hunter might even search the woods for members of a cult, only to stumble across a camouflaged blind made by an equally daring scholar — who's not out deer hunting.

COMMON REACTIONS

Hunter and scholar reactions to one another depend greatly upon the circumstances of their first encounter. Although the discovery that other seemingly normal people perceive the supernatural may be somewhat comforting, that relief is short-lived. Having one's fears and speculations confirmed by strangers destroys any refuge of doubt and refutes the comforting speculation that perhaps the problem is limited rather than endemic. The following are the most likely reactions that hunters and scholars could have upon first contact.

FEAR

The truth about the supernatural world is terrifying and maddening, no matter how experienced an observer is. When a scholar or hunter discovers a heretofore-unknown facet of the truth, she is most commonly given to fear. Arcanum researchers don't know what the imbued are capable of, or whether they're even human. Hunters don't know who or what scholars represent. Neither do they have any idea what

STORYTELLER: LYING DOWN WITH LIONS

The event of a scholar discovering a hunter who's been incarcerated in a mental institution or jail provides interesting potential for your chronicle. A researcher can "rescue" a character who's been institutionalized, by interviewing the hunter and pleading his case. This assumes, of course, that such a scholar would actually *want* to let a hunter go after discovering him. It might make more sense for a scholar to keep such a potentially valuable resource within reach, rather than let the character go on his own recognizance. A scholar could interview a hunter at his leisure under the guise of counseling sessions or anger-management treatments, and eliminate the need to confront the supernatural personally. The "patient's" experiences alone could become the means of the scholar's research. He might even use his influence to keep the hunter safely tucked away even if the patient should become eligible for release. Such a course makes the scholar an antagonist, and stories might focus on the hunter's allies trying to free him.

STORYTELLER: PORTRAYING FIRST CONTACT

When a hunter first realizes that a scholar knows more about the supernatural than the average person does, the character might unleash a salvo of "scanning" powers to check out this stranger. Be prepared for this eventuality, but don't feel inclined to be particularly helpful. Second sight indicates nothing unusual or inhuman about the subject, because there's nothing inherently supernatural about a researcher. Edges such as *Illuminate* and *Witness* don't tell a hunter anything about an arcanist. Use of *Discern* is usually equally frustrating, although it is not entirely pointless. If an aged and significantly experienced arcanist has begun to lose his sanity through exposure to the supernatural, *Discern* might reveal evidence of unusual derangement — a tendency to blink unusually, premature white streaks in the scholar's hair, or a subtle nervous tic. Of course, what the observing hunter makes of these observations is up to him.

Because arcanists are for the most part regular people, they suffer the mind-numbing fear and fugue states that occur with exposure to monsters. Perhaps only those researchers with extremely high Willpower ratings or who are quite mad recall such encounters, and even then their memories are traumatic and the details are uncertain. Exposure to hunters' most overt edges in use is also perplexing and incomprehensible to most scholars. Mundane or rational explanations are often concocted to explain the otherwise incomprehensible feats that hunters might perform.

scholars want. Fear is therefore a likely reaction to the discovery of one faction by the other. Over time, this response can give way to one of the others discussed here (or even to nascent trust) as hunters and scholars become familiar with one another, but sometimes fear alone — and the actions inspired by it — are enough to drive hunters and scholars apart permanently.

SUSPICION

The most common and lasting reaction that hunters and scholars can have is suspicion. Are hunters agents of the supernatural sent to dispose of enemy creatures? Is hunters' appearance some grand red herring devised by cagey beings that realize they're being watched? As it's too soon to tell, scholars of the Arcanum should proceed warily.

Hunters should be even more suspicious of arcanists. To hunters' very limited experience, other people can't comprehend bizarre creatures and events. Everyday folks rationalize even the most unnatural occurrences to suit their safe worldviews, *but scholars do not*. Indeed, researchers might seem to go out of their way to come up with supernatural explanations for unusual events. Be-

cause many hunters seem to prefer their former ignorance over their new insight, scholars' embrace of the supernatural might make hunters uneasy. What's worse is that scholars can turn this same discomfiting curiosity on hunters themselves. Does scholars' attention to the imbued make hunters inhuman? Will researchers turn against the chosen as they could against monsters?

Or, hunters' discovery of the Arcanum as a whole — should that *ever* occur — might inspire suspicion of cult activity, dark secrets and perhaps arcanist servitude to monsters.

CURIOSITY

A potentially hopeful reaction that hunters and scholars could have in common is curiosity. Hunters want to know how Arcanum scholars got involved in researching the supernatural and what they've managed to find out. Scholars would love to find out what hunters' edges are, how they work and how such seemingly unenlightened people came to possess such capabilities. This reaction would probably come with a healthy dose of suspicion and can lead to relief or fear, depending on what conclusions hunter and scholar curiosity draws out.

RELIEF

Those trusting (or merely worn-down) souls who have pursued the supernatural on their own might actually greet evidence that they are not alone with joy and relief. Knowing that some other individual or group also believes in what they do is tacit confirmation that they aren't mad or woefully misguided. There might be someone to turn to for assistance or comfort. This relief can renew an individual's faith in what he does, but it may also fade into either grim fear of what is now confirmed, or into weary resignation that the masses still don't believe.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The sentiments that hunters and researchers take from first contact depend largely on the circumstances and the personalities of the parties involved, but certain patterns are predictable. The most likely reaction is mutual distrust. Each is new to the other, and neither side knows what to make of the other. Although the chosen and scholars could prove to be worthwhile and indispensable allies, the theories that each could come up with about the origin and goals of the other make the likelihood of that occurring a dubious proposition at best.

After an arcanist first notices a hunter or group of them, the scholar's first impression is likely to be disdain or resigned fatalism. Carefully kept records show that a few people throughout history have tried to turn on supernatural predators — specifically clumsy or foolish mortals who have revealed their own existence — and these people take the fight to their enemies. Those same records make it clear that even the most fanatical and successful of these rebels were sorely outmatched and inevitably doomed. The fanatics usually don't want to

be patient or try to help humanity as a whole discover the supernatural, as the Arcanum does. These people simply want to indulge their rage and death wish. Arcanists have therefore made a practice of writing off such suicidal individuals, rather than give them information or assistance that might allow monsters to uncover the society's activities.

A patient arcanist who watches the imbued in action could overcome that academic prejudice, but even she is still prone to forming the wrong impression. Arcanists could easily overlook clues that show a hunter's second sight in use. They may also fail to notice when a hunter's subtle edges are activated (such as when a hunter follows Trail). Or researchers might simply not comprehend what they see at all (they could mistake use of Demand for the effects of an adrenaline surge, for example). If a scholar should witness a particularly showy edge such as Ravage in use, he probably rationalizes the event so that it conforms to his mundane comprehension. Those few scholars who have the capacity to realize that the imbued perform unusual phenomena could assume a hunter is an uncataloged wizard or miracle-worker of some kind.

Most scholars simply can't get their minds around the emergence of the imbued. Nothing matching modern hunters' description has ever been reported by the society. Not even those scholars who work up the nerve to corner and speak to the imbued would find proof supporting any claims of hearing voices or receiving hidden messages. Scholars could believe hunters who claim not to understand their new awareness but would probably attribute this confusion to hysteria and a lack of formal training in any sort of mystical technique.

The potential exists, however, for an even more disturbing theory to arise among arcanists. The emergence of the imbued could seem like a new phenomenon, but not a benign one or a cause for hope. The imperatives that seemingly drive these people, some scholars may claim, are actually generated by the supernatural. It could be theorized that different factions are at war and that some people have become weapons in the conflict. It may also seem that the adversary culls the undesirable from its own number by allowing some people to perceive and respond to these weaklings, making any remaining monsters more dangerous and powerful overall. Under these circumstances, arcanists could perceive the imbued to be as great a threat — albeit unwitting — as creatures themselves.

ALLIES OF CONVENIENCE

Once hunters and scholars meet, it's likely that the researchers do the work to maintain contact. Hunters are often relieved to make it through another night. Getting to the bottom of some investigative stranger's agenda, or figuring out who he works for takes a back seat to surviving, protecting family and maintaining some sem-

blance of a life. Add to that the fact that tracking down an arcanist who doesn't want to be found is beyond the means of most imbued, and the brunt of pursuing any hunter-scholar relationship belongs to the scholar.

STUDYING HUNTERS

If an arcanist encounters one of the imbued engaged in the hunt, the first step is to contact colleagues in his colony, lodge or chapter house for assistance. He might consult experts in the field of paranormal human ability to see if the hunter in question is already a subject of study. If such is the case, the scholar might contact fellows who first discovered the hunter, pool their past and present resources and proceed from there. If the hunter is unknown, the scholar who discovers him probably consults others and discusses the authenticity of any alleged supernatural abilities. Most of this consultation could take place within a single, well-balanced lodge, but arcanists are not hesitant to trade information among lodges as circumstances warrant.

Once a team of researchers suspects that a hunter displays what it construes as paranormal abilities, it might establish surveillance (which can also occur in more mundane situations if a scholar is particularly suspicious or paranoid). Such investigation tends to resemble the activities of a Victorian-era Scotland Yard more so than those of high-tech operatives out of Langley, Virginia. The surveillance is effective nonetheless. It involves passerby inspections, spying through binoculars, subtly interviewing witnesses and following the subject on foot or by car. Progressive arcanists have learned to use such tools as portable video cameras, long-range still photography equipment, hidden tape recorders, computers (for background checks) and telephone wiretaps. A scholar must not only know how to use this gear, however, but also have access to it personally, or she must convince presidents in charge to approve funding for it.

Assuming a hunter doesn't realize he's being watched (which is dangerously unlikely considering how close archaic surveillance methods require scholars to get), surveillance lasts "as long as it must." Typically, a scholar keeps at it until she has some idea of the hunter's goals, methods and basic personality. The more insightful a researcher is and the more access she has to her subject, the less lengthy an observation period need be.

WORKING WITH HUNTERS

After an observation period, a scholar determines whether a hunter would make a worthwhile ally or contact. He asks himself a series of questions and uses his research to approximate answers. The primary question is "What does this person seem to know?" If the hunter is some college dropout whose entire occult repertoire appears to comprise common legends about vampires, a scholar isn't likely to consider her very useful. But if that college dropout is seen spreading gasoline at a vampire's nest....

Another important question is "What might this person expect of me?" If the hunter could demand to be paid for divulging any information, the arcanist must decide whether the price is worthwhile. An insightful researcher is willing to trade information; what his society knows about monsters in return for a hunter's firsthand experience with the supernatural. Such an exchange can come at a price, though. A hunter can take what he learns — perhaps that spirits seem bound to the world through beloved objects — and use the information to destroy otherworldly beings. Scholarship is not rewarded when an object of study is destroyed. Careful researchers can therefore try to withhold information that might jeopardize investigations into specific creatures, but still get to know more about the imbued.

The final question arcanists tend to ask themselves before forging a relationship with hunters is "What's the payoff?" It's hardly worth a scholar's time to track down a hunter, stroke his ego, put him at ease, win his trust and open a give-and-take exchange if the person is likely to attack the first zombie mob he encounters. The researcher needs to know that his time and effort will have long-term benefits, or at least offer some ongoing reward. It just isn't prudent to work with someone who's likely to get himself killed. And then there's the danger that a reckless hunter might draw attention to the arcanist or the Arcanum. A hunter has to earn a scholar's respect before any kind of meaningful exchange is likely to take place.

APPROACHING HUNTERS

Once a scholar decides to initiate a dialogue, he must take a number of factors into account. The first is whether to make his approach alone or with the support of other lodge members. Going it alone can be preferable if approaching a single hunter or two. Allowing oneself to be outnumbered engenders a certain amount of trust and sets one's subjects more at ease, especially if those people don't anticipate the meeting. Standing alone also allows a scholar to project a certain air of confidence and to direct a group's focus solely upon himself.

Sometimes, however, a scholar needs backup. Addressing a potential contact en masse makes a lodge seem to represent something greater than its members and keeps the imbued from focusing on any individual. Showing up in force can also intimidate an unsuspecting hunter, at least long enough to allow a scholar to make introductions and to get to the point of the matter. And in a more practical sense, having lodge members along can overcome obstacles such as language barriers, and can provide security.

Next, a scholar must figure out *how* to approach a hunter. She might arrange a meeting by phone or email. She might slip a note under the windshield wiper of the hunter's car. She could take out an ad in a local paper that she knows the hunter reads. It's even possible that a scholar could recognize the trend of the hunter code and draw (what he thinks are) appropriate symbols

around town in hopes of making contact with the imbued. Of course, the chosen intuitively recognize that such signs aren't authentic, which might give them the impression that a monster has caught onto their "language." Should they reach such a conclusion, hunters may go in search of whoever is counterfeiting the symbols before news of the code spreads or unsuspecting imbued are duped. A scholar might make contact all right, but not on the terms he might have hoped.

Whereas some arcanists prefer furtive methods of introduction, others approach hunters directly once the decision is reached to make prolonged contact. Researchers consider monster-hunters a paranoid bunch and realize that spooky, clandestine means of getting their attention are more likely to cause panic than to facilitate communication. The less forthright a scholar is in getting a hunter's attention, the less likely she is to win that person's trust. Thus, whether an Arcanum member introduces herself by pulling her car alongside a hunter who flees a burning haunted house and yells "Get in," or she introduces herself with a simple knock on the hunter's door, the scholar does so in person.

HUNTERS APPROACHING SCHOLARS

Although it rarely happens, it's possible that one of the imbued could detect and confront a scholar before the arcanist is prepared. A research-minded hunter might realize that another person is looking into the same matter or materials, and so decide to approach this fellow investigator. Or hunters could unwittingly address arcanists via the Internet in search of information.

Arcanum tradition requires that scholars who are contacted by seemingly unenlightened people treat those people with respect but confirm nothing that could prove sensitive to the Arcanum. Researchers then direct people to the most convenient sources of publicly available material (i.e., mundane and undoubtedly erroneous). If someone is persistent or seems to have genuine information about paranormal phenomena, the scholar might arrange an interview. If that meeting proves rewarding, the arcanist proceeds as if he had initiated contact himself and evaluates the subject for her potential value to the society.

Of course, if a scholar first meets a hunter when the imbued sits up in the back seat of the scholar's car, wields a gun and demands to know why she's being followed, protocol is neither particularly useful nor applicable. In such dangerous situations, scholars probably do what experienced arcanists have told them to when confronted by a monster: Give away as much generic information as necessary to appease the being and look for the first opportunity to escape. Some young scholars are told to protect the secrecy of the Arcanum at all costs (even under threat of torture or death), but scholars aren't US Marines. Regardless of the importance of their research or the value of their secrets, most arcanists value their own lives first. A truly "dedicated" hunter can use this fact to her advantage, but doing so

pretty much eliminates the possibility of healthy relations with the Arcanum. And, of course, a scholar can always call the police or act in self-defense if a hunter stages a violent introduction.

BREAKING CONTACT

Sooner or later, a hunter or scholar may want to break off contact for any of a number of reasons. The arcanist might realize that the hunter is attacking creatures that the society is studying. A scholar might grow increasingly uneasy gazing into a hunter's thousand-yard stare, or listening to his tales of violence and terror. Or a hunter might be injured or get into trouble with the law, which inspires the scholar to cut him off rather than maintain a trail to the Arcanum. In some cases, the president of a chapter house might disapprove of a researcher's contact with a "dangerous paranormal sociopath" and order a break. Although an idealistic scholar might resist or even decry such an order (at the risk of her reputation or standing within the Arcanum), few are so bold.

Likewise, a hunter might decide to break off contact. He might grow frustrated that his ally constantly holds back something. He might become disgusted by the scholar's seeming cowardice or unwillingness to act against the adversary. Or a scholar — especially one with a long history in the Arcanum — might eventually prove unstable or insane. Indeed, a truly noble or naïve hunter might want to protect a contact from further exposure to the supernatural, thus defying the scholar's will and creating a potentially adversarial relationship.

Regardless of their reasons, scholars and hunters must face any consequences of breaking contact. Both lose valuable information that the other possesses. Neither can be sure what kernel of unexpected truth or tactical edge the other might have provided. And unexpected repercussions can also arise. Hunters probably underestimate how well word spreads within the Arcanum. The college that studies paranormally empowered humans keeps records. The imbued fall into that category. If a hunter shuns a scholar and breaks contact, that "specimen" acquires a reputation. Any future efforts to deal with the society are probably rebuked (unless the imbued has something truly enticing to offer). If contact was severed because the hunter proved a dangerous liability, daring arcanists might take drastic steps. They could go so far as to interfere in the hunter's pursuit of the enemy by turning him in to the police, leaking misleading information to him or even warning a monster about the hunter's aims in exchange for firsthand information about the supernatural.

IMBUED SCHOLARS

If your troupe members own a library of White Wolf sourcebooks, a player might want to create an Arcanum scholar who has been imbued. Such a request makes sense from a certain perspective. Researchers publish or

perish in the field of paranormal investigation and occult research. An arcanist is exposed to supernatural occurrences (or at least their aftereffects) on a regular basis. A scholar even has access to libraries all over the world that are devoted to nothing but studies of the occult. Who better to attract the notice of the Messengers and be able to take the imbuing in stride?

You can go that route, but be forewarned that it isn't entirely appropriate to **Hunter's** theme. It's true that the Messengers imbue people who are best suited to fulfill the imperatives of the calling, but Arcanum scholars are not generally cut from the right cloth. Most scholars are fairly good at observing, pontificating and theorizing about the nature of the supernatural, but they're not normally the types to stand up and take instinctive action, which is what the Messengers seek. Even the most introspective Visionary was inspired to do something during his first exposure to the supernatural. What's more, Arcanum scholars hardly ever witness otherworldly phenomena firsthand, which insulates them from most of the horror that the imbued must face every day. This insulation allows arcanists to harbor doubt about (and distance from) the paranormal, even when it surrounds them. The Messengers may be aware that removing such insulation is more likely to plunge a scholar fully into madness and fearful seclusion than it is to motivate him into taking action.

And yet, using imbued scholars in a chronicle is not strictly forbidden, so the following is intended to give you an idea of how to go about it.

LIKELY CANDIDATES

It's a rare Arcanum scholar who has a chance to be imbued. First, let it be stated that no scholar or associate scholar with any sort of pre-existing occult ability or connection (from telekinesis to clairvoyance to having an uncle who was a werewolf) becomes imbued. The Messengers simply do not call upon humans who are already empowered. Second, scholars who are particularly longstanding, conservative members of the Arcanum or who are knowledgeable lore-keepers are unlikely to be chosen. The better trained a scholar is, the more preconceived notions he has and the less likely he is to take whatever actions the Messengers might require of him.

Taking those two points into consideration, the Arcanum scholars most likely to be chosen have the least training, the least experience, the least knowledge about the Arcanum as a whole, and the fewest notions about the true nature of the supernatural world. That type of ingenu scholar isn't much different from your average Master's candidate in the English department of a state college, all things considered. Such a novice researcher is best able to react instinctively when the Heralds call, which is what they want.

Should you decide to carry on, proceed with character creation as you would for any other **Hunter** character as far as Traits and Backgrounds are concerned. Being a

probationary member of the Arcanum doesn't grant any real benefits to a starting character, but read the following section for the range of consequences that a young scholar is likely to face after being imbued.

Remember that circumstances and your character's personality should dictate creed, rather than the simple fact of his tenuous affiliation with a secret organization. And yet, the Visionary, Innocent and Hermit creeds are the most thematically appropriate choices, and the ones likeliest to suit the mindset common to arcanists.

LIKELY CONSEQUENCES

Contrary to what you might think, an arcanist who's imbued is not on the fast track to stardom within his society. Just as the Messengers prefer people who take quick, decisive action, the leaders of the Arcanum value the opposite ethic. Most Arcanum scholars confuse forthright action with headstrong temerity, and they don't respect colleagues who act first and ask questions later. Arcanum leaders (from the executive committee down to the heads of individual colonies) uphold a vague ideal that humanity must be protected and preserved, but their plan for doing so is an unfinished, evolving aspiration. They intend to wait and gather information and wait some more until humanity is ready to hear what they have to say. Until that day (which the Arcanum refuses to specify), taking action against the supernatural is strictly *verboden*. When a scholar defies that rule, such as a young imbued scholar would probably be driven to do, he draws the attention of monsters and upsets the society's (unrealized) timetable. He endangers not only himself but also his fellow scholars, and potentially all of humanity.

An imbued scholar who plays it cool and uses his edges and second sight only to aid his research isn't guaranteed a long career in the Arcanum, either. If he saves restless spirits or lays the walking dead to rest, he effectively destroys any evidence to back up whatever claims he makes in his reports about the creatures' behavior. A respected longtime scholar can present an unsubstantiated claim to the president of a chapter house and watch it become one more accepted "fact" stored at the Axis Mundi. Imbued young scholars, however, lack the credibility, the reputation or the political clout to convince any of their peers that they do anything more than fabricate thrilling terror fictions. And even if he's proved to be telling the truth and has some supporting evidence, that imbued scholar eventually comes face to face with the fact that most of what the Arcanum thinks it knows about the supernatural is a misinterpretation, a distortion or a wild inaccuracy. Anything that an imbued scholar would want to share with his fellows (i.e., the truth) would fly in the face of more than a century of established wrongheadedness. And the Arcanum won't have any of that.

The result of friction between a hunter's experiences and the expectations of his superiors is a dim future. His peers don't respect him, don't believe him or

simply don't condone what he's compelled to do by the imbuing and his daily experiences. He never advances in rank, and he's never given access to the most valuable and well-guarded resources in the Arcanum's care. In the worst-case scenario, fellow members fear that he's been driven mad. They might even try to have him committed to an Arcanum-sponsored asylum — for his best interests, of course — where he might nevertheless be easy prey to any supernatural enemies. Most imbued hunters are likely to leave (or be asked to leave) the Arcanum on their own, but it's possible that a few tortured souls have already been institutionalized.

BYSTANDER SCHOLARS

Even though imbued arcanists are rare unto nonexistence (and their careers are doomed), the idea of scholars who are bystanders is not nearly so farfetched. Whereas most scholars are subject to the same unreasoning fear and subsequent rationalization that affects any person exposed to the supernatural, some arcanists remember all too well the terrible things they see. Despite bearing unfiltered witness to the truth, they might not have the courage or opportunity to act in a time of crisis. A scholar might watch impotently through a telephoto lens while a vampire feeds from a sleeping victim, even as disembodied voices urge him to act. Another might run away rather than investigate when the "echo" in a haunted house makes spontaneous statements. A bystander-scholar might never perceive the truth with the same clarity again, but he always remembers what he saw and what it meant, which could fuel the scholarly drive for as many years as his sanity holds up.

For more information on the rules for playing a bystander, see the **Hunter Players Guide**, pp. 25-75.

STORYTELLER INFORMATION

The remainder of this chapter is intended for the Storyteller's eyes only. If you're a player, your Storyteller doesn't want you to see this stuff; your character shouldn't know it, so you empathize better with him if you don't know it. If, however, your character is an imbued Arcanum scholar, read on so long as your Storyteller gives you the go-ahead.

WHAT SCHOLARS KNOW

The Arcanum has amassed a staggering amount of information about the truth of the supernatural world and the plans of the adversary. The trouble lies not in collecting such information but in putting it together the right way, which the Arcanum has failed to do. Scraps and bits of information about the hunt might be scattered throughout countless scholars' reports on a variety of disparate subjects, none of which seem to be related in any tangible way. The following text shows the ways in which Arcanum scholars might interpret some of the most important aspects of the hunt, based upon what they learn from your players' characters.

THE IMBUING

Claims of divine inspiration have issued from the mouths of prophets and madmen since the beginning of recorded history. Imbued explanations for how they came to be empowered seem no different. No study of the worldwide phenomenon has been performed by any Arcanum scholar. Arcanum investigations into wizards and sorcerers suggest that such beings come into their abilities after traumatic events or in sudden epiphanies, so the report of an imbued hunter's experiences doesn't sound new. Arcanum scholars are more likely to believe that one of the imbued simply misunderstands what has happened to him, rather than accept the fact that a new type of supernatural being has emerged.

ABILITIES AND EDGES

Arcanum scholars probably lump hunters' edges, second sight and other strange capacities into the catch-all category of paranormal human abilities (should they discover such faculties at all). The chosen are mistakenly associated with professed psychics, sorcerers and seers. It's therefore possible that Arcanum scholars have already documented cases of any given edge. Because these abilities range from the miraculous to the terrifying to the undetectable, however, with no recognizable pattern or sense of progression, scholars have not associated them specifically with any pursuit of supernaturals or with stories of the imbuing. What is common to every Arcanum report on hunters' edges is the fact that neither the reporting scholar nor the user seems to understand how the powers work or exactly where the capacity for them comes from.

HUNTER CODE

One aspect of the hunt that Arcanum scholars may have noticed and could categorize as a modern phenomenon is the appearance of hunter code. Although they do not recognize it for what it actually is, they ultimately begin to recognize it as a tool of communication, even though its symbols baffle their most skilled linguists. An innovative lodge of code-breakers might eventually compare a random sample of code symbols (mixed inextricably with gang tags and meaningless graffiti) to other forms of visual communication, from Sanskrit to cuneiform to Viking runes to crop circles. This comprehensive study would gain the scholars nothing, however. All it would truly do is terrify them, as what they would definitely notice is a trend for these strange markings to appear on or around sites of supernatural activity. This tenuous evidence might lead some arcanists to conclude that the symbols are a means of contact used by monsters.

The fact that some empowered humans (namely, the imbued) seem able to comprehend this code — should Arcanum scholars ever manage to make the connection — could confirm a theory that such people are themselves agents of the otherworldly. The researchers who perform this study might not be able to determine whether other creatures can comprehend

this code, but they're sure to recognize that no seeming enlightened or mundane person can make sense of it.

HUNTER-NET

Whether by chance, oversight or divine providence, no Arcanum scholar has yet found hunter-net. Hunters who correspond with scholars via regular mail or email are unlikely to take the chance of revealing the secret site to arcanists or to other normal people. Doing so would jeopardize individual imbued and the hunt as a whole. Even mundane searches for hunter "activity" online return error messages or connect Arcanum scholars to harmless discussion forums concerned with stalking deer or buying outdoor equipment. Most scholars who search in vain for evidence of monster-hunter presence on the Internet eventually give up in frustration. Even if a hunter did provide a nonimbued scholar with a direct link to hunter-net, that scholar might be unable to access the site on his own.

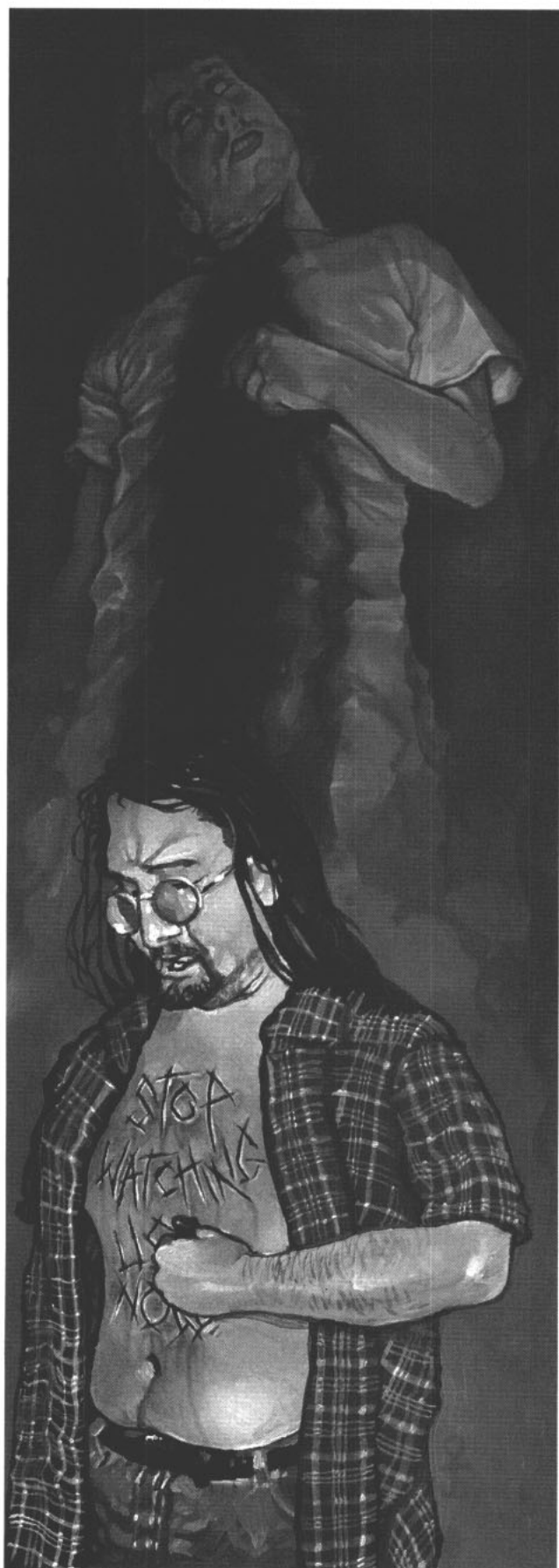
KNOWLEDGE OF MONSTERS

As a society dedicated to the study of supernatural phenomena, the Arcanum has enjoyed varying degrees of success. On one hand, its researchers have investigated many allegedly otherworldly occurrences and modern legends. They've learned that, even though the majority of such allegations are hoaxes or misinterpretations of scientific realities, a portion are genuinely supernatural. And yet, mundane humans — including arcanists — are unable to comprehend fully the complex reality of the supernatural. So what the Arcanum thinks it knows isn't always entirely accurate.

What's more, the founder and the most enlightened minds of the Arcanum conclude that each aspect of the supernatural is united in some malign conspiracy against humanity. Many elder scholars have devoted their careers to (and endangered their sanity by) trying to puzzle together the means by which these elements are connected, as the founder once claimed to have done. Although the specific nature of that connection has never been proved, the prevailing theories about it are listed here along with the "facts" in which the Arcanum has the most confidence. Hints to these connections or theories might be leaked to hunters, whether to the benefit or detriment of the imbued when these ideas are actually pursued.

GHOSTS

Ghosts are the invisible spirits of the dead that devour human thoughts for sustenance. They are able to make themselves visible briefly, exert a range of telekinetic force over physical objects and take partial or total control over living human bodies for finite periods. Many Arcanum reports claim that the better known a ghost's legend is or the more intense an emotional reaction such a legend engenders, the more powerful the spirit is. The fact that most people can't remember interactions with ghosts properly (if at all), especially in cases of direct manifestation or possession,



is considered evidence that ghosts devour thoughts. The personal experience of brave or foolhardy scholars confirms this evidence as well, for scholars are just as susceptible to as are the masses. Arcanists also realize that stories about hauntings and ghost sightings become increasingly prevalent in modern folklore, although they have not determined why this is. They do not conceive of a separate Plutonian underworld in which ghosts gather before returning to torment the living.

The going theory about ghosts is that they exist as a tool of psychological warfare on humanity, wielded by agents of the adversary. Ghosts terrorize and distract, wearing down a person's sanity (and overall will to resist the adversary). It's believed that the world's recent upsurge in spectral activity is a single squall before a coming storm.

OTHER SPIRITS

Apart from ghosts, the Arcanum is aware of the existence of other types of spirits. These entities are not so much independent beings as they are conjured manifestations of certain concepts, which can be harnessed by students of the occult who know the proper incantations and invocations. These manifestations display a range of intelligence from that required for dronelike rote behavior to the ability to follow simple commands to a sinister cunning that shares the unpredictability of sentient, evil beings. Although it's unclear whether these spirits exist prior to being invoked or whether they're created by an occult student's will, the Arcanum's Axis Mundi contains many volumes devoted to the study and control of them.

According to old Arcanum records, such spirits have manifested as disembodied voices that whisper secrets, and as invisible entities that can exert unexpectedly strong forces on physical objects. More powerful spirits can look like child-sized translucent beings that resemble no creature in nature, or even as seemingly solid human-shaped entities with obsidian skin and fire in their eyes.

THE UNDEAD

Arcanists find it difficult to comprehend the undead, but do acknowledge the presence of walking corpses. They have encountered a variety of undead creatures, from mindless, pitiful wretches that are more bone than skin, to sleek and beautiful princes among men who have existed for centuries without revealing their true nature to anyone.

The latter creatures are predatory and possessed of a terrible cunning that's been honed over lifetimes. These monsters are responsible for stories of vampires and similar creatures, which appear in every culture all over the world, and most arcanists think of the beings by that name. The creatures thrive on the blood or flesh of the living, and direct sunlight harms them (whether it burns them, makes them rot or marks them with permanent deformities). "Vampires" act primarily at night, gathering prey and blending in among the unsuspecting masses. The origin of these entities is unknown, but their capabilities have been documented in several

harrowing reports by scholars who were lucky to survive. The creatures demonstrate superior strength and speed, as well as a near immunity to physical harm, all of which presumably makes them better hunters. They fear fire and, in some cases, symbols of established monotheistic religions (iconography devoted to polytheistic religions seems to have no effect on them). Some vampires possess the power to command and hypnotize humans, and others possess the uncanny ability to hide in plain sight. If this type of creature possesses other supernatural gifts, the Arcanum has found no evidence of them.

Some undead creatures are less subtle than these predators. They're simply impossible to miss. Their origins, however, are easier to guess. These undead are the result of malign ghosts' attempts to possess their former bodies rather than those of living beings. This breed of undead is unusually strong and durable, but not particularly fast or smart. Fire destroys them in relative short order, but significant amounts of physical damage (such as hacking them apart with a fire ax) most likely suffices as well. Extant Arcanum records neither confirm nor refute this last assertion.

