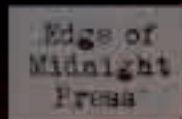


THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

There's a million stories in the naked city.
One of them just melted your car.

Enter a world where the mean streets go on forever and the only justice comes at the end of a gun. *The Edge of Midnight* is a bold new vision in role-playing, a unique system built from the ground up to deliver a one-of-a-kind take on *noir*. Its sharp two-die mechanics offer easy play that encourages storytelling without sacrificing depth or complexity. The world it inhabits is as new as tomorrow, and yet as familiar as the pages of Chandler and Spillane. It's a universe of gumshoes and gun molls, of dark deeds and hard choices. But this isn't just any *noir* world. The laws of physics can be broken here — just like any other law — leading to criminal warlocks who ply their magic like bootleggers. Inhuman “gaunts” rule the streets, while private detectives provide justice for a price. It's a world just a shade off our own, where the skyscrapers loom taller and the shadows yawn wider. It's a world with a dark riddle at its heart, one which only the brave or the desperate have the guts to seek. It's a world on the cusp of the abyss... a world waiting at the edge of midnight.



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THE EDGE OF
MIDNIGHT

Role-Playing Game

EMP 1000

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Role-Playing Game

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

A Role-Playing Game of Mean Streets and Lost Souls

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

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DEDICATION

For Vern Bailey

WARNING

This book contains adult
language and themes. Reader
discretion is advised.

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INTRODUCTION



™The night never ends here.†

- John Murdoch
(Rufus Sewell),
Dark City



THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

WELCOME TO THE EDGE

The lights glow in the foggy night air, turning the streets into phantom canyons. Garbage lines the gutters, mixing with bile and human blood to create a smell that might be fear. The gun lies heavy in your hand as you hug the brick façade, the only way to maneuver closer to your quarry. The two cops who took the direct path now lie fused to the pavement.

A trash can rattles up the block, throwing his shadow into stark relief. You stand and fire without blinking an eye. The gunshots echo loudly in your ears and you can see them catch the man in the shoulder. He spins around, stark rage on his face, and extends his fingers towards you. You dive to the side as the street lamp above you explodes, sending arcs of electricity shooting to the spot where you once stood.

"You'll have to try harder than that," you call.

With a snarl, he staggers backwards towards the wall and launches another spell but this time you're ready. As blue lightning drops down, you tumble forward, rolling along the cracked asphalt before rising to your feet just a few steps away from him.

"Smart play, framing me for the murder," you rumble as the gun points directly at his heart. "Too bad you got sloppy. You're gonna burn for this, warlock."

"Not today." His smile gleams hollowly as he thrusts his hands outward. The telekinetic blow hits you in the chest, sending you sprawling into the street like a rag doll. Your gun goes clattering and before you can retrieve it, his steel-toed boots lift up off the pavement. The trash can and debris rise with him for several yards before falling away with a crash. You can only watch with frustration as he ascends silently into the growing fog.

It's going to be a hell of a night.

The Edge of Midnight is a role-playing game of mean streets, hard luck, and fast guns. It centers on the world of *noir*, a steamy, atmospheric place where cynicism and moral compromise have replaced the better angels of our nature. It's the world of Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, of wisecracking gumshoes and slinky femme fatales. Murder lies just around the next corner, while friendly faces hide all manner of dark impulses. Everyone has a price here and nothing is quite what it seems.

But *The Edge of Midnight* differs from most other *noir* settings, for it lies not in this universe but somewhere... else. On the surface, it looks very similar to our world, with cities, people, and cultural trappings that we instantly recognize. But the shadows are a little longer here; the buildings tower a little higher. Magic exists here, though it's available only to a select few who are hated and feared for their gifts. Inhuman monsters rule the criminal underworld, taking by force what society won't give them. And somewhere beneath the steaming vents and lying smiles lurks a cataclysmic secret, waiting to be uncovered. It's a universe of dark possibilities, of harsh action, and of hidden desires.

It's the universe you and your fellow players are going to bring to life.

NOIR AND THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Noir is a nebulous term, encompassing a wide variety of interpretations. For *The Edge of Midnight*, it means a dark and gritty form of urban drama, emphasizing cynicism, existentialism, and the downside of the American dream. It pulls its primary inspiration from detective novels and crime stories, tales of misplaced greed and schemes gone wrong. Its heart lies in Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Mickey Spillane, whose heroes were compromised men fighting for what they could rather than what was right. That hard-boiled mentality inspired brilliant films like *The Big Sleep* and *Double Indemnity*, and spawned a lengthy tradition which continues in modern classics such as *Memento* and *L.A. Confidential*.

But *noir* is more than just gangsters and detectives. It is an atmosphere, a feeling in your gut, a look from a stranger that says "beware." It's the shadows in the alleyway, the fears of things unseen. It's acknowledging that good and evil are not absolute terms, but shades of gray which can easily be mistaken for one another. It's a feeling of disconnection from those around you, of being cut off from beliefs and morals which no longer seem tenable. But it's also a sense of independence, of relying on yourself and no one else. It's knowing the world for what it is and still not giving into it, charting your own course and saying "to hell with the consequences." In most practical terms, *noir* can't be categorized or defined; it can only be felt.

That feeling often crosses genre boundaries, giving *noir* the ability to readily blend with other genres. Science fiction films like *Blade Runner* often make use of *noir*'s unique sensibilities, and traces of it can be found in horror movies, political thrillers, domestic dramas, and even comedies. Similarly, *The Edge of Midnight* blends elements of fantasy and science fiction into its world; its hard-boiled universe includes magic, strange social tropes, and an oppressed minority (the gaunts) which can legitimately be described as monsters. They are intended to accentuate the core notions around which the game is based, enhancing the atmosphere with a few (hopefully) unexpected twists. But their presence should not detract from the overall feeling of the genre; in their own way, they are as much a part of *noir* as the foggy back alleys and slinky black dresses. (You are, of course, free to use as much or as little of those elements as you see fit. If you prefer your *noir* straight up, *The Edge of Midnight* can accommodate you with little difficulty.)

Role-playing *noir* — whether in *The Edge of Midnight* universe or something a little closer to home — can be a little daunting, especially if you're not used to it. Chapter Seven has tips on playing characters in such a setting, while Chapter Eight contains thorough details on *noir* as a genre and how a GM can run scenarios based around it.



INTRODUCTION

THE WORLD

The Edge of Midnight is essentially a “shadow world,” created from the essence of Earth as we know it but obeying a slightly warped set of rules. Its preeminent nation is the Unified Commonwealth, which features a government, culture, and society very similar to that of America in the late 1940s — though a darker and more cynical version. It’s full of modern cities looking to the future, but holding corruption at their heart. It’s a free press that will ignore the truth in order to sell papers. It’s elected governments that indulge their desires at the public’s expense. It’s the worst of America lurking behind the façade of the best.

It also has a past shrouded in enigma. History and memory play tricks on the mind, reducing thousands of years to an unthinking fog. The only important thing people can remember is a war which — like World War II — was fought overseas by distant powers. It began with magic, when a group called the Order of Nu seized control of an entire nation. The bordering countries quickly launched an invasion, and the conflict soon expanded to engulf the rest of the world as well. Magic use was prolific during the early years of the war, resulting in bizarre reverberations in the physical world. Foremost among these was the rise of gauntism, a strange disease which transformed its victims into gray, leathery abominations. “Gaunts,” as they were dubbed, possessed inhuman strength and speed, but slowly leeched energy from those around them. They began appearing in larger and larger numbers as the war progressed, increasing the outrage against the Order of Nu, whom it was believed were responsible.

The Unified Commonwealth stayed out of the fray during the early part of the war, but when gaunts began appearing in their own cities, they too were drawn into the storm. Their efforts proved the decisive factor, though it took some time and the Order inflicted a heavy toll on Commonwealth troops in the interim. But finally, mercifully, the conflict ended in victory and the Order of Nu was destroyed.

Ten years later, the Commonwealth reaps the fruits of that struggle, both bitter and sweet. Criminals rule the streets, fighting among themselves for the right to supply the public with all forms of vice. Laws exist to be broken, though for the hopeless and downtrodden, private investigators will bring justice for a price. The rest simply depend on their own ruthlessness to get what they want. Gaunts have remained, living in ghettos and relegated to second-class status amongst the populace. Warlocks thrive in the shadows, practicing their magic in violation of the law. Most troubling of all, the specifics of history have a strange way of being lost. Names and dates are difficult to remember, life appears as a distant dream. There are plenty of veterans — people who claim to have fought in the war — but they are hard-pressed to recall anything beyond a few generalities. Even the nations involved seem to fade into hazy “enemies” and “allies” with no specific culture attached. As for what happened before the war, it’s all a blur. People have images of a childhood that may never have existed, a life that never was. How this malaise came to pass is unknown, a mystery that may never have an answer.

But a few people are willing to ask.

Here and there, scattered about the cities and towns, are a small group of souls who realize that there’s something wrong with the picture. They know the world shouldn’t be this way, and they just can’t let it be. They call themselves the Few, members of a precious niche who dare to oppose the status quo. They’re not an organization (they barely qualify as a classification) but are bound by the common belief that “the way things are” just isn’t good enough. In a world without heroes, they’re the closest thing anyone has to real hope.

WARLOCKS

Physics still works in *The Edge of Midnight* the way it does in the real world, but if someone is smart enough and studies hard enough or wants it badly enough, he can find ways to get around it. The loopholes they use are collectively considered “magic,” awe-inspiring effects that normal men and women cannot hope to conjure. Everyone in the Commonwealth knows about magic the same way they know about drug addiction. It’s dark, ugly, and corrupt, something no respectable person would have anything to do with. On the other hand, magic is incredibly powerful and can do amazing things, which means some people will do anything to possess it. Anybody can theoretically be a warlock the same way anybody can theoretically be a rocket scientist; all you have to do is study hard enough to understand the right formulae.

Naturally, the populace despises such “warlocks,” fearful of their powers and distrustful of their motives. Magic is consequently illegal, and those who use it to break the law (society’s laws, not the universe’s) can go to jail for a long, long time. On the other hand, those who are quiet about it — dabblers and a few licensed practitioners — are passively ignored or let off with a slap on the wrist. This leads to a hazy gray area of legality and illegality, of criminals and pseudo-criminals barely separated by the niceties of legal precedent. An Anti-Sorcery Act, passed by the Commonwealth government, issues strict definitions of who can use magic under what circumstances. Some police departments employ warlock detectives and the few warlocks who manage to get a license can practice their craft after a fashion.

Most of them, however, operate under a constant cloud of scrutiny. After all, they have the power of the universe right at their fingertips. Warlocks are generally considered unseemly sorts, shunned in formal company. So they gravitate towards criminals and other lowlives. There are numerous opportunities open for warlocks willing to cross the line. A gunman who can stop bullets, a second-story burglar who can float up to his mark’s window, or a bank robber who can rip the vault door off its hinges... these are skills in high demand. Clever warlocks who know how to properly ply their abilities can make a great deal of money in a very short time. Of course, they also have to keep their powers quiet. “Normal” criminals resent the ease with which warlocks commit their crimes — and may use deadly force to ensure their rivals don’t cut in on the action. And of course, the more you use magic, the harder it becomes to stop...

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

GAUNTS

One of the unpleasant side effects of magic has been the appearance of gaunts — boogeymen, criminals, and Jungian Other all rolled into one. At one point, they were human, but the disease which struck them warped and twisted their bodies beyond comprehension. Their skin became gray and wrinkled, their teeth sharpened, their hands turned into claws, and their faces transformed into hideous apparitions. They enjoy enhanced strength and stamina, along with a few other abilities, but their repulsive appearance generally terrifies those around them. Furthermore, in order to maintain such high levels of energy, their bodies drain energy from their surrounding environment over time. Therefore, they're usually segregated and kept apart from the rest of the populace, who often suffer ill effects after extended periods near a gaunt.

Law-abiding gaunts can usually only find work as physical laborers and the like. High-end careers and well-paying positions are barred to them. But many use alternate paths to success — highly illegal paths. Gaunt criminals excel in their profession, giving them power, money, and a modicum of equality. Indeed, their kind suffers a further stigma because they're always thought of as thugs. Some of them fight the stereotype — and can even find success of a sort — but others reject the world's treatment of them and embrace the criminal lifestyle. Ironically, in their efforts, they reinforce the very prejudices that drove them to such behavior in the first place.

This is the world that you and your fellow players will explore. It is a world of danger and mystery, where ruthless men take whatever they can grab, and ideals are just a fairy tale told to little children. It's a world of corruption and compromise, but also opportunity. A world where every little victory counts, where justice exists only for those willing to pay its price. A world on the edge of midnight.

WHAT IS ROLE-PLAYING?

The Edge of Midnight is a role-playing game, a term with which neophytes may be unfamiliar. Experienced gamers can probably skip this section.

Role-playing games are essentially a sophisticated form of Make Believe. The players get together to tell a story, like impromptu theatre, where they portray the protagonists. Using rules, dice, and a little imagination, they create a group of fictitious characters, then run them through a series of scenarios which another player (the Game Master) controls. The rules exist to determine the outcome of certain variables — Does your shot hit or miss? Do the killers hear you sneaking around? — but the main action takes place in the players' minds. Players don't compete against each other and there are no winners and losers (at least like those in other sorts of games). Rather, they work together towards a common goal, sharing in their victories and setbacks as a team (though in *The Edge of Midnight*, their agendas may not always coincide).

In many ways, role-playing games resemble TV shows. Each scenario represents another episode, where the characters solve mysteries, uncover hidden plots, or face an implacable enemy. But unlike TV shows, where the script is set and unchanging, RPGs give the players the chance to affect the outcome. They decide whether the protagonists should question the suspects or beat it out of them, trust the sultry torch singer or keep far away from her, bargain with their rivals or gun them all down. The storyline depends on the players' decisions, giving them a chance to act in the moment rather than respond to scripted necessity. At the end, success is determined by how they acted... until the next scenario, when a new obstacle arises to challenge them.

PLAYERS

Every player (save one, the Game Master) develops a single character. It might be a cynical detective or a hulking gangster, a small-time con artist or a breathy *femme fatale*. Using the rules as a guideline, the player shapes that character's background, personality, and pertinent skills, then portrays him or her as an actor would: describing his or her actions, imitating his or her speech patterns, and so on. Some players even like to pick movie stars who they envision portraying their characters. Together all of the player characters (PCs) form a group called a "party," who must work together to overcome the obstacles they encounter. The PCs need not always get along — indeed, in *The Edge of Midnight*, mistrust and deception abound — but at the end of the day, their common goals usually overshadow their differences.

Further information on players in *The Edge of Midnight* can be found in Chapter Seven.

GAME MASTERS

While most players have but a single character to keep track of, the Game Master's job is much more complicated, for he must fill out the world in which those characters live. He serves as a combination of narrator, referee, and supporting cast: developing the setting and plots, describing the environment in which the PCs find themselves, and portraying any non-player characters (NPCs) the PCs may encounter. The GM also serves as the final arbiter of the rules, enforcing the die rolls and making sure that the group maintains proper balance.

While the GM's job involves much more work than the players, it can also be the most rewarding. The players have only their characters to run with; the GM has an entire world. Dirty cops, shady deals, and offers too good to be true... all of these are his purveyance, to be shaped and molded according to his desires. He is, in effect, the director of the *noir* story which the group is telling: steering it in the right direction and giving the PCs the opportunity to play out their *noir* fantasies.

Tips and ideas on Game Mastering an *Edge of Midnight* game can be found in Chapter Eight.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO PLAY

Mainly, you'll just need this sourcebook, which provides the background and all of the rules to play. Additional books are currently planned for *The Edge of Midnight* line, which will prove helpful but aren't absolutely essential. In addition, you'll need a large supply of ten-sided dice (commonly referred to as "d10s"), which are available at any local game or hobby store. You'll also need several sheets of paper, and pencils and pens for writing. Finally, it wouldn't hurt to familiarize yourself with some of the seminal works of *noir* — books, films, and television shows. A list can be found in the "Inspiration" section at the end of the book.

THE RULES

The Edge of Midnight utilizes a unique rules system: a tool to help resolve disputes and ensure that everyone has a good time. They often involve rolling dice, which simulate the odds of, say, a gunshot hitting its target, or a driver successfully swerving around a trash can. While they are very important, they shouldn't get in the way of having fun. Sometimes, that means bending or breaking rules which don't work for your particular play style. The GM has the final word on what to use, what to modify, and what to ignore. (It's a common rule in role-playing games that the GM's decisions are final, regardless of what the rules say.) In the end, the only thing that matters is the enjoyment of the group.

WHAT THIS BOOK CONTAINS

The Edge of Midnight is broken into three sections, each comprising a different part of the game. The first part (Chapters One, Two, and Three) contains all the rules you need to play the game: character creation, rules for gaunts and warlocks, combat mechanics, skill resolution, and experience. They were placed in the beginning for ease of reference during play; if you need to find a particular rule, you can quickly access it in the front section without searching through the entire book.

The second part contains all of the information on the universe itself — its cities, its history, its deviations from normal reality. If you're reading this book for the first time, you may want to start with this section before proceeding to the rules. Chapter Four is an overview of the Unified Commonwealth: her society, her customs and government, and the sprawling metropolises which define her life. Chapter Five covers the mysterious warlocks, the powers they wield, and their place in Commonwealth society. Chapter Six details the gaunts in a similar fashion. Chapter Seven gives tips and guidelines for player characters, helping them operate in the *Edge of Midnight* universe.

The third part contains material designed for the Game Master. Players should avoid reading these chapters unless specifically permitted by the GM. Chapter Eight contains advice on Game Mastering, both in general terms and for *The Edge of Midnight* specifically. It also contains a complete discussion on *noir* and ways to bring it to life in a role-playing setting. Chapter Nine is world-specific; it holds the answers to

the universe's great mystery, the reasons why *The Edge of Midnight* is the way it is. It also contains a host of alternate explanations to that mystery, allowing the GM to choose which one works best for his campaign (and to keep nosy players from figuring things out too quickly). Finally, the main Appendix contains a complete campaign setting — the city of Gateway — along with NPCs, adventure hooks, and details on running scenarios within its confines. We've also included an index, a set of ready-to-play NPC stats, a list of movies and books which helped inspire the game, and a character sheet which you may photocopy for personal use.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following terms are commonly used throughout the *Edge of Midnight* rulebook. They are presented here for your convenience.

Attributes: The statistics which represent your character's naturally-occurring traits — those with which he (and everyone else) was born, rather than those which he learned or acquired through life experience. They are Brawn, Smoothness, Build, Brains, Gut, and Moxie, and are ranked from 1 to 10

Automatic Success: A skill roll made when the character's skill and corresponding attribute are greater than the assigned target number, and the situation is not stressful. Such rolls always succeed, regardless of the roll made.

Backgrounds: Unique advantages which your character may possess, either from birth or as part of his life experience. Unlike attributes, backgrounds are not ranked, nor are all backgrounds found in all people.

Brains: The attribute representing your character's IQ, education, and raw memory.



THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Brawn: The attribute representing your character's physical prowess, muscle mass, and lifting ability.

Build: The attribute representing your character's physical endurance, stamina, and size.

Campaign: A series of scenarios linked together to form an overall narrative. Some campaigns are linked only by the presence of the player characters, while others use elaborate plotlines and a unifying dramatic arc. Most fall somewhere in between.

Combat Round: An elastic period of time used to separate combat into individual actions. It's generally enough time for each character to take a single action, such as fire a gun, dive out of the way, and so on.

Contested Roll: A skill roll made when two characters are opposing each other over the outcome; success is determined by who has the highest roll, rather than an assigned target number.

Critical Success/Critical Failure: The results of a skill roll indicating an extraordinary achievement or a disastrous bungle, respectively. Critical successes usually impart some unforeseen benefit, while critical failures inflict an unusual penalty.

Electricity: A scientific (magical) skill relating to the flow of charges, and its practical application in modern machinery.

Experience: Points which represent your character's growth over the course of time. Experience points can be used to improve skills and attributes, purchase new abilities, and so on.

Few, the: A small group of people within *The Edge of Midnight* universe who believe that something is terribly wrong with the way things are. They instinctively desire to know the cause of the world's ills (though they may not be consciously aware of such a drive) which makes most of them skeptical, inquisitive, and generally unwilling to accept things at face value. All player characters are assumed to be members of the Few.

Game Master: Or "GM," the player responsible for conveying the story to the other players, portraying the NPCs, and resolving rules disputes and other uncertainties which crop up during play. He describes what happens to the PCs as they go through the plot, and adjusts the narrative to match the results of their actions. The act of serving as Game Master is often referred to as "GMing."

Gaunts: Or "leatherbacks," a social minority afflicted with the disease of gauntism, which warps them into monstrous form and grants them increased strength and stamina. Gaunts are considered second-class citizens and most are persecuted by the rest of society.

Gravity: A scientific (magical) skill relating to the force objects exert upon one another.

Gut: The attribute representing your character's common sense, "gut feelings," and observational abilities.

Holding Actions: An action which a character deliberately refrains from taking in order to use later at a more opportune moment. Such actions can usually only be held for a certain period of time before they are lost.

Kinetics: A scientific (magical) skill related to the energy of objects in motion.

Magical Skills: Another term for scientific skills.

Magnetism: A scientific (magical) skill relating to the magnetic fields that surround certain types of metal.

Moxie: The attribute representing your character's social abilities, physical appearance, and force of personality.

Non-Player Character: Or "NPC;" characters in the game who are not directly controlled by one of the players. They typically serve as foils for the player characters, supporting figures, or incidental background. Any character not controlled by a player usually becomes an NPC by default.

Partial Success: A skill roll in which one die (either your skill or your attribute die) exceeds the target number and one die does not.

Party: A collected group of player characters, who usually constitute the protagonists of an *Edge of Midnight* game. On rare occasions, non-player characters will be members of the party.

Player Character: Or "PC;" a character created by one of the players, who controls the character's actions and personality during the course of play.

Profession: A statistic representing your character's career or professional handle. Each provides a set of abilities unique to that profession. Not all characters possess Professions.

Scenario: A complete story, usually comprising several sessions of play, with a noticeable beginning, middle, and end. Scenarios are often called "adventures" in other game lines.

Scientific Skills: A collection of specific skills relating to scientific phenomenon and the laws of physics. With sufficient knowledge in a given scientific skill, one can break the physical laws and effectively practice magic.

Skill Rolls: Die rolls made to determine if the use of a particular skill succeeds or not. Skill rolls typically use two ten-sided dice — one representing the skill and one representing the appropriate attribute — which are rolled and compared to a target number.

Skills: Abilities which are acquired through formal learning, training, or life experience. They are ranked from 1 to 10.

Smoothness: The attribute representing your character's finesse, dexterity, and hand-eye coordination.

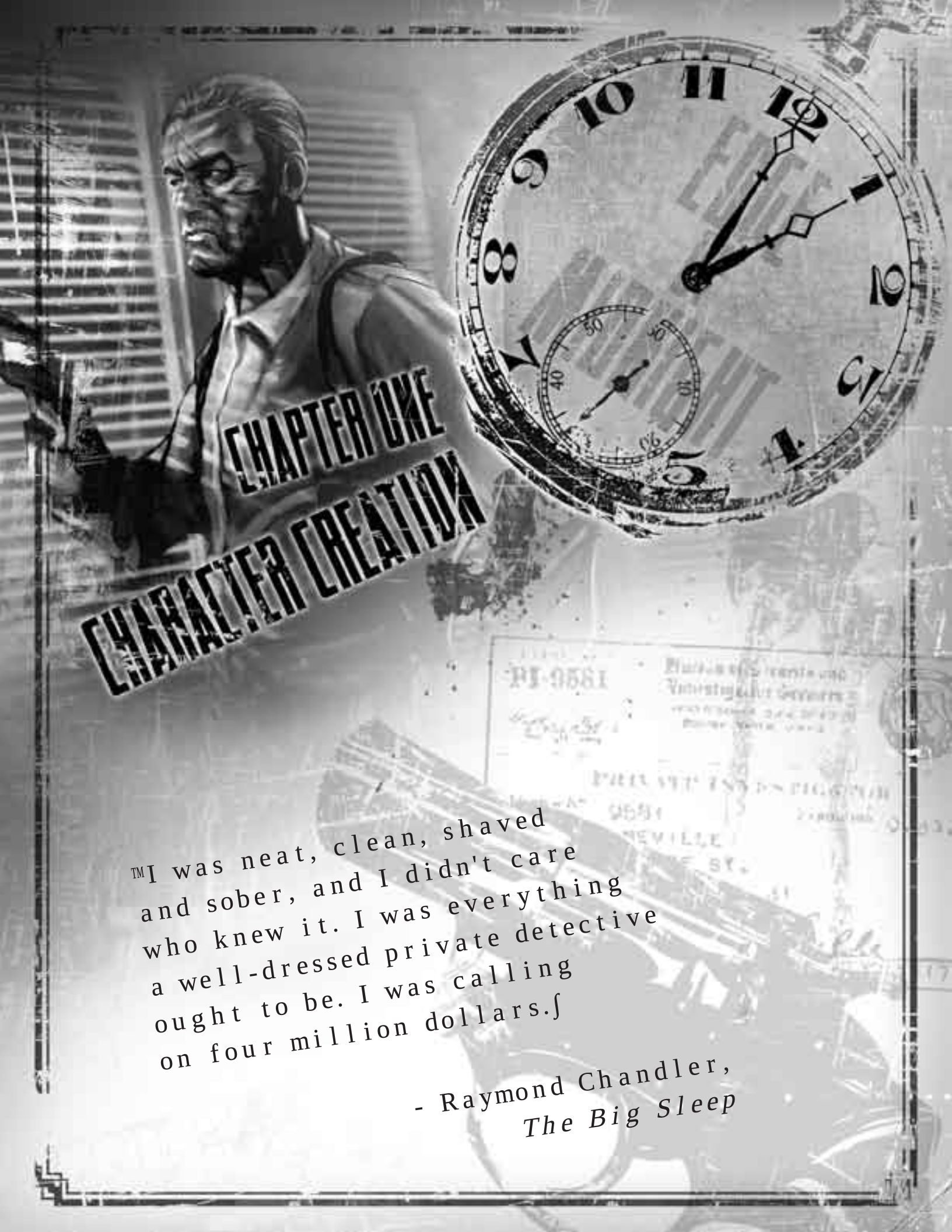
Tensile Energy: A scientific (magical) skill relating to the molecular bonds within a given object.

Thermal Energy: A scientific (magical) skill relating to the relative temperature of objects.

Unified Commonwealth, the: Or "U.C.;" the nation in which *Edge of Midnight* scenarios most often take place. It closely resembles the postwar United States of America in terms of culture, technological development, and government, but contains several notable differences... making it a shadowy distortion of its real world cousin.

Target Number: A number assigned to skill rolls and other mechanics checks which must be matched in order for the roll to succeed.

Warlocks: Practitioners of magic in *The Edge of Midnight* universe. Warlocks are generally well-educated — knowledge of science is a requisite for magic use — and obsessed with power. Because of their abilities, they are feared and oppressed by the remainder of society.



CHAPTER ONE CHARACTER CREATION

™I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything a well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.}

- Raymond Chandler,
The Big Sleep

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New players should read through the world overview in Chapter Four before proceeding.

This chapter covers the creation of player characters, and the basic rules which define them. It has been broken down into eight specific steps.

CHARACTER CREATION, STEP BY STEP

1. CHARACTER CONCEPT

Start with an idea of what kind of character you want to portray. Is it a dedicated cop, a rumpled detective, or a slinky femme fatale? Perhaps it's a natty gangster or a gaunt hitman. The questions on pages 13–14 and 140 can help you, as can the world material in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

2. ATTRIBUTE SCORES

At character creation, each character receives 30 points to be split among his or her attributes — natural traits which occur in every person. Each attribute must have at least 1 point. No more than 8 points may be assigned to a single attribute at character creation. (Attributes gained from backgrounds and professions are not subject to this limitation.)

For example, spending 6 points on your Brawn attribute would give you a Brawn of 6, with 24 points remaining to be assigned.

3. SELECT SKILLS

At character creation, each character receives 35 points to be split among his skills — traits which are learned or acquired through schooling or experience (as well as any foreign languages which the character may speak; see “Select Languages,” below). No more than 5 points may be assigned to a single skill at character creation. (Skills gained from backgrounds and professions are not subject to this limitation.)

For example, spending 5 points on your Streetwise skill would give you a Streetwise of 5, with 30 points remaining to be assigned.

4. SELECT BACKGROUNDS

At character creation, each player may select up to three backgrounds for his or her character, which help lend depth and personality, as well as providing a few mechanical effects.

5. SELECT PROFESSION

At character creation, each player may choose one profession for his or her character: the bare bones framework of a character type. Professions are not required and the player may decline to select one. Instead, he may take 10 experience points, which may be spent in any manner he sees fit (more on experience points can be found on page 38).

6. SELECT EQUIPMENT

Characters start with an amount of money equal to 20 times their Brains in dollars, plus savings (if any) and an additional amount equal to their weekly income (as outlined under Backgrounds and Professions, pages 25–34), which may be used to purchase equipment.

7. SELECT LANGUAGES

Each player may select one language for his or her character, which he or she speaks perfectly and can read and write without problems. Most characters speak only one language (usually English: the most common language spoken in the campaign setting). It is possible to learn other languages by spending skill points. It costs one skill point to learn how to speak a language — with an additional point to learn to speak it without an accent — and one skill point to learn how to read and write the language.

For example, spending 3 points on Spanish allows you to speak it flawlessly, and to read and write it as well. Spending 2 points means that you may either speak it without accent, or speak a heavily accented version and be able to read and write it.

8. FILLING OUT YOUR CHARACTER

With the stats you have already derived, complete any specific details about your character — personality quirks and the like — which may have altered or been changed by other steps in the process. Fill in any remaining auxiliary stats (such as vigor), and you're ready to go.

1. CHARACTER CONCEPT

Every character starts with a core concept: a sense of just who he or she is. Some players will begin with a very strong idea of the kind of character they want to play. Others may need to chew on it for a while. The following questions are designed to expedite that process, and establish a solid basis for your character's personality. If you start with a strong idea, you'll find the remainder of character creation goes much more smoothly, and will result in an equally strong final vision. (Experienced role-players should be familiar with the process.) You should also keep in mind the root causes of your answers, for they reveal far more about your character than the answers alone. For instance, if the answer to “what does your character do to relax?” is “fishing,” then you have a small piece of the character. But if you develop the answer to “he finds fishing peaceful and has early memories of his father teaching him to fish,” then that little detail suddenly provides a much better sense of your PC's personality.

Before defining your character, you should familiarize yourself with the world background in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION

Which three terms most accurately describe your character?

These don't necessarily need to be game traits; merely one-word descriptions that fit your character the best. They will become the foundation of his or her personality.

What does your character look like?

Physically describe him or her, concentrating on such aspects as build, height, weight, hair color, etc., but also noting any unique or distinguishing features which set him or her apart. In addition, mention how he or she dresses, what kind of clothes he or she prefers (including any unique accoutrements), and the like.

What does he or she do for a living?

A career takes up a significant portion of any person's day, and can have a huge impact on his or her personality. Describe what kind of job your character holds; if it's not conducive to adventuresome activities, think about how such activities will impact his career and how the character reconciles the divergent parts of his or her life.

Alternately, your character might not hold any job, either because he doesn't need to (he's wealthy) or he can't find one (he's unemployed).

What does your character do best?

Everyone's good at something, whether it's playing cards or catching touchdowns. Describe the one thing your character does better than anything else. It needn't be something he does every day or even something he finds useful; it's just the one thing he's best at.

What kind of quirks or mannerisms does your character exhibit?

Does he scratch his chin when he talks? Or speak in a deep booming voice? Maybe he's from overseas and affects an odd accent. Those little details will go a long way towards fleshing out what he's like.

What does your character do to relax?

Everyone has hobbies, and your PC is no different. Does he play sports or merely watch them? Perhaps he collects coins or stamps, or maybe he enjoys racing cars. Not everyone's habits are entirely legal however; your character's idea of relaxation may be to pick fights in bars or worse...



How does your character feel about magic?

Magic is outlawed in the Unified Commonwealth (the nation where *The Edge of Midnight* is set) and "warlocks" (practitioners of magic) live a secretive existence hidden in society's corners. Many people fear them and certain politicians have become powerful by vilifying them. What does your character think? Does he consider magic an abomination? Or does he find it fascinating, and believe it should be allowed to flourish?

How does your character feel about gaunts?

Leatherbacks are hated and feared by many Commonwealth citizens. Is your character among them? Or does he approach them with more thoughtfulness and understanding? Perhaps he neither loves nor despises them, but merely views them as a resource to be exploited. Or maybe he himself is a gaunt, and his experiences have colored the way he looks at the world.

Did your character fight overseas?

The Unified Commonwealth was recently involved in a great war with a sorcerous nation called the Order of Nu. Many U.C. citizens went off to fight, and returning veterans have since worked to reintegrate with society. Was your character a combatant in the war? If so, how did the experience affect him? If not, how did his civilian status affect his outlook? (Keep in mind that very few people have crystal clear memories of the war, so your character's recollections should be drawn in broad strokes rather than specific details. See page 139 for more information)

What is your character's greatest regret?

The past has a funny way of catching up to people in *The Edge of Midnight*. Maybe your character betrayed a lover many years ago, or failed to act when he could have prevented a crime. Also think about how much regret he feels over the act — cheating on a test isn't likely to be as acute as committing murder — and whether it has any impact on his current situation.

What is your character's greatest desire?

Dreams are what we stay alive for, even if they never come true. Does your character yearn for a true love? Does he dream of becoming a movie star? Maybe he only wants a little money to buy a nice house away from it all. His desires can spur him to do great things... or tempt him to commit horrendous crimes.

Who is in your characters' family?

How well does he get along with them?

Is your character married or single? How close does he feel to his siblings? Does he have any children? Are his parents still alive? Families provide the strongest personal ties anyone will ever know, which makes their loss or dysfunction all the more difficult to bear.

Does your character have any loyalties besides himself? If so, to what?

Police are sworn to protect the citizens they serve. Mobsters pledge loyalty to a boss or *capo*. Many ordinary people belong to unions or social clubs. What effect do such loyalties (if any) have on your character, and how much support (or opposition) will they provide in times of trouble?

Does your character have a code by which he lives? What lines will he refuse to cross?

Noir is a world of moral ambiguity, where right and wrong are clouded by shades of gray. To combat this, most *noir* protagonists adopt personal codes — individual patterns of morality to which they adhere through thick and thin. It may be that your character refuses to take a payoff. He might never work for certain kinds of people on certain kinds of jobs. Even ruthless killers may draw the line at murdering women or children. Whatever it is, it needs to stand up to the rigors of a compromised world. Too many rules will be impossible to live by; too few will render them meaningless. *Noir* characters must choose their principles wisely and hold them dear, for such codes may be the only real strength upon which they can rely.



2. ATTRIBUTE SCORES

During character creation, each character receives 30 points to spend on attributes, no more than 8 of which may be spent on any single attribute.

Attributes represent your character's basic "building blocks": the naturally-occurring traits such as strength, intelligence, and hand-eye coordination which essentially exist at birth. *The Edge of Midnight* uses six, each of which is represented by a number between 1 and 10. 10 represents the logical human maximum, while 1 represents the weakest or least developed possible. Characters may not have an attribute score above 10 unless a background (such as "Gaunt") or other ruling specifically states that the attribute may rise above 10.

Attributes are generally used to help determine whether your character can complete certain tasks (see pages 15–18 for more details). Each entry below describes the pertinent ability, as well as a brief list of examples designed to give players an idea of what can be accomplished with the various attribute levels possible.

Characters with extremely low attributes (2 or less) may be called upon to make rolls to accomplish mundane tasks (usually TN 3–5; see page 16 for more). For example, a character with the strength of a small child (Brawn 2) may have to make a roll to open a bottle of ketchup while someone with a Moxie of 2 would need to make a roll before mustering the courage to speak to an adult. These rolls are based on the attribute in question and generally don't involve a skill (see page 16 for more details).

Characters with attributes of 0 are incapable of performing any action or skill roll even remotely based on the attribute in question. For example, someone with Brawn of 0 could not move under his own power and someone with Brains of 0 could not form even the simplest thoughts (i.e. he would be effectively brain dead).

Unless specifically stated, attributes may not be reduced below 0. A wound or other injury which reduces an attribute below 0 is considered to have reduced it to 0 instead.

BRAINS

Brains is a measure of the character's book learning and ability to retain information. It's a combination of I.Q., education, and factual knowledge, as well as the ability to understand and retain information.

Brain Ranks

- 10 — Genius
- 6 — Professional scientist
- 4 — Average human
- 2 — "San Dimas High School football rules!"
- 1 — Infant

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION

BRAWN

Brawn is a measure of how physically strong the character is. It is used to measure how much he can lift, carry, push, or pull, and is often used in conjunction with skills relying upon physical might.

Brawn Ranks

- 10 — Professional weightlifter
- 6 — College athlete
- 4 — Average human
- 2 — Child
- 1 — Bedridden nonagenarian

BUILD

Build is a measure of the character's health and ability to withstand damage. It accounts for endurance, resistance to disease and poison, and situations where the character might be required to hold his breath. Normally characters have a vigor score equal to their Build times 5.

Build Ranks

- 10 — Heavyweight Champion
- 6 — College wrestler
- 4 — Average human
- 2 — Elvis: The Peanut-Butter-and-Twinkie Years
- 1 — The boy in the bubble

GUT

Gut is a measure of the character's ability to draw conclusions based on incomplete information or subtle clues. It encompasses intuition, leaps in logic, and "gut feelings," as well as the ability to infer hidden meanings from otherwise innocuous clues.

Gut Ranks

- 10 — Sherlock Holmes
- 6 — Working mother
- 4 — Average human
- 2 — The little old lady who swallowed the fly
- 1 — "\$500 against the Harlem Globetrotters, please."

MOXIE

Moxie is a measure of the character's ability to interact with others socially, as well as his appearance and manners. Moxie also determines your character's ability to appear "cool" and interact with other groups of people; it also represents a character's willpower and ability to resist coercion.

Moxie Ranks

- 10 — Sean Connery
- 6 — Professional politician
- 4 — Average human
- 2 — Shy wallflower
- 1 — Can't make eye contact with adults.

VIGOR

As stated on the previous column, a character's vigor — the amount of damage he can sustain before taking serious injury — is equal to his Build attribute times 5. Vigor is discussed in more detail on page 44.

SMOOTHNESS

Smoothness is a measure of the character's speed, mobility and hand-eye coordination. It is used to gauge how fast a character can move, how quickly he can act, or whether he can accomplish a subtle task like palming a key without anyone noticing.

Smoothness Ranks

- 10 — World-class race car driver
- 6 — Stage magician
- 4 — Average human
- 2 — The Three Stooges
- 1 — "I lack opposable thumbs."

3. SELECT SKILLS

During character creation, each character receives 35 points to spend on skills, no more than 5 of which may be spent on any single skill.

While attributes represent your character's naturally-occurring traits, skills represent his or her learned abilities: the things he or she acquired through education or training or plain old life experience. Like abilities, skills are ranked from 1 to 10, with 10 representing the maximum a human being can possibly know about a subject, and 1 representing a bare minimum of pertinent information (someone who knows nothing at all about a particular skill would not have a ranking in it). Skills may never be ranked higher than 10.

HOW SKILLS WORK

Skills and attributes are used when a character attempts to succeed at a task: to fire a gun, leap across a chasm, notice the smell of smoke nearby, or remember an obscure bit of data. Such efforts are referred as *skill rolls*. Most rolls utilize a specific skill and the attribute most pertinent to it (called the *primary attribute*). When called upon to make a skill roll, use two ten sided dice (d10). First, the GM will assign a *Target Number (TN)* to the task, based on how difficult it is. Then the player rolls, chooses one of the dice (referred to as a *skill die*), and adds it to his character's skill, and adds the other (referred to as an *attribute die*) to his character's attribute. The dice may

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be assigned *after* the roll is made (it's a good idea to use dice with different colors to distinguish skill from attribute; see the nearby sidebar for more).

If both totals are equal to or higher than the TN, the task succeeds. If one of the numbers is equal to or higher than the TN but the other is not, the task is a partial success, which has a varying effect based on the skill in use (see the next page for more). If both numbers are less than the TN, the task fails.

A roll of 1 is always considered a failure for the roll in question and a roll of 10 is always considered a success, regardless of other mitigating factors. Rolling a 1 in this manner does not mean the entire skill roll fails. A partial success is still possible if the other die meets the required TN. Similarly, a roll of a 10 can still result in partial success if the second roll fails to meet the TN.

The TN for a skill roll is always the same for both dice. Samples are included below.

SAMPLE TNs

NUMBER	DIFFICULTY
5	Easy (climb a rope or hotwire a car)
8	Average (climb a rock wall or rebuild a car engine)
10	Difficult (free-climb a rock wall or build an engine from spare parts)
15	Extremely difficult (climb a rock wall during a storm or invent a new kind of car engine)
20	Once in a lifetime (scale a glass wall with no equipment or discover groundbreaking technology)

Note that skill rolls should only be made for tasks which represent a moderate challenge. Routine or simplistic tasks should automatically be considered successful (see "Automatic Success," below, for more).

RULES VARIANT: BEFORE OR AFTER?

Every skill roll in *The Edge of Midnight* entails the use of two dice: an attribute die and a skill die. Which one is which may have a huge bearing on whether a skill roll is successful or not. The default rules assume that the player may choose which die is which *after* the roll is made. This provides a slightly more heroic environment, and translates to more successful skill checks.

However, some GMs may prefer a tougher, grittier environment, in which case it is important to differentiate which die is which *before* the roll is made. The GM should take extra steps to ensure that there is no confusion. The best option is simply using two different colors of dice, and specifically delineating what each color represents before play begins (perhaps even writing it down to clarify). Alternately, players can just roll the dice one at a time, stipulating before each roll which one is the attribute and which one is the skill.

Whatever the method, make sure that the ground rules are understood by everyone involved, and that they are adhered to consistently throughout the game.

MATCHING SKILLS WITH ATTRIBUTES

One of the most important things about making a skill roll is to determine which attribute is applicable to the situation. In most cases, the answer is simple, but sometimes, the task might require a less obvious attribute. For example, the Firearms skill is most often used with the Smoothness attribute (to hit a target) but if called upon to identify a rare type of handgun, it may be more appropriate to use the Brains attribute. The GM has the final call regarding what attribute to roll during a skill roll.

ATTRIBUTE ROLLS (ATTRIBUTE ONLY)

In some cases, characters may be called upon to roll a raw attribute without rolling an attendant skill. Such rolls, called *attribute rolls*, mean that the character rolls one die and adds the result to his Attribute. If it meets the TN, he succeeds; otherwise, he fails. In situations where a critical success or critical failure might be possible (see below), the player rolls a second die, which is considered a skill roll *for purposes of determining a critical success or failure only*. It has no other purpose and cannot affect the roll in any other way. Partial successes do not normally occur with attribute rolls.

For example, a character must run through a raging inferno in order to reach safety. The GM rules that he must make a Moxie attribute roll in order to gather the courage to make the run.

All rolls are considered to be skill rolls unless specifically stated otherwise.

ATTEMPTING AN ACTION WITHOUT THE SKILL

An attribute roll is not the same as attempting a roll with a skill you do not possess. If you don't have the right skill for a task, you only roll your attribute die and the best you can hope for is a partial success (since the skill die is not rolled, it cannot be considered a success). In some instances, the GM may rule it is not possible to succeed on a particular action without the appropriate skill under any circumstances, depending on the complexity of the action undertaken and the nature of the skill required. If a "1" is rolled, the player must make a second roll; if he again rolls a "1", then the result is a critical failure (see below for details). The second roll has no other effect.

For example, the GM will probably rule that it is impossible to build a motorcycle out of the spare parts found in a junkyard without the Engineering skill. On the other hand, he will likely allow a character without the Engineering skill to roll his attribute die when trying to perform a simple task like hot-wiring a car.

AUTOMATIC SUCCESS

If a character's skill and corresponding attribute are both higher than the TN and the situation is not stressful (i.e. he has plenty of time to attempt the task), the character may choose to automatically succeed on the skill roll. Combat situations are always considered stressful.

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION

If the GM rules that there are no appreciable consequences for failure and the character is willing to spend an extended amount of time attempting the action, the skill should be treated as an automatic success since he will eventually succeed. For example, a thief character trying to pick a lock in a non-threatening situation who doesn't mind taking 20 minutes to find just the right tumbler combination will eventually succeed.

CRITICAL SUCCESS AND FAILURE

If, during a skill roll, a character rolls a 1 on both the skill die and the attribute die, the skill roll is a critical failure. Such rolls automatically fail, regardless of what the character's stats are. Furthermore, they usually have some dramatic effect in addition to failure, the exact nature of which should be determined by the GM and appropriate to the circumstance. The effects should be felt immediately, but in general should never last longer than the session in which they occurred. For example, while picking a lock (TN 8), Jack rolls two 1s. Not only does Jack fail to open the lock but he breaks his lock pick and jams the mechanism; it is assumed to stay broken until the end of the session.

On the other hand, if, during a skill roll, a character rolls the same number on both the skill die and the attribute die, and both die totals meet or exceed the TN, the skill roll is a critical success. Like failures, such rolls usually have some dramatic effect in addition to success, the exact nature of which should be determined by the GM and appropriate to the circumstance. The effects should be felt immediately, but should never last longer than the session in which they occurred. For example, while picking a lock (TN 8), Jack rolls two 9s. For the rest of the session, Jack automatically succeeds when trying to pick similar locks.

PARTIAL SUCCESS

A partial success occurs when one die of a given roll meets or exceeds the TN, and one die does not. Each skill description comes with an example or set of examples covering some possible results of a partial success. They are intended to give the GM a feel for how to apply such successes in game terms but the results should be tailored to the task the player is trying to perform. Keep in mind that a partial success is still a success; the GM should never invalidate the character's goal when determining its effects. As a rule of thumb, if the player feels that failure is preferable to the partial success, then the partial success is not appropriate to the situation and should be readjusted to something more fitting.

For example, the description of a partial success in Bureaucracy says "you should still get what you're looking for in 8 to 10 working days." This is a reasonable partial success if the character's goal is to remove a traffic ticket from his record or get a copy of someone's phone bill, but if his goal is to get out of jail before a big meeting, it's probably too severe. In this case, the GM should come up with a more appropriate partial success (perhaps the character has to slip someone some cash and grease the wheels of justice before being released, or pay an unusually high bail before the court will let him out).

AN EXAMPLE OF BASIC SKILL USE

Jack Fontaine wishes to escape the police by jumping from the roof of his hideout to a neighboring building. The GM rules that this is a difficult Athletics feat and requires Jack to hit a TN of 12 using his Athletics skill and Brawn attribute. Jack rolls two dice and adds his Brawn to one and his Athletics to the other. There are six possible results for this skill roll:

1. The total of the attribute (Brawn) die and the total of the skill (Athletics) die both come up 12 or greater, and the numbers on both dice are the same. In this case, Jack achieves a critical success. He makes a flawless leap to the neighboring rooftop and hits without breaking stride. He gains an extra round to take an action before his pursuers do.
2. The total of the attribute (Brawn) die and the total of the skill (Athletics) die both come up 12 or greater. In this case, Jack succeeds at the roll; he makes a flawless leap to the neighboring rooftop and continues his flight from the authorities.
3. The total of the attribute die is equal to or greater than 12 but the skill die's total is not. In this case, Jack has enough strength to make the leap but because his skill came up short he lands less than gracefully (possibly resulting in a minor injury).
4. The total of the skill die is equal to or greater than 12, but the attribute die's total is not. In this case, Jack is skilled enough to make the jump but his strength fails him. He ends up a bit short of his target, hanging by his fingers off the roof ledge (probably requiring an extra action to pull himself up).
5. Both of Jack's dice come up short. In this case, Jack is going to end up lying at the feet of an angry cop.
6. Jack rolls two 1s on his dice. In this case, Jack achieves a critical failure. He falls from the building and suffers a painful injury upon landing.

RETRY SKILLS

After missing a skill roll, a character may be able to try again, though he must first deal with the consequences of failure. In some situations this may be a simple matter of waiting a bit, and making the try after a certain amount of time has passed, while in others it may involve overcoming a significant obstacle before trying again. Sometimes, it may be impossible to retry a skill roll. For example, a character who failed to properly install a car battery could try again after removing the battery; however, he would *not* be able to retry an Appraise

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skill roll until he suffered the consequences of failure (which probably involves losing money on a bad deal), and if he were attempting to catch a bag of money before it falls off the edge of a roof, he wouldn't be able to retry the roll at all.

CONTESTED ROLLS

Sometimes two or more characters find their actions directly conflicting. In this case, each character should make an appropriate skill roll with no TN.

If one character's skill and attribute roll total are both higher than the other, he's won the contest.

If one character has the higher total in one category but not the other, then the character with the highest combined total of both rolls has bested his opponent, although he may be subject to the rules for partial success since he failed one of his two rolls.

Certain circumstances may require multiple contested rolls, with the winner determined by a set number of victorious rolls (a list of suggested numbers is provided below). For example, a policeman is pursuing a criminal in a deserted house, while the criminal is trying to stay hidden long enough to escape. The GM may rule that the first of the two to succeed against five contest rolls is victorious. If the cop wins, he uncovers the criminal before the miscreant can flee. If the criminal wins, he slips out of the building while the policeman is still looking.

The rolls in the meantime can determine the particulars of the search. If the policeman wins a roll, he spots the criminal for a moment and can perhaps squeeze a shot off. Similarly, if the criminal wins a roll, he eludes the policeman for the moment, and can take another action like hiding his stolen loot, preparing a distraction, etc. Details, as always, are up to the GM.

Multiple Contested Rolls

TASK	NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL ROLLS REQUIRED TO WIN
Playing a game of chess	5 rolls
Holding a door closed	1 roll per round
Chasing someone on foot	3 rolls per 50 feet of initial difference between pursuer and pursued
Chasing someone in cars	3 rolls per city block (or 250 feet) of difference between pursuer and pursued.
Hiding from someone	1–5 rolls

SKILL ROLLS INVOLVING MULTIPLE PARTICIPANTS

In instances where multiple characters are engaged in a contested roll, the GM designates a principal character for each side (usually the one most directly involved in the roll). For every additional character involved on each side, add +2 to the respective rolls. The GM may add additional modifiers if the situation warrants (for example, if a gaunt is involved in a contested roll involving Brawn, that may merit an additional +1 bonus), and may limit the number of characters who participate appropriately (for example, if one side is trying to force a door open, no more than three or four characters can

assist in a useful manner). The GM also has the right to decide which contested rolls actually involve multiple characters, and which are simply more elaborate versions of a standard one-on-one roll.

Uncontested rolls involving multiple participants may be resolved in the same manner. The GM simply assigns a target number, and the number of rolls required to succeed at the task. Once the requisite number of successful rolls is reached, the task is accomplished.

SKILL DESCRIPTIONS

Below is a list of skills normally used in *The Edge of Midnight*. The GM is welcome to create more as he or she sees fit. Following the skill's name and description, there is a section titled "Primary Attributes," which states the attribute(s) most often used in conjunction with the skill. Additionally, there is a section entitled "Partial Success" which lists possible consequences of partial success, "Critical Success," which lists the possible consequences of a critical success, and "Critical Failure," which lists the possible consequence of a critical failure. These descriptions are only examples of possible results, not the final word on how they can appear. The GM should feel free to adjust them to add variety or to more accurately reflect the situation.

A master list of all available skills can be found below. In addition to the skills described in this section, combat skills — which are used during fights — can be found in Chapter Two, and scientific skills — which are used to create magical effects — can be found in Chapter Three.

A COMPLETE LIST OF AVAILABLE SKILLS

Appraise	Martial Arts*
Athletics	Medicine
Brawl*	Melee*
Bureaucracy	Perception
Contortions	Perform
Craft	Pick Lock
Demolitions	Puzzles
Disguise	Sleight of Hand
Drive	Sport
Electricity**	Stealth
Engineering	Streetwise
Etiquette	Tensile Energy**
Evasion*	Thermal Energy**
Fast Talk	Throwing*
Firearms*	
Forgery	
Gravity**	
Intimidation	
Kinetics**	
Lore	
Magnetism**	

* Indicates a combat skill (see page 40)

** Indicates a scientific skill, which is used in practicing magic (see page 53)

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Appraise

This skill is used to determine the market value and general condition of a tradable commodity. If the character making the Appraise check is familiar with both the commodity he's trying to appraise and the local economy, this skill is easy to use (TN 5). However, if the object in question is rare or the character is unfamiliar with the local market, the TN can be much higher. (It is recommended that the GM make skill rolls involving Appraise, not the player. That way, the player will not know how accurate his character's assessment is.)

Additionally this skill can be used to gauge the amount necessary to successfully bribe other characters.

Primary Attribute: Brains.

Partial Success: Your estimation of the item's price is off by 10–50% (GM's discretion; roll a d10, divide the results by 2 (rounding up), and multiply the final number by 10. The result is the percentage your estimation is off).

Critical Success: Your estimation is spot on, and you may use your acumen to add +1 to any skill roll made to appraise a similar object for the remainder of the session.

Failure: You have absolutely no idea what the object might be worth.

Critical Failure: You over- or underestimate the object's value (whichever is most detrimental to you) by 100%–200% (GM's discretion) Subsequent attempts to appraise similar objects suffer a –1 to the roll for the remainder of the session.

Athletics

This skill represents a character's ability to jump, swim, climb, run, and conduct other raw physical activities.

A character may run a number of feet equal to 10 + (Smoothness x 2) per 3 second round, walk a number of feet equal to 10 + his Smoothness per 3 second round, or swim or climb a number of feet equal to his Smoothness per 3 second round.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness, Brawn, or Build.

Partial Success: (This example focuses on the climbing aspect of the Athletics skill)

Attribute Failure — Your skills are good enough to see you through the challenge but your strength leaves something to be desired. You'll finish your climb in twice the normal time, after frequent rest stops.

Skill Failure — Who needs skill when you can just cram your hand in a crack and hang on with your muscular digits? You've succeeded but you suffer numerous cuts and bruises during your ascent. You are –2 on all skill rolls involving use of your hands for the next hour or until you receive medical attention (Medicine skill TN 5).

Critical Success: You seem to find cracks where none existed before, and complete the climb in half the normal time.

Critical Failure: You slip and fall while halfway up. Any precautions you may have taken fail and you suffer full damage from the fall (see page 48 for falling damage).

Bureaucracy

This skill represents a character's ability to handle various institutions likely to throw paperwork in his path. Dealing with organizations like the police, the civic government, and the National Law Enforcement Bureau often requires the Bu-

reaucracy skill. Pulling strings to get a character out of jail is a common use for the Bureaucracy skill.

Primary Attribute: Moxie.

Partial Success: You achieve the results you intended but you filed the paperwork with the wrong person. You should still get what you're looking for... in 8 to 10 working days.

Critical Success: You get what you need instantly and normal fees (bail, processing charges, etc.) are reduced by 50%.

Critical Failure: Your request is flat-out refused and you are branded a troublemaker at that particular institution. Subsequent Bureaucracy checks made there in person (or in writing if you used your name) will automatically fail.

Contortions

This skill represents a character's ability to get into small places and escape from bonds using his natural flexibility. Escaping from handcuffs or rope tied around the hands normally takes 1d10+5 minutes (assuming a successful roll). Escape from more serious bindings can take up to 3 times that long.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You eventually succeed but your lack of innate flexibility keeps you working at the bonds for twice the normal time needed to escape.

Skill Failure — You succeed, but in the process, you've pulled one of your joints. You are –2 on all skill rolls involving movement for the next hour or until you receive medical attention (Medical Skill TN 5)

"I'LL TEAR UP THIS TICKET, BUT I'M STILL GONNA HAVE TO ASK YOU FOR A BRIBE."

Successful application of a bribe requires a Moxie + Fast Talk roll. A +3 modifier is added to the roll if the briber can initially determine the amount necessary through a Brains + Appraise roll. Bribes can vary depending upon the offence and the official who is bribed, but the list below provides some ideas of "prices" for a given figure to ignore an average offence:

Beat Cop:	\$20
Police Sergeant:	\$30
Police Lieutenant:	\$50
Police Captain:	\$100
Low-Level Bureaucrat:	\$10
Mid-Level Bureaucrat:	\$50
City Department Head:	\$200
Judge:	\$500
City Council Member:	\$700

Ignoring a felony offense requires a bribe of at least twice these amounts. For the most serious offences (such as a murder rap) the price may be three or four times as high. And of course, there will always be some figures who can't be bribed, no matter how much money is on the table.

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Critical Success: You reach a Zen-like state of perfect body control, and loosen the bonds in half the time it might otherwise take.

Critical Failure: Not only do you fail, but you get yourself stuck in the process. You may not attempt a physically-based skill roll again until someone assists you out of your predicament.

Craft

This skill represents a character's ability in a non-industrial skill or trade, such as carpentry, plumbing, or architecture. It does *not* include skills in electronics or machinery, which are covered by the Engineering skill on the next page. A character may purchase this skill multiple times. Each time it applies to a different type of craft.

Standard repairs of pertinent items (a leaky sink, a new windowsill, etc.) take 1d10 hours. Extensive damage may take several days or longer, depending on the GM's discretion. Actually building a new object from scratch (a table for example) takes 1d10 days.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: You're not quite sure how to get the job done but you know enough not to make any tragic errors. You eventually succeed, but the trial-and-error involved doubles the amount of time taken.

Critical Success: You complete the task in half the allotted time.

Critical Failure: You perform the task exceedingly poorly — the object is not built or repaired — and injure yourself in the process, inflicting 1d10 points of vigor damage.

Demolitions

This skill represents a character's ability to manufacture and set explosives. It is most often used to destroy standing structures or lay traps (see page 48 for more).

Primary Attribute: Brains.

Partial Success: You've misjudged your ingredients or misplaced the explosive. The explosion will be either half as strong as you intended or twice as strong (roll a die or flip a coin).

Critical Success: You set the charges so well that the damage is directed exactly where you need it to go. Damage within the primary blast radius may be adjusted upward or downwards by an additional 1d10 points (with a corresponding difference in the secondary blast damage), as you see fit.

Critical Failure: The explosives ignite or detonate while you are setting them. You have 0-3 rounds to clear the area before the blast. (Roll 1d10 and divide the result by 3, rounding up. On a roll of "0," the explosives detonate immediately.)

Disguise

This skill represents a character's ability to mask his appearance and either go unnoticed or, in the case of someone with a very high skill, pretend to be someone he's not (this may also require Perform). The TN for gaunts to impersonate humans (and vice versa) is automatically 3 points higher.

It is recommended that the GM make skill rolls involving Disguise, not the player, and that he keep track of the results. That way, the player will not know how accurate his character's disguise is in case of a critical failure (a non-critical failure is obvious to everyone). The roll, if successful, should be used as part of any contested roll made to penetrate the character's disguise.

For example, Joe Finnegan is attempting to disguise himself as a police officer. On his roll, his skill die is a 9 and his attribute die is a 6. Later, he attempts to get past the watch sergeant at a nearby precinct. The sergeant must make a contested roll against a skill die of 9 and an attribute die of 6.

Opposed rolls to penetrate a character's disguise are based on Perception, not Disguise.

Primary Attribute: Gut.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — There is a critical flaw in your disguise. Anyone who knows you will see through your disguise if they take a close look at you (i.e. if they get within 6 feet).

Skill Failure — While you've managed to disguise your appearance, you've overlooked some detail, which makes you stand out. Most people won't recognize or question you but they easily recall you if asked.

Critical Success: Your disguise automatically passes all inspections for the remainder of the session.

Critical Failure: Your disguise looks perfect until a critical moment arrives, when something goes disastrously wrong (a piece of padding springs loose, false teeth come apart, etc.)

Drive

This skill represents a character's ability to operate vehicles. Characters do not need the Drive skill to operate a normal car (although it helps) but they do need a Drive skill of at least 3 to drive any other vehicle.

Once a character has a Drive skill of 3 or higher, he may choose to become familiar with the operation of one other vehicle type: ships, planes, trains, motorcycles, and heavy vehicles are a few examples. He may choose an additional vehicle when his skill reaches 6 and at every 3 points thereafter. His Drive skill is considered to be 0 when operating a vehicle type with which he has not chosen to familiarize himself.

For example, someone with a Drive of 2 may only operate a car while someone with a Drive of 6 may choose to be familiar with the operation of boats and motorcycles as well. Alternatively, he could choose heavy trucks and airplanes.

In some cases, GMs may allow characters to forgo the ability to drive a car in favor of some other vehicle type. For example, a character with a Drive of 2 may be able to operate a boat, in which case his skill to drive a car would be considered 0 until he increases his skill to 3 or higher.

Characters driving a non-mechanized personal vehicle (such as a bicycle or a rickshaw) or animals (such as a horse), may choose to use their Athletics skill instead of their Drive skill. If they use their Drive skill, they must be familiar with the vehicle or animal, as above. (Athletics relies on general physical prowess, while Drive indicates formal training).

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

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Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You manage to keep the vehicle on the road but you've scraped up against something. There is some minor damage to your vehicle. Score this result more than once or twice (GM's discretion) and the vehicle may suffer a breakdown.

Skill Failure — You're still going in the right direction but a wild swerve has forced something smaller than you into a bad position. If you're on a motorcycle you may have just forced a little old lady to dive head first into the gutter or if you're behind the wheel of a school bus there may be a car with its front end wrapped around a pole left in your wake. Consequences are up to the GM, but there's a good chance that someone may have gotten your license number in the process...

Note: It's appropriate during chases for a partial success to represent one or more obstacles thrown in your path — either requiring an additional Drive roll to avoid, or a corresponding loss in speed (and distance between you and your target/pursuer).

Critical Success: You and the vehicle seem to be moving as one. You gain a +1 bonus to all Drive checks made for the remainder of the scene.

Critical Failure: Your vehicle crashes or stalls (causing damage to any occupants if appropriate) and may not be used again for the remainder of this session or until an appropriate Engineering check is made, whichever takes longer.

Engineering

This skill represents a character's ability to create, repair, or jury-rig modern machinery. Engineering can be used on large-scale projects, like rebuilding an engine, or on small scale ones, like hot-wiring a car. Standard repairs take 1d10 hours for most complex machinery such as cars or radios. Extensive damage may take several days or longer, depending on the GM's discretion. Actually *building* a radio, car engine, or other device takes 1d10 days.

Primary Attribute: Brains.

Partial Success: You're not quite sure how to get the job done but you know enough not to make any tragic errors. You eventually succeed, but the trial-and-error involved doubles the amount of time taken.

Critical Success: You complete the task in half the allotted time.

Critical Failure: The task is botched beyond your ability to recover. Subsequent efforts (presumably by another character) will take twice as long as they would otherwise, assuming they succeed.

Etiquette/Streetwise

These skills represent a character's ability to interact socially, to avoid offending people and to convince them to work with him. Any time a PC does something that will offend another character, the GM may allow him to roll this skill to take back the statement or action. While they have the same effect, Etiquette and Streetwise must be purchased separately. Etiquette is only used against "high class" characters (like politi-

cians or socialites) while Streetwise is used to interact with the lower classes (like loan sharks and P.I.'s). These skills can also be used to blend into high society or not stand out on the street, and are often used to subtly gain information.

Primary Attribute: Moxie.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You've said all the correct things and put your hands in all the right places so people aren't offended, but something about your demeanor upsets your target(s). You haven't offended anyone but people are trying to find a polite way to end the conversation and move on to someone more personable.

Skill Failure — You've done something that most people consider offensive but it's clearly an accident and your charm more than makes up for it in the eyes of your audience. They treat you condescendingly, however, until you prove your social aptitude... which may make it hard to pump them for any information that they consider privileged.

Critical Success: The person you're speaking to is incredibly impressed and performs any reasonable task or favor requested, provided it doesn't involve any real danger or risk of harm.

Critical Failure: The person you're speaking to reacts with open hostility and will shout at you, throw a drink in your face, or even attack you if the situation warrants. You may not attempt to speak to this person or curry any favors for the remainder of the session, and he or she will consider you an adversary unless you take significant steps to smooth over the misunderstanding.

Fast Talk

This skill represents a character's ability to convince others that what he's saying is true, logical, or otherwise worth listening to. It is also used in haggling and business dealings. The TN is usually the opponent's Gut plus his skill in Perception but the GM may apply modifiers if the topic of conversation is familiar or alien to the target (i.e. it's much easier to convince a security guard that his safety is on than to try the same deception on an expert marksman).

This skill can also be used to make seduction attempts, although the GM may rule that another skill (such as Perform) may apply in particular circumstances.

Primary Attribute: Moxie.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — Your opponent becomes suspicious. All further attempts to fool this individual are at +2 TN.

Skill Failure — Your force of personality overwhelms your opponent but you make a technical error in your deception. In a number of rounds equal to 20 minus your opponent's Brains, he puzzles out that you've been lying to him.

Critical Success: Not only does the opponent buy your patter, but he goes out of his way to assist you by carrying objects, disabling alarms, and any other reasonable action in keeping with your story.

Critical Failure: Your opponent plays dumb, pretending to go along with your story until the worst possible moment, when he pulls a gun, locks you in a storage closet, or otherwise causes trouble.

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Forgery

This skill represents a character's ability to fool bureaucratic institutions through the creation of false records and forms, as well as his ability to reproduce the signatures of other characters. It is recommended that the GM make skill rolls involving Forgery, not the player. That way, the player will not know how accurate his forged document is in case of a critical failure (a non-critical failure is obvious to everyone). The roll, if successful, should be used as part of any contested roll made to perceive the forgery.

For example, Vinnie the Shark forges a policeman's identification, to be used in a robbery. His Smoothness is 8 and his Forgery skill is 6. He rolls a 7 with his skill die and a 4 with his attribute die. Later, his partner attempts to use the i.d. to bluff his way into a bank. The guard makes a contested roll against a skill die of 7 and an attribute die of 4.

Opposed rolls to spot a forgery are based on Perception, not Forgery.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: You've made a minor mistake. Anyone seeing the document may immediately make a Perception skill roll to notice that the document or signature is false (TN equal to your Forgery skill plus your Smoothness attribute).

Critical Success: Your forgery automatically passes all inspections for the remainder of the session.

Critical Failure: Your forgery looks perfect, until the a critical moment arrives, when something goes disastrously wrong (the ink runs, the binding comes loose, etc.)

Intimidation

This skill represents a character's ability to frighten those around him into giving him what he wants. The TN to intimidate a character should never be less than his Moxie. The TN is +2 if the target has the Intimidation skill and it is +4 if his Intimidation is higher than the character attempting the roll. The GM may award a bonus to the Intimidation skill roll if the character making it gets the drop on someone. For example, a character may get +1 to the roll if he's got a knife and his target doesn't, or he may get +5 to the roll if he's got a shotgun pointed at his opponent's face and ten guys standing behind him. Characters whom you've intimidated generally won't act against you unless they absolutely have to (at least not while you're looking) and often spill important information when cornered.

Generally speaking, Intimidation shouldn't work on PCs unless extenuating circumstances are involved. The GM can make the roll to impress an NPC's threats upon a player ("he looks like he means it") but the decision of whether or not to acquiesce is the player's to make and should not be dictated by die rolls. The final outcome of the situation should be determined through role-playing.

Primary Attribute: Moxie or Brawn (player's choice).

Partial Success: You get what you want initially (information, a compliant subject, etc.), but your victim is so mortified at being browbeaten that he resolves never to give in to you again. Subsequent intimidation rolls against this particular subject are at +2 TN.

Critical Success: You so cow your victim — and anyone who witnesses your interrogation — than subsequent attempts to use this skill against them automatically succeed for the remainder of the session.

Critical Failure: Your victim — and anyone who witnesses your interrogation — thinks you're a clown. Any subsequent attempts to intimidate them automatically fail for the remainder of the session (though other characters may attempt to intimidate them as normal).

Lore

This is a catch-all skill for random knowledge that a character may have. A character may purchase the Lore skill multiple times. Each time it applies to a different specialized form of lore.

This skill allows the character to know facts relating to a subject but it does not impart any ability to perform actions. For example, someone with the skill "Lore: Boxing" knows all about the sport of boxing, the history of famous matches, etc... but isn't able to actually box any better than someone without the Lore skill.

Primary Attribute: Brains.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You've read about it somewhere but you just can't recall the specifics. Once you return to your house, a library, or some spot relevant to the knowledge you're seeking you'll find the answer you're looking for.

Skill Failure — You recall all the information you've ever heard on the subject. Unfortunately, there is one crucial piece of information that you've simply never seen before and therefore don't recall. You have to find it, or find someone who knows about it, before you can fully answer the question.

Critical Success: Your recall on this subject is so complete that you automatically succeed on any Lore rolls involving this subject for the rest of the session.

Critical Failure: Not only do you derive the incorrect information, but your rationalizations have muddled the issue for those around you. Subsequent Lore rolls involving this specialty made by anyone who witnessed your failure are at +2 TN for the remainder of the session.

Medicine

This skill represents a character's ability to heal the sick or wounded (or produce a diagnosis when the problem isn't readily apparent). Waking an unconscious character is TN 5 if he's knocked unconscious from blunt damage, or TN 10 if he's knocked out by lethal damage (see page 45 for more). Stabilizing a character reduced to 0 vigor from lethal damage is TN 10. Additionally, once per day, characters with the Medicine skill may spend fifteen minutes, and make a roll with a TN equal to 3 times the number of wounds the patient has lost. Success heals one of the patient's wounds.

At the GM's discretion, Medicine can also be used to injure through the use of poison or other harmful bits of medical knowledge. Poison rules can be found on page 48.

More on healing can be found on page 48.

Primary Attribute: Brains.

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Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You're not sure to what extent the victim is injured. You succeed, but your lack of precise knowledge leads you to treat the victim for several conditions above and beyond what is actually required. This increases the time needed to administer medical attention and may subject the victims to unnecessary drugs or treatments.

Skill Failure — You know exactly what's wrong with the victim but you don't trust yourself to fix it. Perhaps you're shaking from stress, or maybe your hands are full and the sweat is running into your eyes. You need to correct the problem by getting outside help before continuing. After taking a round to have the nurse wipe your brow (or to knock back a shot of whisky), you succeed.

Critical Success: You heal your patient of one additional wound, over and above any benefits otherwise gained.

Critical Failure: You inflict an additional wound upon your patient.

Perception

This skill represents a character's ability to notice the world around him. Perception is often used to search for clues and to notice people sneaking about. This skill is also used by investigators to piece together information or spot a clue about the scene of a crime. The TN to use Perception in this fashion is usually equal to the perpetrator's Gut + Stealth but many factors can affect the roll. If the perpetrator was in a rush or took no steps to cover his actions, the TN goes down. Alternatively, if dozens of people have walked through the scene before the investigation, the TN goes up significantly.

Primary Attribute: Gut.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You notice the clue but not before someone steps on it or otherwise compromises it. It may be damaged or the information you can glean from it is otherwise incomplete.

Skill Failure — You noticed something — and realize its significance — but when it comes to your attention, you're slightly startled. Everyone nearby realizes that you've seen it... and you won't be able to sneak it into your pocket without them noticing.

Critical Success: You notice an additional hard-to-find fact or piece of information that would normally be hidden from even the keenest eye.

Critical Failure: Not only do you fail to notice the pertinent clue, but your bungling prevents anyone else from noticing it either; subsequent Perception rolls made regarding this clue will automatically fail for the remainder of the session.

Perform

This skill represents a character's ability to entertain through public expression, to write, to paint, or to otherwise exercises artistic creativity. When a character purchases the Perform skill he must choose a focus. Examples of a Perform focus would be Acting, Singing, Piano, Saxophone, Writing, Painting, etc. The Perform skill may be purchased multiple times, each with a different focus.

Primary Attribute: Moxie or Gut (to compose or design a piece).

Partial Success: A layman is impressed, but a critic or another professional likely points out minor flaws in your performance.