The going theory about the undead is twofold. The lesser kind (those created when a ghost possesses its corpse) exist for the same purpose as intangible ghosts do, and it seems that their recent upsurge in "population" is connected to that of intangible ghosts. It has been theorized, however, that the superior undead (vampires) have been created to rule the Earth once the adversary's plans for humanity have been carried out. The fact that some undead appear to have achieved positions of power and influence among humanity supports this theory. It is unclear whether the superior undead are the entirety of the adversary or they are its chief agents. But it is clear to the Arcanum that these beings have become particularly active since the turn of the millennium.

SHAPECHANGERS

Arcanum scholars are aware of the existence of shapechangers, but have very little solid information about them. This distressing ignorance is more a result of the apparent danger of studying shapechangers than an unwillingness to investigate them. The Arcanum knows that some monsters are bizarre hybrids of man and predatory animal that bear nothing but violent hatred for "pure" specimens of their component breeds. Each beast has an animal form and a human form, each of which it assumes to blend in with the appropriate group. When it can no longer contain its hatred, the shapechanger assumes its true form (a hulking, feral admixture of both breeds) and unleashes a whirlwind of savage violence. The origin of this unreasoning hatred is unknown, as is whether such loathing can be cured or abated.

Shapechangers can communicate with both humans and animals in their respective stalking forms, but communication seems beyond their grasp in "killing form." They sometimes operate in discrete social units

if the animal that they resemble does so. It is unknown whether they breed among themselves or must mate with members of their hated prey. It is also unknown whether different types of shapechangers (such as those who resemble wolves in European folklore or those who reportedly resemble tigers in India) could or would be able to interbreed with one another.

There is no agreed-upon theory about shapechangers. If the adversary prepares for the destruction or subjugation of the human race, it's possible that shapechangers were designed as shock troops. And yet, shapechangers appear to shun ghosts and the undead, and seem unwilling to cooperate with shapechangers of different breeds. One theory proposes that shapechangers represent a different kind of enemy than ghosts or the undead, or an internal division in a singular foe. The latter is the theory most commonly accepted among scholars who have encountered shapechangers, because the type of unreasoning terror that overcomes these arcanists in such circumstances is no different from that which grips individuals who face ghosts or the undead.

PARANORMAL HUMANS

The Arcanum has long been aware that some humans are created more equal than others. Many reports address humans who are capable of clairvoyance, telekinesis, astral projection, oracular abilities, aura perception and the ability to see and communicate with ghosts. The Arcanum is also aware of wizards and intuitive magicians who seem able to perform miracles by engaging in bizarre ritual practices. This type of empowerment (known alternately as magic, faith, inspiration or ascended consciousness) occurs in all human cultures, as far as the Arcanum has been able to ascertain.

What the Arcanum is more interested in, however, is where this paranormal empowerment comes from. Once, these capabilities were believed to be an evolutionary advancement that arose from humanity's instinctive recognition of the danger posed by the adversary. Working under this assumption, the Arcanum determined to recruit as many people as it could who demonstrated such abilities.

The prevailing theory today is that such gifts come from the adversary, whether directly (as gifts meant to tempt and corrupt) or indirectly (like the bizarre result of radiation exposure or projected insanity). This latter theory came about after many of the Arcanum's "empowered" scholars began to go mad and raved that a hideous red eye watched them from the night sky. This shared hysteria prompted the executive committee to institute a program of culling these agents from the Arcanum's ranks. Some progressive scholars still work with such people on rare occasions (potentially including any imbued who gain their trust and respect), but these arcanists do so without the blessing of the executive committee. To be caught engaging in such illicit (and ill-advised) cooperation can be grounds for dismissal from the society.

USING HUNTERS

Arcanum scholars could conceivably perceive hunters as a yet-to-be-classified type of paranormally empowered human—and as a valuable resource. Arcanists could realize that such people are immune to the madness and numbing horror that comes with confronting the adversary—or better able to resist it. Although conservative scholars are not yet willing to admit that the time to take final action against the adversary has come, they grudgingly admit that proper action cannot be taken without the best and most accurate information possible. If some strange, empowered humans such as the imbued are drawn to the supernatural and can remain unaffected by direct exposure, who better to gather accurate and current information?

If a young scholar gets his way, he might arrange to use any imbued contacts as scouts or investigators. He could counsel them to spy upon a supernatural entity, gather as much information about it as possible and then report back so that the researcher can compile it all. The arcanist might warn hunters to avoid direct contact with an entity, and to use their paranormal abilities (if he is aware of them) only to remain hidden or to escape in an emergency. After all, intrusion upon the subject would change its environment and influence its normal behavior. But such scholars would probably make such demands with no concept of how dangerous a situation is. Others might know full well what they're getting hunters into, but have no regard for the imbued—as long as they get the information they want.

RANKS

The following titles represent the various ranks that scholars can hold in the Arcanum. A scholar's rank not only denotes how enlightened he is in relation to his fellows but also indicates to what extent the society's resources are available to him.

ASSOCIATE

Associate members—also known as “friends of the Arcanum”—scholars who know of the society's existence but who have not been exposed to the supernatural or who have no wish to become full members. They are often independent researchers or contacts outside the organization. They are bound to keep its secrets but are not accountable to any of its other regulations. An associate typically has contact with only one lodge or one colony, and is not granted access to any of the Arcanum's private resources. A recognized member of the Arcanum is allowed to share information with an associate up to his own level of access, but she must clear the release with the president of the local chapter house and provide a full account of it for review.

Those imbued who gain the trust of Arcanum scholars and who prove valuable to the organization might achieve associate rank, but they are never allowed to rise higher. The same is now true for anyone else known to be an empowered human.

NEOPHYTE

A neophyte is a prospective journeyman. Regardless of his exposure to the supernatural, he believes so strongly in it that he wants to know everything about it that the Arcanum has to offer. After passing written and oral exams and then undergoing a background check, a neophyte is assigned to a lodge of scholars with whom he begins a long period of study and training. During this time, he learns the procedures and protocols by which the society functions. He also takes many arcane oaths, he pledges to protect the secrecy of the Arcanum, and he agrees to do everything in his power to make humanity ready to face the adversary when the time is right. Once he does all these things, the neophyte is allowed access to the resources and materials of his lodge's chapter house. He is not allowed to speak to anyone in that chapter house, however, except the members of the lodge to which he's assigned—and then, only when they address him directly.

Hunters are unlikely to have much contact with neophyte scholars. Such researchers usually don't have the experience or skills to recognize hunters' handiwork.

JOURNEYMAN

The majority of Arcanum scholars have achieved journeyman rank. All at this level have had at least some exposure to the supernatural and have published at least one paper within their college. Journeymen can read any material in their chapter house's library and can request to have references transferred from any other house in the world. They can make requests for copies of information stored at the Axis Mundi but cannot enter that library personally. A journeyman is also informed of the adversary's perceived agenda (as it's currently understood) for the world.

It is also at this level that scholars are mostly likely to encounter hunters. Having been exposed to supernatural phenomena, such arcanists are sometimes capable of telling true phenomena from hoaxes or misunderstood natural occurrences, which gives them a chance to be in the same place at the same time as hunters.

ELDER BROTHER

Elder brothers are considered the most enlightened scholars in the Arcanum. Not only have they been exposed to the supernatural, they've had direct contact with agents of the adversary and have survived. Such scholars are recognized as elder brothers by the executive committee and are accorded full rights and privileges. They may visit the Axis Mundi and view any book therein. They have free access to any resources stored at any Arcanum chapter house in the world. They must submit themselves to monthly psychiatric evaluations, however, and must visit the foundation house outside London once a year for a series of bizarre cleansing rituals. Designed to purge the taint of the adversary, these procedures include long periods of deep meditation in incense-choked chambers, baths in alternately scalding and freezing water, the recitation of prayers that were first

THE UNDAUNTED SCHOLAR

Doctor Elliot Wellings had gained a degree of notoriety in the New England medical community for his work in the field of abnormal psychology. What kept his research from gaining acclaim was its focus. He was fascinated with theistic hysteria — the notion of psychological aberration resulting from demonic or divine possession.

Wellings' studies did catch the attention of the Arcanum, though. The scholars made him one of their own and encouraged his work when no one else took it seriously. Wellings was glad for the society's patronage, even though his sponsors demanded intrusive oversight of all his studies and kept file copies of all of his records and notes. They made it possible for him to interview dozens of so-called possession victims, and he developed many theories about how to treat afflicted people.

And yet, Wellings never believed in the phenomenon as anything more than a psychological malady — until one night in late August. He doesn't remember all of the events that took place, but the experience shook him profoundly. A subject he interviewed was in a trance and began to speak in tongues. Fascinated, Wellings asked the man questions about what he experienced. The questions only angered the patient and drove him into some sort of seizure. All Wellings can say is that whatever happened next was not normal or natural, even for a patient undergoing a deeply psychotic episode. Wellings' only subsequent memory is of driving home with a burst blood vessel in his eye and a shard of glass stuck in his palm.

In spite of his fear, Wellings still wanted to find and treat the patient somehow, but the Arcanum warned against it. They claimed he was still ignorant of what he was dealing with. It was more important, they said, to study other patients and gain perspective on the overall phenomenon of spiritual possession, rather than to waste time and resources to cure an individual. After several rounds of arguments, Wellings grudgingly submitted to his superiors' demands, but only upon threat of losing his funding, his library access and all future sponsorship. Nowadays, he questions his patrons' motives and ethics.

Were Wellings to discover the imbued, he might establish a relationship in order to have them do his legwork. If these people can observe individual patients in their everyday lives, Wellings might gain better insight into their ailments — all without breaking his agreement with the Arcanum. Of course, Wellings would have to seek out and contact hunters willing not only to believe in his efforts but to work with him and not visit harm upon his subjects. Maybe he could share credit for his ultimate findings or even set aside a portion of his funding as compensation. But then there's the question of what the Arcanum would do if it ever caught on to his secret partnership.

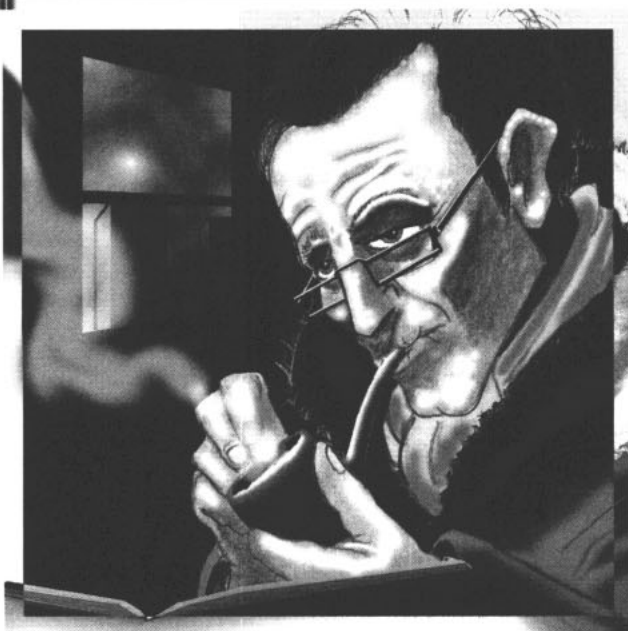
Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence (Interpretation) 4, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics (History) 1, Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Bureaucracy 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Intuition 1, Investigation 1, Medicine 3, Occult (Demonology) 4, Research 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Fame 1, Resources 2

Willpower: 5

Equipment: Digital video recorder, Lincoln Continental, handheld computer, roll of antacid tablets, tape recorder, notepads



written in the founder's diary, and a ritual bloodletting. In severe cases, these cleansing practices can involve medical acupuncture, the ingestion of powerful psychotropic drugs or even electroshock treatment. Those scholars who fail to respond positively to these treatments are committed to Arcanum-sponsored asylums.

Presidents of Arcanum chapter houses are usually elder brothers, as are the grand chancellor and the members of the executive committee. These poor souls are the members most familiar with the inchoate grand design of the adversary, at least as the society understands it. As such, they are expected to help formulate plans and contingencies for how to deal with the threat the adversary poses.

These scholars are least likely to interact with or be discovered by imbued hunters, given their rarity and tendency toward a cloistered existence. (These scholars are also most likely to seem unusual to a hunter's successful use of the Discern edge, as discussed on p. 74.)



CHAPTER 4:

THE DAUNTAIN

They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof.
— Job 24:13

Jonathan didn't like this one bit. He hated being kept in the dark about anything, let alone something so unusual. And he knew what Claire would say if she found out. Fortunately, she didn't know anything. He was very good at deception when he needed to be, he thought to himself. Of course, you don't have to be a great liar to hide an email conversation.

That's how it started — innocently at first, but rapidly the exchange became far more than Jonathan ever suspected it might. Now, here he was in a boarded-up building on Queen Street, waiting to meet someone he'd never seen before. Everyone he knew would have told him this was a mistake, that it could only lead to disaster. He'd read too many posts on hunter-net that confirmed his feelings. He had even experienced firsthand the aftermath of a similar meeting gone wrong. Yet, something deep inside told him to take a chance.

Was it that voice he heard months before when he first became aware of the creatures? Jonathan couldn't be sure. The voice in his head was rarely as subtle as this. Maybe it was something else, a desire to contribute something more to the others' efforts than philosophical musings about the things. He had to admit that he sometimes envied Claire in her single-mindedness. Sure, it led her to make mistakes, but at least she was doing something. Jonathan felt so impotent, sitting behind his computer screen and replying to posts rather than going out and doing what he'd been called to do.

Of course, he wouldn't be here if he didn't spend so much time at his computer. He'd have never begun a dialogue with "Merryweather" — if that was the person's real name. Jonathan liked to think he was security conscious. He went out of his way to maintain multiple email accounts and to rotate them every few months. He used the latest encryption software that he could download for free from the Net. But the fact was that he was an amateur. How else could Merryweather have found him? How else could he explain an uninvited email asking him to "share information of mutual interest?"

That was the beginning of their long-distance relationship, the one he hid from Claire as surely as he'd hide a secret lover. Jonathan was skeptical at first. That was his default position when confronted with the unknown. But he gradually opened up to Merryweather as it became clear that his mysterious correspondent knew a great deal about the Scarborough case. While that one baffled a lot of folks on the list, he gained some genuine insights thanks to Merryweather. But even Jonathan's amateur espionage skills recognized the danger Merryweather posed. He had heard stories of how creatures sometimes masqueraded as ordinary people to gain the confidence of others — and then killed them.

That's why Jonathan questioned Merryweather extensively. Who was he and how did he know so much about goblins? For that matter, how had he found Jonathan? The

answers were more disturbing than Jonathan could have imagined. A self-proclaimed "observer of the fae" — as he called goblins — Merryweather needed help in driving out the creatures. He claimed to lack the strength to take them on himself, which is why he had observed Jonathan.

He never explained it adequately, but Merryweather somehow knew Jonathan wasn't like everyone else. He didn't seem to know about the voices Jonathan heard, or even about most of the things that he and Claire had faced in the city, but Merryweather knew enough, enough that Jonathan began to trust his unknown correspondent. Perhaps "trust" was a strong word, but Jonathan couldn't quite come up with another one that adequately described his feelings about his contact. Respect? Faith? Fear? All of the above? Whatever it was, it was strong enough for Jonathan to keep up his surreptitious correspondence and to slowly exchange information.

The time had come to meet face to face.

Here he was, cold and alone inside the shell of a building on a street he thought he knew pretty well. He frequented the used bookstores here, looking for Latin and Greek philosophy texts. He had never noticed the decay around him. It was funny, really. Things had gone noticeably downhill in the city for years. Jonathan could see the monsters that walked among men and feel their corruption, but he hadn't noticed the equally real — and wholly mortal — rot that ate at the heart of the city. Maybe he was spending too much time in front of the computer.

Jonathan's musings were interrupted by a sound behind him. Someone else had entered the building, pushing past the same loose board he had. For an instant, unalloyed fear gripped Jonathan's soul as he realized he had his back to the one entrance and exit. What if it wasn't Merryweather? What if Merryweather was one of the creatures he feared: a deceiver who had laid an elaborate trap for him?

Fears swirled in Jonathan's head as he spun to see a figure emerge from the darkness. He couldn't make out a face — as if it mattered — but he could see that this thing wasn't human. The being that stood before him was something else. Jonathan saw a misty light that covered the figure's body, enveloping it in a jumble of muted hues. It reminded him of the spirit that had used Father Stone at the church, but it was different somehow. Yet, he couldn't quite pin down how, let alone identify the creature. Jonathan simply knew that it was wrong and he stepped back to assume a defensive position.

The creature extended a hand and stepped into the light. "Philosophe, I presume?" it said, revealing a plain, almost boring, human face, one that showed myriad wrinkles and liver spots — an old man's face. The man stared quizzically at Jonathan for a moment and then spoke again. "What's wrong? You seem frightened."

Jonathan didn't know what to do. He could see that this thing wasn't human, or at least not completely human, but he had no idea what he should do. So, he did the only thing he could: He started up a conversation.

"Merryweather?"

"That's right." The thing nodded, smiling.

"I'm sorry, but you startled me."

"That's understandable. This place is pretty creepy."

"Then why did you choose it?"

"As a test, I suppose." The thing explained. "I wanted to see if you were the kind of person I hoped you to be."



"And what's that?"

"Brave." Merryweather replied matter-of-factly. "As you know, I've been watching you — from a distance — for some time now. I was pretty certain you were the type of fellow I was looking for. That you've come here is proof of that. I must say, I'm very pleased."

"Pleased?" Jonathan asked, casting about for another exit.

"Of course. I thought I explained that we're a rare breed, you and I. Given what we face, we have to stick together."

Jonathan nodded idly as his keen senses noticed a shape moving outside the building, just beyond the entrance. It was a trap. He should have never come here. It was a mistake to trust someone he'd never met. He wouldn't put his life in the hands of many of the people on hunter-net — and they were like him. But here he was doing just that with some kind of thing he'd never encountered before. He was an idiot and he half-thought he deserved whatever he got.

"So, my friend, now that we've met, what say we leave this place and find somewhere more suitable to talk?"

"Sure." Jonathan answered. "Where?"

"That's up to you, but I might recommend my apartment. I guarantee your safety there. They avoid it like the plague."

"They?"

Merryweather smiled. "You know, the fae. They don't do well in my presence, which is why I need your help. I thought you already understood all of this."

"I do, I do. It's just that I'm a bit overwhelmed. I guess I didn't really understand exactly what you were, if that makes sense."

Merryweather smiled again, this time showing yellowed teeth worn by age. "I understand completely. I'm as surprised as you to find a kindred spirit, someone who understands them like I do. Believe me, it does my heart good to know I have partner."

Jonathan nodded as the two walked toward the exit. Through gaps between the boards, he could see the shadow of the other person who lay in wait beyond. Jonathan's throat tightened, and he found it hard to breathe. He was never good at these sorts of confrontations — but this time his very life hung in the balance.

"After you." Merryweather said, as he gestured toward the entrance.

Jonathan gulped, looked back for somewhere to run and saw none. He exhaled deeply and bent over to squeeze through the loose boards. He braced himself for a club to the back of the head — but it never came. He stood up to look for the source of the shadow he'd seen, only to find someone attacking Merryweather! He jumped back to watch as the old man was pummeled to the ground. In disbelief, he recognized the attacker. It was Claire.

"What the hell are you doing?" He yelled at her as she kicked Merryweather's prone body.

"I could ask you the same thing. Don't you realize the danger you're in?"

He gritted his teeth. "Yes."

"Run!" Claire barked at him. "I'll catch up with you."

Jonathan didn't look back as he ran from the lot toward the subway entrance down the street. He heard the sounds of shattering wood and metal and knew that it would be a while before Claire caught up with him.

Once safely on the northbound platform, Jonathan sat, holding his aching head in his hands. What had just happened? What was Merryweather? No doubt, he knew a lot about Jonathan's activities, but he didn't seem to understand their purpose. Even more bizarre, Merryweather had made no threatening moves against him. He appeared to have Jonathan's safety at heart when he asked to move to another location.

The old man was clearly inhuman. Jonathan had seen the muted colors that played across his body — a possible sign of possession, he'd learned from experience. Yet Merryweather seemed to know more about goblins than anyone he'd ever encountered. And he offered to help with the Scarborough case. Where did that leave Jonathan now? Who would help those children? Who would stop the violence?

Jonathan lifted his head and sighed. Was meeting Merryweather a mistake, or was his mistake in leaving the old man to Claire's mercy? Jonathan couldn't be sure, and that frightened him more than anything else.

WHO ARE THE DAUNTAIN?

The Dauntain are peculiar and extraordinarily rare types of goblin (see **Hunter**, pp. 268-270 and the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**, pp. 58-63) that have rejected their supernatural nature and now war against their own kind. As such, they are potential allies to the imbued and are detailed here among more formal organizations such as the Inquisition.

Because goblins are usually among the most elusive of the enemies that hunters face, it's difficult — if not impossible — for most imbued to recognize any distinction between the Dauntain and more "ordinary" examples of their kind. First contact with the Dauntain seldom occurs without miscommunication, misunderstanding and mistrust. As if the imbued needed it, the Dauntain are further examples of just how little hunters know about the opposition — and the dangers that inevitably result from such ignorance.

For reasons that remain obscure to the chosen, the Dauntain have "seen the light" and do not wish to continue to exist as other goblins do. Indeed, these apostate nightmares are among the most vicious — and feared — enemies of goblins, which is why they are of such great interest to the few imbued who discover their existence. After all, if some nightmares can turn against their own kind, could the same be true of bloodsuckers or shifters? If so, what does that mean for the hunt and how the chosen should react to turncoats within the ranks of the other side? Not surprisingly, hunters who are aware of such creatures and who uphold Mercy, and to a lesser degree Vision, might wish to learn more about these unusual beings.

THE NATURE OF THE DAUNTAIN

To understand the outcasts one must first understand the entities from which they sprang. While hunters use terms such as goblins, trolls and nightmares, the Dauntain refer to their kind as kithain, fae or changelings. Despite the terminological difference, the Dauntain seem no different than other goblins to hunters. That is, they appear to be a type of spirit that possesses or "rides" a human host, in the process granting that person supernatural powers and abilities.

While the Dauntain — and goblins as a whole, hunters might assume — appear to see no distinction between a host body and themselves, direct observation of them suggests otherwise. Under second sight and edges such as *Illuminate*, the Dauntain appear no different than any other nightmare. They look much like a ghost or other type of possessor spirit, a luminous form superimposed over the material body of the human host. Seen through second sight, the primary distinction between the Dauntain and other goblins is an odd discoloration, a kind of "washed out" look that paradoxically mutes the luminosity of their spiritual form while at the same time drawing attention to it.

That the Dauntain claim to reject their goblin heritage does not make matters any simpler for the imbued. They still appear *wrong*. That the beings claim to recognize no distinction between themselves and the bodies they inhabit does not make them any easier to understand, either. Few hunters recognize a spirit's "right" to possess a body, and yet some examples of outcasts do not even seem to realize they are anything other than mortal people! Such "oblivious" Dauntain are the exception rather than the rule, at least far as hunters are concerned. The majority of these beings that the imbued encounter do recognize their supernatural nature, claiming that goblins exist in two realities: one mundane, one fantastic. The mundane reality is the ordinary world in which hunters exist. The fantastic reality, which they call "the Dreaming," is the sum of humanity's dreams and nightmares. This otherworldly place is the true home of the fae — the one the Dauntain reject in favor of the material world.

The Dauntain rejection of the Dreaming stems from their strong belief that goblins are parasites who use humanity for sustenance. Goblins, the Dauntain say, need the power of dreams — creativity and inspiration, called "Glamour" — to survive and retain their connection to the Dreaming. They harvest this power by a variety of means, all of which involve cultivating a mortal dreamer to serve as a source. Although it's possible for a goblin to feed on a human's dreams without harming the subject, that method isn't the fastest or most potent means of doing so.

Goblins who crave a "quick fix" can ravage a human's mind, sapping the victim of inspiration and energy until the poor person no longer has the will to live. Victims of such attacks are emotionally shattered and come to

STORYTELLER: HUNTERS AND THE DREAMING

A major source of suspicion between the imbued and outcast goblins is that hunters have no evidence of the Dreaming's existence. Neither second sight nor observation edges reveal its supposed impingement upon the ordinary world. Yet, the chosen's capabilities allow them to recognize nightmares easily enough. This dichotomy has led some imbued to question the trustworthiness of the Dauntain on almost every aspect of goblin society and motivation. Storytellers would be wise to emphasize hunters' inability to confirm anything a pariah says about its nature or origins. Without confirmation, how can hunters determine that the Dauntain don't simply lie to hide the fact that they're really possessor spirits like any others?

resemble hollow versions of their former selves. Some become listless, whereas others are suicidal. A few become violent, so consumed with self-hatred and the belief that the world is an actively hostile place that it must be destroyed. Evidence of any such behavior can attract the attention of both outcast goblins and informed hunters.

The Dauntain claim that these violent methods of harvesting become more and more common as the fae grow ever more desperate. Goblins in general apparently sense that a great change is afoot in the world, whether it's a slow "bleeding away" of everything supernatural or the coming of the "winter kings" who will remake the world in a way that's inimical to goblin-kind. Hunters who hear such stories could postulate that these "winter kings" may in fact be the imbued. If so, it offers yet another perspective on their mission to "inherit the earth." In any event, goblins supposedly fear that they will cease to exist if they do not have the Glamour needed to nourish themselves. Thus, increasing numbers of changelings turn to unwholesome means to survive.

The Dauntain reject the ways of their kind, believing that there is no longer any hope of peaceful rapprochement between humanity and nightmares. They consequently become active enemies of other changelings, using their supernatural abilities to defend mortals against goblins' depredations. Of course, the Dauntain present only one side of the story. Although most of what they say about their enemies explains trolls' observed behavior, there are discrepant points. The most important concerns a group among the Dauntain themselves — the unaware, sometimes known as "sleepers."

Although many Dauntain admit to their goblin heritage even as they reject it, not all do. This isn't because of shame or embarrassment (though many

aware pariahs *are* deeply ashamed of their true nature). Sleepers simply have no idea of what they are. Somehow — and *how* remains unclear — the unaware have retreated within mundane reality so deeply that they no longer have any connection to the Dreaming. They cannot perceive it and are no more likely to acknowledge its existence than any ordinary mortal would.

Yet, there's no denying that, unaware or not, sleepers *are* Dauntain. Second sight and edges such as Illuminate enable a hunter to see that these beings look every bit the goblin as any other outcast. This fact creates a quandary for hunters, since it throws into question the Dauntain's assertion that they do not possess host bodies as ghosts do. If they aren't possessors, why do they appear as such to hunters? And how could a spirit just happen to ride a mortal body, without knowledge and self-awareness? These questions are difficult ones whose answers are seldom obvious, which is why the chosen are likely to remain skeptical about the Dauntain's true nature.

Add to all this confusion the fact that hunters encounter very few Dauntain — perhaps only one during their entire careers. Some Redeemers who've been exposed suggest that sleepers may suppress knowledge of their true nature, in the same way that people

often suppress memories of traumatic or horrific events. Indeed, so powerful is the sleeper ability to disconnect from the Dreaming that other goblins seem to fear *unaware* Dauntain even more than they do *aware* ones. It's possible that sleepers act as powerful sources of "anti-Glamour" due to their denial of their true nature. If that's true, this type of Dauntain might be a useful "shield" against the powers of other nightmares.

In any event, the Dauntain are an unusual group of beings from the imbued perspective. It seems extremely unlikely that hunters would encounter an actual faction of the enemy composed entirely of defectors and traitors. Can the creatures be genuine? Do they seek to lead hunters into a trap? Could this enemy actually be trying to turn hunters' weakness and need for allies against them? There's only one way to find out.

TYPES OF DAUNTAIN

In addition to their broad categories of self-aware and unaware (or sleepers), the Dauntain seem to come in multiple subtypes, each of which can provide hunters with additional insights into these beings and what purpose they serve in the greater scheme of things. Or more likely, these varying creatures muddy the waters even further for hunters trying to understand goblin sects.

STORYTELLER: GOBLINS VERSUS DAUNTAIN

Although it's obvious to the Storyteller that goblins and Dauntain differ from one another, it's not obvious to the imbued. In fact, it's pretty easy to confuse the two groups of nightmares, especially if a hunter has very little experience dealing with either. For your benefit, here's a handy summary of how, *from a hunter's perspective*, they differ. Please note that "unaware" Dauntain described later in this chapter have somewhat different characteristics, especially when it comes to identifying them as goblins.

Physical Appearance: To unimbued eyes, there is no physical difference between a goblin and a Dauntain. Since both "possess" mortal hosts, their physical appearance is determined by their physical bodies. Even so, the personalities of hosts can influence what these people look like. A flamboyant artist is likely to be controlled by a ghoulish being, while a sullen recluse is likely to be controlled by one of the Dauntain. The outcasts are typically not social or dynamic. Ultimately, however, there's no hard-and-fast rule on how these beings look to the naked eye.

Second Sight: Under second sight, both goblins and Dauntain appear as luminous forms transposed over the mortal frames they inhabit. Dauntain's glowing forms have an odd kind of "drabness," however.

Edges: Witness and Illuminate work on the Dauntain as well as on goblins. Witness does not necessarily show any predatory relationship between the Dauntain and humanity, as it can with other goblins. Illuminate makes no distinction between goblins and their apostate brethren — a cause of concern for chosen who seek an alliance with the outcasts. Discern reveals no physical qualities about pariahs to clearly mark them as goblin-kind.

Activities: Whereas trolls of all sorts seek out human company — especially creative or passionate sorts — Dauntain tend to be reclusive. Indeed, the potentially violent among the pariahs seek out their former kin rather than humans. Thus, while goblin activity usually centers on human artistic or emotional endeavors, Dauntain seem to have little interest in such matters. If an outcast is found in the proximity of such activities, it may be because she hunts a goblin that is attracted to people.

Relationship: Goblins avoid and fear the Dauntain. To them, the outcasts embody a virulent disease that they try to escape at all costs. Dauntain can seek out their enemies to strike at them, and can look for fellow rebels with whom to ally. The exceptions are sleepers, of course, who don't realize their true nature. To the imbued who witness it, the relationship between goblins and the Dauntain is like a family feud, with the former trying to avoid contentions and the latter stoking the flames whenever possible.

Note that there is no such thing as a “standard” Dauntain. Each one is a unique individual with his own history and goals. The following subtypes are no more than generalizations and should be treated as such. Some outcasts defy these easy groupings, just as each hunter is different from the next.

Furthermore, much of the information here is fragmentary at best, misleading at worst. Very few hunters have *any* direct experience with the Dauntain. Thus, what follows is of questionable reliability, gleaned through observation from afar and limited contact with aware Dauntain who might not consider the imbued a threat.

AWARE SUBTYPES

Furies: Members of this group are particularly feared. In fighting against goblins, they become as bad as the nightmares, perhaps even worse. Furies are goblins obsessed with vengeance. They believe particular nightmares have aggrieved them for whatever reason — and vow revenge.

Being creatures of passion, furies choose to reject Glamour as a means to destroying their enemy. They become Dauntain as a result. Rejection of their true nature gives them power, and even after they have defeated a specific foe they exult in looking for more.

Like Waywards and some Avengers, furies are so consumed with their cause that they lose sight of the damage they wreak. Eventually, they no longer have any kinship with other goblins and become creatures of pure malevolence, seeking out and destroying others of their kind for the strength it grants them. Even other Dauntain, who rightly fear such beings’ extremism, shun furies.

Furies are anger personified. Their presence is revealed in acts of *focused violence* against very specific targets. Hunters may become aware of furies’ existence when they investigate what at first appear to be hate crimes, stalkings or even muggings that have an unusual bent. Furies don’t stop their actions unless destroyed, because they see violence as the source of their own salvation. That’s why furies are the most obvious — and most commonly encountered — type of outcast, at least from the imbued perspective.

Heretics: The closest thing goblins have to a “religion” is their belief that one day the division between the supernatural and mundane worlds will collapse and the Dreaming will no longer be so distant. Nightmares hope this event will come to pass through the acquisition of enough Glamour that the mundane world can be overthrown and a new age can be ushered in, one in which goblins are restored to their former glory.

Heretics reject this notion and believe that Glamour is not the key at all. They believe the mundane world must grow so strong that it destroys the Dreaming — and thereby brings about a rebirth of that fantastic realm. Like sorcerers, who are described below, they try to destroy all signs of Glamour in the mundane world as

a means of “restoring the balance” between the two realities. Only by doing so do heretics believe goblins can be redeemed. Naturally, these Dauntain encounter stiff resistance from the fae in general.

What’s particularly intriguing about heretics is that their belief in restoring a balance between realities mirrors cryptic comments made by a few imbued. Some Visionaries, for example, believe that the chosen are heralds of a new age, one that will bring down the enemy and save humanity after great tribulation. Could it be that heretics see the same possible future?

Unlike furies, heretics are usually the objects of other goblins’ interest — or more specifically, ire — rather than the other way around. To hunters, they might appear at first to be helpless victims of supernatural depredation, such as an odd old woman besieged by inhuman assailants. Once it becomes clear (through second sight and edges) what heretics really are, the imbued might have less sympathy for their plight.

Sorcerers: This subtype of Dauntain is unusual in that it consists of goblins who embrace mundane reality in order to use it against others of their kind. Sorcerers believe that because the ordinary world works against Glamour, which all fae employ, they can manipulate mundane reality to serve them as a kind of “anti-magical magic.”

Unlike warlocks and other kinds of magic-wielders, Dauntain sorcerers do not employ any significant supernatural effects. Indeed, the majority of their “magical” repertoire consists of destroying the things goblins crave — creativity, inspiration, whimsy — in order to strike a blow against nightmares. Thus, sorcerers might not appear particularly sinister to hunters. Were it not for their goblin nature, they might not even attract the attention of the imbued. Their activities are *that* subtle.

Sorcerers deserve attention for two reasons, however. Their activities inspire the animosity of other goblins, who naturally resent the Dauntain’s attempts to cut off their sources of nourishment. Sorcerers are also extremely frustrated by how little their effort translates into the raw power that they believe it should generate. Many sorcerers become increasingly desperate and undertake dangerous actions that could harm ordinary human beings and the imbued alike. They might try to bring about economic decline or plant bombs in acts of sabotage, for example, to crush the human spirit and cause other fae to starve.

Like heretics, sorcerers often draw other goblins to them. Unlike heretics, sorcerers are more actively malevolent. Even without second sight, for example, hunters can “feel” that there’s something *wrong* about these outcasts. They’re typically strait-laced, puritanical types who wouldn’t know a good time if it bit them. Indeed, even ordinary mortals feel uncomfortable around these creatures, who often masquerade as prudish ministers, austere librarians and cynical teenagers.

STORYTELLER: SEEING THE UNAWARE

One of the truest distinctions between aware and unaware Dauntain is the latter's innate ability to cloak their true nature, even from hunters. So powerful is their denial of their goblin nature that sleepers have a limited defense against second sight and observation edges.

Second sight normally requires a point of Conviction to activate, after which a hunter can see hidden monsters in his vicinity. A player has to spend a *second point of Conviction* to recognize sleepers as inhuman in a scene. Observation edges such as Discern, Illuminate and Witness are similarly impeded. When they're turned on a sleeper in an effort to identify her, a player must also spend a point of Conviction in combination with use of the edge. One point spent in combination with a perception edge allows a hunter to spot sleepers for the entire scene or for as long as the edge persists.

Don't prompt players to offer any additional Conviction for second sight or edge use. Part of sleepers' unique nature is that they can unwittingly evade all but the most paranoid hunters.

UNAWARE SUBTYPES

The Lost: This Dauntain subtype is essentially the paramount example of the sleeper. Beings who fall into this category do not believe themselves to be goblins or supernatural in any way. Rather, they see past experiences with the Dreaming as a form of insanity. They view other goblins as figments of the imagination, conjured up by an unstable mind. They seek to do whatever they can to eliminate these phantasms if they hope to save themselves.

The lost view other goblins as victims of the same general insanity. They feel it's their duty to "help" these other victims, for in helping these people they help themselves. The interests of the lost thus coincide with those of some imbued. They consider belief in goblins a danger to society that must be contained before it can do any permanent harm, regardless of whether such a condition must be cured or cauterized.

At the same time, the lost are dangers to hunters because these sleepers deny the existence of any sort of supernatural reality. These Dauntain have retreated so far into mundane reality that they steadfastly deny goblins are anything more than mentally unstable human beings. Any hunter who rants about Heralds or bloodsuckers is likely to encounter skepticism — and perhaps resistance — from the lost, who are sure to believe the imbued in need of their help as well.

Thanks to her denial of the supernatural, one of the lost might seem no different from any other ordinary person in whom a hunter might confide — and who has a hunter's best interests at heart when she tells (or

forces) him to "seek help." And yet, the lost are still Dauntain and possess supernatural capabilities. A hunter could fall prey to these unacknowledged gifts, which are difficult to discern because of the absolute denial of their own nature by the lost. They are "passive enemies," the supernatural equivalent of quicksand: seemingly solid and ordinary but with the capacity to drag a hunter down by his own efforts.

Nihilists: Although classified as sleeper Dauntain because they can mask their true nature, nihilists differ somewhat from the others in this category. *Nihilists are aware that they're goblins.* In fact, they're quite keenly aware of their supernatural identity. Nihilists are unaware that they've become Dauntain or that they're a source of "anti-Glamour," however.

Nihilists were goblins once. They preyed on human creativity and emotions just like others of their kind. They did everything they could to preserve their tenuous connection to the Dreaming — and failed. At least, that's how they see it. They believe goblins are ultimately doomed. No amount of feeding on human inspiration can save them, which is why they retreat into themselves and await the end.

In doing so, these Dauntain become founts of the mundane, which makes them a grave danger to others of their kind. Nihilists are not actively hostile toward goblins, but their mere presence may harm others, which is why they're in turn a threat to the imbued. Other nightmares may seek to distance such sleepers from sources of Glamour or may forcibly remove the unwitting Dauntain from locales that nightmares frequent. If a nihilist takes up residence in any area particularly rich in Glamour, a horde of goblins may well decide to deal with him — with disastrous results. Such commotion can affect the material world and ordinary people, and probably puts hunters in harm's way.

Plague Rats: This type of sleeper is similar in some respects to nihilists in that plague rats don't always recognize that they're dangerous to their fellow goblins. Indeed, many of these Dauntain aren't aware that they've been "infected" with some type of anti-Glamour. Yet, plague rats undeniably carry a "disease" deadly to nightmares and may pass it on to others before the truth is discovered.

There's no simple explanation for rats' condition. These goblins somehow come into contact with a powerful source of the mundane, one that overcomes their supernatural connection to the Dreaming. This source varies from rat to rat and could be anything from another one of the Dauntain to a bloodsucker. Whatever the source, these infected goblins "transfer" their mundane sickness.

A plague rat's ability to weaken others of its kind suggests an intriguing connection to hunters. Used properly, one of these Dauntain could become a useful tool against goblins, a kind of supernatural weapon that could be employed to make the hunt easier. Of course,

A PLAGUE RAT'S "DISEASE"

A plague rat's infection functions much like the Judgment edge Balance (roll the outcast's Banality — see p.103 — instead of Wits + Zeal), except that its effects last for one day per success rolled. This ability works against goblins (including other outcasts). It's believed that a nightmare who languishes under the disease's effects for too many days starves and become a plague rat himself, although no imbued has any idea whether that's true or not. Other goblins may suggest that mortals can be affected, as well, becoming sullen and depressed to the point of death. Could the same happen to hunters?

to do that, the chosen must find common ground with these sleepers, which could prove problematic. Plague rats have an almost irrational interest in staying close to the source of their contagion, which can be other types of monsters — which means hunters subjecting themselves to these beings!

GOALS

As previously noted, no two Dauntain are exactly alike. In fact, pariahs show a remarkable degree of individuality, even within their various types, much as hunters do. Nevertheless, the few Dauntain that the chosen might encounter can exhibit certain types of behavior, suggesting overarching goals rather than similar identity. It's far from certain whether these objectives can be called typical to all Dauntain — there are still too few examples of them to know — but such pursuits may be rough-and-ready guidelines to the ways in which these goblins act.

POWER

The desire — some would say "compulsion" — to place oneself at the pinnacle of order, to lord over one's fellows, is as old an ideal as any. Human beings crave power all the time; some even try to seize it. Harnessed properly, the quest for power can be a potent motivator, one that encourages the species to seek ever greater rewards. It can lead to unexpected innovations and unimagined achievements. But the pursuit of power for its own sake can cause untold suffering and destruction.

The Dauntain feel the desire for power as keenly as any person does. Sorcerers, for example, are generally consumed with a lust for power. Their willingness to transgress goblin morality in the quest for taboo sources of strength makes them dangerous. Furies, too, can be obsessed with might. By giving in to their anger, they grow in strength. Once furies have tasted the fruits of that anger, it can drive them to the point where rage and strength are synonymous.

The quest for power can be cold and calculating, or it can be charged with emotion. In the end, what's common to both is paranoia, the fear that an outcast

does not possess sufficient strength to fend off her many enemies. These goblins are never secure and are always on the lookout for new ways to increase control over their worlds. It's often a futile search, but that doesn't dissuade the Dauntain from it. If anything, wasted efforts to gain more might only intensify their fears — and desperation.

Storyteller: Power Story Ideas

- Prominent artists are disappearing. Their kidnaper, a power-hungry sorcerer, believes they're hosts for goblins whom he needs for his own dark experiments.

- A nihilist believes that if she destroys enough historical sites she'll gain the power she needs to end her own suffering.

- Hunters receive anonymous tips about supernatural activities. The information is sent by a heretic who hopes to use the imbued in his war against other nightmares.

OBIVION

The self-destructive urge is potent among sleeper Dauntain. Many such goblins were driven to their current state because they couldn't accept their own true nature. For them, the half-world in which nightmares live is fraught with too many dangers, too many uncertainties. Or they may find feeding on human creativity revolting. Whatever the reason, these beings are filled with self-loathing and develop suicidal tendencies. The only escape from their plight is their own demise.

Outwardly, oblivion is a very different motive from the others discussed here. It's hard to imagine how a self-destructive Dauntain is at all comparable to one filled with a lust for power. Outcasts seeking nonexistence want to end their own wretched lives, not wallow in self-aggrandizement. How could that harm anyone, least of all hunters? Any analogy to suicidal human beings is disingenuous, though. Whereas self-destructive people rarely wish to bring the world down with them, such is not the case with the Dauntain. So complete is the hatred, fear and revulsion that brought about their retreat that they lose all sense of proportion. They're obsessed with destroying anything and anyone who reminds them of what they've fled. Dauntain seeking oblivion may spread chaos and destruction far and wide — not just among their own kind, but to anything that seems connected to the fantastic world they've abandoned. The material world and its inhabitants are just such targets.

Storyteller: Oblivion Story Ideas

- The destruction of "irrefutable proof of monsters' existence" isn't a government cover-up, but an effort by a heretic to destroy a powerful source of Glamour — and thus hasten the end of the Dreaming.

- A rash of suicides in the local scientific community is actually the result of a plague rat in the researchers' midst.

- A nihilist seeks to end his suffering by setting a university library ablaze and going up with it.

REVENGE

Revenge is a simple, straightforward goal, one that hunters and people on the street alike can identify with. It's also a common goal for the Dauntain. Although furies are the group most commonly associated with vengeance, they aren't the only ones. A sorcerer might initiate a quest for power to fuel his desire for revenge, just as a heretic's intentions might be muddied by the need to see other goblins humbled for rejecting his beliefs.

Sleepers rarely if ever seek revenge against other goblins. When they do, their intentions are much more confused. Revenge is many things, but unfocused isn't one of them. It is therefore a rare sleeper who explains her actions through a desire to right a real or perceived wrong.

Aware Dauntain are another matter. They all harbor resentment for other goblins to varying degrees. They see their own actions as right and proper, and they may not understand why they're still rejected by their own kind. The need to avenge that rejection can inspire a fervor with which some hunters can identify. Ultimately, it's self-destructive determination, but that doesn't make it any less understandable.

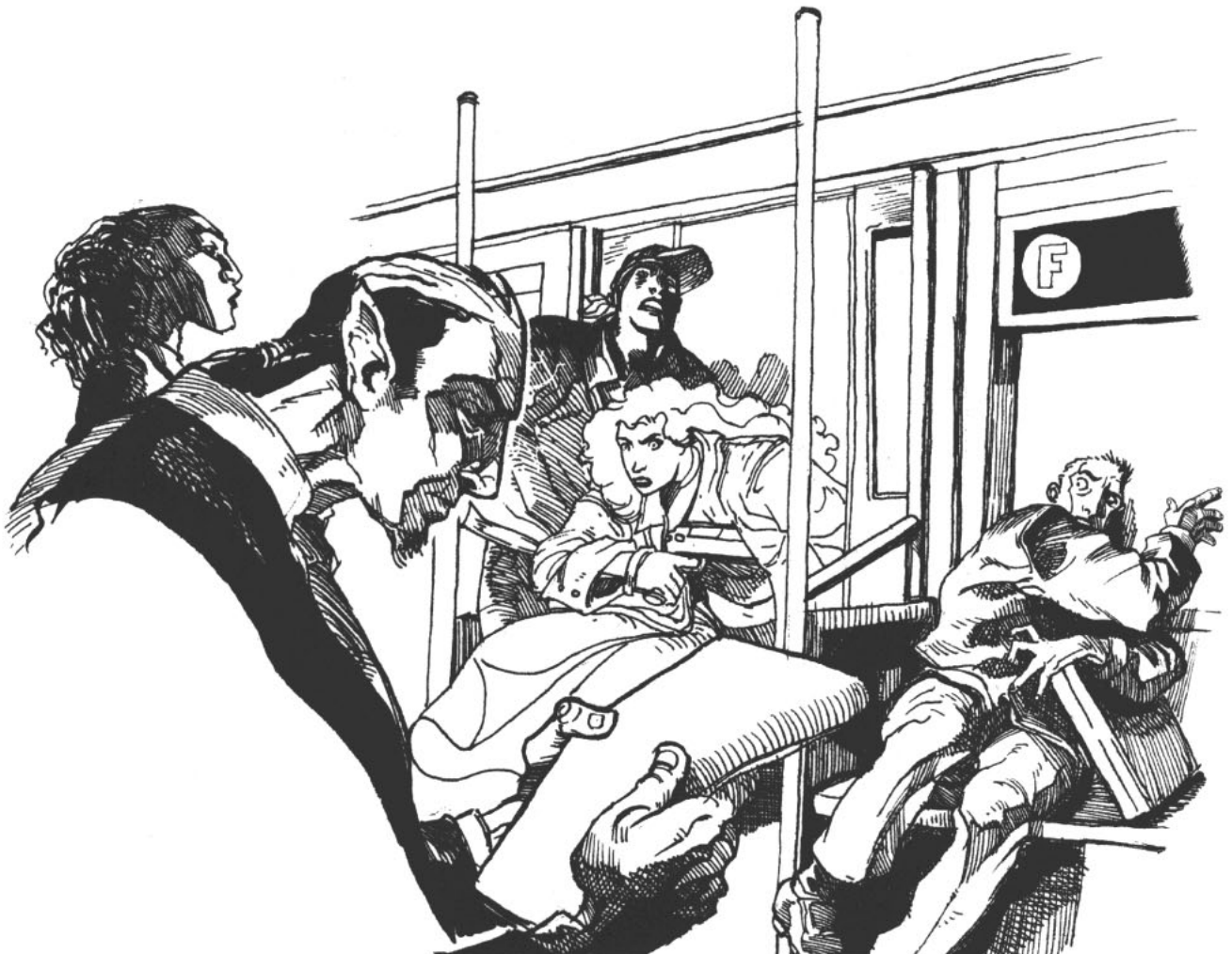
Storyteller: Revenge Story Ideas

- A fury systematically hunts down every one of his former goblin companions in town, drawing the attention of the imbued.
- A sorcerer works to destroy the good name of a prominent philanthropist, who has inadvertently counteracted the efforts of the outcast goblin on numerous occasions.
- A heretic kick-starts a human crusade against local teachers — all of them secretly nightmares — by accusing them of corrupting the young with their unorthodox teaching methods.

SALVATION

Although few would concede it, many Dauntain want nothing more than to restore the fortunes of their kind — and themselves. They want to do so on their own terms, though, which is precisely why they pose such a threat to goblin society. Dauntain rejection of the goals and methods of other fae is the very thing that makes them outcasts. Pariahs represent a fifth column that would undermine everything other nightmares believe in and seek.

In some cases, that opposition only further convinces the Dauntain that they're on the right track. The



more other goblins fight against them, they more firmly these outsiders believe they have found some sort of "insight," one that can restore the proper balance between the Dreaming and our world. Just how this goal is to be achieved varies from Dauntain to Dauntain, but it usually involves a revolutionary change. Heretics are likeliest to have this goal, but others — even some sleepers — may believe their actions can restore a balance to an unbalanced system.

From the imbued perspective, the quest for salvation poses both a possible point of dialogue with the Dauntain — and a threat. Hunters and such beings might agree that the world needs redemption. Unquestionably, the cosmos is off kilter and something must be done to put it back in order. If the chosen and the Dauntain share an aspiration as to how to bring that about — perhaps by separating the fantastic and material worlds completely — they could pool their resources. If not, conflicting hunter and Dauntain methods for world salvation could lead to untold bloodshed and misery between the two.

Storyteller: Salvation Story Ideas

- A changeling who has renounced his former ways — and who initially seems a defenseless person to hunters — is attacked by other goblins.
- The imbued encounter a group of Dauntain trying to restore the Glamour of a city that they've ravaged for years.
- Hunters hear rumors of a large goblin infestation in a remote locale — a meeting, as it turns out, between Dauntain and other nightmares to declare a truce after years of feuding.

METHODS

It bears repeating that the Dauntain are not a unified group of creatures. Except for their origin in rejecting or interfering with the ways of their kin, pariahs share little in common, which is also true of their methods.

SLEEPER METHODS

Unaware Dauntain follow more easily understood methods than do their aware counterparts. Their ignorance (or self-delusion) about their own nature makes them similar to ordinary humans in the way they pursue their goals. They don't often (or intentionally) resort to magical effects to achieve their ends, and they are therefore just as fallible as any normal people. Who would suspect that a reclusive starving artist is actually a beacon of the mundane, whose very presence brings pain and suffering to goblins, trolls and other nightmares? The very banality of sleeper Dauntain helps protect them against being detected. To other goblins, these beings can simply seem like yet more unimaginative mortals. To hunters, these entities can seem so unexceptional among the human masses that imbued never think to turn their second sight on sleepers. These "people" literally do nothing out of the ordinary, and thus don't seem to cause any trouble or raise any suspicions. This is all true, anyway, until the intensity of the

mundane in these Dauntain increases to such a point that they endanger other fae and draw their attention, and can in turn draw the attention of the imbued.

Example: Consider the case of Dr. Anton Stark. Stark is a psychiatrist who specializes in the treatment of children and young adults whose obsession with fantasy becomes a threat to their sanity. Stark is also a sleeper Dauntain of immense power. He and his colleagues (most of whom are ordinary people) work according to "scientific principles," never for a moment believing that the fantastic realm of goblins and trolls is anything more than a figment of patients' twisted imagination. Stark is so firmly grounded in the mundane that he causes great harm to nightmares. He wars against the Dreaming without even realizing it — and that's what makes him powerful.

Although many hunters might consider Stark an ally — and he is to an extent — there are two significant downsides to his activities. His powerful "anti-magic" draws the ire of some goblins. Most avoid him for fear of their existence, but a fanatical few seek to stop him and rescue their fellows from his grasp — with unfortunate consequences for mortals who get in the way. Stark is also obsessive in the extreme. He's unlikely to recognize hunters as any different than the children and teenagers whom he tends. If crossed, he's likely to use his considerable influence to humiliate his opponents publicly, exposing them as "deranged." He may even attempt to have them committed as he has done to his goblin opponents. The chosen would be unwise to assume they

STORYTELLER: THE EFFECTS OF BANALITY

It's stated throughout this chapter that goblins are adversely affected by the presence of Dauntain, and that the power of the mundane can cause physical harm to nightmares. The extent to which an outsider can harm a goblin is based on a Banality rating (described under "Creating Dauntain," below). Whenever a goblin acquires points of Banality in excess of his current Glamour (or Willpower) rating, he can forget his fantastic nature and become a sleeper, even if only temporarily. Repeated acquisition of Banality makes this change permanent, effectively destroying the nightmare. At your discretion, the acquisition of excessive Banality might even transform a goblin into one of the aware Dauntain.

In less extreme circumstances, the acquisition of small amounts of Banality causes nausea, headaches and/or belligerence. Goblins in the presence of Dauntain with a 7+ Banality rating must make a successful Willpower roll against a difficulty equal to that Banality score or lose one die from all dice pools for the duration of exposure to the Dauntain. The goblin may find exposure physically uncomfortable and probably seeks to escape if at all possible, lest his discomfort become even more acute — and dangerous.

could automatically avoid such a fate, given Stark's reputation in the psychiatric community.

Sleepers unwittingly take advantage of goblins' dependence on Glamour to survive and prosper. By acting in banal and mundane ways, they can be far more dangerous than their aware counterparts. Most goblins are accustomed to defending themselves against active threats such as hunters and aware Dauntain. Sleepers, however, are an entirely different class of opponent. They don't realize that their actions cause harm to anyone, which makes it extremely difficult to get them to stop. Their very obliviousness to the fantastic world is both the source of their strength and the reason they are not easily defeatable (see "Banality," below).

It's therefore impossible to make generalizations about sleepers' methods. The best advice one can give the imbued is to "never overlook the obvious." Science and technology receives such unqualified acceptance in Western nations (and many others as well) that its presence is rarely questioned. Indeed, its *absence* tends to cause greater concern. The same is true of many other rationalistic systems such as medicine and psychology, which denigrate the fantastic in favor of logic and reductionism. The presence or proliferation of these forms of reason, logic and science can occasionally suggest the proximity or influence of sleeper Dauntain. The most alert and intuitive hunter sometimes makes this connection and thinks to look for the source of "anti-magic" at work.

Sleepers can pose a unique problem for hunters. On the one hand, they appear to be supernatural beings that possess a human host and therefore to warrant investigation and possibly destruction. On the other hand, one of these possessing spirits seems to cause no harm to its host, and potentially considerable harm to any goblins in its presence. How should the imbued handle such entities? They could use the beings as "lodestones" to attract the supernatural. By keeping an eye on these entities, the chosen might ferret out nightmares in a given area. These Dauntain could become unwitting allies in the hunt. This tactic is controversial and not all hunters are likely to support its use, whether because they feel it exploits sleepers or is an immoral compromise with the enemy. As more hunters encounter sleepers, however, the issue of how best to deal with them might become increasingly more urgent.

AWARE METHODS

Aware Dauntain are another matter entirely; they use methods that actively suit their goals. It's important to understand what a Dauntain seeks in order to understand her methodology. If a fury hopes to destroy a fae target, she might strike at his holdings, family and connections in the everyday world. None of these attacks harm the target directly, but they certainly break his spirit and weaken his resistance. But that doesn't necessarily mean a direct connection exists

STORYTELLER: ARE SLEEPERS MORTALS?

Because sleepers act like mortals and do not recognize their supernatural identity, you might wonder whether they're actually normal people. The answer is a resounding "No." Sleepers are supernatural beings in every important way. They're Dauntain, which is to say a type of goblin. That they don't realize this fact makes no difference. They're visible as "off" or "different" to second sight, with superimposed images of gloomy spirits. They are subject to edges that affect only the enemy. These "people" can behave normally in the presence of other monsters and at scenes involving hunters' powers. So, whereas other normal folks stagger off or are confused by supernatural sights, sleepers see it all. They may not understand it all and may be taken aback, but they don't lose self-control or necessarily flee uncontrollably. That resilience alone can mark them as "unusual" in hunters' eyes.

between every action an outsider performs. Aware Dauntain operate much as hunters do: in secret, following a logic that's often subtle or obscure to onlookers. The key to comprehending these beings' actions is to gather information about the Dauntain in question. The more intelligence a hunter has about an apostate nightmare, the better he understands her methods.

Aware Dauntain comprehend the relationship between the Dreaming and the mundane world. Indeed, that understanding is the foundation for their methods. A power-hungry sorcerer might systematically destroy the children's sections of bookstores, for example. No immediate connection between her quest for power and the attacks is apparent — unless an investigator understands Dauntain existence between the mundane and fantastic worlds. In truth, the sorcerer might require goblin test subjects in order to continue her search. She needs to get her hands on other fae. How does she do that? She targets sources of their power to draw them into her trap.

But even if the imbued grasp the Dauntain's hope to undo the possibly harmful effects of fantastic beings, hunters aren't always in favor of pariahs' efforts. The activities of the sorcerer, above, may raise the ire of many goblins and initiate a conflict that spreads widely in the mundane world. A Dauntain's views on a fitting fate for goblins might not coincide with hunters', either. Imbued efforts to draw out the humanity of a nightmare might come to a tragic end when that being is destroyed by a vengeful member of its own kind. Or a Dauntain's assistance might coincide with hunter efforts now, but when the outcast's efforts affect the material world and defenseless people, she could become the hunters' enemy. Ultimately, compromising

with the Dauntain is a tricky matter, complicated by the fact that they are still goblins, no matter how much the Dauntain deny it.

When it comes to the imbued, Dauntain proceed with caution. Hunters are clearly different from other mortals, especially as they seem aware of the existence of nightmares — or at least of other supernatural beings. Yet, these people are not fellow Dauntain. Pariahs may therefore choose to observe the imbued for some time before approaching them. They gather information by whatever means are at their disposal — personal surveillance, contacts, access to government or Internet records. Even armed with such information, solitary Dauntain rarely make contact with hunters. When they do, they bring (usually human) bodyguards and other assistants with them, such as security forces, bailiffs or contract labor, just in case things turn ugly. These cast-off goblins know firsthand how badly they're received by their own kind. Who knows how an unknown force such as the imbued might react to them?

STORYTELLER: THEMES

At first glance, the Dauntain would seem to be a particularly unappealing group, one that doesn't engender a great deal of dramatic potential for a **Hunter** chronicle. They can be self-absorbed, outright clueless or completely indifferent to mundane people. Yet, these are precisely the reasons why they *do* offer a variety of **Hunter** story hooks. The following are some of the story themes they can inspire.

ALIENATION

The Dauntain are all about isolation. Whether by choice or circumstance, these exiled nightmares have left behind the Dreaming forever. Whatever connection to it they still have brings them only pain and loss, representing what they are not. The fantastic goblin realm is indeed a place of nightmares, where everything they hate, fear and revile is given free rein.

At the same time, the Dauntain realize on some level what they've lost. They realize that the mundane isn't their true home and that they're prisoners in it. Try as they might, they cannot completely banish the hold the Dreaming has over them. Even sleepers long for a peace and contentment that they cannot fathom in a workaday existence.

Hunters sometimes feel the same way — set apart from the world they devote their lives to save. Do these feelings give them insight into the Dauntain? Empathy? Pity? A sense of kinship? Do they find kindred spirits among outsiders? If so, does it frighten or anger them to be more like a creature than like the people they know, love — and once were? How does such a connection to the other side affect hunters' ability to pursue the mission?

MADNESS

Unquestionably, many Dauntain are insane. Their hatred of all things fae knows no bounds and consumes

their existence. Even sleepers possess some of that fervor, albeit in a misunderstood or misguided way. The pariahs' desire to rid themselves of anything affiliated with the Dreaming is so great that they will themselves to forget it. It takes a powerful kind of insanity to produce such delusion. It takes an even more powerful kind to will the destruction of one's kin to protect one's alienation and ignorance. Yet, this is exactly what the Dauntain represent: hatred given form and power.

Although hunters aren't necessarily power-mad, many are insane — or they will be. The Herald's call makes overwhelming demands of the fragile human mind, as does operating in secret and without the support or knowledge of family or friends. It's no wonder that many imbued go mad, becoming deranged to the point of endangering themselves and others.

The single-mindedness of the Dauntain has echoes among the chosen. While you might find it heavy-handed to draw too close a parallel between Dauntain insanity and that of certain hunters, the similarities are present nonetheless. If nothing else, the Dauntain are a cautionary example of the unbridled pursuit of a cause.

TERROR

Closely tied to madness is the theme of terror. Dauntain are goblins. They may reject their heritage and lash out against it, but they're still creatures of dreams. The world from which they spring is very different from the material one, being filled with terrors the likes of which mortals can't imagine. Yet, the imbued may come face to face with see these terrors as such beings prey upon humanity.

Quite simply, the Dauntain can be frightening. These beings suffer from an intense self-denial or loathing, one so powerful that it can literally destroy portions of the reality from which they originate. That's far more than most hunters can do against goblins, and it makes the Dauntain terrifying weapons in the war against nightmares. But what are the consequences of manipulating such weapons? Is doing so even moral? Is it genocide, or is it simply self-preservation? Where do hunters draw the line? At what point do the imbued become worse than the creatures they face?

THE COMING WINTER

Goblins and the Dauntain recognize that great changes are afoot in the world. Forces are at work that might smother all imagination and hope, putting the Dreaming to an end forever. Whether individual nightmares and outsiders struggle against this transition or help usher it in is decided by what they believe is best for the world, whether mundane or fantastic.

Hunters are also aware of a change in the world, even if only through their limited perspectives. They have suddenly awakened to the truth of reality. They know that monsters exist and that their influence lurks everywhere. The world's precarious state, as well as

their own ignorance and impotence, leaves the imbued in need of friends they can trust. Individual chosen sometimes take chances and open dialogues with people — and even creatures — they believe might be able to aid them on the mission. These overtures don't always pay off and can be deals with the Devil that cause more harm than good. Yet, that doesn't always stop the imbued from trying. Ultimately, the chosen *need* allies, even if only to understand the world to which they have been exposed. Some may even turn to the Dauntain, hoping to find kindred spirits among these fellow outsiders.

FIRST CONTACT

How does initial contact with the Dauntain occur? Although it's impossible to make specific predictions about every possibility, some general guidelines exist. Hunters and pariahs can make each other's acquaintance while reacting to a goblin incursion. That's almost a certainty. The Dauntain are too isolated and few in number for the imbued to recognize them as distinct from other nightmares. It's therefore possible that hunters may interact with these outcasts for some time before they realize there's a distinction between a run-of-the-mill troll and one of these apostates.

Aware Dauntain pursue a variety of goals, as stated earlier. Despite their disavowal of the Dreaming, they are almost cursed to be forever in its thrall. Whether their hatred of the fantastic is so strong or because they wish to seize control of it, the Dauntain are defined by their opposition to it. Even in rejecting it, they acknowledge its importance to their existence. Consequently, they are drawn to incursions of fantastic reality into the mundane world — just as are the imbued.

Sleeper Dauntain are not much different in many respects. True, many of them (particularly nihilists) don't admit to belief in the Dreaming. But their denial of the Dreaming's power, their embrace of the mundane is what makes them a threat to nightmares. They don't seek out goblins, but goblins do come after them. In fact, it's not uncommon for a hunter to first encounter a sleeper while investigating a series of unexplained attacks against a seemingly ordinary person. Rather than clarifying the matter, second sight and observation edges only make the matter more uncertain. While those faculties could reveal that a Dauntain is indeed inhuman, they don't explain the being's nature or what it wants from its host or the world. Only through time, effort and communication can the imbued even begin to answer these questions — and then only fragmentarily.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First impressions are said to be lasting ones, and that's definitely true in Dauntain-hunter relations. The Dauntain can be recognizably inhuman from the imbued perspective. These entities may appear little different from any other nightmare. Indeed, some of the more

zealous imbued may take this resemblance as all the evidence they need and act without bothering to delve further into the matter. Innocents, Visionaries and Redeemers can be more willing to set aside their first impressions in favor of a deeper understanding of the Dauntain, but even they are likely to mistake outcasts for "ordinary" goblins.

Aware Dauntain are little better. Obsessed with their own world-views, they can perceive hunters as just another form of nightmare or, at best, a prodigal — a supernatural too distant from his goblin nature even to understand the concept of goblins. Aware Dauntain who make the effort to investigate the imbued don't keep this impression for long, though. These goblins know what it means to be a nightmare; they understand the Dreaming and its relationship with mundane reality. Once they realize that hunters don't have any connection to that other reality, they're likely to lose interest in the imbued. Most Dauntain are immersed in *their own* pursuits and issues. Anything — or anyone — who can't help them achieve their ends is considered inconsequential. A hunter who's ignorant of goblins is probably considered a waste of time.

Unaware Dauntain are, in general, no better off than the chosen. Not realizing what they are, how can they possibly understand hunters? A lot depends on what a sleeper's relationship is to the Dreaming. One of the lost, for instance, is unlikely to recognize anything in common with the imbued. She doesn't recognize the reality of the supernatural, let alone those who fight against it. A nihilist probably views hunters as eccentrics at best or psychopaths at worst. It's improbable that he finds any common ground with the imbued; a nihilist may even use mundane tools such as the police against them.

At the same time, sleepers can unwittingly possess supernatural powers and abilities, some of which may inadvertently affect hunters. Indeed, it's not impossible for one of the chosen to make first contact with a sleeper while investigating a "poltergeist" that turns out to be a sleeper's subconscious projection of her capabilities. That she doesn't understand or recognize her connection to the phenomena around her might make her just as dangerous as any other type of Dauntain.

ALLIES OF CONVENIENCE

At best, the Dauntain can be unreliable and possibly dangerous allies for the imbued. Their interests, methods and goals overlap with hunters' at certain points, but there's enough dissonance that any alliance between the two groups would be tenuous at best. And yet the Dauntain offer the imbued an opportunity like no other: A chance to learn about the enemy *from the inside*. By coming to tentative terms with these renegade goblins, hunters may learn more about nightmares than they ever could working alone.

DAUNTAIN INTENTIONS

It's all well and good to say that hunters have a lot to gain from working with the Dauntain, despite the obvious risks. But do the pariahs have any reason to work with hunters? True, their goals are similar to a point. Both view goblins as an enemy, or at least as a threat. Beyond that, what do they share?

As usual, a great deal depends on individual Dauntain and their goals and methods. These goblins are solitary creatures who depend on their own innate abilities, as well as any mundane contacts and influence. The appearance of the imbued provides them with a chance to gain "muscle" in their war against the Dreaming. Weak though hunters may be compared to many other supernatural creatures, they nevertheless stand head and shoulders above the mass of humanity. Second sight and edges give the imbued unique advantages that many Dauntain would gladly apply to their purposes.

Dauntain who discover hunters can perceive them as excellent "deep-cover agents." Outcasts, specifically the aware, stand out like sore thumbs to other goblins. The taint of the mundane emanates from them like a beacon — but not so for hunters. By manipulating the chosen to serve their ends — perhaps by sharing information about the supernatural or offering mundane resources (even money) — the Dauntain gain the ability to strike against their foes without drawing attention to themselves, at least not initially.