Critical Success: Your performance so wows the crowd that you gain an addition 5-50 dollars (1d10 x 5) in tips on the spot.



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Critical Failure: You are booed off the stage, and will not be paid for this performance. In addition, you are rattled enough so that every Perform roll you make in the next week of game time is at +1 TN.

Pick Lock

This skill represents a character's ability to open doors or windows and bypass other stumbling blocks to his felonious activities. It normally takes 3 rounds to pick a standard door lock. This number can be adjusted up or down to fit the circumstances as the GM wishes.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: You open the lock but a slight slip leaves obvious signs of forced entry.

Critical Success: You discover a new method of coaxing the tumblers into place. Subsequent attempts to pick locks of this type are automatically successful for the remainder of the session.

Critical Failure: Your pick breaks off and jams the mechanism. Subsequent attempts to pick this lock automatically fail until it is repaired (Engineering roll, TN 7), and your picks are now useless.

Puzzles

This skill represents a character's ability to decipher puzzles, play games, or deal with the strange and unfamiliar.

Primary Attribute: Brains or Gut.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You know you've heard some little scrap of information that will solve the enigma for you, but you just can't recall the specifics. Once you return to your house, a library, or some spot relevant to the knowledge you're seeking, you'll find the answer you're looking for.

Skill Failure — You can feel the solution just out of reach of your mind. Unfortunately, there is one crucial piece of the puzzle that you've simply never seen before and therefore don't recall. You have to find it, or find someone who knows about it, before you can fully answer the question.

Critical Success: Your understanding of this conundrum is so complete that you automatically succeed on any Puzzles rolls involving this subject for the rest of the session.

Critical Failure: Not only have you not solved the puzzle, but your rationalizations make it more difficult for others who have heard you to solve it... and similar problems as well. Subsequent Puzzles rolls made by you and anyone who witnessed your failure are at +2 TN for the remainder of the session.

Sleight of Hand

This skill represents a character's ability to trick those around him through quick hand motions and misdirection. Sleight of Hand is often used to separate small objects (such as wallets) from their owners. Additionally, Sleight of Hand may be used to perform card tricks, play shell games, and undertake other simple tasks employed by stage magicians and con artists. The TN to use Sleight of Hand is usually the victim's Gut + Perception.

It is possible to fool some people and not others. When using Sleight of Hand to fool multiple targets, the GM should determine the TN for each target separately.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: Your victim doesn't see exactly what happened but he realizes that something funky just took place. In a few seconds, he starts checking to see if his wallet and watch are where he left them.

Critical Success: The trick succeeds against everyone in the vicinity, regardless of how many witness it.

Critical Failure: Everyone in the vicinity automatically notices you and knows exactly what you were trying to do.

Sport

This skill represents a character's ability in a specific sport, such as baseball or boxing. It differs from Athletics in that it involves a particular type of physical activity and thus a specific set of abilities. When a character purchases the Sport skill he must choose a focus. Examples include Football, Horse Racing, Boxing, etc. The Sport skill may be purchased multiple times, with a different focus each time.

A Sport roll may be attempted using the Athletics skill instead, but the TN is +2.

Primary Attribute: Brawn.

Partial Success: You succeed in your task, but you don't look particularly graceful about it, or your opponent(s) notices a weakness in your technique. The next time you attempt the same skill roll in this match (session), the TN is +2.

Critical Success: You perform at a personal best, hit a home run, knock your opponent to the mat, etc. Unless your opponent can counter with a critical success of his own, you should win the match (session, etc.) on the strength of this alone.

Critical Failure: You perform the task exceedingly poorly and injure yourself in the process, suffering 1d10 points of vigor damage.

Stealth

This skill represents a character's ability to remain unnoticed. The TN to sneak up on someone is normally the target's Gut + Perception. This is modified based on the amount of cover provided by terrain, noise, light or other conditions. For example, the TN may go down when a character tries to sneak up on someone in a poorly lit club since the bad lighting and excessive noise both work to cover his actions.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness or Gut.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — Your skill is sufficient to get the job done but a momentary lack of coordination slows you down to half your normal speed (rounded up) if you don't wish to risk drawing attention to yourself.

Skill Failure — You've made a minor mistake, but innate talent has carried you through for the most part. You leave obvious signs of your passing which anyone will notice if they approach the area.

Critical Success: You may get the job done excessively quickly, moving at twice the normal speed.

Critical Failure: Everyone in the vicinity automatically notices you and can tell exactly what you're trying to do, and may react accordingly before you can take another action.

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Streetwise/Etiquette

These skills represent a character's ability to interact socially and avoid offending people, and to convince them to work with him. Any time a character has done something that will offend another character, the GM may allow him to roll this skill to take back the statement or action. While they have the same effect, Etiquette and Streetwise must be purchased separately. Etiquette may only be used against "high class" characters (like politicians or socialites) while Streetwise is used to interact with the lower classes (like loan sharks and P.I.'s). These skills can also be used to blend into high society or not stand out on the street, and are often used to subtly gain information

Primary Attribute: Moxie.

Partial Success: Attribute Failure — You've said all the correct things and put your hands in all the right places so people aren't offended but something about your demeanor has upset your target(s). You haven't offended anyone but people are trying to find a polite way to end the conversation and move on to someone more personable.

Skill Failure — You've done something that most people would consider offensive but it's clearly an accident and your charm more than makes up for it in the eyes of your audience. They will treat you condescendingly, however, until you can prove your social aptitude... which may make it hard to pump them for any information that they consider privileged.

Critical Success: The person you're speaking to considers you a close friend and will perform any reasonable task or favor requested, provided it doesn't involve any real danger or risk of harm.

Critical Failure: The person you're speaking to reacts with open hostility and will shout at you, throw a drink in your face, or even attack you if the situation warrants. You may not attempt to speak to this person or curry any favors for the remainder of the session, and he or she will consider you an adversary unless you take significant steps to smooth over the misunderstanding.

Combat Skills

In addition to the normal skills listed above, skill points may be used to purchase combat skills. These skills are used almost exclusively during combat, either to strike someone with a weapon or to avoid being struck. Complete descriptions of the combat skills can be found under the Combat Section in Chapter Two.

The combat skills are Brawl, Evasion, Firearms, Martial Arts, Melee, and Throwing.

Scientific (Magical) Skills

In addition to the normal skills listed above, skill points may be used to purchase scientific skills, which are used to work magic. There are six such skills. Any character may purchase a scientific skill but only characters with the Magical Aptitude background or Rogue Scientist profession may use them to perform magic.

The scientific skills are Electricity, Gravity, Kinetics, Magnetism, Tensile Energy, and Thermal Energy.

4. SELECT BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds are unique traits which reveal some of your character's history and personality. Some of them represent careers or positions he may have held. Others are odd traits or abilities which don't fit the same category as skills. They're used to help generate plot points, flesh out your character, and provide a few other specific benefits.

At character creation, each character may select up to three backgrounds from the list below. Unless otherwise specified, each background can be chosen only once, but bonuses gained from backgrounds (including income) stack with other backgrounds, and with bonuses gained from professions.

A player usually *never* select a new background after character creation unless there is pertinent justification in the campaign; that is, it makes logical sense within the dramatic context of the story. The GM has the right to refuse a new background, or he may require some other penalty which fits within the context of the story. For example, a character who wishes to purchase the Mean Streets background would almost certainly not have been raised as a wealthy aristocrat. The GM may therefore refuse this background because it doesn't fit with the character's concept... unless the player can come up with a good explanation which the GM will accept.

In certain cases, however, the GM may allow a new background to be purchased (with the experience point cost listed on page 38), provided that there is some justification in the storyline that merits it. For example, if a warlock character joins a crystal ball squad, he could reasonably assume to gain the Magic License background. The character must still purchase the background with experience points, as he would with any other trait or ability, and the GM has the right to both mandate the expenditure of experience points, or veto the background if he feels it isn't justified.

A COMPLETE LIST OF AVAILABLE BACKGROUNDS

Accelerated Immune System*	Magic License
Acrobatic	Magical Aptitude
Alert	Marksmanship
Bone Spurs*	Mean Streets
Charismatic	Prodigy
Dead Zone*	Racer
Dense Bone Structure*	Reduced Light Vision*
Education	Rugged
Enhanced Teeth*	Sinewy Joints*
Exotic Knowledge	Small
Fanaticism	Wise
Gaunt	
Huge	
Loyal Retainer	
Lucky	

* Indicates a background which may only be purchased by gaunts

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Some backgrounds are restricted to a specific type of character, or a character possessing certain other prerequisites (backgrounds which apply only to gaunts have been placed in their own section). Details can be found with each entry.

STANDARD BACKGROUNDS

Acrobatic

Either you have a natural talent for athletics or you were raised in an environment that exposed you to intense physical training at an early age.

- +2 Smoothness.
- You gain 2 additional points in the Athletics skill.

Alert

You are extremely aware of your surroundings. Perhaps you're a trained investigator, or maybe you're just paranoid. In either case, you may ignore the drawbacks of partial success on Perception rolls.

Charismatic

You may be drop dead gorgeous, roguishly handsome or simply a really nice person. Whatever the explanation, people enjoy being around you, and often go out of their way to make you happy or to get your attention.

- +2 Moxie.
- You may use your Moxie instead of Brains to determine starting money.
- Income: Your force of personality ensures that you earn more money than other people in your position. Perhaps your fans shower you with gifts or maybe your boss keeps giving you raises. In any case, you tend to earn about \$40 per week more than those in a similar position.

Education

You've graduated from college and are recognized among the intellectual community. Unlike the social community, your friends are not frivolous enough to throw constant parties and pass around large quantities of money, but they are very reliable sources of technical information and can be called upon for references.

- +2 Brains.
- You gain three additional skill points.



Exotic Knowledge

You were raised in surroundings with different practices than most in the Commonwealth. Your skills are not limited to those commonly taught in western culture.

- Characters with the Exotic Knowledge background may learn the Martial Arts skill.
- You gain one additional point in the Medicine skill and can often treat patients with improvised ingredients such as herbs, thus avoiding the cost and bureaucracy involved in getting conventional drugs.
- You gain three additional skill points that may only be used to learn a foreign language (or languages).

Fanaticism

Your devotion to magic — and specifically to the routines and formulae associated with it — is so complete it approaches a religion. This makes it easier for you to work your magic, but it also makes it harder for you to resist using magic when it might be prudent not to.

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude background.

- You may choose to add an additional +2 to any roll to use magic. This bonus applies to one die of the roller's choice. It may only be used once per roll and must be announced before the roll is made. However, each time the character indulges in this ability, the resulting debilitation period (see page 61) is doubled.

Gaunt

Your character is a gaunt. The specifics of his or her change are up to you, but he or she has been a gaunt long enough to get used to the condition.

- Gaunts have a tendency to drain the energy out of normal people. Any character in the presence of a gaunt feels lethargic and uncomfortable. If a character spends more than one week in regular contact with one or more gaunts, he suffers a -1 to his Brawn and Build. These penalties increase by an additional -1 for each additional week spent in regular contact with a gaunt. They return to normal after 24 hours spent away from gaunt contact.
- Normally, you may only take this background at character creation. In certain unusual circumstances, a character may acquire it later in the campaign, but it represents a severe shift in his or her development, and takes place only with the GM's consent. The details of such a change should fit with the campaign and be acceptable to all parties involved. See Chapter Six for more information.
- No one is sure exactly what causes a character to become a gaunt, but it is somehow antithetical to magic. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to affect a gaunt with magical skills. The TN for any magic roll that would include a gaunt in its area of effect is +1; if the gaunt's Brains is 6 or higher, the TN is +3.

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION

- Magic use is extremely painful to gaunts. If someone uses magic within 30 feet of a gaunt, the gaunt is +2 to all TNs for the remainder of the round. A gaunt must also make a Moxie roll (TN 10) every round the magic effect remains, or stop whatever he is doing and flee the area.
- Gaunts are incapable of performing magic. Period. Anyone who takes this background may not gain the benefits of the Magical Aptitude background or the Rogue Scientist profession which pertain to the use of magic, though they can still choose those abilities for their other benefits. (For example, a gaunt who takes the Magical Aptitude background may not practice magic, but he still gains the two additional skill points in any scientific skill, as outlined under the descriptions starting on page 53). This rule applies to any other abilities which may impart magic use.
- +2 Brawn.
- +2 Build.
- -1 Smoothness.
- -1 Moxie.
- A gaunt's maximum score in Brawn and Build are increased to 11 while his maximum Moxie and Smoothness are decreased to 9.
- The character's bite inflicts damage (in vigor) equal to 1d10 + Brawn; this is considered blunt damage.
- The character may choose Gaunts Only backgrounds, representing additional abilities granted to him by his condition.

Huge

You're as large as a barn and punch like a ton of bricks.

You may only take this background at character creation. Characters who take the Huge background may not also take the Small background.

- +1 Brawn.
- When making Brawling Attacks, you gain the benefits of the Unbalancing Attack combat maneuver for free. Unfortunately, characters with the Small background enjoy an additional +1 TN to be hit when you target them with close combat attacks.

Loyal Retainer

You have a friend, servant, or companion who anticipates your needs with staggering accuracy. In addition to making him- or herself available for mundane tasks like picking you up from the airport and looking after the house, your retainer tends to show up just when you need him or her with exactly the thing you've been looking for.

- Once per session when you're in a situation where your retainer could logically help, you may call upon his or her aid. He might show up with a getaway car at just the right time or he may have thought ahead and packed an extra lock pick in case you dropped yours down a sewer grate. Note, however, that retainers seldom carry unique or expensive objects. One might, for example, have a backup gun on hand or even a red rose which he quickly bought at a flower shop but he's unlikely to have the Hope Diamond or a brick of gold. The exact nature of the retainer and his or her relationship to you should be worked out with the GM.

Lucky

Who needs skills when you've got luck? Things are easy for you since many of life's random occurrences seem to go your way.

- You receive one extra luck die per session.
- Income: Through gambling, lucky breaks, and the occasional bag of cash falling out of the sky, you earn from \$10 to \$50 per week (roll 1d10 and divide by 2, rounding up; multiply the result by 10). You have accumulated a savings of \$750 in loose cash.

Magic License

You are legally permitted to practice magic under controlled circumstances.

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude background.

- You may not be arrested or officially prosecuted for magic use, though you may still be arrested for attendant crimes. For example, if you use kinetic magic to throw someone against a wall, you can't be arrested for using the magic, but if he dies you can still be arrested for murder.
- Your magic use is more or less public, granting you a dark and dangerous reputation. You gain 2 additional points in the Intimidation skill. See page 117 for more information.

Magical Aptitude

You are gifted with the ability to think outside the box and can — with training — exploit various loopholes in the laws of physics.

- You may choose one scientific skill and gain the ability to perform magic with it. The chosen skill is increased by 2 points (maximum 10).

Marksmanship

Either you're a natural marksman or you've trained extensively in ranged combat. Either way, your firearms skills are astounding.

- When making a ranged attack from outside of your weapon's base range, the penalty to hit is reduced by 1 (minimum 0).
- You gain 2 additional points in the Firearms skill.

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Mean Streets

You were raised in the rough part of town, or maybe you work amid appalling conditions. Whatever the reason, you have extensive practical experience surviving in a hostile urban environment.

- You gain 1 additional point in the Brawl skill, the Evasion skill, the Melee skill, and the Streetwise Skill.

Prodigy

You are considered intellectually gifted. Few people can match your ability to retain knowledge.

- +2 Brains.
- The experience point cost of improving non-combat skills is reduced by 1 (minimum 1).

Racer

You are a skilled driver able to handle almost any vehicle with ease.

- +1 Smoothness.
- You gain 2 additional points in the Drive skill.
- When attempting to operate an unfamiliar vehicle, you may make a Drive roll (TN 10) to operate it normally.

Rugged

You're tough as nails. You may not be the best fighter in the world but you can take an astounding amount of damage before you drop.

- +2 Build.
- If knocked unconscious, you may continue to act normally for a number of rounds equal to your Build, unless you sustain further wounds. At the end of the duration or if you take one or more further wounds, you immediately lose consciousness and suffer the full effects of the combined damage you have taken.

Small

Perhaps you're 14 years old or maybe you're simply shorter than normal; in either case, you are gifted with the ability to outmaneuver larger opponents. On the down side, you're often an irresistible target for "short" jokes.

You may only take this background at character creation. Characters with the Small background may not also take the Huge background.

- You are +1 TN to be hit.
- +1 Smoothness.



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Wise

You're skilled at guessing how others will react, and have a great deal of common sense.

- +2 Gut.
- Once per session you may re-roll one single die (i.e., a skill die *or* an attribute die in a given roll, not both).

GAUNTS-ONLY BACKGROUNDS

These backgrounds are available only to gaunt characters, and cannot be purchased unless the character has already purchased the Gaunt background.

Accelerated Immune System

Your body has adapted to metabolize dangerous agents, from simple tobacco and alcohol to sulfuric fumes and arsenic. You have pronounced black lips and a strange membrane covers your nasal cavity.

Prerequisite: Gaunt background.

- You are immune to all poisons and toxic fumes. You are also incapable of inebriation and cannot be incapacitated by alcohol.

Bone Spurs

Your forearms and legs sport sharp spurs at the joints. These spines can be used for climbing or combat; they are also a noticeable and frightening feature, and often tear clothes to shreds.

Prerequisite: Gaunt background.

- +2 to any Athletics roll made involving climbing.
- You inflict +1d10 damage in unarmed combat. Unarmed attacks from you are considered lethal damage.
- +1 to the TN to be hit by an unarmed attack (i.e., any attack that uses only bare fists, kicks, etc.)

Dead Zone

Magic often refuses to operate in an area around a large concentration of gaunts. Your condition is even more enhanced, creating a magical "dead zone" within your immediate vicinity.

Prerequisite: Gaunt background.

- Any magical effect conducted within a radius around you equal to your Brains x 5 feet is +2 TN, or +4 if your Brains is 5 or greater. You do not suffer the standard increased TN to skill rolls for any magical effects generated within this area, though you must still make a Moxie roll to avoid fleeing as normal. See page 27 for more information.

Dense Bone Structure

You have a phenomenally strong bone structure, making you both heavy and hard to hurt. This is frequently seen in construction workers or other gaunts who work in dangerous occupations.

Prerequisite: Gaunt background.

- +1 Build.
- You inflict +1 damage in unarmed combat.

Enhanced Teeth

Your teeth are larger and more pronounced than most of your kind, allowing you to use them in unarmed combat.

Prerequisite: Gaunt background.

- Your bite inflicts damage equal to 2d10 + Brawn. This is considered lethal damage.
- You gain 2 additional points in the Intimidation skill.

Reduced Light Vision

You can see in reduced light and in some cases even in total darkness. Your eyes are larger than other gaunts, and appear to dominate your face.

Prerequisite: Gaunt background.

- You may ignore all penalties from dim light or darkness. Additionally, you may see hidden targets with a heat signature up to a distance of 30 ft.

Sinewy Joints

You have a more flexible joint structure and accelerated reflexes. As a consequence, you tend to be thinner and more wiry than others of your kind.

Prerequisite: Gaunt background.

- +2 Smoothness. Your maximum Smoothness is raised to 10.
- You gain 2 additional points in the Contortions skill.

S. SELECT PROFESSION

At character creation, the player may select one profession from the list below if he wishes. Professions are not required. If none of these fits your character concept, you may decline to choose one, and instead gain an additional 10 experience points instantly, which may be spent as described on page 38.

Professions represent the character's professional training and/or career choice; they're intended to help lend a sense of personality to your PC. Professions are ranked from 1 to 5; they may not normally be raised above 5. At character creation, all characters are considered to be level 1 in their profession

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A COMPLETE LIST OF PROFESSIONS

Academic
Athlete
Blue Collar Worker
Clergy
Con Artist
Femme Fatale
Gangster
Gunman
Investigator
Lady Killer
Officer of the Law
Performer
Politician
Rogue Scientist
Soldier
Street Tough
Thief
Wealthy
White Collar Worker

but characters may become better at their chosen profession or learn additional professions through experience.

Note that professions in *The Edge of Midnight* don't always represent your character's actual profession. It's more accurate to say they represent the way your character does things as opposed to what he does. For example, it's possible for the mayor to have the Gangster profession instead of the Politician profession if he's a patsy for the local mob. A gritty, hard-drinking private investigator could easily fall under the Street Tough profession while a straight-laced P.I. who takes his job seriously may find the Investigator profession more to his liking. It's even possible for characters to pick up multiple professions as they gain experience. For example, a chief of police who's "on the take" may have the Officer of the Law profession and the Gangster profession.

The effects of professions "stack" with other effects; for example, if a character has two professions which each provide an identical bonus, then the combined bonus for taking both professions is twice as high as it would be for taking only one profession. This stacking is subject to GM approval, however.

ACADEMIC

You're very good at learning new things and retaining information. Scientists, numbers-runners, and doctors are good examples of Academics.

- The experience cost to purchase any Lore skill and the Puzzles skill is reduced by 1 point per level (minimum 1).
- Income: Through educational grants, consulting, teaching, or the occasional article, you pull in \$40 per week per level. You have an accumulated savings of \$1,000 per level.

ATHLETE

Athletes possess the right mixture of physical talent and natural training to make a living at sports.

- The cost to purchase or improve the Athletics skill and *either* the Evasion or the Brawl skill is reduced by 1 point per level (minimum 1).
- Income: The Athlete earns an extra \$25 a week (for either steady appearances, like baseball, or periodic exhibitions, like boxing matches) per level.

BLUE COLLAR WORKER

You have employable skills in a blue-collar industry. You might be a steel worker, a cabbie, or a longshoreman.

- When this skill is gained, pick a physical attribute (Brawn, Build, or Smoothness), and mark it on your character sheet. Once per session per level, if a Blue Collar Worker spends two rounds before attempting a non-combat skill roll involving that attribute, on the following round, the attribute die is automatically successful, regardless of the difficulty or the result of the roll. Critical failure rules still apply however, and a critical failure is still considered a failure. This ability may not be applied during combat. Roll the skill die normally.
- Income: As long as you're willing to put in 40-hour weeks you earn \$30 per week per level. In addition, you have accumulated savings of \$500 in cash per level.

CLERGY

You're a member of the church — Catholicism, a variant of Protestantism, Judaism, or the like — and as such, you are afforded a modicum of respect by those around you.

- The cost to purchase or improve the Etiquette skill and the Puzzles skill is reduced by 1 point per level (minimum 1).
- You can expect room and board in any church building and can often arrange free transportation between parishes. In extraordinary circumstances, you may call upon the church for additional resources or aid — such as a car or some loose cash — though such aid is never given lightly.
- Current members of the Clergy receive a stipend of \$10 per week per level and a small savings of \$200 per level. However, they must adhere to the tenets of their particular order (such as holding Mass every Sunday) and their money must go to "appropriate" resources (a priest shouldn't buy a gun with his funds, for example).

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION



CON ARTIST

There's a sucker born every minute, and Con Artists aim to fleece as many as they can through slick salesmanship, creative bookkeeping, plying a sugar daddy, or flat-out swindling. Salesmen, night club owners, and carnival barkers are good examples of Con Artists.

- Once per session per level, a Con Artist may choose to make either his attribute die or his skill die a success (regardless of the TN) when making a Fast Talk, Etiquette, or Street-wise roll.

FEMME FATALE/LADY KILLER

You know how to ply your sexuality to get what you want. (Femme Fatale applies to female characters; Lady Killer applies to males.)

- Once per session per level, the Femme Fatale/Lady Killer may treat a partial success or failure on any skill roll (such as Etiquette, Perform, or Fast-Talk) involving seduction, persuasion, or otherwise coaxing a member of the opposite sex as a full success. Furthermore, the TN for all such rolls is reduced by 1 for every time he or she has successfully "seduced" that particular target during the current adventure (minimum 1).

Normally the TN to seduce an NPC is equal to his Moxie plus his Perception, though it should be role-played, and is subject to interpretation (and possible bonuses or penalties) by the GM.

GANGSTER

Organized crime is often a vast enterprise, containing a wide variety of enforcers, capos, minions, "ordinary" citizens on the take, and even bureaucratic paper-pushers like bankers and accountants. Mobsters, dirty cops, and money launderers are good examples of Gangsters.

- Once per session per level, a Gangster may call in a favor from a fellow gang member and acquire a common item such as a car, a gun, or the like. The GM should keep in mind that most items gained in this fashion were gained illegally, and using them may have unforeseen consequences.
- Income: As long as you're willing to partake in various questionable activities (like selling stolen goods or helping your friends launder their money) you earn \$30 per week per level. You have also scraped together \$500 per level in loose cash, which you may spend as you wish.

GUNMAN

Violence can be a commodity. Gunmen are those who excel at the use of firearms, and who ply their expertise in order to make a living. Police sharpshooters, soldiers, and hit men are good examples of Gunmen.

- Once per session per level, if a Gunman spends two rounds aiming a firearm (or other weapon at the GM's discretion), on the following round, the skill die is automatically successful when firing at the target, regardless of the shot's difficulty or the result of the roll. Critical failure rules still apply however, and a critical failure is still considered a miss. Roll the attribute die for the attack normally.

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INVESTIGATOR

The truth is out there, and Investigators live to find it, whether to right a wrong, make some money, or simply find out something that few people know. Journalists, police detectives, and mothers of teenage boys are good examples of Investigators.

- Once per session per level, an Investigator may learn one useful piece of information about a potential subject which he is casing. He may learn, for example, that he cheats at cards or that he visits a particular prostitute every Friday night. The GM determines the exact nature of the information, though it must be pertinent to the Investigator's current investigation.

LADY KILLER/FEMME FATALE

You know how to ply your sexuality to get what you want. (Femme Fatale applies to female characters; Lady Killer applies to males.)

- Once per session per level, the Lady Killer/Femme Fatale may treat a partial success or failure on any skill roll (such as Etiquette, Perform, or Fast-Talk) involving seduction, persuasion, or otherwise coaxing a member of the opposite sex as a full success. Furthermore, the TN for all such rolls is reduced by 1 for every time he or she has successfully "seduced" that particular target during the current scenario (minimum 1).

Normally the TN to seduce an NPC is equal to her Moxie plus her Perception, though it should be role-played, and is subject to interpretation (and possible bonuses or penalties) by the GM.

OFFICER OF THE LAW

Officers of the Law work as uniformed police, city detectives, agents of the National Law Enforcement Bureau, and similar positions, as well as judges, lawyers, and court employees. They are expected to keep the peace, enforce the law, prosecute criminals, and gather evidence against suspected wrongdoers. Honest cops, judges, ex-police officers, and meter maids are good examples of Officers of the Law.

- Once per session per level, an Officer of the Law may call for backup and receive aid from 1-6 beat cops. The officers do not normally aid the character except when executing the law.

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION

- **Income:** As long as you're willing to put in 40-hour weeks, you earn \$30 per week per level. In addition, you have accumulated savings of \$500 in cash per level.

PERFORMER

Performers make their living through creative expression and public exhibition. Singers, musicians, and dancers are good examples of Performers.

- Each level of Performer increases the character's Moxie by 1 for the purposes of using the Perform skill. Further, the cost to gain or improve a Perform skill is reduced by 1 per level (minimum 1).

POLITICIAN

The siren call of power is too much for some to resist. Politicians are those who hold or aspire to hold public office... either to make the world a better place, or to enjoy the benefits of privilege and control (usually some combination of both).

- Once per session per level, a Politician may call on a favor from his government and acquire a common item such as a car, a legal document, a piece of evidence, or \$80. The GM should keep in mind that most items gained in this fashion can be traced back to the government, and must be returned or otherwise accounted for.

ROGUE SCIENTIST

The Rogue Scientist not only understands the laws of physics, he has chosen to use his understanding to distort them... becoming a practicing warlock. You're considered a criminal by the powers that be, but your control over the laws of nature more than makes up for the annoying buzz of police sirens.

- Each time a Rogue Scientist purchases a level in this profession, he may choose one scientific skill and gain access to its magical properties. Additionally, each time he purchases a level in this profession, he may increase his chosen skill by 1 without cost (maximum 10).

SOLDIER

You've served your country in the military, either in the war as a draftee, or as a career soldier. Note that this category includes sailors and air force enlistees as well as army soldiers.

The player may choose whether his character served as an officer or an enlisted man.

- The cost to purchase the Evasion skill and the Intimidation skill is reduced by 1 point per level (minimum 1).
- You gain one military-issue personal weapon of your choice (usually a pistol or rifle).

- As long as you put in 40 hours a week — acting as a career soldier — you earn \$20 per week per level. In addition, your room and board is paid for so long as you reside on the base to which you are assigned. Characters who chose not to exercise this option are considered ex-military, may not live on base, and do not draw a salary (though they still gain the other benefits of this profession).

SALUTE SOLDIER!

Characters with more than one level in Soldier have gained ranks in the army, which is reflected in their conduct towards other soldiers. The chart below lists which rank a character holds, or held at the time he left the service.

	ENLISTED RANK	OFFICER'S RANK
1	Private	2 nd Lieutenant
2	Corporal	1 st Lieutenant
3	Sergeant	Captain
4	Staff Sergeant	Major
5	Master Sergeant	Lt. Colonel

STREET TOUGH

Street Toughs hold positions that force them to interact with the lowest dregs of society. They work the seedy side of town, amid crumbling apartments and crime-ridden neighborhoods. As a result, they know how to take care of themselves, and don't flinch at some of the harsh realities of life. Private investigators, beat cops, and snitches are good examples of Street Toughs.

- Once per session per level, a Street Tough may perform one of the following actions: regain consciousness, shrug off the effects of poisoning or intoxication, or, when suffering a wound that would normally result in death, ignore the effects of the wound and instead fall unconscious. You may not take more than one of these actions in a given round.

THIEF

Thieves are simply those who make a habit (or a living) out of taking things that do not belong to them. Pickpockets and cat burglars are good examples of Thieves.

- Once per session per level, a Thief may treat a failed or partially successful Stealth roll as a full success.
- **Income:** As long as you're willing to partake in various questionable activities (like selling stolen goods or helping your friends launder their money) you earn \$10 per week per level. You have also scraped together \$100 per level in loose cash, which you may spend as you wish.

WEALTHY

Perhaps you were born into a wealthy family or maybe you're the head of a crime syndicate. In any case, money isn't a problem for you. In addition to the normal starting money, you begin play with a large house and a staff of several servants (cook, driver, maid, and butler). You also own an expensive car, a vast personal wardrobe, and a number of entertainment and labor-saving devices.

- **Income:** Your investments net you about \$200 per week per level with little or no effort on your part. In addition, you have accumulated a savings of \$10,000 (half in cash, half in stocks and bonds), and own a mansion, estate, or luxury apartment appropriate to your position if you wish. You also have a car of your choice, including a driver if you wish.

WHITE COLLAR WORKER

You have employable skills in a white-collar industry. Maybe you're the owner of a business, a doctor, or a successful entrepreneur.

- Once per session per level, a White Collar Worker may treat a failed or partially successful Bureaucracy roll as a full success.
- **Income:** As long as you're willing to put in 40-hour weeks, you earn \$75 per week per level. In addition, you have accumulated a savings of \$1,000 (half in cash, half in stocks and bonds) per level.

6. STARTING MONEY AND EQUIPMENT

During character creation, each character starts with a number of dollars equal to 20 x his or her Brains, plus an amount equal to his or her weekly income and any savings which he or she has accumulated (as outlined under the appropriate background or profession), which may be used to purchase equipment. The character also starts out with a full set of clothes and a house or apartment appropriate to his personality — with rent paid through to the end of the week. The GM may adjust this if he feels it appropriate (for example, a character who begins the campaign as a homeless person will not have an apartment).

Equipment can play an important part in any character's *Edge of Midnight* adventures. The following generalized list offers a sample of things one might be able to purchase in a given game. Feel free to augment them with other appropriate equipment as you see fit. The Unified Commonwealth, like the United States of the 1940s, uses dollars and cents as currency, though they roughly reflect prices as they existed then, not now (generally speaking, one dollar then bought the same amount as nine or ten dollars now).

COST OF LIVING EXAMPLES

High-class evening wear	\$75
Nice clothing	\$25
Cheap clothing	\$10
Shoes/boots	\$9
Hat	\$10
Postage stamp	\$0.03
Movie ticket	\$0.20
Baseball ticket	\$1
Record player	\$50
Record	\$0.50
Camera	\$5
Hotel room, luxury	\$10 per night
Hotel room, average	\$4 per night
Hotel room, dump	\$1 per night
Apartment	\$50 per month
House, run-down (mortgage)	\$75 per month
House, small (mortgage)	\$100 per month
House, average (mortgage)	\$175 per month
Meal, nice	\$2
Meal, greasy spoon	\$0.50
Pack of cigarettes	\$0.25
Pint of beer	\$0.25
Quart of milk	\$0.25
Medical equipment/first aid kit	\$20
Crowbar	\$4
Lock picks, set	\$2
Stout lock	\$1
Saw	\$4
50 ft. of rope	\$6
Suitcase/steamer trunk	\$10
Flashlight	\$5
Binoculars	\$30
Tool kit	\$8
Dynamite	\$2 per stick
Taxi fare	\$.25-\$3
Cross-country bus pass	\$10
Cross-country train ticket	\$20
Cross-country plane ticket	\$100
Telegram	\$1 per 50 words

VEHICLES

Biplane	\$3,500
Luxury car (Hermes Champion)	\$5,000
Motorcycle (Lancer two-wheeler)	\$200
Roadster, 2 door (Bester Hornet)	\$2,000
Sedan, used 4-door (SSG Thunderbolt)	\$500
Sedan, new 4-door (SSG Thunderbolt)	\$1,000
Truck, commercial	\$2,500

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION

WEAPONS

NAME	COST	BASE RANGE**	SHOT CAPACITY	DAMAGE
Automatic pistol, concealable	\$60	15 feet	4	3d10
Automatic pistol, small	\$60	30 feet	9	4d10
Automatic pistol, large	\$70	30 feet	15	4d10
Pipe gun ("zip gun")	—	15 feet	1	3d10
Revolver, small	\$60	30 feet	6	4d10
Revolver, large	\$70	50 feet	6	5d10
Rifle, hunting	\$100	100 feet	10	5d10
Rifle, sniper's	\$200*	350 feet	10	6d10
Shotgun, break open (scatter gun)	\$80	10 feet	2	6d10–1d10/10 ft.
Shotgun, pump	\$80	10 feet	6	6d10–1d10/10 ft.
Submachine gun	\$300*	45 feet	30–50	4d10
Machine gun	\$900*	60 feet	100 (belt-fed)	5d10
Hand grenade	\$25*	10 feet	N/A	Special***
Brass knuckles****	\$5	0	N/A	As Brawling + 3
Baseball bat/club	\$1	0	N/A	2d10 + Brawn
Knife*****	\$3	10 feet	N/A	1d10 + Brawn
Nunchuks	\$100	0	N/A	1d10 + Brawn
Sai	\$300	10 feet	N/A	1d10 + Brawn
Sword/axe	\$500/\$4	0	N/A	2d10 + Brawn

* This weapon is generally only available through the military. The price listed is its black market cost; use of them outside the military is horrifically illegal.

** The listed number is the weapon's range at which an attack may be made without penalty. The weapon's maximum range is three times the listed distance. Penalties for attacks between the base range and the maximum range can be found on page 43.

*** See page 48, "Explosions."

**** Many improvisational weapons also fall into this category. For example, pistol-whipping someone or hitting them with a roll of nickels in your fist would produce effects similar to using brass knuckles.

***** Shivs, broken bottles, and other improvisational cutting and impaling weapons inflict damage like a knife, but the TN to use them is +1.

See Chapter Two for more information on combat and inflicting damage.

A brief description of vehicles and weapons can be found below (other Cost of Living examples are usually self-explanatory).

VEHICLE DESCRIPTIONS

Biplane: These older model planes are usually used for civilian activities such as crop dusting and air shows. Larger planes, the equivalent of DC-3s, are used for passenger service, and the military has jet fighter prototypes, but neither of these are usually available for purchase.

Luxury Car: This category includes any vehicle which serves mainly as conspicuous consumption, such as a limousine. The Hermes Champion, produced in Central City, is a typical example of a luxury car: often chauffeur-driven, and capable of holding a large number of passengers.

Motorcycle: Used extensively during the war for rapid transport and communication duties, these fast, speedy vehicles are popular with street gangs and those courting a rebellious image. Lancer Motors is the premiere motorcycle manufacturer

of the U.C.; their two-wheel model is typical for bikes of the era, and often emulated by other companies.

Roadster: These are sporty, two-passenger vehicles, designed for pleasure driving and often available with convertible roofs. This type of car also includes professional racing vehicles — anything built for showy speed. The Bester Hornet is a hot little roadster which has recently gained popularity among the young jet-setters of New Eden.

Sedan: These are the workhorse vehicles of the Unified Commonwealth, the equivalent of Packards or Bel Airs in our own world. They're built with plenty of muscle under the hood, and most can seat four or five comfortably. The SSG Thunderbolt is the Model T of the Unified Commonwealth, representing nearly one out of every four automobiles in the country.

Truck: These large vehicles serve to haul freight across country or produce to market; the military uses them as large-scale transportation. They're capable of carrying fifteen people in the bed, or up to one ton of cargo. While very powerful, they often lack maneuverability, and their top speed is hampered by the bulk they often carry.

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WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

Automatic pistol, concealable: These delicate “pop guns,” such as the Robinson Special, are designed to be easily hidden in a purse or garter, much like the Derringers of our world. Most of them are considered “ladies’ guns,” though men often use them as holdout weapons. They have a short range and limited ammo capacity, but can be quite lethal close-up.

Automatic pistol, small: Sleek and deadly, this style of pistol can be conveniently hidden in a waistband or the glove compartment of a car, but provides greater range and fire-power than smaller weapons like the Robinson. The Grenadier Fast-Action, roughly the equivalent of a target pistol in our modern world, is the standard weapon of this type.

Automatic pistol, large: This style of weapon encompasses the largest and most powerful automatic pistols, many used by armies and law-enforcement agencies across the globe. The Mustang standard issue, a 15-shot weapon with good range and stopping power, has served as the standard sidearm of the U.C. military since well before the war.

Revolver, small: Revolvers carry their ammunition in a rotating cylinder, rather than a clip like automatic pistols. Most hold six shots. Small revolvers are usually snub-nosed models — designed for easy concealment and personal defense — and those which fire small-caliber ammunition.

Revolver, large: Large revolvers include police service models, which are carried by most civic law enforcement officials, and even larger “hand cannons” which are often used in hunting. The Drexen Ace is the standard-issue sidearm for police units in all six major U.C. cities.

Rifle, hunting: Civilian-issue rifles are usually bolt-action and manually operated, making them very reliable for hunting and other relatively peaceful endeavors.

Rifle, sniper: These variants of the standard hunting rifle saw widespread use during the war and have since filtered their way into civilian and law enforcement life. They have a longer range than most hunting rifles and are often augmented with scopes and/or bipods for steady firing. Police sharpshooters carry them during special duties when pinpoint accuracy is required, while hit men and assassins use them to dispatch their targets from a safe distance.

Shotguns: Shotguns fire shells, or ammunition comprised of multiple small projectiles. They are devastating at close range, but also very indis-

criminate, and they lose their effectiveness when fired from a distance. Break-open shotguns are comprised of two barrels side-by-side, which may be breech-loaded and cracked open to remove spent shells. Pump action shotguns hold significantly more (usually 6 shots) and may be fired without the constant need for reloading. Sawed-off versions of both weapons, with the barrel and stock cut short, are popular with criminals for their concealable nature.

Due to the indiscriminate ammunition, the TN to hit with a shotgun is always decreased by one. Shotguns deal decreased damage at range. Each 3 feet of distance from the target subtracts 1 from the number of d10 rolled to determine damage.

Submachine gun: Submachine guns are small, shoulder-fired weapons designed for military applications. They may be fired in single-shot or burst modes, allowing them to attack multiple targets at once. Because of this, they were widely used during the war, and gangsters and other criminals have since appropriated them for their own purposes. The 316 carbine was the U.C.’s army-issue submachine gun, and many models can now be found on the city streets, in use by the underworld.

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER CREATION

A submachine gun allows its user to attack up to 3 targets per round as long as they are standing within 6 feet of each other (only the first attack may be modified by a combat maneuver). Using a submachine gun is inherently +2 TN because of the additional recoil associated with fully automatic fire. Characters with a Brawn or Firearms of less than 5 suffer an additional +2 TN to hit when using a submachine gun. Alternately, the character may opt to fire single shots, foregoing the ability to attack multiple opponents and the recoil penalty (though characters with Brawn or Firearms less than 5 still suffer a +2 TN to hit).

Machine gun: Machine guns are fully automatic weapons, designed for use during the war and intended to provide massive firepower against swarming units of infantry. The U.C. Army's famous "Old Sampson" fires 30-caliber ammunition in rapid succession; it is belt-fed and generally unavailable outside the military (though a few criminal elements have gotten their hands on some).

Machine guns cannot fire single shots; their ammo is expended in bursts only. The effects are the same as with submachine guns, above, except that you may attack up to 5 targets standing within 10 feet of each other.

Hand grenade: "Pineapple" grenades — hand-held explosive devices activated by pulling a pin — saw common use during the war and have since flourished in the black market. Each grenade has a three-second fuse and can be easily hidden in a coat pocket. More details on grenades can be found in the "Explosions" section on page 48.

Axe: Axes are chopping or cutting tools with a single broad blade at the end of a lengthy handle. They are not generally used as a combat weapon, though certain brutal gangsters are known to use them as a torture device.

Baseball bat/club: This category includes anything from a bartender's blackjack to the broken-off leg of a chair.

Brass knuckles: Brass knuckles are designed to be wrapped around a person's fist, increasing damage from physical blows. Brass knuckles are used with the Brawling skill rather than the Melee skill.

Knife: Knives are available in a variety of styles and designs. Any bladed or serrated weapon less than twelve inches long is considered a knife. You may throw a knife, but it inflicts Brawn -1 damage when used at range.

Nunchuks/Sai: These represent exotic weapons from foreign cultures, rarely seen in the U.C. Nunchuks are a pair of short sticks joined by a chain, while a sai is a pointed stabbing weapon with guards designed to catch an attacker's blade. They are normally found amid the Tongs and criminal underworld of the U.C.'s Golden (Asian) communities.

Sword: The hey-day of swords has long since passed in the world of *The Edge of Midnight*, and they are now only found in the possession of wealthy collectors (though certain army units still use them for formal ceremonies). They are available in a wide variety of styles, including hidden sword-canes, blunted fencing foils, and exotic foreign models from the Empire of the Golden Sun. Any bladed or serrated weapon longer than twelve inches is considered a sword. All of them use the stats as presented here.

7. SELECT LANGUAGES

Languages in *The Edge of Midnight* are the same as they are in our world, and correspond to the geographical area they represent. In the Unified Commonwealth, for example, most citizens speak English, while in the Borderlands, they speak Spanish, and residents of the Empire of the Golden Sun speak Cantonese. All characters start the game knowing how to speak, read, and write one language of their choice (usually English). It is, however, possible to learn other languages by spending skill points. If you did not use some of the points allotted to skills at character creation, you may spend them to learn additional languages. By spending 1 skill point on a language you can speak it normally. Once you speak a language normally, you may spend an additional point and gain the ability to speak the language without an accent (as a native) or to read and write the language; alternately you may spend 2 additional points to do both.

Languages spoken without an accent may be noted by writing "native" in parenthesis after its entry, while languages which one may read and write may be denoted with a similar "R&W" marking.

For example, a character who could speak German flawlessly would have "German (Native)" written in the appropriate spot on his character sheet, while one who could both speak it flawlessly and read and write it would have "German (Native, R&W)" on his sheet.

8. FILLING OUT YOUR CHARACTER

Finish up any remaining derived stats for your character, such as vigor (which is a measure of Build times 5). Every character receives 5 wounds to start the game. These will be subtracted when the character begins taking serious injury (see page 44 for more).

With stats completed, finalize any personal details about your character. Determine his eye color, his hair color, how he dresses and walks, his name, his place of residence, and any other detail you think is pertinent. Some players like to draw pictures of their characters, while others use photographs of actors or characters in movies. Any aspect that's missing or incomplete — anything you feel you should know about your character before play begins — should be added now.



ADDITIONAL CHARACTER RULES

EXPERIENCE

Experience points measure your character's capacity to grow and change, to learn new things and improve upon already-existing skills. At the end of each game session, the GM should award between 1–5 experience points (xp) which the players may spend on improving their character's abilities. In general, a character should receive 1 experience point for every significant encounter, obstacle, or set-piece he successfully navigated during the session (3 is a good median if you aren't sure).

Experience is spent to improve a character's existing abilities as follows.

Experience Cost

Increase an attribute	current rating x 3
Increase a scientific skill	current rating x 2
Increase a non-scientific skill	current rating x 1
Purchase a new skill	2
Increase the level of a profession by 1	current level x 5
Purchase a new profession	10
Purchase a new background*	5

* After character creation, backgrounds may only be purchased with the GM's approval.

LADY LUCK

The Edge of Midnight is an unforgiving world, but every now and then, Lady Luck smiles and cuts the player characters a little break. The bad guy's gun jams, an important clue reveals itself, or an impossible one-in-a-million stunt comes off exactly as planned. Every session, each player character receives 3 luck dice, d10s, which he may spend whenever he chooses. All luck dice left over at the end of a gaming session are lost. Unless otherwise stated, a player character cannot spend a luck die to affect any other character's roll; they may only spend them to gain something for themselves.

If, during the course of play, the GM feels a player has responded particularly well to an obstacle, found an original way around a problem, or role-played his character in an exceptionally inspiring or entertaining way, then he may give that player an additional luck die. Such dice should be given out sparingly (no more than 1 or 2 per session) and like other luck dice, they vanish at the end of each session.

Luck dice may be spent in one of the following ways:

1) Add to a Die Roll

You may add the roll of a luck die to one other die in any roll you make: either the skill die or the attribute die. You may declare you are using the Luck die at any time, even after the roll is made. The luck die only affects *one* of the two dice made during a roll; it does not affect both. (It can, however, substitute for a skill roll if the character in question doesn't have the skill; see page 16 for more.) If the luck die rolls a natural "0" (or the highest number possible), then the die "explodes," meaning that you re-roll the die and add the result to the previous total. So if you roll a "0" and then re-roll, getting a "3", the total value of the luck die is 13. You may prevent the results of a critical failure by adding to a die roll in this manner. Multiple rolls of "0" continue to explode, so there is no theoretical upper limit to a luck die. For example, if you roll a "0", then roll another "0", then roll a "6", the total value of the luck die is 26.

2) Subtract From an Enemy's Die Roll

When an enemy is attempting to attack you or perform an action which you wish to prevent, you may roll a luck die and subtract the results from either the skill die or the action die of his roll, down to a minimum of 1. The luck die only affects *one* of the two dice made during a roll; it does not affect both. If the luck die rolls a natural "0", then the enemy's die roll is automatically a failure, regardless of what the unaffected die shows.

3) Regain Consciousness

Whenever you are knocked unconscious, you may spend one luck die to immediately regain consciousness. Your vigor total rises to 1 and you may act as normal until your vigor total again drops to 0 or lower.

Whenever you are killed by a blow, you may spend one luck die to avoid being killed. Instead, you are knocked unconscious and remain so until your vigor rises above 0.

Only one Luck die may be spent in this manner per session.

4) Ask for Inspiration

If you're ever stumped about how to proceed, or you need a little "favor," you may spend a luck die and ask the GM for assistance. He is then obligated to provide a hint (no longer than one sentence in length) or allow you to bypass a single minor obstacle through the whims of fortune (for example, maybe the police lose your arrest report, forcing them to release you, or the assassin who's come to kill you accidentally tips you off to his presence, giving you an extra round to react). Such favors are minor (i.e., they cannot involve more than a single incident, or last more than a single round), and the GM may veto any favor which he feels is unduly imbalanced.

5) Other Luck Die Uses

Other abilities and rules may allow you to use luck dice to modify or change the way you use them. These will be listed individually in each rule.



CHAPTER TWO COMBAT AND GAMBLER

™Oh, Jeff, I don't want to die!§

™Neither do I baby, but if I
have to, I'm going to be the
one who dies last.§

- Kathie Moffett (Jane Greer)
and Jeff Bailey (Robert Mitchum),
Out of the Past

COMBAT

This section covers combat, injury and other forms of damage, and healing.

The Edge of Midnight is a dangerous world. Gangsters and criminals prowl the streets, while the threat of murder hangs in the air like mist. You never know who will turn on you, or when a trusted friend may become a hated foe. When the hot lead starts flying, you'd better be ready for it.

TIME AND INITIATIVE

Timing in combat is very important; who acts first can often determine who walks away and who gets carried out in a bag. Because of this, combat is usually divided into recurring rounds; each round lasts approximately three seconds. During each round, the character with the highest Gut may act first, followed by the character with the next highest Gut and so on until everyone has acted. Roll 1d10 to resolve ties, with the highest roll going first. Once all characters take an action, a new round begins. The process is then repeated until the conflict is resolved.

ACTIONS

Every character in combat may take one attack action per round, and one other simple action per round. These actions are all declared simultaneously, and *before* the order of attack is determined. Once they were declared, they may not be altered.

Simple Actions

Simple actions are generally defined as actions which do not harm or otherwise impair another character, and which can be performed in three seconds or less. They include standing up from the prone position, drawing a weapon, dodging an attack, conducting a rapid skill roll, or moving a number of feet equal to 10 plus the character's Smoothness x 2. They can also include non-combat skill rolls if such a roll may be attained in three seconds or less.

If a character chooses to take a simple action, the TN for his attack action increases by +2, as seen under "Taking an Action" listed on the Modifiers in Combat Chart on page 43. If he decides to take the action *before* attacking, he is considered to have -2 Gut for the purposes of determining attack order. A character may take the +2 TN for taking a simple action without declaring what action he is going to take. If he does this, he may use the action at any time during the round. This is often used when a character believes he may have to evade an attack.

For example, Joey the Knife is ambushed in a dark ally. Joey has an Gut of 6 while his attacker has an Gut of 5. Normally, Joey would get to go first, but because he decides to draw his knife before attacking, his Gut of 6 is reduced to 4 for the purposes of determining attack order. During the second round of

combat, Joey decides to yell for his friends. He's still subject to the +2 TN for taking an action but he decides to take his attack before yelling and thus avoids the penalty to his Gut.

Attack Actions

Attack actions are generally defined as any use of a combat skill as defined below. Any attempt to harm, kill, incapacitate, or obstruct another character is considered an attack action.

Characters who do not attack may instead take two simple actions, as described above (at the GM's discretion, this may be modified to include a single simple action which takes up to six seconds or less).

Surprise Attacks

Attacking characters who catch their opponents by surprise may make a surprise attack. To determine if a character is surprised, make a contested roll between the attacker's Smoothness + Stealth and the target's Gut + Perception. If the attacker succeeds, he may take one attack or conduct one free simple action before his opponent is aware of him. After that, combat proceeds normally as described above. If the attacker fails, combat proceeds as normal. Surprise attacks involving multiple combatants on each side may be resolved using the rules on page 18; a success means that all attackers may make a surprise attack. Partial successes are not possible in determining if an attacker surprises his opponent; treat a partial success as a full success.

Holding an Action

When a character's turn to act comes around, he may declare that he is holding his action. He may then take that action any time he chooses after he declared that he was holding it. If a character holds his action past the end of the round, he may act at any time he wishes during the subsequent round, but he still may only act once; unused actions do not "build up" from round to round.

COMBAT SKILLS

Combat skill rolls are resolved exactly like normal skills. The TN for most combat skills is the target's Smoothness, though the specific attribute is cited in the skill's description.

The use of a combat skill is always considered an attack action, unless the GM rules otherwise or a specific stipulation is given.

Partial and Critical Success in Combat

When a combat skill check results in a partial success, the character misjudges his blow (or shot) and hits his victim in a less vital area than intended. In the case of a partially successful attack, the target suffers only half the damage (rounded up) normally dealt by the attack.

Critical success in combat results in your target suffering an additional wound after the attack's normal damage is applied (see page 44). This wound is suffered even if the attack doesn't normally cause enough damage to inflict a wound.

CHAPTER TWO: COMBAT AND DAMAGE

Below is a list of the combat skills used in *The Edge of Midnight*

Brawl

This skill represents a character's ability to fight unarmed.

When making a Brawl attack, roll your Smoothness attribute and your Brawl skill with a TN equal to your opponent's Smoothness attribute. If you succeed, you inflict damage equal to $1d10 + \text{Brawn}$.

Primary Attribute: Brawn/Smoothness.

Partial Success: You strike a glancing blow, which inflicts damage equal to half of what would be dealt by a fully successful attack (rounded up).

Critical Success: Your blow inflicts 1 additional wound on the target, over and above the vigor damage normally inflicted. The effects of this wound are applied before the normal damage is rolled.

Critical Failure: Not only do you fail to injure the target, but your fist connects with a nearby wall or similar hard surface, causing $1d10$ points of vigor damage.

Evasion

This skill represents a character's ability to avoid being hit by dodging, parrying, or jumping behind cover.

When being attacked by a single assailant, you may use Evasion to make his task harder. Doing so constitutes your simple action for the round. In this case, add your Evasion skill to your Smoothness for the purposes of determining the attack's TN. This may only be applied to one attack.

Alternatively you may use *both* your simple and attack actions for the round in an effort to evade multiple attacks. In this case, you may add your Evasion skill to your TN to be hit for the entire round but you may take no other actions aside from movement. Neither form of Evasion works to avoid attacks from characters of whom you are unaware.

In some situations, you may be called upon to roll your Evasion skill as a normal check if you try to dodge in a non-attack situation. For example, running across a crowded street may require an Evasion roll. In these cases, roll your Smoothness Attribute and your Evasion skill, with a TN set by the GM as normal.



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In addition, Evasion may be used if the character is targeted with effects that target the area around them as opposed to targeting them directly (explosions, for example, or indirect magical effects). In these situations, a character with the Evasion skill may make a skill roll using Smoothness to jump out of the radius and avoid injury. The TN to avoid an area effect attack is equal to the number of feet the character must move in order to reach a safe location. Dodging in this fashion requires the character to lose his next attack action.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: You dodge away from the obstacle successfully; however, the effort costs you both your simple action and your attack action. If you are using both your simple and attack action for the round, then the effort costs you another attack action the next round as you pause to get your bearings. You are considered surprised at the start of next round, as if your opponents had succeeded in a contested roll (see page 18 for more).

Critical Success: The Evasion roll does not constitute an action of any sort for this round; you may spend your simple and attack action as normal.

Critical Failure: You freeze like a deer in the headlights. You cannot move or do anything else for the remainder of the round. If you are using both your simple and attack action for the round, then you may not take an attack action next round as you pull yourself together.

Note: By necessity, these results only apply to non-combat situations; use of Evasion during combat does not constitute a roll.

Firearms

This skill represents a character's ability to hit targets with a firearm.

When making a Firearms attack, roll your Smoothness attribute and your Firearms skill with a TN equal to your opponent's Smoothness attribute. If you succeed, you inflict vigor damage equal to that listed for the weapon you're using.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: Your shot wings the target, causing half the damage listed for the weapon (rounded up).

Critical Success: Your shot inflicts one additional wound to the target, over and above the vigor damage normally inflicted. The effects of this wound are applied before the normal damage is rolled.

Critical Failure: Your gun jams, rendering it useless until repaired. It may not be used again during this combat regardless.

Martial Arts

This skill represents a character's ability to use various exotic martial arts. Most martial arts train practitioners in both armed and unarmed combat. Weapon attacks using nunchuks, sai, and certain forms of swords and bladed weapons use this skill. The GM has the final say on what constitutes a martial arts weapon and what constitutes a simple melee weapon.

When making a Martial Arts attack, roll your Smoothness or Gut attribute (your choice) and your Martial Arts skill with a TN equal to your opponent's Smoothness attribute. If you

succeed, you inflict vigor damage equal to that listed for the weapon you're using, or 1d10 + Brawn if unarmed.

In the era of *The Edge of Midnight*, the vast majority of practicing martial artists have Asian roots, from the land across the Columbian Ocean known as the Empire of the Golden Sun. It is possible for non-Asians to learn martial arts, but such instances are extremely rare and require GM approval. You must possess the Exotic Knowledge background in order to take ranks in this skill.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness or Gut/Brawn.

Partial Success: You strike a glancing blow, which inflicts half of the damage which would be dealt by a full successful attack.

Critical Success: Your blow inflicts one additional wound on the target, over and above the vigor damage normally inflicted. The effects of this wound are applied before the normal damage is rolled.

Critical Failure: Not only do you fail to injure the target, but you manage to injure *yourself* in the process, causing 1d10 points of vigor damage.

Melee

This skill represents a character's ability to fight with melee weapons such as knives, swords, and pool cues. This skill applies only to mundane, Western-style melee weapons. More exotic weapons (GM's discretion) use the Martial Arts skill.

When making a Melee attack, roll your Smoothness attribute and your Melee skill, with a TN equal to your opponent's Smoothness attribute. If you succeed, you inflict vigor damage equal to that listed for the weapon you're using.

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: You strike a glancing blow, causing half the weapon's listed damage.

Critical Success: Your blow inflicts one additional wound on the target, over and above the vigor damage normally inflicted. The effects of this wound are applied before the normal damage is rolled.

Critical Failure: Not only do you fail to injure the target, but you manage to injure *yourself* in the process, causing 1d10 points of vigor damage.

Throwing

This skill represents a character's ability to hit targets with thrown projectiles.

When making a Throwing attack, roll your Smoothness attribute and your Throwing skill with a TN equal to your opponent's Smoothness attribute. If you succeed, you inflict vigor damage equal to that listed for the weapon you're using. The base range of a thrown weapon is 10 feet (penalties for throwing an object beyond its base range are covered in the "Modifiers in Combat" table on the next page).

Primary Attribute: Smoothness.

Partial Success: You strike a glancing blow, causing half the weapon's listed damage.

Critical Success: Your blow inflicts 1 wound on the target, over and above the vigor damage normally inflicted. The effects of this wound are applied before the normal damage is rolled.

CHAPTER TWO: COMBAT AND DAMAGE

MODIFIERS IN COMBAT

The following situations increase or decrease the TN to hit with an attack during combat:

CONDITION	MODIFIER
Bad lighting (fighting in a poorly lit ally)	+1 to +2
Heavy rain or fog*	+1 to +2
Unable to see (fighting in the dark or when blinded)	+3
Drunk or similarly incapacitated	+2
Target has:	
10%–25% cover	+1
26%–40% cover	+2
41%–60% cover	+3
61%–80% cover	+4
81%–95% cover	+5
Target is prone	–2
Taking an action	+2
Point blank range (target is less than 3 feet away)	–1
Medium range (target is outside of the weapon's base range)	+1
Long range (target is outside of the weapon's base range x2)	+2
Extreme range (target is outside of the weapon's base range x3)	+3

Note: Range modifications apply only to the Firearms and Throwing skills.

*This normally only applies to ranged combat

Critical Failure: Not only do you fail to injure the target, but you manage to injure *yourself* in the process, causing 1d10 points of vigor damage.

COMBAT MANEUVERS

Combat maneuvers are special feats or abilities which are applied to attack actions. They do not constitute actions in and of themselves; they merely augment already existing actions.

Each time a character attacks, he may choose to use one combat maneuver to augment the action. He must meet the listed prerequisites in order to do so. Additionally, a character may use a second combat maneuver by raising the TN of the attack by 2. A character may not use more than two combat maneuvers during a single attack, nor may he choose the same combat maneuver twice in a single round. The decision to use combat maneuvers is made before the results of the skill check have been determined.

In addition to the combat maneuvers listed below, GMs should feel free to make up their own special combat effects.

Blind Fighting

Prerequisite: Perception 6+.

You may ignore the effects of bad lighting and other types of limited vision.

Deadly Aim

Prerequisite: Firearms 4+ or Throwing 6+ (whichever is applicable).

A successful hit with a Firearms or Throwing attack inflicts an additional 5 points of vigor damage.

Defensive Fighting

Prerequisite: Any combat skill 3+.

Target an opposing character; your TN to be hit by this character next round is increased by 2.

Disarm

Prerequisite: Any combat skill 6+ or Martial Arts 4+.

Instead of doing damage, you may force your opponent to drop any one weapon (or other hand-held object).

Grapple

Prerequisite: Brawl 6+ or Martial Arts 4+.

Instead of doing damage, you may grapple your opponent: holding him fast. Your opponent may attempt to break free by making an opposed Brawl or Martial Arts skill check (using Brawn). While grappled, the opponent may not perform actions other than trying to escape. If you take an action besides holding the grapple, your opponent gains a +2 bonus to his roll to escape.

Haymaker

Prerequisite: Brawl 4+, Martial Arts 6+, or Melee 4+.

A successful hit inflicts 5 additional points of vigor damage.

Leap Up

Prerequisite: Martial Arts 2+ or Athletics 3+.

You do not need to take an action to stand up before attacking, and you may ignore the +2 TN penalty inflicted by Unbalancing Attack.

Lightning Reflexes

Prerequisite: Brawl 8+ or Martial Arts 6+.

You may take an additional attack this round, after making this attack. Your second attack may not benefit from any other combat maneuvers, and you must forego your simple action this round to do it.

Quick Draw

Prerequisite: Firearms 6+, Throwing 6+, or Melee 6+.

You may draw or pick up one weapon before attacking without penalty. This does not constitute an attack action, and it does not apply to weapons which have already been drawn or are being used.

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Sucker Punch

Prerequisite: Brawl 8+ or Martial Arts 6+.

A successful hit with a Brawling or unarmed Martial Arts attack on an opponent who's not expecting the blow (GM's discretion) forces your opponent to make a Build roll with a TN equal to the amount of damage inflicted. If he fails, he's dazed and unable to act in any way during the next round.

Superior Defensive Fighting

Prerequisite: Any combat skill 6+.

Target an opposing character; your TN to be hit by this character next round is increased by 4. Any attacks you make next round are +2 TN.

Unbalancing Attack

Prerequisite: Any combat skill 6+ or Martial Arts 4+.

In addition to inflicting damage, a successful hit causes your opponent to stumble badly. His next action requiring a skill roll is made at +2 TN. He may forgo his next attack action to cancel the effects of this ability.

A COMPLETE LIST OF COMBAT MANEUVERS

Blind Fighting
Deadly Aim
Defensive Fighting
Disarm
Grapple
Haymaker
Leap Up
Lightning Reflexes
Quick Draw
Sucker Punch
Superior Defensive Fighting
Unbalancing Attack

DAMAGE

This section covers damage to characters, unconsciousness, and dying

VIGOR AND WOUNDS

Every character starts with an amount of *vigor* equal to his Build times 5. (This amount increases whenever a character increases his Build through experience and the like; it does not normally decrease, however.) Vigor represents the character's ability to avoid injury, either by shrugging off pain or avoiding being struck entirely. Losing vigor represents growing exhaustion as much as physical injury. As his vigor drops, he becomes more fatigued and the chances of getting seriously hurt increases.

Damage is always reflected by a reduction in the character's vigor. This is sometimes referred to as "vigor damage," though not always.

If an attack inflicts damage less than the character's current vigor, it is considered an inconsequential hit (although it's likely to produce some cosmetic damage like a bruise or a shallow cut). Subtract that number from the character's current vigor.

When an attack inflicts damage equal to or greater than a character's remaining vigor, he suffers one *wound*. Upon suffering a wound, the character's vigor immediately resets to its normal maximum (i.e., the amount it would be if the character were totally unhurt). Wounds represent actual physical damage, rather than near-misses or superficial cuts. Every character has 5 wounds; this number cannot normally be increased or decreased. A character who suffers even one wound has been significantly hurt and will probably require medical

attention. Each wound immediately reduces the character's Brawn, Build, and Smoothness by 1. This reduction remains in effect until the wound heals; it cannot reduce a character's attribute below 1.

Furthermore, it is possible for a particularly damaging attack to inflict more than 1 wound. Subtract the amount of damage needed to cause the target a wound; if the remaining damage is equal to or greater than the target's new vigor total, he suffers another wound. Repeat this process until the remaining damage is reduced below the target's current vigor.

Example 1

Billy has a Build of 4, and thus 20 vigor. Stan shoots him point blank with a shotgun, dealing 6d10 damage. The roll yields 44 points of damage. This is greater than 20, so 1 wound is dealt. Billy's Build is now 3, and there is 24 damage remaining. As the remaining damage is more than 20, he takes another wound. Billy's Build is now 2 and there is 4 damage remaining. This damage is less than Billy's vigor, so he only loses 4 additional vigor, putting his current total at 16. He'd better start trying to get away.

Example 2

Billy has a Build of 8, and thus 40 vigor. Stan shoots him with the shotgun again, but only does 25 points of damage. This is not enough to deal a wound, but Billy still loses 25 vigor, reducing his total to 15.

DAMAGE

Damage in *The Edge of Midnight* — that is, injury to a character reflected by a loss in vigor and/or wounds — can be further divided into two types: blunt damage and lethal damage. Blunt damage is caused by things like baseball bats, fists and



CHAPTER TWO: COMBAT AND DAMAGE

HURTING FLUNKIES

For minor or supporting NPCs (i.e., “faceless mooks” or flunkies) GMs may wish to stipulate that the loss of a single wound is sufficient to knock them unconscious or kill them. This expedites the combat process, though it also makes things easier for the player characters. If the GM chooses this option, then major NPCs or those who will play an ongoing part in the campaign should still lose vigor and suffer wounds as normal.

falling down, which — in the context of the game — are not normally life-threatening. Lethal damage is most often caused by deadly weapons like knives or guns, but can occasionally result from extreme situations. For example, falling drunkenly off the porch would cause blunt damage but falling off the roof of a building onto a pile of railroad spikes will cause lethal damage. The GM has the final say as to whether damage is lethal or blunt.

Blunt Damage

When an attack causing blunt damage reduces a character to 0 wounds, he is knocked unconscious until his vigor rises to its current maximum (through healing or some other effect). Other characters may declare that they are killing an unconscious character by conducting an attack action against him. This action is automatically successful unless the GM stipulates otherwise, or something prevents the attacker from striking.

Lethal Damage

Lethal damage works the same way as blunt damage, with two exceptions. First and foremost, when an attack causing lethal damage reduces a character's wounds to 0, he is killed instead of being knocked unconscious unless someone with the medical skill is able to stabilize him within two minutes (Brains + Medicine roll, TN 10; the GM may increase the TN in cases of severe trauma). Characters who suffer lethal damage after their wounds have been reduced below 0 die immediately. Stabilized characters remain unconscious until their vigor rises to its current maximum.

Secondly, any time an attack inflicts more lethal damage than the character's maximum vigor (not his current vigor), he must make a Build roll with a TN equal to 20% of the amount of vigor damage taken from the attack (rounded down). If he fails the roll, he is knocked unconscious for 1–10 rounds. If the attack inflicted more vigor damage than the target's maximum vigor x 2, he is knocked unconscious for 1–10 hours.

DAMAGING OBJECTS

Inanimate objects can be damaged just like flesh and blood. Every object has a vigor rating, just like a person, and a toughness rating, based on a combination of its thickness and overall density. When an object's vigor reaches 0, it is considered destroyed. Any object with a toughness rating of 4 or higher

has that toughness rating added to any TN to hit it. If the roll exceeds the normal TN to hit the object, but does *not* exceed the TN plus the toughness rating, then the blow is considered to have struck the object (or glanced off) but not penetrated it. Objects with a toughness of less than 3 are considered too malleable to avoid damage in this manner. A list of sample toughness ratings is included below. These numbers can be adjusted by use of Tensile magic, as described on page 58.

OBJECT	TOUGHNESS	VIGOR
Handkerchief	2	5
Book	3	10
Wooden box	4	25
Cane or baseball bat	6	30
Knife	6	40
Chain	6	40
Tire rubber	6	50
Padlock/door hinges	7	50
Pistol	7	60
Rifle or shotgun	7	75
Wooden doorway	7	75
Fire escape	8	75
Automobile part (engine or car door)	8	125
Standard wall (drywall)	9	125
Brick/stone wall	10	175
Steel safe	9	175
Vault door	10	200

EXAMPLE OF COMBAT

Jonas Griffon and Detective Smith have cornered two of Jack Drago's gang on an abandoned pier. The fight is on.

SURPRISE ATTACK

Our heroes have the drop on the gangsters, and have the opportunity to effect a surprise attack. Smith is taking the lead, so he rolls Smoothness (7) + Stealth (5). The attribute roll is a “6”, for a total of 13; the skill roll is a “4”, for a total of 9. Because Griffon is involved in the roll, +2 is added to each, for a total of 15 and 11. Gangster #1 rolls his Gut (6) + Perception (4), rolling an “8” and a “2”, respectively. His attribute total is 15, and his skill total is 6; +2 is added to each because of gangster #2's presence, for a total of 17 (attribute) and 6 (skill). The result is a partial success; because Smith's total (27) is higher than the gangsters' total (23), he is the winner and may take a surprise attack, along with Griffon.

Smith throws a punch at gangster #1: Smoothness (7) + Brawl (4). Gangster #1's Smoothness is a “7”, which becomes the TN of the roll. Smith's attribute roll is a “2” and the skill roll is a “1”, for a total of 9 and 6: a partial success. He rolls for damage and gets a “5”, adding his Brawn of 5 (for a total of 10) and divided by 2 (for a final total of 5). Gangster #1 suffers 5 points of vigor damage, reducing his vigor from 25 to 20.

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Griffon spends his free action drawing his pistol. He's now ready to shoot it out with gangster #2, whose pistol is already drawn.

ROUND 1

Griffon has a Gut of 7, Smith a Gut of 6. Gangster #1 has a Gut of 6 and gangster #2 a Gut of 4. Smith wishes to use his simple action before attacking, so his Gut is reduced by 2 to 4; gangster #1 does the same, as does gangster #2 (reducing his Gut to 2). Smith and gangster #1 roll to see who goes first. Smith gets a "3", gangster #1 gets a "5". Griffon goes first, followed by gangster #1, then Smith, then gangster #2.

Griffon fires his heavy revolver at gangster #2. The gangster is using his simple action to try and evade him. Gangster #2 is within 50 feet of Griffon, so there is no penalty to the shot. The TN of Griffon's shot is thus gangster #2's Smoothness (5) + Evasion (4) or 9. Griffon's Smoothness is 5 and his Firearms is 6. He rolls a "7" for his attribute and a "5" for his skill. Both meet or exceed the TN, so the shot is a full success. The damage roll (5d10) is 33; gangster #2 has a vigor of 30, so he takes a wound (dropping his total to 4), and the remaining 3 points are applied to his vigor. His physical stats now drop 1, and his current vigor is now 27.

Gangster #1 uses the Quick Draw combat maneuver to draw a knife and stab Detective Smith: a roll of Smoothness (7) + Melee (6). Smith opts to spend his simple action and evade, making the TN his Smoothness (7) + Evasion (8) — a total of 15. 2 more is added to the TN because gangster #1 spent his simple action, for a final total of 17. He rolls and gets a "7" for his attribute die (total of 14) and a "9" for his skill die (total of 15). No luck for him.

Smith tries to punch his opponent again, now attempting to deliver a Haymaker as a combat maneuver. Gangster #1 wishes to evade, so the TN is his Smoothness (7) + Evasion (5) + 2 because Smith used his simple action, for a total TN of 14. Smith rolls Smoothness (7) + Brawl (4). His attribute roll is a "8" (total of 15) and his skill roll is a "0" (total of 14), so he scores a full success. His damage roll is an "8", plus 4 for his Brawn, plus 5 for the Haymaker, for a total of 17. Gangster #1's vigor drops from 20 to 3.

Finally, gangster #2 fires his light automatic pistol at Griffon. Griffon has chosen not to take a simple action, so the TN is equal to his Smoothness of 5. Gangster #2 has a Smoothness of 4 and a Firearms of 5. His attribute roll is an "8" (total of 12) and his skill roll is an "8" (total of 13) — a critical success! The damage roll is 23, reducing Griffon's vigor from 30 to 7, and the critical success inflicts an additional wound. Griffon winces from a painful shoulder injury.