The imbued are also ciphers. The Dauntain have no idea who or what hunters truly are. Nor do they know how to deal with these people or their bizarre powers. This uncertainty also benefits the Dauntain, however, whose own nature and abilities are very well understood — at least by other goblins. The imbued provide the Dauntain with more than mere muscle. These people are an X-factor to use against nightmares, and that makes them extremely valuable as couriers, resources and allies to the pariahs.

DAUNTAIN AWARENESS

When a hunter first appears on the scene, a Dauntain is more than likely to assume she's just another type of nightmare — or even another Dauntain. That's both a blessing and a curse for the chosen.

On one hand, this misunderstanding gives hunters an upper hand. *They* are an unknown quantity for a change. A hunter might "play along" with an outcast and coax information out of the being while she can, before it becomes apparent that the hunter really doesn't understand the Dreaming or fae existence at all. On the other hand, misunderstanding of hunters may cause Dauntain to perceive them as rivals and possibly even a threat. After all, outcasts aren't *that* different from regular folks, and we all know humanity's tendency to destroy what it doesn't understand. This tendency can

sour any attempt to establish peaceful relations with apostate goblins.

APPROACHING HUNTERS

Assuming that a given Dauntain somehow overcomes her narrow perspective — perhaps through prolonged observation — and realizes that hunters aren't tied to the Dreaming, how does she go about approaching the imbued? How does she initiate contact? Outcasts and hunters are both extremely suspicious of the motives of any supernatural beings — even ones that offer to assist them. A Dauntain cannot simply walk up to a hunter and offer her services as an ally. This approach would be met with skepticism and possibly violence. The renegade must use subtlety to initiate contact. Fortunately, these beings excel at subtlety; it's their way of life.

The Dauntain probably try to draw hunters to themselves by demonstrating their usefulness to the hunt. Suppose some trolls terrorize a group of schoolchildren on a regular basis, invading their dreams and feeding on their imagination. This is kind of depredation enrages hunters — and many Dauntain. An outcast nightmare might alert a group of hunters to these offenses, whether through an anonymous phone call, a written message or some other means. Alternatively, the Dauntain might seek out the trolls and engage them in numerous short skirmishes, hoping that his actions attract the attention of local hunters. Whatever the means, the goal is to bring the imbued to the Dauntain so the chosen believe themselves in control of the situation. The last thing these pariahs want to do is frighten away the imbued.

Their problem is that the renegades must avoid being lumped in with other nightmares. Unless a hunter is very experienced in dealing with goblins, she's not likely to notice any difference in the beings faced. Ideally, Dauntain's very actions against other goblins is evidence enough that there's a rift between the creatures on the scene. Of course, hunters might let them fight it out and take on the weakened victor, or opt to destroy all the monsters and let God or the Devil sort them out.

All these strategies for making contact with hunters apply to aware Dauntain. Sleepers don't usually approach hunters at all, at least not with any kind of supernatural motive. If they ally with hunters at all, it's through happenstance rather than intent — a mutual cause or desire to accomplish overlapping goals.

The lost are something of an exception, as they often consider themselves on a crusade against an aspect of the Dreaming that impinges on mundane reality (although they usually associate the fantastic with insanity or delusion). They may attempt to ally with hunters, but with the intent to "cure" the imbued of their madness — that which compels the chosen to act against these imaginary goblins and trolls.

APPROACHING DAUNTAIN

Of course, first contact needn't be initiated by the Dauntain. Hunters, particularly those who tend toward the Mercy and Vision Virtues, might seek interaction — or at least that's what they believe they do. More

often than not, what the imbued perceive as initiative

is in fact a reaction to the Dauntain's carefully laid at-

tempts to lure

hunters forth. Perhaps an

unsuspecting nightmare is framed for

crimes by a renegade, and the

Dauntain steps in to help hunters

when they seek justice. Unfortu-

nately, outcasts understand the

imbued only as well as hunters under-

stand the pariahs. Apostate goblins

often fail to realize that the chosen are

unusually alert to the presence of super-

natural beings in the world, even when an

outcast goes to great lengths to trick one of

the chosen into doing her bidding. That

same outcast who sets the trap may in turn be

recognized as the perpetrator of the crime

thanks to hunters' edge-bolstered perceptions.

Indeed, many Dauntain learn to regret their

arrogance about the imbued — assuming they

survive first contact.

When a hunter approaches a Dauntain, he

probably recognizes the presence of goblins or

possessors in an area, moves in and investigates. If

he's exceptionally perceptive and experienced with

nightmares, he may notice that there are different

factions at work and that the Dauntain might be

amenable to negotiations. The need for allies is a

common one, as is the desire to better understand

goblins. There's also the possibility that a hunter

can be just as manipulative as any Dauntain. Vi-

sionaries and Judges might find it useful to have a

cat paw in their struggle against the supernatural. A

hunter might initiate contact with a Dauntain who

has been stalking a group of trolls. The imbued might

do so not to exchange information as he claims, but

to draw the nightmares out into the open — with the

Dauntain as bait.

BREAKING CONTACT

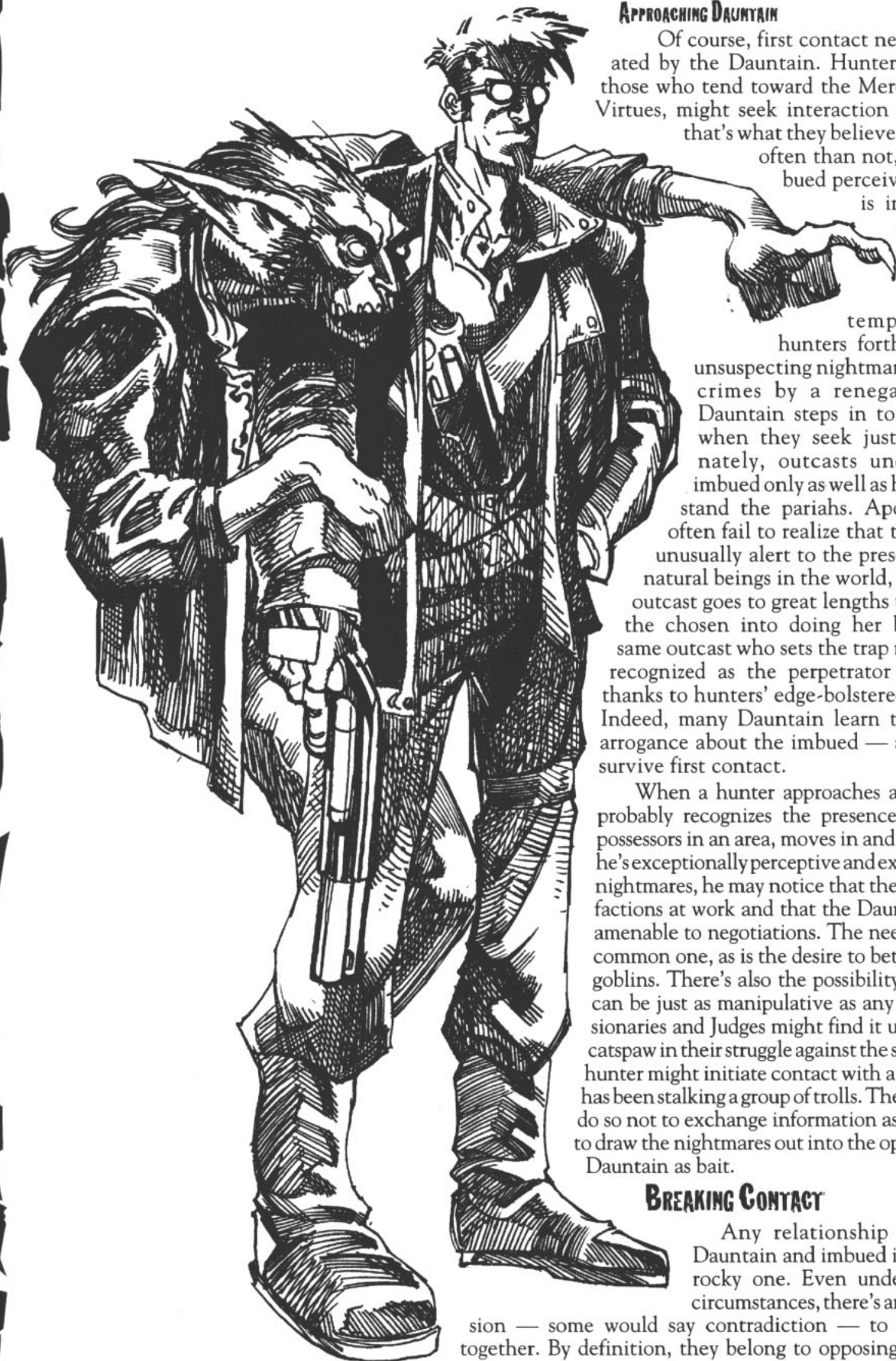
Any relationship between the

Dauntain and imbued is likely to be a

rocky one. Even under the best of

circumstances, there's an inherent ten-

sion — some would say contradiction — to their working together. By definition, they belong to opposing camps. Some



hunters might see cooperating with these beings as a form of treason. Beyond even such partisan attitudes about hunters' course, imbued/ outcast motives and goals can eventually clash or contradict, and stress or break alliances.

Suppose that a hunter and a pariah have established a working rapport. The two exchange information about nightmare activity in a portion of the city. They play off each other's unique abilities to defeat a brood of trolls preying on museum attendees. But the Dauntain is a fury who is so consumed with anger that she regularly forgets why she rages against nightmares. She loses sight of her goals and proceeds to harm defenseless people in a frenzy against the trolls. Not surprisingly, her hunter ally ends their relationship — violently. Or, one of the lost whom a hunter uses as a supernatural "canary in a coal mine" realizes that he's being exploited and turns against the imbued.

For the Dauntain, ending contact with hunters is dangerous business, especially if they've manipulated the imbued for their own ends. Although individually weak and ignorant, many hunters possess enough of a community to call in reinforcements when needed. They also have a shared siege mentality, which complements their desire to strike back at anything that strikes them. Thus, Dauntain who wish to end an alliance with hunters should be prepared for the possibility of retaliation.

For hunters, the situation can be far less perilous, at least in the short term. Hunters may disagree about their purpose or goals as imbued, but they can set aside their differences when a common enemy arises, such as when a Dauntain betrays one of their colleagues. In the long term, however, hunters' differences alienate them as badly as Dauntain are isolated from their own kind. It is that ongoing distance from their own kind that jeopardizes both Dauntain and individual hunters.

COMMON REACTIONS

Once first contact between hunters and Dauntain occurs, there's no set path for it to follow. Individuals on both sides react in different ways, usually according to their own interests and impressions. It's therefore vital that the Storyteller know an outcast's motives to understand how he reacts to the imbued, their behavior and their objectives. A few of the most common reactions from fae castoffs and imbued are suggested below.

FEAR

Most goblins — Dauntain included — have a particularly egocentric view of the universe. They tend to see all other supernatural beings as other types of nightmares. Thus, when pariahs first encounter hunters, they probably perceive these gifted beings as a type of goblin they've never encountered before. That's a cause for concern. Dauntain don't like surprises, and the imbued would certainly qualify. Existence of these charmed people means the renegades have even more foes or problems to

deal with. It also means something has changed about the Dreaming or has always existed without their awareness. Until Dauntain have gathered sufficient information to determine hunters' intentions, they keep their distance or try to avoid hunters altogether.

Some hunters may feel the same way about these strange possessors. Consider that encounters with the Dauntain may occur in proximity or regard to other goblins. The imbued may enter the situation believing they face one type of enemy, only to discover a *second* party at work, one whose very presence harms or harries the first. A tactical retreat may be in order for these imbued. The revelation that yet another faction lurks in the world probably causes great concern and inspires dread.

SUSPICION

Hunters and Dauntain share one major state of mind: paranoia. Both groups have a tenuous hold on the world. They are regularly concerned about security breaches staged by their enemies. Both groups are small in number and without any real organization to rely upon. These conditions make them particularly vulnerable to bouts of suspicion, especially when it comes to the realization that there's yet *another* group of beings out there.

This suspicion commonly manifests as a kind of skepticism about the true intentions of the other group. As naïve as they are about reality, some hunters possess an arrogance that makes it hard to conceive of supernatural beings as potential allies (or at least not as enemies). Dauntain feel much the same way, believing that the imbued cannot possibly aid — let alone understand — them.

In the final analysis, suspicion is far more dangerous than fear. The latter tends to undermine confrontations. The former can lead to confrontations that undermine any chance of long-term accord between hunters and the Dauntain.

CURIOSITY

Observant or introspective hunters realize that they know very little about the creatures they face, and they seek to resolve that problem. They can be curious about the appearance of the Dauntain. Are these goblins a rare occurrence? Or evidence that even nightmares can change? Or perhaps a potential means to sever the connection between possessors and hosts? The imbued undoubtedly have numerous questions for and about the Dauntain, which is why some hunters attempt to gain deeper insights into pariah nature and activities.

Renegades can be just as curious about the imbued, maybe more so as the chosen appear similar to themselves yet different. Unlike hunters, aware Dauntain understand their own existence and that of other goblins. They don't doubt that their cause is just and that they must succeed over their brethren. For many Dauntain, knowledge is power. No sorcerer or fury denies himself information that might aid in his quest to undo other goblins. Curiosity is therefore a possible

response to the emergence of the imbued, coupled, of course, with the Dauntain tendency to assess a situation fully before acting.

Meanwhile, sleeper Dauntain are likely to view hunters as unstable — possibly insane — individuals whose interest in them is cause for concern. Sleeper curiosity regarding hunters focuses on how to get away from these lunatics, and perhaps how to get them help.

RELIEF

If the Dauntain and the imbued can overcome their natural suspicion of one another and find common ground, relief may result for both parties. If a hunter and an outcast both investigate a rash of mysterious suicides, they may initially be wary of any strangers who take a similar interest. After fleeting encounters, each party may discover that the other is not responsible for the deaths, but also trying to resolve the matter.

Even the most fanatical Dauntain realize that they are few and their situation against the supernatural is precarious. Understanding that hunters are not, in fact, another type of goblin descended from the Dreaming does not necessarily put them at ease, but it does relieve some concern for life and limb. The Dauntain rarely see non-goblins as a threat to themselves. Indeed, they often treat “prodigals” — as they call other such beings — with contempt. But that doesn’t mean an outsider can’t learn from one of these beings in the short term — perhaps what he’s learned about the murders.

For their part, some chosen can be relieved that the Dauntain are not necessarily hostile. Considering the wide variety of other groups that do have it in for the imbued, this discovery is worth celebrating. A glib heretic may present himself as a “redeemer” of goblins, coinciding with Merciful hunters’ own goals. A fury’s desire to destroy certain monsters might fall right in line with a Zealot’s objectives. Discovering allies or sympathetic fellows among the “enemy” can offer hope to some imbued, even while others see these beings as tainted by the same corruption as other goblins.

OPPOSING HUNTERS

This chapter focuses on how relations can get under way and be maintained between hunters and outcast fae, but such interaction doesn’t need to be amicable — not even from the beginning. The Dauntain can react aggressively or with hostility to the chosen right away.

Dauntain opposition to the hunt could stem from several sources. The simplest and most immediate is self-preservation. Although it’s true that the Dauntain are not the same as other nightmares, many hunters don’t recognize the distinction — not even if they perceive it. Reactions to the imbued can therefore be entirely about self-defense, and ultimately counteraction, assuming anyone survives an initial encounter.

Dauntain may also react negatively to hunters from the outset to protect their own schemes or machinations. Pariahs are often arrogant and self-absorbed. The

idea that another being should intrude upon their domain and act without permission is abhorrent. These goblins do not sit idly by and watch as ignorant humans disrupt their plans or cause premature harm to the very goblins that these outcasts target. If a Dauntain has plotted the downfall of her kind or a particular opponent for decades, she doesn’t allow some mere human or prodigal to undo all her delicate plans. She tries to eliminate the threat so her efforts may continue.

It’s also possible that a renegade misunderstands the nature of the hunt and acts against it. If he believes the imbued are actually agents of his enemies, he might try to destroy them from the outset.

IMBUED DAUNTAIN

There are no examples of imbued Dauntain in the canonical world of **Hunter**. While you and your Storyteller are free to explore this possibility, certain facts should be considered. More so than perhaps every other group described in **First Contact**, the Dauntain are unsuitable as candidates for the imbuing. Outcasts are not ordinary people, regardless of any claims they might make. That they reject or abhor their heritage is beside the point as far as the Heralds are concerned. The Dauntain are thus highly unlikely to hear the Messengers’ call.

Then there’s the more practical concern that the Dauntain already possess a variety of supernatural abilities. Adding the effects of the imbuing to that mix might unbalance your chronicle, creating a character with far more power than any others. It almost seems as if the Heralds want hunters to work together to achieve any lasting successes against the supernatural. By condoning the imbuing of one of the Dauntain, the Heralds’ intention is thwarted — or at least flouted. Furthermore, by permitting a clearly supernatural entity to be chosen, you could undermine the “common man” theme of the game.

Of course, you may not agree with these rationales against imbued Dauntain. The information presented in this chapter is meant to be speculative. While there are “official” answers to certain questions regarding the relationship between pariahs and the chosen, that’s not the final word on the matter — especially if you don’t want it to be. Maybe you want to blur the distinctions between “us” and “them” that many hunters recognize. By presenting one of “them” as enjoying the obvious blessings of the Heralds, you create a situation that could make hunters pause for thought. Why has a creature been chosen? What does that mean for the hunt? If a rebel nightmare can be imbued, what about other types of creatures?

In the end, what’s most important is that an imbued Dauntain should be included for a reason. Breaking any **Hunter** metaphysics is always acceptable if it serves a dramatic purpose. Making the characters question their mission, the role of the

Messengers and their relationship with the creatures of the night is a fine motive. Ultimately, **Hunter** is about seeking answers to difficult questions about one's identity and the nature of the world.

STORYTELLER MATERIAL

Whereas previous material in this chapter is directed largely at players, with brief asides to you, this section focuses on using the Dauntain in **Hunter** stories. This section gives you tools and advice for presenting exiles as allies, enemies or enigmas in your chronicle. If you like, you may also study the Dauntain further in the **Changeling: The Dreaming** supplement **The Autumn People**.

WHAT THE DAUNTAIN KNOW

As a rule, pariahs know very little about the true nature of the imbued or their mission. This is especially true of sleepers, who haven't the foggiest notion of what hunters are or that they're even much different from other people. Of course, aware Dauntain are another matter. Being reclusive and paranoid, they can be keen observers of others, which may give them *limited* insight into the imbued.

THE IMBUING

One of the greatest mysteries regarding the imbued is their origin. Aware Dauntain may initially view hunters as another type of prodigal, a misled nightmare that has lost touch with the Dreaming. That assumption doesn't hold up to close scrutiny, though. The chosen defy easy categorization as a type of goblin gone awry, even more so than do bloodsuckers or shapechangers. It doesn't take long for a Dauntain to realize that hunters are somehow *different* from "other changelings."

The Dauntain recognize that there's an epic change under way in the world. Many heretics prophesy a time when the wall between the mundane world and Dreaming will collapse. Perhaps hunters are the vanguard of a new injection of the fantastic into the ordinary world. Others speak of the coming of the mythical "winter kings" who will do just the opposite: destroy Glamour in all its manifestations, especially goblins, to prepare the way for a new world ruled by mortals. Could hunters be these mythical beings? No Dauntain is certain, and many would scoff at the notion but few can deny that the imbued are unusual.

CAPABILITIES AND EDGES

The Dauntain know next to nothing about imbued edges. They don't understand hunters' source of power or even their purpose, but they may be able to draw some conclusions based upon what they observe when hunter gifts are used. The Dauntain are apt to misunderstand edges as akin to their own powers or those of other nightmares. This misperception can contribute to mistakes when dealing with the imbued, opening the door for hunters to wreak havoc on exiles' plans.

HUNTER CODE

Hunter code is a complete mystery to the Dauntain. Indeed, they overlook its existence utterly.

HUNTER-NET

Hunter-net is likewise unknown to outcasts. Although there have been occasional security breaches of the list from time to time, they are the exception rather than the rule. No Dauntain has gained access to hunter-net. Neither are any likely to do so anytime in the future. Renegade goblins must acquire their understanding of hunters by direct observation and interaction.

KNOWLEDGE OF MONSTERS

The Dauntain may be as ignorant about hunters as hunters are about them, but that lack of knowledge doesn't necessarily extend to other monsters. Outcasts understand something of the nature and abilities of creatures to varying degrees, which is why they're useful allies to the imbued. But that understanding is skewed by the fact that these nightmares view everything in terms of their own kind. All other monsters are simply different types of fae, "prodigals" who have lost their way. Hunters may therefore learn to take whatever a Dauntain says with a grain of salt. Sometimes these beings are just as confused about the other entities of the world as are hunters themselves.

NIGHTMARES

Obviously, the Dauntain know more about nightmares than any other type of monster. Who else could provide hunters with so much information about this particularly elusive and enigmatic type of creature?

You may assume that all aware Dauntain know everything described about nightmares in both **Hunter** (Chapter 9) and the **Storytellers Companion**. If you want, you can introduce elements from **Changeling: The Dreaming** too, although that level of detail is far more than most hunters even suspect, let alone learn or can comprehend.

And yet, the Dauntain perspective on other goblins is still skewed; exiles have their own prejudices about their cousins. "Feeding" on the creativity of mortals isn't necessarily as violent or traumatic as these renegades would have hunters believe, for example. Likewise, the degree to which other nightmares bear ill will toward humanity can be exaggerated. To some extent, the Dauntain err without realizing it. Their perceptions are twisted by their hatred or fear, making it hard for them to separate truth from opinion. Feel free to take advantage of this discrepancy by using the Dauntain to convey equal parts insight and error to the imbued. **Hunter** stories benefit from uncertainty and misdirection, and the Dauntain are perfect vehicles for such pitfalls.

BLOODSUCKERS

Like all goblins, the Dauntain believe vampires to be nightmares descended from the Kinslayer, a fae who killed his brother after believing himself belittled in the

eyes of his society. Bloodsuckers bear the Kinslayer's curse and are cut off from the Dreaming that nourishes other goblins. Although vampires are cast out, unscrupulous nightmares can make such beings useful allies and can find common cause with them in their efforts to feed upon mortals — vampires on their blood and goblins on their creativity — a deadly combination.

Unless a Dauntain has personally had extensive dealings with these undead beings, she's not likely to know more than the basics about them. The intricacies of vampire politics and rivalries elude renegades. There are a few Dauntain who do deal with bloodsuckers, though. They understand more, such as the fact that vampires have their own society that's divided into two hostile camps, as well as a sense for some of these prodigals' weaknesses (fire and sunlight).

SHAPECHANGERS

The Dauntain believe shapechangers (whether werewolves or other varieties) were once an integral part of goblin society. At some point in the distant past, the shifters abandoned the Dreaming, believing that goblins remained complacent in the face of terrible changes that occurred in the cosmos. Since then, shapechangers have fought against these changes on their own, with little or no assistance from their former kind.

Very few Dauntain have regular contact with changers. Nevertheless, they see shifters as kindred spirits because the animal-people likewise found goblin society selfish and greedy — unwilling to make the changes necessary to weather the coming storm. This admiration is rarely two-way, but it doesn't stop the Dauntain from proclaiming it to shifters all the same.

GHOSTS

Dauntain don't exactly believe ghosts to be types of goblins, but they perceive a connection between the two "species." Renegades believe spirits come about when particularly creative individuals die. Their imagination is so potent that it creates some semblance of itself in the lands of the dead. Renegades have noticed the increased number of ghosts in the living world of late. They cannot explain the rise, but surmise that it somehow presages changes in the cosmos, perhaps the prophesied separation or destruction of the mortal and fantastic worlds, or the rise of a "spirit army" to fight a final battle against the returning "winter kings" of goblin legend. Hunters' similarly apocalyptic explanations for the proliferation of spirits might be the basis for alliances between Dauntain and the imbued. Maybe they can put these spirits to rest together and forestall (or hasten) whatever fate holds.

WIZARDS

Goblins in general have an affinity for warlocks, whom they believe possess creativity so powerful that it can warp reality itself. Nightmares view wizards as the prime manipulators of the world due to the warlocks' impressive ability to dream things into fact.

The Dauntain and the sorcerers among them are at odds with wizards. Outcasts reject the Dreaming and its metaphysics to embrace the mundane instead. Their capabilities lie in maintaining and preserving the everyday world, denying imagination and the supernatural. That denial confounds the imagination, which warlocks seek to bring to and use to alter the world. In fact, warlocks seem almost as strongly affected by the Dauntain's Banality as are nightmares, as detailed below. This relationship between exiles and wizards is perhaps another reason the imbued might take an interest in the Dauntain: to use their power of the mundane against magic.

CREATING DAUNTAIN

To use the Dauntain effectively in a **Hunter** story, you need more than an understanding of what they are and why they act as they do, important though those things are. This section provides a quick-and-dirty system for generating Dauntain cast members.

FIRST STEPS

Dauntain are unusual beings in that they are goblins but are also closer to ordinary humans than they are to true nightmares. The process of creating a Dauntain character is therefore slightly more complicated than for creating a "simple" goblin. First, determine whether an exile is aware or a sleeper. An aware Dauntain has greater access to powers than a sleeper does.

Also decide how deeply immersed the renegade is in the mundane world. The measure is a new Trait called Banality. Banality describes the extent to which a Dauntain has given herself over to everyday reality, as opposed to the fantastic realm of the Dreaming. The presence of strong sources of Banality makes normal goblins uncomfortable and deters their ability to use their own innate powers and capabilities. A Dauntain's Banality rating is used as the difficulty number of any nightmare's attempt to use his powers in the renegade's vicinity. Goblins are therefore impotent near many sleepers and might not understand why, which is the reason these beings pose such a threat.

Typically, an outsider's Banality rating is higher than his Glamour or Willpower rating. Therein is the essence of being one of the Dauntain. Such a changeling's denial of the supernatural has intensified to such a point that it eclipses his connection with the Dreaming. Nevertheless, even highly banal Dauntain can still use their Glamour (as described in the **Storytellers Companion**) or Willpower (as described in **Hunter**) to fuel magical abilities. The effects of Banality apply in addition to the Dauntain capacity to perform goblin spells. Sleepers do not use their powers consciously, but may do so unconsciously.

THE POWER OF BANALITY

Dauntain counteraction of the supernatural is one of their most potent weapons against goblins. Banality has the following effects:

• Goblins in the presence of Dauntain with a 7+ Banality rating must make a successful Willpower roll against a difficulty equal to that Banality score or lose one die from all dice pools for the duration of exposure to the outcast. A goblin may find exposure physically uncomfortable and may seek to escape it if at all possible, lest his discomfort become even more acute.

• When a nightmare seeks to affect someone with his powers, a roll is typically made against a predetermined difficulty, with a dice pool based on the creature's Glamour (or Willpower) or on the capability itself. In the presence of Dauntain, that difficulty number is equal to the renegade's Banality rating if it is the higher of the two. Note that warlocks' spells are equally hampered in the presence of Dauntain, suggesting that there may indeed be some connection between wizards and fae.

• If a goblin tries to use a power in the presence of an outcast — by overcoming the exile's Banality rating — and fails, the goblin himself gains a point of Banality. That point can be eliminated only by cashing in a point of Glamour (or permanent Willpower), or by undertaking actions dedicated to being cleansed, such as recovering lost goblin artifacts or feeding at length on a particularly inspirational mortal.

Prolonged exposure to a Dauntain's Banality (perhaps for a scene or longer) may also increase a goblin's own Banality, at your discretion. The acquisition of small amounts of Banality causes nausea, headaches and/or belligerence on the part of a nightmare.

• Should a goblin's Banality ever exceed his Glamour (or Willpower) rating, he becomes either a sleeper or, in rare cases, an aware Dauntain. This change can be temporary, say a few days or weeks, or permanent if exposure to the mundane world is particularly intense, such as being held prisoner by one of the Dauntain.

SAMPLE DAUNTAIN

Dr. ANTON STARK

The epitome of a sleeper, Dr. Anton Stark is arrogant, close-minded and extremely dangerous. How he became a renegade is unknown, but the precipitating trauma was so great that he fell victim to Banality — and has never looked back. After treating a young girl whose parents feared she spent too much time in an elaborate fantasy world, Stark became convinced that her "malady" was sufficiently widespread among others to deserve his full attention.

Since then, he's devoted himself, his considerable reputation and his resources to locating and "treating" goblins. Stark doesn't realize that his patients are supernatural in origin, of course. They're simply "delusional" or "schizophrenic" — and in need of help. He likewise doesn't recognize his own supernatural capabilities, using them unconsciously when faced with other gob-

SLEEPER POWERS

Sleepers are Dauntain, and Dauntain have powers, but sleepers don't realize they're Dauntain. So where does that leave you when you want to use a sleeper's supernatural capabilities in a story?

Basically, a sleeper's powers work no differently than those of any other Dauntain. They still cost Glamour (or Willpower) to activate and still require die rolls to use. What differs is their *appearance*. A sleeper trying to escape from a hunter might inadvertently activate powers such as Trip or Hole in the Wall to aid her. From a systems perspective, these powers function normally. From a story perspective, they're an unconscious manifestation of a sleeper's true nature, one she may not accept, let alone understand.

lins and dismissing the phenomena as coincidence or by applying "scientific" explanations.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception (Skeptical) 4, Intelligence (Logical) 5, Wits (Clear-Headed) 4

Abilities: Academics (Psychology) 4, Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 2, Drive 2, Empathy 3, Etiquette 2, Expression 3, Investigation (Forensics) 4, Medicine (Pharmaceuticals) 4, Performance 3, Technology 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Resources 4

Spells: Ban, Enslave, Forget, Go Seek

Glamour: 4, **Banality:** 9, **Willpower:** 7

MARTIN CHAMBERS

Martin Chambers wants nothing more from his existence than power. As a goblin, he was always



unhappy. He felt restricted by the dictates of Dreaming society. Although his fellows counseled him to avoid the stifling mundane, they spent their time feeding off the creative energies of mortals. What could be more hypocritical? Martin realized that the others were jealous of him and worried about the strength he'd achieve if he transgressed the strictures of his kind.

Ultimately, he violated them — not out of sheer perversity, but because they impeded the fulfillment of his true potential. Since then, Martin has delved ever deeper into the mundane world; tapping its energy to fuel his own ambitions. He has never forgotten the reality of the Dreaming; he simply views it as gaudy and mind-numbing compared to the stark beauty of the “unmagical.” Indeed, he believes the mundane world will provide him with more power than he could ever have achieved had he remained amid the fantastic.

He now seeks out others of his kind to force them to see the truth as he perceives it. This work frequently draws the attention of fanatical goblins who care more about Martin's destruction than they do about any consequences for the mortal world.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina (Relentless) 4, Charisma (Persuasive) 4, Manipulation (Cunning) 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits (Clever) 5



Abilities: Academics (Existentialism) 3, Awareness (Goblins) 4, Drive 2, Etiquette 3, Intuition 3, Leadership 3, Occult (Hidden Worlds) 4, Politics 2, Technology 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Influence 2, Resources 2

Spells: Enslave, Forget, Teleport, TK, Wreck

Glamour: 6, **Banality:** 7, **Willpower:** 7



CHAPTER 5:

SECRET SOCIETIES

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

— Psalms 51:6

The following three World of Darkness groups are others composed largely of mortals who are in the know about the supernatural. Imbued may work with or run afoul of these collectives, too. What separates them from groups described in the previous chapters is their size — small to infinitesimal — and their corresponding evasiveness. Almost no people are aware that these societies exist, and very few creatures are so informed. And yet, these groups' interest in the supernatural, and perhaps in hunters themselves, can alert the chosen to their existence.

THE ORPHIC CIRCLE

She was such a mousy little thing that it almost didn't occur to me to give her the once-over. I thought she might just be another homeless person turned out by the state. I'll bet you've seen her type in this town more times than you'd like: greasy and matted hair, grimy face, frayed and mismatched clothes, wide and darting eyes.

I was about to step out of her path — she was coming straight at me — when she said what sounded like, “N”, my name is Niner—” at which point she froze. That's when she seemed to notice me for the first time, and she said, “I have to find the Ebon Bench. Do you know where they are?” She sounded a lot younger than she looked.

Just as the thought of her on a bench somewhere alone at night made me really feel for her, some kind of recognition went off in my head. I said, “I'm sorry, you have to find the what?” At the same time, I really looked at her and saw that she was different.

And then she made me jump: “Who!” She yelled at me at the top of her lungs! I was afraid somebody'd think I was attacking her.

I said, “Look, it's okay—”

No! Not ‘okay.’” The words came out like she was trying to hammer them: “The! Ebon! Bench! Collective noun naming a group of individuals, therefore: Who!”

I was still trying to remember where I had heard about an ebon bench or an ebon throne when she pulled a Snickers wrapper out of her pocket and started licking the paper.

I said, “Hey, I was headed for dinner. Would you like...?” She just nodded.

We walked to some diner near the Loop. She did this chant over and over the whole way. I remember the first part went, “‘A’ my name is Aster, ‘B’ my name is Boa...” and the names got really strange after that. She skipped letters, too. She wasn't chanting the whole alphabet. The next one was ‘E’ my name is... something.

Anyway, she ate the burger I bought her, and the food seemed to calm her down. She leaned across the table and said, really soft, “Do you know Taenarus blew up?”



That was when it all clicked. Remember I told you that I've been re-reading all the old hunter-net posts from Carpenter and Ichmail? Well, Ichmail talked about this secret organization he was supposed to have belonged to, the Orpheus Circle. Ichmail claimed they were the ones who started this whole mess, but Carpenter said Ichmail was telling... not lies, maybe, but selective truths. So, I'm thinking this woman might have some answers, and I know I've got about a million questions. I got so excited that I didn't notice the woman standing next to our booth.

The woman said, "Nina" — not 'Niner,' like I thought at first, 'Nine-uh' — "what have I told you about talking to strangers?" She looked really cross, but relieved. She also looked too beautiful to be alive, know what I mean? Kind of reminded me of an old girlfriend. She had my dinner guest by the hand and was trying to pull her out of the booth, but Nina snatched her hand away, pushed herself back against the wall and covered her ears. She said, "Don't call me that! You know not to call me that! She's been bad. She has to report to the Bench...."

It seemed to me like a good time to figure out exactly what I was in the middle of. Instead of just staring at the gorgeous one, I let some light shine over the whole place. I was startled to realize that I had never seen anyone quite like these two. They were like vampires, but not as dead-looking. More like blood junkies, but not exactly.

"It looks like she doesn't want to go," I said.

The beautiful one just stared at me like I had grown a third eye or something. "Does everybody in this shitty town have something hidden up his sleeve? Look, this is family business. Do yourself a favor and stay out of it." She turned to my guest again and said, "Please come with me. It's dangerous for both of us on the streets. How did you get out this time, anyway?"

My guest said, "What's my name? Guess and I'll go with you."

Gorgeous sighed like she'd done this before and didn't feel like doing it anymore. She looked resigned and said, "Aster Bunion?"

My guest shook her head.

"Boa Sinntrue?"

My guest said, "Nope."

They started to go faster than I could keep up with, and the names were too weird for me to catch. Finally, my guest said, "Want a hint?"

Gorgeous nodded.

"If your last name were 'Gunsvaber, and Mummy and Poppy had given us the same first name—"

Quick as lightning, Gorgeous said, "Tori Sunbane? You got me with Tori Sunbane?" She was smiling when she said it. My guest just about jumped out of the booth and gave Gorgeous a hug. She turned around and said, "Thank you for feeding me. Let me know if you find the Ebon Bench, okay?"

Gorgeous threw a folded piece of paper on the table and said, "Do me a favor. Forget you ever saw us." And they walked out, arm in arm. On the table was a thousand-dollar bill. First one I'd ever seen.

I wish she hadn't left the money. I never told anybody else about it all because I wondered if I'd done the right thing. I mean, what if they were related, but Gorgeous took the little one away and drank all her blood? After a while, though, I knew if I had it to do all over again, I'd do the same thing. I can't see my family now that I have legs again. How could I explain it? But the last thing I'd ever do is stand in the way of somebody else's family reunion.

THE BROKEN CIRCLE

"Devilry" best sums up the means and ends of the Orphic Circle, a secretive cult whose members once pursued power through devotion to the Underworld. The 300 beings — some mortal, some supernatural — who belonged to the cabal would have been prime targets for the imbued. Their crimes included — but were not limited to — kidnapping, blackmail, murder, human sacrifice, torture, cannibalism, traffic with demons and stealing from libraries (the Vatican library, for one). And, unlike other secret organizations detailed in this book, some imbued are reasonably informed about the Orphic Circle. An ex-Orphic once infiltrated hunter-net to share details about the cabal's apocalyptic schemes. Ultimately, the concerns expressed to the imbued by the notorious "Ichmail" over further depredations the cult might commit — in its efforts to *merge the worlds of the living and the dead* — proved misplaced. The circle's members — including ghosts, vampires and sorcerers, as well as a variety of mortals — were, with only a few exceptions, already dead, destroyed or serving as vessels for the very beings they once gave obeisance.

Obviously, the Orphics anticipated a somewhat different outcome. Had any of them been certain of even a fragmentary history of the cabal, their collective fate might have been foreseen.

Ichmail got near the truth with his speculation that a vampire, acting as an emissary for forces from beyond, founded the Orphic Circle. In fact, Orphism existed as an ancient Greek cult before its discovery by a death-obsessed bloodsucker out of Asia Minor. This vampire, acting on a premonition from his powerful master, laid the groundwork for the master's return from an anticipated "second death." The parallels between the beliefs of the original Orphics and what these creatures needed in a distant future made the cult ideal for their purposes. After the master vampire crossed into the realm of the dead, as he'd predicted, he began to exert influence over the cult. If the departed vampire's schemes had gone unimpeded, the circle's fate might have been very different. What the master vampire — who, at that point, was effectively a potent evil spirit — had overlooked was competition from other evil spirits for the cultists' hearts and souls (and sometimes whole bodies...).

The Orphics themselves knew almost nothing about the maneuvering that took place in the deadlands. Changes in the temperament of the being

they worshiped were chalked up to demigodly privilege. In fact, the identity of their deity shifted according to the balance of power in the depths of the Underworld. And so things went for hundreds of years until an alignment of elements became evident to Those Below, an event that would allow one of the competing entities to do what the circle's original "guiding spirit" had intended: return to the physical plane. The cost would be sacrificing the cult and "replacing" its members with subordinate spirits that already served much the same function in the deadlands as the Orphics did among the living. Thus, in the callous accounting of evil spirits, *the deed would not be costly at all.*

Interference by competing powers from beyond again prevented plans for the cult to be fully realized, however. The outcome likeliest to attract hunters' attention is the existence of scattered individuals who survived the cult's purge. The remaining cultists nearly all lead existences steeped in dread.

The reason for the survivors' unease is simple: Every one of these roughly two-dozen beings expects to be found and killed at any moment. Death, they imagine, will come in the form of an ex-colleague, or some damn supernatural with a grudge, or in the form of some do-gooder out to serve justice and strike down the meddlers who wrecked the world with a plague of zombies. Instead of enjoying conquerors' dreams, the Orphic survivors suffer nightmares of being dragged from their beds and flayed by the infernal *things* that their tampering loosed — or by would-be heroes out to punish that horrific mistake. Alas, with its manifold supernatural defenses, remote location and protective layers of secrecy, the now-compromised Orphic headquarters *was* a perfect retreat for aspiring despots. Now, even the most fortified citadel seems grossly insecure to any survivor.

ORPHICS AND THE IMBUED

Unlike most other organizations treated in these pages, the Orphic Circle *routinely* had supernatural members. Such beings constitute a high percentage of those who survived the massacre at Taenarus, because the situation demanded superhuman power and ability. Thus, in any encounter with the imbued, most ex-cultists are at the same disadvantage as any other supernatural: Hunters can see them for what they are, whereas even the most powerful sorcerer among the survivors sees the imbued as human — until (and unless) edges come into play. Of course, the handful of human escapees can't perceive hunters as unusual even when they use edges.

Wealth was one of the Orphics' almost-universal characteristics. Nowadays, fearful survivors understand that the Orphic Circle carried them through times of poverty far better than wealth can carry them through a time of no Orphic Circle. Most former Orphics now use their fortunes to insulate themselves from a world

STORYTELLER: THE FALL

The truth of what brought the world to its current state is not as "straightforward" as the fate of the circle. Certainly, the Orphics played a key role in igniting the storm that rages through the Underworld, but so did others. Having a (relatively) human perspective on events that largely took place in an inhuman dimension, the cultists can be forgiven for thinking they're wholly to blame. Indeed, they are quite sensible to quake in anticipation of what might lie ahead for them. After all, the survivors had front-row seats to an Armageddon that almost spread from the deadlands to engulf the realm of the living.

Ichmail gave the members of hunter-net an outsider's description of what happened the night Taenarus, the Orphic headquarters, fell. The insiders' view reshaped the mindset of everyone present. With only one noteworthy exception, *every* existing Orphic had come to the mountain retreat in Greece. The cultists gathered for a ritual that most believed would make them masters of the world alongside the demonic forces that they had long adored. Imagine their surprise as they saw their nine-member priesthood consumed in an instant.

For decades, Taenarus had stood impregnable against trespassers both living and dead. That night, *two* armies of evil spirits — visible even to the mortals present because of a massive breach between worlds — flooded the mansion and went to war.

Only two individuals present were remotely prepared for such an outcome. Antonio Giovanni, an ancient vampire, had been warned through his obsessive Tarot reading (influenced by a deadlands entity in a position to know...). Susan Sarvarian, an insanely rich mortal, had helped to engineer the sacrifice of the Orphics. Yet, even these two were taken aback by the scale of events. Out of desperation to survive, alliances were formed with Orphics whom each might have otherwise knifed in the back.

Giovanni and Sarvarian sought to escape in separate helicopters but still found opportunities to settle a few scores. At the helipad, Sarvarian "accidentally" decapitated one long-time competitor, whereas Giovanni waited until his aircraft had reached a lethal altitude before he saw to the ejection of several passengers whom he viewed as threats.

And so the tone was set for post-Orphic Circle existence.

they once dreamed of ruling. The exceptions are typically gifted individuals of little means, many of whom made Taenarus their home and the Circle's undertakings their career. The majority of Orphics in this second category are now uniformly impoverished and desperate.

Because most imbued are average, especially in the socio-economic sense, the likelihood of a chance encounter between a monied survivor and a hunter is small. Any former cultist would be foolish not to expect attempts on his life — if not by the living, then certainly by the dead. And fools died quickly in the internecine politicking of the Circle. Ghosts, wizards and vampires have few reasons to work together under the best of circumstances, and the Orphic Circle did not end amid good circumstances. The cult's destruction left hard feelings and murderous suspicions among survivors. They now divide their time between eluding assassination and attempting it themselves.

What all this cold-blooded skulduggery means to the imbued is best summed up by one of Niven's Laws: "Never stand next to someone hurling shit at an armed man." Proximity to Orphic survivors is lethally risky. Too bad hunters don't know this important truth. Each former cultist is essentially a target in perpetuity — a target likely to return fire and not care about anyone caught in the exchange.

Of course, the cultists' ruthlessness doesn't end with a lack of regard for their neighbors. To describe Orphics as mere demon worshipers understates the case. The beings worshipped by the cult were (and in some instances *still are*) objects of worship for countless lesser demons. The cruelty and offhand destructiveness of these creatures came to be reflected by the circle as demons' influence on members grew. In other words, as below, so above. Imbued who come to understand Orphism's true nature might feel compelled to hunt the cultists down like the monsters they are. Unfortunately, no Orphic survivor, having dodged doomsday at Taenarus, is likely to put up a billboard reading, "Yo, monster-hunters, come get me!" And even if they are found, these people fight to the death.

Determined imbued have a few advantages if they choose to bring down the remnants of the cult. Beyond their aforementioned "invisibility" to cultists, chosen with hunter-net access know a little of what the Orphic Circle was. Such awareness makes them rare individuals indeed. Moreover, the only former Orphic who knows *anything* about the imbued is "Ichmail." The others have no clue that their secrets stand revealed, if only in a limited sense.

Intramural tensions among Orphics might also prove an advantage for hunters. A mortal billionaire who's saved from killer zombies could be very appreciative — and could salt her lies to hunters with enough truth to engage their interest (*I think a rival arms dealer sent these assassins — and I don't think he's just an arms dealer...*).

Of course, if the imbued intercept such killers *before* they reach their target, the possibility arises for the ex-cultist to think she's being set up (and paranoia might lead her to the same conclusion either way). So, if the hunters trust the target and accept gifts from her — guns, ammo, fake passports, plane tickets to a foreign enemy's territory — they could end up in the middle of a very nasty conflict.

Alternatively, a group of imbued could exploit such a situation and keep any gifts without earning them, but the giver would certainly respond lethally to such betrayal. Or, thinking that the hunters are double-agent assassins, the ex-cultist might *offer* weaponry and resources as a way to trap and destroy the characters. So potent is the paranoia enveloping former cultists that even if they witness a benign encounter between imbued and supernatural, they're likely to imagine themselves to be its *only* topic. Keep in mind, though, that mortal ex-Orphics don't automatically see ghosts or recognize wizards or vampires as supernaturals, so such an encounter would have to be very specific. Does the survivor possess a talisman that reveals ghosts or other beings to her? Or have the hunters taken the unusual step of allowing one of their number to be possessed for purposes of communication?

If the former cultist is a supernatural being, and sees the imbued for what they are, he may use them to prolong his survival. He might believe that hunters interrogate (or fight) other supernaturals to get to *him*. Meanwhile, imbued are unlikely to care that one sorcerer in a coven also belonged to the Orphic Circle — something most hunters don't know by name or reputation. But a supernatural who sees the writing on the wall is likely to offer up a fellow survivor in hopes of a reprieve from hunters.

STORYTELLER: OATH OF SECRECY

Because almost all survivors witnessed the utter destruction of the Orphic priesthood, they are technically free from the mystical binding they underwent upon induction into the cabal. This enchantment compelled anyone who "by commission or by omission, revealed the existence of, the knowledge considered secret by, or the names of the membership of the Orphic Circle" to confess this transgression directly to the nine-member Ebon Bench. Now, each survivor is *able* to discuss the cult's secrets without experiencing that magical repercussion.

Understanding that new reality and exercising the freedom it represents can be two different things, however. Secrecy was so deeply ingrained into Orphics' nature that violating the oath may have dire psychological consequences.

Consider the plight of the cult's onetime librarian, known to her intimates within the Circle as "Anni Besturo," one of her countless aliases. Nowadays, she strives never to say (or hear) her *true* name because it resembles the word "nine," which triggers a fugue state

in which she believes the Ebon Bench (sometimes referred to as "The Nine") still exists. What follows is a near-infantile state wherein she's likely to approach anyone she meets and ask for help in finding the extinct priesthood.

Of course, the nature of the librarian's derangement has roots that predate her membership in the Orphic Circle. The same principle applies to any survivor similarly traumatized by the Taenarus massacre and by the burden of the now-impossible-to-fulfill oath. No two former cultists would suffer the same psychological damage. Many of the supernatural survivors don't suffer these effects, and some mortal ones don't either. But Storytellers who want to complicate the act of getting at the truth about the Orphic Circle may wish to impose such derangement on an ex-cultist.

Such an ailment typically has an irrational logic, and certain presumptions dictate which survivors have one and which don't. Supernatural beings can have experience with the ins and outs of bindings. Likewise, mortals with Occult ratings of 4 or higher may be presumed to know when a binding loses its hold. Both groups are normally immune to these derangements.

Portions of the oath state that a breaker deserves execution by the Ebon Bench, and that the oath-breaker pledges "to correct what I may before my execution." A credible threat of death is therefore necessary to make most survivors reveal Orphic truths.

Even in the face of doom, a belief in the endurance of the binding may drive an individual to tell only near-truths. Hunters who have read Ichmail's dispatches on the cabal might catch a "confessing" survivor in an inconsistency. Confronted with recognition of his lies (the Judgment edge Pierce is handy in these cases), an Orphic may become genuinely distressed upon realizing that he might be *unable* to speak truthfully about the cabal. Some who want to explain *why* they cannot do so might be equally stymied. After all, the binding itself certainly falls under the heading of "knowledge considered secret by" the Orphic Circle.

Alternatively, some deranged survivors might become veritable chatterboxes — at which point the psychological dissonance of their betrayal compels them to flee a captor/interrogator, or perhaps to "correct" the transgression with deadly force. Hunters questioning a subdued survivor might be surprised if their captive suddenly makes a suicidal bid for freedom — or mutual destruction.

The following derangements are possible among cultists who still fear violating their oath. The ailments appear in order from most common to least.

Fugue: Betraying Orphic truths can trigger blackouts during which an ex-cultist tries to find the Ebon Bench. (No survivor's fugue compulsion is powerful enough to make him return to Taenarus, however.) Or he tries to kill anyone who heard his revelations. Hunters might benefit from a "search fugue," assuming they

identify what's happening. By trailing an afflicted individual, they might be led to another ex-cultist or to the former home of a now-deceased Orphic. After coming out of a fugue state (when you think the person's irrational goal is somehow satisfied), the survivor has no recollection of his activities.

Pathological Lying: A survivor with this derangement is able to utter only falsehoods or near-truths about the cult, even when subjected to torture. Such lies would range from the number of members in the circle to so obvious a prevarication (to the imbued, anyway) as a sorcerer or vampire insisting that the cult had no supernatural acolytes. On their way to becoming hysterical, survivors with this condition might beg an interrogator to ask another question (*No, really, I'll tell you the truth this time, I swear*) to prove to themselves that they are able to break the oath. Fact is, they aren't unless they receive drugs — sodium pentothal, for example — that effectively make their utterances unconscious ones.

Hysteria: Sufferers of this derangement must be aware of what they have revealed or still try to reveal about the cabal. Thus, survivors in fugue do not suffer from hysteria, whereas ones who lie pathologically as they try to tell the truth might become hysterical.

Hysteria is unpredictable, so you may make a secret roll to determine the severity of a given attack. One system might be to assign poles of behavior to odd and even die results. Odd means the survivor assumes a fetal position or has quaking fits for a number of turns equal to the roll. Even means the survivor screams, flinches, bites her tongue and is generally uncontrollable for a like duration. An alternative might be to treat the preceding list of violent behaviors as escalating ones. Rolls of 1 to 3 represent vocal outbursts. A 3 might be loud enough to attract the attention of a hunter's nosy neighbor. Rolls of 9 to 10 correspond to fits violent enough to make a restrained mortal break free of anything less durable than handcuffs, and/ or hurt herself enough to require immediate medical attention. In certain rare instances, hysteria victims can *volunteer* information.

ALLIES FROM THE OTHER SIDE

A hunter who chooses to pursue an ex-Orphic has a key set of (probably untrustworthy) allies: ghosts. The wandering dead know many secrets. Some are aware that the imbued can communicate with ghosts, and the Orphic Circle left plenty of dead people in its wake. Whereas ex-cultists are rare, ghosts are plentiful and have long memories. Some ritual murders committed by the Orphics took place decades ago and produced vengeful spirits unable to attain satisfaction until recently. Because the individuals wielding the sacrificial knives were often vampires or sorcerers with unnaturally extended existences, vengeance is still possible — but difficult. A wealthy ex-cultist can be presumed to have

one or more residences that are heavily warded against entry by the wandering dead.

Now, enter the imbued.

Ghosts who observe hunters battling vampires or sorcerers are likely to presume animosity between the combatants. Incautious ghosts might approach hunters directly and learn to their dismay that they're on the enemy list, too. Wiser (older?) apparitions might try to hook hunters' curiosity with messages about unpunished murderers. Alternatively, such ghosts might attempt mind control over hunters — again with dismaying results. The most patient of the dead, having seen the aforementioned tactics fail, might settle on another route to hunters' hearts and minds: dreams.

Some ghosts can tailor mortal dreams to various ends, from blunt terror to subtle communication. Dreams as meaningful messages are problematic, though. Actual dreams are loaded with symbolism, nonsense and fragmented memory. Ones engendered by ghosts in your chronicle ought to be as well, otherwise information that dreams impart might as well have arrived as disembodied whispers or words spelled in blood on a hunter's wall. Those methods are eerie and atmospheric, too, but they're *obviously* supernatural. Dreams can have supernatural origins in the game, but unless imbued sleep in shifts to watch for dream-weaving ghosts, the characters are left uncertain at best. (Perhaps the only way hunters can receive Conviction's protection while sleeping is when they intuitively sense danger. See "Reacting with Conviction," *Hunter*, p. 133.)

One way to handle dream messages is as a subplot to an ongoing chronicle. A person who died at the hands of cultists might be patient about getting hunters' attention, but not infinitely so. As the imbued stalk an elusive zombie, a member of the group might experience recurring or connected dreams about human sacrifice, vivisection or people enslaved by demonic cultists. The affected individual could react to these dreams in many ways, but they continue until she responds to them seriously.

By following clues integrated into dreams, or by capturing and questioning a dream's creator, hunters can learn of a new foe... or discover hidden truths about an existing one. The revelation that a local sorcerer or vampire (or even billionaire industrialist) had a past in something called the Orphic Circle isn't meaningful to hunters who lack hunter-net access. Indeed, the search for facts about this enemy might be reason to introduce the online community into your game. After all, why should the hunters trust what some ghost tells them directly or through their sleeping minds? Yet, even if they do track down the material posted by Ichmail, the imbued may still believe they're being used as somebody's catspaw. Then again, some hunters believe the Messengers already use them as such....

STORYTELLER: T' AENARUS

The onetime headquarters of the Orphic Circle was, in its day, a sacrificial temple furnished like a museum and masquerading as a recluse's mansion. Its remote location in a valley of the Pindus Mountains in Greece meant that the craftsmen who erected it had to live on site. None of them realized they'd never leave the place. The Orphics intended the whitewashed stone structure to be a retreat where they could indulge their darkest whims and direst experiments to plumb the mysteries of mortality. Today, it's a fire-blackened ruin, a monument to runaway ambition and home to an even more sinister array of beings. For Storytellers who wish to employ the Circle and its headquarters intact, the following material describes Taenarus before its destruction.

Unnaturally dense forest and undergrowth fills the valley that surrounds the mansion. The building stands at the heart of a many-acre clearing ringed by a daunting iron fence. Like the entangling woods and the perpetually cloudy sky, the fence has been tempered by enchantment. Touching the fence itself attracts hounds (whose response alerts armed guards), as if the trespasser plucks a harp string to produce a note that only the animals can hear. Approaching the main gate, which depicts Orpheus' descent into the Underworld, can leave the uninvited literally stunned by the intricate beauty of its ironwork (likewise enchanted). A Willpower roll, difficulty 7, must be made for any outsider to shift his gaze away from the gate. A single success makes the subject immune to the gate's effects thereafter. A subsequent Perception + Security roll, difficulty 6, reveals that a portion of the gate is a secret door that swings open if pushed. Of course, doing so alerts the hounds....

The entrances to both the grounds and the mansion face east. A graveled driveway leads from the gate to the structure, which also has an iron gate. A visitor passes into the main hallway of the two-story building. Straight ahead is a rectangular courtyard bracketed by two broad staircases. Upstairs are suites that Orphics use for everything from research and meditation to trysting and murder. Off the main courtyard downstairs are smaller, gated courtyards that variously feature shrines, gardens or statues of often indeterminate origin (some so lifelike the figures could be people turned to stone).

Three wings — north, south and west — make up the mansion. The north and south wings, which flank the central courtyard, contain the aforementioned rooms for use by the Outer Circle, the Orphic membership at large. The mansion's west wing is reserved for the activities of the Inner Circle, the nine priests and priestesses also known as the Ebon Bench. The ground-floor Auditorium is the only part of the west wing where Outer Circle members are welcome. There, they mount a metal dais to petition their leaders for backing in

various projects. The north wing features a vast banquet hall where all 300 Orphics can dine (or debauch themselves). A massive painting on the room's southern wall depicts one of the circle's annual bacchanals — the Great Festival of 1887 — in graphic detail. In the south wing are laboratories and a completely automated operating theater capable of being used to dissect a full-size werewolf. The south wing is also where all Orphic committees meet, including the 10 members of Kerberos, the body that considers and approaches candidates for induction into the cabal.

Outside the mansion are dual helipads (surface vehicles cannot negotiate the supernaturally altered forest; Orphics must fly or hike to reach Taenarus), a rundown stone barn, pens for animals to be sacrificed, and quarters for the estate staff. Note that the distinction between these two groups tends to blur for most cultists. Staff turnover is high because many of these people, who are typically fugitives from justice or refugees already considered dead, end up on Orphic altars. All staff members are mystically bound to the estate and are unable to leave it willingly. Inside the barn is a large disguised platform that lowers 200 feet into the Caves of Orpheus. Here, the circle maintains ritual areas and a dumping ground for the bodies of individuals who decline membership. Orphics can perform such "cleanup" from a secret room called the Well, which is concealed off the main hallway and features a 300-foot smooth stone chute that ends in the caves below.

Several other hidden features of the estate are noteworthy. Not far from the banquet hall in the north wing is a door opening into a wine cellar. Behind one floor-to-ceiling rack of varietals from a forgotten vineyard called "Euridice" is the entrance to secret passageways that connect to the west wing, and also to a trap door that opens alongside the helipads. Only members of the Inner Circle know of these routes and possess keys to enter them. Finally, deep within the Orphic Caves are the off-limits remains of the circle's unparalleled occult library. A floor collapse there means only the foolhardy approach the chamber. The loss of this resource makes its salvage or replacement (neither of which is possible, but both are attempted anyway) top priorities for the cult.

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

Subject: Renewed sense of purpose

From: willow12

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

I've been busy.

Ever since I decided to lend Oracle171 a hand in rooting out that devil's nest she discovered in Greece, things have fallen into place. Somehow, I missed Oracle in Kalambaka, where she promised to assemble a party. But I picked up another trail in a little village a few valleys away from there. What's left of the village, that is.

I'm still not sure what the few people who lived up here called the place. It may not even have had a name before the end came. The only things here were what looked like a general store, a few farmhouses, a tiny church and a graveyard. I'd call the place a ghost town, but even most of the ghosts had cleared out when I showed up.

Most of them.

If you've ever seen ghosts that look tired, sort of barely there, then you know what this bunch was like. They perked up a little after I showed up, then a lot after they figured out they could speak to me and I could hear them. The problem was, they all spoke Greek except for the old man who ran the general store. His English wasn't great, but after a while I was able to piece some things together.

Apparently even before the big explosion that Ichmail wrote about, the valley where these worshippers hung out had a bad reputation. Locals knew to avoid the place but nobody knew why. What I couldn't understand was this story about "Icarus" that the dead storeowner kept telling.

I spent the night, and had an intense dream. This boy fell from the sky. He didn't have wings, but he'd been flying—I don't know how I knew that. It was just clear. He fell in the middle of the night and landed in some farmer's haystack. The farmer brought the boy, who was hurt but alive, to the general store. Everybody said it was a miracle. The farmer got medicine to make the boy better and took him home. A long time passed but nobody heard from the farmer. The storeowner asked his neighbors if anyone knew what happened to Icarus, which is what they called the kid. Every person he talked to promised to find out and let the owner know, but nobody came back. The owner was worried because he hadn't seen anybody at his store except a few tourists. He decided to go visit the farmer, and then Icarus walked into his store. The owner asked where the farmer was, but the boy didn't appear to understand. I don't know why but the sight of this kid terrified me. The owner came out from behind the counter, and I woke up. Screaming.

I can still remember the boy's face, and all I can think is that he wasn't a boy. That he was some kind of devil.

I got my gun and flashlight, and found a shovel. How I knew there was something I needed to find there, again, I don't know. I crossed the road from the grounds of the little church where I'd been sleeping in my car and broke into the boarded-up store. It took me a while, but I found the stairway to the basement. I ought to have been scared out of my wits, but I just wasn't. The floor was hard-packed dirt, so digging it up wasn't easy. It was nearly dawn before I found the bones. The owner's bones. I dug them up and put them inside an empty crate. I carried them up into the morning light, across the road and into the graveyard next to the church.

We held a memorial service, me and this handful of pitiful ghosts. All of them except the storeowner. By daylight, I could see that the bones look gnawed, like some animal had gotten ahold of them.

I can guess now where the rest of the villagers' remains are, but I feel like I've done what I could for them. I drove to Athens, figuring I could get computer access there. Somehow, though, by the time I arrived I had lost interest in tracking down Oracle. I had to find the thing that wiped out those people. I just had no idea where to start.

That night, I dreamed about Icarus again. This time I knew he was no little boy. He was sitting in a puddle of blood with gobs of yellow stuff floating in it. It was the storekeeper's *fat*. This time, Icarus spoke but his voice sounded like the dead owner's. *His wife would eat no lean*, he said. Then he went back to sucking the storekeeper's bones.

I woke up screaming again.

I spent a good hour saying "Jack Sprat" to myself until the name stopped making sense and started sounding like something else: *Jack's Brat*. I didn't know what it meant, but I began to think I needed some help. I didn't hear back from anyone through hunter-net who was closer than central Europe. So, I started working my way back through our archives on Europe. I wondered for a while if I shouldn't try to find Lotus' priest friend on Crete. Eventually, I hit the old Ichmail messages. That's where I came across this:

>> **Caspar Bratovitch** — In the years I knew him, he changed extraordinarily little in appearance. He did change, however, and he went about freely in daylight, so he is no `v_mp_r_`. Whatever he is (which certainly is not the pre-adolescent bumpkin he seems), Caspar is incredibly intelligent, strong and fast. Barehanded, he can pluck out your still-beating heart, and then he's likely to take his time *sucking the marrow from your bones*. I am not being metaphorical. He is security chief for the Circle.

I added the italics. That night, I had one more dream about this "boy." I could see a castle, the kind you'd see up on a hill in old monster movies. Icarus or Caspar or whatever was crawling along on all fours like a dog. He was sniffing the ground and disappeared into the woods. Then a bat flew out the other side and started circling the castle.

If I weren't in Europe, I might have a shot at finding the place, but near as I can tell there are still castles scattered across the entire continent. Any brilliant ideas out there?

CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

Subject: A trip to the library

From: witness1

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

In trying to keep my resolution to get away from home and the computer, I took a walk several days ago

STORYTELLER: THE DEMON-WORSHIPER BLUES

Some would-be Orphics came to the cult's attention because they bore qualities sought by Kerberos, the membership committee. Those qualities were pertinent expertise and a low profile. Part and parcel of keeping a secret organization secret is avoiding the induction of individuals who draw public attention.

Thus, a good candidate was a specialist in the arcane whose abundant knowledge had never been celebrated by her colleagues — even as their reliance on that knowledge was evidence of its existence. Likewise, people whose illegal pursuits required discretion wound up on the committee's short list. Following a collapse in the circle's underground library, which took many rarities and a few Orphics with it, Kerberos focused on replacement members talented at "obtaining" the sorts of books and artifacts lost in the disaster. Such individuals became so devoted to the pursuits for which they were inducted that any pretense of an outside life faded away.

The circle's unexpected end has left the few survivors of this sort without homes, means or real prospects. They can't very well list participation in a fallen megalomaniacal cult on their résumés. Thieves who specialize in rare books and antiquities can return to such pursuits, but clients able to afford such items are often ex-Orphics themselves — whose actual want might be the thief rather than any stolen goods.

Impoverished mortal survivors who understand the implications of the circle's downfall have good reason to seek ancient spells or protective talismans. Lacking the resources of their wealthy counterparts, their lives are beset by ghostly avengers. Imagine trying to maintain a modest apartment where fixtures fly at your head, bath water changes from comfortable to scalding in an instant and bedclothes try to smother you in your sleep. Some ex-cultists wonder why they've survived repeated ghostly attempts on their lives. A few realize that the wandering dead want former Orphics to suffer before dying — and probably after, too.

Life for ex-cultists who cannot afford to shelter themselves from the world at large is miserable, dangerous and uncertain. To an outsider with second sight, these individuals might appear deserving of help. Certainly, many of them *need* help to stave off hauntings and other supernatural assaults. And none of them are likely to tell any savior the truth about *why* some poltergeist targeted them with a rain of stones. A Judge or Visionary might wonder about such a mortal's past, but many other creeds might automatically take the side of an ex-Orphic and unwittingly earn themselves the worst of friends.

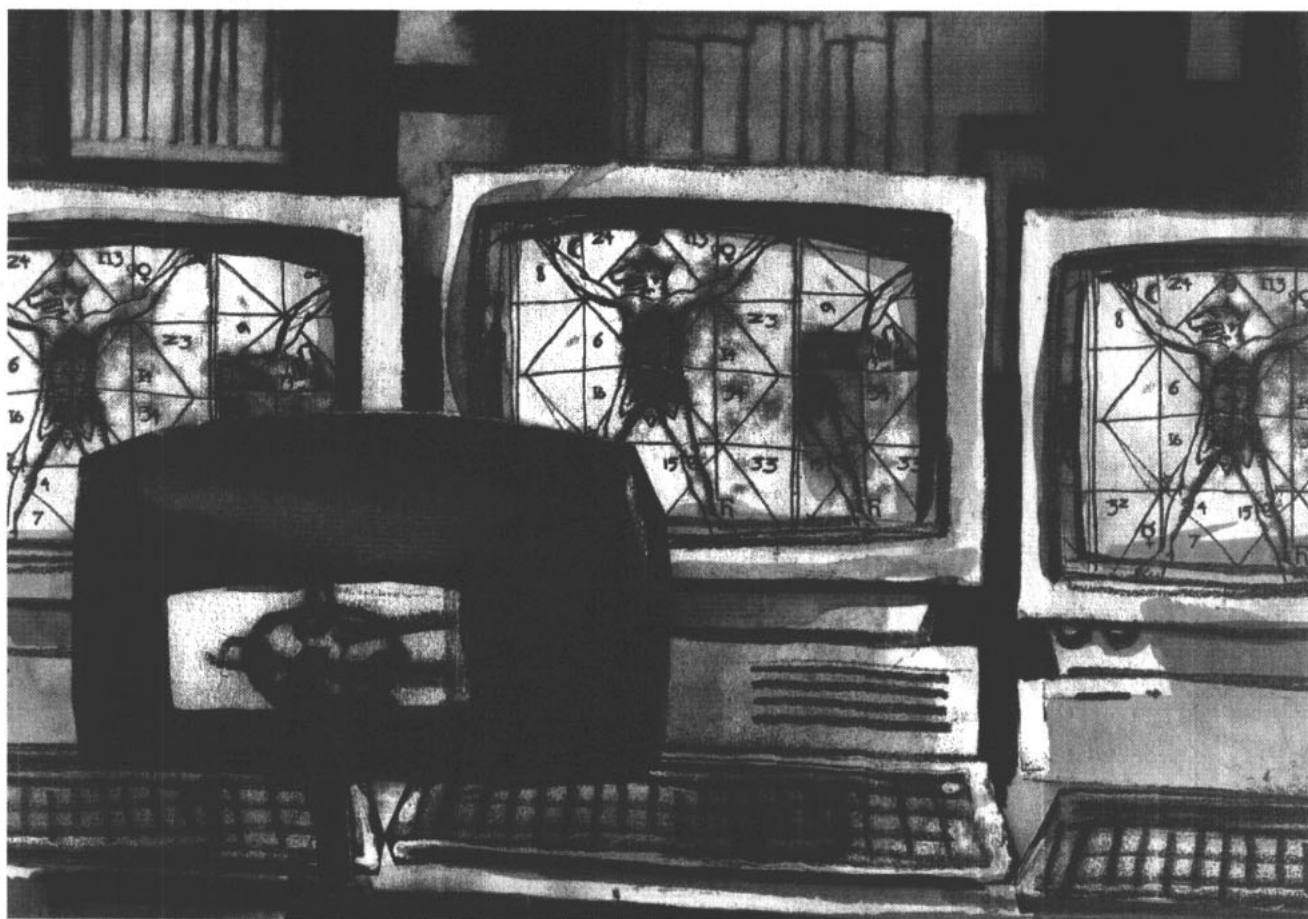
As opposed to fair-weather friends, mortal ex-Orphics are themselves trouble magnets, whose supernatural misfortunes might win them the protection of a gung-ho Avenger, Defender or Martyr. The impulse to present a moving target to her various tormentors might inspire an ex-cultist to keep moving. A likelier outcome, given the deviousness of most former members, is that imbued saviors would be recognized as ideal bodyguards and therefore worth at least a display of gratitude and the pretense of fidelity.