ROUND 2

Griffon wishes to attack before he takes a simple action, so he goes first. Smith elects not take a simple action before he attacks, leaving his Gut at 6. Gangster #1 wants to take an action first, so he suffers a -2 penalty to his Gut, reducing it to 4. Gangster #2 is taking a simple action as well, reducing his Gut to 2. The order of attack is Griffon, Smith, gangster #1, gangster #2.

Griffon, concerned about the shot he just took from gangster #2's gun, so he's going to use a Disarm combat maneuver in an attempt to shoot the pistol out of his hand. Gangster #2 is continuing to evade, so the TN is his Smoothness (4) + Evasion (4), or 8. In addition, +2 is being added to the respective TNs, since Griffon wants to use a simple action later in the round, so the total TN is 10. Griffon's Smoothness is now 4, and his Firearms is still 6. He rolls a "2" (totaling 6) and a "4" (totaling 10): a partial success. The GM rules that the shot causes half damage, and does not disarm gangster #2. The damage roll is 25, divided by 2 and rounded up to 13. Gangster #2's vigor drops to 14.

Smith continues pounding on gangster #1, who wishes to evade. He rolls Smoothness (7) and Brawl (4), against gangster #1's Smoothness (7) + Evasion (5), or 12. The attribute roll is "9" (totaling 16), and the skill roll is "5" (totaling 9); a partial success. The damage roll is "4", plus Smith's Brawn of 4 — totaling 8 — divided by 2 for a total damage of 4. Gangster #1's vigor drops from 3 to 0 — he takes a wound — then resets to 25. There's still a point of damage left, so his vigor drops an additional point to 24. Gangster #1 now has 4 wounds, and his physical attributes each drop a point.

Gangster #1 now continues his knife attack. Smith cannot evade, as he did not elect to take his simple action, so the TN is only his Smoothness of 7 + 2 since gangster #1 took

CHAPTER TWO: COMBAT AND DAMAGE

a simple action, for a total of 9. Gangster #1 currently has a Smoothness of 6, and a Melee of 6. His attribute roll is “3” (totaling 9) and his skill roll is “6” (totaling 10), a full success. He rolls a “9” for damage, adding his Brawn of 4 for a total of 13. Smith’s vigor is reduced from 25 to 12 as he suffers a shallow cut along his arm.

Gangster #2 now takes aim at Griffon, who is attempting to evade. The TN is 11, combining Griffon’s Smoothness of 4 with his Evasion of 5, plus the 2 added for taking a simple action. Gangster #2 has a Smoothness of 4 and a Firearms of 5. He rolls, and the dice come up double “1s” — a critical failure! The gun jams and is now inoperative for the remainder of the combat.

ROUND 3

Griffon opts not to use a simple action, so he will act first. All three of the others wish to use simple actions before attacking, so all three suffer a -2 Gut. Smith and gangster #1 roll to break the initiative. Smith rolls a “4” and gangster #1 rolls a “4”. They roll again; this time, Smith rolls a “2” and gangster #1 rolls a “5”. The order of attack is Griffon, gangster #1, Smith, gangster #2.

Griffon fires his gun again before gangster #2 can switch weapons. Gangster #2 opts not to evade, saving his simple action to drop his useless gun and draw another one. The TN is 4, matching gangster #2’s Smoothness. Griffon’s Smoothness is 4 and his Firearms is 6; he rolls a “3” for his attribute and a “4” for his skill. Not great, but good enough for a full success. He rolls damage and gets a staggering “42” on 5d10. Gangster #2 loses 27 vigor and drops another wound, then loses an additional 16 vigor on top of that, leaving him with 3 wounds and 14 vigor. Furthermore, because the damage was lethal and inflicted more than Gangster #2’s maximum vigor of 30, he must now make a Build roll with a TN of 8, which is 20% of the damage roll of “42”. He rolls a “2”, which, when added to his current Brawn of 4, totals only 6. He is immediately knocked unconscious for 1d10 rounds.

Gangster #1 spends his simple action dropping his knife, which isn’t slowing Smith down much, and uses the Quick Draw combat maneuver to draw and fire a light automatic pistol. Smith is evading, so the TN is his Smoothness (7) + Evasion (5) + 2 (since the hoodlum wishes to use a simple action, for a total of 14). Gangster #1 has a Smoothness of 6 and a Firearms of 6; He rolls a “7” on his attribute die (totaling 13), and a “5” on his skill die (totaling 11). A clean miss.

Smith now attempts to Disarm gangster #1, preventing him from using his weapon. His Smoothness is 7 and his Brawl is 4, rolled against a TN of gangster #1’s Smoothness (which is 6) + 2 for taking a simple action, for a total TN of 8. He rolls a “1” for his attribute (totaling 8) and a “3” for his skill (totaling 7). The “1” is automatically considered a failure, but his skill roll succeeds, resulting in a partial success. The GM rules as he did previously: the blow causes half damage and the gun is not knocked away. Smith rolls a “6” for damage, added to his Brawn of 4 for 10, and then halved for 5. Gangster #1’s vigor drops to 19.

ROUND 4

Griffon wishes to spend his simple action before attacking, in order to cross the distance to gangster #1. His Gut is lowered to 5, putting him below Smith and gangster #1. Gangster #1, however, wishes to use his simple action first, since he will now need to evade two attackers. Smith, too, wishes to use his simple action first. Their Gut is now both 4. They must again roll to determine initiative. Smith rolls a “9”, gangster #1 rolls a “2”. The order of action is Griffon, Smith, gangster #1.

Griffon spends his simple action to leap at gangster #1 and lock him in a grapple. Gangster #1, attempting to escape, spends his entire action on evading. The TN is his Smoothness (6) + Evasion (5), or 11. An additional +2 is added, since Griffon has used his simple action. The TN is thus an imposing 13. Griffon rolls his Smoothness (4) and Brawl (6); he opts to add a luck die to the Smoothness rolls, since it will be difficult to succeed otherwise. The attribute roll is a “4”, the skill roll is an “8”, and the luck die is a “6”. The attribute total is 14 (4+4+6), while the skill total is also 14 (6+8). Jonas has grappled gangster #1 and now holds him in a bind!

Smith is ready to end things, and draws his gun, then spends a second simple action to put it against gangster #1’s temple. “Playtime is over,” he growls. The GM allows him to make an Intimidation check, and rules that the TN will be only 5, since gangster #1 is now alone and held fast. The TN is raised +2 to 7, since the gangster has Intimidation too. Smith’s Moxie is 6 and his Intimidation is 7; He rolls a “3” and a “5”, respectively, resulting in an easy full success. Gangster #1 thinks better of resisting and allows the two men to cuff him. Combat is over.

NON-COMBAT DAMAGE

FIRE

Damage caused by fire reduces a character’s vigor by 2d10 points per 10% of his or her body covered by fire (minimum 1 point). If left unchecked, the fire will engulf an additional 10% of the character’s body each round. For example, if a character’s hand is on fire, his vigor is reduced by 2d10 on the first round and the fire spreads up his arm. On the second round, his vigor is reduced by an additional 4d10 points, and the fire spreads to his upper torso etc. Fire always causes lethal damage.

A character exposed to open flame runs the risk of catching on fire. He must make a Smoothness roll, TN 8, or else 10% of his body is set alight and he suffers damage as above. The following round, he may make another Smoothness roll (still TN 8). Success indicates that he has doused the flames; otherwise the fire spreads and he suffers damage as above. This process continues until either the fire is out, or the character dies. Application of a bucket of water, fire extinguisher, or the like adds +2 to the roll. Jumping in any body of water larger than a bathtub automatically douses the flames.

Chemical fires (like gasoline fires) inflict twice as much damage as natural fires, at the GM’s discretion.

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EXPLOSIONS

Explosions usually deal 1d10 points of vigor damage in their primary blast radius and half as much (rounded down) in their secondary blast radius. The primary radius of an explosion depends on its strength. Examples can be found on the chart below. The secondary radius is the same size as the primary radius, beginning from the limit of the primary radius's effect.

Most of the time, explosions do lethal damage in their primary blast radius and blunt damage in their secondary blast radius. The exception would be the hand grenade and similar weapons (which produce large amounts of shrapnel), in which case all damage is lethal.

EXPLOSIVE	PRIMARY RADIUS	SECONDARY RADIUS
Gunpowder	0–3 feet	3.1–6 feet
Molotov cocktail	0–5 feet	5.1–10 feet
Stick of dynamite	0–6 feet	6.1–12 feet
Hand grenade*	0–10 feet	10.1–20 feet
Dynamite bundle	0–20 feet	20.1–40 feet

*All damage is considered lethal.

FALLING

When falling, characters suffer 1d10 points of vigor damage for every 5 feet they fall. Falling damage can be either blunt or lethal, depending on where the character lands. Soft landings (i.e., a mattress, an awning or the like) deliver blunt damage, while hard landings (pavement) deliver lethal damage. The GM has the final say on which constitutes which.

DROWNING

Characters may safely hold their breath for one minute per 3 points of Build they possess. Characters with the Athletics skill above 3 can hold their breath for an additional minute beyond that. Each round after this time has elapsed, the character must make a Build roll with a TN of 1 + the number of Build rolls he's already made. If he fails a roll, he inhales water and begins to drown. Each round thereafter, the character loses 1 point of Build. A character whose Build reaches 0 in this fashion loses consciousness and will die within 5 minutes unless his lungs are cleared of water and he's resuscitated (usually requiring a Medical skill roll, TN 5). Once revived, the character's Build will return to normal after 15–30 minutes of rest.

VEHICLE CRASHES

A crash usually causes 1d10 points of blunt damage per 10 miles per hour the vehicle is traveling. Protective gear can mitigate this damage at the GM's discretion (note that seat belts and other safety innovations do not normally exist in *Edge of Midnight* automobiles).

When figuring crash damage, be sure to figure relative speed. For example, if a character is moving 60 miles per hour and collides with an object moving 50 miles per hour in the same direction, the relative speed is only 10 miles per hour so he would take very little damage. If on the other hand he had a head on collision with the same car, his relative speed would be 110 miles per hour.

POISON

Poisons can have a variety of effects, depending on what purpose they serve (which can be found on the chart below). For simplicity's sake, we have divided them into three basic types: contact, ingested, and knock-out. Contact poison is generally delivered by touch, or in gaseous form; ingested poison is swallowed or taken with food; knock-out poison is non-lethal and is usually used to render someone unconscious. The effects described can be modified by specific type as the GM wishes.

Each poison has three attributes: its initial effect (including the time it begins), continuing or secondary effects (including how long such effects last), and the TN required on a simple Build roll in order to resist the effects for a given period. These details are on the table below. Again, these numbers can be adjusted for particular types of poison.

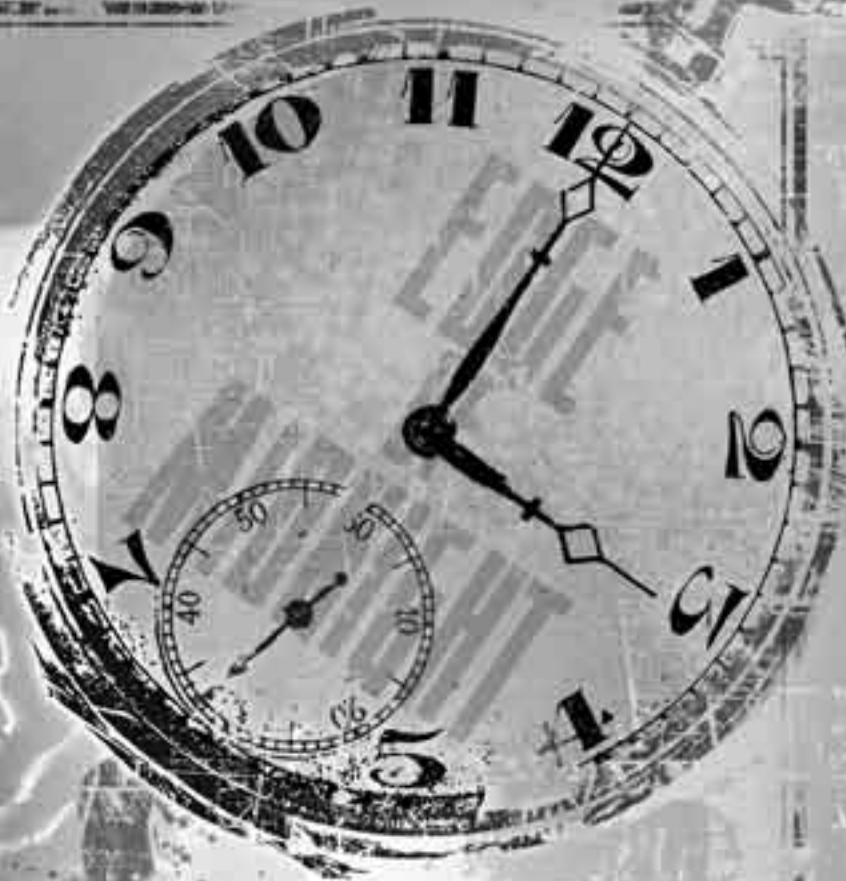
HEALING

Every hour, a character may make a Build roll with a TN of 6 in order to regain 1d10 vigor points. Additionally, every second day, a character may make a Build roll with a TN of 6 to heal one wound. Characters with the Medicine skill can aid the healing process (see page 22). Injured characters in a hospital or other facility automatically receive the benefits of a successful Medicine skill check once each day.

POISONS AND THEIR EFFECTS

TYPE	INITIAL EFFECT	CONTINUING EFFECT	TN TO RESIST
Contact	1d10/2 wounds (rounded up)	1 wound per hour	10; 1 check per 15 minutes
	(2 minutes after exposure)	until poison is cleared	
Ingested	1d10/2 wounds (rounded up)	1 wound per hour	12; 1 check per 10 minutes
	(10 minutes after exposure)	until poison is cleared	
Knock-out	Unconsciousness lasting 1d10 hours (1 round after exposure)	None	10; 1 check upon exposure

CHAPTER THREE MAGIC



TM Los Angeles, 1948.
Everybody used magic.}

- Opening Title,
Cast a Deadly Spell

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This section covers the rules for practicing magic. Further details can be found in Chapter Five

“Magic” in *The Edge of Midnight* differs from the term as used in other role-playing games. Here, it is an extension of pure science, relying upon grounded principles of physics and engineering. However, while such principles are generally solid in *The Edge of Midnight* universe, they are not absolute... meaning that they can be broken if one tries hard enough. Loopholes exist — “short cuts” along the edges of scientific knowledge — that allow warlocks to defy the laws of physics just as they would any mundane societal law. The more one knows about science in this universe, the more one can circumvent its otherwise-immutable boundaries. This process is referred to as magic.

SCIENTIFIC (MAGICAL) SKILLS

There are six scientific skills in *The Edge of Midnight*, representing the specific fields required to create magic. Any character may use scientific skills to conduct mundane research (discussed below), to resist magical effects (discussed on page 51), or to detect the use of magical effects (discussed on page 62). However, only characters with the Rogue Scientist profession or the Magical Aptitude background may actually use them to create magical effects, for only they have learned to bend the laws of physics sufficiently. Any time such a character learns a scientific skill, he gains the ability to create magical effects with it.

Any character may use scientific skills in a mundane fashion: they simply roll the skill normally. For example, a character trying to write a research paper on the effects of gravity would use a Gravity skill roll, as he would with any other skill (see pages 15–18). Effects for partial successes, critical successes, and critical failures in these instances should be treated as they would for the Lore skill.

When attempting to create magical effects with scientific skills, characters still roll normally as outlined in the skill section (pages 15–18), but the following rules apply:

- Scientific skills used to create magic are always based on the Brains attribute.
- The TN to use a scientific skill to generate a magical effect is equal to the level of the intended effect + 3. For example, if a character is trying to make himself float, he will need to use the Gravity skill at power level 6 (see page 55). The TN to create this effect would be 9 (6+3). The player can create a higher level of effect than is required (for instance, generating a Gravity effect at power level 8 when he only needs a power level 6), but the TN will be higher as well.
- Magic-using characters may attempt to generate an effect higher than their current skill level but it is extremely dangerous. Any failure in such an instance is treated as a critical failure. Partial success is handled normally. They may not attempt to generate a magical effect using a skill they do not possess.

- Magic use in combat is broken down as follows: an effect which is intended to harm another person (either directly or indirectly) is considered an attack action. All other effects are considered simple actions.
- Two or more warlocks may “stack” magical effects upon a single subject, so long as those effects are generated by different scientific skills. For instance, one warlock may lift a car off the ground (Gravity), while another can turn its tires to dust (Tensile). Each warlock rolls to generate his specific effect, with success determined normally.
- Two or more warlocks attempting to affect the same subject with the same scientific skill may not “stack” their effects (a warlock with a Gravity of 3 and one with a gravity of 2 could not combine their abilities to produce a level 5 effect, for example). Instead, they make a contested roll, as described on page 18. The winner generates the pertinent effect; the loser generates nothing. This may be used to disrupt an ongoing effect if the succeeding warlock wishes.
- A single warlock may not normally generate more than one effect at any time (and therefore may not combine effects from different scientific skills). All effects must remain within the limits dictated by each skill. For example, one warlock may increase the weight of a car by 4,000 pounds (Gravity). Another warlock may attempt to return its weight to normal (prompting a contested roll), but he could not increase the car’s weight to 8,000 pounds, since it expands beyond the known boundaries of Thermal magic.

Specific descriptions of each scientific skill begin on page 53.

RANGE OF MAGIC

As powerful as magic is, it isn’t all-encompassing, nor can it be performed without specific limitations. Most importantly, a warlock must be present for any magical effect he or she generates. The range of any roll used to create a magical effect is equal to the skill being used times 10 in feet from the warlock’s current location. The area of effect is a sphere with a radius equal to the skill being used in feet (or a total diameter equal to the skill x 2 in feet). This radius can be lessened as the user sees fit, and can affect as many or as few objects within that area as the user’s skill allows. For example, someone with a Gravity skill of 5 could reduce the weight of every object within a 5 ft. radius. Alternatively, he could make a single paperclip within that radius float.

If more than 50% of an object is inside the radius of a magical effect, the object falls under the magic’s effects. It is not possible to affect part of an object; it is either entirely affected or not affected at all. For example, if a man’s foot was inside the radius, but the remainder of his body was outside the radius, he would not be affected by the magic.

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC

This rule is rescinded if the object in question is larger than the total area of effect (i.e., buildings, streets, mountaintops, etc.) In this case, all of the material within the area of effect is affected, but the remainder is not (allowing the warlock, if sufficiently powerful, to tear holes in walls, rip up street pavement, and the like).

Objects which enter an area of effect may be affected as if they were within the area when the magical effect was enacted. For example, a bullet fired into an area which is being affected by Kinetic magic could slow down or speed up at the casting warlock's whim.

When an object consists of multiple pieces — such as a car, which contains multiple components operating in sync — the GM decides whether it constitutes several objects or just one single object. For instance, a warlock might affect the tires of a car without affecting the entire car, since they could logically constitute multiple distinct objects, but a radio would likely be considered just a single object, and therefore could not be affected on circuit-by-circuit or tube-by-tube basis. Logic, common sense, and good gaming practices should prevail. A good rule of thumb is that if it demonstrates imagination or makes the game more interesting, it should be allowed. Worn clothing (including belts, shoes, and small objects carried in one's pocket) is considered part of the wearer for the purposes of magic rules.

When using magical skills, warlock characters must be able to physically see or touch the center of the area they wish to target. If they wish to affect an individual object, then they must be able to see that object. If they are unable to do this (because they have ducked around a corner, fallen unconscious, etc.), any magical effects they are generating immediately cease.

Similarly, any object which leaves the area of effect or the warlock's effective range immediately loses any unusual qualities which it may have held. For example, a book made heavier by gravity magic will lighten upon leaving the area of effect; to affect it again requires bringing it within range, and making a new Brains + Gravity roll. Objects in motion will remain in motion once they leave the area of effect (i.e., a thrown rock given increased velocity by Kinetic magic will retain that velocity after it leaves the area of effect), but it cannot be otherwise altered or affected until it is brought back within the warlock's range.

THE EFFECTS OF MAGIC

Living beings tend to resist magic better than inanimate objects for reasons as yet unknown by warlocks. Some believe that the field generated by live cells somehow restricts magical forces. Others believe that it's psychosomatic, and a living target's innate understanding of the laws of physics helps keep him or her "grounded." Whatever the reason, it makes unwilling humans difficult to affect with magic.

DAMAGE FROM MAGIC

This innate resistance can most clearly be seen when a magical effect threatens to injure a living being. The damage a character takes when caught in the effect of magic is considerably less than what is normally suffered by inanimate objects. The default damage in vigor for any magical attack targeting a living being is a number of d10 equal to the level of the effect generated minus 3 (minimum 1). Note that this applies only to magic effects targeting another character directly. An indirect attack, such as a brick hurled through use of Kinetic magic, would still cause damage as appropriate. See page 44 for more on vigor and damage.

Similarly, attacks against a living being which are meant to inconvenience, rather than harm, act as if the warlock's pertinent skill were 3 levels lower. For example, a warlock using Gravity magic to pull a charging character off the ground would require a Gravity level of 9 to affect him, rather than the 6 which would be sufficient to affect an equivalent amount of inanimate matter.

OTHER EFFECTS

Effects which don't directly affect a living being should use the power level as a guideline for the kind of effect which can be generated. For example, if you use Kinetic magic to alter the direction of a bullet, the damage dealt by the bullet is reduced by the power level of your effect.

Contested rolls should always use the power level of the effect being generated. For example, if a warlock tries to yank a gun out of another character's hand with Magnetism, the resulting contested roll uses the target's Brawn and the warlock's Magnetism.

A living being's innate resistance to magic is generally considered automatic but it can be consciously overcome. If a character deliberately allows him- or herself to be affected by magic, then the effects take place as normal.

In addition to the innate resistance of living beings, anyone who possesses the same scientific skill which the warlock is using to generate the effect can attempt to stop him. A character with 1 point in the pertinent scientific skill can increase the TN of the skill check by 1. Characters with a skill equal to half the warlock's skill or greater can increase the TN by 2 and characters with a skill equal to or greater than the warlock's may increase the TN by 4. Attempting to stop a character from using magic in this way requires a simple action, as outlined on page 40. It is not necessary for a character to know what magical skill is being used. A character only needs to declare whom he is trying to stop and all of his scientific skills are taken into account if his target attempts to use a magical skill as his next action.

Damaging Inanimate Objects with Magic

Damaging a non-intelligent, non-living object with magic can often produce considerably more spectacular effects. To determine damage against non-intelligent targets, roll a number of d10 equal to the level of the effect generated multiplied by 1 to 3 depending on how powerful the effect is:

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LEVEL OF THE EFFECT	DAMAGE MULTIPLIER TO INANIMATE OBJECTS
1–3	x1
4–6	x2
7–10	x3

Note that only Tensile magic affects an object's toughness (see page 58 for details). Other magic must overcome an object's toughness before damaging it. However, instead of adding the toughness rating to the TN of the magic roll (as you would do when attempting to damage an object normally), subtract it from the number of dice rolled to determine damage. If the result is 0 or less, the object is not damaged by the magical effect.

Some magical effects merely augment or redirect a source of damage that already exists. In these cases, the GM determines how much damage the normal situation inflicts and increases that by the power level of the magical effect. In certain situations, the pre-existing source of damage can affect the type of damage dealt as well. For example, a warlock could use the Kinetics skill to increase the speed of a thrown knife, and the target would take damage equal to the effect's level in addition to the damage normally dealt by the weapon.

CONTINUING AND CHANGING EFFECTS

Successful magic effects can be maintained as long as the warlock does not lose line of sight with the center of the target area and continues to concentrate (i.e., does not take any other actions; characters may *not* perform attack actions while maintaining magical effects.) This doesn't apply to direct damage; the warlock must make a new skill roll each time he wishes to directly damage (as opposed to just affect) an object with magic.

If the character stops concentrating, then the standard laws of physics reassert themselves, and the affected objects will act accordingly. Effects will linger only so long as they are supported by the standard laws of physics. For example, a car affected by gravity magic will instantly return to its heavy state, while an object superheated through thermal magic — though remaining hot — will instantly begin to be cooled by the surrounding temperature.

A character can force another character to lose concentration by making a contested Perform or Intimidation roll. The warlock rolls the appropriate scientific skill to defend against this. A warlock who loses any wounds or vigor points automatically loses concentration, regardless of any other conditions.

If the warlock wants to redirect the effect or change any of its parameters he must re-roll the required skill. If the roll succeeds (including partial success), the magical effect is maintained continuously and shifts to its new parameters. If the roll fails, then the entire effect is immediately cancelled and the laws of physics return to normal. Critical successes and failures may be dealt with as the GM feels appropriate.

PARTIAL SUCCESS AND MAGIC

Partial success tends to be more dangerous when generating magical effects. With a normal skill, a partial success may cause some minor problem for the character, but with magic,

unexpected targets explode, crushing waves of gravity tear apart city streets and lightning bolts arc between lampposts. To make matters worse, the use of magic is illegal in *The Edge of Midnight*, and stunning light shows tend to draw unwanted attention.

If the warlock fails his attribute (Brains) roll, but succeeds at his skill roll, his skill is halved for the purposes of determining area of effect and range. In some cases this may be inconsequential. For example, someone with the Gravity skill of 8 who tries to make the teacup next to him float will not have a problem achieving the effect, even if his skill is effectively reduced to 4 (a tea cup can easily fit inside that radius). In other cases, this makes the effect useless. For example, someone with a skill of 6 who tries to affect an object 50 feet away will not succeed if his effective skill is reduced to 3.

Partial success is particularly dangerous, however, when a character succeeds at his attribute roll, but fails his skill roll. If this happens, the effect encompasses an unexpectedly large radius and power level. Both the radius (in feet) and the power level of the effect are increased by the difference between the skill roll total and the TN (up to a maximum of 10). The effect increases along the lines outlined in the skill's description while the radius is increased by 1 foot per point of difference. All pertinent items within the area are affected (including the warlock himself, if appropriate).

For example, if a character is using Magnetism to make a key float across the room and fails the skill roll by 1, the speed of the key goes up 1 point (from 5 mph to 10 mph), the maximum weight affected goes up from 1 pound to 3 pounds, and the radius increases by 1 foot (encompassing all ferrous items weighing 3 pounds or less within that area). Remember to duck.

CRITICAL SUCCESS AND FAILURE

If a character rolls a critical failure during a magical skill check, treat the effect as you would a partial success with a failed skill roll, as above. However, all effects (radius, power level, etc.) are doubled (though power levels are limited to a maximum rank of 10). Furthermore, the warlock is now caught up in trying to contain the effect: the magical effects continue for the round following the critical failure, and the warlock may take no actions except to try to rein in the magic. Doing so requires a Moxie check, with a TN equal to that required to generate the effect. Success — even a partial success — indicates that he has corrected his oversight, and the magical effect immediately ceases; he may then act as normal. Failure means that the effects continue for another round (and the warlock can do nothing except make another Moxie check when appropriate). Critical successes and critical failures do not apply during the Moxie checks; they are counted as ordinary successes and failures. If the warlock is knocked unconscious or killed, the effect continues for 1d10 additional rounds before returning to normal.

If a character rolls a critical success during a magical skill check, treat the effects as if the warlock's pertinent scientific skill were equal to its current level +2 (maximum 10). This lasts as long as the effect in question is maintained.

SCIENTIFIC SKILL DESCRIPTIONS

Below is a description of each scientific skill, along with a chart depicting progressive power levels in each, and a series of examples clarifying the sorts of feats which a warlock can accomplish with each power level. Level 10 represents the known limits of magic use with each skill; no effects may ever be generated which exceed the numbers listed on each level 10 effect. Rules on magic-based damage can be found on page 51.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity is the flow of charges, often used to power machines, and occurring naturally in the form of static electricity and lightning. Using the Electricity skill, you may increase or decrease the amount of electrical power within the area of effect by the amount shown on the chart below, to a minimum of 0 watts. Some examples of the use of Electrical magic would be to cause blackouts, to charge or deplete batteries and to create random electrical strikes, which can be directed with concentration.

ELECTRICITY LEVEL	POWER LEVEL
1	10 watts (power a flashlight)
2	25 watts
3	75 watts (power a car)
4	150 watts (power a refrigerator)
5	325 watts (power a house)
6	650 watts
7	1,250 watts (power a city block)
8	2,500 watts
9	5,000 watts
10	10,000 watts (power an entire neighborhood)

Level 1 - 10 watts

Apprentices who experiment with the power of electricity can summon only the mildest of shocks, using their power to fuel small electrical cells or provide a slight jolt. While this jolt won't cause much real damage, it will sting and may cause a small burn if applied directly to the skin. If used cleverly, the electrical shock could short out a fuse, power a flashlight, or scorch paper.

Level 2 - 25 watts

At this level, the warlock is beginning to understand conduits, electrical motion theory, and higher voltage. The force commanded by a warlock of this power is dangerous, and can short out small devices such as radios with but a touch. The warlock's ability can singe people, scarring the flesh and damaging musculature; the individual shocked may even experience nerve damage or temporary difficulty with muscle control.

Level 3 - 75 watts

Journeyman warlocks with electrical power have the capacity to use their magic to fuel electrical objects, or to shock-start larger ones such as cars or other spark-operated machines. This much electricity also creates a noticable light source, singing the ozone in the air and illuminating a ten-foot radius with ease. The light is so bright and intense that it can temporarily blind opponents if they are not expecting the flash and it comes at close range.

Level 4 - 150 watts

The continued burst of energy from a warlock who has mastered electricity to this degree can power an electrical appliance, or maintain a charge on a failing system. It can easily short out electrical systems, burning them out completely and destroying them. When applied to a living being, this can interrupt the body's electrical system, causing unconsciousness or serious bodily harm.

Level 5 - 325 watts

A warlock who carries his studies of the science of electricity to this level is commonly termed an Adept, and their



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power covers all aspects of electrical voltage. They can summon forth a long-range burst of electricity, mimicking a bolt from the heavens, or joining two electrical conduits at a moderate range. The damage from this bolt can scorch metal, fry paper, and explode wood. It can cause significant damage, and even power large electrical systems like houses or other small buildings.

Level 6 - 650 watts

Electricity is a difficult power to master, requiring understanding of voltage, electrical flow, and physics. Once a warlock reaches this degree of mastery, he can all but see the flow of electricity in the air, watching and tapping into its movements as naturally as a summer storm. He can knock groups of people back, shocking them in tandem as the lightning leaps from one ground to another; this can cause serious damage and massive problems with the body's internal systems. The warlock has the potential to short out an entire city block, rerouting its power at will and shutting down systems or buildings easily.

Level 7 - 1,250 watts

At this level, the warlock can not only reroute electricity, but can also single-handedly power a city block, even if all other electrical systems in the city are shut down. The electricity that this warlock controls can kill easily, and can reach great distances, traveling through the air at the warlock's will and striking even relatively long-distance targets with great impact. With continued blasts, the warlock can destroy structures or set them on fire, devastating entire areas with lightning assaults.

Level 8 - 2,500 watts

Electricity is powerful, and this warlock is capable of causing massive damage with electrical strikes. They can power great swaths of cities, lighting or blacking out several blocks at once.

Level 9 - 5,000 watts

Warlocks this powerful in the Electrical field can shut down large areas with their control over electricity, or power massive systems such as dams, governmental complexes, or other high-level security systems. The strike of their channeled energy can destroy entire city blocks, and they can summon indirect lightning, such as ball lightning, capable of moving around corners and hovering like a trap, waiting for a conduit to approach before they strike.

Level 10 - 10,000 watts

Once a warlock has reached the rank of Perfectus in Electricity, they can power an entire neighborhood, small town, or government base. Their ball lightning creations can deliver massive strikes; any straightforward bolt made by this warlock can literally knock aside cars, as well as burning intense fires through systems, metal objects, or even people.

GRAVITY

Gravity is the force objects exert on each other. In most cases, the planet's gravity is the only naturally-occurring source of gravity that characters have to worry about.

Using the Gravity skill you may increase or decrease the weight of any object within the area of effect by an amount up to that shown on the chart below, to a minimum of 0. (The warlock generating the effect may decide upon the exact weight, subject to standard restrictions.) Some examples of the use of Gravity magic would be to make objects float or crushing them under their own weight. It does *not*, however, allow telekinetic manipulation; it merely renders objects heavier or lighter. Note that certain sets of multiple objects (such as a man wearing several pieces of clothing) are considered one object for purposes of these rules (i.e., a Gravity Journeyman could increase the weight of an entire suit of clothes by 30 lbs, but not each individual piece of clothing by 30 lbs. apiece, unless they were not being worn by the same man at the time). As always, the GM has the final say on the matter.

GRAVITY LEVEL	WEIGHT AFFECTED
1	5 lbs.
2	15 lbs.
3	30 lbs.
4	60 lbs.
5	125 lbs.
6	250 lbs.
7	500 lbs.
8	1,000 lbs.
9	2,000 lbs.
10	4,000 lbs.

Level 1 - 5 lbs.

Apprentice warlocks can lift small objects, commuting the gravitational pull in order to levitate them or make them sail upward. Although 5 lbs. is not a great deal, when used intelligently, it can do great feats. A 5-lb. pull on one tire of a speeding car can cause the wheels to turn out of synchronization, possibly causing the car to wreck around swift curves (i.e., requiring the driver to make a Drive skill check). This level of power can lift small items such as pencils, drinks, plates or other crockery, as well as knives or small metal objects (assuming they aren't held down).

Level 2 - 15 lbs.

As the warlock's power increases, his control and ability enable him to lift heavier objects, or deliver heavier blows. At this level, a warlock can force guns to tilt out of aim when being fired (contested roll, the gun owner's Brawn + Athletics vs. the warlock's Brains + Gravity), or lift moderately sized items such as small tables, telephones, or heavy crockery.

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Level 3 - 30 lbs.

Journeymen warlocks of gravity are known for their ability to lift objects and crush them down again with severe outcomes. At this level, their power can make even a small object too heavy to lift. Items such as washing-tubs, bags of feed, or tires (not attached to cars) can be lifted and slammed against the ground with immense force. Using this much power against smaller items can force a gun out of someone's hands even if he's actively fighting the effort.

Level 4 - 60 lbs.

Once a warlock reaches this level, he is able to lift large objects – chunks of plaster, cannon balls, luggage, and other items. This tug can disjoin someone's limb, or slow them down significantly if applied to them while they are running.

Level 5 - 125 lbs.

Adept level warlocks can hurl large objects at their opponents, lifting them and crushing them against the ground. Iron park benches, heavy pylons, and the like can be controlled as easily as a feather in the wind. These warlocks are feared for their power, and the effects they create can inspire terror in all those who watch.



Level 6 - 250 lbs.

Warlocks of the Gravity science have the power to completely undo the weight of a crushing object. Even by applying a slight amount of their skill, they can rip apart a complex object by lightening just a single part of it, but leaving the remainder unaffected (a car cannot run if its engine flies upward out of the frame, after all). At this level, they are also capable of lifting themselves off the ground, floating upward like a balloon.

Level 7 - 500 lbs.

Once a warlock has achieved the rank of a Gravity Secundus, they stand among those with the most knowledge and facility of their power. They are often teachers to those less powerful, and their names are whispered among the Warlock underground as a true power within their sphere of study. They can lift very large objects, or massive collections of objects, weighing almost three times as much as a man. Items such as a wrecking ball, a motorcycle and sidecar, or several large pieces of furniture can now be lifted with ease, or gravity can be increased to cause serious damage to items or people.

Level 8 - 1,000 lbs.

Gravity can be an immense ally — or a brutal enemy. With this degree of power, the warlock can lift very heavy objects, hurling boulders, lamp posts, or even small cars into the air. These objects can cause tremendous damage as they fall, ripping through pavement or shattering several floors of a multi-level building.

Level 9 - 2,000 lbs.

The power of these warlocks has reached the heights of mortal capacity. They can lift cars, tear apart building foundations, and rip up city streets, as well as crushing metal objects such as a roof or a wooden structure. This amount of gravity, when impacted on a body, can easily kill.

Level 10 - 4,000 lbs.

A Perfectus of the power of Gravity is an awesome force, able to alter the weight of people, cars, buildings, and objects made of steel and stone with hardly any effort. Manipulating gravity is a natural ability to them, instinctive and fluid, and they can increase or decrease its power immensely. These people are rare, and exceptionally dangerous — they can literally level cities or shred street pavement when they choose to exert their power.

KINETICS

Kinetic energy is the energy of objects in motion. When such an object collides with another object, part of that energy is transferred. It is this transfer of energy that damages objects during collisions.

Any object in motion has kinetic energy. The Kinetics skill allows the warlock to increase or decrease the speed of moving objects (limited to the speed listed in the chart on the next page). Alternatively, they could manipulate the flight of an object in motion, causing it to twist and turn according to the warlock's will.

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Some examples of the use of Kinetics magic would be causing a thrown knife to decrease in speed (doing less damage), forcing a car to slow down, or changing the direction of a bullet to force it away from its target.

KINETICS LEVEL	SPEED INCREASED/DECREASED
1	1 mph
2	3 mph
3	5 mph
4	10 mph
5	15 mph
6	30 mph
7	60 mph
8	125 mph
9	250 mph
10	500 mph

Level 1 - 1 mph

Kinetics is the science of motion; no object that is stationary can be affected by this power. However, even the simplest Apprentice knows how to create kinetics by pushing an object manually in order to create the initial kinetic charge. Once the object is “activated” in such a manner, the warlock can increase or decrease this innate potential by up to 1 mph, or, he can alter the direction of the thrust in any manner he wishes. This can be a very useful push — guns can suddenly have a more massive kick, or an object in flight can suddenly be turned aside.

Level 2 - 3 mph

As the Kinetics warlock progresses, his power over motion grows stronger and more efficient. He can begin to target parts of objects — for example, causing a single piston of an engine to misfire, thus causing the entire engine to malfunction. An intelligent warlock will also realize that the body is a system in motion — internal processes can be shut down, slowed, or redirected, causing internal pain to an opponent. Further, the warlock can muster great leaps, using his Kinetics power to increase his forward propulsion.

Level 3 - 5 mph

A 5 mph increase may not seem like much, but it can prove devastating in the right circumstances. Causing a partial increase in a complex mechanism’s speed may force the object to shatter by suddenly and dramatically reversing the object’s motion. The Journeyman, with a little creativity, can use kinetics to halt even the most unstoppable objects dead in their tracks.

Level 4 - 10 mph

Slowly, the warlock’s understanding of kinetics grows more and more powerful. To truly understand kinetics, one must realize that the size of the object does not matter; a car moving 10 mph and a train moving 10 mph are both the same to a warlock of Kinetics. Only the amount of force and movement possessed by the object matters to him or her.



Level 5 - 15 mph

Adept-class Kinetic warlocks can perform startling feats. Their magic can render a bullet nearly harmless by deflecting its concussive force away. Further, they can stop hurled objects such as knives, slowing them enough that their damaging force becomes inconsequential.

Level 6 - 30 mph

Kinetics is the science of force, and a warlock at this level has a great amount of force potential to deliver or remove. Most creatures cannot run faster than 30 mph; therefore, the warlock can take such a creature from a run to a dead stop in an instant; or stop most cars or motorcycles on average streets. Stopping a car, but not reducing the kinetic force to those within it, can cause great damage.

Level 7 - 60 mph

Kinetic warlocks who can call themselves Secundi are among the most powerful of their kind. They can stop cars dead, cause falling objects to fling back upwards, or increase a thrown object’s potential by several times its original force.

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Level 8 - 125 mph

Once a warlock reaches this level of kinetic understanding, he can perform truly awe-inspiring feats, causing cars to fly up into the air, or airplanes to drop completely out of flight. Small hurled objects such as paper clips or pencils can move completely through a person's body, or impale themselves inches deep in wooden or light metal objects.

Level 9 - 250 mph

Masters of Kinetic magic can move themselves or others more than three times the speed of a car, hurling themselves through the air in imitation of true flight. Their ability to speed up or slow down kinetic force on any object or series of objects can splinter buildings, or detonate even small objects into a flurry of motion. They become truly fearsome, and any object with even a faint amount of integral motion can turn into a devastating weapon for the Kinetic master.

Level 10 - 500 mph

Once the warlock becomes a Perfectus, his skills are truly phenomenal. He can reverse, alter, or increase an object's potential motion by up to 500 mph, an amazing amount. This power can drop a plane in mid-flight, crumpling its wings and fuselage like paper. The warlock can cause cars to fly forward at staggering speeds, or become a blur of motion himself: moving faster than his opponents can follow.

MAGNETISM

Magnetism concerns the magnetic fields that surround ferro-magnetic objects (mostly those which contain iron). Additionally, this skill can be used to manipulate the magnetic field of the Earth itself, to a limited degree.

Using the Magnetism skill, you may move any ferrous objects within the area of effect (of a combined weight listed below) at a rate of 5 mph per power level. The weight of the objects cannot exceed the amount listed on the chart below. Unlike most other types of magic, magnetism may change the direction of movement as the warlock desires, allowing him total control over it as long as he maintains concentration and the object remains within the appropriate area of effect.

Some examples of the use of magnetic magic are to cause a ferrous object to fly around or towards a larger ferrous object.

MAGNETISM LEVEL	WEIGHT AFFECTED
1	1 lb.
2	3 lbs.
3	5 lbs.
4	15 lbs.
5	30 lbs.
6	60 lbs.
7	125 lbs.
8	250 lbs.
9	500 lbs.
10	1,000 lbs.

WARLOCK RANKS

Warlocks organize themselves into rough ranks as a means of measuring the power they have accumulated. Apprentices are beginners who have only enough knowledge to generate minor effects (level 1). Journeymen have picked up a few clever tricks, though their knowledge remains largely untapped (level 3). Adepts have mastered the basics of their discipline and are ready to delve into deeper and more complex powers (level 5). Secundi are quite powerful warlocks, able to exercise control over a wide variety of effects (level 7). Masters have approached the limits of what sorcery can do, and are widely feared for their powers (level 9). Perfecti are the unquestioned masters of sorcery: the equivalent of an Albert Einstein or Stephen Hawking of magic (level 10).

Very few Secundi or Masters exist, and the number of Perfecti is almost nonexistent. Their powers require great will to control, and when they inevitably break down, they are hunted as the most dangerous kind of criminals. Also, very experienced warlocks often sport a permanent mark (see page 62), which allows them to be spotted more easily. Most warlocks in the U.C. are Journeymen or Adepts: powerful enough to work great magic, but not so powerful as to draw undue attention to themselves.

Level 1 - 1 lb.

Magnetism is one of the most useful sciences for a warlock to discover. Apprentices of Magnetism can manipulate ferrous objects, drawing them closer or pushing them away as the warlock wishes. While this may seem significantly less powerful than other sciences, the ability to control metal objects — even a small amount — can be used to telling effect by a clever warlock. Guns cannot be easily aimed (adding the level of the power (1) to the TN to hit), car keys bend and become useless, and other small objects move entirely at the will of the warlock.

Level 2 - 3 lbs.

At this level of ability, the warlock's power over magnetism becomes more fine-tuned, allowing for movement and manipulation of heavier, more sturdy ferrous objects. Further, a warlock with this power may use his ability to increase or decrease the magnetic force impacting on an object, potentially ruining cameras, radios, and other mechanisms with copper wiring or other sensitive inner materials.

Level 3 - 5 lbs.

Warlocks of magnetism often seem much like the wizards of myth, lifting and hurling objects at their will, for hundreds of common items are composed at least partially of ferrous materials. These objects can move seemingly independently: the warlock can change the course of hurled metal objects, collapse small parts of engines by increasing the magnetism between movable parts to the point that they can no longer move, and even cause metal compounds to lose their integrity by applying magnetic power to the object.

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Level 4 - 15 lbs.

Magnetism can also affect ferrous objects internally, bending the connections between atoms and causing the metal to become intensely brittle, bent, or blunted. With this level of power, the warlock can begin to weaken guns, or thin metal doors or bars, causing even the lightest impact to shatter the object (in the case of a gun, it would shatter upon firing, rendering it useless after but a single shot). The warlock can move heavier objects, lifting them or hurling them in any direction he pleases.

Level 5 - 30 lbs.

Once a warlock has become an Adept of Magnetism, he commands fearsome power. Even relatively large objects — or groups of smaller objects — can be affected. Thicker metals, such as swords, car frames, or chains can be weakened and eventually broken. The warlock can fully disrupt a body's natural activity, polarizing the iron and clotting blood, viciously attacking the body in order to cripple or completely disable it. This damage is severe, and difficult to treat.

Level 6 - 60 lbs.

At this power, the warlock can lift ferrous or partially ferrous items, carrying a great amount of weight. He can imbalance cars, or shift their axles in order to force them to turn as he wishes. At this level, metal becomes mildly malleable, shifting with the polarization of magnetism within its atomic structure. The warlock can write on metal, twist it into simple shapes, and otherwise manipulate it on a very basic level as he sees fit.

Level 7 - 125 lbs.

Secundi are generally respected within their own sphere; at this level, those who practice the Magnetism science are capable of rendering ferrous objects immune to other magical effects as well. Electricity cannot pour through non-ferrous metal, and Magnetism can deny a metallic compound that ability. Gravity cannot lift something held tightly by magnetism, and kinetic power is hampered by the strength of the magnetic pull.

Level 8 - 250 lbs.

The first true mastery of the Magnetic science is seen in the warlock's ability to disrupt complex ferrous objects. The heaviest pieces of iron and steel are theirs to command, flying about at deadly speeds. The warlock can use thin sheets of metal to float upon like platforms and repair the damaged body of cars with a simple flick of the wrist.

Level 9 - 500 lbs.

A Master of Magnetics is a formidable foe, using his power to flip over cars, shatter heavy iron pylons, or magnetize hundreds of small objects at once, hurling them about the room like a swarm of angry bees. They can command all ferrous objects in their area with incredible force and leverage.

Level 10 - 1,000 lbs.

True Perfecti who specialize in Magnetism are capable of outstanding feats — shattering cars, boats, and other large metal structures, and reshaping their core components at will. They can lift and redirect an incredible weight of metal, commanding it at a whim and treating the metal as if it were a malleable, fluid thing.

TENSILE ENERGY

Tensile energy refers to the strength of the bonds holding molecules together. Using this skill, characters may weaken, strengthen, or even change the state of matter. With the Tensile skill you may increase or decrease the toughness of any object within the area of effect by an amount equal to the magical effect you're attempting. Normally altering an object's molecular bonds simply makes it stronger or more fragile. This is reflected by adding or subtracting the power level of the effect to the object's toughness. The Tensile skill cannot reduce an object's toughness above 10 or below 0. Below is a sample scale designed to illustrate the toughness of various objects.

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TENSILE LEVEL	OBJECT
0	Powder
1	Tissue paper
2	Notebook paper
3	Cloth
4	Glass
5	Drywall
6	Mahogany
7	Sheet metal (car doors)
8	Brick/concrete
9	Granite
10	Steel

Objects whose toughness ratings are altered to 0 take on the properties of a near-powder: the slightest touch causes them to crumble. Objects altered to levels 1–3 become pliable solids (like cloth or paper) and objects altered to 4 or higher become true solids.

This skill does not change the weight, pressure, or temperature of the objects in question. It is possible, for example, to create warm ice with this skill, simply by hardening the molecular bonds of water.

When used on intelligent targets this skill can increase the toughness of a target, making him or her harder to damage (add the level of Tensile Energy skill used to the TN to hit the target). Alternatively you may directly assault the structure of your opponent's body, dealing damage as per the Effects of Magic section on page 51.

Level 1 - Tissue Paper

Apprentices of Tensile magic can alter objects by the slightest amount, making them somewhat tougher or more brittle. While it rarely looks like much, such subtle changes can prove invaluable in the right setting — say, by strengthening a rope you're trying to climb, or weakening the chair leg which a thug is trying to break over your head.

Level 2 - Notebook Paper

The more the Tensile warlock studies, the more he can manipulate an object's cohesion. At this level, he can give fragile objects like teacups increased durability, or reduce a pile of incriminating notes to dust.

Level 3 - Cloth

Journeyman Tensile warlocks learn how to focus their power where it is most effective: weakening struts in stairwells (causing them to collapse when a pursuer runs across them) or strengthening the bonds on doors (holding it firm against that angry gaunt on the other side). It also can have more subtle effects, such as reducing a closet full of clothes to bare threads.

Level 4 - Glass

With this level of study, the warlock can start to fundamentally alter an object's strength: giving a dress the protective quality of a piece of iron, for example, or allowing a car door to be wrenched off at the hinges.



Level 5 - Drywall

An Adept of Tensile Energy has truly begun to understand what his power can do. Warlocks with this ability can reduce dining room tables to kindling, punch a doorway through a solid tenement wall, or make a book as difficult to damage as oak.

Level 6 - Mahogany

Warlocks with this level of mastery can now affect large amounts of metal and other near-impervious objects. A wheelbarrow full of bricks can be torn apart like newspaper, and wooden doors can be turned to paste with but a single touch.

Level 7 - Sheet Metal

Tensile Secundi are known to make concrete sidewalks as brittle as ice, and render stairwells impassable to all but the most fleet-footed pursuer. On the flipside, they can hide behind restaurant menus given the consistency of steel, or turn a bouquet of roses into a deadly bludgeoning weapon.

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Level 8 - Brick/Concrete

Very few barriers are any impediment to a warlock with this ability. Entire building foundations can be turned to peanut brittle, and simple string can be made to support many thousands of pounds worth of weight.

Level 9 - Granite

Masters of Tensile magic are able to make the flimsiest objects as unbreakable as steel, or scoop chunks of cement out of the street like ice cream.

Level 10 - Steel

A Tensile Perfectus can break down even the strongest element with but a touch of his hand. Bank vaults fall to dust, handkerchiefs are turned into impenetrable barriers, and cars and clipper ships can be reduced to a few scraps of metal.

THE THERMAL ENERGY

This skill governs the control of thermal or heat energy. Using the Thermal Energy skill, you may increase or decrease the temperature of the selected object to the point of melting, igniting, or freezing it. The heat or cold thus generated is localized within the object itself, and does *not* affect other nearby objects. It is therefore possible to, say, incinerate a single book on a shelf while keeping the other books near it intact. However, once an effect has been successfully generated, the warlock may choose to accelerate the object's heat past the ignition point, causing it to burst into flames. While the object itself cannot convey its temperature, the flames do generate heat, and can cause damage and spread to other areas as normal. Nothing is required to generate this effect once the initial temperature change has been enacted. The warlock has no control over any flames thus generated. Only objects which are normally combustible and ranked 5 or lower on the table below may be affected in this manner.

The following table provides a general scale designed to demonstrate which kinds of materials a Thermal warlock can affect with his power. GMs are encouraged to add to it as the situation warrants.

THERMAL LEVEL	MATERIAL AFFECTED
1	Water
2	Paper, alcohol
3	Light wood, rope
4	Cloth (cotton, wool)
5	Oak, nylon
6	Tin
7	Aluminum
8	Glass
9	Gold
10	Steel

Level 1 - Water

Apprentices of the thermal energies can perform simple tasks such as heating cocoa, lowering the temperature of a martini, or performing numerous other parlor tricks to impress and amaze onlookers.

"THAT'S COMING DOWN..."

Tensile magic affects the ability of objects to support themselves; a cunning Tensile warlock can weaken the struts of a bridge, causing it to collapse. Cross reference a given object with the Gravity magic chart on page 54. As a general rule, the amount of weight which an object can support before it collapses is equal to its toughness level on that chart. For example, a beam with a toughness of 7 could support approximately 500 lbs before it collapsed.

Level 2 - Paper, Alcohol

As the Thermal warlock studies the science of temperature, his ability to raise and lower heat becomes more and more formidable. At this rank, the warlock can significantly alter temperature in combustible objects. Paper chars, candles light on fire, and a glass of beer can be chilled to perfection or frozen solid.

Level 3 - Light Wood, Rope

Journeyman warlocks who specialize in thermal science have the ability to ignite thin wood, freeze light materials, or make life extremely uncomfortable for a living being.

Level 4 - Cloth (Cotton, Wool)

With this level of study, the warlock can massively alter an item's nature, melting softer materials and causing cloth and fabrics to burst into flame.

Level 5 - Oak, Nylon

An Adept of Thermal Energy can cause widespread burn patterns, igniting fires in broad sweeps on even very resistant items such as fabrics, organic materials, and plastics. The warlock can sear meat with a thought, making it go from uncooked to well done in only seconds, and can cause a great deal of damage to his enemies.

Level 6 - Tin

This level of temperature modification is akin to placing the item in a hot kiln for an hour. This can bend swords or other medium-weight metals, or make locks soft and malleable.

Level 7 - Aluminum

Secundi of the science of Thermics are also colloquially known as "firebrands," for their ability to melt metal and soften even relatively thick metals, bronze, or other compounds until they can bend. This warlock can also shatter light metals through cold, rendering them brittle and useless.

Level 8 - Glass

This level of heat is roughly the equivalent to standing on the surface of the planet Mercury. Metal solder liquefies at this level, forming solid seals, and organic materials can be charred into ash.

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC



Level 9 - Gold

Masters of Thermal Energy control heat, cold, and even weather in their hands. With this level of ability, they can stretch and forge metal with the application of heat, causing it to become semi-fluid and easily malleable. Only extremely hard metals such as stainless steel, titanium, and other compounds can resist the level of heat and cold applied at this warlock's command.

Level 10 - Steel

Volcanic, pyroclastic flows reach this temperature – the level which a Perfectus of Thermal Energy can achieve. Stone, ore, and base metals are no match for this warlock's power. Nickel, one of the few metals that still resists the power of thermal science at this level, will become malleable with only a small amount of pressure. This heat will demagnetize metals, rendering them invulnerable to the effects of magnetic magic, and the level of cold, if applied in a single burst, can freeze a large object solid.

MAGIC ADDICTION

Magic use has an immensely detrimental effect on those who use it. The power of defying the laws of physics comes with a unique rush... one which inevitably fades, leaving the warlock weak, drained, and eager for more. The more he uses it, the more it drains him, until he's left an empty husk, too weak to lift a finger. "Burnout" is the term used to describe warlocks who do not respect these boundaries — who use magic regardless of the effects on their bodies. Their inevitable demise (as their powers slide out of control) is as horrendous as it is spectacular. More on the addictive effects of magic can be found on page 106.

In rules terms, magic grants increased intellectual potency at the cost of physical drain. Each time a warlock generates a magical effect, his Brains attribute increases by +1; his Brains may increase beyond 10 in this manner, with no upper limit. However, during the same period, his physical attributes (Brawn, Smoothness, Build) all decrease by 1, with an attendant drop in corresponding attributes (i.e., his maximum vigor decreases by 5). The effects of this last for a period of time — called a "Debilitation Period" — dictated by the level of the magical effect generated:

LEVEL	DEBILITATION PERIOD
1	1 minute
2	5 minutes
3	15 minutes
4	1 hour
5	2 hours
6	5 hours
7	12 hours
8	24 hours
9	36 hours
10	48 hours

After this period, the warlock's abilities return to normal at a rate of 1 point per attribute per hour and 5 points of vigor per hour. A warlock *can* use additional magic effects during the Debilitation Period. Each additional effect grants an additional +1 Brains and an additional –1 to the warlock's three physical attributes. It also "resets" the Debilitation Period, based on the highest-level effect generated in that time.

For example, Mortimus Sims generates a level 5 magic effect, granting him a +1 Brains and a –1 Brawn, Smoothness, and Build. The effects last for 2 hours. One hour later, he generates a level 2 magic effect. He now has a +2 Brains and a –2 Brawn, Smoothness, and Build; as per the level 5 effect, the effects last for 2 hours *from the point when he generated the level 2 effect*.

If any of the warlock's attributes drop to 0, he can no longer produce magic effects until his attribute rises above 0 (he is too weakened or disoriented to generate the necessary will-power) and he gains a mark (see page 62). If this happens two or more times in the course of a single day of game time (including those instances where two or more attributes drop to 0 simultaneously), then one attribute (GM's choice) is perma-

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nently reduced by 1 point. The player may raise his character's attributes through experience as normal, but the maximum score in that attribute is permanently lowered by 1.

For example, if the warlock has a Smoothness of 4 before his Debilitation Period, it returns as a 3; he may increase his Smoothness with experience as normal, but the maximum Smoothness score he can possess thereafter is a 9.

THE MARK

Every time one or more attributes are reduced to 0 through the effects of magic addiction, the warlock gains a "mark:" a sign of the magic he has misused. Scientists believe that these marks are a sort of instantaneous genetic mutation, while the general public attributes them to more superstitious origins. Whatever the reason, they are telltale signs that a warlock is beginning to edge out of control, and that his obsession for magic may be consuming him.

To determine the exact nature of a mark, roll 2d10 and add the results, and then consult the table below (the GM may choose an entry if he wishes). Unless otherwise stated, the effects last for 1–5 (1d10/2, rounded up) days before fading.

ROLL	EFFECT
2-3	The warlock's eyes become unnaturally colored — yellow, purple, or some similar shade — and glow slightly.
4	The warlock's skin becomes pale and slightly luminescent.
5-6	A sixth finger or toe develops on one extremity (GM's choice).
7-8	An odd-shaped birthmark develops on the warlock's body.
9	The warlock develops an unnatural aversion to cats.
10	The warlock develops an unnatural aversion to water.
11	The warlock develops an unnatural aversion to moonlight.
12	The warlock can consume only raw eggs.
13	The warlock can consume only raw meat.
14	The warlock can consume only fresh milk.
15	The warlock can consume only white or red wine.
16	The warlock periodically (once every 3d10 hours) excretes (sweats, cries, etc.) blood.
17-18	The warlock gains an unnatural aura that makes others uncomfortable (+1 TN to all Moxie-based rolls involving positive social interaction).
19-20	Roll again, rerolling if this result is achieved. The determined effect is permanent.

DETECTING THE USE OF MAGIC

Magic doesn't leave any supernatural residue in *The Edge of Midnight* — no fairy dust, glowing letters, or the like. However, it does leave more mundane traces of passing, which, while harder to detect, can still point to magic use. It is possible to examine a scene and draw the conclusion that magic has been used with the Perception skill; crystal ball squads excel at it and even more mundane detectives can spot obvious signs. For example, if Gravity magic were used in a certain area, it might pick up all the dust from the floor in that area. A circle of dust-free carpeting at a murder scene would therefore indicate the use of Gravity magic.

Determining that magic was used is a normal use of the Perception skill. The TN is increased by 2 if the character wishes to determine exactly what effect was generated. Those who possess the scientific skill upon which the effect was based may ignore this penalty, and may make the skill roll using the pertinent scientific skill instead of Perception if they wish.

All of these effects can be spotted by those in the know. Anyone attempting to identify a character who bears these marks as a magic practitioner gains a –3 reduction in his TN. More on marks can be found on page 104.

In addition, any warlock who reaches a rank of Secundus in any scientific skill gains a permanent mark. He gains an additional permanent mark at the rank of Master and another at the rank of Perfectus. Multiple marks may be gained through the mastery of multiple skills.

ANTIDOX

A recent "innovation" in the battle against magic use is Antidox: a "lobotomy in a syringe" which renders its subject utterly incapable of magic use. Antidox can only be administered in a hospital, where government doctors are licensed to perform the procedure. The formula for the chemical is a closely-guarded secret and no one outside of a few physicians in Nova Roma know it. (Quite a few people would love to get their hands on it, however...)

In game terms, administering the regimen requires a dose of the drug, along with fifteen minutes of uninterrupted time (The drug must be placed in a specific area at the stem of the brain, which requires medical knowledge to find; you can't simply jam a needle into someone's skull and have the formula take effect.) A successful Medicine roll, TN 11, is needed to complete the procedure. The science skills of anyone subjected to Antidox are permanently reduced to 0, the Brains attribute is permanently reduced to half its current rank (rounded down), and the Magical Aptitude background is permanently lost. There is no known cure for the procedure. See page 105 for more details about Antidox.

**CHAPTER FOUR
THE WORLD**

™That it 'keeps going on like this'
IS the catastrophe.}

- Walter Benjamin

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

This chapter details the universe of *The Edge of Midnight*.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF JONAS GRIFFON

How did we get here? How did we go from whatever came before us to wherever we are now? Those of us who ask these questions don't have an answer, at least not yet. The past is too indistinct, the hows and whys too unformed for us to really understand them. We keep trying though; what the hell else are we going to do?

It started with victory, most of us agree on that. The end of the War. That was when it all catalyzed into something concrete, when names and places started appearing our memories. Half a million dead has a way of bringing things into focus. Before then, there was just a fog of half-remembered dreams.

The warlocks lay at the root of the fighting. Not all of them, of course, but enough to let us blame them for the whole damn mess. Magic use was a big problem overseas even before it cropped up here, and the number of warlocks in the world was steadily increasing. No one liked sorcerers much, but the power they offered proved pretty tempting to the young intelligentsia overseas. And power breeds fear, which in turn breeds prejudice. Got a problem? Blame the warlock. Lost your job? Blame the warlock. Want to get elected by finding a scapegoat for all your country's woes? Blame the warlock. It made for a nice dynamic: a powerful yet persecuted minority which the rest of the world took great joy in kicking around.

Things got pretty tense there for a while — an ugly situation just waiting for a match — and then in the middle of it came something new. I suppose you could call it a disease, though it never killed anyone. People would fall ill, and in the course of a couple of weeks their bodies would... change. They lost their hair, their skin turned all leathery, and their strength went up like a bodybuilder's. Some of them could see in the dark; others could jump like an over-sized frog. Furthermore, their bodies had a weird draining effect on those around them. You felt tired and listless if you spent time near them, and prolonged exposure caused serious problems. The change was permanent and irreversible; those afflicted with it could never go back to normal lives. They were called "gaunts," a term at once endearing and repugnant to its subjects. And it seemed that their appearance amid the populace almost perfectly matched the rise in the use of magic.

Naturally, people blamed the warlocks. No one's entirely certain if magic was behind the gaunts' creation or not, but since when does rationality play a part in these things? There were no gaunts on our side of the ocean, and we only had a fraction of the warlocks that they did overseas. That was proof enough. What had been passive harassment against magic users slowly turned into active persecution. Anti-magic legislation was passed. Warlock "clubs" were raided, their members

thrown into prison. Books were burned. Sorcerers went into hiding. And through it all, the number of gaunts slowly grew larger — proof, many said, that the warlocks were up to something.

We here in the Commonwealth were happy to ignore the whole thing. Like I said, we had no gaunts over here, and our warlocks were too thin on the ground to really spook us. We even offered refuge for some of the persecuted magicians out there. Not a whole lot, of course, just enough to show everyone how tolerant and enlightened we were. Other than that, it looked far away and insignificant from here. Somebody else's problem.

But then something happened which nobody expected. The warlocks fought back. At first, it was just sporadic resistance — a few showdowns with law enforcement, an underground movement designed to keep arcane texts intact, and the like — but some of them had bigger plans. One group in particular had connections to the ruling elite of a major country (magic can do wonders for making political problems disappear) and one dark night, they seized power in a coup. The men they deposed were hardly well-liked, and the populace, though shocked, couldn't muster the will to oppose the new order. The warlocks seized the industrial base, took control of the army, and proclaimed themselves the head of a new government. The Order of Nu, they called it: a place where sorcery could flourish unmolested and warlocks could practice their arts without fear.

Their neighbors declared war within a week.

A "Coalition" of nearby nations was hastily assembled with the intention of forcibly deposing the leaders of the Order. They thought it would be over lickety-split — they had the resources and the manpower to overwhelm the fledgling government — but the Order was ready for them. Magic has a nasty way of evening the odds (do you have any idea what a kinetic warlock can do to artillery shells?) and the people under the Order took umbrage at foreign troops trampling all over their turnip patches. It got ugly. Fast. Nu units were tougher and stronger than their Coalition counterparts, and Nu factories poured out supplies quicker than anyone could have imagined. Though outnumbered and surrounded, the Order soon brought the Coalition offensive to a halt... and then launched one of their own.

When it became clear that normal forms of warfare weren't going to get it done, the Coalition changed tactics. They began using magic as well — "loyal" warlocks who enjoyed legal immunity in exchange for their services — and even began drafting gaunts into their units. Gaunts had strength and endurance that made them superior to ordinary troops, and they hated magic like a cat hates water. The Coalition stopped the Order's advance in a series of hellish battles. They couldn't do much with it, though. The war settled in to a series of ever-moving fronts, see-sawing across the continent and eating up everything in its path. Men, machines, towns, and villages all fell into the maw. It seemed to take on a life of its own; every time one side got the upper hand, the other side countered with some bold strategy or innovative piece of hardware. It made for a hell of a mess.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD



And more gaunts kept cropping up. The increase in magic use saw an astronomical increase in gauntism, enough to form a new minority all their own. It became increasingly clear that magic had something to do with their “condition,” and that the more magic was used, the more gaunts would appear. That’s what brought us into the fight. The Commonwealth had stayed out of it the way we stayed out of everything over there. We sold some raw supplies to the various factions — we’re nothing if not good capitalists — but mostly we were content to take the high road, plead for peace, and pretend that none of it really affected us. And then, in the third year of the conflict, gauntism appeared on our shores. Out of the factories, up from the slums: lost souls mostly, those with little affluence or clout. But it was enough to get our attention. No one wanted it to get worse; no one wanted gauntism afflicting our populace. The Order of Nu became our prime target. We asked them to scale back their use of magic. They refused, and the rumble was on.

The fight quickly took on the terms of a holy crusade. We weren’t going to war to defeat a traditional enemy; we were going to war to destroy the forces of evil forever. The Order of Nu — which we had been content to ignore since its inception — was suddenly irredeemable. Newspapers and radios vilified them daily. All we heard was how they encouraged the spread of sorcery, instigated gauntism, and violated every law of man and the universe in their quest for power. By destroying them,

we would ensure that our good land and free people would never again suffer the wickedness they represented. Go fight, they said, and turn back the tide that threatened to swallow us all. It sounded pretty damn inspiring at the time.

The surge of Commonwealth troops re-energized the Coalition attack. They scaled back their sorcery operations — warlocks were no longer permitted to participate in the fighting — and tore into the Order with new vigor. Commonwealth citizens who didn’t fight went to work in the factories, and with all the menfolk overseas, lots of women found new opportunities riveting steel or walking a beat as cops. Meanwhile, we soldiers gritted our teeth and hung on. For two more years, we fought and clawed our way across the continent. Victory drew nearer, but the cost kept rising. The bodies piled up, gaunts were becoming more and more common... and the Order just wouldn’t go down. They had tricks up their sleeve, all right, and they played every one of them like a card shark closing in on a make. The worst of it came during a push across their territory — our best, most ambitious effort to finish things once and for all. The Order used fifth columnists to cut our supply lines, then hit us with a barrage of new magic, forcing us to retreat less than a dozen miles from the capital. Our army was battered and winter was coming on. There would be no victory, at least not without a bigger chunk of blood and treasure.

As the troops pulled back, depleted and exhausted from the effort, the powers that be in the Commonwealth decided to

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take drastic steps. They were going to use sorcery, like the rest of the Coalition had, but this time, it was going to be different. The government secretly contacted a small cabal of local warlocks— some native, some immigrant refugees — and asked them to come up with a final solution. Many of them were rivals of the men leading the Order, and had been chomping at the bit for years waiting for the chance to destroy them. The national government in Nova Roma gave them all the money they needed, and told them to do whatever it took.

GAUNTS AND WARLOCKS

From *TM Speculation on Gauntism and its Causes* by Dr. Marcus Gunderson:

"Most residents of the Commonwealth believe that gauntism is created by magic, and that those in the vicinity of chronic magic use run the risk of becoming gaunts themselves. They are correct in the abstract, though not in the details. Gauntism has no geographical link to magic use — those who spend time around warlocks are no more likely to become gaunts than anyone else — but the cosmic imbalances created by magic are directly responsible for their creation. Every time a warlock engages in magical practice, it pulls energy from the cosmos. In order to replenish that energy, the cosmos must draw it from somewhere else. When the deficit becomes large enough, a human being suffers the consequences. His essence is drained — dispersed into the ether to replace what the warlock has taken — and replaced with an alternate energy source, the exact nature of which is still not understood. The result warps his form, gives him monstrous attributes, and marks him forever as a member of the gaunt minority. His new body can still be sustained, but with his original essence lost, it must draw energy from other sources: most notably his surrounding environment. Thus, plants tend to wither around gaunts, associates complain of exhaustion or tiredness... in fact the very air itself feels stale and expended.

"Such is the curse of gauntism. The body pays the metaphysical price for someone else's activities. (It may also explain why gaunts and warlocks exhibit a natural antipathy towards each other: an instinctive reaction, perhaps?) With the end of the war and subsequent drop in magic use, the number of new gaunts has abated, and the population numbers have stabilized. Unfortunately, new cases continue to occur, and there is little an individual can do to protect himself from affliction. Like being struck by lightning, the onset of gauntism is utterly random, with no bearing on location, status, or physical type (though to date, no children have become gaunts). Until magic use is ended or reduced to an absolute minimum, new cases will continue to appear, and new victims will fall prey to gauntism's devastating effects."

They holed themselves up somewhere in Central City, studying, debating, and arguing amongst themselves. For six months, there was no word. The troops in the field entered an extended holding action, hoping — praying — that the big brains could engineer an end game. And then the orders came. A secret cable was sent from Central City to Nova Roma, then across the seas to the generals and the colonels and the captains. "Fall back from enemy territory. Leave all that you can spare behind." The devil was coming for the Order of Nu, and we did *not* want to be on the property when he rang.

At first the Order, thought they had won — that we were retreating for good and would presumably sue for peace. Then it came. To this day, no one is certain exactly what *it* was. The term used most often is "White Light," a swath of magical energy that dropped out of the sky and laid waste to everything it touched. The Order's capital city vanished in a flash of energy. Buildings were disintegrated, streets disappeared, and 500,000 soldiers, civilians, and innocent bystanders were obliterated in an instant. The White Light's power sucked the life out of the earth itself, rendering the soil ashen and inert for hundreds of miles in every direction. Its brilliance lingered for weeks after the initial blast before finally fading like a photo-negative. Not a single member of the Order of Nu survived the blast. The remaining elements of the army surrendered within a few days.

THE PEACE

After a little mopping up, we left our allies to rebuild their shattered countries and returned home heroes. We stepped off the boat to cheering crowds, ticker-tape parades, and the fruits of victory waiting to be enjoyed. That was the first date I can remember. April 13, the day of the big parade in New Eden. The earliest event in my life I am absolutely certain took place. It was a glorious day, full of hope and promise for the future. We should have known it couldn't last. It never does.

In the first place, we now had gaunts to worry about. They didn't vanish with the Order like many had secretly hoped, and their status in the Commonwealth became an uncomfortable question. New ones still appeared every now and then (though not with the frequency they had in the war), and the ones who already existed were bitter and resentful. No one wanted them around; they gave people the creeps, and prolonged exposure to them caused dizziness and fainting spells. Slowly, gradually, they were shunted aside. Opportunities dried up for them. High-end jobs were no longer available, forcing them to become coal miners, janitors, ditch-diggers, what have you. Gaunt ghettos sprang up: lower-end neighborhoods where "their kind" could congregate away from the "normal" people. Legally, of course, they still had the same rights and privileges they always had, but in practical reality, they were second-class citizens.

It's not surprising that so many of them turned to crime. Their condition made them well suited for it. The stronger ones could throw men through brick walls, and even the weak ones were tougher than most normals. If they couldn't make money at straight jobs, and the notion of social power was a

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bad joke, what was left but crime? Within a few years, most of the major cities had gaunt street gangs. A short time after that, combines and large-scale gaunt syndicates spread through the underworld like wildfire.