Hunters might come across such individuals in a variety of contexts where the two parties' "interests" overlap. The seemingly kindly, certainly knowledgeable researcher who directs a Visionary to exactly what she needs in a library is likely to earn the hunter's thanks. Should such a helpful individual later be seen as a victim of invisible forces, even the most judicious of Judges might put aside any suspicions in the belief that ghosts target his own efforts rather than the researcher.

Alternatively, hunters might determine that an anchor for a ghost is on display at a local museum. Experience may have taught the hunters that ghosts can be controlled and sometimes eliminated with such objects, so they break in — and meet a mortal ex-cultist. The burglar has been tormented by the ghost and wants the object for the same reasons.

The hunters might briefly mistake the fellow thief as another one of the imbued, but her inability to comprehend the Word can correct that error. Still, do the characters perceive this individual as a potential ally, or at least as a victim of supernatural predation? Is the ex-cultist perceived to be an antagonist, just as the ghost is?

Mortal ex-Orphics have sufficient experience with the wandering dead to understand the existence of ghosts and to take some action against them. They lack Conviction, however, so a confrontation with an especially hideous zombie (or shapeshifter or other creature) induces "mind blindness." Also, unless they wear talismans to protect against ghostly mind control, former cultists are subject to possession, illusions and the like. What do hunters do if they witness a "helpful" researcher or "desperate" thief fall under an apparition's sway and begin attacking people — possibly the imbued themselves?



that led me (surprise, surprise) to a very worrisome puzzle involving the Internet.

I was passing the main entrance of the downtown public library when two women came out in a hurry. I had been “exercising my eyes” to see what things were like on the streets — scarier every time I’m out — so I wasn’t shocked to see they both had that aura we see around some people. I’ve learned it isn’t healthy to stare at someone you’ve just recognized as *unusual*, so I headed into the library. One woman, the more striking of the two, was nearly dragging the other. As they passed, the one trailing said, “Do you think it has anything to do with last night?”

The other woman said, “Not now.”

All this sounded benign enough at first, but I decided to look around inside. I could tell there was a commotion on the mezzanine level, where the public computer terminals are. I saw a half-dozen upset people trying to talk all at once to a librarian, who was having no luck quieting them down. I heard the words “thing,” “screen,” and “drawing.” A bank of abandoned computers near the railing all seemed to need rebooting, so it was hard to tell whether these people were more shook up by something they had seen on the machines or what they *weren’t* seeing on them now. As a library tech arrived, I saw an empty station and had an idea.

A few minutes later, I was sitting there in a trance, literally seeing what I’d missed just before I came in.

I watched as the pair of women I’d passed outside rushed silently downstairs. That wasn’t back far enough, I figured, and tried again, concentrating hard. It shocked me this time to *hear* what they were saying even as I saw what they were doing. They walked out of the rare book department and toward me. The tall one said, “These places are always worth a look. Did I tell you the Morgan Library actually had a copy of *Artes Perditae*?”

The shorter one said, “We had an *Artes*, but it fell through a crack in the floor. I cried.”

The tall woman smiled and said, “You always were sentimental. I only care about what I can learn from these books. You know, a copy of *Artes* would come in handy for dealing with unexpected guests like the one we had last night.”

The little one looked horrified and said, “Junie, I didn’t invite him. I wouldn’t do that without asking you. Besides, he didn’t have a head. Don’t zombies need to have—”

The tall one cut her off and looked around, apparently making sure that no one was close enough to hear. “It’s just an expression,” she said. About that time they were near the computers. Just as the shorter woman

passed in front of the first machine, the screen changed and the person using the computer said something like, "What the hell?" Neither of the women noticed, and they kept moving. As they did, each successive computer changed to the same image.

Where I was standing — that was the first moment I realized I was standing, but just in a remote way — I could see part of a very detailed, old-fashioned ink illustration of something furry and massive that had been dissected. What was left of the head looked as if it had come from a wolf, but the body was like a gorilla's. The style looked like Dürer's.

The little one stopped. She pointed at one of the computer screens and said, "Junie, there it is again. That's what I saw last week at the mall. It's one of Skyvling's [spelling?] drawings." She turned and examined the row of machines. "It's on all the screens!"

The tall one whispered the "Skyvling" name and said, "You told me you never touched that book. Are you sure?"

The small one looked distressed. She said, "I'm sure. I scanned that page for the Inquisitor once, but I used—"

The tall one looked horrified and silenced her companion. She stared at the screens, which all went blue at once, just as I'd found them after arriving. She took the small woman by the arm and raced for the stairs. As they reached the point where I'd glimpsed them earlier, I collided with something I couldn't see and fell to the floor.

Pain yanked me back to the present. I hadn't even been aware that I was moving when I walked into a cart loaded with books. A librarian looked frightened and asked if I was okay. I guess I must have at least *looked* like I knew where I was going during the trance.

I apologized and got to my feet. The librarian gave me a sidelong glance. It seemed like time to leave. I headed outside and tried to pick up the two women's trail on the steps, but couldn't manage the trance state again. Another attempt the next day just got me images of other people entering and leaving, but not the two I was looking for.

Since then, I've been trying to make sense of what I saw and heard. After a lot of searching, I found one reference to a purported book of spells called *Artes Perditae*, which translates as "Lost Arts." I don't think the other name, which I've entered as everything from "Sciveleng" to "Skaifling" without results, is related to that book, but it makes sense that it's connected to arcane literature or study in one way or another. I don't know of any scholarly studies on dissecting wolf men. More puzzling was the fact that not one of the web browsers that brought up the image had a URL visible in the field — as if this picture had come from nowhere. "Ghosts in the machine" always fascinate me, but frighten me too, simply for the implications to our security here.

If anyone comes across similar anomalies, please report them right away. The same goes for crossing paths with this female Mutt and Jeff: both Caucasian, both brunettes, one tall, over six feet and beautiful; the other under five feet, nondescript and somewhat tattered (when I saw her). Clearly, they have a strong interest in "forbidden" books. What troubles me most is the possibility that a forbidden book appears to be interested in *them*.

STORYTELLER: BOOKS

Horror literature abounds with lost or "unholy" tomes whose contents, authors, creation and use are the stuff of stories. The World of Darkness has volumes of its own in this vein, including *Chronicle of the Black Labyrinth*, vampires' *Book of Nod* and, to a far lesser degree, hunters' own *Apocrypha*. Over the course of its history, the Orphic Circle helped make such books scarcer than they already were by amassing them (sometimes many copies of one work) in its library. Some incunabula (volumes predating the printing press) didn't exist outside the cult's archives.

With the loss of their headquarters and its contents, many Orphic survivors fell prey to the worst strain of bibliomania: that insane acquisitiveness ardent book lovers justify with the line, "I can't live without this book." For an ex-cultist desperately seeking the exact procedure for warding off ghosts or destroying zombies *en masse*, these words may be literal truth.

Storytellers who wish to introduce one of these works (whose scarcity means that 99.9 percent of humanity has *never* seen one) as a plot element have several options. Imbued characters might search for a text rumored by an interrogated supernatural to be vampiric prophecy, whether as a source of insight into their foes or for possible clues about their own nature. An ex-cultist might possess just such a book (if he's an old and powerful vampire) or could seek it himself for reasons he'd try to keep secret.

Most Orphic survivors are willing to commit crimes from extortion to murder in pursuit of such books. Stealing or paying for books known to be stolen (even if the thieves happen to be hunters...) doesn't bother an ex-cultist a bit. Survivors target places such as private and university library collections, antiquarian book shops and the chapter houses of an organization called the Arcanum (see Chapter 3).

As mentioned previously, several books of this sort exist not only as items characters can pursue but also as props that players can hold, after much in-game trouble and strife. Alternatively, an energetic Storyteller can turn to the writer who perfected the device of the "evil book": H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft not only imagined the now-ubiquitous *Necronomicon*, he also encouraged his writer friends to use it and similar creations such as *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* to lend these books an air of believability — and therefore menace.

SHADOW PETALS

These small talismans feature black printing on black pages and can easily be mistaken for elaborate blank books. Orphic survivors recognize and covet shadow petals for the protection these wearable booklets lend against possession and ghostly mind tampering. They were first fashioned by cultists who understood that some participants at Orphic bacchanals lacked bodies and enjoyed "borrowing" various ones over the course of the seven-day festivities. These cultists would wear nothing else for the duration of a Great Festival and ask knowing fellows, "Acolyte, where are your shadow petals?" Most mortal Orphics mistook the talismans for aphrodisiacal charms.

No survivor knows the process for crafting shadow petals, so the hundred-odd specimens not already in the possession of ex-cultists are tough to find. Some languish in the attics of grand manors amid the leavings of Orphics long dead. Others find their way into flea markets and sell as curios.

Description: The black leather bindings of shadow petals have trailing thongs for attachment to the user's person. The user must tear a page (or petal) from the booklet at sunset and burn it to gain a day's invulnerability against possession or any mental intrusion by ghosts. Obviously, such talismans have limited use. Most were created with 32 pages, though some have 64. If the talisman is removed from the user's person before 24 hours pass, its benefits vanish until the next petal is sacrificed.

System: Roll Intelligence + Occult, difficulty 6, to receive the talisman's benefit. A failure means the user fumbles the activation ritual and only believes himself insulated from possession. A botch actually attracts spirits.

An Occult rating of 3 or higher is needed to recognize shadow petals and understand their use.

STORYTELLER: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Considerable economic variance exists between Orphic survivors. Wealthy members came to the cult that way and prospered. Poor ones chosen for their knowledge or ability never worried much about money because they never expected the opulence and security of the circle to end. For various reasons, many supernatural survivors are male (some of whom are Benandanti; feel free to use the Damnationist template on p. 131* as a starting point for these people). Many of the mortal ones are female. Each sample character's title/ profile reflects the cultist's standing when the cabal met its end, although you can ignore that event and still use a character as is.

ORPHIC ACOLYTE

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence (Book Smart) 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Drive 3, Empathy 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 1, Linguistics 3, Occult 3, Politics 1, Security 2, Stealth (Rare Book Thievery) 4

Backgrounds: Contacts 3

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Lock picks, stolen grimoire, talisman (see p. 130)

DIKEIA ASPIRANT

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 1, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 1, Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Etiquette 3, Finance 1, Linguistics 2, Occult (Ritual Sacrifice) 4, Politics 2, Security 3, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Resources 5

Willpower: 5

Equipment: Private jet, yacht, cache of sacrificial knives

Note: The Dikeia (dee KAY uh) were priestesses, and their followers held the majority of power over the Orphic Circle at its end. Diké (DEE kay), their patron, is the likeliest suspect in the cult's fatal "reconsecration." By and large, not even that evil spirit's most devout surviving worshipers know whether Diké is to be blamed for the cult's demise — or thanked for sparing those who escaped.

THE BENANDANTI

I first noticed the man as I was checking into a Savannah bed-and-breakfast. I hoped to spend a weekend there away from monsters, strange compulsions and phantom voices. He had just checked in, and as he turned he smiled and said, "Hello." His accent was lovely, but tough to identify. Mediterranean? He was quite handsome — curly-headed with a complexion like milky tea, and stout but sturdy looking. I could think of about a dozen places that he might hail from.

This bad habit of placing people came from my work as a court stenographer. I'd gotten good at it, and courthouse records often let me check how close I was. As I smiled back, I thought, Wherever he's from, he's very nice to look at.

I introduced myself to the owner, who asked me to sign the guest book and share the expected particulars. Just above the space he indicated for me, I saw the name "Ennio Giardini" and an address rendered in an elegant script. My scrawled "Celia Goldman" looked embarrassing under his. I realized that I didn't want him to see my ugly handwriting, then I silently chastised myself for behaving like an eighth-grader.

"Ma'am?" The owner held my room key out to me. I realized he'd been waiting for some time while I was wool-gathering. I blushed, apologized and followed him to my room, which was one floor above the lobby. As we walked



upstairs, he stated the hours for breakfast and when the lobby door would be locked.

"If you come back after 11," he drawled, "ring the bell and I'll let you in."

Something in the way he said it made such an entry sound like a violation of an unstated law. Fortunately, it was solitude that I needed as tonic for unsought comrades-at-arms and nosy neighbors. A one-night tryst in my room wasn't in my plans.

After splashing some water on my face, I went back outside to get my suitcase — and saw the attractive Mr. Giardini for a second time. He was unloading, too, but his cargo was alive: two dogs, one a German shepherd, the other a mutt. I noticed with a twinge of envy that he had a suite with a private entrance below the main door. No 11-o'clock limit on him.

"What beautiful dogs," I said.

"Thank you," he said, sounding very Italian. "Don't worry, they're well-behaved. I'm a trainer."

"How wonderful that you get to work with animals. I often think they'd be better company than most people."

He laughed. "And what do you do?"

"I work in a county courthouse. I'm a stenographer."

He laughed again, a sound I was growing to like. "Lawyers, judges and criminals. No wonder you have a low opinion of people."

We traded introductions and a few other pleasantries. We ended by promising to look for each other at breakfast.

Loneliness, nosiness or just plain horniness — all three, maybe — caught up with me hours later, with too many hours between me and morning. I was in bed, pondering whether Mr. Giardini might be in his somewhere below me. I thought, Hell, why have this... talent... if I never use it for myself? I didn't ask for it, after all....

I decided that I deserved a peek at Mr. Giardini.

I stretched out, closed my eyes and imagined the interior of his room—

—and found myself there. I was immediately disappointed to see that he appeared to be asleep with the blanket covering him to his chest. His dogs were wide-awake, though. To my surprise, they seemed aware of my "presence" right away. The mutt released a low growl, while the shepherd lifted its head and yipped mournfully. Not wanting to make trouble for their master, I began to withdraw.

As my consciousness reached the ceiling, though, I felt one of those headaches. Frightened, I paused and looked hard. The sleeping form of Mr. Giardini seemed... off somehow. Hope and horror struggled in my mind. Could he be like me? What if he isn't? I literally hovered, uncertain what to do, as the dogs persisted with their racket. Suddenly, both animals calmed down and gazed in an expectant way toward the other side of the room. Then, another Mr. Giardini — this one ephemeral, though somehow not ghostly — became visible alongside the bed! This spectral Giardini settled into the physical one like a person entering a bathtub. My headache vanished.

And Giardini's eyes opened, staring straight at me! Startled, I willed myself back into my body. Even as I sat up in bed, my mind raced.

At breakfast too many long hours later, I lingered over coffee and muffins until Giardini — in the flesh, once more — entered.

I had already shooed several other guests away from the plate I had prepared for him. "Muffin?" I asked. "I saved one for you."

"Thank you," he said, as he sat next to me. We were alone. I was petrified as he removed the napkin I had used to cover his food — and the imbued symbol I'd formed with strawberries and a muffin on the plate.

What a lovely gesture," he said. I detected neither tension nor recognition in his voice. My voices, meanwhile, remained irksomely silent. Step two, I thought, as I activated my insight.

I saw a burly, good-looking man with a mouthful of blueberry muffin.

He swallowed and said, "Do you have plans for today?" Utterly confused, I shook my head.

"Perhaps you'd like to join me. I'm visiting the animal shelter. Am I correct in thinking that you could use a pet?"

I nodded.

"Good. The joy of having a faithful companion is like...." His voice became lower, almost conspiratorial: "An out-of-body experience."

My eyes widened. I was about to speak when he said, "Shh. Later. We have all afternoon, yes?"

My weekend proved to be far livelier than anticipated.

SPEAKERS WITH THE DEAD

The loose-knit body of mystical sojourners who call themselves the Benandanti have intimate knowledge of the afterlife and its secrets. Each Benandante is both born and made a member: A child who at birth wears a caul — a membrane that covers the infant's face — becomes an apprentice through the intercession of an adult master who removes and ritually prepares the tissue. Later, under the tutelage of that master (or a surrogate, though such instances are, like Benandanti themselves, rare), the apprentice fashions his birth-caul

STORYTELLER: MIXED SIGNALS

Benandanti can be sources of tremendous confusion to the imbued. As semi-awakened beings whose magic can vanish forever with the loss of their talismans, these mystics can appear perfectly normal to second sight — as long as they're not using a talisman or fennel sword at the moment.

When a Benandante uses her talisman for full Ekstasis (see p. 131) to exit her body astrally, possibilities arise for real befuddlement among the imbued. Like the body of a Hermit who can similarly abandon his mortal shell, the body of a Benandante in Ekstasis seems comatose. The mystic cannot be roused by any means until her astral form returns "home"; she receives no sensory input from her body while projecting. For this reason, a sensible Benandante chooses only the most secure locale for entering Ekstasis. A lucky mystic has an apprentice to watch over her body. Such precautions mean that hunters are unlikely to get a glimpse of a Benandante in action (which, ironically, often equates to bodily inaction). An imbued with a postcognitive edge such as Delve can probe the past, however, to see what a mystic might have done. Likewise, a Hermit using the Reach or Transcend edge can spy on the Ekstasis process. What any hunter using second sight sees in such a case is a still form that is "wrong" in the supernatural sense. Note that a Benandante's ghostlike astral form is usually visible to the imbued — even to a Hermit projecting his consciousness — only as it enters or exits the mystic's body. Beyond that, the spirit is literally in the realm of the dead and escapes hunter detection, while the inert body seems "off."

A mystic who remains in her body and who uses her talisman to see her ghost-world surroundings is rendered "odd" to second sight during such activity. Again, wise Benandanti normally seek privacy before engaging in their rituals. The afterworld is currently enduring an ongoing cataclysm. All kinds of dangers abound there, and various spirits can ride the ghost-winds. Many mystics therefore check the surrounding "spirit weather" several times a day to avoid... surprises. Also, as a precursor to entering Ekstasis, every Benandante inspects the place where she intends to recline physically. No mystic wants to exit her body and leave it in the company of invisible enemies who might otherwise have been detected and dispatched.

Use of Illuminate or Witness on a Benandante can produce results that range from a clinging whiff of death to a halo of what looks like black light surrounding a talisman-user. These impressions are gained at moments when second sight also applies. Thus, Illuminate and Witness signify that something is supernatural about a Benandante's body while she projects into the lands of the dead, assuming hunters gain access to the body.

If second sight also detects magical items in your game, a Benandante's talisman has a "wrongness" about it.

Finally, any physical use of a fennel sword causes both sword and user to appear "wrong" to second sight. Of course, if the sword-wielding Benandante faces an apparition, she already has to be using her talisman to view the ghost and appears "off" by virtue of seeing the otherworldly. When she travels astrally, a mystic's fennel sword must be near her body to be available in its astral form.



into a talisman that allows him to penetrate the wall between the realms of the living and the dead. To say the least, the imbued might learn a lot and answer many riddles through communication with these spirit-world explorers. Unfortunately, the Benandanti's scattered, disorganized and even fractious nature means that any two share radically different information with a hunter. Finding *one* Benandante is a feat, however, and a hunter convincing him to give up "trade secrets" would be impressive in itself.

Benandanti differ from most individuals detailed in this book in a way that's crucially important to a hunter's perception of them. The imbued are "awakened" humans, ones capable of seeing the true face of the supernatural *and* of remembering the truth. In contrast, Benandanti are "semi-awakened"; their paranormal abilities depend entirely on the possession and use of one of the aforementioned talismans. Without his reshaped caul, a Benandante is a human being — albeit one inured to the supernatural and thus aware in the "awakened" sense. Years of gazing upon deadlands horrors steel these mystics to such sights, so they never suffer the forgetfulness that routinely afflicts other mortals who confront ghosts or the walking dead. Ghostly mind control, illusions or memory-altering magic are different matters and are addressed elsewhere.

Their specialization in ghostly matters also means that Benandanti usually *are* subject to the "mind blindness" inflicted by other supernatural beings — including hunters, so edges are mysterious or in some cases invisible to these mystics. Think of them as having "artificial second sight" and "situationally limited Conviction." Even a Benandante with a talisman on his person appears to a hunter's second sight merely as somebody in possession of "odd" paraphernalia. A Benandante *using* his talisman — or a caul-derived fennel sword, a weapon that nearly all sect members carry — is another matter altogether.

Traditionally, these Old World mystics integrate their birth-cauls into eyepieces that allow limited (that is, astral or out-of-body) travel to the deadlands or viewing of that mysterious realm and its denizens. A Benandante may don his eyepiece talisman — which usually looks like regular eyeglasses or sunglasses — to see the bleak, nowadays tumultuous world of ghosts and ghostly things. "Peeping" does not make anything in the deadlands solid to the mystic himself. It does reveal any ghosts within sight, however. Temperament of the individual Benandante determines whether he unsheathes his fennel sword to attack, or he queries the spirits in whatever languages he knows. Like hunters with their informal creeds, the Benandanti have several schools of thought about ghosts, the spirit world and the unexplained cataclysm that wracks the Underworld. The prominent factions among these mystics are the *Redentori*, or Redemptionists; the *Dannati*, or Damnationists; and the fast-growing *Isolatori*, or Isola-

tionists. How membership in a specific faction influences interaction between hunters and mystics is detailed elsewhere for Storytellers.

Beyond the need for his talisman to perform supernatural feats, a Benandante may exit his mortal frame to explore the ghostly realm between sundown and sunup. This process, called Ekstasis, lets the mystic wander in astral form among the dead and the "ghosts" of objects — buildings, mementos, *weapons* — as if they are solid. To a Benandante in Ekstasis, the ghost of a wall can slow escape, and spectral pursuers can pierce his astral form with, say, ghostly bayonets. A mystic who suffers the equivalent of mortal wounds to his astral form dies. Furthermore, Benandanti strive to never be caught out of body at sunrise, for this eventuality leaves them lost and typically unable to return to their bodies.

In normal deadlands conditions, ghosts of vanished roads, footpaths and the like help make travel through existing structures, foliage and other objects a breeze. Unfortunately, what blows through the spirit world nowadays is *no breeze*. A Benandante exposed to the brunt of the ongoing hellstorm suffers effects almost identical to what ghosts endure under the same circumstances (see **Hunter: The Walking Dead**, Chapter 7), and similar to what an unsheltered person feels in the midst of a cyclone. The hellstorm also inhibits visibility for "peepers." Benandanti who remain "in body" while using their talismans to see (hear, smell) their ghostly surroundings suffer limited sensory input that worsens in direct proportion to the strength of the storm in the area (see "The Hellstorm," p. 130).

THE BENANDANTI AND THE IMBUED

An unfortunate fact not yet understood even by the Benandanti is that their days are numbered. Like the speakers of a dying language, practitioners of this mystical tradition are no longer numerous enough to perpetuate their own existence. Thanks to falling birth rates in Europe and abundant supernatural hazards, the Benandanti populace worldwide can only shrink from now on.

Before the rise of modern hospitals and the consequent drop in the number of people born at home, most Benandanti received midwife training in order to screen newborns for potential apprentices. Now, only a dwindling percentage of the mystics put this instruction into practice, which is crucial if new blood is to enter the sect. Indifference to traditional ways is largely behind this problem. And yet, a positive result of this straying is that age-old proscriptions against inducting females are overlooked. Nowadays, *any* cauled newborn, regardless of gender, is sure to be ritually apprenticed if a Benandante is present.

Even so, these mystics are extraordinarily scarce. Changes in the political landscape and in travel modes mean that they're spread thinly throughout Europe and North America, rather than concentrated in nations

surrounding the Adriatic Sea as was once the case. Benandante presence in other places largely follows patterns of Italian and Slavic emigration over the last few centuries. In other words, the number of these mystics to be found in Asia, Africa and Australia can be counted on two hands.

Despite changes in attitude about apprenticing women, the ranks of the Benandanti remain mostly male (80 percent of the sect). Overall, the group is still respectful of its old ways mainly because of its master-apprentice structure. Yet, members no longer feel hidebound by tradition. Secrecy does remain second nature to the mystics, though, thanks largely to periodic persecution over the centuries by fanatical agents of the Church.

ENCOUNTERS

Special or dire circumstances would be needed to make a mystic violate the sect's principles of nondisclosure. Various sorts of encounters with hunters can suit one or both of those definitions. The most extreme case would be a ghostly disaster like the one that destroyed the Canadian town of New Dijon (see the **Hunter Survival Guide**). Such events are uncommon but certainly not unknown to the Benandanti, who recognize how dangerous such hellstorm outbreaks can be. To discover allies in the midst of such an event — particularly seemingly normal people able to perceive the common threat *and* defend against it — would be a godsend for any Benandante. Imbued intervention in a confrontation with the walking dead would elicit a similar response. Many Benandanti still struggle to deal with the influx of spirits and animated corpses in the world, so help against zombies from unexpected quarters is viewed positively.

Apart from situations in which Benandanti are outnumbered or out of their element, things get tricky. Encounters with hunters are nearly certain to involve the dead because of overlapping Benandante/imbued concerns and capabilities. Faction and creed play a huge part in any non-crisis meeting, because individuals' personalities determine how they get along. An aggressive Defender might offer needed support to a mystic, and vice versa, but if the two can't see eye to eye or even find common ground, clashing personalities may preclude them from ever working together.

The likely exception here involves all Benandanti and any member of the Hermit creed. Hermits can venture out of body much like the Benandante can, and mystics who discover this fact might well view such imbued as kindred souls. Remember, though, that Hermits traverse the physical world in spirit form, whereas Benandanti leave their bodies and immediately enter another plane — the deadlands — where *no* hunter senses or powers penetrate. In other words, the two types of astral wanderers don't normally cross paths. Many Benandanti grow sensitive to disembodied presence, however, so Hermits may be surprised to see a

mystic take notice when spied upon via Reach or Transcend. Make a Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 5, for a Benandante in the presence of a Hermit's projected consciousness. Excess successes grant the mystic increasingly greater information about the Hermit (generalities about the observer, including emotional state or gender; distance and/ or direction to the observer's body; a flash of the observer's face or name). A botch means the Benandante mistakes the Hermit for a ghost. Remember, too, that although imbued cannot see wandering Benandanti in astral form, a mystic who remains in the physical world and who uses his talisman can see — and even attack — a Hermit in astral form. Likewise, a hunter using second sight can see a talisman-wielding Benandante as "off."

Another variable that could shape encounters between hunters and mystics is interaction with monsters other than the wandering dead. Many Benandanti recognize the existence of vampires because of mutual roots in Italy — most mystics know to avoid Venice, in particular — and because some Italian vampires seem keenly interested in the dead and the deadlands. Otherwise, werewolves, "wee folk" and wizards all fall into the category of folklore for the Benandanti. Sect

members explain persistent belief in sorcerers, for example, as lies and misapprehensions about the Benandanti themselves, spread by their longtime persecutors in the Inquisition. Thus, mystics are as likely as any other mortal to be preyed upon by a creature outside their experience. The stranger whom an imbued group saves from a she-goblin could have supernatural secrets all his own....

Of course, as in the episode that opens this section, imbued and Benandanti could also meet in any of the ways that people do. Like Celia Goldman and Ennio Giardini, they might not recognize each other as anything other than normal — at first glance. Giardini is an example of a Benandante who has integrated his secret life into his workaday one. Knowing, as many mystics do, that dogs and other animals see and respond negatively to ghosts, he entered a field that surrounds him with loyal allies. Other likely Benandante professions include nursing, obstetrics, metalworking (one American Redemptionist has achieved minor fame as a sculptor; his subjects are none other than the wandering dead) and smithery.

The imbued occur worldwide, but so do the ghostly incursions that Benandanti and hunters alike try to

STORYTELLER: ISOLATIONISM

Before the hellstorm's outbreak, the *Isolatori* upheld the newest and least supported of Benandanti philosophies. The group originated in the guilt of an elderly master (now deceased) whose apprentice — and nephew — became trapped out of body and fell comatose. As penance, the tortured old man cared for other such "lost" wayfarers, with the result being a hospice that grew to house more than a dozen unfortunates. The caretaker also tried to convince other Benandanti that the dangers of exploring the afterlife outweighed any of its benefits. Naturally, if another mystic visited the hospice, the master had plenty of visual aids around to prove his case.

Once the hellstorm took hold of the deadlands, its lethal conditions made astral visits rare. Isolationist membership began to look quite sensible and has grown accordingly.

Currently leading the faction is the formerly "comatose" Salvatore Ruggiero, who eventually managed to return to his body. Years of being bedridden left Ruggiero handicapped. He walks with the aid of two canes, and he is among the few survivors of flooding that recently inundated his uncle's hospice. Most Benandanti who were being kept alive at the converted farmhouse perished in the disaster. By waking and dragging himself to the roof, Ruggiero lived to gain a charmed reputation and unequalled loyalty among his fellow mystics.

After the floodwaters receded, Ruggiero saw no reason to reopen the hospice. To do so, he said, would merely encourage the sort of foolhardiness in other Benandanti that had cost him his health and years of his life. He could also attest to how much more dangerous the ghostly realm had become after the outbreak of the hellstorm, which for reasons of his own he calls "*Numero Sei*," or "Number Six."

At any of the informal Benandanti gatherings that he attends, Ruggiero points to himself as living proof of what forays into the afterlife can cost. "And consider," he says in Lombard-accented Italian, "how lucky I was. Others like me are dead now."

Ruggiero and his onetime attendants from the hospice form the core membership of the Isolationist faction. In addition to advocating avoidance of astral travel, all *Isolatori* pursue arcane knowledge on warding and exorcism. Ruggiero seems convinced of worse things ahead unless the wall between the living and the dead can be shored up. Isolationists recognize that despite their unwillingness to visit the dead, the dead are more able and likely to visit the living these days. Thus, these mystics guard against mass incursions of angry ghosts.

Isolatori most resemble members of the Defender creed in temperament and outlook as protectors and vigilants. Their effort to uncover some remedy for the upheaval in the Underworld also gives them goals like those of the Visionary, Judge and Redeemer creeds.

quell. A lone mystic — or possibly a master-apprentice pair — has limited means to know what fellows abroad might face and so probably can't share much about ghosts or the sect in general. Unless, that is, the Benandante is the sort to trust in spirits' claims about Underworld events and encounters with other distant mystics. Similarly, few imbued are aware of hunter-net, and "information" that is found there is best taken with a grain of salt. Mystics and hunters are therefore very similar in awareness of themselves, or truths about the world and each other, so they might make fine bedfellows — or at least peers in misfortune.

STORYTELLER: THE HOSPITAL OF THE LOST TRAVELERS

L'Ospedale dei Viaggiatori Perduti, the defunct hospice for unfortunate Benandanti trapped outside their own bodies and therefore "comatose," was the closest thing mystics had to a headquarters. The following material describes the place in its heyday for any Storyteller who wishes to integrate it intact as a setting.

The hospice was once a Lombardy beet farm erected at a bend in the river Po. It was also the ancestral home of Pietro Scarpa, who was rumored to be a direct descendant of the Benandanti's founder. Scarpa was nearly 60 before he apprenticed his sister's son Salvatore. In his cocksure teens, Salvatore made a solo trip into the deadlands and became trapped there. He thus became the first of many "patients" at what would eventually be known, through the white business cards that Scarpa distributed, as *L'Ospedale dei Viaggiatori Perduti*.

At best, the drafty, ancient stone structure was inappropriate for the use Scarpa made of it. Its tile roof had blown away in some forgotten catastrophe and been replaced with thatch. Emergency lights hung from I-V poles or were clamped to the posts of the oddball beds that Scarpa assembled. Even near the end of the 20th century, the place had yet to be connected to any electricity or telephone grid. Power for lighting, hand-me-down ventilators, outdated monitoring equipment and the like came from one of the property's three generators — at least one of which was always under repair. Staff comprised a handful of apprentices whose masters were patients. Scarpa received a meager but steady dribble of money from bereft masters to keep the place (and its residents) alive.

Medical emergencies were mercifully infrequent, considering the self-taught training of the caregivers. A few patients were lost to infections or unexpected heart attacks, but most of the hospice's charges simply... endured. The real threats came from ghosts who saw the place as a repository for bodies awaiting possession, and from Benandanti ignorant of what the place was about. At least one mystic mistook Scarpa's merciful endeavor for an experiment performed by throwback Resurrectionists — an extinct faction dedicated to providing ghosts with the "usable" bodies of comatose or mentally impaired people. The young staff members always took turns overseeing their charges and watching through their talismans for any invisible menace.