Then there were the warlocks, practitioners of the same magic that helped win us the war. The Commonwealth never had the huge numbers of sorcerers like the rest of the world, but that didn't mean we trusted them. The White Light bought them a little reprieve, a few legal outlets where they could practice their art under controlled conditions, but nothing more. Then an Anti-Sorcery Act was put into effect, making it illegal to work magic without a strictly defined license. With the rise in gaunt activity among the underworld, normal criminals turned to illegally-operating warlocks to even the odds. Sorcery became a "gray market" pastime, a dirty little secret that everyone condemned but no one really had the nerve to stop.

Both the gaunts and the warlocks were only symptoms of a larger problem, however. There was something wrong with the world, something that spread beyond the crimelords and the back-alley spells. I think maybe it's always been that way, and the war was just an excuse to forget about it. A big victory meant a shiny new coat of paint on our souls: redemption for all our sins. But redemption never comes that easily.

The national government has weakened over the last few years, withering away like a dead tree. Most of the power in the Commonwealth now lies with the cities: huge metropolises whose populations soared during the war. Civic councils dictate the law and local police enforce it. Big businesses choose the players, buying elections like they buy stock. And while the national government still has the clout to smash some toes if they want, they're not the unifying force they were during the war. We're still one nation, but the individual pieces mean more than the whole. Nova Roma is a fading capital, falling into obscurity even as it pretends to hold onto its authority. The scavengers have risen to fill its place. Victory was just a hollow shell, curdling into a darker, more permanent condition. Corruption and hypocrisy thrived beneath the veneer like a hidden disease.

Pick up any newspaper and it screams at you from the headlines. Walk down the street and you can feel it beneath your shoes. In the shadows lie desperate people, willing to kill to make their pain go away. In boardrooms and courthouses, power turns men into clawing abominations. Sin leaks out into the corners of our mind, offering pleasure and bliss for an oh-so-easy-to-pay price. We line up for it. We *beg* for it. And then we go back into the light and tell ourselves that we're still good people. The ideals are still there. We pay our taxes, vote in elections, speak our mind without fear. But it's all just a façade, a fairy tale we tell ourselves so we don't have to look at what we've become. The gaunts and sorcerers become easy scapegoats — if it's *their* fault, then it can't be ours, can it? — allowing us to live a lie without thinking twice.

THE PAST

Memory's a funny thing these days. The further back you go, the harder and harder it gets to remember any details. Anything after the White Light is fine: some have better recollections than others, but the concrete details — the *reality* of what you're recalling — feels right. It's the years before the Light that cause people problems. Childhood memories, pre-war events... all of it's gone, nothing more than vague images and emotions. Even the war itself is hazy. I can't remember the names of battles or the places where we fought. Only general memories, nightmare flashes of combat devoid of context or circumstance. And it's not just me. Everyone I talk to is the same way. A lot of people can't even remember why we went to war in the first place, or if they do, it's in generalities like "the enemy had to be stopped." It's like we've all been afflicted with a case of amnesia.

And it extends to more than just the people. Books and newspapers, plaques and treatises, anything referring to the world before the war is hard to come by. Libraries are stacked with recent texts, written in the past ten years or so, but anything before that is out of stock, or unavailable, or never came across the ocean. Statues and landmarks have nothing commemorating their unveiling; buildings have no date of foundation. I can't find any maps or history books detailing events before the war. Not one. Before the White Light, nothing existed that didn't need to, and even those details trail off the further back you dig. The world before then is a great empty void.

Most people out there never question that. They just go on about their lives, looking after their day-to-day concerns, and not giving a second thought for the past or their place in it. Like the drugs they buy. The hookers they use. The debts they incur and the shady deals they make. The past gets forgotten like all the rest, a dirty secret that no one ever thinks about. The here and now is all the world cares about; the rest slips imperceptibly away.

The scary thing is, I don't think any of it's an accident.

THE DEAL

I can remember the first time I thought there was something wrong, when all of the pieces of the puzzle stopped adding up. It was one of those scorching hot nights that are never supposed to happen in Gateway, when the air itself feels like a pile of bricks. I opened the window to my apartment and looked out across the city with its siren call of corruption and complacency. I heard the sounds of dirt and sin, felt the hum of deals being made and trust being broken, and all of a sudden, it hit me like a wave of ice. *We're not the victors. We're the spoils.*

I don't know how the thought popped into my head, but once I had it, I couldn't let it go. It felt solid. Real. It had more weight than the ocean of half-truths and justifications out there. There was no victory. Only the illusion of one.

The most obvious sign goes back to the war and the White Light that ended it. Do you remember that sorcerous cabal I mentioned, the ones who the government contacted, and who

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ultimately unleashed the Light on the Order of Nu? I've done some looking into them, or at least I've tried. There's nothing out there. And I don't mean a conspiracy or some active effort to suppress the information. I mean there's *nothing*. No one can remember their names. No one can identify their faces. No one can say where they lived. Everybody "knows" the facts of the matter — of their deal with the government, their efforts in Central City, and their final solution. But if you try searching for concrete evidence, you'll end up chasing your own shadow. There's no radio broadcasts, eyewitness testimonies, or newspaper reports of their accounts — or even of the day the White Light struck the Order. No records. No announcements. No words praising or condemning their deeds. But for our hazy memories, it might as well be a myth. And the world seems okay with that. No one questions why they can't be found, where they went, or who they were in the first place. Hell, they won a whole damn war for us; you'd think there'd at least be a statue or something.

The more I thought about their little vanishing act, the more it fit in with everything else I've noticed. The warlocks unleashed the White Light, a spike dividing the here-and-now from the hell and gone. Before that point, it was all muddled and indistinct, and after that, everything seemed clear. They touched off an explosion that defined us, set this world ticking like a watch wound for the first time. They gave us what we wanted — what we *thought* we wanted — and then bit-by-bit, the victory we asked them for fell away, leaving empty dreams and ashes in its wake. The world slipped into the shadows, robbing us of the peace and idealism we thought we'd won. And now, our valiant saviors are nowhere to be found. They just vanished like ghosts, and no one knows who they are, where they went, or how to find them.

Any con artist in the world can tell you about that game.

They suckered us. They played us for marks. They sold us out, and then they split before we got wise. No evidence to connect to them, no names to leave a trail. Just a collective shrug and a great big fog. The biggest snow job in the history of the world, and we swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. The question is, why? What did they hope to accomplish, and what did they gain in return? I don't know, and I don't think anyone does. But have no doubt. Those warlocks brought darkness in with their Light and left us to pay the check.

That's the best answer I can come up with to explain the whole damn mess. You can see it out there, beneath the skyscrapers and the stormy clouds. People give themselves to it willingly, selling their souls piece by piece in exchange for money, power, sex, what have you. It takes and takes and takes, and we keep asking for more. Because we believe the lies. Because we think we're entitled. Because we won the war, which is enough to excuse any sin, and because we have hope for the future. Hope is the bitch of it, the force that keeps us going through all the pain. "Just one more score," it tells us. "Just one lucky break. Just one day of sunshine to make up for all the rain." As long as we believe it, nothing will change.

You might think I'm crazy for telling you all of this, and I know it sounds insane. But I'm not the only one who's come to this conclusion. Other people out there have put it together,

repeating the questions that no one wants to ask. There's not a lot of them: maybe one in ten thousand, maybe less. But each and every one of them knows there's something wrong with the world. You can see it in their eyes, in the questions they remember, in the answers they refuse to accept. They know. They *know*. And they just can't let it be.

I call them the "Few," and I've met enough of them to stop questioning my own sanity. They sure as hell aren't on the side of the angels. One guy I met, he's a loan shark, and another's been taking kickbacks since the day she joined the police force. Most of the time, they just try to survive, which is hard enough these days. But they keep chasing this notion, this idea that we aren't who we're supposed to be. It eats at them the way it eats at me, and if there's enough of us out there, maybe — maybe — one of us can find some answers.

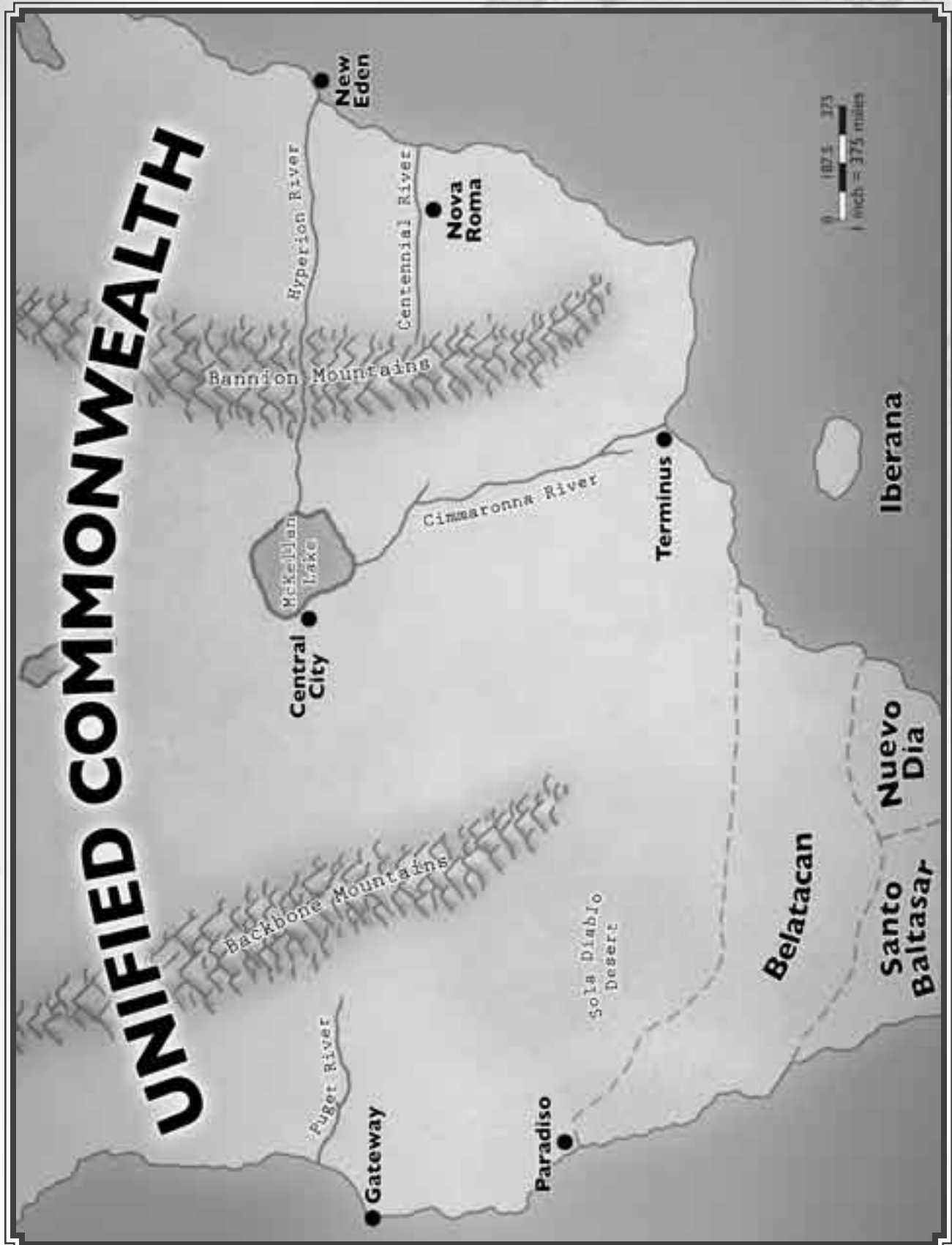
Our inquisitive natures have another side effect too, one a little more immediate than fumbling with cosmic riddles. You see, when you feel that the universe is wrong somehow, then there's naturally an urge to put it right. Maybe not the whole thing, but some small part of it at least. Every now and then, they'll see a chance to do something — get somebody out of a bad situation, say, or stick it to some bastard who dearly needs to be stuck. And when that happens, they don't hesitate. Not for a second. It's just something they have to do. They know that it will have a price, and they also know that nobody's going to throw them a parade if they pull it off. The junkie they help might go back on the needle, or the corrupt politician they bring down might be replaced by one just as bad. No one will notice their efforts. No one will care. But that doesn't matter. *They* care, and for that brief moment, it lets them remember how things are supposed to be.

How much difference can the Few make? Not much. Maybe nothing at all. Heroes went out of vogue a long time ago and like I said, the world isn't interested in the past any more. The Few are grains of sand on a huge beach; the waves will keep coming in no matter what they do. On the other hand, sand has a way of getting into places that it shouldn't. Bit by bit, the Few worm their way into the shadows, and sooner or later, one of them will start asking the right questions. The answers might just give the world a hell of a wake up call.

In the meantime, the Commonwealth goes on much as it has since the end of the War. Leaders come and go, the newspapers blare their headlines, progress marches forward... though towards what no one wants to say. On the Gateway docks, the Patterson brothers are making their move against that new gaunt syndicate. Down in Paradiso, the Angel Eyes killer has taken another victim and the cinema's brightest star just turned up dead in a dingy hotel room with enough drugs in her to kill a thoroughbred. The deputy mayor of New Eden is fending off questions about a "sorcerous" past and 35 people died last night in a Central City tenement fire started by their landlord, who hoped to collect the insurance money. We stand at the cusp of an abyss, doing what we can and knowing it isn't enough. So it is and so it's been every day since the world began.

Whenever the hell that was.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD



THE UNIFIED COMMONWEALTH

Most *Edge of Midnight* campaigns take place in the Unified Commonwealth, a constitutional republic which closely resembles the United States of the late 1940s. Other nations exist, across the two oceans which bracket the country, but their role is minimal (for more details, see page 98).

In most ways, the U.C. functions as the United States did just after World War II. People go about their lives under the auspices of freedom and prosperity: they hold jobs, pay taxes, attend church on Sunday (Catholic and Protestant faiths, as well as Judaism and other minority religions, exist unchanged in this world), and look after themselves and their families as best they can. The Commonwealth has a strong industrial base, producing cars, radios, telephones, and other sophisticated products for public consumption. Daily newspapers inform the public with varying degrees of objectivity, universities provide education and research facilities, and libraries are open to anyone who can fill out a card. For entertainment, people can go to the movies or catch a baseball game, as well as indulge in less savory appetites. The fabric of society remains eerily similar to our own... though a few key differences are apparent.

A national government ostensibly controls the Commonwealth from the city of Nova Roma. The National Legislature — divided between two political parties — theoretically holds jurisdiction over the entire country, and controls such elements as the army, the postal service, the nation's highway system, and the prosecution of any crimes which cross local boundaries. Legislators are elected by city and territory, serving three-year terms in either the Assembly (the lower house), or the Praetorium (the upper house). The Praetorium Speaker — elected by the vote of his peers — is the nation's leader, though the Chief Assemblyman runs a close second in power and influence. There are no states in the Commonwealth. Land is divided into political districts which are reapportioned every ten years, and into cities whose powers far exceed those of the national authorities above them. Mayors and civic councils effectively hold the lion's share of power, while the national government's authority is diffuse and easily slowed. All politics is local in the Commonwealth.

Every city has its own means of electing leaders, but most follow a straightforward system of regular elections and executive-style stewardship. The mayor crafts legislature (which the city council votes upon), and appoints the heads of various departments such as public works and sanitation. Unions and lobbyists play a large part in such decisions, leading to an elaborate pecking order of favors and backroom deals. Such machinations are conveniently hidden under the pretense of democratic elections, giving the populace just enough control over the outcome to make the politicians nervous.

Transportation largely takes place by train and automobile. Commercial plane flights are available, but expensive, and most involve multiple stops to refuel. An extensive railway

network connects all of the Commonwealth's major cities, with regularly scheduled trains to anywhere a traveler wishes to go. Every city has at least one large train station, and the largest have several subsidiary stations as well. Trains account for a huge percentage of freight traffic, with only a small minority being filled by trucks and ships. Central City is a hub of railway activity, and most transnational journeys include at least one stopover in that metropolis.

Local transportation consists mainly of trolleys, subways, and increasing numbers of automobiles. All cities have a functioning public transit system, with bus service supplementing local trains and subway lines. Most families own at least one car, and the more affluent often have two or three. Cars have become a symbol of freedom to many Commonwealth citizens, and the last five years have seen a large upswing in automobile use. In the city of Paradiso, the city council has recently unveiled plans for a "freeway," where vehicles will be able to traverse the length of the city without stopping for lights. It remains to be seen whether such a plan is economically feasible, or what impact it will have on local transportation. The national government maintains a series of highways across the country, bound by smaller roads and throughways. Cross-country travel by car is infrequent; buses and cargo trucks dominate travel on the highways.

The Commonwealth has a thriving industrial base, and leads the world in technological development. Cities are filled with factories, which readily shifted from a wartime footing to the production of domestic products such as cars and refrigerators. Class distinctions exist, but hold less power than they once did. Like the United States, the U.C. thrives on the notion that anyone can succeed with hard work and perseverance. The line between the haves and have-nots is sharp, but it can be crossed, and success comes often enough to perpetrate the belief that every man controls his own destiny. Business leaders take great pride in "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps," and while old money still holds influence in commerce and politics, it is by no means a guarantee for success. The lower classes are dominated by labor unions, who hold as much power as management and other influential parties. They also ensure a modicum for fair and equitable treatment, and provide a "safety valve" for venting class-based hostilities... although in truth they are as corrupt and power-hungry as any other large organization.

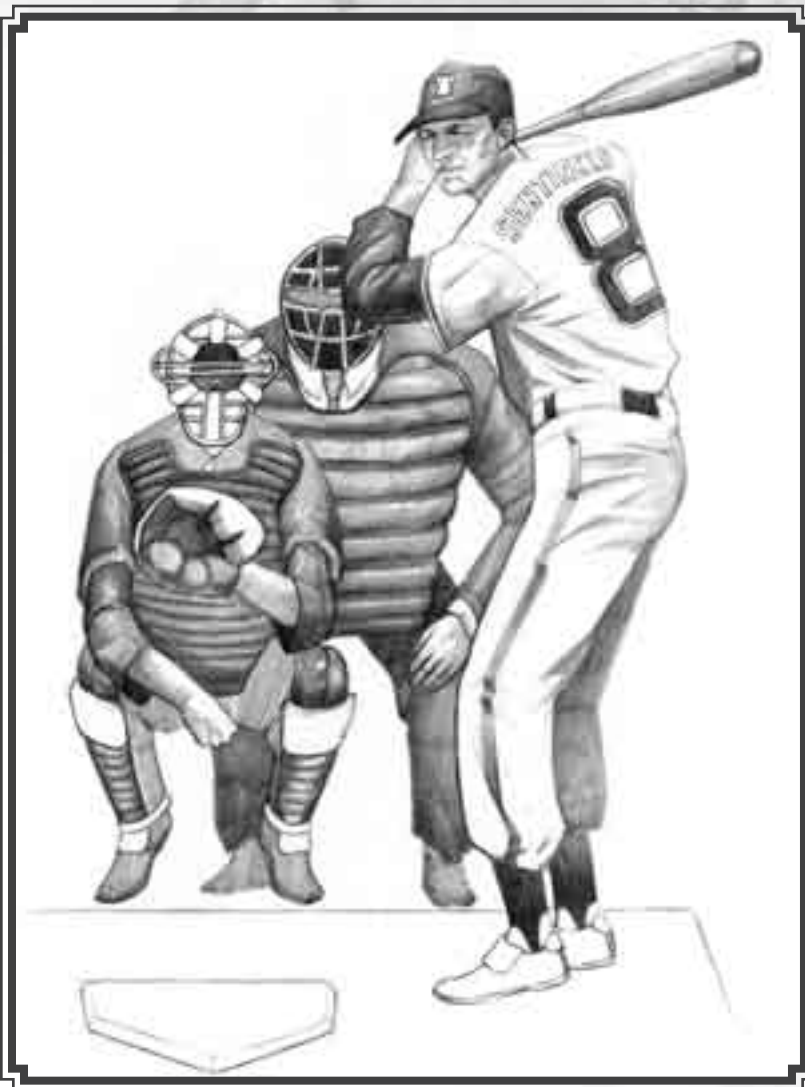
Racism as we understand it is largely absent in the U.C.... with a few glaring exceptions. Though individual minorities maintain cultural distinctions and are often grouped into specific neighborhoods, the notion of oppressing people based on their heritage or skin color is surprisingly muted. Blacks and Latinos hold prominent positions of power, and job and education opportunities are rarely barred from aspiring minorities. Though a few scattered incidents occasionally take place, the U.C. exhibits very little of the prejudice that America experienced during the era.

The reason for this is less enlightened than it first appears, and stems from two specific causes. First, the needs of the war (as it is remembered) necessitated unity among the U.C.'s

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various subcultures and minorities. The Commonwealth came together much more solidly than its real world counterpart, and those who benefited from the increased opportunities were able to hold their ground after the war. Second and much more importantly, the rise of the gaunts provided an easy scapegoat for the fears and prejudices of others. With their horrific appearance, terrifying strength, and vampiric aura, they were marked as outsiders in ways which minimized the differences between more “normal” humans. White collar workers afflicted with gauntism were forced to vacate their position, leaving openings for blacks and other minorities to fill. The shift created a great deal of social turmoil, however, which further exacerbated the tension between gaunts and normals. (More on gaunts and the prejudices they face can be found in Chapter Six.)

For all of the Commonwealth’s prosperity, however, desperation and greed remain constant companions to its citizens. The rise in gaunts has caused massive fluctuations in the work force, leading to lost jobs and shrinking wages. Many U.C. citizens struggle to make ends meet, and the lure of quick money can sway even the most stalwart soul. The notion of entrepreneurship — of making your own fortune through ambition and hard work — walks hand in hand with a strong sense of entitlement, and “short cuts” to easy wealth lead the overly ambitious to some very dark places. Criminals of all stripes are happy to feed on those desires, creating a thriving underworld of which many are aware, but few choose to overtly acknowledge.



ART AND ENTERTAINMENT

Mundane pastimes in the Commonwealth center around recent advances in technology, and on long-standing “traditions” which have filtered through the pre-war fog. Paradiso is the home to a huge entertainment industry, which produces hundreds of feature-length films, short reels, and radio plays every year. Radio dominates household life, and while a few experimental televisions exist, it has not yet achieved enough influence to supplant other mediums. Citizens tune in to news reports, listen to concerts or other public events, and eagerly await the next episode of serial dramas like *The Spectre* and *The Amazing Adventures of Jack Foster*. Every neighborhood has a movie theater, and gossip magazines are filled with the latest goings-on of Paradiso’s famous film stars. The music industry, based in the city of New Eden, produces a regular supply of recording artists, with swing and jazz dominating the popular charts.

On more esoteric levels, high culture flourishes under a steady supply of upper class support. New Eden theaters produce a wide variety of plays and musicals, which slowly make their way across the country. Ballets and classical concerts are a regular staple of upper class social life, and art has seen a tremendous upswing since the war. While most painters practice a popular form of neo-realism, cubism and other forms of abstract art remain on the cutting edge of the medium. Enclaves of bohemians flourish in the bowels of New Eden and the coastal “box homes” of northern Gateway.

Sports and athletic activities are most prominent on the university level, with intercollegiate leagues organized by tradition and territory. Saturday afternoons are the purveyance of college football, and the top team from every local league meets for the Valley Cup Tournament every January in Paradiso. Track meets and swimming competitions are regularly broadcast to enthusiastic listeners, and champion runners can earn a lucrative living as advertising spokesmen should they so choose.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Professional sports are dominated by two overwhelming favorites: baseball and boxing. Baseball remains the U.C.'s great national passion, and leagues exist on every level from grade school to seniors. The Commonwealth League, the nation's premier competitive organization, features twelve teams filled with the best athletes in the world. The seven-month season culminates in the CL Series, a nine-game tournament to determine the national champion, which represents the pinnacle of the U.C.'s sporting year. (For more on baseball, see the sidebar below.)

Boxing is the high-water mark for individual sport, despite (or perhaps because of) its penchant for brutality. Fighters of all weight classes participate in bouts ranging from pool hall matches to titanic battles for hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Union of Commonwealth Boxing, or U.C.B, organizes most legitimate fights, and hands down belts to the champions of each weight class. Though rife with corruption and nakedly tied to organized crime, the U.C.B holds powerful influence over the fighters, and any match worth broadcasting must have the organization's clearance to go forward. Reigning heavyweight champions are often more popular than the Praetorium Speaker himself.

THE GRAND OLD GAME

The Commonwealth League — the nation's premier professional baseball league — is a symbol of tradition in the U.C., a beloved institution which draws millions of fans to its games each year. Little boys dream of growing up to hit the winning homer in the CL Series, while old men muse about half-remembered games they attended in their youth.

The U.C.'s particular brand of baseball differs from that which modern readers may be used to. Pitching rotations are irregular and most top clubs have only four starters in their stable. Runners can be called out if a thrown ball hits them (though it's considered supremely bad sportsmanship to deliberately bean a runner), and the stolen base is a recent novelty which has only sprung up in the last two years. Bunting has not yet occurred to anyone. The designated hitter doesn't exist. Probably most strikingly, there is no farm system; instead, a series of ranked divisions separate the best teams from those of lower quality. At the top of the pyramid is the Elite Class, twelve teams divided into two divisions of six apiece. Beneath the Elite Class is the National Class, containing sixteen teams divided into four divisions. Beneath that is the All-Around Class, with twenty-four teams, and below the AAC is a massive hodge-podge of barnstormers, local clubs, and semi-pro organizations hoping to be promoted to the big leagues.

Teams move between classes based on a combination of on-field performance and tournament participation. The Conference Invitational, held every spring, brings ball clubs from all over the Commonwealth in the hopes of being admitted into the All-Around Class. Participating organizations must have played at least 100 games, and have a winning percentage of 60% or greater. The champion of the invitational rises to the All-Around Class, displacing the previous year's last-place finisher. Similarly, the All-Around Class champion, along with a second team determined by a two-round playoff, displaces the two lowest-ranking National Class teams, and the National Class champion, along with the team with the best overall regular season record, displaces the two lowest ranking Elite Class teams.

Rookie players with potential usually begin with a lower class team, then steadily advance by either signing with higher-ranked teams or winning enough games to promote their respective clubs. Players in the Elite Class enjoy high salaries (though a pittance by contemporary real world standards) and celebrity status; Elite Class stadiums are palatial structures holding up to 40,000 people, while lower-ranked venues are simplistic and offer few accommodations. Advancing to a new class can change a ball club's fortunes forever, bringing in increased revenues and heightened prestige. Canny owners can parlay a single championship into decades of dependable profits.

Most games are still played in the day; night games, while possible, are felt to detract from the purity of the sport. The sole exception is Shelby Park in the city of New Eden: home of the Gallants, who introduced night games at the end of the war and now use it as a unique marketing gimmick ("The Gallants shine day and night!"). Every Elite Class game is broadcast on the radio, and fans often gather in large groups around a single receiver to listen to the latest at-bat.

The reigning Elite Class champions are the Gateway Sentinels, perennial contenders who rode their ace pitcher Gerald Scruggs to victory in last year's CL Series. The final Elite Class standings were as follows:

NEFF DIVISION

1. Gateway Sentinels
2. New Eden Gallants
3. Shoreline Silvers
4. Longview Blue Caps
5. Paradiso Buccaneers
6. Olympia Zephyrs

KEYES DIVISION

1. Central City Switchmen
2. Brenton Haporth
3. Terminus Torpedoes
4. Nova Roma Centurions
5. New Eden Grays
6. Stonebrook Wanderers

The National Class champion Brockton Strongmen and the Waverville Red Shirts will replace the Zephyrs and the Wanderers next year.

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A few other professional sporting organizations exist, though they lack the popularity of either boxing or baseball. Midwest cities feature small pro football leagues, and horse racing thrives in most warm-weather areas. Basketball remains a novelty, intermittently popular in the colleges but rarely seen outside of exhibition matches. To date, no professional hockey teams exist in the Commonwealth.

The use of magic to influence any sporting event is strictly prohibited, and gaunts are barred from participating in organized sports — with the exception of boxing, which has a separate division for gaunt pugilists. Despite the ban, several impromptu gaunts-only baseball leagues have sprung up throughout the Commonwealth, and gaunt athletes occasionally participate in track meets and similar activities. The first (and to date only) sanctioned boxing match between a gaunt and a normal took place three years ago, and ended when gaunt heavyweight champion Randall “Rugged” MacReady shattered his opponent’s skull after fifteen seconds in the ring.

CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Of course, the above represents *legal* forms of entertainment. For those willing to forego the straight and narrow, an entire world of forbidden pleasure awaits... and a huge number of citizens are only too happy to indulge. Gambling, though outlawed in most major cities, is a staple of underground vice. Illegal casinos offer cards and games of chance, while bookie operations do a thriving business on the latest fight or marquee baseball match. Prostitution and drug use flourish in the inner cities, shielded by police indifference and “victimless crime” excuses. None of it would be possible without a thriving customer base: desperate or ambitious souls seeking respite from their pain, or hoping to erase their troubles with one roll of the dice. “Victims” is a relative term in the U.C.’s underworld, and few who become ensnared in its tendrils have anyone other than themselves to blame. As long as the demand exists, someone will happily provide the supply.

Nor is it limited to “voluntary” sins such as gambling. Truck hijackings are regular occurrences on intercity highways, so much so that a national task force has been created to fight it. Smuggling operations spread illicit goods throughout the U.C., and while overseas crime is as murky as everything else across the ocean, shipments of illegal contraband somehow find their way onto the docks. Armed robbery of varying sophistication plagues shopkeepers of all varieties, and a major counterfeit ring was recently uncovered in the city of Nova Roma.

Wherever crime flourishes, violence follows in its wake. Powerful syndicates fight for control of key turf, while small-timers struggle to pick up the crumbs. When “customers” fail to pay up, or new gangs challenge the status quo, the streets run red with blood. Civic authorities sometimes fight back — usually to placate the voters or stymie political criticism — but most criminal organizations pay for protection, linking them with the very forces that make such a show of putting them behind bars. Clashes between gangsters and the police often cause as much violence as those between rival criminals, and the Powers That Be disdain such overt bloodshed.

Every city in the U.C. has one or more crime syndicates, seeking to dominate the flow of illicit trade. The most dangerous have moles in the halls of power, bribing police for information or working closely with bought politicians. Others rule through fear and intimidation, using street-gang tactics to control neighborhoods where the police are outmanned and outgunned. Gaunts and warlocks both have a palpable presence among the criminal community, selling their unique abilities to anyone willing to pay the price. Indeed, gaunt crime lords have made a formidable name for themselves of late, and the underworld is one of the few areas where prejudice does not work against them.

Details on individual criminal organizations can be found under the respective city descriptions in the second half of this chapter.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Any crime which doesn’t fall under the purveyance of the national government belongs to the local police force, making them the predominant instruments of law and order. Local law enforcement in the Commonwealth runs from the draconian to the farcical, but in every circumstance, the cops have the clout to make their presence known. Civic police forces are divided into precincts, which cover several neighborhoods apiece and handle any case within that area. Each precinct is divided between uniformed patrolmen (“beat cops”) and plainclothes detectives, who each handle different types of crime.

Beat cops serve as the forces on the street, dealing mainly with crimes in progress, domestic disputes and other “first call” incidents. They patrol precincts in pairs, using a squad car equipped with a radio transmitter and a back-up shotgun to move about. A few still walk their routes instead of driving, but most prefer the security and speed of a patrol car. All beat cops carry standard issue revolvers and nightsticks, along with cuffs, police whistles, and in some cases skeleton keys. High crime areas see a huge number of beat cops on the street each night, while more affluent, “safer” neighborhoods have fewer police patrols. Beat cops never trouble “good” citizens (read: those who live in nice houses and drive fancy cars) unless specifically called in to investigate a disturbance.

For more elaborate crimes, or for those whose perpetrators are not immediately apparent, plainclothes detectives are often called in. They conduct formal investigations, pursuing suspects who have gone to ground and are no longer readily identifiable. They also assemble evidence to build cases, and often work closely with the district attorney’s office in the prosecution of specific criminals. On occasion, they also do undercover work, posing as criminals or would-be criminals in order to track acts of wrongdoing. Plainclothes cops carry very few tools of their trade out in the open: usually just a wallet badge and a pistol concealed somewhere on their person.

Each precinct is overseen by a small group of lieutenants and a captain, who answers to the Police Commissioner. The Commissioner’s office is typically an adjunct of the mayor and oversees all police operations within the city, including high-profile incidents, delegation of authority in cases which

WOMEN IN THE U.C.

As stated elsewhere, prejudice in the Commonwealth has largely passed over blacks and other minorities, who find far fewer limitations to their prosperity than their real-world counterparts did. The same holds true for women. During the war, women were actively recruited to fill the jobs which enlisted men had been forced to leave. They worked in factories and power plants, served as traffic cops and fire fighters, and a few even took public office. Such a transition was considered essential to the war effort, making the most use of the nation's resources in order to achieve the overarching goal of defeating the Order of Nu. While women were not permitted on the battlefield, they made great strides in just about every other walk of life.

When the war ended, some effort was made to return the fairer sex to its previous role as mother/domestic. It didn't take. Employers saw benefits in women workers, who would often accept smaller paychecks than the men they replaced, and women — having tasted the freedom of new opportunity — were fiercely unwilling to surrender their positions. Though it took several years (and caused additional hardships for returning veterans, who sometimes struggled to find jobs) the U.C. eventually accepted the notion that female professionals were here to stay.

Today, women can be found throughout the work force, performing jobs alongside their male counterparts. It's not unusual to see female policemen, factory foremen, private eyes, and construction workers in every city in the Commonwealth. They are more uncommon in white-collar areas (such as business or academic studies), which were viewed as less essential during the war, and in the armed forces, which has been slower to integrate than other industries.

Even so, women have been making quiet inroads in both sectors, and larger numbers of female soldiers, professors, and captains of industry may only be a matter of time. There are even women lawmakers, serving in Nova Roma and city councils throughout the nation.

The exception to all this equality, of course, is female gaunts, who suffer the same hatred and prejudice as males of their kind. Moreso in fact, for beauty is still more of a social premium for women than men, and the terrible physical changes wrought by gauntism have a particularly devastating effect on females.

Many female gaunts are unnaturally preoccupied with their appearance, and routinely wear wigs and make-up to minimize the stain of their condition. Besides factory work and service positions within their own community, there are no realistic employment options for gaunt women. The increased opportunities for the nation's other females have completely passed them by.

(See Chapter Six for more information on gaunts.)

cross precinct lines, and investigation of police wrongdoing through an internal affairs division. All arrest reports, shooting reports, coroner's reports, and other elements of the police bureaucracy ultimately find themselves here, where they are processed and recorded within the city archives.

Officially, all citizens of the U.C. have the same rights under the law which we have in the United States. Suspects cannot be held more than forty-eight hours without being formally charged with a crime, and cannot be induced into self-incrimination. Trials take place before a jury of twelve, and the legal system ostensibly operates under the principle that all suspects are innocent until proven guilty. However, the police are *not* required to inform suspects of their rights before taking them into custody, nor is a right to legal counsel absolutely guaranteed under the law. Suspects can be harassed and even attacked by the police with few repercussions, and poor defendants are sometimes forced to argue their own case without the benefit of a lawyer.

Add to this a considerable amount of coercion, bribery, and low-key shakedowns, and many police units are only a few shades more respectable than the wrongdoers they hunt. Which isn't to say that all policemen are corrupt. Most cling to the tatters of morality, using their defense of the law as a justification for their actions. The better ones understand where the line is drawn, and can tell the difference between a harmless kickback (say, to keep a gambling den open) and a genuine dereliction of duty (ignoring a murder suspect). Beat cops often look for trouble cases (i.e. noisy and/or public crimes), and will quietly ignore victimless criminal operations unless circumstances demand it. Good cops understand that they can't fix everything, and do the best they can when they can. The bad ones do their job only when it suits their interests, and line their pockets in the meantime.

Crystal Ball Squads

Magic presents a unique problem for police units. With the abilities at their disposal, warlocks can unleash devastating power and cover up evidence of their misdeeds. Ordinary police often find themselves at a severe disadvantage when confronting warlock criminals, and even veterans can be hard-pressed to find clues that magic has hidden. The cities have responded to this growing concern with the creation of "crystal ball squads:" police units made up solely of warlocks who use their magic to hunt magic-using criminals.

It started in Gateway, when the mayor authorized the creation of a special division to cover magic-related crimes. Magic use was common among the city's police, a problem which threatened to spill into the public arena. Mayor Loomis responded by turning the looming political crisis into a PR coup, transferring all known and suspected warlock cops to a single division and then announcing the formation of an "anti-magic task force" to counteract the growing threat of warlock criminals. When one reporter asked if he wasn't setting the fox to guard the henhouse, Mayor Loomis replied, "I think of it as setting the fox to catch other foxes." The press soon dubbed the unit the Crystal Ball Squad, and a string of high-profile arrests quickly followed. The success of Loomis's experiment led to the creation of similar units throughout the Commonwealth.

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Though the precise duties of each squad vary from city to city, the essentials remain the same: each handles crimes which directly involve the use of magic, or for which a warlock is a key suspect. Squad members are permitted to use magic during the course of their investigation (much the same way ordinary cops are permitted to use physical force), and incidental “after hours” use is generally excused so long as it stays quiet and doesn’t harm anyone. Many warlocks view crystal ball cops as turncoats, but it is one of the few ways one can openly practice sorcery and still retain a modicum of respectability. In addition, crystal ball cops receive a great deal of media attention, and their high-profile cases are often lionized in the press. More on crystal ball squads can be found in the Warlocks chapter on page 110.

The Bureau

The National Law Enforcement Bureau handles crimes that fall under national jurisdiction. Any criminal operating in more than one city, crossing civic lines, or engaging in trade which affects multiple political boundaries becomes the NLEB’s problem. This includes kidnapping, smuggling, serial killings (if it involves two or more cities), and any large syndicates operating in more than one territory, as well as more mundane crimes such as postal fraud and tax evasion.

Every city has an NLEB office, which investigates local case threads and coordinates activities with the city police. NLEB headquarters is in Nova Roma, where the majority of its agents are stationed. From there, they are dispatched across the country in pursuit of various suspects. The NLEB’s “Special Agents” generally work in pairs and depend upon the nearest office and local police for back-up.

Technically, the NLEB (or “the Bureau,” as it is often called) has authority over all local law enforcement agencies, and can requisition men and materials from such agencies as they see fit. In reality, however, their power is much more limited. They usually won’t contact local police unless they require help, and civic authorities will use such need to leverage them out of the scene unless they behave. Local cops refusing to assist the Bureau are rarely punished (though their tax returns for the next few years may get nasty), and Bureau agents learn not to throw their weight around if they want to get anything done.

Despite their diminished status, however, their job still has some unique perks. Bureau agents have the right to transport prisoners as they see fit, moving suspects for “safety reasons” out of a dangerous area. They may make arrests without worrying about local statutes, carry firearms without notifying the police, and obtain access to national funds, which often exceed those of their local brethren. Furthermore, cases they investigate must be tried by nationally-appointed judges, which reduces the chances of bribery or compromise.



In addition, most local agents take great care in currying the favor of city police units — making friends with key lieutenants, greasing the wheels at city hall, etc. — which pays dividends during important investigations. Those uninterested in politics instead take a fly-in-the-ointment approach, endeavoring to be as much of a nuisance as possible to those who don’t wish to help them. This often develops into a “wild card” image, with agents deliberately inserting themselves into delicate situations and playing local political factions off against each other. Though they lack the clout they like, they can still make things difficult for civic authorities, and few have any problems paying unwelcome attention to any of the locals’ pet rackets. Most are as open to bribery as any other cop, but their masters in Nova Roma deal very harshly with agents whose “local interest” compromises national authority.

Recently, NLEB headquarters established a series of specialized task forces, devoted to the eradication of specific criminal activities. They include an Organized Crime Division, a Kidnapping Division, a “Highwayman” Division (dedicated to stopping inter-city hijackings), a Treasury Division fighting counterfeiting, and a Psychological Sciences Division, devoted to “understanding the nuances of the criminal mind.” Agents not specifically assigned to one of these divisions serve general duties, investigating various crimes as the situation and manpower permits. In addition, several warlocks are surreptitiously in the NLEB’s ranks, though their status is never acknowledged and they lack the numbers or prestige of crystal ball squads. To date, only a handful of gaunts have been employed as agents by the NLEB.

PRIVATE EYES

Police corruption and the risks of depending upon the law have given rise to a new subclass in the U.C. Private investigators — mercenary sleuths with their own rules of conduct — flourish in society’s moral gray area. They provide independent crime-detecting methods to anyone who wishes it, as well as legal counsel, bodyguard work, and other less savory duties. The Commonwealth has seen a marked increase in the number of private eyes since the end of the war, their ranks swollen by returning soldiers, disaffected cops, and warlocks hoping to capitalize on their unique abilities. They look into matters that the police won’t touch, seeking the answers which “legitimate” legal authorities have no desire to pursue. For them, justice is business, a business at which they excel like no one else... as long as you can pay their price, of course.

Sleuthing is a dirty, thankless job, especially when performed freelance. It often focuses on tedious cases — a woman hoping to catch her cheating husband, for example, or a company seeking evidence of employee fraud — and when it doesn’t, it can turn deadly in a heartbeat. Private eyes associate with dubious characters, rubbing shoulders with the worst elements of the criminal underworld in the course of their duties. Yet for many people, they offer hope where none existed before. For a lover seeking her missing beau, or a theft victim hoping to regain his stolen life savings, a private detective can find the answers while the police are still filling out reports (of

POLITICAL PARTIES

Commonwealth politics is divided between two powerful parties: the Plebeians (representing the left) and the Citizens (representing the right). While occasional third party candidates emerge, they rarely disrupt business as usual for these two behemoths. The Plebeians led the country during the war, only to suffer a decline in fortunes following the victory — their use of warlocks to end the conflict was not viewed kindly in the ensuing years. They have begun a recent rebirth of late, hoping to recapture control of the Praetorium after several years of minority status. The Citizens boast the current Praetorium Speaker: Joshua Holmes, a moderate populist who built his career on heroics during the war.

Despite their national significance, both parties depend on local elections to secure their power base. City council seats are often more hotly contested than positions in Nova Roma, and local political bosses can shape the caliber of debate across the nation. Party machines are the order of the day, with influential men making back-room deals to decide which names go on the ballot, and using quasi-legitimate “citizens’ groups” to rubber stamp their selections. They fight neighborhood-by-neighborhood for the hearts and minds of voters, and dirty tricks of all varieties crop up on a regular basis. Unions and organized crime interests often muscle their way into the process as well, leading to a constantly churning mud pit of dirty money, thwarted ambitions, and old-fashioned power mongering.

The party leaders in Nova Roma acknowledge this unpleasant reality, but most believe that the system still works better than any other. The masses have the pretext of democracy, the men in charge have the instruments of control, and there’s just enough uncertainty in the process to ensure that everyone behaves. For a country as large and sprawling as the Commonwealth, it is perhaps the only way to maintain order.

course, they aren’t always the answers their clients want to hear, but life is full of disappointments). *The Edge of Midnight* has more than its share of desperate people, which means that independent sleuths will always be in high demand.

Officially, most private eyes have no legal authority beyond that of any other citizen. They need a license to practice and most have a permit to carry firearms, but other than that, their powers are limited. Yet it’s precisely that lack of authority that allows them to accomplish what rank-and-file law enforcement can’t. They aren’t bound by rules of conduct, nor are they required to answer to superiors for their actions. While some may engage in breaking-and-entering, petty theft, and similar activities, their status makes it difficult to prosecute and most judges tend to look the other way if it produces results. Evidence uncovered using such methods is still admissible — unlike the police — and while they rarely make

reliable witnesses, the best have a penchant for building solid cases around their findings. Their membership is eclectic and diverse, ranging from downtrodden snoops to extensive businesses with hundreds of employees.

P.I.s generally have a working knowledge of the law, and understand the risks involved in breaking it. They often operate alone and lack the resources of legitimate law enforcement, but they make up for it with dogged zeal and a rough code of honor which defines their behavior. Their diligence often gets them into trouble, a fact which has yet to diminish their numbers. Because there are so many of them, several efforts have been made to unionize, but the lonely nature of the profession makes its members extremely unwilling to sacrifice their independence. As one famous gumshoe said, “nobody owns the lease on my soul.” Their iconoclasm and penchant for asking questions often leads them down paths that no one else would dare take. It’s no mistake that more members of the Few work as private eyes than any other profession in the Commonwealth.

The ranks of P.I.s also contain a fair number of warlocks. The more righteous sorcerers find comfort in the sleuths’ peculiar form of honor, and their magical skills give them a considerable edge when hunting for clues. Warlocks dwell on the fringes of society, just like detectives, and while some clientele shy away from “vulgar wizards,” most are too concerned with finding answers to care about who gets them. For a known warlock looking to stay on the right side of the law, private investigation offers one of the few legitimate sources of employment available.

GEOGRAPHY

The Unified Commonwealth occupies a huge swath of land stretching almost 3,000 miles from one end to the other. A pair of mountain ranges bisects the continent down the middle, dividing the land between the coastal regions (where most of the population lives) and a vast plain full of farmland. Roads are fairly well developed, with a series of highways interconnecting the biggest cities, but train travel is still the most expedient way of traversing the distance. Two large oceans separate the Commonwealth from its neighbors, lending it a natural security and lingering feelings of isolationism among its populace.

While the U.C. countryside is vast and bountiful, city life dominates its culture. The Commonwealth contains over half a dozen colossal metropolises, where most of the population lives. Cities in *The Edge of Midnight* are huge sprawling affairs, much larger and more chaotic than their counterparts in our world. During the war, most of the population migrated to the cities, working in the factories and ammunition plants. When the war ended, they stayed on, leaving empty, under-populated townships behind... and swelling the largest urban centers to unheard-of levels. Ten years later, the cityscapes practically define the U.C., leaving the lands between their sprawling borders haunted and empty.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD

Below is a brief description of five of the most important metropolises in the U.C.: Central City, New Eden, Nova Roma, Paradiso, and Terminus. A sixth, Gateway, is covered in complete detail in Appendix One; further information on the remaining five will appear in the upcoming *Naked City* sourcebook. Like so much else in *The Edge of Midnight*, each is a shadowy reflection of a real world city, their essence distorted into twisted versions of what we're familiar with.

CENTRAL CITY

The self-styled "Crossroads of the World," Central City is a town of railways and shipping lines, of warehouses and blue-collar workers. Located on a vast lake that stands midway between the east and the west, it serves as a nexus point for traffic of all sorts. Huge amounts of industrial goods pass through its famous switchyards, en route to stores and warehouses all across the country. It is estimated that over 500 trains enter the city every day — carrying everything from farm supplies to radios to canned peas and carrots — and every major trucking line has an office in Central City. Add to that a staggering number of individual travelers, carried by rail and road from every corner of the nation. Anyone heading west is almost required to stop in Central City, and passenger trains run as often as the freight lines. Downtown contains some of the most luxurious hotels in the country, along with countless smaller motels and transient lodges. Everyone comes to Central City sooner or later, and as the billboards remind everyone, "you may never want to leave."

But all that material entering its borders means a lot of money as well, and the massive amount of transit means a lot of items lost or misplaced... which makes the city a perfect haven for organized crime. Syndicates have their tendrils in almost every aspect of life here. Their snitches patrol the train stations, seeking news of juicy shipments, while their smugglers move illegal goods disguised as food or paper products. With smuggling and hijacking as a base, organized crime can expand into gambling, money laundering, and prostitution. A river of dirty funds pours into the city, controlled and fought over by a vicious criminal base.

And surprisingly, that has become a celebrated part of the city's fabric. Across the U.C., no one has as romanticized a notion of crime as Central City. Mob bosses are lavished with media attention and regarded with secret adoration by the public. Unlike the street gangs of New Eden or the sycophants of Paradiso, Central City's criminals are seen as working stiffs made good: self-made men who now enjoy the just fruits of their labors. It's not unusual to see an indicted thug attending the latest performance at the opera house, or watching the celebrated baseball Switchmen from the comfort of the owner's box. The city politicians make a big show about getting tough on crime, but since much of their funding comes from illicit sources, they have little desire to shut down the party.

Gang wars take place on a regular basis, as rival outfits compete for Central City's territory. The canny bosses take care to limit the violence when they can — realizing how it tarnishes their image — and leave the police to clean up those who "cross the line." A covert hit in a dilapidated neighborhood is acceptable, but running gun battles in city streets make trouble for everyone. The more adept one is at balancing violent necessity with benign appearance, the more quickly one can climb the criminal ranks in this city. The tension of unseen violence thus bubbles beneath the surface, rarely visible but always present. The remainder of Central City simply acknowledges that fact and goes on about its job of moving the nation from here to there.

In the seedy bars and low-lit nightclubs where the gangsters plot their next sin, the sounds of Central City's musicians cut through the clutter. Jazz and blues remain a staple of this working class city, heard on every radio station and played in every bar from the lakefront to the switchyards. Unlike the antiseptic sounds of New Eden, where big band swing plays to huge crowds, Central City's music is raw and genuine. Its blues players live hard lives, working the same clubs for the same wages day in and day out. But the very rough and tumble nature of their existence makes their music soar, delivering a unique sound unmatched in the entire world. As they listen to the latest hit to come out of New Eden's recording industry, Central City residents smile as they recognize the same riffs they heard months before... from an unknown sax player at their local dive.

CALENDARS

Calendars in the U.C. are identical to those of our world. Months have the same names and length, weeks start on Sunday and end on Saturday (with five-day work weeks being the norm), and years are measured with the same yardstick as us (i.e., Anno Domini, the rough estimation of Christ's birth). However, like everything else in the shadow world, the specifics have been lost. Few people use the term "A.D." and fewer still know what it denotes. Precise dates are rarely used, except on legal records and similar documents. Technically, the year is 1949... but if you ask most people what the year is, they'll need to check a calendar. They usually refer to events in terms of the war (i.e., "five years after" or "a couple of years before").

Play is assumed to begin early in 1949. The war against the Order of Nu ended ten years earlier in the summer of 1939. The exact length of the war varies, though most hold that it began sometime in 1934 and that the U.C. entered the fray in late 1936. The precise dates of events during the war are only accurate to the month. Any events before the war are impossible to pin down, a meaningless mixture of popular impressions and unspoken assumptions.

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CRIME AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

As stated on the previous page, few cities have an underworld as large or deeply entrenched as Central City's. Small timers have a difficult time prospering unless they pay protection to one of the big rackets, and "upstart" gangs are quickly squashed before they can become a threat. Several large syndicates struggle for control of various areas, each hoping to consolidate the entire city beneath their thumb. Everyone from the penny-ante players on the street corner to the largest hijacking operations at the switchyards ultimately works for one of these organizations. They buy political favors, subjugate the unions, and rule Central City like feudal kings.

The Drago Combine is the strongest faction in Central City's underworld, controlled by a terrifying gaunt named Jack Drago. He supposedly hails from eastern money, a wealthy heir who enjoyed the debauched excesses of his class before gauntism took it all away. He took over a crew several years ago, specializing in boosting trucks after other gangs had stolen them. His rivals took the fall, and he got away clean with the goods. When a better-established gang took umbrage, he tore its leader apart with his bare hands ("like a falcon with a rabbit in its claws" one eyewitness reported). Since then, he and his crew have expanded their operation to include gambling, prostitution, and drug running as well as hijacking. Drago controls most of the territory

around the switchyards, and his brutish behavior hasn't stopped him from living the good life. Even places normally forbidden to gaunts wouldn't dare turn Drago down.

Several other crews fiercely compete to amass as much territory as the Drago Combine. They include the Scarelli gang (who work the lakeshore), the Westbrook Runners (who control downtown), and Ernie Silver, a "gold dealer" whose men specialize in shaking down the city's precious metal trade.

Local law enforcement generally serves as a balancing force between these factions, keeping them in line without actually doing anything about them. Every major gang has its own cops on the take, but none can definitively control an entire division. As a result, the police can still act when they need to, biting the hand that feeds them if it gets too careless. As stated above, they only strike hard following particularly violent or public crimes, or against those who don't enjoy the protection of the major crews. The current chief, Buck Watterson, is an adept politician who prefers stability to showy gestures. As long as the criminals know their limits, the police are content to leave them be.

That may be changing, however, The NLEB has taken a keen interest in Central City's criminal empires, and has dispatched several groups of agents to investigate. The most prominent were publicly announced... which drew attention away from the remainder, who have been operating in secrecy since they arrived. Their primary target is the Drago gang, but without more resources (or the ability to go to the local cops), it's an uphill battle.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

Crossroads Railway Station/ Central City Switchyards

The south side of the city is dominated by a Byzantine labyrinth of tracks, ties, and switching stations — the heart of the nation's railway system. Over a dozen separate track systems form a concentric ring around the city's southern neighborhoods, coalescing in an endless series of marshalling areas and loading docks. Hundreds of trains arrive here each day, collecting cargo, unloading freight, and exchanging countless boxcars and flatcars in continuing service of the national economy. Cargo is unloaded into nearby warehouses by an army of yardmen who swarm over the area like ants. A series of yard managers carefully track what comes and goes, and report their findings to the Switchyard Chief, who oversees the entire affair.

The coordination of so many trains and so much cargo is a daunting task, which leaves a lot of room for outside parties to stick their fingers in. Every yard manager is on somebody's payroll, and the occasional disappearance of a truck full of cargo is considered the price of doing business. The yardmen all operate under a powerful union (which also controls the city's longshoremen), though its clout has not prevented the steady rise of gaunts among the switchyard employees. Leatherbacks are barred from joining the union, and their continued presence in the switchyards has become a source of considerable tension... which the city's crime lords cheerfully exploit to their advantage.

A short ways north, passenger trains debark at Crossroads Station, Central City's principal nexus for travelers of all varieties. Over thirty separate lines run through here, with trains leaving every hour to New Eden, Gateway, and all points in between. The station itself consists of a huge marble foyer, with ticket windows arranged along one side and an electronic schedule board high on the wall opposite the entrance (the board is a fairly new apparatus, replacing an old chalkboard which was updated by a pair of retired trapeze artists). Stairs leading down to various tracks can be found everywhere, and it's easy to become lost in the station's cavernous recesses. A gigantic clock dominates the center of the foyer, with benches facing it from all directions. The clock keeps almost perfect time, and engineers from all over the country have been known to set their watches by it.

Campbell Field, home of baseball's Central City Switchmen, can be found just a few blocks north of the switchyards.

Typical Central City Yardman

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 4, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Drive (Car, Train) 5, Engineering 4, Evasion 3, Intimidation 4, Melee 4, Perception 4, Pick Lock 3, Sport (Baseball) 4, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Street Tough 1.

The Commodore Hotel

The finest accommodations west of New Eden can be found on North 75th St., in this towering edifice of brick and brasswork. The Commodore Hotel caters to the pampered and elite, entertaining movie stars, captains of industry, and on at least two occasions, Praetorium Speaker Holmes. Its thirty floors hold almost five hundred rooms, plus a swimming pool, private spa, and numerous meeting chambers hosting dozens of gatherings and conventions each month. Its famous open-air elevators provide a stunning (if vertigo-inducing) view of the lobby far below. An elaborate set of green trees frame a beautiful stone fountain, and the concierge at the front desk has a full view of everyone who comes and goes.

The Commodore has had more than its share of strange happenings over the years, and management has quietly curried an "off the books" policy towards its more debauched clientele. In addition to the usual array of prostitutes and loud parties, the Commodore provides a quiet clean-up service, and never reports its guests' activities to the police (assuming said guest provides adequate compensation). Housekeeping has cleaned bloodstains off the sheets on more than one occasion, and management has disposed of numerous pieces of obvious criminal evidence over the years.

But its closest-kept secret is known only to a tiny handful of employees. "The 13th Floor," a hidden series of rooms in the hotel basement, is available to certain select guests — those with money to burn and secrets to keep. The walls of these rooms are heavily soundproofed, and no services are available to the occupants. They simply receive their key and are shown to the door. A concealed entrance in the nearby alley allows one to come and go without being seen. What goes on in there, no one knows, and guests often pay \$1,000 a night or more for the privilege. A pair of deaf-mute housekeepers are retained to clean up any mess; they are both well-paid, and know better than to nose about unduly.

The Commodore's concierge is a perennially chipper woman named Sarah Alders. Her sharp eyes notice everything that passes her desk, and she has yet to forget a guest's name after ten years on the job. Sarah knows all of the Commodore's secrets — the trysts, the deals, the customers who checked out without leaving — and prefers working the night shift when (as she puts it) "the wild children come out to play." Those who earn her trust will find her an invaluable source of information.

Typical Commodore Bellhop

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 6, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 4, Firearms 2, Forgery 4, Melee 3, Perception 2, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 6, Stealth 4, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Rugged.

Profession: Thief 1.

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NPES

Jack TMSlaughterhousef Drago

James Sinclair Van Drachenberg, alias Jack “Slaughterhouse” Drago, is one of the toughest and most prominent gangsters in Central City, and the most influential gaunt in the city’s gangland politics. Born the eldest son of Horatio Van Drachenberg (of the New Eden Van Drachenbergs), James — a celebrated war hero — was a secretly troubled young man who resented his family’s control over him more than he could say. His metamorphosis into a gaunt shortly after the war was a matter of public record, and made the society pages of newspapers as far away as Paradiso. When he left the hospital, he rebelled against his father’s attempts to hide him from society by crippling the old man and ruling the remainder his family through fear. His “reign of terror” ended less than a year later, when he killed his sister for calling the police on him. Van Drachenberg fled New Eden — and the law — using cash to hide his trail and finding work as a hired thug for a number of gangs. He eventually found himself in the employ of gaunt mobster Daniel Petrucci in Central City, where he worked under the name “Jack Drago.” Within months, he was one of Petrucci’s most trusted enforcers — an ill-placed trust that ended when he arranged for Petrucci to disappear. Under Drago’s new leadership, the gang set a new standard for cunning and viciousness. When the rival Lombard gang accused him of “boosting their swag,” he went on a furious rampage, tearing Augustin Lombard and his cohorts apart with his bare hands. The incident earned Drago the nickname “Slaughterhouse,” as well as establishing him as one of the most feared mobsters in Central City.

Today, Drago revels in his infamous reputation, a murky reflection of the society darling he once was. He cares for no one, and although he cultivates an air of intense loyalty to those who work for him, he would happily sell them out to take what he perceives as his. Drago is tall even for a gaunt — reaching almost seven feet in height — and possesses a terrifying strength. He dresses to make an impact — his clothes are almost universally black, his only concession being a wilted white carnation he wears as a buttonhole. He always carries a pocket watch he stole from his father, and keeps a medal he was awarded for his services during the war in his breast pocket at all times. Not even his closest associates have seen them however; they’re from a time he prefers to keep quiet (and proof of his original identity for those bold enough to find them).

Jack TMSlaughterhousef Drago

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 10, Build 11, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 55.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 8, Drive (Car) 3, Etiquette 4, Evasion 4, Firearms 7, Intimidation 9, Melee 5, Perception 6, Puzzles 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 8.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Dense Bone Structure, Huge.

Profession: Gangster 3, Gunman 1, Street Tough 3, Wealthy 3.



CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD

Police Chief Buck Watterson

Watterson gained his position through a combination of brains and perseverance. He looked the other way just often enough to prosper, and cracked heads just often enough to prove he wasn't a patsy. The combination made him the top cop in Central City, and he hasn't wasted the opportunity. Under his reign, crime has stabilized and public violence has gone down... even as the criminals themselves strengthen their grip on power.

The Chief believes that a quiet city is a happy city, and cheerfully lets sleeping dogs lie so long as they make no trouble. Bribes and kickbacks have made him a rich man, and while he never publicly rubs shoulders with the city's "celebrity gangsters," he has reached an understanding with most of them. But he never forgives those whom he feels have disrespected him. Violent crimes are treated especially harshly and protracted gang wars earn a swift and brutal reprise. Syndicate members who get out of hand receive a friendly warning. Once. After that, he makes an example of those who spurned his good graces; most never live to see trial.

Watterson is a thick, bull-headed man with a wide red face and hair cropped in a severe crew cut. He smiles readily and has a charming tone to his voice, making him very easy to listen to. The smile vanishes when his temper flares, however, and his speech takes on a quiet, menacing tone. His wife of thirty years is always with him during public events, despite his string of mistresses of which she is well aware. The pair are plotting a run at the city council once he retires from the force, and perhaps even higher political office.

Police Chief Buck Watterson

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 6, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 7, Drive (Car, Truck) 4, Etiquette 5, Evasion 5, Firearms 7, Intimidation 6, Perception 6, Perform (Oratory) 7, Puzzles 5, Street-wise 7.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Officer of the Law 3, Politician 1, White Collar Worker 2.

NEW EDEN

City of tomorrow, capital of industry, shadow-laden pit... these terms and more have all been used to describe New Eden. An island metropolis situated just off the eastern coast of the U.C., it towers above the surrounding territory with skyscrapers of mind-boggling height: the better to view the depths of its folly.

New Eden contains the heart and soul of the Commonwealth's business community. Steel tycoons and marketing magnates of unparalleled influence make their headquarters

here, governing from posh boardrooms cloistered high above the streets. From their dictates, the nation's economy flourishes or decays, workers are promoted or fired, and new industry rises or falls. An ocean of paperwork flows out of their offices, employing thousands just to keep track of it all. Much of the city's success springs from "old money:" well-established families with a reputation for shrewd business practices, who have lived in New Eden from time immemorial.

Those same families also fund numerous artistic endeavors, making New Eden's culture as vibrant as its business. The nightlife here is legendary. Supper clubs and concert halls adorn its downtown streets, while the big band sounds of the hottest recording artists can be heard every night. New Eden is home to the Commonwealth's music industry, and singers will spend their nights playing the most popular clubs after a full day of cutting records in the studio. Loftier arts flourish in New Eden as well, from elaborate theatrical productions to galleries and concerts in the city's parks. The elite dress to the nines for these occasions, while working-class citizens content themselves with reduced-fare matinees, or focus their attention on one of the city's three baseball teams. Regardless of circumstance, however, there's always something to do.

With so much going on, the city prides itself on its cosmopolitan nature. A large mixture of ethnic and cultural affiliations lead to great diversity among the populace, and even the gaunts have a few places to call their own. It's not unusual to see wealthy men in tuxedos and tails sharing a diner counter with gaunt sanitation workers just off the late shift. The city's fast-paced lifestyle creates a constant state of tension, which longtime residents accept like a callus over their sensitivities. New Edeners have a surprisingly jaded nature, and take an odd pleasure in shrugging off events that would have out-of-towners goggling in shock. Life in the big city brings them a perspective that they wouldn't trade for the world. Unfortunately, their "been there, done that" ennui also translates into abnormal detachment, and citizens will often ignore a troubling situation simply because it doesn't directly affect them.

The streets of New Eden snake between the skyscrapers in a grid of artificial canyons. With so little room, architects have had to develop new and creative means of construction, resulting in spectacularly original structures, each one higher than the last. The buildings are often so tall that sunlight only filters down to the pavement for a few hours each day; the rest of the time, it's shrouded in gloom. The thoroughfares are constantly crowded with people, and traffic jams are common, leading many to make use of the city's underground train system. Those without ample resources have very little space and no privacy; tenement slums rise as high as the downtown skyscrapers, squeezing thousands of units into an infinitesimally small space. The streets become a cold form of release — you're still not alone, but at least you can move around — and everyone feels compelled to hit the sidewalks if only to get away from the same four walls every night.

New Eden's westernmost side forms a natural harbor, where most of the city's docks and shipping is situated. A series of bridges connects the island to the mainland, where suburbs like Brenton and Hart Beach stretch on for some distance. Middle class residents live here, partitioned into brick town-

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houses and wood-frame duplexes. In the northern hills, private estates sit nestled amid maple trees and country roads. Most of New Eden's elite make their homes away from the rush of island life, but still only a short drive to the latest show.

CRIME AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

"Rats eat each other in these conditions," a cop once said about life in New Eden. The swirl of activity and constant tension create a sort of shared lunacy which law-abiding citizens relish, and criminals use as an excuse to take the gloves off. New Eden's underworld favors survival of the fittest. Small-time street gangs are the order of the day (organized syndicates have a hard time competing with the "legitimate" thieves in the boardrooms), but their activities have a cruel, vicious quality unseen in other cities. Muggings and street robberies often end badly, as adrenaline-fueled crooks twitch the trigger one time too often. Long-time citizens quickly learn to defend themselves, whether with an array of bodyguards or a swift right hook. Individual gangs tend to stick to their respective neighborhoods, and while crime is omnipresent in New Eden, the perpetrators rarely wander from their established haunts.

The city's underground subway system provides an easy escape route for enterprising criminals; the tunnels branch off to every corner of the island, and are as easy to access as prying open the nearest manhole. New Eden P.D. has established an Underground Division charged with policing these tunnels, but they focus their attention on the train stops, and rarely enter the tunnels themselves without good reason. Smart crooks use them to hide stolen goods, lay low when the police are around, and move around without attracting attention. Several years ago, an enterprising gaunt hit upon the idea of charging "tolls" at key access points for those who wished to use them. A concentrated police sting scattered his band, and the tunnels' other regulars finished him off before he could regroup, but it's only a matter of time before someone else tries a similar tactic.

New Eden's law enforcement focuses primarily on localized issues. Every neighborhood has its own precinct house, and beat cops are as much a part of the street life as the pigeons. While there are few overarching criminal targets — even the biggest New Eden mobs are nothing compared to those of Central City — they make up in quantity what they lack in quality. Every time some scumbag goes to jail, three more rise to take his place, and for all their efforts, the police never seem to reduce the rate or the frequency of crime. Departments always need more funding, and with so many cops already out there, the resources each one receives is minimal. Most precinct captains just do what they can to hold the line.

With the odds stacked so much against them, New Eden police often resort to vigilante tactics. Many a perpetrator has taken a fall off a tall building, or is shot "while resisting arrest." Internal affairs rarely looks too closely at these cases unless the newspapers get involved or it entails circumstances which are beyond the pale. The mayor makes half-hearted reform promises every year, but many constituents secretly ap-

prove of the strong-arm tactics... at least if it's not in their neighborhood. Crooks, too, know that if they get arrested, they may end up in the hospital or worse, leading them to escalate situations that might otherwise have been resolved peacefully.

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

The Shooting Star

The glittering nightclubs along Cavalier Street are filled every night with New Eden's best and brightest. None of them, however, can compare to the Shooting Star, a neon-swathed paradise where the party never ends. Situated at the top of a newly-completed skyscraper and accessible only through an express elevator, it overlooks the cityscape like a god from the heavens. Tuxedo-clad gaunts enforce a strict black-tie dress code, and the line at the entrance often stretches on for blocks. Substantial political favors must be called in get on the club's VIP list. Inside, a revolving stage hosts live bands from among the city's cream, and a huge white-lit dance floor can host almost 500 revelers at once. Games of chance are available for those who wish, and private suites — complete with balconies overlooking the dance hall — can be rented by the night for sums most people think of when buying a house.

The Shooting Star is owned by Stefan Fallager, a wealthy playboy who used his fortune to build his own personal playground. Though business has been booming, he occasionally spikes the profits by moving illicit materials under the table. He does it more for the thrill than anything else, and it gives him access to goods and services that law-abiding clubs can't provide. Guests are expected to be discreet when they indulge, and troublemakers are promptly reported to the police. Fallager has enough friends on the force to quietly quash any inquiries directed his way.

Competition to play the Shooting Star is fearsome among New Eden's musicians. Record executives are regular patrons, and one good performance can land a lifetime contract. Fallager tries to vary the performance schedule as much as possible, but he has a trio of repeating acts who monopolize most evenings. Other bands scramble to catch the remaining crumbs, eager for just one moment in the Shooting Star's spotlight: a back-up act once murdered the headliner and disposed of her body in order to get a shot on the big stage. Such is the pull of New Eden's brightest nightclub. Getting in the door can be the toughest thing you ever do.

Stefan Fallager

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 7, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 3, Lore (Music Scene) 5, Perception 3, Perform (Piano) 2, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Loyal Retainer.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Lady Killer 1, Wealthy 2.

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Lazlo's Rare Books

New Eden's warlock community is highbrow and bohemian, fed by the latest fads among the intellectual elite. While a few sorcerous thugs prowl the underworld (as they do in every city), the majority see magic as a quiet form of social rebellion. They embrace it as an expression of the counterculture, using their resources to create havens where their kind can meet in peace. One such haven is Lazlo's Rare Books, a private club in the Fairway district supposedly catering to the discerning reader. The dingy façade holds a dozen or so dusty shelves, mostly containing used paperbacks and old college textbooks. The sublevel entrance has only a small sign to announce itself, and casual customers are usually left disappointed by the shoddy selection on display.

But behind a wrought iron door marked "Private" lies a room that would send anti-sorcery crusaders into fits. Huge bookshelves flank a long oaken table, holding all manner of forbidden and esoteric texts. Some were brought over after the war, "spoils" of magic-practicing soldiers. Others came to the store's owners by various and sundry illicit means: theft, embezzlement, even a spot of blackmail (the owners aren't above extorting their own in order to add to their collection). Each one has contributed to the store's reputation as an unparalleled resource for magical pursuits. Every warlock worth his salt has passed through the doors on at least one occasion, hoping to find some lost bit of knowledge that will complete his studies. A bare cinderblock corner, cut off from the remainder of the room by a high wall, contains the telltale signs of repeated sorcery use; the radiator which once kept the room warm has long since been melted to slag.

There is no "Lazlo" in Lazlo's books. The owners are a pair of sisters, Gina and Gerry Roberts, who were expelled from a Terminus girls' academy when their supernatural dabbling was uncovered. They robbed a traveling mob courier of over \$50,000 and then high-tailed it to New Eden, where they hoped their sorcerous gifts would be appreciated. The shop represents their nest egg — augmented by a few shady deals and other bits of wrongdoing — and has brought them a promising future as movers and shakers in the warlock community. That is, as long as they keep their past a secret; it's only a matter of time before they draw the attention of the police, however (not to mention the Central City mobsters whose money they stole, and any one of a half-dozen wronged warlocks).

Gina and Gerry Roberts

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 5, Disguise 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 3, Kinetics 6, Magnetism 4, Perception 5, Puzzles 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: White Collar Worker 1, Con Artist 1, Rogue Scientist 1.

NPCS

Silas Grenadier

Grenadier Shipping is one of the foremost transportation companies in the country, with trucks and cargo ships in every major city. Its owner, Silas Grenadier, comes from old money, but works as hard as any penniless entrepreneur. He spends long hours ensconced in his office, using a stock ticker and a phalanx of telephones to stay connected to his empire. His workaholic tendencies led to an ugly public divorce; he retained custody of his two daughters more as a point of pride than any concern for their well-being.

He runs Grenadier Shipping with a ruthless eye on the bottom line, treating his employees like family and his competitors like human trash. He earned the enmity of the Commonwealth underworld due to his tendency to hide hired muscle amid the cargo in his truck shipments — armed to the teeth and ordered to shoot at the first sign of a hijacking. Silas survived a mob-ordered assassination attempt last fall; once his bodyguards had gunned down the would-be killers, he ordered the bodies chopped up and mailed back to their employers, piece by piece. Fellow businessmen claim that his boardroom tactics are equally effective and only slightly less blunt.

Silas is a slight, balding African-American man with watery eyes and a mirthless smile. His unimposing figure often leads others to underestimate him, a fatal mistake as his business rivals have learned. His family has roots stretching back centuries, and though he cannot name any of his forefathers (save his beloved grandmother, who died just after the war), their "legacy" weighs heavily upon his mind. He refuses to compromise his family's success, although his two daughters have no such compunctions. They spend every night at New Eden's hot spots, getting into all manner of trouble. Silas has retained several private detectives to keep an eye on them, but he worries where their wild behavior will lead.

Silas Grenadier

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 6, Etiquette 5, Evasion 6, Firearms 3, Intimidation 7, Perception 5, Puzzles 5, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Loyal Retainer, Wise.

Profession: Wealthy 4, White Collar Worker 3.

Arlen Eaton

Eaton is a prime mover and shaker in New Eden's music world. His bands play in over a dozen different clubs, and his word alone can make or break an aspiring artist. He has his own record label, Hi Notes Music, which has long-term contracts with many of the industry's most popular bands. He and his scouts cover every major club in the city, hoping to spot the next sensation.

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Eaton started out as a composer, but his lack of success convinced him to switch gears. He found he had a knack for politics and a willingness to play dirty that made him a natural wheeler-dealer. In his mind, he keeps the jackals away from "his" bands, while providing a stage to show the world what they can do. If he sullies his hands in the process, at least they're *his* hands, and not those of the talent. Considering the number of hit-makers he's shepherded to the big time, it's hard to argue with his results.

Eaton is also a member of the Few, and has discreetly aided fellow questioners from time to time. Among his possessions is a record single of a song called "In The Mood," which he can't remember anyone — *anyone* — ever recording. He found it in an old pawnshop, and the sound of it has haunted him ever since. He would never dream of allowing one of his groups to play the tune (let alone record it), but it has a hold on him that no other music can match. He keeps it locked in a safe in his office, away from prying eyes. Sometimes he plays it late at night, listening to it over and over for hours on end.

Arlen Eaton

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 6, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 4, Drive (Car) 3, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 4, Lore (Music Scene) 8, Perception 5, Perform (Composer) 5, Perform (Piano) 4, Perform (Trombone) 9, Puzzles 4, Stealth 5, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky.

Profession: Investigator 1, Performer 1, White Collar Worker 3.

NOVA ROMA

An entire nation distilled into a single fluttering pulse. That's Nova Roma. With a reach exceeding its grasp and pretensions to glory that have long since faded, it presides over a national government of declining influence, housing an unwieldy bureaucracy that can make life difficult but no longer truly leads. It holds the instruments of the Commonwealth's might: the National Legislature, the NLEB, the offices of the Army and Navy (which have been slowly downsized since the end of the war)... all of it fed by a vast army of politicians, pencil pushers, and power mongers.

Residents of Nova Roma seem to live in their own universe. They have little interest in the world outside of the capital, save as an instrument to govern — a target for the reams of useless legislation they churn out. The politicians must periodically venture forth to court their constituents' vote. The rest just attend to their jobs, going about "the country's business" with little regard for the country itself. Numerous buildings — government departments of various sorts —

handle tax collection, postal services, highway maintenance and repair, and the armed forces. A plethora of buildings spreads out from the central square, dominating downtown and extending into the surrounding suburbs.

Nova Roma itself is patterned after the geography of ancient Rome. Buildings are designed in a classical motif, with marble pillars and towering domes marking the landscape. It begins in Freedom Square, site of the National Dome and the War Memorial. From there, the streets are laid out in a rigid grid, creating a checkerboard of white stone facades and stairwells. Over the last few years, maintenance on national buildings has begun to slip, and their gleaming white surfaces have become darkened with soot. Hardy trees line most of the larger boulevards, and the city's famous street lamps blend well with the neoclassical architecture. Further north, the suburbs contain a collegiate atmosphere. Nova Roma sports several nationally known universities: ivy-and-red-brick affairs which routinely disgorge a ready supply of bright-eyed intellectuals.

Thought most citizens work for the government, the bureaucracy is convoluted enough to prevent a ready ascension of power. Workers rarely feel "in the loop," and often act on orders whose origins are murky and unclear. The Legislature is rife with cronyism, as political lobbies, special interests, and "advisors" muddy the waters around the elected officials. Everyone has a superior to answer to, and even the Praetorium Speaker is beholden to his fellows. Paranoia comes easily to those living in such conditions, and political jockeying dominates every level of society. Nova Roma's mailrooms are just as Machiavellian as the halls of the Legislature, and the Praetorium itself is a viper pit of political dirty tricks.

Sorcery is strictly forbidden within Nova Roma — a by-product of the Legislature's recent anti-warlock fervor. The Anti-Sorcery Act, passed in 1942, has translated into active persecution of magic-users, and the north side colleges — which teemed with warlocks at the end of the war — have since been wiped clean of any "sorcerous influence."

CRIME AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

As the nation's capital, Nova Roma operates according to a different set of rules than most cities. Though the national government is in decline elsewhere, it maintains a firm grip here... and everyone knows it. The National Law Enforcement Bureau treats the city as its private stomping grounds, keeping the "riff raff" under tight wraps. The local police are basically subordinates of the NLEB, and Bureau agents handle any infraction above the smallest and pettiest. Under that umbrella, criminals are hard-pressed to make their presence known. Any signs of organized activity beyond a few street gangs are ruthlessly crushed, and the streets of Nova Roma are widely considered the safest in the Commonwealth.

The cost for such security, however, is quite high. The city has granted the NLEB wide authority in carrying out its duties, allowing them to act on far less pretext than law enforcement bureaus in other towns. They rarely overstep their mandate — overt abuses are not tolerated — but on the other hand, their mandate is wide enough to encompass all manner of snooping, spying, and strong-arm investigating. Intrusive

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agents who push the limits of citizen privacy are accepted as a fact of life. Technology developed during the war increased the efficiency of wiretapping and other surveillance methods, allowing the NLEB to listen in on private conversations nearly at will. Fedora'ed agents are everywhere, lurking in the corners of vision and arresting troublemakers just often enough to make the population nervous. (Thankfully, such influence declines dramatically beyond the city limits. The enormous national government spends most of its budget just sustaining its various departments, leaving fewer resources to extend its reach into other cities.)

While traditional forms of crime are hard to find in Nova Roma, subtler corruption has spread like a wildfire. The National Legislature attracts lobbyists, toadies, and sycophants eager to feed at the national trough, leading to all manner of bribery and coercion. Machiavellian dirty tricks permeate every corner of the capital, accepted with a shrug as the cost of getting things done. While outright felonies (such as kidnapping and murder) are not tolerated, the NLEB happily turns a blind eye to less conspicuous infractions. (As one local journalist put it, "What's a little blackmail between friends?") Those in power can more or less act as they please, provided they keep their name out of the papers, and the NLEB only steps in when it is politically expedient to do so.

Within this environment, a few enterprising law-breakers have quietly flourished. Information is a priceless commodity in Nova Roma, and a thief or racketeer who might otherwise be muscled out of another city can find all manner of opportunities among the legislative elite. Stolen files, compromising photos, anything that can be used in the city's never-ending political jousts has value — either to the former owner or to his political enemies. Nova Roma's second-story men know how to procure documents without getting noticed, and have made an art form out of covering their tracks. With all the dirty money flowing through the city, it's easy to miss a few "freelance expenses" doled out for incriminating dirt, and Nova Roma's hardball atmosphere ensures that no questions get asked. Street thuggery never pays in the U.C. capital, but "civilized" criminals who know how to play the game find it the paradise of their dreams.

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

The National Dome

The center of Nova Roma — geographically, culturally, and symbolically — is the Capitol of the National Legislature, better known at the National Dome. Its marble edifice towers over the nearby buildings in Freedom Square, looking like something out of another age. It occupies an entire side of the four-cornered square, its immaculate lawn the only real green amid the stone and mortar. The dome itself is almost 400 feet tall, and holds chambers for both halves of the Legislature beneath it. A trio of lengthy wings extends behind and to either side of it, containing offices for every Assemblyman and Praetor, and their staff. The building also contains extensive libraries, phone banks, a series of private meeting rooms, and

a "leisure suite" where lawmakers can shoot pool or have a cigar in between sessions. A series of wide marble steps opens out from the Dome onto the square, flanked by Honor Guards and filled with tourists clicking pictures of the capital's most famous building.

The Dome itself only houses the Legislature, who craft and approve the nation's laws. Implementing those laws falls to the dozens of Departments, Offices, and Bureaus which occupy the other buildings along Freedom Square. Most citizens know what goes on in the Dome (which is a matter of public record) but passively ignore the invisible instruments of government surrounding it. Any legislator worth his salt works hard to curry favors with the denizens of the surrounding offices — the better to extend his influence. The Assembly holds 500 members, whose districts are determined by population. The Praetorium has 75 members, elected along rigid territorial lines. Praetors and Assemblymen alike serve three-year terms, with no limitations on the number of times they can run. Men outnumber women by roughly three to one in both houses. No gaunts currently serve in either house, although one or two have campaigned in the past.

Typical Assemblyman

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 6, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 7, Etiquette 7, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 5, Lore (Politics) 6, Perception 4, Street-wise 2.

Backgrounds: Charismatic.

Profession: Politician 2, Wealthy 2.

House 63

The NLEB has a wide variety of boltholes and safe houses scattered all over Nova Roma. Some serve as *de facto* agent living quarters, while others keep witnesses and other key figures out of the public eye until trial. But House 63 serves an entirely different purpose. It stands on a large lot, a red brick structure completely isolated from its neighbors. Tall trees mask it from the street, and a wrought iron gate keeps curious visitors at bay. The neighbors think that some kind of shut-in lives there, for every now and then, a delivery van can be seen making its way down the crushed gravel path towards the front door.

The NLEB uses House 63 as an off-the-books interrogation site, bringing suspects in through the vans and holding them for "extended questioning." The inside has been divided into several clearly demarcated areas, all thoroughly secured and soundproofed. Suspects are brought in and restrained, then usually left waiting for several hours until a specially selected set of agents can attend to them. Most interrogation sessions involve only basic tools — sometimes only the agents' hands and anatomical know-how. Particularly stubborn suspects require more extensive techniques, which the agents apply

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with grim determination. It's not unusual for those brought there to leave with missing digits, punctured eyeballs, or worse. To a man, they have never fingered their attackers.

The NLEB usually employs the house only when they need answers quickly, or when the suspect is so odious in the agents' eyes that he deserves such brutal treatment. Suspects interred there never learn its true location (they are blindfolded for the journey), and no one comes to House 63 if their word holds the slightest weight with the media or the public at large. Only a small number of agents know of its existence. The Bureau chief is officially out of the loop (although he knows all about it), and agents deemed too "inflexible" (i.e. moral) never learn of its existence. It remains the purveyance of those who believe that the law must sometimes be broken in order to be upheld. Despite its odious nature, House 63 has proved invaluable on several important cases when tortured suspects revealed far more than they would ever be inclined under normal circumstances. In the minds of its defenders, such results are well worth the price they exact from their "guests."

Typical NLEB Agent

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Evasion 6, Intimidation 5, Perception 5, Pick Lock 4, Puzzles 4, Stealth 5, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Investigator 1, Officer of the Law 1, Street Tough 1.

NPCs

Clarence Hennessy

"Across this great land, the curse of sorcery raises its ugly head. Warlocks ply their unholy trade in secret, hiding behind the safe façade of schools and churches. Every spell they cast corrupts our country's soul. They are a blight upon the very essence of the Unified Commonwealth. When the time is right, they will rise as one and subjugate us beneath their ungodly yoke."

The words were spoken by the Honorable Patrick Deacon, Citizen Praetor and Nova Roma's most avowed anti-warlock. But they were written by the Praetor's aide, an unknown figure named Clarence Hennessy about whom the public knows next to nothing. Under Hennessy's quiet direction, anti-sorcery feeling in the Commonwealth has risen to historic levels, and Deacon has found a crusade that will assure his reelection for some time to come.

Hennessy is a demagogue of the first order, a master at manipulating fears to ensure public loyalty. During the war, he worked for the government's propaganda arm, finding new and horrible ways to vilify the Order of Nu. The White Light made sorcery a little more palatable, forcing him to switch gears. He resigned his post with the government and signed on to Deacon's election campaign, then strapped for cash and struggling to find a message. Hennessy brought them one, straight from the pages of his wartime *raison d'être*. He worked the anti-warlock angle for votes, playing on the fears and suspicions of Deacon's constituency. Deacon won in a landslide, and the two have since been making good on their promise to "eradicate sorcery from sea to glorious sea."

Hennessy serves as a chief advisor to the Praetor, guiding his policies and enunciating his vision. Together, the two draft anti-magic legislation which Hennessy polishes and Deacon delivers to the floor with fiery zeal. Their crusade has made them prime movers in the capital, topped by the triumph of the Anti-Sorcery Act, which Deacon officially sponsored. Despite such success, Hennessy has not pressed for further measures just yet. He doesn't want to provoke a backlash and besides, ever-present scapegoats like the warlocks make his job much easier.

A sallow and charmless man, Hennessy lacks the personal magnetism to make a run for office himself, but found a perfect proxy in Deacon (whose folksy demeanor and twisted logic struck a chord with the voters). He dresses in gray suits and pale blue ties, indistinguishable from hundreds of other capital sycophants. Naturally a man such as he makes numerous enemies, most of whom realize that he is the power behind Deacon's throne. He welcomes their enmity. As long as they stand in his way, he'll always have someone new at which to point his finger.

Clarence Hennessy

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Bureaucracy 8, Etiquette 5, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 2, Lore (Nova Roma Politics) 8, Lore (Propaganda) 8, Lore (Sorcery) 5, Perception 5, Perform (Speechwriter) 9, Puzzles 3.

Backgrounds: Small, Wise.

Profession: Politician 3, White Collar Worker 2.

Destiny Rae

The Midsummer Blues is a quiet nightclub on the north side of town, catering mainly to jazz lovers from the nearby universities and clients who prefer to keep their business out of the public eye. It was built by a prosperous Assemblyman named Albert Vandermeer, who bought his way to Nova Roma and threw money around like it was going out of style. The Midsummer Blues was a present for his former paramour, a sultry

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red-headed crooner named Destiny Rae. Vandermeer doted on the young woman, nearly thirty years his junior, and she knew how to play him just right. When she asked for a stage of her own, he never hesitated for a second; only the best would do for his little songbird.



The nightclub cost the Assemblyman his marriage, his standing, and eventually his seat in the Legislature. Rae kept the fruits of his labor and the notoriety it brought. Everyone in Nova Roma knows about Destiny and her reputation as an ice-cold *femme fatale*. Unfortunately, none of that matters when she takes the stage. Her voice can turn the hardest man to whimpering mush, and she has a string of “admirers” who will happily do whatever she asks for the price of a smile. She plays at the Midsummer Blues four nights a week, bagging a whopping 60% of the take each night. Every performance brings out fans for whom her infamy is an irresistible aphrodisiac, even if she never gives them a second glance. With her fortunes now reasonably secure, she has begun turning her eyes towards greater prizes. Movies, fashion lines, maybe even more? The sky’s the limit for a girl with her ambitions.

Albert Vandermeer has neither forgiven nor forgotten how his ex-mistress ruined him, but he’s smart enough not to strike directly. Instead, he watches her from afar, keeps close tabs on her movements, and waits for the moment to wreak a proper vengeance. Destiny is aware of it, of course, and is quietly debating finding some patsy to remove the former Assemblyman from her life for good.

Destiny Rae

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 3, Disguise 3, Drive (Car) 2, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Perception 5, Perform (Singer) 8, Stealth 5, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky.

Profession: Femme Fatale 3, Performer 2, White Collar Worker 1.

PARADISO

On the surface, Paradiso appears to be the exact opposite of the U.C.’s other cities. It’s bright where they are dark, cheerful where they are grim. Warm sunshine permeates every corner of the city, while sea breezes blowing in from the western ocean ensure that the weather remains pleasant year ’round. Palm trees line the boulevards, lending an air of the exotic to the shops and homes, and bountiful orange groves stretch as far as the eye can see. Tourists flock to the beaches in droves, and a lucky few catch glimpses of movie stars... or even get “discovered” and put on the silver screen themselves.

Paradiso contains the heart of the Commonwealth’s film industry, and every major studio has offices and production facilities in the city. Red carpet premieres are a weekly occurrence at its celebrated movie palaces. Radio dramas also thrive here, and actors regularly move back and forth between the two mediums. The Commonwealth has a bottomless

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appetite for motion pictures, from screwball comedies to science fiction epics. It lionizes its favorite stars, making larger-than-life heroes out of two-bit hacks and glamorous leading ladies out of truck stop waitresses. The moguls who control the studios exercise as much power as any politician, and box office figures determine the pecking order amongst cinema's elite. The lure of fame draws thousands to Paradiso every year, hoping to strike it rich amid the glitz and glamour.

That's the fantasy they sell. The reality is a different story. The city's dream factories have a high price of admission, and chew up countless aspiring actors for every bona fide star they produce. Those cast aside have a difficult time of it. The lucky ones find work elsewhere; waiting tables, farming the orange groves, or quiet desk jobs in the city's subsidiary businesses. The rest fall prey to the human vultures who hide behind the bright spotlights. Pornography and prostitution run rampant in the city's seamy red-light district, feeding on desperate "actors" with nowhere else to go. The rare few who succeed in the business find the spotlight uncomfortably brief. Fame can fade as quickly as it blooms, creating instant celebrities who slide into obscurity after a few short months.

Paradiso's elite — the luckiest stars, the studio moguls, and their hangers-on — lead lives of bacchanalian excess. The mansions in Bailey Canyon echo with revelries that would

put Roman emperors to shame. A thriving tabloid industry collects the juiciest tidbits, printing them for a public eager to tear down the gods they have built. The police patrol the wealthiest neighborhoods like armed guards, providing unparalleled protection for those who can afford it. In contrast, the poor neighborhoods receive little police protection: cops only appear there when searching for a suspect.

The ephemeral nature of its primary industry translates to the rest of Paradiso as well. The city is really more mirage than reality. It was built in the desert, fabricated from nothingness into a self-promoted oasis. A huge aqueduct, constructed just before the war, provides ample water for the entire region (at the expense of the farming communities further inland), ensuring that gardens flourish where once there was only sand. The phoniness creates a culture of facades: neon lights and plaster-of-paris rather than any real structure. First impressions are everything, and style supplants substance on every corner. As one denizen put it, "Other cities have a real backbone beneath their streets. Paradiso is just one big empty."

That emptiness defines the city at its core. The lack of culture becomes a culture all its own, reveling in the latest, the flashiest, and the new. People can reinvent themselves every day, and the promise of a fresh start lingers on every street

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corner. Paradiso's smartest citizens quietly revel in their city's phony charm while refusing to believe a word of it. It's not hard to get the hang of it. After all, the sunsets are nice, the people are pretty, and the ocean has a way of washing your sins clean. The rest of the town — the ones who believe the lies — are eaten alive. Their bodies disappear beneath the sun and the sand, replaced by the next load of dreamers fresh off the bus.

CRIME AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Paradiso's criminals have a knack for verbal deception; hustlers and con men are appallingly at home here, indistinguishable from "legitimate" promoters or moguls. Many a naïve waif has arrived from the heartland, only to be robbed of everything they had by some shyster promising them the world. The city's wilder side also ensures a steady drug trade, as members of cinema royalty search for new ways to alter their consciousness. The north side fleshpots feed a regular string of heroin addicts, subsidized by organized crime which provides the drugs in exchange for a cut of the profits.

The underworld caters mainly to vice and greed here: bookmakers do a thriving business placing bets, and a trio of renowned horse tracks gather ne'er-do-wells like flies to honey. Prostitution and drug running walk hand-in-hand, feeding on those who craved escape from their shattered dreams of stardom. But it all stays fairly friendly. Violence is a relatively sedate occurrence in Paradiso, limited to crimes of passion and individual plotters. While narcotics smuggling has its share of casualties, protracted gang wars of the like seen in New Eden or Central City simply don't exist.

The police department is renowned throughout the country, immortalized by radio dramas like *Danger Squad* and *Shield of Gold*. The department goes out of its way to curry a clean-cut image, aided by self-promoting detectives like Angela Valentine (see page 91) and a compliant press that loves its heroes. Local cops ensure that the wealthy are left untroubled while focusing on those who supply their illicit pleasures. Dragnets often canvas the stagnant north side, bringing in small-time pushers and streetwalkers in an impressive display of authority. The occasional flashy bust along the harbor, coupled with enough celebrity arrests to keep the elite on their toes, helps smooth over any glaring double standards in the department's behavior.

Paradiso PD is currently embroiled in the search for the "Angel Eyes" killer, a serial murderer whose victims have appeared in various locations across the city. All were young and attractive — three women and one man — with a taste for late-night clubbing. All were found stripped naked with puncture wounds around the abdomen and ribcage. The killer claimed the victims' eyes; none have yet been recovered, and the tabloids have run riot with speculation. The latest theory holds that the killer is a warlock who uses his trophies in some kind of bizarre ritual. Police scoff at such stories (magic doesn't require organic compounds), but the public image has been fixed. The longer the killer remains at large, the wilder the speculations become.

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

Privateer Pictures

The current king of the Commonwealth box office is Privateer Pictures, with a stable of stars to rival the sky itself and a string of hits stretching back to before the White Light. Studio boss Charlie Beekman has a nose for public tastes and an uncanny ability to deliver what they think they want. His audacity would shame P.T. Barnum, but few could argue with the results. The films under his watch have earned massive critical and popular acclaim, from the swashbuckling *Guns on the Water* to the light-hearted *New Eden Sunshine*. The company reflects that success.

Privateer Studios occupies a prime piece of real estate — a quiet valley just off the beach. The hillside provides privacy for shooting and the shoreline is an easy escape where starlets can frolic after a hard day on the set. Beekman maintains a series of bungalows right on the waterfront, which he allows favored underlings to use as they please. Further back, the main offices afford a glorious view of the sunset, while the sets themselves stretch in a long row back into the valley. The streets can be redressed to simulate any location in the world, and the huge indoor studios can fit entire buildings within their bulk. A wrought iron gate flanks the Studios' entryway, where visitors must sign in before proceeding. Moguls, actors, and other VIPs use private entrances scattered around the perimeter. Guards patrol the grounds at night, but they're poorly paid, and have seen enough strange goings-on after hours to dismiss all but the most brazen illicit activities.

The special effects department is run by a pair of warlocks, who use their powers to produce some of the most spectacular images ever caught on film. Beekman keeps their employment off the books, protecting them from unwanted legal attention. More troubling is the fact that Privateer's biggest star, Scott LeClerk, has a thousand-dollar-a-week drug habit which the studio privately bankrolls. He also associates with several prominent members of the Paradiso underground, and while Beekman tolerates it for the moment (the bad boy image has punch at the box office), he's already on the lookout for LeClerk's replacement.



THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Typical Studio Security

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Evasion 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Melee 4, Perception 5, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Soldier 2, Street Tough 1.

Bianco Memorial Pier

Stretching far out into the ocean surf, the Memorial Pier dominates the seaside landscape. It was built just after the war, on the foundations of an older structure which had washed away in a fierce storm. The renovated pier features a wide assortment of attractions: street vendors, jugglers and musicians, and a miniature amusement park built on the far end. A restaurant specializing in spicy food (i.e., Mexican and Hispanic dishes) adds a touch of the exotic to the surroundings, while fishermen cast their lines in a long row on the far end. Beachgoers are attracted to the music and attractions, while Paradiso's seamier elements use it as neutral ground to discuss business.

The constant flow of traffic at the pier also attracts bums and panhandlers, who jockey with the street musicians for prime spots. The police roust them every now and again, but they always come back after a few days. They're harmless enough in the sunlight, but the bolder ones won't hesitate to attack visitors alone at night; tourists attracted to the carnival are advised to refrain from strolling too far down the beaches. In addition, many of the attractions are rigged, and the operators are often involved in smuggling and other unseemly business.

The beaches to the south make excellent landfalls, meaning that product can be transferred to offshore boats without alerting the authorities, and the lights from the nearby beachfront hotels never seem to illuminate the pier's darkest shadows. The police keep up semi-regular patrols, but there's a whole lot of beach and only a few officers. Canny smugglers can arrange a meeting, row to shore, unload their cargo, and vanish before even the sharpest officer knows they're there.

Typical Smuggler

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Drive (Boat, Car, Light Aircraft) 6, Engineering 5, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 5, Forgery 4, Melee 2, Perception 3, Pick Lock 2, Stealth 5.

Backgrounds: Racer, Mean Streets.

Profession: Gangster 1, Street Tough 1.

NPES

Eddie O'Reilly

Voyeur magazine is a sleaze rag on the rise, dishing the dirt as no one else dares. Though it lacks the numbers of bigger papers like *The National Scoop*, its brazen disregard of basic journalistic principles has a perverse readability to which the public is rapidly warming. Much of its fire comes from its chief columnist, "Easy" Eddie O'Reilly, who spearheads an ongoing mudslinging campaign of Napoleonic proportions.

Formerly a reporter for a prominent New Eden paper, Eddie was fired for publishing unfounded rumors, a practice which led to a massive lawsuit against his employers. He found himself in Paradiso, where his freewheeling brand of "reporting" was more welcome. He took a job with the struggling *Voyeur*, hoping to squirrel away a little cash before it went belly up. Then his exposé, "Shemale Menace in the Harrison Hills," revealed one of Paradiso's hottest young "actresses" as a man in drag. Circulation went through the roof and *Voyeur* was officially on the map.

Since then, Eddie has become the most hated man in Paradiso... and he loves every minute of it. He lurks around movie sets and nightclubs, waiting for juicy innuendo and using a small army of informants to tip him off. No one can distort the facts like he can, and he has an unparalleled ability to bring just enough truth to his hogwash to prevent casual dismissal. He proudly claims to have ruined the careers of at least three movie icons, and has been beaten unconscious by every studio security team in town. If there's trouble brewing or dirty secrets being hidden, Eddie will always be there — camera in hand — to make a bad mess much, much worse.

Naturally, he's taken steps to protect himself from any angry subject looking for revenge. He carries a large-caliber pistol with him at all times, and has been known to hire bodyguards when he can afford it. They never come with him on the job, however; they crimp his style. And with the way his luck has gone lately, he hasn't had much cash to spare for them anyway. Eddie has a weakness for horses and sporting events. His paychecks keep him one step ahead of the bookies, but a fondness for long shots constantly threatens to put him deep in the hole. With numerous enemies and an increasing list of underworld "associates," it's only a matter of time before the wrong person catches up with him.

Eddie O'Reilly

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3, Drive (Car) 3, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 8, Forgery 4, Lore (Horse Racing) 3, Lore (Yellow Journalism) 7, Melee 1, Perception 8, Pick Lock 6, Puzzles 6, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 6, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Con Artist 1, Investigator 2.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD



Angela Valentine

When Mildred Valencia arrived in Paradiso, she thought she could be a big star. Two years and 115 failed auditions later, she gave up. She had the charisma, she had the chops, she even had a great new stage name, but she just couldn't get a foot in the door. The breaking point came when a sleazy producer tried to grope her in exchange for a walk-on role in a B horror movie. She cried "rape" loud enough to be heard across the lot... just before beating the man senseless with his own belt. The investigating policeman was so impressed that he recommended she join the academy. With no other prospects, she decided to give it a go, and in the process found her real path to stardom.

A string of high-profile arrests landed "Angela Valentine" on the cover of several tabloids, and the department noticed how deftly she handled public attention. Rapid promotion soon followed, and within a few years, she was the rising star of Paradiso's Homicide Division. Though her colleagues resented

the way she courted the press, they couldn't deny her flair for the dramatic. Every celebrity bust or public case seemed to have her name attached to it. Her face appeared in the paper next to every handcuffed miscreant. Off-duty, her profile rose even higher. She appeared at film premieres and gala soirees, usually with the latest hunk of the month on her arm. The department even received fan mail, dutifully passed along to the glamorous detective by a grudging clerk.

Surprisingly, Angela passed up the chance to lead the Angel Eyes investigation: serial killer cases take up too much time. Instead, she kept her eyes peeled for simpler cases — those with publicity potential — and her instincts for the limelight never led her astray. Today, the "Homicide Detective to the Stars" has a sterling track record, along with several promotional deals and a proposed radio serial based on her exploits. Though they offered her a starring role (playing herself, naturally), she opted to remain on the force and leave the radio play to someone else. Why settle for being an actress when you're already a star?

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Angela Valentine

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 6, Contortions 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Etiquette 7, Firearms 6, Melee 3, Perception 5, Perform (Acting) 3, Puzzles 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Femme Fatale 1, Investigator 1, Officer of the Law 1.

TERMINUS

Every country has some part of itself to be ashamed of, a darkness that blights the surface no matter where you tread. This place absorbs all the darkness and holds it tightly, refusing to let it go. In the end, it rots from the inside, and the rest of the country stays sterling clean. At least that's how some people justify a city like Terminus. It isn't like the rest of the Commonwealth. It doesn't waste time with glitter and whitewash. What you see is what you get — even if you can't stand the sight of it. Walking through the gutters of this city is bound to get blood on your shoes.

Terminus is a lady, a *grande dame* who still remembers her old days of glory. Its denizens can see the paint chipping and the iron rusted on the grate, but she never looks beyond her old days. She still pretends that her dress is in style, her hair isn't graying, and her eyes don't hold the pain of a generation. To appease her, her residents pretend the same — and every citizen of Terminus knows how to forget the present in the illusion of the past.

The buildings in Terminus are old, rising above the streets in a coil of elegance and fading color. Her wharf-fronts are packed with trade, the old ships rocking against wooden piers as they unload box after box into the city's heart. She's a port city, a river city, destined to watch as the water passes her by. The southern charm still flutters behind her waving fan, occasionally surfacing in a tipped hat or genteel whisper of lilac wind.

To say that Terminus has an ugly underbelly is like saying that a walk in the bayou might get your feet wet. The city is a cesspit; criminals scuttle from her bars and dance parlors like crawfish from under an upturned rock. The primary export of Terminus is tobacco, but it is said that its primary import is lawbreakers. They flock to the city from across the country, filling its houses with people who have no names. Terminus is a haven for the lost and disenfranchised, offering them solitude and anonymity within its ancient, fading arms.

During the day, Terminus is all work. The ports are rolling, the boats struggling in on the river from the wide gulf that sparkles beyond the bay. The people work incessantly in the heat, not caring about propriety in their battle to make ends meet. In the center of the city, beneath a gilded dome, the city council meets to discuss issues of genteel law. The sunlight gleaming from the dome reminds citizens of the solemn morality of their intentions — while still revealing the peeling gilt of greed and false promises. To the north, tobacco grows in cool fields, the green leaves plucked by generation after generation of hardened farm hands.

But at night, the sky darkens, and the *grande dame* puts on her diamonds. The bars and dance halls open, with drinks and dances for fifty cents apiece. Dark smoky music fills the air, and once a year the celebrations of *mardi gras*, Fat Tuesday, rip through the city like an electric storm. The nearby swamps and bayous conceal a thousand crimes and a thousand criminals, some above the water and some forever hidden below. The masks and glitter of Terminus's celebrations are matched only by her darker visage — *houngans* and warlocks hiding their magic behind bloody rituals of *voodoo* and betrayal. The city's tombs stand above the ground, silently holding back the waters that threaten to swallow the city whole.

Travelers can take their fill of the city night, walking through narrow cobblestone streets and twisting alleyways to hidden hotspots in the dim, back corners of Terminus. Many men and women have found their ending there, in the darkness and smoky lights. More than anything else, Terminus is the end of a long journey from prosperity to grief.

CRIME AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Most cities have battles between the law enforcement agencies and the underworld. In Terminus, that war is as dead as the bodies in the deep bayou. Terminus belongs to the underworld; its soul has passed “corrupted” and headed straight to hell. The closest thing to law that the city holds is honor — and honor among thieves is a tenuous thing at best.

The underworld of Terminus consists of more than seven intricately involved groups, all vying for control of the city's harbor and wealth. Like a collection of dukedoms within a great kingdom, Terminus is broken down into pieces, split between those who try to control her. The best that the overworked, underpaid, and heavily bribed police force can do is to settle these disputes with as little loss of public life as possible.

The strongest factions in the city's underworld are the Baron's Men, the Roughhousers, and the Silent Scepter. Under that lie the Green Riders, the Shadowmakers, *Déjà Vu*, and the Widows of Fortune. The leader of the Baron's Men is Remy Favroux, a powerful Terminus elite with money to burn. It is said that he saw a vision a few years back — an oracular dream of the city united beneath his boot — or it might have just been a trance induced by drugs fed to him by his faithful right-hand man, the warlock Valmont. They control almost a third of Terminus, outstripping by far any other group.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD

Together, the Roughhousers and the Silent Scepter outnumber the Baron's Men, but only if they unite — and for these distinctly different groups, such alliances are shaky in the extreme. The Roughhousers consist largely of immigrants from the northern cities, ethnic Irishmen who found Nova Roma and New Eden too difficult to crack. Their leaders are brutal, uncultured, and command a near-army of gaunts — brothers and sisters of the cause. On the other hand, the Silent Scepter is far more elite, with less than half the membership that the Roughhousers can summon. However, the Scepter is one of the strongest warlock cabals in the Commonwealth, boasting cells in Terminus, New Eden, and Central City. These two groups have only a tenuous alliance — the gaunt population finds it difficult to trust the warlocks, and vice-versa.

The lesser groups control anywhere from a six-block radius to nearly a mile of city property, organizing themselves as best they can, and shuffling their positions beneath the three more powerful groups. Only one of these lesser subsidiaries does not actively seek to ally itself with the other groups: Déjà Vu, a magical organization whose practices have eschewed traditional warlock scientific trappings for a bloody, ritualistic quality. They control the bayou outside Terminus, and anyone who dares wander through those mossy lands at night may find themselves torn to pieces by their powerful *voudoun* magic.

The police have little power in Terminus, and they know it. They're fighting a losing battle, their crystal ball squads hiding in dark alleys and skulking about like criminals themselves. Those who choose to fight for the law in Terminus have their work cut out for them. Their best hope is to keep the fractious groups battling one another, and hope that no single individual has the charisma and pull to unify the criminal elements in Terminus. If that should ever happen, the city will finally fall into darkness.

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

St. Lafayette Cemetery

The St. Lafayette Cemetery is the largest and most prominent burial ground in Terminus. It is entirely above ground, for all bodies buried in soil become overwhelmed by the marshy swamp and brought back up to the surface. The cemetery opened many hundreds of years ago — so long ago, in fact, that the dates on the standing tombs have all been removed by age, wear, and weather. Most of the graves here are done in traditional Greek and classical styles, but some few are designed with an insane grace reflected within their twisting iron ornamentation. They seem to be almost livable residences, standing free among the twisting rows of graves and tall statuary.

Those who wish to visit the cemetery should be warned; not only are the standing graves a perfect labyrinth for muggers and thieves, but it is also a common meeting ground for warlocks. The police never patrol between the tombs and many of those who go missing near the cemetery are never found again.

Typical Footpad/Crook

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 4, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Appraise 2, Brawl 6, Evasion 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, Melee 4, Perception 2, Pick Lock 3, Stealth 5.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Thief 1.

Low Quarter

The Low Quarter is Terminus's answer to the glittering corridors of New Eden and the palm-shaded avenues of Paradiso. The original twenty blocks which comprise the heart of the Low Quarter were built before the rest of the city. The houses which stand to either side of the main thoroughfare are covered in delicate iron-work and overwhelming trellises of wisteria and flowering vine.

The Low Quarter is the celebration area, with a hundred bars catering to any desire, no matter how dark or decadent. The streets are moss-covered cobblestone, and many are too small and narrow for cars. The buildings are all "historic" (i.e., dilapidated and weary), and their tall archways sag beneath the weight of too many years.

Typical Barman

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 5, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 3, Brawl 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 4, Intimidation 5, Medicine 3, Melee 5, Perception 3, Puzzles 3, Sleight of Hand 2, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Con Artist 1.

City Capitol Building (Hall of Fame)

The grand central building of Terminus' government stands in the low hills to the north of the city, its glittering golden dome sparkling like a small sun upon the earth. The building is as old as the city, though it has supposedly burned to the ground twice in the past — and was recently threatened by numerous warlock and criminal factions. Regardless of the danger, the government of the city still meets within the dome, passing laws and reviewing important documents. Nearby, the Terminus Central Police Station still stands, its membership futilely trying to redeem themselves against the city's darker side.

The area around the Capitol building is potentially the only crime-free portion of the city, standing like a bastion within Terminus's corruptive core. Police stand on every street corner, watching for the slightest hint that this small patch of virtue might be overwhelmed. A massive fountain stands in the center of the square, cascading thousands of gallons of water beneath a tall golden horse and rider — the symbol of the city's glorious past.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Typical Terminus Cop

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 4, Evasion 5, Firearms 5, Intimidation 4, Melee 5, Perception 4, Stealth 3.

Backgrounds: Rugged, Marksmanship.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Officer of the Law 1.

The Sun Dial Bar

Standing atop the largest building in the city, the Sun Dial Bar is a renowned meeting place for the city's elite and wealthy. Its glass-paneled walls offer a 360-degree view of Terminus, the river running through it, and the giant bay to the south. It is a magnificent establishment, capable of both social parties and intimate gatherings, and with a view that almost makes you believe the city below is still the *grande dame* she once was.

The Sun Dial Bar is owned by James Scott, a colonel who won great fame in the war overseas before retiring. He maintains a very neutral stance both on politics and the criminal elements of the city, managing to keep his bar above the workings of the city below. It doesn't hurt that his staff consists largely of war veterans, who carry substantial firearms and know how to handle trouble. The bar is generally known as a neutral area, where all elements can meet in safety – and where the owner will ruthlessly stamp out any signs of violence or impropriety.

Typical Terminus Socialite

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 4, Etiquette 7, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 3, Lore (History of Terminus Monied Families) 6, Melee 4, Perception 3, Sport (Tennis or Golf) 6.

Backgrounds: None.

Profession: Femme Fatale/Ladykiller 1, Wealthy 2.

NPCs

Remy Favroux and Valmont

The leader of the Baron's Men, Remy Favroux is master of the Terminus underworld. Jealously guarding his territories, he has the power to make or break any man in "his" city. He controls his power by keeping his enemies at each other's throats — using his cunning and guile to encourage open war among his competitors — and by keeping taxes and export tariffs on tobacco low enough to flood his banks with money.



CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD

Remy is a short man, standing only five-foot-four. He wears simple, but expensive suits, and always carries a gold pocket watch on a jade chain. He began life as a butcher's son, cutting up meat and selling it in his father's shop. He supplemented his family's income with petty street crime, which he soon elevated to more elaborate schemes. He remained hidden from his rivals, using patsies and bribes to keep his name out of the police records. Since then, he's organized one of the strongest underworld combines in Terminus.

Then one night, several years ago, the cutthroat backdoor dealings stopped. Remy came out of the shadows — no longer willing to hide himself or his accomplishments — and threw Terminus on its ear. Half of the police force was already on his payroll, and the rest stood in mortal fear of him. Suddenly he was one of the most elite businessmen in the city, appearing as if from nowhere with a fortune built on tobacco and corruption. And at his side walked a tall, elegant gentleman with skin the color of ancient ebony, who answered only to the name of Valmont.

Valmont is publicly known as a warlock who disdains the scientific trappings of most of his ilk in favor of an older, more shamanistic philosophy. In his eyes, magic is not a loophole in the laws of physics, but the gift from spirits who reward those most faithful to them. He claims to have generations of *voudoun* sorcerers in his lineage. No one knows where he came from; even the deepest bayou families don't remember him. Yet his power is known, and the acts of sorcery he has accomplished cannot be denied.

It is unknown if Remy is working for Valmont, or the other way around, though the Baron's Men studiously ignore Valmont and pay respect only to Favroux. Valmont is a mystery to them, a pawn in Remy's service, and little more. It is said that

Remy Favroux

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 7, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 7, Disguise 5, Etiquette 3, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 6, Forgery 6, Intimidation 8, Melee 6, Perception 6, Pick Lock 5, Puzzles 3, Stealth 6, Streetwise 8.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Rugged, Small.

Profession: Gangster 2, Street Tough 1, Wealthy 2, White Collar Worker 1.

Valmont

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 4, Contortions 5, Evasion 6, Gravity 6, Intimidation 8, Kinetics 7, Lore (Voudon) 9, Magnetism 7, Medicine 6, Melee 6, Perception 7, Puzzles 7, Sleight of Hand 7, Stealth 7, Streetwise 5, Thermal Energy 8.

Backgrounds: Exotic Knowledge, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 3, Thief 1.

he gave Remy a vision when they first met, an oracular dream of Terminus united beneath his rule. With this as a goal, the two have already begun to conquer the city.

Col. James Scott

James Scott is the owner and operator of the Sun Dial Bar, one of the most prominent locations in the city. He served as a colonel in the armies that fought against the Order of Nu, and returned from the war with one hand missing. He soon had it replaced with a golden duplicate, which could move slightly through delicate mechanics housed within its frame.

The colonel is known for his wry wit, sharp temper, and unyielding dedication to the law as he perceives it. He maintains his bar as a neutral zone, throwing out any interlopers or vigilantes that enter to make trouble — and he expects his patrons to respect his authority. No fighting is allowed on the premises of the Sun Dial, and shady deals go unsigned and uncommitted. The Sun Dial has since become a revered place, guarded by army veterans and bouncers too tough to remain within any of the city's gangs for long.

The Sun Dial is also populated by the city's elite, though Terminus does not define such things as do other parts of the Commonwealth. While most of the city's gathering places reek with smoke and shadow, the Sun Dial is a shining light where the truth — however dark and treacherous — is exposed and even welcomed. During Fat Tuesday's *mardi gras* celebrations, it pours out shining golden light from every window, lit from within by hundreds of flickering candles against the wide windows that surround the central bar and dance floor.

A tall man with distinguished sideburns and a wide gray moustache, the Colonel is easily recognized throughout the city. Although he rarely wears his officer's uniform, he still keeps it in a glass case, along with two revolvers and an old cavalry saber, on the wall of his bar. He could still fit in the uniform, having gained no weight and kept himself in excellent trim since his retirement from the military.

Col. Scott never speaks about his time during the war, limiting his conversations to the present and the future — never the past. Though his eyes are often troubled by memories, he never speaks of them, nor will he explain the three golden rings he carries with him — one fitted for a woman's finger, and the others sized too small for adult hands.

Col. James Scott

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 6, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 6, Demolitions 4, Drive (Car, Plane) 4, Etiquette 5, Evasion 5, Firearms 7, Intimidation 7, Lore (Business) 5, Lore (Military) 6, Lore (Terminus) 7, Perception 4, Puzzles 4, Sport (Horse Racing) 7, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Rugged.

Profession: Athlete 1, Soldier 5, White Collar Worker 2.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT



Marguerite van Renaud

Although her part in Terminus's functions may seem small, Marguerite's role is critical, for she is the hub of information within the Terminus streets. She runs a small pawnshop in the Low Quarter, a place considered sacrosanct to even the lowest criminals. The shop, Mont Reynard, is a somber hole-in-the-wall filled with junk, forgotten treasures, and abandoned dreams. But it is more than a pawnshop; it is the city's final afterthought — the last gutter before all hopes and wishes are washed forever out to sea. The shop door bears the image of a human-sized fox in a top hat with a debonair cane and coat tails. Marguerite lives in a small apartment over the shop, its latticed iron trellises emblazoned with the image of running foxes and ivy vines. Within the shop lie wares from Terminus, Nova Roma, Paradiso, and even over the seas. Everything seems to end up here, and Marguerite knows all of their stories.

Marguerite van Renaud is a 30-something woman, her black hair curled in ringlets behind a brightly colored scarf. Her skin has the honey quality of a mulatto, and her eyes are a brilliant greenish amber that can flash with anger or shine with amusement within a second. Her mind is keen, and she never forgets even the smallest detail; she can remember every item in the store, and easily tell if any of them have been so much

as touched while her back was turned. Although she is not classically beautiful, she possesses a striking — and unique — demeanor that few can forget.

Behind the counter of the little shop, Marguerite keeps a very large shotgun and a box of shells. It is said that she has killed five men during her life — two for trying to rob her, two for threatening to burn her shop, and the fifth because of bad humor. She has also been accused of practicing sorcery, but no one has ever been able to prove the allegations. Few are daring enough to try.

Marguerite van Renaud

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 6, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 8, Brawl 3, Evasion 6, Firearms 7, Intimidation 5, Medicine 3, Perception 5, Puzzles 3, Sleight of Hand 6, Streetwise 7, Tensile Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Magical Aptitude, Mean Streets.

Profession: Femme Fatale 1, Rogue Scientist 1, White Collar Worker 1.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORLD

SMALL TOWNS AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

City life dominates the Commonwealth, but smaller towns and rural areas have not yet disappeared. There's too much land and resources to let it all go to waste, even if the populace prefers towering skyscrapers to moonlit fields. Country towns still dot the countryside; their residents farm, mine, and provide other key services as well as they are able. Most prosperous areas lie within a few hours of the cities, however, bringing produce or raw materials into the urban centers to be processed. The further one travels from a large metropolis, the starker and more dilapidated the countryside becomes.

When the war called, countless millions migrated to urban areas in search of work. Factories, munitions plants, and other vital forms of industry ran night and day, creating a huge boom in employment. By the time the war ended, most opted to remain in the cities or nearby rural communities rather than return home, leaving the outlying areas filled with semi-populated ghost towns. Travelers passing through such areas rarely linger, stopping perhaps just for a meal or to spend the night.

Country residents tend to cluster in the central part of whatever village they occupy: the main street, any centralized industry, maybe a few side avenues depending upon the location. Outlying houses and other buildings — unoccupied since the war — are slowly being reclaimed by the elements, their walls and foundations falling apart. In some cases, entire towns have been abandoned, leaving nothing but crumbling masonry behind. Vagrants and hijackers make their homes in the ruins, using them to hide from the NLEB or local authorities.

Populated areas in the countryside usually center around a particular industry: a mine, a factory, or a farming combine. The locals typically work for the same employer (the lucky towns have union representation) and never leave the immediate area. Trucks transport the product to the nearest big city. Most small towns have a few amenities for travelers — a diner or two and perhaps a hotel — but outsiders are not welcome in the bars or other gathering places. “Insular” is an understatement in rural Commonwealth communities; so many have already left that the ones remaining are fiercely protective of one another.

The main sign of civilization in the hinterlands is an extensive system of roads and highways, interconnecting all of the major cities and pertinent points between. The national government is charged with maintaining these highways, and has worked tirelessly to expand and improve upon them. Most consist of two-lane blacktops, wide enough to allow large trucks to pass one another in safety. Smaller roads that branch off of the main system are a mixed lot; the best are paved, or at least have firmly packed gravel. Many, however, are still dirt track, connecting the main highway with the nominally paved streets of the local community. Approaching cars often kick up huge clouds of dust which can be seen from miles away.

Traffic along the highways consists mainly of trucks carrying supplies from one location to another. Numerous bus lines also operate within the U.C. and anyone within a day's ride of the highways can find a regular stop that will take them wherever they wish to go. Automobile travel is fairly limited by today's standards; those with even modest means take the train when traveling between cities, and using a car to cross such distances is generally considered a sign of poverty.

The national government gives a great deal of attention to the highway system, considering it a vital link between the U.C.'s rapidly fragmenting territories. They have made every effort to keep the roadways in good condition, although some areas are badly in need of repair and others are as yet incomplete. Nova Roma has plans to expand the roads in the near future, facilitating (perhaps) a return of national authority.

Their chief success is Silverberg Highway 263, better known as “The Silver Ribbon.” Its four-lane expanse stretches from Central City all the way to the outskirts of Paradiso, making it the longest single roadway in the Commonwealth. Its terminus makes it a romantic icon, the gateway to the west and the “shining road” to the pleasures of Paradiso. The route has proven extremely popular with the citizenry, becoming the subject of several hit songs and numerous media articles. Hotels and souvenir shops dot its length, and the towns it intersects have found new forms of income by catering to the tourist trade. Families have been known to plan entire vacations around a journey up and down its length.

Crime in the countryside has a distinctly different caliber than in the city. Organized gangs are rare, and most illegal acts consist of isolated thefts and crimes of passion. The principle problem is hijacking, in which armed gangs will stop trucks full of goods, kill or incapacitate the driver, and steal the shipment. The empty towns of the countryside make perfect hiding places for stolen material, and hijackers find easy buyers in the criminal syndicates of the big cities. Recently, several prominent organizations have sent their own operatives into rural areas, intent on consolidating hijacking operations. Local gangs fiercely resist such incursions, as do the country sheriffs and elements of the NLEB.

The highways fall under jurisdiction of the national government, and patrolling them is the duty of the Bureau. Agents work to trace kidnappers, hunt caches of stolen goods, and crack down on hijacking. They also deputize local officers, who perform the more mundane task of citing traffic violations. Most such officers are attached to the local police department, and charged with patrolling a specific stretch of roads. Needless to say, corruption among their ranks is rampant, as criminals can easily bribe or intimidate their way past their patrols.



OVERSEAS AND POINTS ABROAD

Two colossal oceans — the Columbic to the west and the Neptunic to the east — separate the Commonwealth from the rest of the world, providing a natural barrier that has long fostered isolationist attitudes amongst the populace. The lands beyond the sea are strange, exotic places, in which Commonwealth citizens have no business. That changed somewhat during the war, and the U.C. experiences in that period softened their insular beliefs, but with the White Light and victory, they have once again turned inward, and not occupied themselves with the happenings overseas.

Like so much else in *The Edge of Midnight*, foreign countries appear indistinct to residents of the U.C. Few can remember visiting, and those who do can't recall much beyond the most general impressions. Ships arrive, carrying cargo and trade, but those who work on them never see more than the docks and perhaps a few wharfside bars. "Experts" on foreign culture or history are notoriously difficult to find. Nova Roma maintains diplomatic ties with certain countries, but they are kept quiet and rarely shared with the public. The vast majority of U.C. citizens have no interest in foreign countries and no desire to visit them.

Two primary territories can be identified beyond the seas. The Empire of the Golden Sun — corresponding to our Asia — lies to the west, consisting of numerous smaller countries and principalities. Steeped in tradition and embracing values markedly different from the U.C., the Empire sat out the war and has since remained even more insular than the Commonwealth. Numerous immigrants have crossed the ocean and settled in the western U.C., interweaving their traditions with those of their new land. Gateway and Paradiso both have substantial "Golden" interests, and the trappings of Asian culture can be seen throughout those two cities.

The victorious Coalition — corresponding to real-world Europe — controls a small continent on the far end of the Neptunic Ocean. Like the Golden Empire, the Coalition consists of a series of allied countries, bound by geography and common purpose. Their territory was devastated during the war, and they have since devoted most of their energy to rebuilding. Ten years after the White Light, the Coalition is only now getting back on its feet. Nova Roma sends regular aid packages, but otherwise leaves the various governments to tend their own house as they see fit. The U.C. brought them victory, the reasoning goes; it shouldn't have to bear any further burden.

In addition, several large nations and independent territories lie to the south of the Commonwealth (corresponding to Mexico and Central America), collectively known as the Borderlands. These areas are economically poor and beholden to the U.C. in many ways. Border immigrants are a vibrant part of many cities, and form a key element in Paradiso's cultural out-

look. Unlike other foreign countries, the Borderlands are well known and frequented by tourists from the U.C. Most don't consider the area "overseas" at all.

There are two categories of Commonwealth citizens who have spent any appreciable time across the oceans. The first are veterans of the war, who fought their way across the Coalition countryside against the Order of Nu. Their experience consisted of horrific battles, ruined towns and villages, and a smoking landscape scarred with bomb craters. Most have very vivid memories of immediate details — fields in which they crouched during engagements, houses or roads bombed into oblivion, the dead faces of men they killed — but stumble when it comes to the larger picture. They can describe every heart-stopping moment of a particular battle, but ask them to name it or point out its location on a map, and they can never recall. Psychologists dismiss such behavior as shellshock, and veterans hate probing at their memories of the war anyway. Most want nothing more than to forget it.

The second category of "foreign-savvy" citizens are immigrants, those who have fled their native land to begin a new life in the Commonwealth. The years before the war saw a tremendous influx of foreigners arriving on the U.C.'s shores, seeking respite from oppression or poverty. They formed enclaves in the biggest cities, keeping old traditions alive even as their children slowly acclimated to their new country. Over time, they adopted the Commonwealth way of life, although they still maintained many customs of their ancestral home.

Like the veterans, immigrants have specific memories of their homeland, but they are limited to immediate details and surface impressions. They can tell you all about their native village or province, but say little about the overall geography, the cities they traveled to, or the government which ruled them. They practice the traditions of their ancestors (and often cling quite stubbornly to them), but can't place them in context; there's no concrete history or reasoning behind them, it's simply "how things are done." Their journey to the U.C. was invariably unpleasant, and their desire to start anew means that — like the war veterans — they rarely reminisce about the world they left behind. Overseas nations are as hazy to them as they are to anyone else in the Commonwealth.

Though passage across the ocean is relatively easy to obtain (either by boat or by air), it's strangely difficult to complete the journey. Ships' crews rarely fraternize with those outside of their clique, and never speak of the sights they've seen. Passenger ships are small affairs, and plane travel is costly and not entirely safe. Those who go usually go to stay, and their numbers dwindle with each passing year. Oddest of all, no member of the Few has ever successfully crossed the sea, despite dogged efforts to do so. Planes develop engine trouble and are forced to turn around, while ships spring leaks or experience similar problems. It is as if the fates themselves conspire to keep the Few bound to the U.C. Such incidents only add fuel to their determination, and prove to them that their misgivings have some very concrete facts behind them. (More on the Few can be found in Chapter Seven).



CHAPTER FIVE WARRIORS

™Thou shalt not suffer
a witch to live.†

- Ex. 22:18

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

From the Secret Testimony of
Professor William Mortensen

I remember the nightmares.

Nightmares. All warlocks have them. Yes, I said *warlocks*. It isn't a pretty name, but then we didn't choose it, did we? It was given to us by people who hated and envied what we did. In the old tongues, warlock means "oath-breaker." I could give you seventeen permutations of that word, with each of its dialectic variants spelled out, but the end result is the same — we're the ones you hate because of our knowledge.

You've heard the stories by now. How the world was under siege, perched on the edge of demise, and a group of warlocks was called in to save everyone's hide. And we did it.

White Light. Nobody remembers the event in perfect detail, of course. That's why they're all so sure it was our fault. Half of the people walking the streets of Nova Roma don't remember a thing — they hardly even remember the war. But one thing's for certain, they were ready to blame us before they even knew what was going on. We were sent out of every decent neighborhood; our families looked on as if we'd acquired some kind of disease, and anyone who showed potential went right down the ringer as far as the upstanding social types were concerned.

The prohibition is the worst. Magic, restrained and chained up, caged, forcing us to study our trade in dusty bars and filthy gin-shops. Science — the wonders of human knowledge — reduced to scribbling chalk against filthy chips of blackboard, hoping the next knock on the door isn't the police. Some reward for saving the world. We have to hide what we are, keep our God-given knowledge secret, or have our houses fire-bombed in the middle of the night, and our children taken away by counselors who so astutely "assess their potential risk to society." Some warlocks even work for the police, lending their powers to assault squads that lock us away — trading their talent for a false sense of freedom, and following in the footsteps of those poor bastards that "saved the world."

Did you know that no one can remember their names? The cabal who created the White Light? We're all pretty sure there were nine, but there are no records. No proof. No impact point for their magic. No scientific data backing the claim that they even performed such a ritual. But we, the warlocks, we're sure of it. Not because of our magic, or because of our keen scientific minds — and definitely not because we believe the rubbish that the police squads spout about us. We believe that it happened because we still have the dreams. All warlocks have them to some degree — recurring nightmares of a brilliant white light. Sometimes there are other images, sounds, and smells within our grasp. Noise. The face of a shattered watch. The smell of soiled clothing, and burned hair. A hideous feeling, like a zipper being drawn across flesh. And a name on the tip of our tongues, chilling us to the bone. "Open" something; no one ever remembers it clearly.

Then the light comes again, and every single one of us wakes up screaming.

THE LAW OF FAITH

From a Series of Letters, Confiscated
During an Anti-Warlock Raid by the
Central City P.D. Author Unknown.

Not everyone is born with the right combination of intellect and iconoclasm to practice magic. For some, it develops like a blooming rose, opening slowly to potential. For others, that rose needs to be opened with a crowbar. Magic can be practiced by anyone, regardless of what the upper crust says, but like science, it has to be developed, taught, and brought out for it to be worthwhile. Not that there aren't ringers — children born with such potential that they all but scream "warlock!" from the moment you see them in the bassinet. Those are rare, though, and prodigal children usually end up locked in special schools where the government watches over them like rabid dogs.

Then there are the casual elite, looking for a taste of danger. You've seen those rich, sadistic women in their private apartments, spoiled with elegant furs and long cigarettes, and learning a bit of magic on the side. They view it as playing with dark forces, increasing their reputation as a *femme fatale*. They're dabblers in the art, nothing more — though they can be as dangerous as the rest. You can't toy with the laws of the universe like they were the latest fad. Magic is an environment in delicate balance just waiting for a mistake to... well... White Light. Devastation. You know the rest.

It's a fine line to walk, knowing how to practice magic while hiding your skill from the world. It requires an extreme amount of faith in yourself, and a hell of a lot of dedication. People who want to show off aren't going to make it far — maybe just as far as a shallow pit in the woods. When people know you've got an "addiction" to magic, that pretty much signals the end of your social life.

Warlocks aren't your everyday people. It takes will to cheat on things like gravity and kinetics. With will, we defy reality. Without it, the world's just the same predictable, boring place as ever. Gravity goes down, friction stops movement. Yawn. But once a warlock's tasted the sensation of forcing those locks open — then that's a sure point of no return. It's addictive, permanently changing the way you see the world. You go down that road and there's no coming back.

Sorcery is science — based on logic and mental intuition, not some mystic talent or alteration in genetics. There's no predicting someone's talent just by their lineage or their birthright, just like there's no telling who's going to be a great ballplayer or a brilliant poet; "magic" is all hard work, study, and research, tied together with pure stubbornness. Anyone who walks past you on the street might have a trick or two up their sleeve — power over motion, kinetics, maybe electricity — but you'll never know what they're up to. They won't move differently, or talk differently — until the moment they wiggle their thumbs, and three cars fly up off the street toward the sky.

Anyone can become a warlock. Even you.

CHAPTER FIVE: WARLOCKS

BECOMING A WARLOCK

Magic is more than talent. It's dedication, self-confidence, and raw potential rolled into one algebraic equation that is more than the sum of its parts. It is no more easily explained than perpetual motion, and no less powerful than the full force of kinetic energy against a perpetually stationary sum.

Sorcery requires a tremendous amount of study and understanding to control. It is part kinetics, part calculus, and all power. If you're not ready for that, then back off. Magic use will eat you alive more surely than any addiction, and it will rip your body to shreds faster than a shotgun blast. This is a dark world — and magic reflects its soul. There are no faeries in the U.C., and I've never seen a virgin with a unicorn in the gutters of Terminus or New Eden. All we warlocks have is a healthy sense of self-preservation, and maybe, just maybe, a key to the way the world works.

A child born with the talent usually shows it immediately. They're better with math, they've got an eye for how things fit together, something along those lines. That's why the crystal ball squads keep tabs on elementary schools, watching out for any child that shows talent. If they can, they stomp it out of them from the very first minute.

Some kids get through it — either through cleverness, or because their talents bloom late. Many Terminus teenagers sneak off to “special clubs” where they practice magic late at night. They tell their parents they're at a study group and spend their evenings learning physics and kinetics. The copious knowledge required, and the natural evolution of kids toward the opposite sex sorts out those who aren't serious. Those left are frustrated, angry youths with a powerhouse behind very quiet eyes. And there's no law that they have to be male, either. There are as many female warlocks as males — maybe more when they're still teenagers. (Females are still called warlocks, though. There's no getting around the name.)

Adults who start dabbling in magic are, quite frankly, behind the times. They're playing a constant game of catch-up with those who have studied and researched since they were small. Someone whose talent (and interest) doesn't show up until this stage rarely becomes a powerful warlock, but more than a few such “dabblers” have enough ability to do damage if they choose. They specialize in a few focused tricks, which is a way of compensating for their lack of skill. Or they go the other route, becoming jacks-of-all-trades and mastering none. There are also those who start out late because they have absolutely no talent or dedication — but they've read too many books that romanticize a warlock's lot, or they want to scare their neighbors with some “dark and forbidden powers.” They're fakers, no more warlocks than someone with a tarot deck and a crystal is a fortune teller.

There is some fact to the rumor. Warlocks aren't entirely like other people. I suppose you could say we're scientists; then again, we're not even like most scientists. What we do isn't just a matter of mathematics or finger-wagging. It's a metamorphosis, a collusion of energy and matter into a communal, pliable whole. A lot of people are just not ready to grasp that. Others don't want to — but they want the power or

SCIENCE OR WITCHCRAFT?

In game terms, magic is a mental skill, not a spiritual one. It draws upon the fabric of hard physics, shaped and governed by the warlock's own understanding of scientific principles. Warlocks understand how the universe works, from the rotation of a planet to the acceleration of a race car. Indeed, they understand it so well that they've learned to spot the loopholes — those places where the immutable constants of the universe can be broken or subverted. Some warlocks (such as the *voudoun* of Terminus) approach magic with a distinctly spiritual bent — believing that their mental power alone is responsible for the magic they wield — but it doesn't alter the mechanics entailed. Some GMs may wish to allow a character's fanatical adherence to a certain routine give him a minor advantage in related situations, but most warlocks know better. “Magic” is no more spiritual than a calculus equation. It's simply taking a short cut at the universe's expense.

the mystique. The mind makes the magician. If you can grasp the concept and not let go — if you have the will to find the flaws in the Common Laws (the ones most scientists will tell you are inviolate) — then you can do what we do.

It takes time to become a warlock. Even those with a natural inclination towards magic must train it into something useful. Effort dictates a warlock's power as much as his or her IQ — though with both, an individual can be trained into something truly elite. Silent schools exist to for those who show talent and can be trusted. It can take as long as five years for someone to master even the simplest concept — although there are “tricks” for the unenlightened: easy (but dangerous) ways to, say, light a cigarette with your fingertips. To the experienced warlock, those are no more than parlor games. The power to perform such tricks can come easily, but the knowledge is hard to build on. Shortcuts don't explain the raw kinetics behind each movement and computation. It can be simple to learn, mastered in only a few months, but in the end such shortcuts do not increase one's true power. They only access a fragment of knowledge and release it without real understanding or control. On occasion, such shortcuts can be fueled with an individual's true talent, causing an imminent explosion of power — but often creating a backlash that the aspiring warlock cannot control.

A lot of warlocks will tell you that they first really came into their powers when they were teenagers. They try to link its source to their sexual maturity. That's a load of bunk. They simply noticed then because their hormones were out of whack and they were trying to impress some skirt. Like smoking or drinking, it's forbidden fruit... and there's nothing teenagers enjoy more than indulging in the things they're not supposed to have. The talent comes to every warlock when we're ready for it — whether we're children or getting on in age.

WHAT IS MAGIC?

Excerpt From a Lecture by Annie Dupree,
Crystal Ball Squad Detective

Magic can be summed up in two basic ideas: the laws of physics can be broken and only bad people break the law. It's a catch phrase among the common folk, something repeated by the government a thousand times a day while they're smashing laboratories and destroying precious knowledge in exchange for a little false security. Physics still works, but if someone is smart enough and studies hard enough or wants it badly enough, he can find ways to get around it. That's sorcery: the will to change the world, and the knowledge of how to do it. Together, those two forces break the Common Law (warlock parlance for the way the world works without magic) and cause those nasty displays that make everyone so nervous.

Magic is dark, ugly, and corrupt — something no sensible person would consider. But like drugs, it strikes directly at their greatest weaknesses. When they become tired, they want the easy way out. When they grow bored, they want a new experience. When they get frustrated, they want something that satisfies them immediately. Magic may not be easy to work, but the results are as quick as they are spectacular. Everyone wants a suitcase full of money and a fast car; magic can bring that rush more quickly than anything else out there.

Warlocks use powers based around concepts of physics: kinetic mages can slow down and catch bullets, thermal mages can start fires, and so on. Use of it requires a vast knowledge of physics, both an intellectual understanding and a meta-physical knowledge of the Common Laws of reality and how they work. Unlike a common criminal, a warlock can't break the law unless he is intimately familiar with the way it works. Magic is the epitome of scientific thought — it is the science of sciences, the hypothesis that explains how all the disciplines of the world work in concert.

Warlocks guard their abilities jealously, and many refuse to share their secrets, believing that their magic is more powerful when it is unknown. Warlocks, therefore, are secretive and cunning, keeping to themselves and protecting their secrets from those who would steal them. The more powerful a magician, the more likely he is to be well-educated and involved in sorcery from an early age.

Magic sells, and those who are adept can command a high price on the black market. Those who practice magic are feared, and rightly so; their powers can tear apart city blocks. And the worst news is that the less educated the warlock is, the more likely his powers will run amok. Although most magical formulae require both physical gestures and verbalization, some warlocks are quite adept at keeping their movements subtle and their voices soft, so that their magic stays hidden among the crowds. The best preventative medicine, however, is to have a solid idea of what you're doing before you get started. And that requires some study.

Education

Most warlocks spend as long as five years in a "school" of sorts, or with a mentor, learning the basics of the craft. Both are dangerous. Learning in a school — even under private, hidden tutelage — means that more people know you're a warlock, even if they don't know what you can do. Having a mentor has its built-in disadvantages as well: there's someone out there who knows you intimately, and knows what you're capable of. If he gets caught, then your secrets are on fire.

Learning on one's own is a hundred times more difficult. More amateur warlocks die from mistaken formulae and "Learn Magic at Home" courses than from any crystal ball squad. Magic is a difficult science, and those who don't respect it rarely last long enough to learn from their mistakes.

Since the passage of the Anti-Sorcery Act (see page 107), learn-at-home courses continue to increase in popularity. Most who rely on such methods end up in jail or splattered all over their living room, but those underground pamphlets still produce a few legitimate warlocks now and then. More and more, hand-printed leaflets describing how to do simple tricks, cantrips, and other half-useless nuggets are giving way to thicker texts describing the ultimate power of a true warlock — and how to find all you need right there in your kitchen. The U.C. loves the notion of the self-made man, and these courses tap right into that entrepreneurial spirit. They just don't tell you how nightmarishly wrong it can all go.

Ghosts

Rumors persist of another way to learn magic, taught by neither a school nor a mentor nor self-education pamphlets. From time to time, a warlock pops up with great ability and little to no background in the scientific craft. Many warlocks reject such individuals, saying that they simply hide their abilities effectively; all the same, they cannot be traced and no one knows where they come from. Urban legend attributes these mysteries to "before the war," a time when magic came more easily and was less dangerous. The White Light seemed to polarize magic, giving it a stringent inflexibility — like a rubber band stretched to its limit. These men and women who move among the warlocks are like ghosts, their magic fluid and remote, hardly moving the rubber band at all. Their magic is the same as our own — but different in myriad small but noticeable ways.

Such "ghosts" come and go as they please; there are no records of their existence. Some hypothesize that they work for the government. Others insist that they are the nine who created the White Light in the first place, moving partly on this side of reality and partly in some dream world created by their magic. It's hard to tell for certain — they come and go without preamble, and their purposes are unknown to even the most powerful warlocks. Sometimes they stick around just long enough to make you think they're normal people, but then something happens, requiring them to use their magic — and they're gone.

Ghosts are myth and legend among the warlock community, their names forgotten or whispered in low voices. They move with silent steps, performing unknown tasks and interacting with other people only as necessary for them to complete their enigmatic purpose.

CHAPTER FIVE: WARLOCKS



Demographics

A lot of government agencies conduct research on warlocks (both legal and under-the-table) to find out what makes us tick. Their results may have some blood on the corners, but they always make for an interesting read. They are distributed among government research centers — attached, of course, to the prison centers — of the great cities of the Commonwealth, spreading their knowledge and encouraging even more tests on the warlock population of the world.

More than two-thirds of all warlocks are men, yet some of the most powerful warlocks in the world are women. This has implications — maybe men have a more common aptitude, or women have a greater potential, but are less willing to risk society's wrath. The real truth is probably some combination of both.

There are very few old warlocks. Most die or burn out by the time they're 45. Magic relies on a calm, steady mind, and the sheer strain of magical practice claims a lot more lives than one might suppose. Paranoia and despair at being hunted only add to the stress, until they simply crack like a shell-shocked soldier. A common warlock must live his entire life in secrecy. He hides his power, his talent, and his passion from friends and family lest they find out and turn him in. Every time he uses magic, he's taking the risk that the spell won't activate

properly, and that he may be caught. He walks the streets in a jangle of nerves, watching everyone out of the corner of his eye and wondering which of them belongs to the crystal ball squad. There are people everywhere, just trying to get along — but if he helps any of them, he's putting himself at extraordinary risk. And then, just when he's maturing and growing more certain of his powers, the burnout factor kicks in. With a single mistake, he can shatter his mind into nothingness. His fingers start to get slower, his mind a little less facile. One mistake, one miscalculated formula, and the house of cards comes crashing down. It may sound like a good life — to have almost 50 years — but it isn't. It's a rip-off.

Demographically, there are more warlocks in Terminus and Gateway than almost anywhere else. This isn't just because the cities are more populous, but because many warlocks flock there due to the lenient sorcery laws. Gateway is soft on magic, and Terminus's police are so rife with corruption that warlocks can get away with a lot. Central City has the third strongest magical presence — it may even tie with Gateway, but Central City warlocks are much better at keeping their heads down. The least "sorcerous" cities are Nova Roma, which is damn near fanatic in hunting us down, and Paradiso, far to the west. Of course, the Paradiso police credit this to

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

their sterling reputation, but it's more because of a general lack of interest; cocaine and movie stars make much better copy than some bookworm's pranks, no matter how many traffic lights he can topple.

The Marks of Magic

Repeated use of magic can alter you physically. Vestiges of it touch everything, much like gravity, friction, and a thousand other unseen forces that we all know about, but don't pay much attention to. Those who use magic to get around the Common Laws open themselves to its influence. The physical forces respond to magic, revealing their hidden flaws to its computations — and affecting the ones who rely too much on its power. Eventually, like residual buildup, the magic leaves its mark on those who use it frequently.

Magic is denial. Through a warlock's will, he denies the Common Laws of electricity, magnetism, or the particle bonds that hold things together. With every act of magic, the warlock proves that the Common Laws do not apply... or at least that they are not all-encompassing. In time, it becomes almost natural to ignore those laws, and the warlock's mind starts to break. This breaking is commonly called "burnout," but the underlying cause is madness. The world works the way it does for a reason, and the aberrations that warlocks exploit are still *aberrations*. Without a grasp of reality, the warlock doesn't know which laws he's breaking — and the real world starts to blur. Magic becomes uncontrolled, as the warlock crosses the wrong lines without realizing the consequence.

While in this state, he begins working magic almost unconsciously. Without will or provocation, the warlock undergoing burnout ignores physical laws which he shouldn't — running into walls, tripping over the tiniest cracks, and misgauging even simple tasks like picking a cup off of the table. Even their controlled wizardry is unstable, and their will erodes day by day, leading to increasingly erratic behavior. Those who pay attention may notice these subtle shifts early in the warlock's burnout. For others, the signs remain invisible until the warlock's mind snaps, throwing him into complete shock and shattering his grasp of reality.

This encroaching madness tends to leave physical signs. Some have lesser stains — their skin grows paler or darker, their eyes shift color to an unusual hue or brightness. Others bear larger marks — an extra finger slowly grows on one hand, an unusual birthmark appears, or the warlock evinces a persistent desire to consume certain materials (raw eggs, milk, or white wine are among those most frequently noticed). Not all of the marks of magic use are external — sometimes, it manifests as an inherent creepiness, or an aura that follows the warlock like a shadow. Scientists liken such manifestations to cancerous growths: the warlock's cells warping against his reckless practices. Crystal ball squads are trained to notice them, which can be invaluable in singling a warlock out from a large crowd. Sometimes, the odd markings of magic are temporary, following some powerful spell. On other occasions, after several of these small "burnings," the effects are permanent.

(Rules on warlocks' marks and magic addiction can be found in Chapter Three.)

Some chowder-heads have it that people who use magic can "sense" others with the same talent. Don't believe it — it's a tall tale told by crystal ball squads to frighten new warlocks. We can sense the signs of burnout better because we're trained to watch for them, but we can't "smell magic" or "sense warlocks" in any sort of supernatural way — no more than any other person can.