During spring and winter, Scarpa himself traveled frequently between Benandante council meetings to spread the news (and the cell phone number) of the hospice to as many mystics as possible. In summer and fall, he worked alongside his staff. Because Scarpa preached strenuously against full Ekstasis, most phone calls were anonymous threats. Only a few Benandanti were upset enough by the gentle Isolationist to actually find his remote home and make threats in person. Other visitors arrived in desperation, not anger, to deliver a new human burden, not to vent rage.

CHANCE MEETINGS

Subject: Anyone recognise anything here?

From: lotus19

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

I'm chewing at a bit of a riddle and wondering whether my experiences ring any bells for anyone out there.

I recently entertained a customer who left me wondering exactly what he and his friends were about. These men — I'll call the two whom I encountered directly Rembrandt and Rubens — were in town about a week ago. Superficial details about them suggested that they were tourists. One of them had my address written on a piece of stationery from a nearby hotel. We went through the standard negotiation, money changed hands and services were rendered. The man and sex with him were unremarkable. About his neck he wore a thong with a tiny pouch, maybe the size and shape of a large fig. He never removed this thing, even during our transaction. When I asked him whether the pouch held his good luck charm, he smiled and gestured in a way to suggest that it bestowed erections. It did have that appearance, but I didn't believe him. I looked at the necklace *that way* and I was not surprised to see that it had an *off* quality to it.

Getting to the heart of all this, I decided to visit the hotel where the fellow appeared to be lodging. The place is small, and I know the owner. A chat with him revealed that he had directed "Rembrandt" my way. I told my friend that something precious of mine was missing after Rembrandt's visit, and he agreed that involving the police was not in anyone's interests. Instead, the owner let me join his housekeeping staff while Rembrandt remained a guest of the hotel, where he attended a conference of some kind.

I had to balance actually doing the job with my snooping. Luckily, I'm in a field where changing bed-clothes is familiar labour. I got inside Rembrandt's room on my second day. Nothing there suggested anything otherworldly. I asked the owner later how I might get inside the auditorium where Rembrandt's group was meeting, but he drew the line there. The group insisted on privacy, even to the extent of barring hotel staff during its gatherings. My friend said they belonged to a lodge of some sort and were fearful of having their "secret handshake" compromised. He seemed to be

half-mocking in this remark, but I wasn't sure whether he knew more than he was telling or if this was simply his way of protecting unsavory guests. He did, however, agree at last to let me patrol the hallway outside the auditorium in time for the group's midday recess.

The next day, I was sweeping crumbs from the carpet outside the room when the doors opened. The hallway filled with ten or so men in their 50s and older. Rembrandt was one of the latter. I heard him before I saw him. He was talking to another man in Dutch at the back of the crowd, and a glance up told me they were headed my way. Fearing that Rembrandt might recognize me, I leaned against my broom and covered my eyes with my other hand. Then I did the trick that lets me see through barriers — even my own hand. "Rubens," the man Rembrandt was chatting up, interrupted to point me out. "A damsel in distress," he said. They paused, and Rembrandt asked whether I needed help. I shook my head and whispered, "Headache." I watched them the whole time. They stood there a moment longer, then one said, "Very well," as the other wished me health. As they walked away, Rubens said to Rembrandt in Italian, "What a lovely little caramel she is." Rembrandt agreed, also in Italian. Then, they disappeared around a corner.

For my trouble, I noticed that both men had similar bulges from something worn around their necks. Also, both carried odd pieces of luggage. Rembrandt had what appeared to be a poster tube strapped over one shoulder. Rubens held what resembled a case for a musical instrument — a flute perhaps, or a horn of some sort? Both men bore scars on their hands that suggested they had been burned repeatedly, as if by hot metal.

My friend the hotel owner told me I'd had ample time to track down my property, so I was unable to return to the housekeeping job. My hope to see the interior of Rubens' room was dashed.

After that, I chose to observe from a café facing the hotel. I watched the entire group depart in taxis over the course of an afternoon. I noticed this time that they included at least four teens, each of whom seemed to accompany one of the older men from the auditorium.

That's really all that I have. One glimpse of something out of the ordinary, a group of men who might be wizards of some sort but who might just as easily be pedophiles. Or single fathers. Or Masons. I am at a loss here, I must confess.

CONVENING MYSTICS

What the Benandanti have that the imbued lack is an actual framework for regular meetings, or *Raduni*. These gatherings occur seasonally, last a week and tend to draw about a dozen mystics, usually ones who have a region and at least one language in common. *Raduni* (or Ember Week Councils) occur four times a year: starting on the first Sunday in Lent; on the seventh Sunday after Easter (Pentecost); on or im-



mediately after September 14; and on or immediately after December 13. The standard setting for a *Raduno* is an inn or hotel large enough to house most or all in attendance and small enough to let attendees exercise a degree of privacy. Outside times of crisis, councils are casual affairs that involve socializing, trading stories, and philosophical debate. The various Benandanti faction members use these meetings to seek converts and to try to influence the behavior of fellows in other factions.

The hellstorm makes any *Raduno* a serious affair these days. Drinking, brawling (Benandanti have traditionally preferred fists to gavels for enforcing parliamentary procedure) and proselytizing are at a minimum — unless no one can agree who should take the floor first.

Once procedural matters are settled, the mystics hear reports of the latest horrors encountered. Wise attendees listen to accounts of brushes with the dead, then offer constructive criticism. Bone-headed bullies drunk on their own testosterone (all too numerous in the sect) assail anyone who has let a kill get away or failed to stand his ground. Such assaults invariably shift discussion from the practical to the polemical, as adherents of Redemptionism or Isolationism denounce such screeds by — and the attitudes of — Damnationists.

In other words, apart from the mystics' face-to-face style of interaction, the experiences of an imbued and a Benandante are often parallel. They might have a largely common mission, but they can't agree on how to go about it or whether others' perspectives have any merit. That coincidence is no guarantee of cooperation between hunters and mystics, though. Their interaction is still largely determined by how open-minded each is to the other's presence, or even existence.

MISENCOUNTERS

Because of their small numbers, Benandanti seldom encounter *any* supernatural being that they have not actively sought — or vice versa. Chance and the sect's magical trappings, which might easily be mistaken for ones associated with necromancy or demon worship, have drawn members into occasional conflict with the Inquisition (see Chapter 1), however. Only a few centenarian mystics recall firsthand the last time these groups ran afoul of each other. Nevertheless, many Benandanti know stories about the horrific post-WWI era, when Inquisitors intervened in the mystics' sectarian struggles, interrogated and tortured some members, and took part in wiping out the Resurrectionist faction.

Since the early 20th century, Inquisitors and Benandanti have largely managed to avoid one another. Memories of past persecution still guide mystics

STORYTELLER: REDEMPTIONISM

Redemptionists are moved to act as guides for ghosts, which they believe to be souls that don't understand they've died. And yet, that compassion is increasingly difficult to champion — or defend — as the hellstorm crams the living world with spirits that seem dedicated to destruction.

Some *Redentori* respond to the challenges presented by the storm — which they call the Quickening — with redoubled devotion, prayer and hope. But a growing number feel they can no longer deny the Damnationist view. These crestfallen mystics take up the fennel sword and enter battle with great regret, often followed by pleas of forgiveness for their actions. A few defect to the Isolationist camp and also become fighters, yet ones who stress defense of the living over punishment of the wicked dead.

Redemptionist emphasis on forgiveness and understanding is heavily influenced by sect members' religious background. Faith guides most aspects of these mystics' secret and public lives. A Redemptionist's apprentice is typically the mystic's godchild also; many Benandanti stand as godparents when their youthful charges are baptized, and many swear to help guide these children spiritually. Redemptionists always take this oath with the deepest seriousness.

At one time, the ban against women in the sect coincided with the one observed in the Catholic clergy, and these two affiliations often dovetailed together for Redemptionists. Sunday mornings, a *Redentoro* master-apprentice pair assisted their parish priest during Mass, with the youngster serving as altar boy and the elder as deacon. Sunday evenings, the mystics came together again for cemetery duty.

In many older European towns, especially in rural Italy, Redemptionist Benandanti took pains to keep occupants of church cemeteries at peace (and thus their living neighbors, too). *Redentori* would don their talismans and search among the tombstones for forlorn or enraged spirits. The standard procedure upon finding either was to sweep and polish a tomb, deliver fresh flowers and offer prayers for the dead soul — if it could be recognized. Redemptionists found these actions to be remarkably effective in preventing rampages by lone ghosts.

Sometimes, these overtures gained the trust of an apparition and opened communication with it. What followed often depended upon the drives of the dead person. A deceitful one might try to use the Benandanti as tools in its quest for revenge or other vindication. An honest ghost might enlist the mystics to achieve something it left undone. Encountering an angry ghost often led Redemptionists to an understanding of its condition — and sometimes to new evidence in an unsolved crime.

Redentoro activities made them valued members of their communities. Citizens and even priests would appeal to them whenever exorcisms seemed necessary. Townspeople routinely shielded Redemptionists when the Inquisition was openly active. Yet even these Benandanti guarded their secrets. If asked, they presented their talismans and fennel swords as holy relics handed down from saintly ancestors. Beyond such white lies, townspeople didn't ask and the mystics didn't tell.

Today, things are more complicated for *Redentori*. Gender integration of the sect has undone some of the coziness that Redemptionists enjoyed within the parochial structure. The hellstorm's effects frequently force these mystics to choose between principle and expediency. Many old cemeteries overflow with ghosts in search of shelter or are surrounded by angry spirits that want to drag all the dead — and living — into the storm with them (see "The Hellstorm," p. 130). Worse, graveyards are prime "birthing places" for the walking dead, many of whom are aggressive and noncommunicative. Despite these impediments, Redemptionists can be expected to press ahead with faith (albeit not always Catholic faith, of late), and even gratitude for what they view as rare and special gifts.

Redemptionists' will to make things better and to seek nonviolent solutions whenever possible gives them many similarities to the Redeemer creed. Their staunch faith and willingness to communicate with the dead also make them resemble some Innocents.

in keeping a low profile. Hunters, with their miraculous abilities and talk of messages from beyond, might appear to informed Benandanti as the most ardent of Inquisition warriors. Under such circumstances, any alliance between mystics and the imbued would be a wary one and probably last only until the end of any immediate crisis. Thereafter, wise Benandanti would exit with all possible discretion. Should they cross paths with the same imbued again, the mystics might well anticipate antagonism.

In fact, little that the imbued can do or say engenders trust among the Benandanti. The best prospect for eased relations is mutual, benign discovery between a mystic and a Hermit. Yet, such an encounter also bears the seeds of disaster. If the Benandante mistakes the imbued for a ghost and attacks him, but fails to kill him, war might follow if each has allies.

Damnationists would be likely to rouse their side to attack, or at least to send a few ghosts at the other side to test hunters' mettle. Isolationists and Redemptionists

STORYTELLER: DAMNATIONISM

As their collective name suggests, *Dannati* believe that souls of the dead still lingering on Earth have only one proper place: Hell. They try to speed along as many ghosts as possible to what a good Damnationist considers punishment postponed. Volume matters to these ghost-slayers, and some even compete for the greatest number of "kills." Of course, because ghosts leave behind little that can serve as trophies, some of these mystics are more imaginative than they are cold-blooded. Still, years of training make most *Dannati* fearsome foes for the average ghost.

Whereas a Redemptionist confronted by a possessed person might try to convince the spirit to depart, a Damnationist is more likely to use her fennel sword to oust such an invader. After successfully exorcising a ghost, any *Dannato* feels she has all the evidence she needs of its malevolent intent. If the freshly removed "evil spirit" is not immediately swept away by prevailing ghost winds (as often happens these days), the Damnationist typically continues her assault. Instead of the gentle prod she used while the creature was encased in mortal flesh, she slashes at the ghost until it dissipates from her view. To onlookers who lack second sight, the mystic might be waving away insects. Hunters, of course, are able to watch the fennel-sword wielder do damage to her opponent as if she used an item affected by the Cleave edge.

Note that any gentleness a *Dannato* brings to the exorcism process has more to do with keeping her sword intact than it does with kind treatment of a possessor's victim. Damnationists are notorious for attitudes that might charitably be interpreted as "tough love." These harsh taskmasters commit most of what qualifies as apprentice abuse within the sect. Sexual abuse of a young charge is heavily frowned on by Benandanti and is therefore infrequent — but it happens. Cruel training techniques, such as abandoning an apprentice in the deadlands to teach respect or quick-wittedness, are Damnationist specialties. Not all apprentices know that other Benandanti exist, so a desperate one might appeal to the imbued for rescue from an intolerable master.

Realize, though, that *Dannati* are ruthless in their dealings with ghosts, and such attitudes often color their interaction with the living. Hunters who piss off one of these mystics might suffer terminal regret. Depending on how vicious their work makes them, Damnationists often end up earning money along the hard lines of the law, whether as a private investigator or bodyguard, an enforcer or a thief. Ghosts, suitably intimidated, can offer all sorts of information, from who pulled a trigger and when, to what scrolled across someone's computer screen when he thought he was alone. Some *Dannati* might use such information directly, whereas others might coerce the dead into performing their dirty work for them.

"Meddling" in what a bull-headed Damnationist considers sect business might constitute as little as a hunter discussing the "true nature" of ghosts with the mystic's apprentice. Less volatile Benandanti require actual threats to themselves, their charges or their talismans to make them respond forcefully. Then again, even a mild-tempered Redemptionist is likely to use extreme violence to recover a stolen fennel sword or talisman.

Reliance upon violent or destructive methods puts Damnationists in league with Avengers and even Waywards. They're actually unlike Judges because *Dannati* see a ghost's very being, not necessarily its actions, as an offense and therefore cause for eradication.

would argue for learning more about people who possess powers that could be useful in the sects' battles. These sect disagreements in themselves might bog down or preclude establishing ties with the chosen. Should an alliance cross even these hurdles, one wild card could undo it in an instant: the Inquisition. Rather than see even bitter sect rivals vanish into Inquisitors' dungeons, most Benandanti would offer up a hunter to save themselves or their colleagues.

The imbued, assuming they believe Benandanti aren't just powerful and devious sorcerers able to frustrate second sight, might be far more willing to pursue information about the mystics. Of course, mere inspection by "aware" outsiders might be cause for mystics to fear hunters' intentions. In any alliance that might blossom, the imbued are almost invariably suitors to the Benandanti's shy maidens.

After years of desultory collaboration, a progressive group of Benandanti might break all sect rules to invite a Hermit or maybe a Zealot with Cleave to a *Raduno*. If fighting were to erupt, the culture shock alone might be enough to send any imbued in attendance racing for the impersonal embrace of hunter-net. At that level of rapport, two dangerous revelations might cast all Benandanti in an unfavorable light. One would be learning about the "occult eugenics" practiced by the long-gone Resurrectionist faction, which few mystics discuss in its embarrassing detail. The other would be discovering just how many of these mystics had, over the centuries, joined a group whose name is ominous to hunter-net veterans. Of course, even as secretive as the Benandanti are, most know nothing of the Orphic Circle....

ECHOES OF THE DEAD

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: tarjiman220

Subject: Re: Anyone recognise anything here?

[Warden has read Lotus19's post and asked that I translate the following message of his in response.]

Reading of Messrs. Rembrandt and Rubens, I remember a story I had not thought of in years. A policeman once told me of a rivalry between two members of what he called the "Boulevardiers." Depending on whom you asked in Marseilles at the time (the 1930s), these men were a lodge like the Freemasons, a coven of black magicians or the Templar knights' modern heirs, complete with swords.

In either case, one of these rivals was cousin to the town's police chief. After a fight in which Caucionnier, the larger of the two, blinded the chief's cousin in one eye, Disenét, the smaller rival, swore revenge. He told his cousin the police chief, who was notoriously corrupt and brutal, that the man who had ruined his eye wore a pouch about his neck at all times. In this pouch, Disenét claimed, was a sapphire of surpassing beauty and worth. If the chief were to arrest the man for assault and take the gem for himself, Caucionnier would be unable to complain. The reason, Disenét claimed, was because the Boulevardiers knew an ancient method for creating such stones from worthless powder. Disenét insisted

that rather than publicly reveal the society's secret, Caucionnier would be forced to craft another sapphire.

Without delay, the chief had Caucionnier arrested. When he tried to remove the pouch from the big man's neck, pandemonium ensued. Five policemen — one of them the very fellow who told me this tale — had to work together to restrain Caucionnier. Numbers won out, Caucionnier was jailed, and the chief took the pouch. He told his men he wanted to see what contraband this criminal had fought so hard to protect.

Shortly after the brawl, my policeman friend said, the chief ordered his men to bring Caucionnier to his office. The chief was furious. He kept asking the prisoner, "Where is it?" Caucionnier tried to remain calm and begged that his necklace be returned. This time, it was the chief who became frenzied, and he used a truncheon to beat the prisoner while his officers held the man. All the way through the beating, the chief kept demanding, "Where is it?"

Later, my friend said, after Caucionnier had completed his time in jail, he returned to confront the chief and demand what was his. The chief threatened to arrest the fellow again. Caucionnier began to leave, but from the doorway said, "All thieves suffer the regrets of the damned."

The chief carried on as if nothing had happened, my friend said, but later that week things changed.



Everyone could see it. The chief constantly looked as if he needed sleep. He began to stammer in his speech, sometimes to fall asleep as officers delivered reports. He did this in front of my friend and then immediately awoke screaming. After several weeks, he began to call his men before him one at a time to ask whether any of them had removed from his office what he called "a fold of onion paper." My friend said no and asked why it was important. The chief told him everything then, including the fact that he was being haunted and would be until he returned Caucionnier's property. Eventually, the chief stepped down and retired to the countryside.

None of this surprised my friend. When he told me this tale, decades after the fact, he had been Chief of Police in Marseilles for many years. My friend said he had resented working under this thug. To hasten the man's "unavoidable downfall," my friend had taken what he called "devil's skin" from the chief, who was then punished for his misdeeds by Caucionnier's "unholy allies." In the bargain, the policeman believed he had stripped a black magician of his talisman, for all the Boulevardiers trafficked with netherworld powers, my friend claimed. He even showed me what he insisted had been the contents of the pouch, a shriveled bit of translucent brown tissue.

A dubious story, but could these "Boulevardiers" be the same group you encountered, Lotus? One detail that takes on different importance for me now is that of the artificial sapphire. Such a stone, which is usually pear-shaped, is called a "boule." Inside a tiny sack hanging from a thong, a stone like this would appear fig-like, yes? And artificial gems can be created by applying extreme heat to powdered metal.

I am most eager to speak with your Rembrandt or Rubens.

STORYTELLER: THE FENNEL SWORD

A Benandante's talisman, fashioned from the caul with which she is born, is a tool. It allows her to see ghosts in her vicinity and to travel to their realm. In contrast, the fennel sword is a weapon. In dealings with disembodied spirits, the weapon is largely useless without the accompanying talisman; a mystic minus her talisman cannot see apparitions to strike at them. Against the walking dead, possessors and ghosts with the terrifying power to make themselves solid, the same mystic has a chance to strike her targets directly. But what does a fennel sword *do* to the dead, and why?

Each fennel sword is fashioned by the Benandante who wields it, and each contains a fragment of its maker's caul. Like talismans themselves, fennel swords are not interchangeable. Most mystics choose to be buried with their weapons. Ill-named, fennel swords are closer in form to large wands. Because some mystics gave their wands points or edges (or both), the sword label has stuck. These artifacts are neither more nor less effective because of such modifications.

To the uninitiated, fennel swords might be nothing other than ornamental pieces of wrought iron. Their actual composition is *ferro spettrale* — ghost iron — which a Benandante prepares himself from iron and from fennel that has been fertilized with a bit of his birth caul. The demanding process requires that each sword be made twice: once in the realm of the dead, and again in the land of the living. In the deadlands, the mystic forges and names the sword, then cools it in a hell-hole — a vent that opens onto the deepest portions of the Underworld.

The finished sword acts as a ghost-bane. Its touch can exorcise most possessors from their hosts and damage even disembodied spirits as if it cuts them. While a Benandante holds her sword or merely bears it in its sheath, she is immune to ghostly possession. Note, however, that spirit powers which do not require ghostly contact with a target, such as illusions and memory alteration, are not negated by a fennel sword.

The onset of the hellstorm has forced mystics who regularly confront the walking dead — as opposed to disembodied spirits — to rethink their fighting techniques. The inherent brittleness of *ferro spettrale* is not appropriate for actual swordplay. Some Benandanti have undertaken fencing exercises, others the study of Eastern martial arts such as *bojutsu* to master contact with solid targets yet not damage their weapons. In play, assume that any botch involving a fennel sword breaks the item. The sword's owner loses three points of Willpower. The dispiriting consequences of such a loss mean that many mystics flee the walking dead if possible.

In any confrontation with wandering dead who have physical form (Storytellers may choose to include vampires in this category), each contact with a fennel sword (Dexterity + Melee) does Strength +2 damage (lethal, or aggravated if you have the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**). To exorcise a possessor from a human or animal host usually requires that the Benandante only touch the host with her sword. The mystic's player rolls Willpower +1 (maximum of 10) against a difficulty equal to the ghost's Willpower. The possessor is banished from the host for an hour per success. A botch means the host suffers two levels of bashing damage, automatically. Note that fennel swords leave no marks upon physical targets, unless used in such a way that they shatter in the process.

Once a possessor is banished from its host (or if it was exposed to begin with), the same damage rules for physical zombies, above, apply. Benandanti and hunters using second sight see the disembodied forms appear slashed or even dissolve wherever they are touched by a fennel sword.

STORYTELLER: THE HELLSTORM

One thing many Benandanti know that most imbued do not is that the world has felt the effects of hellstorms before — although no previous one ever

spawned the walking dead as the current one has. Elder mystics of jaded outlook quell talk of the "Last Days" among the young. *Both* of the 20th-century storms that preceded the current one aroused the same fears, they say. And they were both *far* worse than this little shower, these old men like to tell their juniors.

Among themselves, however, Benandanti old enough to have lived through one or both of the World Wars agree that this hellstorm is far more fierce than its predecessors. Furthermore, Biblical prophecies associated with the dead rising make many of these aged mystics, whose origins tend to be Christian (and primarily Catholic), worry that the End Times truly are here.

Old-timers' only sense of hope comes from the duration of the hellstorms that overlapped the World Wars. Each took a decade or so to subside, they believe. "This one too shall pass — unless..." That "unless" masks the fear that this hellstorm's end and the world's end may coincide. The idea keeps individual Benandanti awake nights but silent on the subject. Some upstart imbued who thinks she knows anything about the hellstorm might become a target at whom to fire such awful conclusions.

When hellstorm activity spills across the barrier between the living and the dead, several things happen. Hunters using second sight can see any ghost in their vicinity as well as any beings present in astral or otherworldly form, be they Hermits, Benandanti or those rare vampires capable of this means of travel. Ghosts, specifically *angry* ghosts, are sure to outnumber all other comers, usually at the ratio of dozens to one. Walking dead may occur instantly as one or more ghosts swarm into the corpses of freshly killed mortals. Unlike other ghosts, angry ones do not suffer damage from exposure to hellstorm winds in such situations; rather, they ride these gusts, swirl about their opponents and strike at will.

Due to their travels into the deadlands, Benandanti are immune to the more subtle effects of such outbreaks. All other mortals in the vicinity, including the imbued, suffer the loss of two Willpower for the duration of these spillovers. Regular people also suffer confusion and hysteria while exposed to the storm and its denizens, much as they would when confronted by ghostly tricks. Hellstorm outbreaks can make even desert residents in the midst of a heat wave feel chilled, forlorn and vaguely hopeless. Often, though not always, physical bad weather

coincides with a spillover. In either condition, Benandanti using talismans and hunters using second sight suffer impaired Perception of the supernatural according to the following scale.

STORYTELLER: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

The following represent the most common Benandanti faction members for their respective age and experience.

DAMNATIONIST MASTER

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Crafts (Blacksmithing) 3, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Linguistics 2, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Occult 3, Politics 1, Stealth 2

Backgrounds: Resources 1

Willpower: 7

Numina: Ekstasis

Equipment: Talisman, fennel sword, poster tube (discreet scabbard), rottweiler

ISOLATIONIST APPRENTICE

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Crafts (Blacksmithing) 1, Dodge 2, Drive 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Linguistics 1, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Occult 2, Politics 2, Stealth 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Influence 1

Willpower: 7

Numina: Ekstasis

Equipment: Talisman, water-damaged Physician's Desk Reference (Italian edition)

STORYTELLER: EKSTASIS

All Benandante magic requires the user to have his own birth-caul talisman. To perceive the deadlands while in a waking state, Benandanti peer through their talismans as if through eyeglasses. Make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, for the character to see past the material world, and as a precursor to any Perception-based roll (which is affected by the local hellstorm level; see box).

Hellstorm Level	Area Affected	Incidence of Ghosts	Weather Conditions	Loss to Perception
1	large building	1-2 dozen	not applicable	zero
2	neighborhood	10-20 dozen	heavy rain	-1
3	small town*	500-1,000	gales, hail	-2
4	large town	2,000-5,000	tornadoes	-3
5	big city unknown		hurricane	-4

*New Dijon was struck by a hellstorm outbreak of this magnitude.

To enter the deadlands in astral form, Benandanti enter a sleeplike state and concentrate on their talismans. Make a Perception + Occult roll, difficulty 8. Each success allows travel there for approximately one hour. Note that a Perception + Occult roll, difficulty 6, is needed for the mystic to return from the deadlands.

THE NSA

"Steve?"

One word told Steven Williams that months of letting his hair and beard grow had been a waste of time. He hadn't been in St. Thomas two days and someone had recognized him. Not just anyone either, but Brent Burkett, the toughest SOB Steven knew during his entire enlisted career. Worse, Brent appeared to be as much of a rogue as Steven had been forced to become, if the dead sailor on the beach between them was any indication.

Whether Steven would be next was the foremost question in his mind.

"B.B. How you doin', man?" Steven thought he sounded more relaxed than was humanly possible given the size of the handgun that Brent aimed at his head.

"Don't bullshit around, Steve. What the hell are you doin' here?"

"What, before or after I saved your ass from this guy? I'm pointing a gun at you 'cause you're pointing one at me."

Yeah, and I should've pulled the trigger already. The ass you saved was your own. If you hadn't spoken up to warn me he was still alive, my next bullet would have been for you. Lucky for you, I'd know that Texas twang anywhere, even under all that fur."

Something in Brent's mockery almost made the hunter lower his gun... but he had just witnessed a revenge slaying or something even more disturbing. Neither explanation made him optimistic about walking away from this encounter.

Steven had seen the wrong-looking sailor within hours of his arrival two days ago, and followed the "man." Best, he figured, to get a sense of any local threats sooner, not later. Shaka had underestimated the inhabitants of Haiti and might have paid for that mistake with his life. Finding his friend and fellow imbued Earl Deams was one reason Steven had come to the Caribbean. Avoiding a nationwide U.S. manhunt was the other.

Steven wasn't stupid enough to think the Feds had any less of a reach in the Virgin Islands. He hadn't planned to stay there. But Brent was more than capable of making St. Thomas Steven's final resting place.

"Listen, I want to show you something, okay?" Steven spread his left hand open, raising it to show that it was empty. Brent's face betrayed nothing, but he didn't object, either. Steven paused, then lowered himself to his knees. He inscribed the hunter symbol for "ally" in the sand, and looked up at Brent expectantly.

"What's that?" the other man asked. "A compass?"

Okay, Steven thought. I'm fucked. He looked at Brent's dark-brown finger on the trigger of the huge pistol and wondered whether he'd feel the bullet enter his body.

"Answer one question for me," Brent said.

Steven nodded.

This thing in New Orleans they're after you for?" Shit, Steven thought. He'd hoped that whatever Brent was up to had kept him away from newspapers and the TV for the past few months.

"What about it?" Steven's mouth was dry.

"Did you do it?"

"Lynch a black cop? Even one as bad as that guy was? No way."

"Didn't think so."

After a moment, both men lowered their weapons simultaneously without saying another word.

"I need to do something," Brent said. "Then let's get outta here."

✦ ✦ ✦

"So, tell me how that sailor was even able to move after I shot him. I mean, there was a hole right through the guy!"

The two men hunkered inside a small cave several miles from the deserted stretch of beach where they met. Brent offered his canteen to Steven, who took it and drank before he spoke.

"I think he was... possessed."

Brent bit his lip and cast his gaze upward into the darkness. "I was afraid you'd say something like that. How do you know?"

"I don't for sure. Call it a hunch. Why'd you ambush him?"

"Same reason we ever did anything Uncle Sam wanted. Orders."

"And... why didn't you shoot me?"

"Remember Nelson Folkes, that guy from Louisiana who bunked with us?"

"Who could forget that asshole?"

"I remember how he kept trying to pick a fight with me, calling me 'Charcoal Burkett.' Shit like that. I remember you making him chill out and shut his mouth. You were always straight up." Brent paused. "Unlike the outfit I'm working for now."

"Look, I don't want you telling me anything that's gonna—"

"No, I need to tell somebody! They've got me doing wetwork, Steve! On our own people!"

"That's why you took his wallet? Made it look like he was robbed?"

Brent nodded. "After I'd been in the Special Forces for about a year, they transferred me to Puerto Rico for a special assignment. I got trained there as part of a counterintelligence squad. They told us we were fighting a new 'remote brainwashing' technique perfected by the Russians. That is, terminating targets who couldn't be taken into custody. But some of the stuff I've seen...."

"Doesn't add up?"

Brent shook his head and fell silent. After a while, he said, "The only reason I did any of this is because I love America. But these people aren't spies and they aren't traitors, they're victims. Of somebody. Or some thing. I'm

not sure how long I can love a country whose military deals with people this way."

Steven nodded. "Duty can be tough to face," he said. "If I had a crystal ball back in the day, I might've thought harder about walking away from mine. You, though... I have to tell you, Brent, I don't envy your choice at all."

"Mmh. Thanks. So what are you gonna do?"

"I think I'm headed to Haiti. It's a duty thing. You understand."

BIG BROTHER

As the division of the United States government that monitors electronic transmissions worldwide, from phone calls to email, the National Security Agency looms prominently over the activities of the imbued. Even if that were its only function, it would be perilous for hunters to disregard the organization. For several years, though, a core group of military and ex-military officers heading the NSA has been aware of some of the same entities that the imbued oppose. This cadre's devotion to utmost secrecy means that most NSA employees (who comprise both civilians and enlisted people) know nothing about this cabal's activities. And the public's concomitant ignorance means that NSA operatives and the imbued could easily collide in the course of their respective pursuits.

So clandestine are the deeds of the NSA leadership that even the President of the United States is unaware of them. The three men in charge have what they see as the best reason in the world to keep the commander-in-chief out of the loop: They fear his subversion — or, worse, his *conversion* — by the forces they secretly battle. The organization's heart is therefore secretive even for a twilight agency (see Chapter 2), and it deserves exploration on its own.

The unlucky predecessor of the current NSA administrators knew precisely what he and his agency faced: vampires, ghosts, and things for which he had no names. Arthur Clifford's misfortune was that some of his craftier vampire opponents *knew* that he knew, thanks to their blood-pawn spies and to espionage techniques that the government could not even begin to imagine. The bloodsuckers used their knowledge to humiliate Clifford repeatedly in such ways that his superiors had to treat him as a security threat. His removal also meant that talk of the supernatural at the NSA guaranteed an agent's demotion at best, or termination at worst.

Into this fragile and fearful environment came a trio of reformers determined to put the agency back on track. A new technology that allowed the NSA brass a glimpse into the world of ghosts led them to a key misinterpretation about the supernatural entities Clifford fought. Seeming similarities between some vampires and some disembodied spirits, when viewed through the NSA's "chaoscopes," birthed a hypothesis that the two entities were different stages of a single

STORYTELLER: HALF-SEEN TRUTHS

Under the guise of increased screening for unauthorized weapons at various facilities in and around Washington, D.C., the NSA installed monitor grids that resembled (and also functioned in part as) metal detectors. These "chaoscopic" devices actually revealed many ghosts, all vampires and all servitors of vampires who were enhanced by the blood of their masters. The next stage of the program was to screen all individuals at strategic missile silos or who boarded nuclear submarines. Finally, military bases most sensitive to national defense were placed under surveillance. The overall results of such screening alarmed the NSA's leaders. They were gradually able to identify dozens of "compromised" personnel throughout the federal framework. From congressional pages to chief petty officers to civilians within the NSA itself, these "moles" were tracked closely. That the intruders' true natures were due to vampiric influence or ghostly possession didn't matter to the agency; their proximity to nukes, chaoscopic operations and the president (in that order) did.

Being able to recognize foes hidden in the bureaucracy was not enough to let the brass sleep soundly at night, though. Technologies and various programs evolved to combat covertly what personnel called trans-dimensional entities, or TDEs (or less formally "black-bodies," because of the way such beings looked when viewed via chaoscope). The dire nature of these programs made them *beyond* top-secret. After all, detaining federal employees and other citizens for experimentation to learn what measures, if any, could free them of TDE influence was not something the NSA wanted to see detailed on *60 Minutes*.

Many aspects of the organization's clandestine war are based outside the United States. The Caribbean, a longtime proving ground for new U.S. combat techniques and technologies, is where many "extralegal" NSA activities take place. Even so, the fruits of the agency's offshore developments are deployed across the country and around the world even now. Opportunities increase daily for the imbued to cross paths with agency operatives and initiatives.

kind of alien invader, the "before" and "after" of bodiless beings that took over human hosts.