Magic leaves its marks on the mind, as well as the body. Those who use it often find themselves itching to use it in progressively inconsequential arenas. With this comes a feeling of near-godhood, a sense of power and exhilaration unmatched by any drug. And power's addictive; ask anyone who's ever had it. Magic is unfiltered power, and once you've got the taste, it becomes harder and harder to just say no. Warlocks are as prone as any other mortal to the shortcomings of ego. As they grow more powerful, they occasionally do something we call "falling into the magic." They become obsessed with their abilities, believing strength should be at the disposal of the strong. Once they accept that, then they're lost to it. A lot of the problems we have start with a warlock going off the deep end and trying to carve his name into the pages of history. They're the ones for whom everyone holds the rest of us responsible. The ones who forget basic morality. The ones who think they're gods.

Science can't make a god. It's formulaic fact, not relative ethics. Those who take the leap into insanity aren't gods; they're broken men to be pitied and forgotten — once the power is stripped away from their megalomaniacal hands. The rest of us have to find a way to force a burnout, to safely dispose of all of the power he's hoarding before he uses it like a great metaphysical bomb, destroying himself and a thousand others in his mad rush for invincibility. Unfortunately, after that, the poor deluded soul is nothing but a shell: dark and empty, mumbling about the glories of the past. At least, that's if he's survived at all.

The Populace

Evil. Dangerous. Wrong. The words bandy about a thousand times a day: in pamphlets blowing on the cold winds of Terminus; on flyers posted to the alleys in Nova Roma; in the bars and dance-halls of Paradiso. It is a catch phrase among those who fear for their lives and believe magic to be the work of evil, no matter what it may have offered society in the past. There will always be a segment of that society that sees warlocks as aberrations.

Socially speaking, the government perceives magic as a threat. Therefore, they seek to control it. Laws were passed, creating government departments to patent, regulate, and prohibit the spread of sorcery. Like a prohibition on drugs or alcohol, magic is illegal in most Commonwealth cities — though the severity of the law varies. Those who use it openly are often persecuted and placed in jail. However, it is historically difficult to stop the spread of knowledge, and almost impossible to retrieve it from someone once they have it. People who work too much magic can go to jail for a long, long time, condemned by the law and by a jury of very frightened and angry peers. There is little social tolerance for magic — anything

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that can't be understood by the general populace naturally augments their fear. Like the witch-trials of old, warlocks are dealt harsh punishments for daring to practice their arts.

Still, if everyone who learned some small sorcerous tidbit were thrown in jail, there wouldn't be enough people left to lock the door. Protective measures had to be put in place to separate the curious socialites from the serious practitioners. Therefore, "dabblers" and licensed practitioners (usually government operatives) are ignored or let off with a slap on the wrist. This leads to a hazy gray area of legality and illegality, of criminals and pseudo-criminals barely separated by the niceties of the law.

The general populace sees warlocks through smoked lenses — a past filled with awkward remembrances, unaccounted for occurrences, and flat-out blank patches. Yet they are united in this knowledge: that we, the warlocks, caused the White Light, and in doing so, demonstrated just how much power magic can unleash. Add to this our general proclivities towards secrecy and hoarded knowledge that the common individual can't understand, and it's easy to see how superstition spreads. In some cities, the populace rails for stronger anti-sorcery laws, laws that would imprison anyone with a smattering of talent. Some call for even more extreme methods, particularly in Terminus, where warlocks run loose in the street and the police need any weapon they can get to fight their losing battle.

Bur for every magician captured, another school pops up in the back alleys, and five more snot-nosed punks running away from their parents take up the trade. That's the problem with warlocks: you can't pin us down or hold us, no matter how many you throw in jail.

THE LAW OF WILL

From Sgt. Cyrus McPeek, Guest Speaker,
Nova Roma Police Academy

Penal codes prohibit magic use in any part of civilized society, issuing a series of statutes to govern when, where, and if warlocks may practice their craft. Most cities employ qualified specialists to locate and destroy secret havens and libraries where these illegal sciences are learned. All gatherings to practice, research, or teach magic are outlawed in five of the U.C.'s six biggest cities, and although Terminus is lax on its adherence to national codes, the government feels certain they will pass new laws to update their standards within a few months. In short, the laws state that no magic can be used within civic boundaries, and that any warlocks must register their abilities and preclude use of them within the city environs. Any warlock found using said abilities in violation of these laws can be charged and sent to prison for a very long time, and arresting officers have wide lateral to use violent force against those resisting arrest.

GETTING OUT OF THE GAME

Unfortunately, warlocks can't be stripped of their guns and knives like the usual criminal. Knowledge sticks the way hardware can't — especially knowledge that lets you shoot lightning out of your fingertips. It makes it a hundred times harder to imprison or rehabilitate warlocks — if such a thing is even possible. The people who support "soft laws" allowing warlocks to keep walking around have their heads in the not-so-white clouds. Typically, most cities prefer to imprison rogue warlocks, or press them into service on crystal ball squads — but cities like Nova Roma believe that the only good warlock is a dead one. Sometimes, they're sent into exile, and sometimes they're put in such a deep hole that the world forgets they ever existed.

Then there's the other route. The one that they call a last resort. Some years ago, a group of ambitious scientists created a drug called Antidox which, according to the state flyers, "prohibits mental comprehension on the level that understands and controls magic." It's essentially an injected lobotomy: once a man's been shot with Antidox, he becomes complacent, law-abiding and magic-free for the rest of his life. Of course, he's also a mental vegetable who needs help just to do routine tasks, but those are the breaks. The people who play with sorcery know what they're getting into; they asked for it. We gave it to them.

ANTIDOX

Some call it the savior of the world, the common man's protection against illegal mages. But what is it? Antidox arrived only a few years ago, sanctioned by the government as a permanent means of neutralizing warlocks. It effectively lobotomizes its subject, removing both the intelligence and the will on such a level as to place magic beyond his or her reach.

But what is Antidox? The patent is registered with the government, who keep its exact composition under top secret security clearance. There are rumors, of course — the leading one being that Antidox is composed of a serum made from the blood of gaunts. Since gaunts cannot be warlocks — something in their make-up prohibits magic — then the Antidox, if formed from the blood or tissue of the gaunts, would also inhibit magic in normal humans, reducing their intelligence to that of a small child and effectively neutering their will.

The reality may never be known, and the government keeps its secret by only administering the drug in dire cases. Be that as it may, however, most warlocks would rather die than be subjected to Antidox's ravaging effects.

Mechanics for the drug can be found on page 62. Since its use effectively terminates the character's existence in a campaign, GMs are urged to carefully govern its use against PCs and other pertinent figures.

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Most people who take the Antidox lose about half of their mental capacity, which means that some of them are still relatively functional members of society. Others — the more powerful warlocks — turn into gibbering feebs, and their families get saddled with the responsibility of caring for them. If they don't have a family, they get shuttled to social services, and spend the rest of their lives as janitors or common workmen. The law works. Society is saved. We all get ahead. Or so they say.

WALKING AWAY

Every once in a while, a warlock is “rehabilitated.” Through force of will, or fear of the law, he or she renounces the practice, and puts magic behind him or her forever. I'd like to say it works, but the sad fact is that more than half the time, that same warlock gets busted not a week after he walks out of the clink. Sorcery use is addictive. You've seen it on all the flyers; you've heard the sermons. It sinks into your veins, and it will kill you if you practice it often enough. Don't believe what the warlocks tell you. If you aren't strong enough to walk away, it will turn you into mush. There's a file in police headquarters marking every single warlock they've captured over the last few years. Some call it the “endangered species” file, or the “file of the condemned,” because it has names, and it tells the stories without flinching. Warlocks who killed their families, set fire to entire city blocks, brought gravity to a stop and flung innocent children stories above their playgrounds... Yeah, it's all in there.

Society has to protect itself against people who disregard it. By practicing magic, warlocks disregard the common good to pursue their own selfish ends. So it's up to the rest of us to keep an eye out for them. Every man, woman, and child in this nation has a responsibility to watch their neighbor, to take notice of hidden meetings, and to spot the residual signs of magic use. If someone's practicing the dark arts, their family will see it first. And their family has a responsibility to protect the rest of society, even if that means turning their backs on the offender. Magic is dangerous, and those who use it lose themselves in it. Even a little is too much.

BURNOUTS

Some warlocks don't listen to reason. They don't listen to law. They want power, and they'll do anything to get it. And the only thing the common man can do is batten down the hatches and pray that the police come quickly. These powerhouses are completely lost to their sickness — they use it for everything from tying their shoes to calling up earthquakes — and it's a hell of a job to put them down once they get started.

But sometimes, Mother Nature takes care of these aberrations herself. Magic has a funny way of backfiring on those who abuse it, and those backfires can be more dangerous than the magic itself. You see, a lot of warlocks rely on their talent, using it all the time until they go crazy — and lose control. The magic burns through them like poison, stripping them of their sense of the world. We call this “burnout,” a condition caused by a combination of things — from overuse of magic to simple loss of morality from possessing too much power.

As a matter of scientific fact, a burned-out warlock becomes insane, losing his grip on reality in the same proportion that he breaks the laws of nature. In fact, he forgets the laws of reality entirely, and his magic wreaks continuous and unabated havoc upon his surroundings. The warlock forgets reality, emotions, and situations of his past and becomes lost in the magic. It is difficult for these individuals to separate fact from fiction, or to pull themselves from their imaginary, schizophrenic world long enough to see the damage they wreak. Antidox can prohibit the flow temporarily (or permanently, with a high enough dosage) and if caught early enough, the warlock may be able to enter a mental institution to recover his will and grasp on reality. In some cases, however, this state of burnout is permanent, and the warlock must be killed to stop his uncontrolled use of magic. Such a situation is often the most dangerous a policeman can ever encounter.

THE LAW OF MAN

Partial Speech From the Honorable
Patrick Deacon, Commonwealth Praetor:

The war against the Order of Nu shook the world, stripping it of peace, normality, and security. Since then, we have fought night and day to reclaim that dream, to rebuild it. The Order of Nu stole it from us; we want it back.

The Order was a nation of warlocks, studying their magic despite the danger it brought to the world. They pushed their scientific fiction on others, trying to bring the world into their hell — but the Coalition stopped them. Every man who fought

MAGIC AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Magic is illegal in *The Edge of Midnight*, and enforcement of anti-magic laws closely resembles that of Prohibition, or the modern day war on drugs. Magic use permeates every level of society (though only a tiny minority of people actually use it), and minor uses of magic are often overlooked by authorities if perpetrated by people of influence or social standing. The hammer falls hardest on ivory tower academics, known criminals, and those without the legal means to fight back.

As a general rule, using magic ensures that a character receives the maximum punishment if used in conjunction with another crime. If no other crime is committed, then the offender usually receives a minor punishment (a hefty fine or a brief prison stay) though he will be watched closely in the future. Repeat offenders are often subjected to the maximum penalty (2-5 years, or a regimen of Antidox). Those with a license to practice magic are not penalized for its use, though they still face full accountability for any crimes they commit while using magic (see page 40 for more details).

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THE ANTI-SORCERY ACT

Amendment XXV

Section 1. Upon the passage of one year from the ratification of this article the study, use, or facilitation of magic, magical knowledge, and the practice of sorcery within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the Unified Commonwealth and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof is hereby prohibited.

Section 2. The National Legislature and all pertinent local civic authorities shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Amendment XXVI

Section 1. This article shall call into being elite corps for the purpose of governmental pursuance, to enforce and fortify Amendment XXV across the continent. For this purpose, small groups of magicians may be allowed to practice magic under controlled conditions and solely for the betterment of society, but only as is necessary to root out this evil from our midst.

in the war, every woman and child who supported our troops — they won the war. Not the warlocks, not some supernatural white light that swept the surface of our planet, but us. That spell was something else entirely. The war was already over when they launched their ungodly “final solution.” The White Light didn’t fix the world — it broke it.

Everyone has their stories from war. A lot of people can tell you about the bloody beaches, the invasion, and the terrible hand-to-hand struggles to the death. Magic is a dangerous opponent — unpredictable and devastating. Only a surprise attack against the Order of Nu had any hope of succeeding. And it did. Our boys crossed the boundaries, threw their forces back and pinned them against the wall. But mere minutes after they breached the Order’s headquarters, the White Light erupted across the sky. Magic was unleashed, and the world was changed forever.

The Order of Nu began overseas, hardly raising an eyebrow in the Commonwealth during the initial phase of its organization. But when they seized control of their government, the world took notice. The Order of Nu was a strong arm for magical domination, preparing their forces and encouraging sorcerers from around the globe to join their cause. Their new nation was supposed to be a place where sorcerers would control the government, society, and advancement; in time, everyone in that nation would be a warlock. It was a dangerous proposition, and as the Order gained more and more supporters, the effects became known. Opulence. Degradation. A precipitous rise in natural disasters. And most distressing, the gaunt populace across the world grew by leaps and bounds.

When the Coalition finally did something about the threat posed by these rogue warlocks, it was already too late. War was the only answer, and even then, no one was ready for the hell that the Order of Nu unleashed. They were ready for us, waiting with newfound horrors to remake the world in their image. But we fought them, and we beat them — with or without the support of “Coalition-loyal” warlocks.

The end of the war brought the White Light: supposed sign of our victory but surer sign of our damnation. It destroyed the capital city of the Order of Nu and everyone, warlock and soldier alike, within its walls. Buildings, streets, tanks, and people vanished in a burst of white light. Everything disappeared except a bright glow on the horizon — and in time, people forgot to look for it, and it, too, faded away.

That is the awful legacy of sorcery. That is the power which these criminal reprobates wield like a child with his father’s gun. Warlocks, by their very nature, shatter the laws of science. And the government, by our nature, must punish those who break the law.

CONTROLLING THE PROBLEM

After the war, the government tried to work with the warlock contingent of the population. They considered sanctioning warlocks, giving them permits so that their magic would be regulated and controlled. But as time wore on, the government slowly began to realize that magic was corruptive, uncontrollable. It could no more be regulated than a man’s thoughts.

But that didn’t mean it wouldn’t be tried.

The initial laws governing sorcery were relatively gentle, concerning open use of certain magics, and outlawing research of new magical formulae without governmental funding and investigation. Official offices opened up in most of the cities, allowing those who wished to practice sorcery to register and attend government-sponsored “safety training.” In turn, their formulae were collected and patented by the government, and any new effects they discovered had to undergo rigorous safety testing and inspection before warlocks could practice them formally.

Under this system, magic prospered for a brief time. Common citizens were confident in their government’s control of these individuals, and the government felt capable of enforcing the law upon those who wantonly caused havoc. But in time, it became obvious that this was not enough. Rogue warlocks used their magic to help the lower classes — mobsters, criminals, black market dealers — and the U.C. soon found it almost impossible to track the patented “spells” in use. A warlock would simply steal the formula or refuse to come in and patent it; “free trademark” formulae went for thousands of dollars on the black market, and illegal magic use flourished as never before.

In order to stop this, the governments of Nova Roma, New Eden, and Central City began to pass and enforce more stringent laws. The production of magical formulae outside governmental research laboratories was completely outlawed, and the police confiscated numerous laboratories. By restricting equipment and research materials, organized society at-

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tempted to protect itself against the dangers of unregulated magic use. Sadly, these efforts only caused more trouble. Illegal workshops soon sprang up, with laboratory equipment moving into the forbidden areas from cities with less stringent laws. Much of this equipment was sub-standard, resulting in poor conditions and rampant hazards. Several were the sites of massive failed experiments, taking out entire city blocks in their magical and chemical conflagrations. Others saw the warlocks using them go mad, wreaking massive havoc before being put down by the authorities. At this point, the government and law enforcement agencies of the cities petitioned to have standardized sorcery regulations throughout the Commonwealth.

The Legislature listened, and responded. In a famous speech on the steps of the Nova Roma senate, Praetor Patrick Deacon decried magic use as “a violation of morality, society, and the public good.” Although the battle was fierce and vocal, the laws passed by a quiet majority, and the Anti-Sorcery Act was ratified. Every city in the country had the right to compound these laws, but such would be in addition to the national restrictions on sorcery. In effect, the government forbade any and all use of magic that was not specifically sanctioned by official sources. All laboratories, schools, and research facilities were shut down entirely save for a few government programs. The warlocks whose names and addresses were on file came under security watch from the NLEB, and any sign of magic use was forcefully investigated.

It was hoped that, within a generation, magic would become a thing of the past. If warlocks could not pass down their secrets in schools and functioning laboratories, magic use would diminish and eventually die out. While sorcery-based incidents have since decreased, the number of rogue practitioners increased initially, fighting against society’s prejudice and forcing law agencies to resort to deadly force to stop the practice. In Nova Roma alone, more than three hundred warlocks were imprisoned and seven public book-burnings were held by citizens to support the Act.

The real turn of events came when the drug known as Antidox was released. Used by law enforcement agencies as a means of permanently prohibiting magic, Antidox allowed imprisoned warlocks to work off their debt to society within the public eye, forever stripped of their need and desire to perform sorcery.

TWELVE DAYS OF CHAOS

Warlocks pride themselves on their ability to change the world. Little did they know that they weren’t the only ones. When the Anti-Sorcery Act passed, it changed the outlook of the U.C. cities against sorcery. Under the law, national government associations could move through the cities and enforce the Act unilaterally. Because the Anti-Sorcery Act was a combined national law, warlocks could no longer flee to cities with lighter sentencing; the cities were theoretically united in their battle against rogue magic use.



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The Anti-Sorcery Act established strict definitions of “legal” and “illegal” sorcery. It organized warlocks into two groups — those who work for the sanctioned courses, and those who were considered rogue elements. Rogue elements, by the letter of the law, could be captured and tried — or destroyed, as law enforcement officers evaluated the risk. Before Antidox was created, sorcerers were hunted like dogs, their magic considered too dangerous to risk imprisonment.

The initial rush created by the Anti-Sorcery Act was met with violence, fear, and mayhem. Laboratories were rooted out, known warlocks imprisoned, and general rioting erupted in the streets as rogue elements resisted arrest. For nearly twelve days — some of the worst in Commonwealth history — there was anarchy. Only the strength of the law enforcement officers and the sheer dedication of the citizens of the Commonwealth to resisting the warlock threat carried the people through. The chaos came to a halt on the twelfth day, when Antidox was officially presented to the public as a means of permanently neutralizing the warlock threat. Only with this very public punishment in place did the rogue warlocks at last abandon their public antagonism and go underground, hiding their illegal sorcery from the eyes of the law. In the end, most of the rogue elements were captured and tried, thrown into jail or placed on Antidox, and hundreds of illegal laboratories were seized and destroyed.

History never forgot those twelve days, and they are still taught in schools as a prime example of why magic is outlawed. The danger that magic presented became real and tangible, no longer hidden within rhetoric or behind veils of scientific talk. It was something everyone could understand — and the potential for violence was obvious. Those warlocks who rebelled against the Anti-Sorcery Act did more than just end their own lives; they cemented public opinion firmly behind the power of law enforcement.

The cities were once again safe for the populace, and the enforcement agencies assured the nation that the warlock threat was effectively contained. Life began to return to normal, with popular opinion placed firmly behind the Anti-Sorcery Act. Even those warlocks who worked as government agents suffered from the hatred and fear focused on magic; condemned to the lower castes of society, they often hid their identity, even from their fellows.

Now, years after the Anti-Sorcery Act was established, many police departments use crystal ball squads — deputized warlocks who hunt their own. Although these squads are looked down upon by the other police, they perform a critical function in identifying and apprehending rogue practitioners. See page 110 for more on crystal ball squads.

Some few warlocks manage to get a license on their own, and are allowed to practice their craft in controlled conditions. Most of them, however, operate under a constant cloud of scrutiny. After all, they have the power of the universe right at their fingertips. Warlocks are generally considered unseemly sorts, unwelcome in “proper” company. So naturally, they gravitate towards criminals and other lowlives.

NEW CAREERS

Once the Anti-Sorcery Act was passed, those individuals known to be warlocks found themselves ostracized by society. They were fired from their jobs, given notice in their apartments and homes, and turned out of their families. The world rejected warlocks, even those who swore never to use their magical skills, and they were sentenced to live amongst the lowest dregs of civilization. For many, there was no choice but to become a silent member of the magical community. Their names were on file with the government, their every action scrutinized for illegal activity. As magic slowly went underground, many of these ostracized individuals ended their lives in poverty and loneliness. They became symbols of persecution: part of society, yet cut out of it.

However, unlike the gaunts, whose skin tone and size parade their individuality for all to see, warlocks can hide within every strata of the world, covering their unique abilities behind facades of normality. Those with talent watched as public outcry turned known warlocks into mere shadows of themselves, stripping them of pride, prestige, money and well-being until they crumbled to ash. Thus, warlocks learned to be silent, to hide, and to keep their interests and talents out of the limelight and locked away from society. Like worms behind the bark of a healthy tree, they burrowed deep and seemed to all but vanish.

No sensible warlock makes his abilities public. Even those who choose to work for the law tend to keep their true abilities hidden from their families and neighbors. Few are outwardly known as sorcerers, and those who are flagrant about their abilities can become as ostracized as their predecessors. Once a warlock is caught using magic, even in the smallest instance, it brands him for life. They are catalogued, and their every action and movement become part of the police files.

Like the witch trials of old, those who are known to be warlocks — even if they have only performed small trickery — are often judged by civilization’s hatred. Petty crimes are given massive punishments, and often unscrupulous police or neighbors will make up charges simply to remove the “offending element” from their midst. It is rumored that people who are not warlocks are occasionally targeted by others, dragged into jail on trumped-up charges, and given Antidox before their innocence can be found. Unfortunately, once Antidox is administered, there is no antidote — reducing the dosage will only bring mania and schizophrenia, and the intelligence removed by the drug can never be regained.

Occasionally, someone begins a suffrage group for warlocks, attempting to support their right to normal lives. These groups are targeted with ridicule and mockery in polite society, and their marches and loud rallying rarely results in any change at all. More typically, the leaders of such an organization are assumed to be warlocks themselves, and their names are added to blacklists across the Commonwealth. At best, such groups may acquire leniency for one or two “minor dabblers” taken in by the police, allowing them to be released on their own recognizance after a fine or a brief stay in prison.

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"Warlock" is generally not a legal career option. While there do exist a few practicing magicians known to the public, (mostly in the city of Gateway, which is very lax in enforcing anti-sorcery laws), it is extremely uncommon to simply look in the yellow pages under "w" and find a warlock for hire. Those publicly found to be practicing magic have few options — they can hire out for janitorial work or other menial labor, or (if their magic is strong enough) they can join the police-sponsored crystal ball squads. Otherwise, they're left peddling their "wares" from secretive back alleys and the like. It is far more common for law-abiding warlocks to practice magic with government collusion, outside of their normal occupation. These researchers may be on crystal ball squads, or they may be sponsored scientists working to create the next advancements to neutralize magic. These individuals are hired by government agencies on retainer, their identities shielded in order to allow them to lead relatively normal lives. Still, even if they are fully sanctioned by the government, these men and women must take care to hide their abilities lest their employers, co-workers, or family discover their "night job."

CRIMINAL SOCIETIES

If you think the warlocks learned their lesson with the fall of the Order of Nu, you'd be terribly mistaken. Warlocks are even more dangerous today than they were in the open. They hide their identities behind masks of propriety, keeping their research and their illegal studies underground. The black market is thriving, and illegal sorcery is a high-profit business. Being a warlock draws people down that dark road. No matter how strict the laws or how efficient the police, there will always be some elements who seek power for their own use.

Warlocks have developed an "underground" of sorts: hidden libraries, abandoned warehouses where they can practice their craft, and other havens. They have become efficient in hiding their wares and research centers, creating entire laboratories from tubing and Bunsen burners. The existence of such locations is carried through their hidden society by word of mouth and hastily-scribbled codes. Every laboratory is another broken law — and most of them are dangerously unstable — but these modern warlocks are too involved in their lust for power to care about the innocent lives they risk. Anyone found sheltering, aiding, or assisting with such a laboratory can be prosecuted under the law, so there are few non-warlocks willing to help the black market community with assembling a laboratory of this nature.

Thus far, there are few actual warlock societies. The police break up groups of warlocks, raiding their laboratories and meeting locations so that they never become comfortable working together; moreover, these rogue warlocks are paranoid, afraid that other warlocks will study their formulae or become jealous of their power. Since the days of the Order of Nu, no single warlock society has risen within the Commonwealth. Still, the fear that such vast conspiracies could exist keeps the police on their toes. So far, however, no formal organization of warlocks stands beyond a few loosely-organized (and highly illegal) cabals (detailed starting on page 112).

Regardless of their lack of unionization, there are plenty of warlocks in the criminal element of the world. They work singularly, or in small groups, traditionally as a master/apprentice combination (if they work in a group at all). There are numerous opportunities open for warlock criminals. A gunman who can stop bullets, a second-story burglar who can float up to his mark's window, or a bank robber who can rip the vault door off its hinges... these skills are in high demand among the underworld. Clever warlocks who know how to properly ply their skills can make a great deal of money in a very short time. Of course, they also have to keep their abilities quiet. "Normal" criminals resent the ease with which warlocks commit their crimes — and may use deadly force to ensure their rivals don't cut in on the action. And of course, use of magic while committing a felony will add twenty years to your sentence, guaranteed...

CRYSTAL BALL SQUADS

The government calls the system "using the fox to catch the hound," but to most citizens, it is a questionable practice. They are called "crystal ball squads" almost in mockery of their abilities: warlocks, hired to solve magic-based crimes, trained and registered and given license to practice magic within the cities. They are called traitors to their kind, betrayers of freedom, and power-hungry lapdogs. They receive little respect for their work, and throw themselves into dangerous situations on a daily basis.

The crystal ball squads were specifically granted leeway to exist in a codicil to the Anti-Sorcery Act sponsored by representatives from the city of Gateway. These special units are carefully chosen and organized by the local police enforcement. They are chosen for their loyalty, and for their willingness to take on the deadly hatred of their opponents and the condemnation of the public eye. The brave men and women of the crystal ball squads are warlocks, scientists, and those who have specialized in tracking down and stopping illegal magic use. For their efforts, they are faced with mockery and hatred; their families are targeted by rogue warlocks seeking to blackmail the law into complacency. If they weren't willing to make such sacrifices, these units would surely cease to exist under public pressure — and the rogue warlock population would more than double from police inability to contain them.

Magic presents a unique problem for police units. It is almost untraceable and can propagate itself rapidly. Magic is dangerous, and those who do not have experience with it can easily be overwhelmed in the wake of its power. Warlocks break the laws of physics, reversing gravity, changing the course of electrical conduits, and routinely altering every facet of reality on which we rely. Unlike ordinary criminals, warlocks have awesome forces at their command — both to help them commit their crimes, and to help them cover their escape. They can also turn their powers against the police, slaughtering beat cops without a thought before an untrained officer can even react. Normal police turning their skills against a warlock is like asking a bird dog to sniff out bombs — it's a waste of their talent, and it's dangerous in the extreme.

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It began in Gateway, as a response to a large number of warlocks on the city police department (see page 170 for more). A number of warlocks, all police by vocation, were transferred to a single unit. This division of police was placed on call to other squads when magical attacks were threatened or suspected, and the crystal ball squad went into action. Within a week, the high-profile squad took down three of the most powerful and feared rogues in the city, countering magic with magic and using their own knowledge of sorcery to effectively neutralize and capture their opponents. The squad was a public success. When the Anti-Sorcery Act was passed, the mayor of Gateway petitioned the national government to exempt his “pet sorcerers” from the new law — and the experiment was quickly replicated within other cities across the continent. Even in the notoriously magic-shy city of Nova Roma, crystal ball squads were added to enforcement agencies.

Crystal ball squads handle any crimes which directly involve the use of magic, or for which a warlock is a primary suspect. Squad members are permitted to use magic during the course of their investigation (much the way ordinary cops are permitted to use physical force), and incidental “after hours” use is generally excused so long as it stays quiet and doesn’t harm anyone. However, there are negatives to belonging to a crystal ball squad. First, they are known warlocks — and their social life will forever be stigmatized by that fact. Although their magic is technically legal, it still isn’t considered “acceptable.” Those who work on the squad are cast out of society for having magic — and they certainly aren’t welcome in warlock society.

Some members of the crystal ball squads are malcontents, forced into a position through a bad turn of luck. Others are loyal police officers that either have talent of their own, or have learned the powers of a warlock because their other talents are useful to the police. In the crystal ball squad, the amount of magical power you have is not important; loyalty is the crux, and loyalty will achieve promotions far more rapidly and assuredly than magical ability. Needless to say, working on the crystal ball squad is rather like eating a caramel apple after it has fallen on the ground. Sometimes you get apple, and sometimes you get a mouthful of sand. Not everyone on the squad wants to be there. Many of them were forced to it as their only option after being publicly outed. Others are police officers that still hold their grudges against warlocks, and have joined with the crystal ball squads specifically to exercise their override desire for vengeance.

There are some individuals on the job who are both skilled with magic and loyal to the government, but these are few and far between. They are the working heart of crystal ball squad forces, spread thinly between corruption and revenge. These warlocks have nothing but their job to focus on; their lives are all but lost to public bigotry and fear. They live for their duty, bringing down rogue after rogue as if to soothe their own feelings of ostracism and uselessness. Sometimes it works... for awhile.

FREELANCE OPERATIVES

A few warlocks use their abilities publicly, risking arrest and public disdain in order to sell their skills at a high price to the desperate. These warlocks are retired government operatives, or those whose magic is too insignificant to be of any concern for the police. They operate with the full knowledge of law enforcement agencies, occasionally hiring out to the crystal ball squads when the police are stumped or in great need. These minor warlocks specialize in investigation, defensive magic, and protective measures designed to work against active warlocks. As the government is fond of saying, they are foxes catching other foxes, kept in business by rogue warlocks who use their powers to terrify the average citizen of the Commonwealth. They work as private investigators, fortune-tellers, and personal bodyguards, protected by their government license to use sorcery (and little more).

It is a difficult life in which one is constantly tempted to join criminal organizations and use one’s special abilities to procure greater sums of money or more prestige. Occasionally, one of these freelancers falls to those temptations and must be hunted down like the rest. They live in the gray world between the fallen and the righteous, treading on the edge of a knife’s blade. Neither side truly trusts them, yet both make use of them, occasionally storming the freelancer’s beliefs and safety indiscriminately in order to get what they want. Consequently, freelancers know how to make do with little things in order to preserve their independence. Honor is important to these individualists, and they rarely break their word, knowing that trust is the only thing that keeps them alive in this sea of sharks.

THE LAW OF PHYSICS

Throughout each section of this text, we’ve given you a perspective-based idea of the warlock. We have seen the truth from a warlock’s point of view, from that of a common citizen, and from that of the law. But in between them all is a single, irreconcilable truth: magic works.

Warlocks function very much like classic hermetic mages of fantasy literature. Most require an exceptional intelligence and a good education. Intelligence is a critical facet of a warlock’s ability. Magic, after all, is merely a greater form of science, covering all the laws of nature (known as “Common Law” to warlocks) in a sort of unique hypothetical bubble. By learning how to perceive and manipulate this bubble, a warlock begins to shift the world in ways non-magic-users simply can’t. Those who grasp science more readily will be facile with magic, while those who find mathematics difficult will likely not make powerful warlocks.

Science is a critical facet, though every warlock perceives this in a different manner. Some believe that science is only a part of magic, a method of understanding some cosmological plan. An ancient adage states that any sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic — and now, that ad-

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age has decisively come true. Magic shifts the balance of science, changing the law of gravity, kinetics, electromagnetism, and other natural states of the world.

Magic is learned as any science would be: through practice and application of mathematically-grounded formulae and knowledge. There are no spells (though certain formulae are referred to as such), and no concise methods of altering states. When water reaches a certain temperature, it will boil. Although this is a given, it is also not a total absolute. It may take one pot 10 seconds to boil and another under the exact same temperature may take significantly longer. The absolute is not a perfect answer — and so, too, is magic a continual absolute and also a continual variable.

Science is also a matter of will, and warlocks must apply their will to all their work, using sheer intellectual stubbornness and creativity to their practice in order to achieve results. Magic is tiring — exploiting the universe is never easy — and worse, it can become addictive. The same will that defines a warlock's manipulation of the world around him also protects him from the backlash of that alteration. When a warlock falls into "burnout," that legendary state of insanity, it is because his will has completely snapped. They work magic simply by not recognizing the laws that they are breaking. Magic has taken control, and the warlock's open will wreaks havoc even without his knowledge.

Those who study and learn how to control their will can power magic — but it is always a risky business. Even advanced sorcerers occasionally miscalculate — and performing magic under pressure, on the fly, can bring about disastrous results. Failure is always an option, and as the procedures and formulae become more and more advanced, the warlock is hard-pressed to keep up with his understanding.

LEARNING

It is fairly easy to tell a "newbie" warlock from his more experienced companions — the longer one practices magic, the more easily one can fine-tune the effects. While a new apprentice may be able to produce spectacular effects, those effects are uncontrolled and wild, often resulting in random results. It is far easier to simply shut down gravity, shift electricity into a wild bolt, or increase friction to the point that a warlock's opponent is completely trapped than it is to subtly affect any or all of these three at once.

Master wizards use their power sparingly, with finesse, and thus are harder to catch and identify. A car flying into the air is magic; a bottle sliding off the table is an accident. The difference makes the entire world. The less experienced mages tend to produce the most spectacular effects and consequently tend to get arrested and imprisoned much more often. Master warlocks know how to keep their abilities quiet, and can produce subtle, unseen effects that are nonetheless superior to those of their crude apprentices.

WARLOCKS IN THE WORLD

Within the main cities of the Commonwealth, several well-known illegal cabals of warlocks function beneath the city's daily grind. These groups hide themselves behind a secret grid of names and passwords, keeping their meeting locations carefully guarded. They achieve notoriety with their actions, and thus they are feared and hunted down throughout the Commonwealth. Some of them are small-time operations, with limited goals and manpower. Others are powerful magical fraternities spanning several cities, moving underground to accomplish criminal ambitions that outstrip those of common thieves and bagmen.

Some of these organizations are comprised of simple criminals, lusting after money, luxury, or power. Others have more politically based ambitions, attempting to change the world through force and blackmail. Some are personally motivated, fighting against society and the law simply to prove a point or avenge an injury. But the most dangerous of all aren't interested in any sort of goal; the pure achievement of magic and knowledge leads them into ever more dangerous waters.

Some of the best-known societies are outlined here. Others exist, either too new, too small, or too adept to be tracked; the ones listed here are simply the most prominent — or the most wanted.

Silent Scepter

The Silent Scepter were the first, and loudest, pro-warlock organization in the Commonwealth. They were originally known as the Knights of the Scepter, a group loosely affiliated with the Knights of the West (a fraternal organization dedicated to charitable endeavors) and several similar groups. After the laws became stricter, the Knights of the Scepter were sentenced to menial tasks within those organizations, and their magical talents were called upon less and less frequently.

Then the Anti-Sorcery Act was passed, and the Knights of the Scepter were uniformly removed from the records of their parent groups, buried under a mountain of paperwork and social stigma. But they did not go away easily. Despite their abrupt dismissal, they remained a tightly-knit group, utilizing their contacts in several major cities to establish the first warlock safehouses and resistance groups in the country.

Now renamed, the Silent Scepter still clings to its principles, helping the poor and those in need — particularly warlocks. Today, they act as an informal Underground Railroad, helping warlocks become lost between cities, shedding their pasts, and erasing all records of their history. The Silent Scepter provides new papers, fresh identities and safe houses for those who want to leave their social stigma behind. Occasionally, they allow payment in money, but far more often, they prefer favors, assistance, and owed debts called in later.

The Silent Scepter has close to a thousand members, culled from various fraternal organizations and primarily concentrated in Terminus, New Eden, and Central City. Although it is said that they maintain a small chapter house in Nova Roma, there are no records of their activities in that city.

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Men of Dunswick Street

This secretive society is based in Gateway, beneath the thick fog and dark shadows. They are a strictly for-profit organization, using magic in order to increase the size of their bank accounts. Many of the warlocks in this faction are Asian, tracing their lineage to the Empire of the Golden Sun. They work in small groups of two or three to a job, organized in a tong-like collaboration of cells and secrets. Each warlock wears a mask to obscure his features both from the police and from his fellows, and they all use code names to masquerade their real identities. Even the other cell members don't know one another by their true faces, only by the color of their masks.

Each small unit includes one individual called the Coister, who knows the true identities of the others. This one person is jealously safeguarded, for if national or local agents capture him, the entire cell is compromised. It is not unknown for a Dunswick Street Coister to commit suicide in his prison cell — sometimes by his own hand, sometimes aided by a shiv in the night.

The Men of Dunswick Street (a misnomer, as group includes women as well) are a completely self-interested criminal organization. They have few to no political ambitions, and work their magic only in self-preservation and in the pursuit of illegal aims. They are entwined in Gateway's tremendous opium trafficking trade, as well as the shipment of research materi-

als from overseas. It is said that a particularly high official in the government leads the Men of Dunswick Street — though the obvious candidate, Casper Lang, bristles at such allegations (see page 186 for more on Casper).

The Men of Dunswick Street enjoy their notoriety, marking their crimes by leaving a mask behind. They are covered in great detail in the Gateway papers, where new rumors about the cabal emerge every day.

Black Walkers

The Black Walkers are an extremely tight-knit organization, comprised of warlocks from many different cities who have sworn allegiance to one another. They travel from city to city, moving on when an area becomes too hot to stay. They are a small group, numbering no more than ten at any time, and usually get smaller when police raids and bad deals cull their numbers. The Black Walkers are suicidally loyal to one another, and would trade their lives in the interest of the whole if necessary. When a member joins, he is branded by a burning iron, marked with the symbol of interlinked rings forming a "B" upon his upper arm.

The Black Walkers are researchers, seeking more power to fuel their magic. They value knowledge only in so much as it relates to magic; to them, those without magical ability are cretins, hardly worthy of mopping floors or cleaning automobiles. Few of them are engaged in politics (it detracts from

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their research), but if they did take an active hand in political matters, it would likely manifest as violent, terrorist-like incursions against the government. In fact, several of the NLEB squads that track the Black Walkers from city to city claim that the warlocks are attempting to recreate the White Light itself. Many Black Walkers are among the most powerful sorcerers in the world; if they truly wished to bring about such an occurrence, they might very well succeed.

The Black Walkers are drawn to any sort of new research, powerful totem, or newly captured power. They will go to great lengths to destroy any obstacles in their way, cleaning an entire area with their magic without regard for innocent bystanders. Because of their activity, more than seven laws have been passed in the Praetorium and Assembly further restricting the use of magic.

The Order of Nu

The name brings fear into the hearts of the common citizen. School children are taught that they rank among the greatest evils of human society, along with legendary villains and hideous tales of war. According to the public version of history, all the members of this established magical nation died — along with their dreams — when the war ended. But the truth is much more insidious.

Although the Order of Nu ruled an entire nation with established boundaries and borders, it was also an idea — a dream now shared among a thousand warlocks — of equality and knowledge. The science of magic, it was theorized, could free mankind of the burdens brought by disease, poverty, and hatred. Magic was the answer to the world's ills. Today, small clubs keep that dream alive beneath the banner of a name long remembered in infamy. They fight fiercely against the Anti-Sorcery Act, trying to push legislation to change the laws against magic, and insisting that sorcery is still man's best hope. Yet behind secret doors, they meet and reforge the traditions of the Order... traditions that once tore the world apart.

No warlock is public about belonging to the Order of Nu, but members still carry the flame of that ancient group. They use the banners, the secret signals and — most importantly of all — the libraries that survived the war. The Order of Nu were primarily researchers, and their successors still protect those secrets with a guarded eye. Those who join the Order today have access to some of the most potent secrets in the world, both magical and political, and some say they protect the true secret of the war's outcome. Needless to say, the group is hunted more than any other in the Commonwealth.

Theta 73

One of the most "scientific" of the warlock communities, Theta 73 is considered the Mensa of the magical world. Only the most intelligent warlocks — not to be confused with the most powerful — are contacted to join this group. Theta 73 is not a political organization, but many of their members are government officials and national servants. These men and women struggle to keep science from being confused with magic, ensuring that the progression of law does not strip society of scientific progress. Not all members of Theta 73 are warlocks; scientists are often offered entry into the group as well. These

individuals prize intelligence and scientific advancement, and are among those attempting to piece together the events that led up to the White Light at the end of the war.

The members of Theta 73 do not meet face-to-face (and live widely scattered among the cities of the Commonwealth), but instead communicate only via letters, drop-boxes, and clandestine advertisements in newspapers. Although this might seem dangerous, the members of Theta 73 feel assured in their supreme intellect; by the time someone of "lesser intellectual standing" identifies the code, the society will be using another one.

Déjà Vu

Déjà Vu is an organization of warlocks that adheres to the primitive principles of superstition, *voudoun*, and sympathetic magic. Using an approach that unifies psychology, parapsychology and scientific fact, members of Déjà Vu prefer the darkly spiritual to clean white laboratory conditions.

Déjà Vu, in many ways, encourages the dark side of magic, helping its membership to create the image and ambiance of spirituality among the implements of science. It has as many charlatans as actual warlocks, making Déjà Vu one of the more "public" magical societies in existence. Although the police occasionally raid meetings, they rarely find anything other than old ladies reading palms and the occasional *houngan* "guru." But once in a while, a member of Déjà Vu comes forward with real magical talent, and reminds the world that this society is not to be forgotten or ignored. These practitioners cloak their scientific formulae in the trappings of the occult, claiming that spirits or other supernatural phenomenon imbue them with their powers. Dilettantes and the upper crust seek out Déjà Vu in order to add some spice to their lives. Prominent members are invited to cutting-edge clubs, private gatherings, and other elite occasions in order to add a touch of mystery and danger. Certain wealthy clients join the group — at a hefty cost, of course — simply for bragging rights. But beneath this, Déjà Vu maintains some significant criminal activities — particularly opium and alcohol smuggling, as well as prostitution, kidnapping, and worse crimes. Most warlock scoff at the group's occult traditions — physics is physics, regardless of how you dress it up — but learn to do so quietly. Those who don't respect the organization's beliefs find themselves on the losing side of a psychological war, their minds battered and shaken long before any genuine magic is invoked.

DARK TIDINGS AND DEAD MEN

Magical societies are not the only underground groups active in the cities of the Commonwealth. Nor are criminal and Mafioso elements alone in their desire to organize chaos within the underground movements of the world. Anti-magic societies are also powerful, and their goals are in some ways darker than their pro-sorcery counterparts.

Because warlocks are not clearly identifiable in society, these anti-sorcery groups cannot simply persecute based on visual identification of their targets. Therefore, they must be exceptional investigators, poking into private lives and past secrets of those suspected. They have eyes everywhere,

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spread widely within the common populace. As all members of the Commonwealth are encouraged to stop sorcery and turn in warlocks, so do the anti-sorcery societies gain followers with every passing day. They actively recruit in areas where warlock activity has caused damage, hoping to capitalize on the fear and hatred propagated by warlock activity.

Below are some of the most famous anti-sorcery leagues, and their agendas. Game Masters are encouraged not simply to use these as NPC groups, but also to encourage government-loyal PCs to join or be associated with them. Most of them are considered patriotic, loyal citizen societies. They are supportive of the government, socially integrated, and provide valuable contributions to the world around them.

Praetorian's League of Citizens (PLC)

The Praetorian's League of Citizens (commonly called the PLC) was the first anti-sorcery society to leap to prominence within the Commonwealth. Based on one of Patrick Deacon's speeches immediately following the institution of the Anti-Sorcery Act, the PLC tries to "bring the citizens of the Commonwealth into the fight against magic, spreading strong moral values and the might of a united society into the war for our children's souls."

The Praetorian's League's constitution supports "commonality, citizenry, and security," and decries sorcery as antithetical to all three. The PLC recruits mothers, wives, fathers and sons; they focus on family values and personal safety from a grass-root point of view rather than structuring themselves as a national organization.

The PLC maintains very few chapter houses, meeting instead in community centers and churches across the nation. They post flyers at school, warning children about the dangers of sorcery, and schedule protests outside libraries known to house books on science considered "dangerous" by the PLC. Each year, the PLC publishes a list of banned books, study topics, and other protective measures that parents can take to keep their children safe from magic. One of the mottos of the PLC is "protect the children, and the nation will grow up strong."

Some of them are a bit more radical than others, preventing their own children from any real scientific inquiry, but for the most part the PLC is fairly knowledgeable about the difference between science and magic — where understanding of the physical laws gives way to notions on how to break them. They target most of their petitions and public outcry against the books and individuals who actually spread magical tolerance. The PLC has some political agendas, but none of significance beyond the salvation of the status quo. They are mostly content with the Anti-Sorcery Act, and their only additions to national law include their petitions to ban certain books and educational topics from schools.

Community Conscience

The groups known as Community Conscience do not yet have full national backing, nor do they inhabit every city of the Commonwealth. They primarily operate in the cities of Terminus, Central City, and New Eden, with a few splinter or-

ganizations struggling to recruit in Nova Roma. There is no real representation of the Community Conscience group on the west coast of the Commonwealth.

The Community Conscience society is an active lobbyist within the governments of Central City and Terminus. Their activities have led to the capture and prosecution of numerous warlocks, and resulted in an active citizen's patrol, watching for magic use on the streets and in public places. This community watch is comprised of off-duty policemen, bouncers at bars, and other strong citizens willing to give up some of their free time in order to protect and better their community.

This means, of course, that the Community Conscience group is prone to being in the thick of danger, performing citizen's arrest of practicing warlocks foolish enough to draw attention to themselves and their magic. In order to help their agents, Community Conscience also sponsors courses in self-defense, magical knowledge (to spot and protect oneself against warlocks), and cooperation with the police and NLEB to provide a community watch service through troubled neighborhoods or areas where magic has been prevalent in the past.

Occasionally, radical elements of Community Conscience take the fight against sorcery very personally. These individuals become paranoid, investigating their neighbors and watching those they suspect of magic use any way they can. Community Conscience does not sanction these radicals, although their activities often lead to the capture of many warlocks who would otherwise be able to slip beneath the notice of the police departments.

Presley, Patton & Cunningham

Originally, this prestigious law firm was one of the forces behind the national laws prohibiting magic. Lawyers from their firm were involved in drafting the Anti-Sorcery Act, organizing petitions and drives towards making sorcery illegal in the Commonwealth. They have also prosecuted many of the highest profile cases against warlocks, each time asking for the maximum sentence and strongest punishments available. Their lawyers are among the best in the Commonwealth, and seem universally dedicated to ensuring the public safety by putting warlocks behind bars.

Presley, Patton & Cunningham is also the driving force behind the legalization of Antidox as fitting punishments for magical crime. Through their funding, the drug was invented, and with their guidance, it has become one of the most highly publicized anti-sorcery prohibitors in the Commonwealth.

The law firm has offices in every major city of the Commonwealth. They occasionally take pro-bono cases, particularly if the case is against a warlock, or stands to further the laws against sorcery. Their lawyers are high-powered, well-trained and educated, and have the most advanced legal libraries in the nation.

Many members of Presley, Patton & Cunningham — have also made their mark in government. Praetorian Walter Presley, son of one of the partners and one of the youngest representatives of New Eden in the Commonwealth Praetorium, currently heads the Council Against Sorcery (the national agency designed to organize national response to the warlock issue across the Commonwealth).

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The Red and White Society

The Red and White Society works entirely beneath the surface of the law, hiding themselves in order to infiltrate warlock societies and expose them to the police. Members of the Red and White Society hide their identities from those outside the organization, practicing extreme caution when meeting or working together. Typically, their members work in small groups of two or three, the better to hide their actions from the warlocks whom they are infiltrating.

The Red and White Society takes no credit for their actions, usually dropping off notes at police stations or other drop-boxes when they have enough proof to blow open a gathering of warlocks. This usually consists of the location of the meeting, as many pieces of concrete evidence as can be gathered (usually letters or photographs), and the names of the members of the warlock organization.

Because the Red and White Society is not a government-sponsored organization, there is no official list of its membership. Neither do individual members know much concerning the organization's hierarchy. However, they do operate much like a government, with small groups working in collusion and meeting on occasion with representatives of other small groups. There is no real hierarchy or titular head of the society. Instead, they work individually, pooling their efforts only when they happen to be working the same area or when an infiltration proves too difficult or dangerous for just one or two individuals.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS

PLAYING WARLOCKS

Although warlocks are masters of science and magic, it is not necessary for a player to have a physics degree in order to effectively play one. The most important thing a warlock player needs is imagination and ingenuity. Those two facets are more critical than any other single part of the character's understanding. Warlock characters must be able to understand the simple forces that make up their specialty. Gravity makes things go down. Magnetism is the force that pulls things together. Electricity is caused by static, by the motion of things against each other. With such basic understanding, a player can create a devastatingly effective warlock character. For those who are still extremely science-shy, we recommend finding an old junior high school science book or going to one of a hundred websites that explain science in simple terms. A little bit of research can make a warlock character five times more effective in play — and knowing how science works can help a player understand how his character thinks and acts. These simple steps add not only to your own enjoyment of your warlock character, but also to the fun of others around you.

Making warlocks realistic is second only to making them fun. If learning science isn't your idea of a fun time, then work with your GM to find several simple effects that your warlock can have "on call" — things that you both agree are possible,

scientifically, such as lifting objects, disarming people with gravity, or using electricity to shock your opponents and cause them to trip and fall. Thinking of a few ideas ahead of time will help make the game flow more smoothly, and will make your character more effective during the course of play.

BURNOUT

Burnout is the notorious complex that a warlock suffers when he relies too much on magic. In terms of game play, this indicates that the GM has begun to alter the character's physical state, performing magic at random around the warlock character. In game terms, the warlock's will has evaporated, and his magic is operating without the warlock even noticing.

In game terms, the GM is free to cause any effects he wishes in order to facilitate burnout, using the warlock's ability (but not skill) in order to assure havoc. These effects may be small or large, as the GM feels is appropriate. The exact effects are entirely up to the GM, but small effects might include bottles levitating, cars refusing to start (or starting randomly) or other "minor" effects of uncontrolled magic. In effect, they are caused by the will eroding slightly, and the warlock's control of their power slipping — but only a bit. Therefore, the events around them are slightly modified, still very controlled.

However, the warlock will likely not notice that these effects are out of the ordinary. He is beginning to fall to his imagination, and losing touch with the Common Laws of the world — in effect, he's become so used to exploiting the loopholes in reality that he forgets the loopholes even exist. Therefore, it seems almost natural for the bottle to float. As the warlock progresses deeper and deeper into magic, his control fades away almost entirely. Not only are his own formulae more difficult, but his magic continually affects the world around him in increasingly less subtle manners. Cars lift spontaneously off the ground, lightning storms follow the warlock through the city, and other massive effects take place within a few blocks of the warlock's presence. Luckily, it is not necessarily obvious who the warlock is — even to experienced crystal ball detectives or other warlocks. The effects occur randomly, with no pattern, over a relatively large area. Tracking down every person within that range is a difficult and time-consuming task, one that can easily put a detective squad in mortal danger.

PARTY ROLE-PLAYING

Despite their outsider status, there are easy methods of integrating warlocks into a typical *Edge of Midnight* party. By the very nature of the world, warlocks have two options: they can choose to hide their magic, even from the other party members, or they may be public with their magic — with or without a formal government license. Either way, a clever Game Master can assist the warlock player to integrate seamlessly with the rest of the party, ensuring that his concepts with those who choose not to play sorcerers.

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Secretive Warlocks

Warlocks who choose to hide their magic from the rest of the world (including the party of player characters) are accepting a great limitation. They have to be extremely subtle with their magic — and they must have a very high sense of control, the better to ensure that when they do use magic, it doesn't backfire and expose them. Keeping magic a secret in *The Edge of Midnight* can be a difficult proposition.

The Anti-Sorcery Act gave law enforcement officials the right to do as they pleased with warlocks, using whatever force they determine to be necessary. If an unlicensed warlock is discovered, he will certainly be placed in jail — if he survives arrest. If other members of the party are law officers, they may have a serious grudge against those who use sorcery — forcing the warlock PC to be extremely subtle in his use of magic.

For a warlock to remain with his party and yet keep his magic use a secret, he's going to need a cover story, an alternate identity, or at least a reason to be useful to the party without magic. Whether the warlock poses as a detective, has a job as a researcher or a police officer, or any of a number of alternatives, the player needs to play up his "day job" in order to give him an identifiable purpose and function. If the warlock is also a needed party member, then his magical talents will be auxiliary — and he can more easily keep them secret from the others.

Another way to keep this sort of a warlock in touch with his party is to either allow the characters to know about the warlock's magic (giving them reasons to keep it secret as well), or to give the warlock character a completely separate reason to be with the party whether they want him to be there or not. For example, a party member could be blackmailing the warlock character, forcing him to perform magic for the party in exchange for secrecy. Or, there could be a romantic or familial tie between the secret warlock and one of the party members. Additionally, the warlock could be in hock to one of the other party members, or to a third individual who holds the reins over all of them.

Public Warlocks

Warlocks who are public with their talents have two options — one far more accessible than the other. They may possess licenses — permission from the government to practice — or they may be so powerful and well connected that the local law enforcement officers cannot afford to move against them. Obviously, it is far easier for a warlock to get a license, or join the police and work within the system, than it is to be so famous and so influential that the police cannot afford to bring public charges against him or her. Licensing is not difficult — so long as you don't mind your neighbors lobbying to have you thrown out of the apartment building, or your wife leaving you, or being turned down for every job you apply for without even an interview.

Obtaining a license for magic requires a thorough background check, and a complete month-long interview wherein the warlock must divulge every formula, scientific theorem, and ability he possesses. The police take no chances with these potential law-breakers. If the law allowed police to put

a tag and dog collar on them, it would probably be done. Even after obtaining a license, the warlock is watched relentlessly. He must keep his current address on file with the police, and can be fined for moving from one city to another without first filing an application for the move with both cities.

However, a licensed warlock has a great deal more freedom to use his magic... and an almost assured position in the local crystal ball squad if he wishes. For warlocks captured on petty crimes, this may be their only option (though the addition of such malcontents does nothing for morale on the force). They may not even be particularly skilled with magic. Dabblers captured without any friends to get them out of jail find themselves in a precarious position — and may end up on the force by default. Often, entire units of crystal ball policemen have no real magical skill. They must make up for their lack of talent in other areas — and by relying on their teammates.

The second type of public warlock is far rarer. These individuals are among the elite. They are the pinnacle of society, and you can often find them behind legislation to block the practice of sorcery. No one would believe that they are secretly warlocks — but those who know the truth hate them with a bitter and completely ineffective fire. These paragons hoard their ability, keeping it quiet from the media and using it solely for their own benefit. Their names are like a public whisper in the night, haunting dedicated police officers with the certain knowledge that lawbreakers are going unpunished. They are not flagrant in public, but in private, they spare no expense. They create expansive laboratories to rival those of government research facilities. They use their power and prestige to arrange private funding of black-market researchers, stealing the formulas underground warlocks invent and using them to increase their own power. It is challenging for a player character to play this role, but these individuals make excellent long-term antagonists.

CLOSE TO THE VEST

Secrets and suspicion are at the heart of *noir*, and they enhance the mood of darkness and intrigue. Keeping your character's magic a secret is entirely within the paradigm of *The Edge of Midnight*, and in fact can make the game even more interesting for all concerned. In order for a warlock to better keep his magic a secret, that player should keep three simple rules in mind. One, always control the magic. If you can't do the spell efficiently and quietly, then don't waste your time trying. Two, never use magic to help yourself directly. Obvious assistance makes you the target of suspicion. Third, and lastly, always have another excuse. Magic can appear innocuous if applied directly — or another warlock could be to blame. Keeping these three rules in mind will keep your character from making himself public, and will increase your enjoyment of the subtlety and secrecy necessary to play a warlock character.

Always control the magic. Without high control, magic can be rampant. Even simple tasks have a high chance of backfiring, and the more useful the ability, the more difficult it is likely to be. Warlocks are known for being unable to control the magic from time to time — reaching for increasingly more

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difficult effects before their control is established. Hidden warlocks can't take any chances: they must be able to control their effects, or the magic will run rampant, and the jig will be up. Targeting smaller effects, or using the magic only to assist in minor ways, helps keep the secret. An invisible warlock is a safe one.

Never use magic to help yourself. Your team is always watching — and they know full well how often something unusual is likely to strike. If you are always the one missed in a fire fight, or if your car is mystically unharmed during a warehouse inferno, it's going to be noticed. Use magic to help others, not yourself. It throws off the target, and makes it seem far less likely that magic is involved. By allowing your own items and safety to be compromised slightly, you lift the suspicion from your shoulders.

Always have another excuse. A good warlock is a canny warlock. Be elsewhere. Have your hands full. Don't appear to pay attention. These are simple rules, all bearing down on one fact: plausible deniability. That alone will keep the attention far from you, and you'll be safer for it. If your party sees the good work you do with investigation or in gunfights, they won't ask where the other strengths of your character might be. Keep them guessing; misdirection is everything. If necessary, talk a harder game than you can play — just to make them think that you're better with a right hook than you are. Once they have that image in their minds, they won't be as likely to suspect you of having other talents.

Games with Giants

Warlocks hide for a very good reason: the entire government, from the lowliest beat cop to the highest national official, is against them. The Anti-Sorcery Act is just a public face on an ugly bias, leading the citizens of the Commonwealth in their bigotry and hatred. No matter where the warlock character goes, he will find no real safe haven. In Nova Roma, warlocks are so universally hated that they are thrown out of bars, their credit routinely shut down, and their every move tracked by the authorities. Their houses are marked by the government, and licenses for warlocks in Nova Roma are routinely desanctioned — usually a day or so before the warlock is notified (it's awful when the mail is slow, isn't it?). By the time the warlock realizes his license has expired, he's already practiced magic illegally — and he's nothing more than bait for the police who swim around him. Nova Roma doesn't play fair, and warlocks know it.

Other cities, particularly Gateway, have more tolerance toward warlocks — but don't be confused into thinking that they are gentle on lawbreakers. Even in dark Terminus, warlocks always get the raw end of the deal. It's the way of the world. You may be able to bribe your way out of jail in Terminus, but the amount of money it's going to take to clear your record would buy a house with a gold roof.

Any party with a warlock in it is just asking for trouble — even if they don't know it. Government hounds and spooks are watching every minute of every day, and the smallest mistake might get the entire party thrown in jail for collaboration

and collusion. One warlock in the party — with or without their knowledge — and the whole group is suspect. This element of intrigue and danger can add to the background and the drama around the party, keeping them on their toes, or making them suspect one another without being able to place the real sorcerer.

Hidden warlocks within a party also have to deal with the inevitable knife in the back. Other player characters won't appreciate the warlock hiding such a great secret from them. They may even side with the law, turning the warlock in when he least expects it. At the least, such a dangerous secret can tear a party apart (in character, at least). A clever Game Master can use this to his advantage, drawing in many of the background elements of *noir* — backstabbing, mistrust, paranoia, and a constant feeling of “us against them.”

Magic in the Air

Although many people will say that atmosphere is a Game Master's concern, it is also very much a responsibility of the player — particularly a warlock player. With a character capable of crushing rocks, shooting lightning bolts from his fingertips, or sticking cars together with massive magnetic power, striking the right tone is vital. In order to keep the tension and structure of *The Edge of Midnight*, both player and Game Master must seriously consider how to integrate magic into their campaign. Subtlety and caution are keywords, and a Game Master whose warlock players abuse magic or use loud and public sorcery have full right to assault them with all manner of misery.

It is wise to monitor magical education among party members, and to encourage other talents and abilities in lieu of sorcery. In addition, a Game Master might want to impose even harsher restrictions on warlocks who increase their magical ability during game play. Adding research times, requiring warlocks to have laboratories or to spend a significant amount of time studying the magical arts will also add to the genre. Encourage the feeling of hiding, paranoia, and fear — at any moment, the warlock might be discovered. Even those he feels he can trust might turn against him if their own lives are in danger — or if they are offered enough money to buy off their guilt. Being a warlock is asking to be persecuted — if not by the authorities, then by the warlock's own hand as he forces his studies farther and farther underground.

Even a warlock who has “gone public” should be leery of talking about magic openly. Most people believe that magic is inherently evil. The public as a whole does not agree with magic and many people tend to blame warlocks for any and all problems in the world. Anyone who acts flippant or frivolous with their magic will draw attention of the wrong sort. Magic isn't amusing — it isn't something to flash around, or to impress people with. It is a scourge, a black mark on an individual's very soul. Magic is dark and dangerous, and those who can control it must suffer the penalty for their forbidden knowledge.

CHAPTER SIX
GAINTS

™If you see me comin'
Better step aside
A lot of men didn't
A lot of men died.}

- Tennessee Ernie Ford,
[Sixteen Tons]

This chapter contains information on the oppressed minorities of *The Edge of Midnight*: gaunts.

THE LIFE OF A GAUNT

The world is a forbidding place, filled with heartless cities and soulless people. People who are little more than monsters in their hearts, people driven ever onwards by an engine of sin. Fog-choked alleyways and crumbling tenement buildings house monsters made flesh, creatures both pitied and feared. As suburban husbands drive to work, they catch sight of them sweeping the streets and plodding their weary way home from long shifts in hot factories. Later that night, they hear the news, and another mob murder is attributed to one of these beasts. From behind inhuman faces, they stare out with eyes alien and unreadable, draining the life from the world itself with their very presence. They are the threat of the different in living color, hostile, violent, and frightening. They are unlike the rest of humanity... if one can even call them human. They are the gaunts, and nobody ever asked them if they wanted to be monsters.

Gauntism as a disease takes almost exactly two weeks to run its course. The scientific community is still debating exactly whether or not gauntism is a disease, or what the root cause of the problem is, but the doctors and nurses who deal with the transformation still treat it as an incurable malady. The process creates pronounced changes both mental and physical, each as sweeping as the other. At the conclusion of the disease, the new gaunt could almost be another person. Sometimes the process unhinges the person's mind, turning him into a dangerous beast. Sometimes, the victim hangs onto his deepest motivations and the disease reshapes his personality around that. There are times, of course, when it alters nothing, and the victim is entirely capable of coping with his new status as a gaunt. Whether the mental state is dependent on the victim or the disease, none can say.

Gaunts have been part of life in the Commonwealth since the days of the war, yet people remain extremely wary of them. Most gaunts are well over six feet in height and weigh over two hundred and fifty pounds. They have tough, leathery skin and flat black eyes, bald heads and broken, empty cavities where their nose once was. Their teeth are as sharp as needles and their fingers end in claw-like nails. Gaunts have a peculiar effect on the world around them — in order to maintain their preternatural strength and other abilities, their bodies leech the energy from their surroundings. This has little to no effect on humans and animals in the short term, but prolonged exposure to a gaunt can cause rubber and wire to corrode, brick and plaster to crumble, metal to rust, plants to wither and die, and people to faint. The gaunts themselves are powerless to stop this, much as a normal human would be powerless to stop his or her heart from beating. This ability, however, tends to preclude the gaunts from living among normals, forcing them into their own neighborhoods — impoverished, run-down, squalid ghettos devoid of any pity. Many gaunts struggle to

find honest work as they encounter fear and prejudice from the common citizens of the U.C., and most gaunts can only earn a living as laborers, factory workers, or in other hazardous, underpaid occupations. Gaunts are stronger, hardier, and will work in more dangerous conditions than normal workers, making them more desirable to certain employers. As a consequence, many normals resent gaunts who they believe are “stealing jobs.” Gaunts are forbidden to join most unions, and thus lack protection from less scrupulous employers. They look after their own, however, and fierce bonds of community help shape and define this fledgling minority. Though there may not be gaunts speaking on the Assembly floor in Nova Roma, that does not mean that they are meek creatures crawling through the cracks in society's floor. Perhaps the most notable aptitude possessed by the gaunts is the one that earns them the most respect — and the most fear.

With legitimate success often denied to them, many gaunts turn to crime to better themselves within society. With strength surpassing that of the average human, and faces that (to the unwary) look much like any other leatherback's, gaunt criminals dominate the underworld, from petty larceny to organized crime cartels across the country. Some of these criminals are the product of society, simply trying to get by in a world that doesn't care about them. Others are truly the monsters they appear to be, using an illusion of community loyalty and the promise of violence to fuel their own greed and ambition. Crime pays, and the gaunts who engage in it make certain it pays well. While many gaunt mobsters are no better than their normal counterparts, some are not as immoral and selfish. More than one criminal has bloodied his hands in order to carve out a better life for those he cares about, regardless of the cost. To these gaunts, death is not such a high price to pay, and they balance the crimes they commit against the good they bring to those they feel deserve it.

Feared and forgotten, rootless and marginalized, the gaunts stare uncertainty and doubt in the face every day. They were once human, and in many ways they still are, but looks go a long way in this brave new world, and gaunts stopped looking human a long time ago. Some of them have heard so many stories about their monstrous souls, that they're starting to believe them. A few are the reason the stories exist in the first place. But others — too many others — are just people trying to get along. People who never found an answer to the question “why?” and never really know just who they're looking at in the mirror.

GAUNTISM

The disease responsible for the creation of gaunts was unknown within the borders of the Commonwealth until the war, though gaunts had been appearing in increasingly greater numbers overseas since the rise of the Order of Nu. There was an appalling lack of information on gaunts and gauntism, which was of little concern to the Commonwealth, since the disease was largely limited to lands beyond their borders. As

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GAUNT ABILITIES

“The theory of evolution, disputed though it may be, can be seen to be most eloquently proven in the case of the gaunts. Certain victims of gauntism continue to exhibit signs of change years after the cessation of the disease’s main work. Consider that the symptoms are not, in fact, symptoms — rather, they are signs of adaptive evolution at work within the gaunt’s physiology.”
— Dr. Marcus Gunderson, *Adaptive Evolution: Body and Soul*

Gaunts often exhibit enhanced physical abilities, which sometimes develop after their initial transformation. Some develop larger teeth, or spurs of bone jut from their skin. Others experience an increase in bone density or an enhanced resistance to magic. No one has yet determined why such additional abilities develop — whether it is an evolution of gauntism, or some form of abnormal mutation — but it has only increased the general public’s fear and mistrust of gaunts.

In game terms, these new abilities develop once a gaunt player purchases the appropriate background. The GM should make note when a player does so, and tailor the next session or two accordingly as the gaunt experiences another horrifying change to his physique. Gaunts-only backgrounds can be found in Chapter One.

war consumed nations abroad, the Commonwealth watched, contentedly removed from the threat posed by the sorcerous Order... until reports of gaunts wandering the streets of Terminus and Gateway filtered through to the Powers That Be.

The first U.C. gaunts were a mystery to the government and medical science. Some were aggressive, some were fearful, some were just plain confused, but none of them could shed any light on where they’d come from or how they got to be the way they were. Military Intelligence quickly discerned that these gaunts weren’t spies for any foreign power, nor were they harboring any agenda against the government. What they couldn’t learn, however, was who they were, or what had happened to bring them into such a state.

Needless to say, they created a widespread panic. In those early days, people were no clearer on the causes of gauntism than they are today. Rumors whipped back and forth across the continent, questions were asked in the Capitol, and blind panic gripped the populace. Things only grew worse as the numbers increased. At first, a solitary gaunt was seen in Terminus, then a gang of five milling around a burning trash can in New Eden. By the time the Commonwealth entered the war, the panic had turned into a full-blown hysteria. Mob violence was common: gaunts driven from their dwellings, dragged behind cars, and even lynched. But new cases continued to appear, and as the fear and hatred slowly abated, the Commonwealth looked for deeper answers.

The Order or Nu was the easy scapegoat: their rise to power and the inception of gauntism was indelibly linked in the minds of the public. Many assumed that, when the Order was destroyed, the gaunts would go back to normal, and no new cases of gauntism would arrive. The belief fueled the U.C.’s entry into the war, and the fervor helped drive them and their allies to victory. But it became clear in those first days after the White Light that the gaunts were not going anywhere. And while the number of new cases lessened, they by no means vanished as everyone prayed they would. The days following the war saw an increase in the study of gauntism in a desperate and futile attempt to find a cure, a preventative measure, or at least some understanding.

It was almost a year before doctors got their first good look at the process that turned a normal human into a leatherback. Someone found a mechanic in Gateway passed out with a nosebleed on the floor of his garage and took him to hospital. When he woke up, he complained about headaches, blackouts, and further nosebleeds, and had trouble remembering even the most elementary facts about his life. Over the next two weeks, doctors from across the Commonwealth documented every step in his metamorphosis, and speculation was rife in the newspapers and over the airwaves. Gauntism seemed to strike most often at the people living ignored and invisible lives on the fringes of society, which explained why no one had documented a case for so long. With the information they gained, they were able to spot and observe a few more cases: Larry Hastings, James Sinclair Van Drachenburg and a few notable others. These individuals spent the duration of their transitional phase in the hospital — a tiny handful of the larger gaunt populace — and through them, the doctors were able to pinpoint several key elements. Without the notes, theories, and information gained through the study of these scarce cases, the medical community would know even less than they do now about this mysterious plague.

THE PROGRESS OF THE DISEASE

The first stages of gauntism are barely noticeable — for about two days, the patient suffers from slight headaches and occasional nosebleeds. This stage was rarely noticed before a radio broadcast reported the symptoms of gauntism to the public. That evening, three hospitals in Central City alone were forced to close their doors to stem the tide of panicked citizens.

From day three of the disease’s progression, the symptoms become slightly more pronounced. The headaches are excruciating, and can cause blackouts. The nosebleeds become much worse, and the blood contains small fragments of the subject’s disintegrating nasal membrane. By the end of the first week, blackouts are a regular occurrence, and are accompanied by rapid hair loss. The victim is usually completely hairless by day eight or nine of the transformation. Pronounced aches in the jaw herald a chilling change in the subject’s dental work — as the old teeth fall out, new sharper teeth force their way through the gums. From this point, the symptoms arrive one upon the other at an increasingly ferocious pace. From the start of the second week, the subject develops a tremendous

appetite, and cannot stand to have his or her food cooked. This tendency continues into the gaunt's new life, but is at its most pronounced here when his or her new metabolism is asserting itself most strongly. In conjunction with the increased appetite, the physical changes become more pronounced, as do the headaches. Many sufferers need to be restrained in this stage, as the rapid increase in physical mass and the alteration of the bone structure can drive the patient into a brutal rage. The life of more than one doctor has been lost due to negligence or underestimation of a restrained victim of gauntism.

During the second week, the skin toughens and darkens to an ashen gray in color. The physical changes accelerate; by day ten, the nose has rotted entirely to pieces. As of yet, no theory has been able to cohesively explain why the nasal cavity is exposed so, though the notion that it somehow ties in with their greatly atrophied sense of smell has yet to be disproved. Some time in the second week, the subject's eyes invariably begin a delicate process of alteration that makes the patient angry and pained in direct sunlight for a few days. Usually, the gaunt begins to exhibit an increased physical stamina by this point, and can maintain a normal conversation despite the visible alterations to his physical form that still wracks him throughout this period.

As the painful changes take their toll on the subject's physique, the first manifestation of the gaunts' fabled "draining" ability occurs. This usually takes place in the final days of the transformation, and the first manifestation is always the most potent. The new ability is brought forcefully to life, siphoning enough energy from the surroundings to sustain and fuel the fearsome changes. This results in a rapidly accelerated pace of draining from that normally exhibited by gaunts. It rarely lasts long, but it has given rise to some of the wilder stories about gauntism. Most doctors place a flowering plant in the room containing the patient. The progress of the plant's decay is the surest indicator of the status of the patient's drain on the surrounding environment. During the initial drain, the subject's headaches reach a peak, and then break like a fever, leaving the subject's mind all but totally blank. Most of the subject's personal memories are eradicated, leaving him as a blank slate upon which he must found a new life. Some persistent or willful few are capable of clinging to occasional treasured memories during their transition and after, but there are no known criteria by which memory retention can be successfully and reliably triggered. By this stage, the transformation is all but complete, and the new gaunt need only wait and allow his metabolism to return to normal while readying himself for his new and unexpected life. Additional attributes may appear over the course of time — spiny bone protrusions, for example, or enhanced vision — but the gaunt is essentially unchanged from this period.



REBIRTH AND ASSIMILATION

Adjustment to a new life is often traumatic for gaunts. Many have no memories whatsoever of their old lives, and only a lucky few have any tangible recollection of who and what they once were. Severe and irretrievable amnesia is a common symptom in gaunts, and led many to the erroneous conclusion that the big leatherbacks were less intelligent than regular people. In truth, the mental capacities of most gaunts remain unchanged after the transition is complete, and though the "growing pains" of gauntism can shatter the minds of the very frail, this condition is rare. Thankfully, the blind panic and hatred which accompanied early gaunt appearances has faded, replaced by a more passive prejudice. While it hasn't helped the gaunts' situation much, it has allowed a modicum of social support immediately following the change.

How a gaunt adjusts to his or her new life is closely related to where he or she underwent the transition. If it took place in a hospital or other secure facility, there are frequently psychiatrists and other specialists on hand to brief the new gaunt about who they were and talk with them to discover any alterations to their psychological makeup. If they transform in some forgotten corner of the city, they are likely to wake up confused and bewildered, with no memory of how they got there or who — or even *what* — they are. A gaunt's first memory is always of the pain, and as they are adults already when they undergo this process, it tends to have a very significant impact upon them. Whereas gaunts "born" in a hospital will know exactly who they were, and may even see photographs of themselves as a human (though psychiatrists are beginning to believe any psychological effect such mementos have is detrimental), a lost gaunt will have to struggle with his new identity on his own.

Oddly, this seems to be the least traumatic method of adaptation to a new life, as the gaunt does not suffer any concern or sense of loss over his old life. The reaction to the past varies from gaunt to gaunt, and can be as varied and extreme as any human grief over a loss. Some gaunts attempt to continue their old lives as if nothing has happened, even going to great lengths to reacquire themselves with skills they once knew and maintain relationships they had before. Often they find themselves frustrated, with old friends and coworkers looking fearfully into their face, searching in vain for some trace of the person they knew. Even family members, no matter how much they may still cherish their loved one, cannot maintain a close proximity to them for any length of time, and no matter how many times they remind the new gaunt of his past, he will never remember it. Other gaunts travel a different road, changing their names and declaring themselves dead. Some even have funerals for their old lives, saying goodbye to their past in a formal manner. Most take the middle ground, leaving everything they once had behind to make a new life in the crumbling ghettos which the gaunts call home.

Adjustment to life in a gaunt community can be difficult — the gaunts have no family, and thus their social structure is different from that of normal society. Ideally, the gaunts view every member of the community as part of an extended family, a bond borne of mutual suffering. In practical terms, however,

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this is rarely the case. Most gaunts neither know nor trust themselves for the first few months of their lives, let alone other gaunts. Thus, new gaunts are often left to their own devices as they adjust to life as a leatherback and come to terms with the fact that they have become the creatures they may once have feared.

ABILITIES

The physical abilities of gaunts are impressive and go far beyond the human norm, even in weaker specimens. Gaunts as a rule are generally stronger, tougher, and more durable than normals. While most specimens fall short of the legendary strength of gaunt bank robber Sid Curtis (who threw a beat cop through the engine block of a car), the strength of gaunts is still difficult to forget. The average gaunt stands well over six feet in height, and some have been over seven feet tall. Most gaunts are wide in the shoulders, having roughly the same build as a professional boxer. A gaunt can generally work or engage in other exertions (such as running or playing sports) for a much longer period of time than a normal human before growing fatigued. Gaunts even have a greater resistance to pain and harm than normals. Those questioned about their newfound strength claim that they have never felt so healthy, though some occasionally complain of persistent growing pains, like an ache in their bones that never leaves them. Besides their strength and endurance, many gaunts have enhanced vision as a result of their transformation. Often, their featureless black eyes can see in the dark almost as well as a cat, and many gaunts prefer living in dingy, poorly lit environments. Though sunlight causes no pain to gaunts, many simply find the dark more relaxing. As if making up for this increased eyesight, many gaunts possess a greatly atrophied sense of smell. Few odors save the strongest (raw meat, rotting fruit) can be sensed by gaunts, which means that gaunt districts frequently smell bad; the inhabitants simply don't notice.

As time goes on, some gaunts develop other abilities as well. Some grow bony extrusions from their joints, while others exhibit incredibly dense muscle structure. These traits often appear without notice — apparently a further mutation from their “disease.” Scientists are at a loss to explain them, though the gaunts themselves often put such abilities to good use.

Energy Draining

Another property unique to gaunts is their inherent mechanism for sustaining themselves by draining energy from the world around them. This ability accounts for their enhanced endurance and strength; they require a great level of energy to remain active for long periods of time. Though the effect is subtle and not immediately noticeable, if any area is exposed to the presence of gaunts for a long time, it will deteriorate as the energies that hold it together are gradually leached away. Plants are the most immediately affected, and a houseplant that is not kept well-watered can wither and die in a matter of hours in the presence of a gaunt. With normals, it manifests

as a general fatigue or exhaustion, while buildings and other structures will fall into dilapidation after only a few short months. The knowledge that gaunts have no means of control over this draining has made them widely feared, though normals as a rule are too strong to suffer anything truly life-threatening.

Another side effect of this supernatural siphoning comes from the use of magic. A warlock using magic in the vicinity of a gaunt will automatically draw the spell's power from the largest and nearest source — usually the gaunt himself. While the casting of magic has no noticeable effect on non-gaunts, it is physically painful to leatherbacks, who hate magic — and by extension, warlocks — with a passion. This strange connection is taken as the most compelling evidence that magic is somehow tied in with the creation of the gaunts, though how exactly, no one is able to say.

The “draining” process is commonly thought to be a major influencing factor in the strange diet of the gaunts. They despise cooked food of any sort, and prefer to eat raw fare. Cooked meat and vegetables tend to nauseate gaunts, and some claim to have no idea how they could once stand to eat their food cooked. The tendency of gaunts to eat their meat raw can be somewhat unsettling, though some normals — particularly those in cities — have become accustomed to it. It's something of a standing joke in Central City that the only place where you can get a good rare steak is the Silver Spoon, a gaunt-owned diner on the outskirts of town. Gaunts are prodigious eaters, although they can survive on little food. Though primarily carnivores, gaunts will eat fruit and vegetables as well, and are particularly fond of carrots and potatoes.

Aside from their unusual culinary tastes, one of the few things that most gaunts crave is tobacco. Almost every leatherback in the U.C. smokes, and those who don't are looked upon as odd. It is unknown whether their smoking habits are motivated by a physical urge or psychological pressure manifested as a result of the group's desire to find some common ground. But regardless of the circumstances, the gaunts' love of smoking ensures a lucrative trade among the community, something that has provided a firm financial base for some of the Commonwealth's more powerful gaunt syndicates.

GAUNTS IN SOCIETY

Everyone hoped it wouldn't last. Everyone hoped the end of the Order of Nu would mean the end of the gaunts. Everyone knew, deep down, that it wasn't true, that the hope was false and forlorn. The war ended in a blinding flash of light, the victory was celebrated, and the gaunts were still there; lost on the fringes of society, monsters made flesh, a symbol of the war and the price it cost the world. The Commonwealth was left with something it had no idea how to handle, and new gaunts were still succumbing to the disease. Something needed to be done, and the government in Nova Roma had just the solution — it would ignore them.

PREJUDICE

In the years since the war, no legislation has been passed concerning gaunts whatsoever. No government acts dictate where they live, work, or pass their time. No one takes away from their rights; no one exercises any official prejudice against them. On the other hand, no one helps or protects them either. Nowhere is this more evident than in the "districts," the unofficially designated slums where the vast majority of gaunts dwell. Proximity to gaunts is known to be hazardous, and it quickly became common practice to charge over the odds for gaunts attempting to live in normal neighborhoods. Any neighborhood with a population of gaunts — even a small one — would quickly empty as people moved away from the creatures that could leech away their lives just by being there. This, coupled with the difficulty gaunts have finding work, led to the rise of mass slums in every Commonwealth city. In places such as Nova Roma with small gaunt populations, the district is located on the outskirts near an industrial estate — somewhere out of the way, where the residents can be safely ignored. Cities with larger gaunt populations, such as New Eden or Central City, have large, centrally-located gaunt districts. In these cases, slumlords simply buy up the cheapest land they can — which usually means dilapidated tenements in the old inner city.

Unsurprisingly, gaunt districts are among the worst housing in the country. The owners argue that the concentrated presence of so many gaunts in the area will simply make it decay anyway, and so it is rare that they will ever lift a finger to help their tenants out. Life in the districts is harsh, but gaunts are nothing if not resilient. Many of the buildings lack telephone lines, electricity and gas are erratic to say the least, and the facilities and furnishings would fail any honestly-conducted hygiene and safety inspection. The slumlords, however, rely on negligence and bribery to keep themselves in business, collecting as much rent as they can squeeze out of their disenfranchised tenants while maintaining a stranglehold on gaunt housing in their respective cities. As the districts are the only affordable housing for most gaunts who can earn an honest living, they are to an extent the only place you can find an honest gaunt. Property outside the districts is prohibitively expensive to gaunts, and yet a small minority does live among the general human population. As it is almost impossible for a gaunt to find work that will allow him to pay for normal accommodation, the majority of gaunts outside the districts are prominent and influential criminals. The high profiles of all gaunts living among normal society does nothing to enhance their reputation; no matter what their conduct is, it is usually apparent that they do not have a respectable source of income. How else could they afford to live among the normals?

Leisure pursuits and activities also follow the pattern of unspoken segregation between normals and gaunts. Fear is a powerful motivating factor, which can surface at the cinema or ballpark just as easily as it can in a darkened back alley. Gaunts tend to congregate together when going out, though not through any conscious desire to do so, or from seeking

strength in numbers. If a gaunt takes a seat for the movie, he will suddenly find the row around him clearing out. Depending on how nervous the other moviegoers are, the gaunt may have the entire smoking section to himself. Other gaunts will tend to sit in the empty seats, simply because it provides some level of socialization (even though it isolates them more and more from the majority of the populace). As a result of this segregation, many gaunts find themselves charged more for admission to theatres, cinemas, and sporting events, and thus are less inclined attend these events. Though gaunts love baseball, they hate the prejudice which rears its head whenever they try to buy a ticket; the Central City Switchmen are the only major baseball team that allows gaunts into their stadium, and some cynics attribute this to a slick form of gamesmanship (stands packed with leatherbacks tend to give opposing teams the willies).

Medical care is another sector in which gaunts face prejudice, though the medical profession is unique in its attitude. Gaunts are not considered for work as staff in any regular hospital, nor are they allowed near sensitive equipment, intensive care, or maternity wards. Indeed, most doctors will not allow a gaunt into hospital for any but the most cursory length of time for fear that their presence will destabilize critical patients or newborn infants. However, recognizing that gaunts need medicine just as much as the rest of the population, some medical professionals have begun lobbying to create and staff gaunt-only infirmaries. The first such installation, founded last year in Central City and run by Dr. Edna Dumont and her staff of eight nurses, is little more than an old mobile army hospital with cheap camp beds and surgical tools. The inexpensive nature of the operation has revolutionized medical care, allowing gaunts almost the same level of care as a normal. The only other real option an injured gaunt has to receive treatment is to seek out a gaunt doctor, most of whom practice in the slums. These doctors live well, though they prefer the anonymity of a house in the districts to the prominence of living outside. They peddle their skills to the local gaunts as well as to criminal syndicates (something the infirmaries may refuse to do). The doctors have learned to keep their mouths shut about gunshot wounds, and a favored doctor will be afforded great respect by the crime lords whose minions they treat. The downside, of course, is that the syndicates never quite see eye to eye, and rubbing out a rival gang's doctor is one of the best risk-free methods to get back at them for a slight...

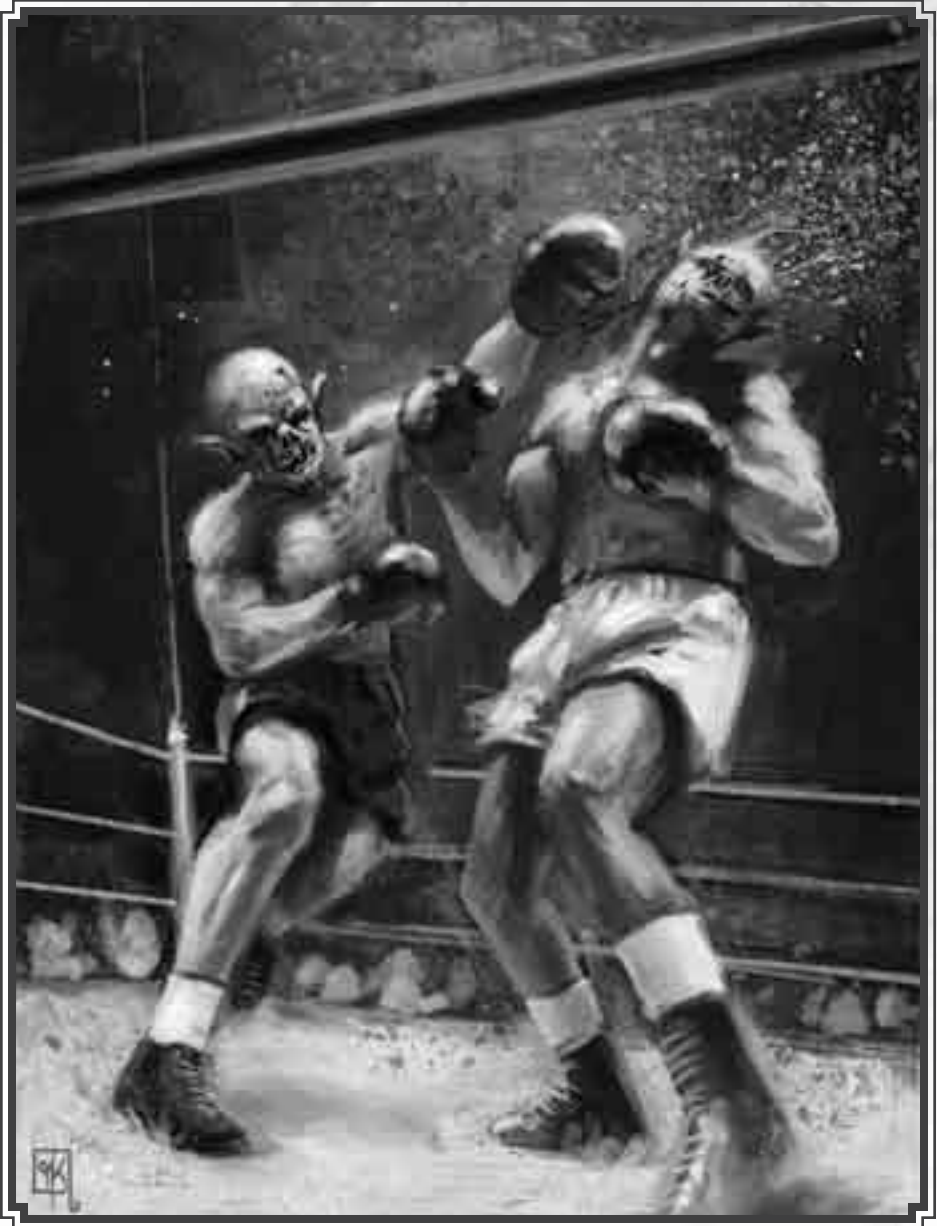
RELIGION

Gaunt spirituality is an oddly polarized phenomenon. The Catholic Church is active in the gaunt districts, and a number of gaunts are devoutly Catholic as a result. Some, however, retain memories of religions they may have previously adhered to, such as Judaism, and may remain — or attempt to remain — true to their original faith. The only other widespread spiritual position among gaunts is Protest Atheism. This position accepts the existence of God but, rather than accepting the world as God made it, rebels against it. Protest Atheists form

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a vocal and intellectualized minority among gaunt society, and are more likely than other gaunts to be found debating theology at coffee houses or gaunt diners. In keeping with this intellectual prestige (or perhaps simply as a gesture of rebellion against society) most gaunt mobsters tend to be Protest Atheists.

The Catholic majority are devout churchgoers, attending the ugly makeshift chapels that can be found tucked into odd corners of the districts and hearing sermons delivered by both gaunt priests and normals who have dedicated themselves to their spiritual welfare. Gaunt chapels are sparsely furnished, and often bear a simple cross as their only ornamentation rather than the more acceptable crucifix. The tension between Catholicism and Protest Atheism is visible, and can lead to fights. The Protest Atheists believe that their brethren are wasting their time praying to a God whom they feel has forsaken the world, whereas the Catholics feel that the Protest Atheists are too overcome by bitterness to see the silver lining in their lives. The divide is all-consuming spiritually. While Baptist, Jewish, or Muslim gaunts do exist, it is impossible to find an agnostic gaunt, or one with no opinion of theological issues. It is, gaunts attest, hard to doubt the existence of God after what they go through. The issue is whether they trust Him or not.



ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE

Gaunts rely on their own numbers for entertainment and leisure activities. For a gaunt, even a movie ticket can be too expensive, so they must find other means of entertainment. Gaunt-only theaters operate in most slums, and games of all sorts are popular. Gaunts are stronger and more enduring than normals, so they tend to favor sports that require a great deal of exertion. Football is popular, as are impromptu weightlifting contests. Their favorite sport, however, is baseball, which is generally played in the evenings on cleared lots. Spectators attest that gaunt baseball is baseball the way it should be played. Matches are invariably close, and every gaunt district has at least four or five teams competing in good-natured ri-

valries. Gaunts do not play baseball professionally, but several recreational leagues exist, as well as barnstorming teams which compete against normals at province fairs and the like. Most gaunts unwind by playing for at least one evening a week, and bad weather never interrupts the games. One of the sport's most famous gaunt players is Gustav Carlssen, who once hit a home run ball through an entire building. Of course, the athletic prowess of the gaunts prohibits them from competing fairly with normal teams, and no gaunt is allowed to participate in professional sports as a result.

The only exception is gaunt boxing, which exists as a separate sport: violent, feral, and funded almost entirely as an exercise in gambling and money laundering. Regardless of the corruption inherent in the Gaunt Boxing Divisions, they have

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their audience among leatherbacks and normals alike. The aggression of the sport — as well as the opportunity to make an easy dollar on a sure win — draws in the cruel and the desperate. Needless to say, there is also a considerable traffic in illegal gaunt-versus-normal fights and bare-knuckle gaunt bouts, all of which are organized by well-connected gaunt criminals. Such matches are illegal of course, though the police rarely raise a finger to stop them if the appropriate wheels are oiled.

EMPLOYMENT

Finding work is a constant struggle for gaunts, but their natural strength and toughness predispose them towards heavy manual jobs, such as construction and factory labor. In fact, their strength coupled with their unnerving appearance and life-draining presence has all but forced most gaunts into thankless and underpaid heavy labor. Deemed unsuitable for most jobs, gaunts are almost never found working in a bank, lecturing at a college, or serving as technicians in a power plant. On the other hand, the steel, construction, and mining industries benefit as much as they can from cheap gaunt labor. Many gaunts chafe at such duties — they are often horribly overqualified for it yet unable to find positions anywhere else. To add insult to injury, they are frequently underpaid, far less than normals in comparable positions. What makes matters worse for gaunt laborers is that the one group they could turn to for aid — the unions — have turned their backs on them. Union policies throughout most industries forbid gaunts from joining, thus trapping the gaunts in dead-end jobs in order to preserve the rights and safeguard the positions of normal workers (who perceive the gaunts as competitors for their jobs).

Aside from heavy labor and menial tasks, a few gaunts find work in other areas of society. Gaunt boxers are employed within their own league (as well as in illegal fights against normals). Gaunt mechanics work on aircraft, boats and automobiles across the country, and some gaunts even own businesses such as garages, diners, and laundries. Of course, the diners are clearly labeled as gaunt-owned, and the gas stations never get quite the same level of business as the normal place across the road. Yet they persist in spite of the struggle. Some gaunts manage to become police officers, and more are eager to follow this path with a view towards eventually gaining decent and regular policing of the districts. Sadly, they find that promotions are incredibly difficult to swing, and most gaunt police officers tread out their days as beat cops, growing more and more resentful as normals with less ability get promoted above them every time. No gaunt cop has ever risen above the rank of sergeant and most gaunts on the force doubt that one ever will.

The simple truth of the matter is that no normal wants to be bossed around by a gaunt. Criminal syndicates — where fear and intimidation rule — are the exception; the more scrupulous elements of society don't care for answering to something alien and different from them. Gaunts are mistrusted and feared throughout the Commonwealth — the stronger



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leatherbacks can throw a full-grown man clear across a city street, and even weak ones are far stronger than the average joe. They eat raw meat, and they look like someone's nightmare. This fear and suspicion — softened since the early days but always running like a current beneath society's surface — has held the gaunts down since they first appeared on the shores of the U.C. Humanity still blames warlocks for all of the world's ills, and while it sees the gaunts as unfortunate victims of their hubris, it still can't bring itself to treat the gaunts like the people they are. That gaunt charities such as the Congressional Society of New Eden exist is an insult to many of the more progressive and outspoken gaunts. What good is a soup kitchen, they ask, when the only reason they need it is because they can't get a normal job like everyone else?

GAUNTS IN THE U.C.

The major cities of the Commonwealth have differing attitudes, numbers, and homes for their gaunt populations. New Eden has a surprisingly high number of gaunts, even though the percentage of citizens who suffer gauntism there is no higher than anywhere else in the country. Monsters and debutantes rub shoulders among the shining steel towers of that city, and the gaunts who live among the populace engender no more surprise than anyone else would among the complacent citizens. The city's gaunt districts are heaving neighborhoods of grimy tenements and winding, dilapidated streets that squat like a cancer in the heart of the city, as the leatherback street gangs tear each other apart for territory and fun. Nova Roma has little use for its gaunt population, and the legislators and bureaucracy of the Commonwealth see little need to sully their intrigues by slumming it in Gaunt-Town. Most gaunts who are not engaged in menial tasks either serve as bodyguards for big politicians or make a nice living as shadowy lobbyists for the big syndicates in Central City. The mobs like to throw their weight around in the capital, so most gangs who have influence beyond one city have at least one gaunt hoodlum prowling the streets of Nova Roma. Paradiso has a stable gaunt population, albeit one that has achieved only a token level of respect. Despite the city's repeated declarations that a gaunt can do anything a normal can in their town, most gaunts know it to be nothing but empty words. Paradiso's gaunt district is the most noticeable and clean in the Commonwealth, but the gaunts there live no better than those in New Eden; a fresh coat of paint on the broken-down buildings doesn't change that.

Central City is perhaps the hub of the Commonwealth's gaunt population, the nexus point to which they are drawn. A large gaunt population and an apathetic government combine in a city where prominent gaunts have season tickets to the Switchmen, and even receive respectful visits from the mayor. Vast, sprawling districts and a vibrant gaunt nightlife — as well as the most powerful and wealthy gaunt syndicates in the Commonwealth — make Central City the heart of gaunt society, though the corruption from the mobs appalls many an honest gaunt.

Aside from Central City, most gaunts find themselves drawn to Terminus, along with everything else that gets lost. The gaunts' main neighborhood there has developed near the swamps outside town, and the buildings are little more than wooden shacks. Despite that, many gaunts live elsewhere in the city, and Terminus' gaunt slums contain the highest proportion of non-gaunts in the Commonwealth — forgotten people losing themselves in the deepest well of desperation. Most of the gaunts here could care less what they do for a living — they define themselves outside of work, as musicians, singers, philosophers, and artists. While gaunt music has its home in Central City, the spirit of inspiration definitely spends a lot of time in Terminus.

GAUNT CRIMINALS

Gaunts have a hard road to travel. While not officially persecuted the way warlocks are, people either hate them, fear them, or quietly resent them. No one respects them, no one appreciates them, and no one looks out for them. Worst of all, no one even gives them a fair chance. More than a few gaunts have bowed down under the pressure, living quiet, broken lives of backbreaking toil. Some strive honestly for better recognition, working as hard as they can at quiet, neglected jobs without ever knowing if they've made a difference. Many, however, look in the mirror and see the same monster that the rest of the world does. Maybe gauntism turned them bad, or maybe they always were and now that they look bad on the outside they don't have to hide it anymore. Maybe they just want to strike back at a society that ignores them, or maybe they want to help out their fellow gaunts the only way they can. Regardless of motive, the number one growth industry in the gaunt community is crime.

Crime pays. In this shadowy universe, everyone looks out for number one, and everything's just another way to get rich. From the petty housebreakers and fences on the streets of Terminus all the way up to the dapper, savage bosses of Central City, there are an increasingly large number of gaunts involved with crime. They take pride in their work — after all, it is the one area where merit is rewarded, and anyone with enough ambition, drive, and ruthlessness can achieve their desires. Gaunt criminals, while not exactly earning the respect of their fellow citizens, can evoke genuine gut-wrenching fear, and as far as they're concerned, that's as good as respect. Denied legitimate success and recognition, even basically honest gaunts often turn to a life of crime. Some work alone, conducting small-time operations that attract no attention from the bosses. Others prefer strength in numbers and band together, sometimes with normals but more often with other gaunts. Originally, normal gangs hired many gaunts as enforcers, but it didn't take the "muscle" long to figure out that there was nothing to stop them from using their natural gifts to usurp their employers. More than one normal boss has since found himself out of the picture because of a supposedly loyal gaunt bodyguard.



Gaunt criminals, whether they are dime-store operators or big wheels in the underworld, prefer to operate from the shadows. Gaunts never have much success as pickpockets or con artists — they're far too noticeable, and not nearly personable enough. This is not to say that there are not gaunt pickpockets, rather that they have to go to extra lengths to appear innocuous, or else operate mostly among their own kind. Most gaunt criminals tend to favor more violent and direct crimes — bank heists, muggings, hijackings, and hit jobs. Gaunt hitmen are the best in the business. While they tend to be more direct than a talented warlock enforcer, they get the message across unmistakably and simply. The considerable power of the syndicates they work for helps them in their grisly tasks, too — an enforcer for the Drago Combine in Central City once killed three members of a rival gang in the middle of the street in broad daylight. Nobody was willing to testify, and any witnesses there just turned their backs on the scene and crawled away into the woodwork. Such occurrences are the subject of hushed conversations in bars and gambling joints around the Commonwealth, growing in their retelling until one brutal act by a particularly bold syndicate boss is transformed into a vast and terrifying gaunt conspiracy, with overarching armies scheming to control the Praetorium itself.

GANGS AND SYNDICATES

Mob membership is subtly encouraged for all members of the gaunt underworld by the bosses. Refusing such encouragement is a sure-fire ticket to getting shot at regularly by hoods working for the big gangs. The bosses or their henchmen spin a yarn or two about solidarity and standing by your fellow gaunts, then turn up every so often to pressure the smaller fry into taking a particular job, or spending a few years in prison in the place of one of their favorites, or just surrendering a cut of their earnings. Despite the often-despotic commands of the bosses, gaunt gangs flourish in every city of the Commonwealth. These gangs are not afraid to use every advantage in order to muscle in on any rival operations in the area, and they are also much less likely to respect a rival mob's territory than a comparably-sized normal gang. In fact, if a gaunt gang gets wind that their normal rivals have turned to using warlocks to even the odds, they are likely to embark on a rampage that will only end in the elimination of them or their enemies.

Normal gangs increasingly find themselves usurped by gaunt mobs. Many smaller normal gangs fear the gaunt syndicates, and some have even sought peace and cooperation with them rather than being wiped out. Despite this, the larger normal mobs are still complacent about their fearsome competitors, since they have been secure in their positions from time immemorial. They have wealth, tradition, and numbers on their side. The gaunts only seem to have brute force. This impression, common among both normal criminals and police authorities, is quite erroneous. The social disregard that gaunts suffer gives them a distinctive advantage over normal lawbreakers. Individuals are difficult to identify, and the districts — where police presence is minimal and abandoned buildings average two a block — make ideal hiding places for a crook on the run. As gaunt syndicates expect and reward merit, gaunts will cling fiercely to any chance they get, fighting with a fire born of oppression, rejection, and desperation. This edge — the need to seize an opportunity no matter what the cost — is more vital to the success of gaunt criminals than their strength, their resistance to magic, or their fearsome visages. Normals tend to discount gaunts' intelligence or motivation, and the gaunts are all too happy to go on letting them think that... until they control every racket in the Commonwealth.

Organization

Order and loyalty are only maintained in a gaunt mob, regardless of its size, through displayed and implied strength. The simple street gangs constantly teeter on the verge of anarchy and are quickly swallowed by more established syndi-

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cates, while older and larger mobs maintain stability through the intermittent execution and rewarding of willful subordinates. In larger syndicates, simple physical strength is not the governing factor it is with street gangs, though some Central City bosses could still snap a man's neck without breaking a sweat. Most gaunt gangs, regardless of size, are either perpetually wary or perpetually on the verge of collapse. The leader of any gaunt gang usually gets where he is by disposing of his predecessor, and thus must divert a lot of time and energy to buying off his most ambitious lieutenants without souring his most loyal followers. If a leader can play this game successfully, it's likely that the mob will grow. If he fails, the mob may not necessarily collapse, but he certainly won't be leading it in a week or two. When word gets around that a leader is weak, the sharks start circling, and the henchmen wait for their moment to strike. Clever bosses are known to deliberately provoke coups within their gangs in order to weed out their greediest henchmen, but this is a risky tactic. The power struggles within gaunt syndicates are a tricky business, and their Byzantine delicacy would make any Assemblyman from Nova Roma blanch. (Naturally, normal syndicates practice this form of maneuvering as well, but the gaunts' strength and savagery is much more intense... and permanent.)

The gaunt underworld is a place of innovation and affected tradition, of reverence for a past that never was and the haphazard creation of a new outlook and tradition. Gaunts have no traditions of their own, no tried and tested method of organization, and no chain of command beyond the law of the jungle. Thus, gaunts tend to adopt the organizational methods and trappings of gangs local to the area, or else defy organization entirely, swarming about in a state of near-anarchy. The 5th Street Wreckers of Gateway, a gaunt gang under the tenuous control of Sam Sketch, is one such bundle of rebellion, stalking the heart of that city's gaunt district like a pack of wolves. In stark contrast, the Central City Drago mob bases itself on the moneyed families of the East Coast... and bears many of their affectations, sporting dapper suits and black hearts. It has remodeled itself on a twisted fusion of modern industry and New Eden street gangs, buying stock with one hand and boosting trucks with the other. Within Nova Roma, the larger gaunt gangs take on many political aspects, lobbying and backing bills that pass through the Assembly and garnering themselves an air of respectability, while the smaller gangs act more like rebels, bitter at society and often singling out corrupt politicians for intimidation. These cells are often more interested in their political message than the larger gangs, but lack the patience or cynicism to manipulate the system, instead striking out swiftly and furiously at whatever they can. Terminus' more successful mobs fight like rats in the crumbling streets, struggling against the warlocks and other gangs in a city overrun with the desperate and the lost. In short, gaunts draw their inspiration from the world around them, affecting some aspects of normal society while discarding others in favor of the emerging trappings of their own subculture.

Crime may be endemic in gaunt society, but it is by no means a product of the supernatural disease that twisted them into the monsters they appear to be. A leatherback may have a short temper, but that makes him no more a criminal than an

impatient man stuck in traffic on a hot day. Gaunts are no more or less predisposed to crime than normals, and gauntism changes nothing about that. Gaunt criminals are at least as much a product of circumstance as they are a product of their all-too-human greed. Society has forced them into poverty, and they have very few ways to rise above their meager lot. The syndicates reward them, respecting loyalty and fast thinking. It doesn't mean they have to like what they do, but every year more of them begin to think that maybe a short and brilliant life of riches and excitement is better than a long life of drudgery and fear.

GAUNTS AND COMMUNITY

Society is both hauntingly familiar and crushingly alien to the gaunts. Wherever they may have fit in before, they don't fit in now. Even if they were once a part of a community that would welcome them back regardless of their status, the sense of utter disconnection from all that they once held dear can often drive fledgling gaunts away from their old homes to seek a new life — a life of monsters and shadows amid the crumbling ruins of the districts.

Like much of their lives, the gaunt community as such is new; a society invented whole cloth out of a sense of desperation and shared misfortune rather than any history or established cultural conventions. Gaunts have had to learn to adapt to their condition, and find their own sense of community on the fly. As gaunts are created rather than born, no gaunt community bears the stamp of "family" in the conventional sense. There are no parents and no children. Gaunt females are unable to bear young, and no child has yet been afflicted with gauntism. The sound of children playing is never heard in the districts, and an aura of suspicion pervades the silent streets.

MENTORS AND GANGS

The social unit that keeps the gaunts together is something akin to family, but more closely related to the mentor-student relationship. More experienced and community-minded gaunts will frequently take "fresh" leatherbacks under their wings, educating them in the social mores of the districts. The particular conventions vary from district to district (and from street to street within the districts), but certain trends tend to recur throughout the gaunt community as a whole. Firstly, gaunts who have any relation at all to each other tend to cling tightly to that thread of unity — which often results in fierce camaraderie, particularly among the gangs and the non-union gaunt workforce. Though gaunts have fewer rights than the average worker through the unspoken prejudice of the workplace, they are more loyal to their own kind than any normal could ever dream.

Secondly, gaunts who inhabit the same building tend to associate with each other more than any other group or subculture. Gaunts, lacking any form of family cohesion or sense of trust beyond themselves (and often wracked with self-doubt), have

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formed tight and volatile bonds of community centered around their crumbling homes. This bond even transcends feelings of “racial” unity towards other gaunts. While they may look out for each other and often view the whole Commonwealth as their enemy, gaunt communities can fly apart into factionalism with frightening speed. The merest whiff of betrayal or deceit is enough to turn all but the most established district neighborhoods against each other, as intra-building or intra-block groups close ranks and turn on the perceived foe — in this case, another similar gaunt grouping. Since few gaunts think twice about solving their problems with their fists — fists that can strike with lethal force — such blow-ups can be unspeakably destructive.

Street gangs are a natural offshoot of this phenomenon. Factionalism invariably gives way to armed gangs, which often operate out of “turf” encompassing several blocks or the like. It can thus be difficult for outsiders to differentiate between legitimate criminal activity, and simpler factionalism within a gaunt district. Ironically, the presence of more organized criminals can serve as a balancing or unifying force in such a situation. Gaunt gunrunners, hijackers, and other hoods have difficulty operating out of districts beset by complicated internecine conflicts that could escalate into physical violence at the slightest provocation. It is therefore in the best interests of organized crime to make sure the districts stay safe... or at least quiet. This is usually accomplished by leaning on every faction, forcing them to the negotiating table, and maintaining stability. If that fails, they wipe out the most vocal member of each faction within the district, which either cows them into silence or unites them against the larger mob.

CLERGY

Another, more positive unifying force in the districts is the Church. Gaunt and normal clergy alike are respected figures in the districts, and most gaunts who have found God are very serious about their faith. This willingness to listen to men of the cloth on most matters has led to trouble in the past, however, as criminal syndicates use them to help sway their flocks. A few extra donations in the collection plate can silence many reservations, and more than a few priests have taken advantage of the trust and respect of the local community. When such indiscretions are uncovered, the results are rarely pretty: churches have been burned down, clergymen beaten or worse, and riots lasting for days have rocked entire districts. Thankfully, such incidents are fairly uncommon, and syndicates have learned to be more cautious in meddling in the church’s affairs.



SOCIAL UNREST

During riots and turf wars in the districts, police usually erect barricades around the gaunt neighborhoods, making sure that the monsters don’t break out, and then leave them to it. The usual line is that it’s simply too dangerous to send in the police, and they’re usually right. The fact that they rarely care whether the leatherbacks kill each other never comes up... officially at least. However, while such barricades often prevent the riots from spreading, they also trap many law-abiding gaunts in areas ruled by bloodthirsty mobs.

The patterns of behavior seen in gaunt communities still tend to mirror the normal communities, from which they see themselves as cast out. At the highest level, the community spirit is very similar. Differences emerge only as one approaches the individual level. There is no family unit, so even the syndicates have less in the way of inherited loyalty than their normal equivalents. Loyalty and friendship is an earned commodity in the world of the gaunts. How can you trust your neighbors when you can’t even trust yourself? Possessing no past, no life, and no memories, gaunts are thrown into the unenviable situation of trusting monsters — monsters they may once have feared, but have now become. In such an environment, a true and loyal friend may be the closest thing to a community one has.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS

Playing a gaunt can be tricky — how do you portray someone who lost everything to a disease they can’t even remember suffering? How do you play a creature with no memory of his or her own past, a creature who either toils in obscurity or breaks every rule just to survive? As a gaunt, you aren’t a blank slate. You know how to do much of what you did as a human; you just can’t remember anything personal. It’s as if the person you were before the change died, and you can still remember what they knew, but not who they were. Any mental differences from humanity are usually a result of your desire to portray yourself as different. Gaunts are mentally no different from humans — they are no more or less intelligent than they were before the disease struck. Regardless of any strength you may possess, you’re not forced to play a big dumb bruiser simply because you’re a gaunt. You get by with whatever you have, and the only ability a gaunt definitely doesn’t have is knowledge of magic. That doesn’t mean that you can’t play a scientist or a psychiatrist or a historian if you take a mind to it. In that sense, they are no more limited than anyone else in terms of ability.

Socially, however, is another story.

Gaunts exist on the fringes of society. Everywhere they go, people will stare. There still aren’t that many gaunts across the Commonwealth as a whole. While their presence might not cause a stir in the factory district of Central City or on a New Eden construction site, they will shock the good citi-

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zens almost anywhere else. Mistrust dogs their steps – if a gaunt walks into a store for a soda and a sandwich, he will be watched like a hawk until he leaves. The newspapers whip the public into a nicely profitable xenophobia aimed right at the monsters among them, and the gaunts are in no position to refute the claims of endemic criminal influence in their community. No gaunt is trusted, no gaunt is respected, and no gaunt is given a chance. Every day gaunts live with the hatred of an entire country. There are few jobs they can take, few places they are welcome, and few people who will even acknowledge their presence on the street with anything other than fear. How you as an outsider react to that attitude is an important quality of the development of your gaunt character. Some knuckle under, just trying to get by as best they can in a society they know they can't change. Some struggle against it, trying to prove society wrong by being someone everyone,

not just gaunts, can look up to. And some rebel, taking to the streets as beat philosophers or living in the shadows as members of the underworld.

Mobsters are more common than gaunts like to admit in their crumbling districts. No matter how appalled the gaunt community may be, many still look to gaunts like Jack Drago as achievers — those who have risen far beyond their origins and struck a blow for their fellows. Nonetheless, crime is rarely romanticized. Drago's syndicate is a far cry from Robin Hood and his Merry Men, and the gaunt gangs who battle the Tongs in Gateway are every bit as callous and bloodthirsty as the papers make them out to be. Even the gaunts who join the underworld for noble reasons are not doing great and noble things — they're doing what they can to get out of the rat-holes to which they have been consigned. They simply see themselves as backed into a corner and running low on options.

Criminal gaunts — especially PCs — tend to espouse some sort of code, a line they will not cross. Maybe they don't have any problems with knocking over liquor stores and fencing stolen furniture, but they won't get suckered into any armored car robberies. Maybe they'll crack safes and hold up banks, but they draw the line at murder. Maybe they're willing to kill, but they're picky about who. Maybe they just won't hit a woman, or they won't touch liquor. Whatever their limit is, they won't cross it. Something has to set them apart from the other monsters out there — whatever they look like — even if it's only good intentions. Sometimes, intention is all it takes to tell the white hats from the black.

There are exceptions, of course, exceptions that struggle with every waking breath to disprove the rule. Some gaunts find themselves in roles that are habitually barred to their kind. They somehow manage to break a few unwritten rules and end up as firemen, cops, or even college professors. This is a natural place for gaunt PCs — an “unusual” person in a unique position — but they must still deal with the stigmata of their kind. Regardless of their actual position, they are opposed by social prejudice at every turn, and are likely the least appreciated and trusted person in their work-



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place. As a result of this, they will likely try all the harder to be the best that they can be, ignoring the petty insults and suspicions of their fellows. They soldier on even though less able and trustworthy humans are promoted above them. They endure investigations and the watchful eye of their superiors, hovering over them and waiting for them to step out of line. A gaunt professor is just as smart as her colleagues, but she is much more likely to struggle against a perception of stupidity — a perception entirely founded on appearance. A gaunt cop is as likely to have an exemplary record as any other cop on the force, but his superiors will always suspect him of taking bribes or covering up the activities of some gang as a favor to other gaunts. Sometimes, these gaunts earn the respect of the normals around them, but they aren't doing this for the normals. They do it so that other gaunts can see that life isn't just limited to hot, sweaty industrial jobs or brutal acts of crime. They're doing it for themselves and every gaunt in the Commonwealth. In a world of easy options and quick greedy compromises, they are the knights in shining armor.

Others stand more openly against the monolithic forces of money and power. These down-at-heel philosophers speak of unity and strength, of respect and ideals of equality. Nothing is more important to them than their ideals. They meet in coffeehouses and cheap bars, discussing their ideas with passion and eloquence, but they do not stop at merely talking about what they can put into action. They take the fight to anyone who would exploit their people, striking back with a surprising and brutal fury at corrupt industrialists and gaunt mob bosses alike. These idealists usually burn out quickly — beaten back by the system or even killed — but they hope that their example will embolden those who come after them to carry on the struggle.

Then there are gaunts who just fall between the cracks. Their amnesia becomes a form of paralysis, leaving them lost and bewildered without the faintest idea where they belong. Oddly, they come to terms with being a gaunt pretty quickly. Deep within them, however, is the aching void of uncertainty and the belief that their condition is some kind of punishment from God. By day, they toil away in some sweaty menial job, and care let the mindless repetitive drudgery carry their worries away. As night falls, the doubts claw at their souls, souls they are not even sure they have anymore. PCs in this mode are often eager for answers — something to give their lives meaning, to give them a place in the universe — and latch on to anything that may help elevate them from the continual purgatory in which they dwell. It's very easy for gaunts in such a position to become members of the Few.



The Few and the Forgotten

It may initially seem strange that gaunts might question the universe the way other members of the Few do. They remember nothing of the world or their life before gauntism, and thus would presumably miss the little inconsistencies that give rise to the Few. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. In one fell swoop, gaunts lose everything — their memories, their personality, even their hopes and dreams. Facing such a void, it's no surprise that some are left with the unshakable conviction that something is dreadfully wrong. To these gaunts, the mirror is a liar; why shouldn't the rest of the world lie too? If they themselves are walking mistakes, then doesn't it stand to reason that the remainder of the universe might be that way as well? Some gaunts cling to fragments of a childhood that only comes to them when they sleep, and dreams that seem more real to them than the waking nightmare of their reviled lives. Regardless of the circumstances, gaunts who belong to the Few will exhibit marked differences from normal gaunts. Perhaps they whistle a tune nobody else knows, or maybe they always get the name of the local baseball team wrong. Usually, they suffer from nightmares more than other members of the Few do.

(More on the Few can be found on pages 138–140.)

Playing Nice

A party need not be composed solely of gaunts to function viably with a gaunt (or more than one gaunt) within it, nor need it worry about the tendency of gaunts to sap the energy from their surroundings. In the Commonwealth, you take your allies where you can get them, and if you can find someone you trust enough to watch your back when the lead starts to fly, does it really matter if they're a leatherback? Besides, sometimes the only folks you can count on are the ones with nothing to lose, and the gaunts have nothing to lose in spades.

Of course, the reverse is just as true — how can a gaunt trust members of a society that steps on his kind at every turn? Trust is hard to come by in the *Edge of Midnight* world, but it is a vital factor in making any party work. Warlocks can also cause problems. It may be tough for a human to trust a gaunt — after all, gaunts have shown themselves to be untrustworthy — but it will be that much more difficult for a gaunt to trust a warlock. Many gaunts directly blame the selfish dabbling of the renegade scientists for their existence. Without warlocks, there would be no gaunts — and a lot of gaunts want very badly to not be gaunts.

Despite that, trust between party members — at least to a certain extent — shouldn't be difficult. It's a tough world out there, full of people who will sell you out to your worst enemy for a few miserable dollars. Knowing a few people who think the same way you do can go a long way to making the world seem like a better place. Sometimes, you find friends in places you never thought you'd look — a gaunt mob enforcer or a renegade warlock, for instance — but friends are friends. If anything, gaunts are less likely to take things at face value than humans are. While it may be an uphill struggle convincing one to hang around with a warlock on a regular basis, if the end result is in the gaunt's favor, he is likely to grit his teeth and bear it. His kind has gotten very used to it.

CHAPTER SEVEN
PLAYER CHARACTERS

™ These men would never break,
never lie down, never bend
over for anybody. Anybody.†

- Verbal Kint (Kevin Spacey),
The Usual Suspects

PLAYERS

You've finished creating your character: determined his stats, fleshed out his background, and now have a shining vision of him sitting in you head. How do you integrate him into the *Edge of Midnight* world? This chapter covers a few tips on role-playing *noir* figures in general and characters from the *Edge of Midnight* universe specifically.

PERSONALITY

Characters are more than just numbers on a piece of paper. They have hopes, fears, dreams, and quirks all their own. They have a background: a past which helps define them (though in *The Edge of Midnight*, that past is less reliable than they realize). The character creation section contains a series of questions designed to give you a feel for your character. Keep those questions in mind during play, and use them to flesh out his or her personality. Adopt his mannerisms when you speak for him, remember his fears and prejudices as you deal with the obstacles in his way. The more you can take on his voice, the more deeply his personality will resonate at the gaming table.

It also helps to make a clear distinction between your character and yourself. Sometimes, you'll need to respond to something "out of character" — describing what he does or questioning the GM about some detail of the game. If you can portray your character differently enough, then the other players will know when you're in character and when you're just being yourself... which goes a long way to both establishing the mood and marking your character in your fellow players' minds.

Noir is especially useful in determining character voice. Many of the genre's best pieces use first-person narratives, where the protagonist reveals his innermost thoughts and feelings directly to the audience. You can employ a similar technique to help find your character's personality. Think about what he might say during such a narrative: the things he would reveal to a reader or a listener, his turn of phrase, his insight and observations. You may even want to write some of it down, incorporating it into your character's background material.

The genre also employs a particular manner of speaking: tough, hard-boiled dialogue using colorful phrases and rapid-fire wit. By familiarizing yourself with its rhythm and cadence, you can quickly develop a unique means of communication for your character. Raymond Chandler was the unquestioned master of *noir* dialogue, and novels like *Farewell, My Lovely* and *The Big Sleep* are outstanding examples of hard-boiled diction. So too are the works of Dashiell Hammett and Mickey Spillane, as well as more modern pieces like Frank Miller's *Sin City* comics or Ed McBain's 87th Precinct novels.

Take care, however, that inspirational examples don't turn into simple regurgitation. Typical *noir* dialogue is so stylized it can become clichéd very rapidly... as well as robbing the

speaker of any discernible personality. If you adhere too closely to the conventional manner of *noir* speech, your character will sound like every other tough guy gumshoe ever conceived. As a general rule, use the bare bones framework of that manner of speaking — the timing, the rhythm, veiled metaphors, and the like — while adding touches and flourishes that make your character unique. Come up with a few personal phrases to sprinkle into his dialogue, terms no other character would use (you might want to write some down to have on hand at the opportune time). Think about his motives, which might dictate what he says (and more importantly, what he *doesn't* say) and why. And try to avoid stock terms that anyone would recognize; the more original you can be, the better. If you want to borrow a term from a favorite book or movie, that's fine, but make sure it's not something everyone knows by heart. Obscure passages — or better yet something of your own devising — will resonate much more deeply than just parroting a well-known witticism.

Also keep in mind that *noir* dialogue, if not performed properly, can quickly descend into self-parody. Humor has a place in *The Edge of Midnight*, but not at the expense of the overall mood. If you find yourself using Detective Speak to get a laugh out of the other players or drop too many "the deader they die" clichés into your dialogue, you should probably switch gears.

MOTIVE

Action never takes place in a vacuum; people don't do things without a valid reason for their activity. Your character's motivations can explain a lot about who he is, as well as helping you make decisions that are consistent with his personality. They color his interaction with other people, justify the actions he takes, and guide him through the things he has to do. They can also aid the GM in tailoring scenarios to fit his particular goals. Think about what your character wants to accomplish — both his immediate goals (get the money, rescue the girl) and his long-term plans (become mayor, avenge his father) — and incorporate them into play. The better and more plausible your motives, the more realistic your character will appear and the more enjoyable he'll be to play.

Your character's motives should never come from "meta-game" thinking, however. By that, we mean any concerns rising from the fact that you're playing a game (for example, a detective taking a case because "it's the only way to start the scenario" or anticipating an ambush because "the GM always has one in these spots"). Such thinking destroys suspension of disbelief and damages the tone of the game. Again, stick with plausible reasoning than makes sense within the game universe. Some of this falls under the GM's purveyance — the scenarios he plans should never railroad the PCs into doing something they normally wouldn't — but the players can help by keeping their characters internally consistent at all times. They should behave according to their own dictates and personality, not because they are fictional constructs driven solely by the necessities of plot.

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GOING AGAINST TYPE

RPG characters have a tendency to fall back on well-tested stereotypes for their personality. This is doubly true of *noir*, where the stereotypes are so well known. Everyone is familiar with the slinky femme fatale or the down-on-his-luck private dick, and one of the joys of role-playing is to play up those stereotypes for a little fun with your friends. There's nothing wrong with that, and if it makes your *Edge of Midnight* cam-

paigns more enjoyable, by all means use it. There comes a time, however, when the clichés grow boring, and the novelty of riffing on Philip Marlowe fades to just another old joke.

The easiest way to avoid character clichés is to focus on the little details. Find a few small aspects of your character, then go completely against expectations with them. Perhaps your gangster plays the accordion, or your cold-blooded hitman loves a particular lighthearted children's show on the radio. A detective could wear vests and bow ties instead of trench-

coats, and that beautiful torch singer may be shy as a mouse once you get her off the stage. Such flourishes go a long way towards establishing a character, turning a cardboard cutout into an intriguing and dramatic figure.

Another way to avoid ready stereotyping is to devise a background that takes a different path to your characters' current position. If you want to play a private eye, for example, don't assume that he started out on the police force, or that he works in a dingy office with Venetian blinds on the windows. Perhaps he's a classical musician with an eye for detail who took up investigation when his orchestra folded. Or an immigrant, stranded in the U.C., who works odd jobs and sells his services to those who can't turn to the police. Both of these figures still do all the things that a stereotypical private eye does, but their history gives them something meatier to hold onto, and makes them more than just Sam Spade clones.

With such details, plausibility is key. If you just slap them together because they sound different, your character will have no real soul; he'll just be a collection of quirks. Make sure the traits fit with your character's personality, and that they have some reasonable basis in fact. Also make sure that his stats and other pertinent facts reflect his background (in one of the above examples, the classical musician will probably have a high Perform skill in his chosen instrument). If they make sense and feel internally consistent, they'll make your character stand out from the crowd without drawing attention to his fictitious nature.

Similarly, while originality is important, even the most unique character contains a little bit of stereotyping. Archetypes help give him a sense of consistency, and place him in a greater context which others can readily identify. If you try to create a totally unique figure — completely divorced from every preconceived notion in existence — then again, you're going to



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end up with a pile of bizarre personality traits, not a real character. Stereotypes can form a good starting place, a basic idea that can constitute your PC's foundation. (The professions starting on page 29 were designed with this in mind). With the archetype as a skeleton, you can then flesh him out with more unique elements, adding details that give him a real identity. The better you can blend the known with the unknown — adding new touches to familiar ideas — the more interesting and believable your character will be.

THE HARD KNOCKS OF NOIR

Noir differs from other RPG genres that players may be familiar with. Dramatic conventions work a little differently here, and the scenarios may not unfold the way some might expect them to. The better prepared you are for those differences, more easily you'll get into the spirit of them, and the more enjoyable the game will become.

Noir characters are not invincible. Sometimes they get beat up, and sometimes they lose a lot more than their pride. Players who attempt to fight their way through every encounter are probably going to end up with a tag on their toe. Violence lurks on the edges of *noir*, felt but rarely seen. When it shows itself, it's brutal and ugly, and your character will likely wish to be done with it as quickly as possible (though you as the player may find it much more exciting). While a sense of action is part of any good *Edge of Midnight* story, many obstacles will involve using your wits, or leveraging NPCs to do what you require, not simply blasting the bad guy.

Similarly, victory isn't always assured in *noir*. Other genres (like fantasy or space opera) are predicated on the heroes' success, and defeat — while possible — is certainly more the exception than the rule. Not so with *The Edge of Midnight*. Goals can be thwarted, villains get away with it, and sometimes, the best you have isn't quite good enough. As a *noir* player, you should expect such eventualities, and be prepared to deal with them when they occur. They don't necessarily reflect failure on the part of the players; they're simply the way the world works. If you (and your character) can accept that, you'll find yourself getting into the spirit of the game almost by default. Also keep in mind that just because victory is less assured doesn't mean that every scenario will end in failure, only that it is more common than many role-players expect. Because of that, you shouldn't be deterred by setbacks. Rather, use them as a tool to help your character grow and expand, to add new dimensions to his or her personality. Defeat shouldn't be a reason to pack up and call it quits, but should instead increase



your character's resolve, giving him greater incentive the next time he saddles up. Victory is all the sweeter if you have to fight to earn it.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, notions of ethics and morality take a serious slant when entering a *noir* universe. *The Edge of Midnight* is a great moral gray area, where right and wrong are rarely what they first appear. Good things can come from seemingly evil acts, and even the best of intentions can sometimes lead to great catastrophe. In order to survive, the character will need to maneuver in this hazy morality, which means adopting the right combination of flexibility and resolve.

There's nothing in *noir* that demands sterling ethics from its protagonists. Though they are likely members of the Few (see page 138), player characters are not obligated to be heroic or do the right thing just because it's the right thing to do. Those who walk the straight and narrow — never bending, never compromising — end up taking a great big fall. It's those who know when to bend, when to compromise on their high-flown ethics, who stay alive. Selfish behavior is par for the course

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in *The Edge of Midnight*, and you shouldn't feel compelled to behave honorably if it's not in your character to do so. If you live for a paycheck, so be it. If you kill people that get in your way, so be it. It's a tough world and no one will begrudge you doing what you have to do survive in it.

At the same time, no character should be completely without morals. Even the worst *noir* protagonist has some redeeming qualities, and players who view the game as a hedonistic free-for-all are in for a rude surprise. Every action in *The Edge of Midnight* has a reaction. Robbery victims want their money back. Dead men have friends and family who itch for revenge. Those loose ends have a way of catching up with you, and it's nearly impossible to clean up all of them. Any character who acts without regard for the consequences will find himself painted into a nasty corner. A sense of ethics, even if it's just an instinct for survival, can mean the difference between life and death... as well as giving your character a reason to stay alive. Most PCs are members of the Few (see page 138), which gives them a built-in framework to temper their darker tendencies, and can serve as a compass if you as the player are unsure of how to proceed.

Most *noir* protagonists fall somewhere in the middle. They don't always do the right thing, but they do draw the line somewhere... and their principles are all the more valued for being so few. A hitman who doesn't kill kids will likely stand by that conviction unto death, since it's the only thing he has that keeps him human. Similarly, a PI who has no issues with dirty money might draw the line at the illegal job he takes it for. The player's questions in Chapter One includes one on personal ethics, which you should consider very carefully. It provides the all-important standards to which your character adheres, which in turn defines the areas where he's willing to bend with the wind and allow him to survive in the shadow world of *The Edge of Midnight*.

OBLIGATIONS

People game to have fun, and as a player, you're presumably here to enjoy yourself with your friends. In most cases, it's the GM's job to help facilitate such enjoyment, and the sessions he designs are presumably constructed with that in mind. But it's not a one-way street. The players bring elements to the table just as GMs do, and as a player, you are obligated to help make the game a good experience for everyone.

In the first place, work *with* your GM; don't set out to thwart his efforts. Some players think of role-playing as a win-lose proposition, and the GM as their primary opponent. In that mindset, the GM sets obstacles to stop the players from reaching their goals, and it's up to them to outthink or outmaneuver him in order to succeed. This rapidly creates an antagonistic situation, where quoting rules and meta-game arguments overcome the game's atmosphere. In order to avoid that, be honest with your GM. Tell him everything about your character, and give him a good idea of what kind of game you're expecting. In return, he should let you know what style of game he's planning and take steps not to breach your trust.

(That doesn't mean he won't throw your character for a loop or put you through the wringer every session, only that he does so because he feels it will enhance the game and make things more fulfilling in the long run.)

In addition, the character you create should be designed with the campaign in mind. Don't expect the GM (or the other players) to conform to unreasonable demands just because you want to play an untenable personality. You'll either end up feeling superfluous as the campaign moves on around you, or you'll spoil everyone's fun by forcing them to accommodate your concept. *Noir* has more flexibility in that regard than most genres (you can play someone with secrets which the other players don't know about, for example), which makes it all the more important that you don't take things too far. Talk to the GM beforehand about what you want to do with your character. Ask him what sort of things he's planning and whether he feels your concept will mesh well with the campaign. If you're keeping something from your fellow players or portraying a character that may be different from their expectations, keep in mind what will happen if those secrets come out. Will it make an interesting addition to the campaign? Or will it make things more difficult? If you don't think it will contribute anything meaningful, you may want to skip it.

Similarly, take steps to get along with your fellow player characters. As members of the Few, you all have a reason to stick together, despite diverse methods and lifestyles. That means you may have characters in the party with whom your PC won't get along. You may fight and bicker with them, you may disagree with their methods, you may even have reasons to distrust them. These are all normal parts of the genre and — taken in the right spirit — can make the game quite exciting. But don't overdo it; make sure everyone can still work together towards a common goal and party cohesion remains intact. If you plan on following your own agenda during play, try to anticipate the long-term consequences, and make sure others don't feel put out.

Personal motives may also be important. If you plan on letting your character sucker his fellow party members (or otherwise behaving less than honestly towards them), that's a reasonable — and even expected — part of the genre. But before embarking upon it, ask yourself why you're doing it. Is it because the PC would reasonably be expected to do so — and more importantly, because it would enhance the game as a whole — or is it because you want to get a rise out of the other players? If it's the first, you should proceed with care; keep the quality of a good story in your mind at all times, and think about how best to advance the sense of drama. If it's the second, you should probably abandon the whole idea.

Basically, being a good player means not being a jerk. It means putting everyone's enjoyment ahead of just yours, and keeping *noir*'s twists and double-crosses in a proper context. As a rule of thumb, if an in-game incident spills over into out-of-game arguments or if the player characters resort to attacking each other in-game, someone has gone too far. Fun and enjoyment are the paramount purpose of the exercise. If another player becomes unhappy with your behavior, everyone loses.

BE PROACTIVE

Many players are used to the notion of showing up, allowing the GM to generate a scenario, and then just going along with its stated goal. Passivity becomes the norm, allowing standard expectations to dictate the course of your character's actions. In *noir*, this is an easy way to get killed. Nothing is ever quite what it appears and solutions don't present themselves without a little digging on the part of the protagonists. In light of this, it behooves a *noir* player to take an active hand in shaping the scenario, using his character's motives to help move the story along. Don't just sit around and wait for something to happen: work with your GM to *make* it happen.

The best way to do this starts at the beginning, when you're creating your character. Spell out what you want to do with him and think very hard about how that can develop in game terms. If you have a missing brother, for example, or a lost lover who you'd like to forget about, those details can form the basis of an entire scenario, or part of a campaign. It might even be something in the past you're trying to outrun — something that might rear its ugly head when you least expect it. Once you're done, give your GM a list of things your character hopes to achieve, or the threads you'd like to develop over the course of play. He can then incorporate them into his own plans and bring them out at an appropriate time. That doesn't mean things will necessarily work out the way you planned — the GM may pull a few nasty twists if he's so inclined — but it does give you a hand in how the campaign develops, and more importantly, ensures that the PCs will always be in the forefront during the game.

You can apply that kind of thought on a smaller level as well. During the scenario, the GM will describe your character's surroundings, using the details to evoke a feeling and mood for the scene. But that doesn't mean you can't add little details of your own or make use of them during play. For example, suppose your character visits a seamy bar on the far side of town. The GM describes the surly denizens, the faded pool table, the darkened booths lit by pools of light. He doesn't talk about the bar itself, but as a player, you might infer from his description that it has stacks of liquor bottles on the shelves behind it. If combat breaks out, you can use those bottles as a weapon or smash and ignite them to provide a diversion. All you need to do is say "Hey, aren't there a bunch of bottles or something behind the bar? I want to use some of them." Not only does it help fill in the blanks of a given location, but it also gives you a greater hand in determining the story's progress. The details you provide should always be reasonable, however — you shouldn't "just happen to find" that rare spell book you're looking for under the bar — and the GM has the right to veto any suggestion.



THE FEW

The bag hit the floor with a soft thump. "\$10,000, all untraceable," Benny grinned at the man across from him. "You did a good job, and a deal's a deal."

The man leaned over and scooped it up, pulling out the stack of bills with practiced ease. "That's real nice." He pocketed it and turned to face the little gangster. "And you're sure you can handle the heat when they find the body? Dead cops don't just disappear, you know."

The sneer on Benny's face grew even wider. "Are you kidding? With Detective Simmons cold and stiff, the police won't have the first idea where to start. I'll be on the train to Paradiso before they even finish the paperwork."

The man nodded.

"So what do you plan to do with all that money?" Benny asked.

"Don't know yet. Delana hasn't decided."

The gangster's smile disappeared. "Delana?"

"Delana Fitzgerald. I believe you know her."

Benny's eyes widened. "How... how do you know Delana...?"

"I ran into her at the Central City bus depot. Turning tricks is hard to do with a face full of knife scars." The gun appeared out of nowhere in the man's right hand. "After I helped her clean up, I asked her how she got them. You have a wicked temper, tiny man."

Benny slowly backed up towards the door. "I... I don't know what she told you but..."

"Save it," the man loomed over the retreating gangster like a hawk. "I saw the way you worked the blade on that fence. The same kind of cuts were on her face. It's like a fingerprint, Benny. You can't hide that."

Benny stumbled backwards, slipping on the stone floor. "This don't make no sense! You're a professional!"

"And my job is done," the man rumbled.

"But you killed a cop..."

"A dirty cop. Who just so happened to have it in for you." The barrel gleamed in the lamplight. "The way I see it, I'm doing him a favor."

"Listen... listen, you don't have to do this," Benny stammered. "You have the money! You can just let me go!"

"And wait for the next little girl to piss you off? Nah. I think I'll save everyone the grief."

The gunshots echoed for a long time.

Across the Unified Commonwealth, small groups of people have emerged who ask the wrong questions. The fuzzy memories, the empty history, the lands beyond the ocean that no one can clearly recall... all of it speaks to a rupture in the way things are supposed to be. They see these cracks and inconsistencies — the holes in the fabric of the cosmos — and dare to seek the cause of them. Most of the world never looks around the way they do; it lacks their skepticism, dismiss-

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MEMORIES

As stated elsewhere, the details of the shadow world only become concrete with the end of the war — specifically, the coming of the White Light which destroyed the Order of Nu. Before that, everything about a person's life is hazy and indistinct, drawn in broad strokes rather than specific details. Details of your character's early existence — all the way up to the White Light — should be similarly sketchy. Stick with feelings and impressions, or incidents whose precise date and location always seem to elude you. Let them shape your characters' identity — he can believe with all his heart and soul that they happened and consider them very important — but avoid getting into too much detail. The more abstract you can make them, the better.

Naturally, that doesn't apply to events taking place after the White Light. From there, things unfold normally, and your character's life can be as concrete and detailed as you wish.

ing their logic with a bored shrug. It fails to notice what they find inescapable. Jonas Griffon called them "The Few," though they have no formal name and barely constitute a plurality. They are the Unified Commonwealth's best hope for a brighter tomorrow.

The Few are defined simply as those who realize that something is wrong with the world. At some point in their lives, they stumbled across a gap in the universe's logic — a peek behind the cosmic curtain — which altered their perceptions forever. It may have been a newspaper morgue with no editions dating before the White Light. It may have been a ship across the sea... which repeatedly had to turn around every time they boarded it. It might even have been a small object or knick-knack, something that felt out of place with the rest of creation and yet somehow more *real*. Whatever it was, it shook them up, demanding explanations that defied their every belief. They couldn't walk away from it even if they wanted to.

The more they dig, the more questions they find. Why are there no books or movies before the White Light? Why can't people remember details about their childhood or distant past? Where are the warlocks who won the war? In most cases, those questions have no apparent answer. Asking why no one can remember life before the war is like asking where we go when we die, or why bad things happen to good people. Members of the Few who actively seek answers find only frustration and pain. Some go mad. All come away empty-handed, at least so far. If there is a root cause to the state of the world, it must be deeply hidden indeed. Instead, most of the Few learn to re-channel that curiosity towards more practical ends. They start asking other questions, more mundane ones with easier answers. How did that money get in the mayor's account? Why did Sonny Piscotti turn up dead? Was the millionaire's wife always rich and beautiful?

It's not easy, and it requires a certain mindset. If someone tried to convince you that the world didn't exist until about ten years ago and all of your memories before then were a fabrication, you'd probably think that they were insane. Most people refuse to accept the reasoning of the Few, even when confronted with direct evidence in support of it. One cannot become a member of the Few by being told. The conclusion must be reached on one's own without anyone influencing the decision. Consequently, most members of the Few have an inquisitive mind to begin with, or at least exhibit iconoclastic tendencies. Many are policemen or private detectives. Others are just naturally curious. But all of them despise lies and feel an instinctive need to seek out the hidden or the distorted. Their attitude often gets them into trouble — with colleagues, superiors, and even friends — but they never abandon their questions for long.

Every now and then, they go a few steps further. Their subconscious need to "correct" the universe's unbalanced equation leads them to smaller injustices, which they do their best to repair or set right. When the time is right — when they see a chance to expose a lie, punish a wrongdoer, or free a well-meaning person from unpleasant circumstances — they act without hesitation. The hope (unconscious sometimes) is that addressing those small flaws will help repair the large ones, and answers to the little questions will somehow lead them to the cause of the big ones.

Which isn't to say they are universal do-gooders. Far from it. Some are criminals, some are killers, and some are even worse. Belonging to the Few doesn't impart any specific sense of ethics or morality, and "setting something right" may have a wildly different meaning for one person than for the next. Like Benny's unnamed killer at the beginning of this section, they might do good at the same time they commit great evil and while they're all driven to commit positive deeds, they don't necessarily do so 24-7. But the moments where they take action are often the most satisfying of their lives. Things feel better, at least to them, and so they are inclined to periodically repeat such actions, even if it takes months or years for another opportunity to present itself.

The Few have no organization to speak of. They don't belong to any cabal, and contact between them is practically nonexistent. Indeed, most of them don't even use the phrase "Few;" they simply think of themselves as different. Some have gathered together in small groups, working towards a common goal when the circumstances are right. These groups tend to stick together, for shared camaraderie can be a great comfort and it's rare to find others who think as they do. Many others walk their path alone, trusting in themselves to reach whatever explanation lies in wait for them. They could be gangsters, detectives, musicians, architects, gaunts, normals, or warlocks. The only thing that binds them all together is their fervent mistrust of the world as it appears, and the lengths they are willing to go in pursuit of the grand mystery behind it all.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

PLAYER CHARACTERS

All player characters are assumed to be members of the Few, skeptical of the world they see and willing to seek out the answers if given a chance. It need not be their sole motivation, or even their primary one, but it is still an inescapable part of their character. The rest of the world lives with blinders on; the Few can see the lies for what they are and maybe — just maybe — do something about them. Unless they have good reason (such as a unique concept that doesn't entail belonging to the Few), the players should incorporate that notion into their character background. The Few come from all walks of life and can belong to any social group; they are linked only by their beliefs and by the will to question what others ignore. That concept should be a part of every player character in *The Edge of Midnight*.

PARTIES

Unless the GM dictates otherwise, their status as the Few is the most likely reason why the PCs come together as a party — why they operate together as a group despite differences in outlook and background. *The Edge of Midnight* is full of lonely, desperate people. Fellow members of the Few can provide support as no one else. They understand the character's fears and share his need for answers. It also explains why a hardened criminal would work alongside a dedicated cop, or a gaunt alongside a practicing warlock. In normal circumstances, they might be at each other's throats. But the doubts they harbor and their compulsion to seek answers overcome all that. They are willing to set those difference aside (though sometimes only temporarily) because the connection they share runs deeper than that. They are all part of the Few, and that makes them companions — perhaps the only ones in the world who truly understand each other.

Because of this, it's important to establish a solid background for the party as a whole — how they came together, when they first realized they had something in common, and why they keep working together despite their differences. Below is a series of questions which you and your fellow players should contemplate when the game first begins. Though some of them are directed towards the PCs as individuals, they all have a bearing on the larger group you're putting together. They relate specifically to the characters' status among the Few, and clarify the connections which bind the PCs to each other.

Where were you when the
White Light appeared?

The White Light was the catalyst that brought an end to the long war against the Order of Nu — a brilliant explosion that wiped them and their capital off the map. It also marks the first time anyone can remember anything for certain. Whatever came before it is indistinct, recalled in the abstract as if through a fog. Most members of the Few can remember exactly where they were when the White Light detonated, and exactly

what they thought about it at the time. You should determine the details of that for your character, and what effect (if any) it had on him or her. (See Chapter Four for more details about the White Light.)

What was it that made you
a member of the Few?

When did you first begin to realize that something was wrong? Was it a sudden feeling, like turning on a switch, or was it a slow gradual process? How did that knowledge affect you? For most of the Few, that moment is a defining part of their lives which directly led to their current status in the world. The details surrounding it should be an important part of your PC's background, and help explain why he's willing to work with the other characters.

How did you meet your companions?