WRITING ON THE WALL

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: shophet125

Subject: Mall walking

Has anybody taken a stroll around the National Mall in Washington lately? I saw several of our

symbols there in different spots. A couple were scratched into the sidewalk! The really strange thing was that all of them were directional emblems. They seemed to surround a central point, but I must have missed an emblem somewhere. That, or I missed the point, literally.

One of the sidewalk symbols isn't far from the Capitol. It's in front of the National Gallery's main building, in the middle of the block, and it points diagonally across Madison. It leads to another that's gouged into a tree trunk along the green. I must have overlooked something after that, but later I saw another sidewalk one across the Mall, outside the Air and Space Museum. That one pointed more or less at the first one, but if there's something between them that's meaningful, I'm at a loss.

NSA OPERATIVES AND THE IMBUED

Only a fraction of the thousands employed by the NSA are aware of chaoscopic and MEF technologies (the latter of which keep many federal locations, including the agency's headquarters, free of certain supernatural intruders). Nevertheless, that aware fraction is powerful, well equipped and determined. Numerous other arms of the agency exist, from cryptology to computing, and the compartmentalized nature of the NSA means that those arms can tangle. At present, though, the agency's many autonomous (and often self-interested) subdivisions have managed to keep out of each other's way. Some civilian higher-ups in the NSA know the military leadership has Something Big under way, but they stand as much chance of learning about it as does the average U.S. citizen.

Of course, what the average U.S. citizen knows is roughly the same as what most imbued know — or could learn — about the NSA: Based at Fort Meade, Maryland, midway between the District of Columbia and Baltimore, the agency has existed since about the middle of the 20th century. The congressional act that established the organization guaranteed that no information about its budget, personnel, facilities or even its precise function need ever be recorded, reported or in any way divulged. A few books about the NSA have been published, and a Maryland museum that celebrates the agency's code-breaking efforts does exist. And that's about it, apart from the transparently false claim that the organization neither has nor exercises any domestic jurisdiction.

In other words, even a hunter who knows the difference between the NSA and NASA, for example, is unlikely to suspect the intelligence agency is involved in combating the supernatural. And in the eyes of the NSA brass, it isn't. Moreover, the last thing an operative of the agency would tell an outsider — even one who had just saved his life — is his employer's identity. An old joke has the organization's three initials standing for "No Such Agency," and indeed the federal government did officially deny the NSA's existence for many years.

FORT MEADE

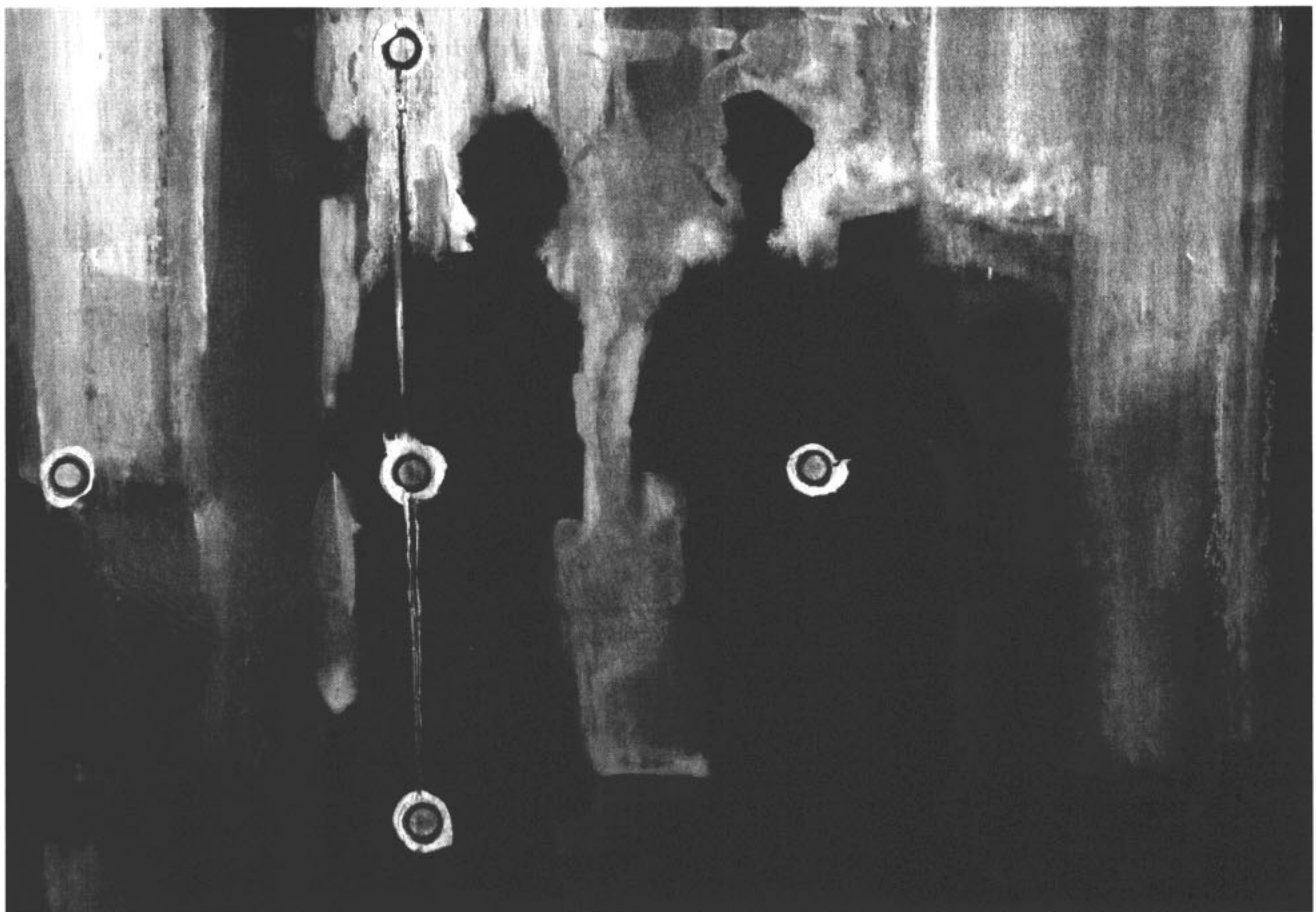
As the home of chaoscopic monitoring for all sites in and around the nation's capital, as well as for military bases in the continental United States, Fort Meade was the first beneficiary of the technology that protects against invaders whom the average soldier cannot see and would not believe in if he did. Of course, because it defends against things that shouldn't exist, the technology itself is perforce invisible to most base personnel.

The Mather-Eburn Field, commonly referred to as MEF or MEFtech, had its origins in a device that predated the chaoscope. Once the chaoscope gave NSA bureaucrats a sense (albeit an inaccurate one) of the often invisible menace they faced, the work of Ruby Mather and Aline Eburn was on the fast track.

Under the aegis of the Paranormal Research Wing, a think tank devoted to fields of study dismissed by most scientists, Mather and Eburn respectively invented and later refined a device that destroys ghosts. Early models required maneuvering "subjects" into the narrow confines of a stationary field generator. Subsequent efforts led to MEFtech, which generates an invisible, spherical field, the effect of which on humans is empirically tiny. For the disembodied dead, however, any contact with the field causes instant annihilation.

Hunters are unable to perceive an active MEF, but use of second sight reveals its disintegrating effects on ghosts. Ghosts can see the field — it looks to them like a little sun half-embedded in the ground — and they know to avoid it (*Please, don't make me go into the light!*). The imbued might mistake such kill-zones as manifestations of the hellstorm, assuming they're even aware of that phenomenon. One day, some Visionary or Hermit may put together *military perimeters* and *destructive invisible fields* in a hypothesis that gets closer to the truth — especially if the hunter in question has read the "lost chapters" of *Hunter Apocrypha* that were posted online.

At Fort Meade's gated entrances are chaoscopic grids like the ones protecting the White House and the Capitol, only bigger. MEFtech has no effect on the walking dead, vampires, vampires' blood-addicted servants or possessors hitching a ride on living humans. Ghosts who are aware of the fields learned this particular dodge by observing ill-informed possessors who ventured (and returned unscathed) where their more knowledgeable fellows feared to go. Chaoscopic monitoring is in place to deal with just these sorts of material incursions. Military police sometimes respond to such physical security breaches, but not always. Individuals whose agendas are unknown but who pose no clear and present danger are often allowed to go about their business unmolested. After all, a secret method of detecting enemy spies won't stay secret for long if one detects *every* intruder it uncovers. Also, some beings simply don't register on chaoscopic monitors, which show concentrations of "negative energy." The list of the elusive includes the imbued (even Hermits in astral



STORYTELLER: MONITOR CENTRAL

Fort Meade's chaoscopic command center is about 300 feet underground inside an enclosed, self-sufficient structure not much smaller than a nuclear submarine. Resemblances don't end there; some submarine technology went into the construction of the command center. Hence, its nicknames include "the Co-op" (short for Counterinvasive Operations), "the Coop," "the Nautilus" and simply "Hell."

Operatives gain access to "Monitor Central" via a tram system that runs between the facility and a restricted blockhouse on a fenced-in portion of the base. The 30-person staff enters and exits from below and ascends into the structure. A security post constitutes the "bottom deck." Individuals passing through this checkpoint are again scanned chaoscopically, one at a time, in a sealed chamber that can be flooded with nerve gas of lethal or nonlethal potency.

Once cleared, personnel ascend one level to reach the scanning room. Here, a dozen chaoscope operators are seated amid banks of screens, computer readouts and controls that are evolving toward virtual-reality interface. Currently, most operators are former fighter pilots, due to the highly technical demands of monitoring several grids simultaneously. Each operator surveys all checkpoints at several facilities nationwide. At present, these include the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon, Dulles International Airport, NORAD headquarters, Fort Meade, all active land-based missile silos and various other extremely sensitive federal locations. As much as the triumvirate that runs this show would love to monitor comings and goings at FBI and CIA headquarters, installation of such scanning grids remains too obtrusive.

Also on this middle level are quarters, power generators, environmental control (air, heat), the larder and "aforeships," Fort Meade's MEF generator, which keeps wandering spirits away. The top level of the structure houses offices for General Rex Shivers (retired), Colonel Alec Riley and Colonel George Johnstone. From this level, the trio can oversee NSA activities taking place around the world.

form), Benandanti in astral form (see p. 131), most sorcerers, and all shapeshifters, goblins and their kin.

Inside the barriers that MEFtech and chaoscopy form around Fort Meade exist both aspects of the NSA: the aware and the unaware. Areas that folk who have mere top federal clearance can enter stay busy with the filtering of email and phone calls, code-breaking and bureaucratic interaction. Beneath one stretch of woods, however, is the underground nerve center of the military leadership's "counterinvasive operations." Installed here in secret, the facility is surprisingly modest — relative to the size of Fort Meade, that is. Even among locals with no connection to the federal government, rumors of subterranean NSA activity in this area reach the level of folklore. Longtime suspicions graduated to a sort of wink-and-a-nod understanding bred by roadside signs that read, "RESTRICTED AREA — Patrolled by U.S. Government Police — NO TRESPASSING." What would surprise citizens is realizing that they know as much about what goes on in such places as the average NSA employee does.

COVERUPS

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: pilot56

Subject: Re: Mall walking

Not only did I see the emblems you're talking about Shophet, I went through hell and high water to get city crews out there ASAP to sandblast the damn things away. And if you think that was easy to do without leaving a paper trail, think again.

I can't overstate to the members of this list how STUPID a stunt that is! Do you really believe the seat of national government goes unwatched? Think about what the FBI is going to do if it comes across strange symbols within walking distance of its headquarters, symbols whose meaning isn't readily clear. Those guys are paid to be suspicious. Their first thoughts will be "gang symbols" and will just get scarier — and closer to the truth — from there. Remember, all of you: in the eyes of the law, we're criminals at best, insurgents at worst. Every post I make to this list is evidence of treason on my part. If anybody knows who might be behind this, please let them know that it has to stop yesterday.

COLLISIONS

The activity likeliest to bring the imbued into contact with NSA operatives is any interaction with ghosts or vampires, or with mortals under the sway of either, anywhere the agency happens to be watching. Because chaoscopies are not calibrated to detect creatures apart from the wandering dead (a classification that, in this context, includes vampires) and blood slaves, undetectable beings effectively do not exist to the agency. Of course, that ignorance does nothing to protect NSA field operatives from a "nonexistent" creature whose interest in them becomes more than casual.

Best-laid plans gone awry probably account for most instances of hunters and agents stumbling into one another. Such meetings are extraordinarily dangerous for both sides, but usually more so for the imbued than for NSA operatives. A hunter often feels he must keep his activities secret because onlookers tend to mistake them for criminal behavior. In contrast, an NSA operative on a field assignment *always* has an explicit hierarchy of orders for dealing with anyone who witnesses her activities, which are supposed to be covert and are certainly illegal. The unexpected, such as the inexplicable behavior of the imbued, can cause orders to go unremembered, unexecuted or outright ignored, though.

Spectacles create problems the NSA would prefer to avoid, so awareness of potential witnesses in the vicinity of a kidnapping or assassination is sufficient reason to call things off. Members of a "grab team" tend to be aware of such dangers simply because of their numbers. A "scrub specialist," as an NSA assassin is called, always works alone.

Members of "grabs and scrubs," that ultrasecret subdivision of the NSA known formally as Field Operations, all come from non-intelligence branches of the military such as the Special Forces, the Navy SEALs or the Army Rangers. Each agent is individually picked and transferred to agency command in such a way that his former comrades are left with only hints of the covert world at work. Each agent is capable of killing most people he meets with his bare hands. Agents approach their work with the certainty of the supremely skilled. Too bad what they were brought together to combat isn't human and isn't covered in basic training.

Whether an individual is the target of assassination or kidnapping depends on the NSA's limited understanding of supernatural creatures. Vampires, sentient zombies, angry ghosts and people unlucky enough to be possessed are considered "mature" TDEs. When viewed through a chaoscope, these death-suffused beings resemble people as they appear in a photographic negative. After an ill-advised frontal assault against an aged, powerful vampire led to what the agency *hopes* were 100-percent casualties, the NSA committed to a different approach. It focused on nipping the problem in the bud by targeting TDEs "before they reached maturity." What this means in absolute terms is that vampires' blood slaves (including the rare *congenital* varieties) and individuals currently possessed or who have been possessed in the recent past (roughly 30 days) are the most common targets of grab teams. Because their chaotic profiles can vary widely, insentient zombies (which many hunters call shamblers) can end up being regarded as either mature or immature TDEs.

Field Ops' rules of engagement are as follows. Direct contact with mature TDEs is to be avoided whenever possible. Should a mature TDE demonstrate itself to be a clear and present danger to members of the federal government (especially NSA Co-op personnel) or to

strategic missile defense personnel (including nuclear submariners), the entity is to be dealt with by the most certain and least direct means possible. This ordinance translates to demolitions or long-distance sniper attacks by night. Direct contact with a mature TDE must be reported via personal satellite uplink at an operative's earliest possible convenience. Failure to notify Co-op command immediately and by the approved method is grounds for summary termination (*not firing*, it should be pointed out).

Because portable chaoscopes have yet to be perfected, Co-op personnel are typically the ones who inform an operative that he has experienced risky exposure. Agents are expected to present themselves weaponless within 48 hours at the gate of the nearest "secure facility" — one from a list of military installations shielded by MEFtech. An operative who fails to abide by these strictures understands that she is presumed to have gone rogue and is subject to termination or detention "until the cessation of TDE hostilities or until the end of the agent's natural life, whichever comes first." In practice, only operatives revealed by chaoscopic examination to be "compromised" are detained and (sometimes) experimented upon. Because the few agents who have undergone this whole ordeal are predictably tight-lipped about it and get assigned far away from anyone they've worked with before, every field operative has great respect for NSA procedure.

Obviously, operatives who become possessed themselves tend to lose track of things — *especially* procedure. Such individuals are the least-favorite targets of grab teams, but such an effort is usually mounted anyway. Each NSA field operative represents an enormous investment of money and time. Only if the agent is proved to "host a mature TDE" are kidnapping plans abandoned. Otherwise, a grab team proceeds into the field much as it would to kidnap any other person "under alien influence." Grab teams, like scrub specialists, are expected to do their work without leaving witnesses. A kidnapping is usually slated for some isolated spot to minimize risk to the public. A few grabs have taken place in broad daylight, with the use of fake ambulances and electrical stun guns.

A hunter might find himself the purposeful target of a grab team or scrub specialist for several reasons. The main one, admittedly rare, is the case of an imbued individual who is currently possessed or who has recently been possessed *and* who pays a visit to a chaoscopically monitored location. An Innocent or other imbued who chooses to "hang out" with, say, a vampire for the creature's protection might see it take a sniper's bullet to the head — and then join the monster on some scrub specialist's hit list. What should be considered the rarest of episodes, though by no means impossible, is a field operative's imbuing followed by a lapse in his duties that make the agent a target of his colleagues. If apprehended, how long

would such a chosen be able to keep his altered state a secret? Presumably, he'd want to do so as an alternative to spending the rest of his life staring from a cell at R & D personnel.

Chance offers a broader range of possible encounters for hunters and field operatives. Consider what happens if an imbued group tries to kill a supernatural whom field ops wants alive. Although grab teams seldom *carry* lethal weapons, most members of such a team *are* lethal weapons. Imbued who aren't packing major firepower are likely to end up detained or dead (probably the latter). Alternatively, imagine the possessed friend of hunters who hope to exorcise their pal — but just as they try to ambush and subdue her, her head

STORYTELLER: THE ARMAGEDDON PROTOCOL

One agency scrub specialist is actually on the payroll of both the NSA and the Secret Service. His dual allegiance is unique, as is his assigned potential target: the president of the United States.

Fearing that the Commander-in-Chief might fall under TDE influence and ignite a nuclear war, the NSA brass has taken great pains to bring one of the president's bodyguards into their confidence. This man knows much of what the agency's triumvirate knows, but no one apart from that group has any inkling of him or his orders.

In the event that Monitor Central determines the president to be under TDE sway *and* to be preparing for a nuclear strike of any sort, the triumvirate's man inside has unambiguous orders to terminate the president. The most important piece of communications equipment at Co-op headquarters is a transparent-case telephone sealed within a vault in Gen. Shivers' underground office. Lifting the phone's handset from its cradle overrides the Secret Service communications that normally reach the double agent through his earphone. His subsequent receipt of a code-word sequence, which changes daily based upon headlines from the New York Times' front page, seals the chief executive's fate — and the double agent's, no doubt.

Through sufficient astral snooping at Co-op headquarters, a Hermit might be able to discover the so-called Armageddon Protocol or other highly secret NSA information. Contrary to what Fyodor suggests in the online-only chapters of *Hunter Apocrypha*, Solitude creed members using the Transcend or Reach edges cannot be harmed by MEFtech exposure. Whether the same is true of similar shields deployed by the Russians — who got the secrets of MEFtech from a spy — is unknown. A couple of Hermits or an anchorite and her Benandante friend might have to learn the truth about the Kremlin's invisible shield the hard way....

explodes. If the assassin is surprised and spotted, he's likely to fire on the hunters as well. If he escapes in the belief that he has left no witnesses, how do the imbued react if they're able to link him to the government?

Depending on who best knew either victim, above, the hunters might pursue vengeance, alliance (with some dissent, no doubt) or just answers. Assuming they're up to the task of subduing a scrub specialist, the agent almost certainly lies to them about why someone was assassinated. Even if the hunters use torture, an NSA killer is likely to serve up a story about Russian brainwashing like the one Brent Burkett mentions to Steven Williams in this section's opener. Of course, if one of the imbued uses Pierce during the interrogation, she may know the assassin is lying.

Things don't get that far if an agent suspects his captors might ply him with truth drugs: In that case, field operatives' orders dictate use of a suicide capsule that each agent has implanted just beneath the skin. It merely needs to be cut open where it lies in the body to be activated. The Storyteller should make a Willpower roll, difficulty 9, to determine whether an assassin is able to follow through as required by NSA ordinance.

PERMUTATIONS

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: shophet125

Subject: Re: Mall walking

I figure someone who's not on this forum made the markings, so you may be wasting your time, Pilot. We haven't heard boo. But then again, who knows? Someone might explain it tomorrow. Or possibly never, thanks to you.

COLLUSION

Given the strictures of secrecy that most Co-op personnel operate under, how is it possible to have NSA operatives and the imbued work together?

The answer is that it's tough. The soldiers chosen by the agency to wage its clandestine war aren't the sort to violate standing orders or to break the rules of engagement casually. Still, such things can happen.

Consider the E.M. Forster line about different kinds of loyalty: "If forced to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friends, God give me the strength to betray my country." This choice is the one that Brent Burkett makes when he spares Steven Williams' life in this section's opening fiction. What happens if operative and imbued are opposed in a lethal situation, but they also know each other or are mutually sympathetic? Or, amazingly, are also kin? Even the most unswerving assassin is going to think twice before he shoots a friend or relative to preserve national security.

Alternatively, consider the moral weight under which any government assassin operates. Every killer of this sort justifies her actions as "in the best interests of her nation." But what if she stops believing that's true?

What if she *did* kill a friend or relative at some time in the past? Are the hunters in her sights now the back-breaking straw? If so, do their parallel efforts at destroying an enemy make them a suitable audience for a confession? If the hunters wind up saving her, she might confess anyway. If she tells them the unvarnished truth, make a Willpower roll, difficulty 9, to determine if this breach of duty sparks a suicide attempt. Alternatively, a temporary derangement such as fugue might result from such truth-telling.

BEHIND THE SEEN

To: shophet125

From: sender unidentified

Subject: [no subject]

Nice try, Shophet. Or do you prefer to be called Mr. Franco? Yes, I know who you are. You're ex-Israeli Army, you idiot! Didn't you realize your life would be on file somewhere? You're just lucky that I'm the one who photographed you drawing new symbols at the Mall (looks like your first set got erased). Your past has enough loose ends to put you in a federal pen for keeps.

You can shovel your bullshit on the list all you want, but I know you made those markings. Were you hoping the President would notice them maybe and, bang, be enlightened to the cause? Are you that deluded? Or is it *your* cause at this point? What is it you're after, you irresponsible asshole? Keep in mind that I'm only asking out of curiosity, not because I would help you. But I do expect an answer. After all, from here on I own you.

If you can't figure out who I am, good. Either way, feel free to post your explanation to the list. I'll read it there. Whatever you do, don't try to contact me.

To: pilot56

From: shophet125

Subject: Hello

Sorry, I don't take orders anymore.

As for what I want, it's that white supremacist nazi fuck Peleus' head on a stick. But I don't know where he is. God45 might know, seeing as he swore he was headed out to kill the bastard, but I'm sure as hell not going to ask that scary SOB anything. You and your buddies in the "Company" or the "Bureau" or whatever had Peleus under surveillance (and never lifted a finger while he torched people in their homes). So tell me: IS HE ALIVE? If he is, where is he? If he's dead, where's his body? I want to see it in person. That fucker got up and walked out of one morgue already. I'd like to see him in several pieces, but I'll take whatever you've got.

While you were taking pictures of *me*, my friends were already following *you*. I figured those "corrupted earth" symbols I formed with pebbles on the green would make *somebody* jumpy. What good luck that the "somebody" was my old buddy Pilot, who nearly wet his pants when he thought he was standing on cursed ground! Knowing somebody in D.C. who's chosen is a good source of inside information. And already having

STORYTELLER: R & D

Although the function of the NSA's R & D division is research and development, in this case the familiar, seemingly benign shorthand stands for Research and *Detention*. Captured blood slaves, possessed individuals and walking dead end up in laboratories operated by R & D scientists. Because the imbued are invisible to chaoscopic monitoring, hunters wouldn't be taken to such a facility under normal circumstances. But when are things ever normal in the lives of the imbued?

R & D is largely what the creators of MEFtech and chaoscopes mutated into after the NSA brass placed that private organization and all its personnel under agency aegis "for purposes of national security." R & D facilities in Berkeley, California, and Rutland, Vermont, still house the largest chaoscopes in existence. These massive devices are almost useless nowadays because of interference from the hellstorm. Nevertheless, minimal crews of analysts keep the machines in constant working order because clear images occasionally come through on their enormous screens. Unlike smaller chaoscopes elsewhere, these prototypical devices can capture goings-on in the deadlands themselves. Hunters who could manage to infiltrate either facility might get quite an eyeful.

Security at the Vermont and California sites is moderate. Armed guards are stationed at exterior gates and several interior checkpoints, so numerous determined individuals who are prepared to sacrifice their lives might actually reach the subterranean laboratories where facility chaoscopes and MEF generators are housed. Unfortunately, no one who succeeds at such a mission would live to tell any outsider about it. And why bother, when a Hermit could pass astrally through checkpoints and the Mather-Eburn Field alike, totally unscathed and undetected? Of course, a Hermit familiar with Fyodor's writings on "paranormal countermeasures" might balk at striding into what she expects to be certain death.

Hunters stand a far better chance of being *brought* to an R & D facility than they do of invading one. Analysts who specialize in chaoscropy or MEFtech (*nobody* does both) would be fascinated by imbued abilities to perceive, damage and even destroy ghosts — TDEs in these scientists' eyes — without use of any external device. NSA analysts believe themselves to be developing weapons of war. If they were to view chaoscopically a fight between a hunter and one of the wandering dead, the damage inflicted on the black-body would be apparent to them even though the edges inflicting the damage would be invisible. In such a case, the hunter in question would become the NSA's foremost experimental subject. The fact is, however, that no test, sample or dissection of an imbued individual could ever teach R & D scientists a damn thing about where edges come from. Of course, all those procedures would still have to occur before analysts could reach that frustrating conclusion.

Fortunately for the imbued, chaoscopes are unwieldy and almost impossible to deploy in the field because of their huge power requirements. The only place a hunter might face the aforementioned scrutiny would be at one of the secret NSA facilities in the Caribbean. These bases are where the "detention" part of R & D takes place. No supernatural being captured in what analysts term an "animated" state — the NSA considers the ongoing disappearance of corpses from morgues and elsewhere a function of trans-dimensional activity, or TDA — is ever detained for long in the United States proper. When possible, such creatures are transported by submarine to one of several subterranean docking facilities in Haiti or Puerto Rico. From there, "subjects" travel in disguised trucks to underground facilities situated beneath existing military outposts.

that person's email address makes blackmailing him so much easier, don't you think?

P.S. How's life at Fort George Meade? That's where the National Security Agency is based, isn't it?

P.P.S. You have to teach me how you do that "sender unidentified" thing. Hey, good friends are good sharers, right?

CORRUPTION

A wise man once observed that it's impossible to exercise real control over a secret network. The NSA embodies that truth perfectly. Instead of democratically elected officials subject to a system of checks and balances, the agency has a trio of warriors who tend to

see things from a single viewpoint. With all the best intentions in the world to preserve freedom and "the American way," the NSA triumvirate nevertheless presides over a truly frightening campaign that can continue only by further invasions of privacy and violation of citizens' constitutionally guaranteed rights.

Because the imbued are often forced into technical criminality by their burden, some might be likely to sympathize with the hard choices made by the NSA brass. Both groups struggle against forces that most people dismiss as folklore or tabloid journalism. Truly thoughtful hunters who learn what the organization does might pause to wonder how expendable they themselves are. Certainly, many everyday citi-

zens of the United States and other Western nations have asked how private the Internet is thanks to the NSA and other governmental monitoring, another question any imbued on hunter-net ought to pose (if only to herself).

Imbued who escape detention by NSA analysts or who witness an agency assassination (and survive) might wrestle with the morality of such initiatives. Otherwise, few agency insiders tell hunters about the awful things they do in the name of national security.

Of course, some insiders know more than others. Field operatives who confront repeated inconsistencies or enigmas (i.e., the supernatural) as they "stem alien threats to the integrity of the U.S. military" might be a little more open to the truth that the imbued can impart. If that happens, a hunter might get some distressing truths in return.

Members of the Merciful creeds and certain Zealots might be especially outraged to learn that possessed or blood-enslaved people are being killed because the NSA misunderstands what it fights. To learn of the agency's offshore experimentation program, hunters would have to deploy powerful edges on the right person in the right way *and* be lucky as hell, or get detained themselves. Not even field operatives know what that parallel division is up to unless they are likewise sent to such a place as test subjects.

The most aggressive experimentation goes on in Haiti, for several reasons. The ugliest truth has roots in the near-ubiquity of the supernatural on the island. Haitian traditions of ancestor worship and *vodou* mean that ghosts and vampires are taken for granted, and therefore these beings are *everywhere*. So are blackness and poverty, and these elements combine to make it easier for the less-than-diverse staff of R & D to rationalize kidnapping Haitian nationals for research. Once interned, Haitians identified as suffering TDE exposure are treated as well as prisoners can hope to be. Nevertheless, they *are* prisoners, as well as guinea pigs, and despite food and shelter inside R & D facilities that surpass anything available to most Haitians, no one who is brought into a lab ever leaves — alive, that is.

A hunter who somehow becomes privy to the agency's monstrous practices abroad might well be moved to unveil them publicly. A foolish hunter might seek to blackmail the NSA over such information. Given the organization's almost magical methods of surveillance, however, the act of contacting the NSA to make demands (*release our comrade, find Vampire X, destroy Ghost Y*) would be tantamount to signing one's own death warrant. Between the agency's forensics experts (part of its cryptology school) and its multiple supercomputers, the only way imbued could pull off such a scheme safely would be to do it from another planet.

Of course, depending upon whose hands such demands fall into, the result could be an internal investigation that pits competing departments of the organization against

one another. Remember that most NSA employees know nothing of the leading triumvirate's activities. Chances are good, though, that the ultimate outcome for a blackmailing hunter would be the same. An NSA inspector-general who discovers his organization's vast conspiracy would never reveal it to any outside body or individual. But he *would* try to find out anything he could about people with enough balls to make such threats. Either way, the hunters would gain very little advantage (the aware portion of the agency *might* offer up some lesser supernatural merely as a way of trapping or identifying the blackmailers), and very determined enemies.

STORYTELLER: TRUTHS YET TO BE SEEN

Even Aline Eburn, the scientist who perfected Mather-Eburn Field technology for the NSA, doesn't understand its hidden costs. As stated already, MEF radiation has empirically tiny effects on humans — *not* nonexistent ones. Eburn never leaves the confines of the R & D labs in Haiti or their protective MEF shield. She'd therefore be a good subject for a study of long-term field exposure.

Living humans exposed to MEF radiation suffer an incremental dampening of emotional response. This reduction of intense feelings is one reason why R & D analysts are largely untroubled by their experiments on people. Leaving the confines of a lab allows a scientist's capacity for empathy, passion and outrage to return to normal at a quick rate. In other words, most base-bound NSA personnel behave somewhat "robotically" at work, as do the thousands of military personnel at installations shielded by MEFtech. Staff members who live off base sometimes wonder why they feel so much more alive at home and elsewhere. All of them blame it on the workaday grind.

Eburn herself chose self-imprisonment at the Haiti facility after a series of near-fatal accidents made her rethink the exact nature of what she'd always considered to be "postmortem psychic residue" (what some of her old colleagues actually dared to call "ghosts"). No dummy, she had to wonder why her string of misfortunes commenced shortly after her organization's larger chaoscopes ceased functioning. Could there be some truth to certain scientists' contention that what the devices monitored *wasn't* an alien dimension (as their military bosses insisted), but the afterlife that might await everyone? And if that was the case, could the strange mishaps she'd suffered be payback for the thousands of ghosts she had destroyed over the years?

Her desire for personal safety has made Eburn a workplace recluse and almost as much a prisoner as her experimental subjects. She is young and intelligent enough to question the semblance of a life she leads, however. Her pre-NSA existence was split between scientific inquiry and erotic exploration. She misses that duality almost as much as she resents "don't ask, don't tell" policies. Fragile and nearing a breakdown of some sort, if the right hunter came through Eburn's laboratory door,

used a postcognitive edge to glimpse her unhappy past with the disembodied dead and offered to help, Eburn might well "defect" into the protection of the imbued.

STORYTELLER: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Members of the NSA's Field Operations and R & D divisions are the individuals likeliest to interact with outsiders, whether they be hunters, random TDEs (the wandering dead) or enlisted personnel shown chaoscopically to be under trans-dimensional influence.

NSA FIELD OPERATIVE

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl (Martial Arts) 4, Dodge 2, Drive 3, Firearms (Night Sniping) 4, Intimidation 1, Investigation 1, Linguistics 2, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Arsenal 1

Willpower: 6

Equipment: Portable communications dish, suicide capsule

R & D ANALYST

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 1, Stamina 1, Charisma 2, Computer 3, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Drive 1, Empathy 2*, Science (High-energy Physics) 4, Security 3, Technology (MEF Experimentation) 4

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Influence 1

Willpower: 5

Equipment: Assorted MEF generators, Cabinet-level security badge

*This rating applies outside the effects of MEFtech; inside a field, subtract 2 Empathy.

coming next... **HUNTER:**
THE NOCTURNAL



HUNTER
THE RECKONING

HUNTER FIRST CONTACT

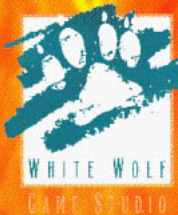
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As far as the chosen know, they're the first to see the truth, to know that monsters exist and prey upon humanity. But the imbued aren't the only ones to oppose the creatures of the night. Government agents, crusaders and mystics wage their own wars. How do these people perceive the chosen? Can alliances be forged? Or is war inevitable between all these hunters? And can monsters reap the rewards?

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