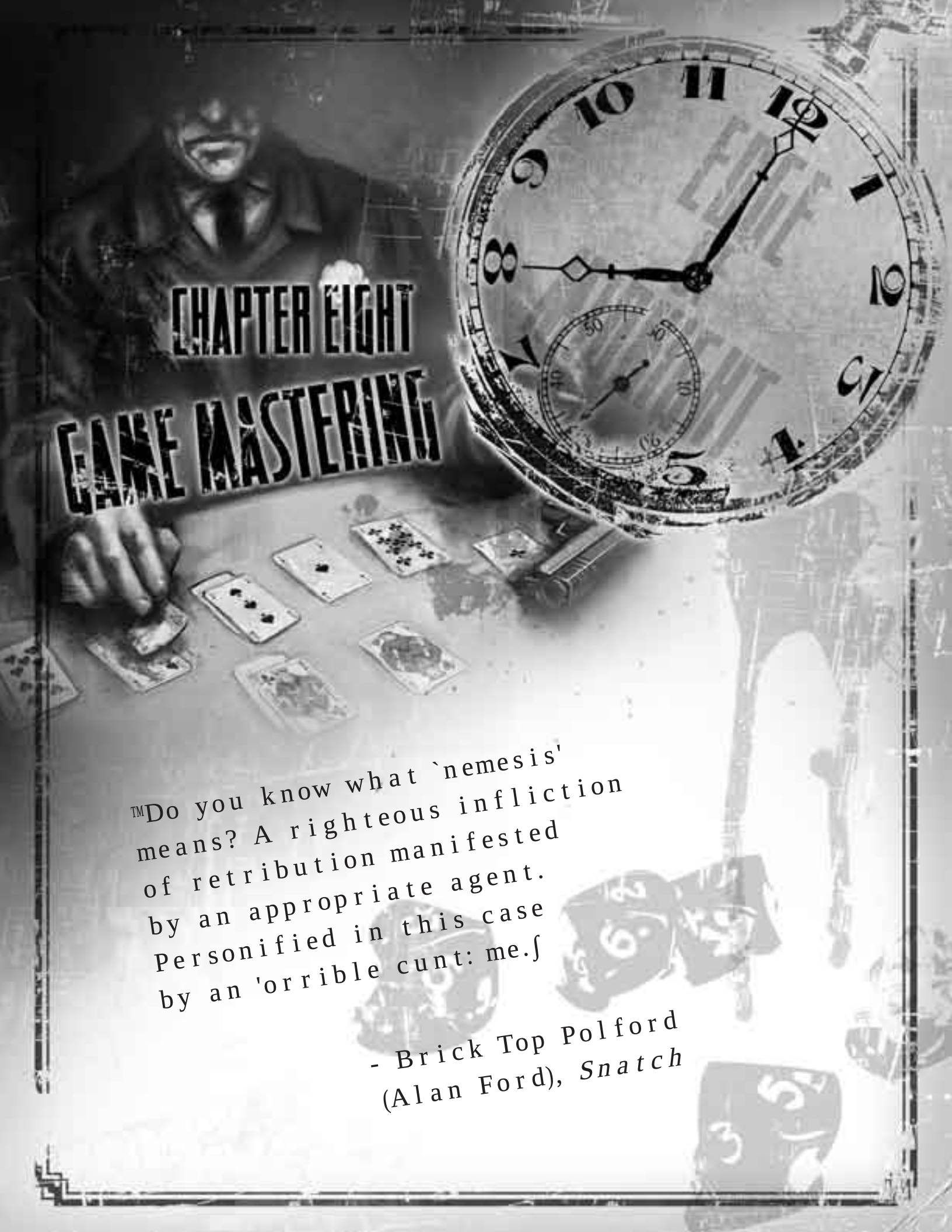
At some point, your character and the other PCs came into contact with each other and realized that they all had something in common. Their status links them together in ways which transcend other differences, leading to a group cohesion that wouldn't otherwise exist. Perhaps they met while following up on the same clue, or during an incidental encounter in which they revealed their mutual insight. It might be as simple as passing each other on the street and sensing that common bond between them. Whatever the reason, you should discuss it with the other players beforehand and figure out the specifics to everyone's satisfaction. (The GM may even devise an introductory scenario designed to bring your group together, allowing this initial meeting to take place through role-playing.)

How well do you get along
with your companions?

The Few come from all walks of life, and despite their common experience, might not be totally compatible with each other. A policeman and a gangster in the same party will likely be at odds much of the time, while a rich debutante has little in common with a gaunt construction worker. As with the previous question, discuss the options with the other players. Try to identify points of friction and play them up during the game. A little inter-party conflict can add spice to a scenario, and help clarify your character's personality. Just make sure all of the players involved are comfortable with the dynamic, and that "inter-party friction" doesn't turn into an out-of-game argument.

How fiercely does
your curiosity draw you?

Some among the Few are consumed by their obsession. The world's fissures call to them constantly, and they cannot rest until they find the answers. Others place it far in the back of their minds, contemplating it only in moments of rest or reflection. The importance your character places on unraveling the mysteries around him will determine how easily he can operate with other players, and what sorts of scenarios the GM is most likely to devise for him.



CHAPTER EIGHT GAME MASTERING

™Do you know what 'nemesis' means? A righteous infliction of retribution manifested by an appropriate agent. Personified in this case by an 'orrible cunt: me.}

- Brick Top Polford
(Alan Ford), *Snatch*

The Game Master is the most important position in every role-playing game. The section covers tips and guidelines for beginning GMs, as well as suggestions for experienced Game Masters on running campaigns set in a *noir* universe.

THE BASICS

DUTIES OF THE GM

Being Game Master is a difficult but rewarding path to follow. Whereas players are concerned only with portraying their character, you have much more to do. Not only must you role-play anyone with whom the players interact, but you also must conceive the plot, adjudicate combat and skill resolution, and set the mood of the setting and scenario. Frankly, it's a tricky business. The entire world is yours to command, and you must take up that responsibility with concern for its inhabitants — particularly the players — foremost. As GM, you will find yourself writing scenarios, running adventures, and above all else making sure your players enjoy themselves. You will be called upon to adjudicate the actions of the players, convey a concrete sense of an imaginary world, and convincingly portray everyone your PCs meet, from the villains and *femmes fatales* right on down to the sweaty informants and world-weary cigar girls. As referee, it is your job to know the rules (or at least be able to wing it convincingly), and enforce your decisions with confidence. As narrator, it is your job to immerse the players fully in the world their characters inhabit, ensuring that they connect with and care about their imaginary alter egos and their make-believe stories. You must make sure that, when their car spins out of control, their hearts are in their mouths as much as their characters', and that the gunfight in a fog-choked alleyway is filled with the right sense of danger. As an actor, you must extend the believability of the world to its inhabitants, imbuing the people the PCs encounter with a distinctive and memorable personality that makes them hated, feared, loved, or mistrusted.

GENERAL SKILLS

GMs require a number of basic skills to do their job. Firstly, it doesn't hurt to be descriptive. Don't worry — you needn't on a par with Thomas Hardy or F. Scott Fitzgerald. The easiest way to unlock an evocative description of the world is to immerse yourself in the genre — if you're adventuring in a high fantasy world, watch and read *Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf*. If your campaign is in a grim science-fiction dystopia, read *Stand on Zanzibar* and watch *Blade Runner*. If you're playing *The Edge of Midnight*, watch *Dark City* and *Double Indemnity*, or read *The Long Goodbye* (a list of good examples can be found in Appendix Two). In all cases, the purpose of the exercise is the same — study the tone and mood of the setting, and convey it in everything you say and describe. When you know the genre, you will be able to paint it more vividly in your words and

the game will benefit immeasurably for it. Sometimes, a description of cigarette smoke curling lazily out of an abandoned ashtray is all it takes to convey the feeling of lurking danger you are looking for. Don't over-describe, but also don't leave out any necessary or evocative details. The players should receive a clear mental picture of what you are conveying, but it shouldn't take all day to get that image across. Maintaining a balance of clarity, detail, and conciseness is important.

Another element of evoking the world is keeping the players excited about what's going on. If there is no real element of danger, mystery, or challenge, they won't be engaged in the game. Similarly, if their adversaries regularly put them in the hospital, or they are bamboozled by unsolvable clues, or slain in inescapable traps, they'll be more irritated than fulfilled. Unwinnable scenarios will annoy them at least as much as a scenario that they can breeze through without a second thought.

Keeping players excited can be accomplished as much by the solving of a particularly difficult mystery or convincing a frightened witness to step forward as it can by a running gun battle or a moonlit rooftop chase. The trick to excitement is to keep your players challenged, or to surprise them in a way they didn't expect. Don't be afraid to throw them a curve ball, but keep in mind that having NPCs act out of character for no believable reason, or things regularly turning out in a way they wouldn't expect them to, will damage your players' suspension of disbelief (a key factor to their excitement and enjoyment of the game). Another advantage is keeping your players thinking in terms of the game world rather than the meta-game "outside." They shouldn't be thinking about their chances for success in terms of percentages or die rolls, but rather how their character would *act* in those particular circumstances.

One of the most important things about being a GM is cheating... or to put it more delicately, fudging the rules. There's nothing wrong with cheating; indeed it's an expected part of the GM's role. Of course, you shouldn't cheat in order to "beat" or punish the players (despite Brick Top's admonition on the previous page), but rather to enhance the drama and enjoyment of the scenarios. For example, let's say the player characters confront a thug in a smoky pool hall. Within the first few seconds of combat, you have rolled your attack, and the dice indicate that he's crushed one of your PC's skulls with a pool cue before the player has even had time to think. This isn't particularly dramatic (or fun for the player of the newly-dead character), so the odd roll gets fudged; the PC is merely wounded (or is struck later in combat), the fight pans out a bit better, everyone's happy, and no one's the wiser. Obviously, you can also cheat to allow success or failure at dramatically appropriate moments for either the PCs or your NPCs. However, cheating too much reduces the game to little more than a script on your part, so discretion is required when fudging the dice. For the most part, it is best to play it honest — cheating is a powerful tool, and must be used with care.

The portrayal of non-player characters bears special consideration for new GMs. NPCs are the most concrete representations of the world you're portraying — they are the inhabit-

CHAPTER EIGHT: GAME MASTERING



ants of the world, and no matter how vivid your descriptions, if your NPCs are unconvincing, the game will fall flat. The trick with NPCs is to know how to use them. Your major NPCs — story villains, characters the PCs regularly associate with, and other significant figures — will likely be fully-fledged characters, with their own likes, dislikes, quirks, and mannerisms. Maintaining a consistent characterization with these NPCs is vital — they should be believable to your players, and their appearance should always evoke a reaction, be it hate, fear, joy, or amusement.

Smaller-scale NPCs — people whom the PCs unexpectedly run into, thugs out to kill them off, or minor informants — need not be subjected to the same degree of verisimilitude. Typically, a smaller-scale NPC can be easily portrayed by picking one character feature (a squint, a tendency to say “um...”, or a nasal accent) and running with it. If the PCs need to interact with these small-fry in the future, you can recall how they were played and portray them similarly again, or build up a more detailed personality.

NPCs are also excellent tools for giving an impression of the world and its atmosphere — if your PCs are walking down a lonely and foreboding street, having a passerby turn up her collar, glance nervously at the strangers, and hurry past them without making eye contact will tell the players more about the feel of the moment than any amount of setting description or obvious embellishments. The sneer on the face of a gaunt

relaxing in a diner will make the players feel unwelcome in a most succinct manner. A smile from the singer in their favorite club will make them more relaxed than any amount of described music. The world is in the details, and the key to the details is the people. Make them live, and the world lives with them.

YOUR GAME

The heart of any role-playing game is the campaign — a series of scenarios that may or may not share a common thread (the adventures of your PCs). From character generation onwards, you should have a pretty solid idea of what your players want to address — the direction in which they want it to go — and you can work this into the basic framework of your campaign. Talk to the players beforehand, give them an idea of what you have in mind for the game, and find out what kind of experience they’re expecting. The kind of characters your players create will tell you what they want; a group consisting of political insiders is after something very different from a group of up-and-coming gangsters.

Not every campaign needs to be personalized to the characters — indeed, some of the best ones hook the players as they proceed — but making a campaign personal and meaningful to the characters from the start adds a sense of believability to their actions. They aren’t nosy interlopers with no connec-

tion to their world; they're people living their lives. A campaign should be driven forward by its own impetus to a conclusion. For example, *The Lord of the Rings* forms an excellent blueprint for a fantasy-style campaign: the One Ring must be taken to Mount Doom and destroyed. A simple premise, with a definite beginning and a definite end. Either the PCs will destroy the Ring, or Evil will triumph. Many campaigns follow a similar structure — you should begin with a clear goal, though it needn't be immediately apparent to your players. The fulfillment of this objective should be the purpose of the campaign — to tell a story that has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Of course, it's unlikely to be plain sailing, and you're probably going to develop stories you hadn't expected in the middle of the campaign when your players head off in diverse and unexpected directions, but that's fine. It shows they're interested in the world, and letting them explore their characters and their environment in such a fashion helps the world to grow organically. Nevertheless, most campaigns should conclude as they set out to, though it is probably best if you conceive of your conclusion in broad strokes — that way, it allows the campaign to finish in a fashion which isn't scripted from the outset.

Within your overall campaign structure, there will be numerous smaller story arcs: plots intended to show the more personal side of things or tie more immediately into your PCs' actions and motivations. By using the motivations of your players to construct scenarios, you relieve yourself of part of the GM's burden, discreetly using your players to assist you. This also ties the PCs to the world, and lets them feel as if they are a more solid part of it. Remember also to keep the world living — continuity is essential to a good campaign. If the players blow up a bank one week and it's fine the next, that would be considered a glaring continuity error. Keep an eye on any potential problems of that nature, and keep notes if it helps you set your ducks in a row.

PROBLEMS

Problems invariably arise in a campaign and not all of them can be anticipated. However, some problems are common to many groups; learning how to avoid or solve them is the biggest job of a beginning GM.

First, let's take a look at a certain style of play. We call it "munchkinism," to follow its colloquial appellation, but it goes by many names. "Munchkin" players concern themselves with how much money they have, how powerful their gun is, and how many enemies they can lay waste to with as little danger to themselves as possible. They evaluate backgrounds and classes based solely on the benefit it can gain them in their chosen area of expertise, maximize the abilities that they view as important without any consideration of their character, and only buy skills that they see the point of, regardless of any other considerations. They typically play "lone wolf" types — gruff, aggressive, and ultimately bereft of reasons to associate with the rest of the party.

The trick with this sort of player is getting them to engage mentally with the world and their character. Ultimately, they view it as little more than a collection of statistics that they must dominate in order to prove the might of their character: to "win." By playing to the weaknesses of their character (and there will be weaknesses, as remorseless over-specialization is the hallmark of this type), you force them to confront their shortcomings, and perhaps think of their character as a part of your group's world, rather than a player in a game where there are winners and losers. You may be able to resolve differences of this sort by a number of means — for example, talking to the player out of game time about the effect his approach is having on the group and the campaign.

Another problem to consider is cliché. Every genre has clichés, and every gamer perpetuates them to some extent — from the wandering samurai whose silence is matched only by his deadliness to the dashing swordsman who fights left-handed even though he is not, or the cackling arch-villain in his secret volcanic lair. Chapter Seven discusses stereotyping in player character creation, but the same adage applies to GMs as well. A certain amount of formulaic adherence is required of all attempts to emulate genre, since the hallmarks of a style are a powerful indicator of its unique character. Although a little cliché is good as a tool of evocation or a reaffirmation of genre conventions, too much can be disastrous. As a GM, nothing will kill a game faster than a story rife with expected events and conclusions, and characters who are exactly what everyone expects. They deprive the players of the opportunity to interact with anything but scenery-chewing stereotypes. Of course, as GM, you are in position to steer the party — and the campaign — either towards or away from excessive use of clichéd plots and characters. The players will tend to follow your lead on this — your inventiveness will spur their imaginations, and vice versa. Remember: just because something is proven to work, that shouldn't deter you from the challenge of crafting something new.

A third common problem is solely the province of the Game Master. You devise a brilliant campaign or scenario, with a roller coaster of shock, revelation, drama, and excitement... and then your players spend an hour following a walk-on character around because they don't like the cut of his jib. Suddenly, your carefully-crafted scenario has taken a right turn into something you didn't expect. So you go to great lengths to drag your players back on track, and then carry on as if nothing has changed. Maybe you notice that the rest of the scenario proceeds as planned, but with a marked lack of enjoyment or emotion on the part of the group. We refer to the problem as "steel rail" syndrome: shackling the scenario to one outcome, one course of action, and one solitary linear method of progression.

While this might make your job easier, it won't make for an enjoyable session. Maintain a flexible approach to your game world — when the players respond unexpectedly, follow their lead. Allow them to explore different options as they see fit, and if it changes the direction of the scenario, then adjust the scenario to match their inclinations. For example, the throw-away NPC they pursue could be tied into the main scenario,

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taking on the role of a formerly important NPC who has now been passed by. A key clue hidden in one location could be shifted to another location which the players are now exploring, while an incident scheduled to take place at a certain time can be moved forward or back. A good GM will always know when to lead and when to follow, and your players' actions will show you what they expect. Work with that and try to set as little of your scenario in concrete as possible. It's usually fairly easy to adjust pre-planned elements to fit new directions; sometimes only the name and personality details need to change.

EVERYBODY HAS FUN

Above all, every GM should be able to read and work with their players — know when they're bored, know what they're looking for, and know what sort of plot, character, and situation will capture their attention. The most important part of any gaming session isn't defeating the villain, exploring your character, or even getting experience points. The cardinal rule of role-playing is to ensure that everybody has fun. As GM, the onus of that falls squarely upon your shoulders. You direct the action, you invent the plot, and you portray those with whom the players interact.

Surprisingly, this makes it a lot easier for you. As a player, you only have control over your own character. As GM, however, you control the entire game, and can always find something for everyone to do. If something doesn't fit, you can always change it. This is especially important when it comes to including all of your players — no one should feel left out of your group. Pay close attention to players who seem to vanish quietly into the woodwork. Try to involve them in the session as much as everyone else, don't favor the actions of one player over any other, and make sure that there is something in your session for everyone. By maintaining a well-balanced group dynamic, you'll find that your players enjoy your games, and are willing to trust you with whatever you have in mind for them. If, however, a character has little to do in your game, the player's interest will likely wane. The simplest remedy for this is to provide an opportunity for every character to shine in their area of expertise. Of course, this does not have to mean that your Assistant District Attorney will always triumph in court or that your crystal ball squad cop has to hunt down a rogue warlock every week, but you should be aware of the skills of your PCs and tailor your scenarios to suit them.

As usual, one rule applies: what works best for you, works best for you. Every group is different, and only you know the best way to handle any problems in yours. The more experience you gain as a GM, the more easily you'll be able to anticipate any problems, and ensure that everyone leaves the table happy.

ADVANCED CONCEPTS

The following pages provide guidelines on how to run campaigns set specifically in *The Edge of Midnight*. They include a discussion of *noir* as a genre, a breakdown of the game's central themes, and suggestions on how to design and run scenarios within *The Edge of Midnight*'s setting. As always, they are intended as tools and guidelines, not concrete rules. You are free to use as much or as little as you see fit.

WHAT IS NOIR?

The term *film noir* was first coined by a group of French critics shortly after World War II. During the war, occupied Europe had no access to American movies (a popular import in the years previous). The Nazis strictly censored everything that was seen or heard in territory they controlled. When the war ended and U.S. films returned to Europe, people noticed a drastic change in the content. While movies before the war had been largely bright, colorful, and upbeat (*The Wizard of Oz*, for example), the new batch was brooding, cynical, and grim. They featured morally compromised protagonists, downbeat storylines, and an atmosphere that often reflected the turbulent emotions of its characters. And they came from a nation which remained largely untouched by the fighting, and whose prosperity stood in marked contrast to the devastation of Europe. Though the critics based their discussion on a handful of specific films, the themes they identified reverberated far beyond; they could be found as far back as Edgar Allen Poe and continue to be felt in movies, novels, and TV shows to the present day.

Noir is an ephemeral and nebulous genre whose defining characteristics often defy categorization. Some maintain that it's not a genre at all, but just an artistic movement which began and ended with a defined set of books and movies. Ask any one hundred experts to explain *noir*, and you're liable to get one hundred different explanations — every one legitimate and every one applicable to the debate. It has its roots in expressionist horror films like *Nosferatu*, and was fueled by the prolific writings of Chandler and Hammett. It's often associated with detective stories and "hard boiled" fiction, though it's neither limited to them, nor bound by their conventions. It's atmosphere made tangible, substance created by style. And it is, above all, a uniquely American creation.

For *The Edge of Midnight*, *noir* embodies certain specific themes and ideas, which are discussed below. Please note that this is not an all-encompassing definition of *noir*, nor is it intended to be an authoritative statement on the topic. It's simply a list of the most important features as they apply to this game.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT



TIME AND PLACE

Noir had its truest genesis in crime and detective stories of the 1940s. Such stories were a product of that period of history, and have easily identifiable characteristics of the era. Fashions and culture followed particular dictates (men wore fedoras, for example) and advancing technology resulted in astounding new discoveries. Socially, America grappled with the problems of a post-war world. WWII had ended in victory, but the fruits of that victory seemed increasingly uncertain. Much of the planet lay in ruins, vulnerable to political extremism. The Soviet Union was on the rise and fears of communism gradually took root in the populace. Veterans often found reintegration with civilian society difficult, and women and minorities were slowly being forced backwards after making

ATMOSPHERE

Above all, *noir* is an atmosphere, an overarching feeling which covers every aspect of *The Edge of Midnight*. In fact, “feeling” is the proper term, for things in this world are sensed rather than seen. The cityscape cuts off one’s field of vision, masking the horizon with towering steel. Much of the action takes place at night, in smoky rooms and back alleys with little lighting. Fog and steam obscure the surroundings, turning approaching figures into ghostly phantoms. Danger and violence are ever-present, yet they are implied rather than overt; they wait behind the corner, in the doorway, around the bend. Even the fashions seek to obscure: flapping trenchcoats, slinky dresses, fedoras pulled low over the eyes. These trappings permeate *The Edge of Midnight*, defining everything from its rumpled detectives to its sprawling metropolises.

Expressionism dominates the game’s atmosphere, further enhancing its overall mood. The physical landscape of *noir* bears an uncanny resemblance to the psychological unease of its characters, externally reflecting their internal emotions. The shadows grow long and threatening, while building façades take on an aura of menace. Lights are bright and harsh, while the darkness is pitch-black and absolute. Venetian blinds divide rooms into bands of black and white, while street lamps break up the night with isolated pools of illumination. There’s a strong emphasis on surfaces — blank white faces, neon signs framing dark storefronts, rain-soaked streets reflecting the light — which mask untold secrets from prying eyes. All of it generates feelings of isolation, cynicism, and uncertainty... feelings matched by the protagonists who call such a world home.

healthy social advances during the war. All of these elements found fertile ground in *noir*, and were reflected in its overarching worldview.

Yet paradoxically, *noir* is devoid of time and place. It focuses on purgatorial lives where one day bleeds into the next, never changing or growing. The past intrudes constantly into the present, and the future is an empty void, destroying all sense of growth and progress. Cities become endless mazes devoid of geographical boundaries, while roads and highways stretch on with no beginning or end. (Such formlessness helps explain why the genre can be so easily applied to science fiction settings like *Blade Runner* or *The Matrix*). *Noir* is at once both timely and timeless, centered on a specific period and yet utterly unbound by it.

The Edge of Midnight is steeped in similar trappings. On the one hand, it has a very specific sense of time and place. Like the U.S., the Commonwealth is trying to relish a hard-won victory following a lengthy war. Its technology, culture, and fashion match those of the period, and its social struggles have obvious parallels with our own history. The war they fought so hard to win has delivered a questionable victory, the gaunts constitute a seething minority, and warlocks lend an air of paranoia and mistrust to the general populace. Yet it is also cut off from historical context, a world with no past and a murky future. Its populace suffers from a collective amnesia — robbing them of their true identities — and even the geography grows distorted the further one travels from the Commonwealth. The push and pull between a set time and an enforced timelessness is a key part of *The Edge of Midnight*’s atmosphere.

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CYNICISM

Player characters in *The Edge of Midnight* are driven by a profound distrust. The world around them tells stories about how wonderful things are, how bright the future looks, and how those in authority have things in hand. But *noir* protagonists refuse to believe a word of it. They see things as they are, not as they should be, and despise the pretty lies used to hide from reality. People cheat and deceive others to get what they want; love and friendship are expediences to be discarded the moment they become inconvenient. Similarly, governments and large institutions exploit the people under them, playing on themes of patriotism and nobility to serve their own ends. *Noir* protagonists don't necessarily hate such exploitation, only the sugar coating used to justify it. They call a spade a spade, and their rough honesty denies wrongdoers the comfort of self-deception. In so doing, they achieve a sort of tenuous truce with the corruption around them. While they lack the means to vanquish it, they can at least deny it a place to hide.

PARTIAL SUCCESSSES

During play, it is common for a player to achieve a *partial success*; that is, a skill roll where one of his dice equals or exceeds the TN, and one does not (see page 17 for more information). This mechanic was deliberately designed to facilitate role-playing opportunities, which the GM should feel free to take advantage of. Whenever a partial success is rolled, it means the character achieves his task... but there's a little twist added. It may take longer than he thought, for example, or draw an unwanted amount of attention.

Depending upon when and how it occurs, it makes the perfect opportunity to spice things up a little: to throw the players for a loop or add some new wrinkle that hadn't appeared before. For example, say the character was attempting to swipe an envelope full of money from a mobster in a bus station. He rolls a partial success, meaning that he gets the envelope without the mobster noticing... but perhaps he's noticed by a plainclothes cop in the bus depot on other business. The cop tails the character, and eventually starts to connect the character's activities to the mobster's...

Such a development can bring an added dimension of danger to a game session, and help the plot stay fluid and dynamic. Naturally, you should maintain a proper proportion to it all. Not every partial success should result in a whole new plot twist, and the developments should stay relatively minor regardless. But if one takes place at the right time, and gives you a notion for an interesting new development to be added into the story, by all means pursue it. It's what partial successes are there for.

IDENTITY CRISIS

A fundamental uncertainty pervades *noir*: a world where not only your surroundings but your very being is in doubt. Characters in *noir* stories are dislodged from their moorings, adrift physically, morally, and emotionally. Perhaps most important for *The Edge of Midnight* is the notion that identity — the characters' most intimate sense of self — is nothing but an illusion. External forces have compromised individual being, lending the populace a false belief of who and what they are. They go about existence content that what they think and feel is fundamentally *theirs*, while in reality, everything about them has been externally dictated. In *The Edge of Midnight*, no one is who they claim to be... both figuratively and literally. Characters are deceitful and secretive, often to themselves as much as anyone else. That friendly cop could be a mob informant, that tattered piece of gutter trash might have a will of steel. They lie to themselves, and by lying, they become blind to their true identity.

Such deception feeds into a much larger and more pervasive illusion. *No one* in the U.C. knows who they really are (see Chapter Nine for more details). The cosmos itself has shifted their perceptions, presenting them with a sense of self profoundly different from who they once were. They live out lives which have been imprinted upon them by their environment, oblivious to their former selves. Indeed, before the appearance of the White Light, the world simply didn't exist for them — at least not in any form which they would recognize — and yet they have memories stretching back further than that: jobs they never held, friends they never had, a war they never fought. Only the Few realize that something's the matter, and even they have only vague suspicions.

MORAL AMBIGUITY

Within this malaise, right and wrong become difficult to define. It's not simply that things are bad, but that the bad cannot always be separated from the good. Positive things come out of reprehensible behavior, and evil sometimes springs from the very best of intentions. A dirty politician may use mob influence to buy an election, then turn around and use his position to fund a badly needed public works project. A policeman might commit murder in order to pin the death on a vicious gangster who has thus far eluded all attempts at capture. "The right thing to do" is difficult to discern, and sometimes doesn't exist at all. The world of *noir* is a never-ending pattern of moral grays, defined not by firm lines but by a constant give-and-take between the positive and the negative.

THE CODE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

In such a universe, the protagonist often has little but his instinct to guide him... and that instinct becomes the only trustworthy moral compass. The world of *noir* values individual ethics over that of society as a whole, trusting its flawed heroes rather than corrupt institutions or traditions. For the individual has the freedom to act when he chooses, to step forward and take a stand while society's bloated instruments

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struggle to overcome their dead weight. The individual can feel in his gut when something is wrong; he can sense the hypocrisy that keeps others from acting when they should. His virtues aren't always comprehensive, but those he does possess are reliable and unbending. Those who never doubt their morality are often the most amoral of all; those who question — who live with ambiguity instead of trying to deny it — find admirable virtues which can survive in a flawed universe. Such rough codes hold the key to salvation in *The Edge of Midnight*, and they never exist in large quantities. You find them only the hearts of lone men and women, willing to fight for something only they believe in.

THE BIG EMPTY

The Edge of Midnight differs from other campaigns the players may be used to. Those who play fantasy and other epic styles of gaming might seek a root cause of the world's corruption — an overarching villain to defeat or a lingering condition to reverse. On the other hand, fans of darker games such as *Vampire* or *Call of Cthulhu* might brace themselves for a coming apocalypse. The shadows herald the approach of a permanent night, and the characters can do nothing except make the most of the time they have left. Neither of these assumptions fits *The Edge of Midnight*, despite trappings and themes which may appear similar. There is no grand conspiracy, no hidden cause for all the world's ills which can be uncovered and rectified. Nor is there an inevitable, all-consuming oblivion looming to put everyone out of their misery. Instead, it's an endless road, stretching to the horizon with no apparent destination. It has no finale, no demonstrable triumph or total despair. It just *is*. Day in, day out, its corruption and greed endure in a never ending cycle... along with the remnants of morality which refuse to succumb to them. It walks a fine line between hope and despair, a hard-boiled universe that still clings to a few precious ideals.

From the players' perspective, that means walking the same fine line. They are neither helpless nor all-powerful, able to affect change yet faced with insurmountable obstacles. Freeing the world from the shadow it has fallen into is a task beyond humanity's limits. Flaws, injustice, and human suffering will continue no matter what they do. However, that doesn't mean that the PC's actions have no value. Their abilities still count for something, and even if they can't make the big picture right, at least they can try to rectify some of the smaller details.

Strangely, a nation as compromised as the Unified Commonwealth has very few unequivocal wrongs in need of righting. Crime requires a victim, and victims — *real* victims — are in short supply in the U.C. Everybody has an angle; everybody looks out for their best interests. Though many live the pretense of ethical lives, they do so only because those ethics have never really been tested. If they were, most of them would find themselves wanting. A little extra money, a mistress on the side, a harmless transaction that no one knows about... few have the moral fortitude to say no to such temptations. If they embrace their darker instincts, they do so willingly, using coy justifications to explain away their sin. When bad things happen (as they invariably do), it's hard to cry too loudly: one way or the other, the "victim" probably had it coming.

Ironically, that equation couldn't exist without the better angels of human nature. Hope springs eternal in *The Edge of Midnight* and that too contributes to the world's failings. The promise of a better tomorrow, so vital for our species' well-being, inadvertently feeds a huge array of bad behavior. Every dark act ever committed, every crime or sin ever indulged, had its beginnings in hope. Hope for riches. Hope for love. Hope for a life less wretched than the current version. Someone needed an escape or a boost or a leg up, and that desire led them to commit acts they would never dream of in normal circumstances. If that hope didn't exist — if no one believed they could make their lot better and just surrendered themselves to despair — then much of the world's problems would disappear.

Yet hope can also heal as well as hurt, for while it drives men to their doom, it can also save them from it. If everything ended in tears — if every dream turned to ashes — then no one would struggle. And if the possibility of a better tomorrow exists, then every now and then, it can be achieved. Not often, perhaps, but often enough to make the battle worthwhile. Therein lies the player characters' main reward.

Fulfillment for the PCs comes in the form of little victories, the kind which are rarely heralded but hold deep significance for those who earn them. Maybe they rescue a runaway from a child molester, or put a killer out of action permanently. Maybe they help a good person get a break, or keep a bad person from taking advantage of one. They have to fight for it — the world won't just hand it to them on a platter — but hope can give them the strength to keep up that fight until the end. Members of the Few — and by extension, the player characters — learn the value of hope and the tiny rewards it provides.

And the rewards are there, even though they may be hard to see. The crooked cop who they put away will be replaced by one just as bad, but the victims of his crimes can sleep well knowing that justice was done. The prostitute they rescue from the streets of Paradiso will never become the movie star she dreams of, but at least she's no longer turning tricks to feed her habit. The player characters will probably face dozens of such incidents like this throughout their lives. None of them will be noticed or lauded, and none of them make much of a difference in the world at large. But those few souls who they help will never forget them, and the good they do — while seemingly inconsequential — is enough to keep them from succumbing to despair.

It won't always work, of course. Sometimes, the bad guys get away with it. Sometimes, people will slide back into the pit the PCs pulled them out of. Victory is never guaranteed and even if the PC achieve their goals, the results may be entirely different than what they intended. It's a long, hard road fraught with setbacks and wrong turns. But the alternative is to close their eyes and ignore it... something no self-respecting *noir* protagonist would ever do. Belonging to the Few doesn't assure you of coming out on the winning side; it merely gives you the strength to keep fighting. Hope exists, but it doesn't come in a grand rush; it has to be earned bit by agonizing bit. Its rewards are precious, and each little moment is worth savoring.

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NOIR GAME MASTERING

A bellhop checks a group of men into the presidential suite of his hotel. They're well-dressed, but keep to themselves and have an odd swagger to their walk. There's a couple of gaunts among their number, which raises the bellhop's suspicions. Later that evening, the front desk takes several complaints about the noise coming from the presidential suite. The manager dispatches the bellhop to kindly request that they keep it down.

The bellhop arrives to find the door slightly ajar. The room is a disaster — furniture smashed, wallpaper torn — and there's no sign of the occupants. As he moves through the shattered window glass and overturned chairs, he comes across a grisly sight: a severed human hand, nailed to the table. It's still warm, and a small pool of blood has formed around the digits. Investigating further, the bellhop makes another discovery: \$10,000 in small bills, folded into a packet and tucked under the mattress. There are no other signs of foul play and no clue as to how (or why) the men left.

What does he do now?

In *noir*, the answer is usually "he takes the money, disposes of the hand, and tells the manager that they left after a wild party," but *The Edge of Midnight* leaves that issue up to the players. Whoever is portraying the bellhop (assuming he's a PC) must decide if he keeps the money, whether he reports the missing hand (without necessarily mentioning the money), and what he tells other characters about the state of the room. Those decisions will directly affect how the scenario unfolds; as the GM, it is pivotal to adjust quickly and move the scenario along without robbing the players of their free will.

Most importantly, the need to guide or punish players who make the "wrong" decision should be curtailed. As discussed elsewhere, "right" and "wrong" in *The Edge of Midnight* are relative terms at best, used to justify certain actions or excuse certain crimes. The characters should not be obligated by the dictates of the plot to behave in a certain manner, nor should they be directed to take a specific action unless it fits with the parameters of their personality. In light of that, doing the smart thing is sometimes less interesting — and makes for a much more boring adventure — than doing the *stupid* thing: succumbing to a moment of weakness and taking the goodies without thinking of the consequences. Don't assume that the players will behave a certain way just because they're the protagonists. Let them decide for themselves, and then react and adjust as needed.

Instead, focus on the background and the plot. Don't worry about whether the bellhop should or should not take the money, but on what happens when he does (or doesn't). The hand has an owner, the cash comes from somewhere, and whoever arranged for them to end up in that hotel room is probably going to want them back. When designing the scenario, establish the reasons behind it all — the events leading up to it, the motivations of the people behind it, the steps they'll take in order to get what they want — and have a good idea of how that will play into the PCs' decisions. If your scenario has a strong central core, and you are familiar with what's driving it, you'll find that you can easily shift it to accommodate the players' moves.

Suppose, for example, that the money belonged to a gambler who intended to use it to pay off the local mob. He stole it from his wealthy mistress, and then hid it before the meeting. When he didn't reveal its location right away, the mobsters killed him and fled the scene. They're now trying to track it down, unaware that it was left behind at the scene of the crime. Meanwhile, the jilted mistress realizes that the money is missing and concocts a scheme to seduce it back from whichever poor sap currently has possession of it.



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With this in mind, the GM can tailor the action to fit whatever the bellhop decides to do. If he keeps the money and doesn't report anything, the mobsters will deduce that he has it and come after him. If he reports the incident to the police, but keeps the money, then the mistress will find him and try to slide it out from under him. Even if he turns the money over, either or both parties may target him under the false belief that he still has it, and so on. By focusing on the back-story, and the motives of the NPCs who are helping to shape the plot, the GM is thus prepared for any contingency, and can allow the PC to make his decision freely without biasing the choice. Trouble (and presumably an enjoyable scenario) will follow no matter what the bellhop does.

The key to this process comes in the notion of consequence — a large part of *noir* which can be used to help determine when and where the players run into problems. Every action has ramifications. If you hit someone, that someone is going to hit back. If you engage in deceit, you will need to maintain that deceit in the face of any adversity. The PCs may not understand where their actions will lead them, because they don't have all the pieces to the puzzle. But if the GM does, then

he knows when and where he can hit them with an obstacle. Knowing how the mobsters think will explain why they try to take the money back, which will explain how and where they confront the bellhop. That in turn, dictates what options the bellhop has in resolving the situation... which dictates where he has to go and what he has to do from there, and so on. By anticipating the consequences of the characters' choices, the GM will quickly find the scenario unfolding before him and can guide it towards its conclusion without forcing the players to follow a preordained path.

Within this framework, specific events don't necessarily take place in a rigidly defined order. Though some might follow a standard chain of cause-and-effect (i.e., the police won't show up at the hotel unless somebody calls them), they can change very rapidly should the players take an unexpected path. In light of this, the GM should design his encounters with flexibility in mind, and be ready to make adjustments when logic and the pacing of the scenario demand it. This doesn't necessarily mean abandoning an encounter that you've worked hard on. If you have a big set piece, or a confrontation in a particular locale, you don't need to drop it simply because the players

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don't go the way you think they will. Instead, try to refit it to accommodate the new circumstances, changing the details to fit the particulars while keeping the essence of the scene intact. Decide what's most important — the locale, the obstacle to overcome, its placement in the arc of the scenario — and retain that, then shift the remainder as you see fit. That keeps the core of what you wish to convey, and gives the scenario a fluidity that can accommodate unexpected twists and turns.

THE STRUCTURE OF SCENARIOS

Noir scenarios work a little differently than scenarios in other genres. They are at once open-ended and rigid, offering the PCs a huge amount of freedom while simultaneously restricting their choices to a seemingly preordained path. *The Edge of Midnight* places its characters along a double-edged sword, giving them the ability to choose, and then forcing them to live with the consequences. It's a tough balance to maintain, and the onerous falls mainly upon the GM.

The trick is to structure the scenario so that the characters become the architects of their own misery. *Noir* figures are rarely victims of circumstance; they enter the trap of their own free will, and then have to fight their way out once it closes. The structure of *Edge of Midnight* scenarios should follow that same pattern. The PCs should never feel forced into the situation; rather, they should decide for themselves to enter it, believing (or hoping) that it will be to their benefit to do so. The danger comes only after they've made their move.

Most story arcs in *The Edge of Midnight* begin with one of two things: 1) a mystery or conundrum that needs solving, or 2) an opportunity to improve the characters' fortunes, advance their positions, hurt an enemy, or the like. We'll discuss the structure of each type momentarily, but first, we should emphasize the similarities that they — and every scenario in *The Edge of Midnight* — share.

As mentioned above, the PCs should always have a vested interest in the outcome... though whether they retain that interest by the end is far from guaranteed. They should stand to gain something (or at least believe that they do), although as members of the Few, they might do it to help someone else. The use of "bait" or some other enticement to lure them into the intrigue is paramount. They shouldn't get involved because it's required of them, but because they want to. The opportunity is too good to pass up, the reward is too enticing, the potential to fulfill a long-desired goal is too strong, etc. The players should be licking their chops at the prospect. Conversely, they should have the freedom to walk away from it if they wish — to say "no" and not feel like they're ruining the scenario. (As implied above, have some contingencies planned in case they choose not to pursue the thread you've prepared... perhaps by having multiple paths tying into the same basic plot.)

With all *noir* stories, nothing is what it initially appears. People have hidden agendas, situations spin out of control, and events which at first seem so clear-cut become a morass of conflicting purposes. Similarly, the goal the players are initially presented with should rarely be the actual purpose of

the scenario. The true goal should remain hidden within the framework of the investigation, and not be revealed during the early phases. NPCs will keep their true motives a secret, lying to or deceiving the party to throw them off the track. The players should learn to look between the lines for the scenario's true purpose, to approach things with a slanted view, and to take very little at face value.

Finally, a sense of entrapment should pervade any *Edge of Midnight* scenario. Once the players are involved, their options slowly shrink as the danger builds. Perhaps the police are pursuing them, or the mobster they're chasing has his men looking for them. The deeper they go, the more they should feel the world closing in, cutting off their avenues of escape and pushing them towards a very nasty outcome. At the same time, they should also feel strangely empowered, as if losing everything becomes a freedom in and of itself. With no one else upon whom to depend, they must take things into their own hands, trusting their instincts to lead them, and hoping that whatever answers they uncover will extradite them from the situation. Experienced gamers take to the notion quite readily, making it easier for the GMs to evoke in their campaign.

MYSTERIES

Mystery is an indelible part of *noir* and an easy fulcrum for an *Edge of Midnight* scenario. It provides a readily identifiable goal for the characters to pursue (for instance, someone has been murdered and the killer must be found; or something valuable has been stolen and must be recovered). The characters may be working for someone else (hired detectives or policemen), or they may be operating on their own, seeking answers for personal reasons. Whatever the case, their investigation leads to clues suggesting a logical outcome, and obstacles appear to keep them from reaching that outcome. As the scenario proceeds, the mystery catalyzes — perhaps taking an unexpected twist or revealing details that change its focus entirely. The stakes should be raised, threatening the characters with a loss of money, prestige, or worse, and at some point, they should have the choice of letting it go and cutting their losses. Finally, a solution appears (though it may differ significantly from the solution the PCs originally had in mind) which should hinge entirely upon their actions to reach a satisfying conclusion.

Pacing in a mystery scenario depends largely on the players. The GM lays out a series of clues and leads, and lets the party pursue them as they see fit. They set the agenda and dictate the course the investigation takes; the GM merely re-



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sponds to their actions. He can move things along if the party gets bogged down (perhaps inserting combat or other action-filled moments to spice things up), but otherwise it's up to them to propel the scenario along. Because of this, the action shouldn't follow a linear path, with one clue leading to the next in an inevitable line. Rather, they should be spread out in a web, interconnecting with each other and setting a series of alternate paths which may or may not lead to the solution. As the players get closer to the heart of the mystery, the web starts to narrow until all paths point to a single conclusion... but that narrowing is a part of the process, and the PCs should never take it for granted.

Dead ends and false leads are an important part of this process as well; they help obscure the path and lend a sense of accomplishment as the players sift through them and move forward. The GM should play out such leads if necessary, letting the players decide for themselves how far to pursue them without actively discouraging their efforts. In addition, some seemingly dead-end leads can be useful even if they're not directly connected to the mystery, pointing to more fruitful avenues of pursuit. Similarly, the GM can use descriptiveness to disguise vital clues beneath unimportant details and other descriptions. If you need them to look behind a picture, don't make the picture the only thing you describe in the room. Talk about the cabinet, describe the pattern of the wallpaper, and note some other areas where interesting things might be hiding. Such clues shouldn't be uncovered by simple skill checks (although that can make a handy solution if the players grow too frustrated), but by the PCs' choices about what and where to check. By masking the key detail behind a smokescreen, it increases the sense of accomplishment when (or if) the players figure it out.



OPPORTUNITIES

Unlike mysteries, opportunities are contingent upon the PCs to initiate, but once they get going they take on a life of their own. The GM provides an opening, offering the characters access to something they want — the chance to make a lot of money at the racetrack, say, or the possibility of wiping out a criminal rival. The exact nature depends upon the characters, but it should appeal to their wants and needs; the more it ties in to some aspect of their personality, the more readily they'll dive in. All that matters is that they act of their own free will, as discussed above.

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Naturally, once they do, they find that the “opportunity” has some nasty strings attached. Maybe they make an agreement on which their partner then reneges. Maybe the money they acquire was stolen from someone very powerful. They might be patsies for an NPC who wishes to use them for his own ends, or unwitting accomplices in a large and elaborate crime. Regardless of the circumstances, they soon find themselves in a sticky bind as their dreams turn slowly to nightmare. The remainder of the scenario centers around their efforts to extricate themselves from the situation before it dooms them.

The key here is keeping the pressure on: letting the players feel the heat as the vice starts to squeeze them. They should never feel safe or secure; the notion of inexorable pursuit should always hover around them. Move them from locale to locale constantly, forcing them to stay just a few steps ahead of their pursuers. Emphasize the consequences of failure; let them know what will happen if they can't find a way out. Naturally, the players might be inclined to hit back every now and again — sometimes very effectively — and the GM is welcome to stage a few appropriate encounters to help them blow off steam. It shouldn't buy them more than a brief respite, however, and they should never be able to clear themselves by simply shooting a way out.

In order to escape their predicament, they'll need to work hard, apply their talents, and perhaps exercise some original thinking. At this stage, the scenario will likely take on aspects of the mystery detailed above, as they seek to identify their antagonists and/or uncover the root cause of their woes. Their efforts, if successful, should open up a viable course of action that can lead them to safety. The climax arrives when they confront their tormentors, attain the exonerating piece of evidence, or undo the damage they have done. The scenario ends with their (hopeful) exoneration, though if they aren't careful it may leave lingering plot threads which may pop up to torment them in the future.

Tangible rewards in this scenario are nebulous and indistinct. Lucky PCs might come out with what they originally wanted, but such cases are rare. In most situations, they receive nothing concrete, and are thankful to end up back where they started. At the same time, they shouldn't feel as if they left empty-handed. Knowledge — especially secrets or little-known information — can make all their efforts feel worthwhile. If they gleaned a bit of heretofore-unknown insight, it could give them an edge that might aid them in the future. Similarly, perhaps their circumstances are more stable now than they might have been when the scenario began. A powerful enemy might in jail, for example, or they may have made a new contact among the local police. If someone died along the way, their fate can place the PCs' rewards in context, and remind them of their relative good fortune. The GM should emphasize the benefits of such intangibles — possibly playing off of them later in the campaign — and impress their value upon the players.

VICTORY AND DEFEAT

Noir thrives on a state of uncertainty, within which victory is far from assured. The resolution of a *noir* scenario is not contingent upon success by the players, and sometimes, despite their best efforts, the other side wins. The killer goes free, the crooked millionaire buys his way out of trouble, the money they counted so much on making vanishes into thin air. Setbacks like that are a key part of the genre. When Game Mastering *The Edge of Midnight*, you may want to consider bringing them into your campaign... while at the same time, ensuring that the players find them intriguing and enjoyable, instead of just frustrating.

It helps if the players understand from the get-go that defeat is a real option. If they know the mood of *noir* and have embraced its cynical worldview during play, then the sight of their quarry beating the rap will fit in more comfortably with their perceptions. They can take it in their stride — viewing it as a part of the game rather than a personal failure — and will return for the next session more determined to see their goals through. Defeat should serve to egg them on, not resign them to a permanent sense of failure. The GM can encourage them by rewarding such efforts, and make sure that their willingness to climb back on the horse isn't just an exercise in futility.

Just because bad things happen, that doesn't mean that success is an impossible dream. Not every scenario should end on a down note, and if the PCs are clever and daring, then they should be reasonably assured of reaching their goals. Such victories will become much more meaningful in the wake of a genuine setback, lending the players an increased sense of accomplishment as they realize that the outcome was far from ordained.

Similarly, when a scenario doesn't turn out the way the players expect, the GM may wish to emphasize the positives as well as the negatives. Perhaps they gained something new that will help them in the future, or made an ally upon whom they can call when they get into trouble next time. Even if they haven't succeeded in their task, such little benefits can still make the scenario satisfying, ensuring that they don't lose patience with the game.

The same tactic can be used in reverse: letting defeat color an otherwise palpable success. Pyrrhic or temporary victories are very appropriate for *noir*, and while immediately gratifying for players, they still leave considerable unsolved problems to address. Suppose the players dedicate themselves to uncovering a shadowy criminal mastermind, who has his hands in the city's underworld. They gather evidence against him, neutralize his underlings, and finally bring him to justice after a lengthy series of scenarios. To their surprise, his arrest doesn't reduce crime in the city; quite the opposite in fact. The underworld explodes with violence as underlings scramble to fill the void; suddenly, instead of facing one mastermind, the PCs are confronted with five or six, all making vigorous war against each other. Unintended side effects make for an enticing twist to an otherwise expected outcome, especially if they

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come as a direct result of the players' actions: it provides an increased sense of responsibility, as well as emphasizing that even their most meticulous plans can be affected by forces beyond their control.

Finally "defeat" certainly doesn't have to mean "death." Few things are more infuriating to a player than developing a richly detailed character, only to have him knocked off in a random or seemingly meaningless way. Such a death may fit with the game's atmosphere, but if the player doesn't feel it had some purpose or meaning, he's likely to take it poorly. The PCs are the central figures in the story. They may get knocked around (and the campaign wouldn't mean much if there weren't some threat of death), but they're more likely to end up in the hospital recovery ward than the cemetery. If the death of a PC does take place, don't simply kill him or her off because it's in the spirit of *noir*; give it dramatic weight. Let the player feel that it served some purpose, that it moved the story forward or that his character's sacrifice saved lives. The search for meaning in a seemingly pointless death is a strong part of *noir*, and can be emphasized to great effect. Perhaps the deceased's memory drives the other PCs forward, as they vow to bring his killer to justice or finish some piece of business which he left undone. A character's death is as important to the campaign as his life, and though it may be bleak and unheroic, it shouldn't be devoid of meaning.

GROUP DYNAMICS AND NOIR

Role-playing scenarios always center around the player characters as a group; they are the protagonists of the story and must work together towards a common goal. Normally, such dynamics are not a part of *noir*; the protagonist works alone, with at most one or two casual friends to come to his aid. *The Edge of Midnight* differs from other *noir* tales in this regard. Unless the GM is running a solo scenario, the players will belong to a party like those of other role-playing games, and share the spotlight with each other. This takes careful planning, which the GM should be aware of as he designs his campaign.

Most role-playing parties need to get along with each other, and often consist of fast friends and lifelong companions. That's true with *The Edge of Midnight* as well... though it's tempered by other aspects of the setting. As *noir* characters, the PCs don't need to trust each other — or even like each other — in order to work together. "Friendship" isn't necessary among the party, and a "look out for number one" philosophy is perfectly acceptable... as are party members who bicker, disagree, and even work at cross-purposes.

At the same time, certain limits need to be set. In-game treachery can quickly deteriorate into out-of-game arguments, and a player who takes the self-serving notion too far can make for a miserable role-playing experience. The party must have a common purpose — something that keeps it together during the campaign — and when push comes to shove, the players should put that purpose ahead of their individual desires. If they routinely betray other PCs, stab their compatriots in the back, etc., then the other players will eventually tire of it and trouble (the wrong sort of trouble) will ensue.

Moderation is important. For example, it's perfectly acceptable for a character to skim a little reward money before dividing it up, just as long as 1) he understands what happens if he gets caught and 2) the other players don't feel unduly put out if they learn of it (though their *characters* can certainly feel put-out). The limits of such activities vary from group to group, but the GM should make sure that everyone understands where they are. As the campaign moves forward, keep track of how the players are interacting, and don't be scared to pull the plug on any scheme which you feel is out of line.

The characters' status as members of the Few makes an excellent magic bullet to solve these problems. As discussed elsewhere, almost no one else in the world believes what they do, and their shared doubts about the state of the universe can ensure that they play well with each other. Even if they have their own agendas or wouldn't trust the other PCs with a burnt-out match, they should be loath to discard that oh-so-rare connection that members of the Few can provide. Stress their shared bond if necessary, and use it to help smooth over any ruffled feathers during the course of the campaign. (See page 138 for more information about the Few.)

GAUNT-BASED PLOTS AND STORIES

There are many elements that make the Commonwealth of *The Edge of Midnight* different from our world. None are so immediately visual, however, as the gaunts. The presence of these embittered monsters milling around in their wasted districts lends an immediate sense of alienation to the world. Like us, gaunts are outsiders to the Commonwealth, only just beginning to learn about the world around them. They are widely feared and mistrusted, and their presence is literally poison to non-gaunts. Even among their own kind, gaunts have little idea where to turn, and they have no reason to trust the rest of the gaunt community — after all, anyone can be a gaunt, and there is no shared bond of generational growth together. The elements of alienation, prejudice, violence, personal enigma, and corruption that are so prevalent in *film noir* apply themselves very well to the predicament of the gaunts. Adventures that feature gaunts will probably highlight the ever-present threats, oppression, and societal rebellion that they represent. There are, of course, many different levels on which the nature of gaunts can be conveyed.

A gaunt-related storyline need not be straightforward and simple, nor need it predominantly feature criminal activities. The following paragraphs contain a few ideas regarding plot and motive for bringing gaunts into a game, and the ways in which gaunts can be used to add to *The Edge of Midnight*'s overall atmosphere.



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SHADES OF GRAY

The personal dichotomy suffered by many gaunts can make for interesting stories that focus more on the individual: stories that don't touch on the social issues or the crime or the bigger picture. Gaunts, after all, have their problems just like the rest of us — problems that, more often than not, cannot be solved. Mysteries and riddles becloud the plots of *noir* like a fog, and gaunts are creatures of mystery. Their origins are shrouded in obscurity — nobody knows why they are created, nobody professes any cure for gauntism, and no gaunt retains any solid memories of his or her life prior to the metamorphosis. Gaunts are outsiders, lost souls hovering on the fringes of society, subjected to a fate over which they have no control. Their pasts are a closed book to them... but it might still hold its share of demons ready to strike.

One of many personal and immediate mysteries a gaunt can pursue is the riddle of his or her own past. Perhaps he is the missing husband of a wife who has long since buried him and moved on, only to be confronted by the grotesque reality of his new state. How will she react? How will the husband-turned-gaunt react? Perhaps the gaunt knew some dark secret about a prominent politician and succumbed to the disease before he went public. The politician's henchmen backed off, unwilling to draw any attention when their target would lose his memory anyway, but now the gaunt is digging around where he shouldn't — trying to find answers about who he was. A party of non-gaunts can invariably find something to hook them into a gaunt's desperate quest to uncover his past identity. Perhaps they're investigators, hired by a suspiciously wealthy gaunt to find out who he used to be — no questions asked. Maybe they're searching for someone who went missing — someone who either knows something of importance to them or means a lot to them personally — and discover that he has succumbed to gauntism and now can't even remember his name.

MEAN STREETS

Life as a gaunt is a low, mean, dirty, violent affair. Gaunts are, by their nature, urban animals: prowling the streets of the city, as suspicious of others as they are suspected themselves. Any scenario set among the gaunt community could emphasize that they only really hang together through shared misfortunes, and that the crimes of a few are gaining every one of them a bad reputation. Fear and the threat of violence should be forever in the air, particularly if a group of non-gaunts is traveling through a district looking for a gaunt criminal.

For example, a story might involve a gaunt mobster who pays a human construction worker to take the fall for a crime committed by one of his men. The guy is poor, so he agrees, hoping to pass on what he makes to his girlfriend while he rots in jail. The girl doesn't know what the story is, but she might beg the PCs to prove the man's innocence — an attempt he won't be willing to help them with, and which might put them in danger without the mobster ever showing his hand. The gaunt community won't look kindly on a group of humans trying to pin a crime on one of their own...

A similar theme can involve a human (perhaps even a warlock if you want to make it more interesting) whom the players know getting lost in a particularly lawless part of a gaunt district. Dangerous meetings with gang leaders who take offense more easily than the Emperor of Japan, and futile questioning of flat-eyed locals lead them deeper into the district in pursuit of a person whom they suspect has been greatly changed by their experiences among the gaunts. The PCs must fight against gangs, mistrust, and their own growing sense of despair as evidence mounts up that their friend has lost his mind, or found something important in the wasteland that must be removed before the drain of a thousand nearby gaunts destroys both it and him...

AN EMPIRE OF BLOOD

Crime is omnipresent in gaunt society: the proverbial golden fleece that hangs just out of reach, enticing honest gaunts to a better life. That better life, however, is often bloody and short, a whirlpool of corruption, vice, booze, and death. The criminal life can be a temptation to many gaunts — and the theme of temptation, and of giving in to or resisting that temptation, can be a powerful driving force for an *Edge of Midnight* adventure. As a gaunt, organized crime helps you look out for you and yours, earn respect, gain creature comforts you've never had... the list goes on. The honeyed arguments of gaunt hoodlums find ripe grounds for recruitment in the bitter, poverty-stricken slums, and many gaunts end up dancing to the tune of vicious crime lords in order to make ends meet. In reality, working for a syndicate is no different than working for any other big company; the price is just a little bloodier is all.

A gaunt could join a syndicate in desperation, sick of her life of drudgery, and become a gun for hire under one of two feuding bosses. The players could be hired to retrieve this fledgling mobster by her friends, and have to risk life and limb by playing the two gangs off against each other without killing their quarry or letting any innocents die in the crossfire. Alternatively, the players could have fallen from grace and now run a mob in a gaunt district, only to resort to more and more drastic and vile tactics to keep their people from being exploited by rival normal and warlock gangs (who stand to gain from moving in on the gaunt underworld). Anyone who has fallen into such a life will ask themselves every day if what they do is right, if the road they have taken — the path of the criminal as a knight in soot-stained armor — is doing more harm than good. And if the players, or an NPC underling, decide to get out of the life, it might cause far more problems than it solves...



WARLOCK-BASED PLOTS AND STORIES

Film noir lends itself stunningly well to the supernatural, even “scientific” variants like those of the warlocks. The application of their abilities makes even “simple” mysteries intricate, and magic can hide itself within more obvious clues — revealing itself only when the characters look extremely closely. Magic, supernatural horror, and dark science lend themselves to this genre well (if used carefully), and can add both enigma and corruption to the game. Magic can provide elements that are all but undiscoverable until looked for — adding depth and layering to the original problem that can only be uncovered with time and dedication. As in the movies, these stories should unfold slowly, and contain many false leads. Just when you think you have it all figured out, something new happens — just like magic.

Below are some suggestions for warlock-based plotlines and characters that can be integrated into any *Edge of Midnight* campaign. They are designed to give the Game Master ideas to build on, with which he or she can create unique alterations, additions, and ideas.

MAGIC IN THE SUBURBS

Supernatural elements can be added to an *Edge of Midnight* campaign without being overpowering, lending a touch of mystery and madness to an already hard-boiled plot. People who are kidnapped, captured, or assaulted may be connected to dark secrets — not all of which are mundane in origin. The suburban tales of deceit and murder — of perfect families hiding darkness beneath their sunny smiles — can gain immense depth when the lure of forbidden knowledge is added. Like drugs, alcohol, or easy money, magic can burrow its way into the happiest home, destroying it from within.

Stories of common people are more tragic and touching when they hit the heart, the very humanity of those concerned. Magic is applicable when it can be brought into the personal arena — when the warlock is a living person with hopes and fears and dreams, he will be more missed when he leaves — and the characters will be more easily able to identify with his plight. Perhaps the warlock is the one missing, leaving behind a perfect suburban family completely unaware of his affiliations. The wife is a beautiful blonde with two perfect children, crying her eyes out over a picture of her high school sweetheart. But the further the player characters investigate, the more dark secrets they uncover: sinister cabals, banned books, and warlocks of alternating factions played against one another until the whole deal goes sour. In the end, the entire tale of betrayal comes full circle, and a war between the two warlock factions is narrowly averted by finding the true criminal — the wife, who mastered warlock abilities in secret in order to murder her husband without placing suspicion on herself.

MURDER IN THE CITY

Cities are glittering backdrops for stories, where even the most vocal warlock can be lost — for a time — in the crowd. Faces blend together, and plots can become incredibly complex as they wind through strange neighborhoods, wharves and shipping docks, and the shining buildings of the city’s heart. With thousands of varied locations, a city is the ideal backdrop for *noir* campaigns, allowing mystery to hide around every corner — and a villain within every face in the crowd.

Tracking sorcery, and warlocks, through the city environment can be an almost impossible task. Crystal ball squads work closely with beat cops, tracking down every lead to discover their quarry’s name, and to trace his final steps into the alley where he died. One by one, the events become clear, leading to twists and turns that endanger not only the party, but also the city itself. City settings include seedy places that linger on the edge of society like beggars at the door. So, too, do warlocks stand outside the workings of society, unable to be themselves despite the power at their command. Cocktail lounges, bars, alleys, dark city streets, train stations, dance parlors... these are the haunts of the warlock, where the ultimate power of the universe lies waiting in a smoky corner booth.

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA

The concept of a multi-city scenario is an ambitious one. It requires the Game Master to ensure that each location is distinct, to interweave the complexity and uniqueness of the entire world into a single plotline, tying in potentially thousands of NPCs through a single long-term story. The world of *The Edge of Midnight* has excellent potential for just such a plot, but the Game Master must be certain to utilize each of the cities located within his story. To simply pop through them one by one, like a series of beads upon a chain, robs the storyline of ingenuity and character. Each of the cities of the Commonwealth has its own special flavor; together, they can add momentum and grandeur to a long-running plot.

When you are setting up such a plot, take into account the strengths and settings present in each city. Work with the different laws of the cities — warlocks who can be open in Terminus should be deadly afraid to utilize their magic in Nova Roma. Although the Anti-Sorcery Act is national and overarching, each of the cities interprets its statutes differently. Some are harsh, some are lenient, and some simply do not have the manpower to truly enforce the Anti-Sorcery Act.

Warlocks experience vastly different levels of persecution from city to city, and a campaign designed to travel through the Commonwealth can illustrate this with aplomb. A warlock can often pass for normal in a city where he hasn’t been discovered, and if careful in using his magic, he can continue to hide among the populace throughout the campaign. However, some cities are sharper in their methods of discovering a warlock, and a single error in one city can haunt a sorcerous fugitive even as he travels. Seeing one’s face on a wanted poster is one thing; realizing that the same wanted poster has been distributed to every city within the Commonwealth is quite another.

CHAPTER NINE THE WHOLE DAMN MESS



TMYou gotta convince me that
you know what this is all
about, that you aren't just
fiddling around hoping it'll
all come out right in the end!f

- Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart),
The Maltese Falcon

WARNING

The following pages discuss the possible explanation behind *The Edge of Midnight* universe — its cause, its reason for existing, and its purpose (if applicable). This is presented for the edification of the GM, and is intended to assist him in running an *Edge of Midnight* campaign. Player characters *do not* have access to this knowledge — precious few even suspect it and in some cases, it may not exist in *any* tangible form — and therefore players should not read this section UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES unless SPECIFICALLY permitted by the GM. Certain parts of the universe defy the understanding of those who live there. The “Great Whatsit” often cannot be explained, and *The Edge of Midnight* relies upon the sense of mystery and the unknown which that conveys. Players who “peek behind the curtain” are robbing themselves of that mystery and diminishing the pleasures of the game. The GM can decide how (or if) the player characters ever learn the information provided below. Until then, anyone besides the GM should refrain from reading these pages. Yes, this means you.

The Edge of Midnight exists in a different world than ours — referred to here as “the shadow world” — even though it retains many elements of our own. There are many possible reasons behind its existence, although each particular campaign likely has only one. Below is a series of explanations, each espousing a different root cause for why the shadow world is the way it is. The first section, “The Lost,” is considered the canonical version, and future supplements for *The Edge of Midnight* will operate under its dictates. GMs who don’t wish to use it — because they prefer another explanation or because it doesn’t fit the dynamics of their group — may select an alternate scenario from the list which follows it. Four are provided, each painting *The Edge of Midnight* in a slightly different light. And of course, the GM is free to develop his own ideas as he wishes... or to simply avoid *any* explanation and let the mystery be.

THE LOST

The beginnings of *The Edge of Midnight* universe lie with the missing persons of ours: those souls who somehow fell away from the world. People disappear every day. They kiss their wives, walk out the door, and are never heard from again. Some vanish during plane flights, traveling across the ocean or similar vast spaces. Others simply drop out of sight, with

no family or loved ones to enquire after them. Only the most notable are widely reported; the rest fill up some police blotter or are never reported at all. The world is full of lonely people: those who go through life without friends or connections to link them to the rest of society. They pass like ghosts, barely leaving any impact on those around them. And when they fail to turn up, they usually receive little more than a few casual questions years after the fact. “Whatever happened to that guy who used to come in for coffee?” “Say, you remember the janitor who worked the night shift a while back?” “What neighbor?”

So it’s been since the beginning of time. Millions of people over the course of three millennia have vanished from the face of the Earth, leaving no signs of their fate. Entire communities have disappeared — like the famous case on Roanoke Island in 1587, or the Eskimo village on the shores of Lake Anjikuni — as well as countless small groups and individuals. And while a certain number of such cases have perfectly rational explanations at their core (their killers hid the bodies well, the area was too inhospitable for a proper search, etc.), the remainder suffered a far different fate. These poor souls slipped between the universe’s cracks, stumbling into shadows and never emerging. Schisms in reality — ever-moving breaches between the world we know and somewhere *else* — claimed them forever. They found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, caught in some quiet locale with no one around, and fell into darkness.

Where and what this darkness was, none can say. It may have been what the Christians call Limbo, or perhaps it held the “dark matter” which physicists believe constitutes the bulk of the universe. Whatever the case, it existed without shape or form or purpose, like a shadow of our universe. It was nothing and nowhere, a timeless void that left its occupants comatose and without awareness. There the lost souls remained — for centuries in some cases — caught in a state of oblivion that leached thought and identity away. They floated amid the formlessness, their bodies the only things marking the empty space. Memories of their previous lives — of the world now cut off from them — were gone, leaving them nothing but blank slates. Most of them spent far more time there than in the mayfly speck of their Earthly lives; after a hundred years or so, they could be considered far more the void’s children than those of the world they left behind. And yet some core of their being withstood its effects: their physical forms retained cohesion, a sort of “body trace memory” which prevented them from merging completely with the emptiness around them. A few emotions may have lingered as well: buried feelings — usually from early childhood — which allowed them to maintain a tiny kernel of humanity. As they floated in the abyss, joined by the slowly growing ranks of fellow lost souls, they forgot everything about who they were — everything but the barest facets of existence.

This condition might have continued unabated until the end of time: the void was eternal, as were the people it swallowed. But something happened on a hot summer’s day in 1945 that gave it all a coherent form.

CHAPTER NINE: THE WHOLE DAMN MESS

THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

In 1939, German scientists succeeded in splitting the atom, opening the door to a new — and potentially apocalyptic — form of energy. Alarmed by the prospects of a nuclear weapon, several leading physicists pleaded with President Roosevelt to fund research into the area, and the Advisory Committee on Uranium was established that autumn. It soon blossomed into the most important scientific project of the 20th century: an unprecedented effort to conceive and construct an atomic bomb. The Manhattan Project, as it was dubbed, involved the finest scientific minds of the time, along with thousands of men and a staggering amount of resources, all dedicated towards a single purpose. Fear drove them forward: fear that the Nazis had an atomic program of their own, and fear of what would happen if Hitler got his hands on a bomb first. The threat posed by Germany kept their doubts about the moral implications of their work in check, and pushed them onward with a tireless zeal... made all the more palpable by the extraordinary nature of their endeavor. It all came to a head in the early morning hours of July 16, 1945, with the detonation of the first atomic bomb in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

The blast unleashed a breathtaking amount of destructive power, sending shockwaves that could be felt for miles in every direction. The radiation rendered the immediate area uninhabitable and spread untold energies in a ever-widening ring. Nothing like it had ever been seen before, and the metaphysical rift it created brought change where none had previously existed. It was even felt in the void... and the effects were miraculous. The detonation gave shape to the formlessness, bringing a cognizant pattern into the formerly empty space. The effect was similar to creating a photographic negative. Everything the blast touched — starting in Los Alamos and expanding in all directions until it had encompassed the globe — echoed across the dimensional barriers and into the void, which then took shape based on those echoes.

The result created an entirely new world, one eerily similar to our Earth... but with imperfections and distortions that separated it from the original. Structures, geography, even plant and animal life reappeared — though sometimes in warped or slightly irregular forms. It even had a population: trapped in purgatory, unconsciously clinging to their humanity and wanting — *needing* — some trace of their former existence to maintain themselves. As this new world sprang into shape, the souls of the lost drank it in with mindless abandon, letting it fill them with thoughts, memories, and emotions. It gave them a new sense of identity, based on the world echoing through the A-bomb blast and now finding concrete form in the emptiness around them.

Like the remainder of the void, their new identities had a distorting effect on the cultural and social mores they absorbed. Some were clouded with trace memories of their original lives, while others were imperfectly perceived or twisted by personal circumstance. They reverberated with the environment, creating a culture, identity, and societal mores whole out of cloth. Instead of the United States, they had a Unified Commonwealth; instead of Chicago and Los Angeles, they had Central City and Paradiso; and so on. By the time the blast

abated, an entire “shadow world” stood where once there was only emptiness. The lost found themselves again, with new lives and new identities, in a universe that felt more real to them than their forgotten existence long ago. The bomb had created as well as destroyed... and gave those trapped in the void a second chance.

Naturally, there were catches. The distortion increased the entropy in the shadow world, leading to a slow spiritual decay. New life led to new desires, silenced by centuries of oblivion and now brought back with a vengeance. Greed, vice, and selfishness, though by no means universal, found a firm foothold in the populace, adding to the slow corruption. The physical laws governing the shadow world also suffered a subtle breakdown. They remained strong and largely intractable, but they contained loopholes, which a sufficiently educated individual could exploit. When added to residual superstitions from the void’s longest occupants, it led to the appearance of warlocks (and their subsequent persecution). Gaunts manifested as well, “incomplete” individuals who retained a piece of the void in their souls. As magic use rose, more gaunts appeared, which in turn fed prejudice and oppression against them. The shadow world was flawed from the beginning, a slow rot that could continue in perpetuity until the end of time.

Then there was the question of the past. While the shadow world attained enough energy to create the semblance of history, it could not imprint thousands of years of civilization onto its new form. It had just enough to explain the present circumstances — a global war (which still raged in the real world when the bomb went off), its cause, and a few memories that grew increasingly hazy the further back one went. For *The Edge of Midnight*, life literally began with the White Light, an explosion which ended their “war” and clouded the memory of any concrete events prior to it. The shadow world could grow beyond that — the people would create new history as they lived out their lives — but its foundation lay in nothing firmer than a cosmic hiccup.

There is no way to cross the gulf between the shadow world and our Earth; it’s a one-way trip, and returning from whence one came is an exercise in futility. However, just because there’s no way back doesn’t mean there’s no proof of what happened... or no way to effect change. For starters, there’s the Few.

THE FEW

The vast majority of *The Edge of Midnight*’s denizens were left in the void far too long to remember any details of their former lives. Long years in oblivion followed by the rush of new life cut them off from Earth permanently, leaving them inextricably linked to the shadow world. But there are a few whose previous existence has not yet been silenced — who still retain enough subconscious memories of their lives before the void. They are the “recent inductees,” as it were: those who slipped out of the world just a few months or years before the bomb. They constitute a tiny minority — less than 1% and perhaps much smaller than that — but the chaos of global war made them more prevalent than in previous ages. The number of missing persons in the 30s and 40s, among both the military

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

and civilian populace, is substantially larger than any previous period in human history. Because their time on Earth outweighed their time in the void, these people endured far less of the Lethe-like emptiness than their fellows. Furthermore, the Earth they knew before is very similar to the world they now inhabit — in some aspects nearly identical — often leading to a cognitive disconnect between what they *see* as true and what they subconsciously *acknowledge* to be true. While none of them can remember their previous lives, they retain a few precious links, buried deep within their psyche and inaccessible only on the most primal levels. But that leads to questions, which in turn leads to skepticism and doubt — the defining trademarks of the Few. (For more information, see page 138.)

THE RESIDUALS

Just as people slipped into the void, so too did inanimate objects: books, knickknacks, and other items which, like their human counterparts rarely drew much attention from their absence. (Anyone who ever lost their keys or misplaced something they remembered having just a few minutes earlier can attest to this fact.) Most were swallowed up by the void, but a few — usually those with tangible emotional significance — survived and were reconstituted with the creation of the shadow world. They are the sole links between *The Edge of Midnight* and our reality: clues to whatever came before the White Light.

In many cases, these objects have a tangibility that other objects lack, an aura which differentiates them from their surroundings. They don't possess any supernatural abilities, but their connection to our universe leaves a palpable feeling with those who come into contact with them. Most people want nothing to do with them. They lie buried in hidden corners: dusty pawnshops, library archives, maybe in the hands of a few warlocks who sense their innate power. For the Few, however, they are more valuable than gold: signs that they aren't crazy, and that all their doubts and questions have some rational justification. Indeed, some didn't start asking questions until they came across one of these objects; its unique nature started the wheels turning in their heads.

Among the artifacts that survived the shift between worlds are a collection of objects relating to the Manhattan Project — files, photographs, and a few small bits of machinery which were classified and presumed lost amid the vast paperwork of military intelligence. If they could be uncovered, they would shed a great deal of light on the shadow world's true nature. As the force which created *The Edge of Midnight* world, the atomic bomb holds talismanic significance to the shadow world's denizens, even if they aren't consciously aware of it. Everyone has memories of the White Light which ended the war, and the awesome force it unleashed corresponded exactly with the explosion in Los Alamos. In fact, trace memories of the men who created the bomb linger in the populations' minds, though it has become quite distorted and is rapidly fading in the minds of all but the Few. They remember only a group of men who came and brought finality to the past in order to pave the way for the future, a small band who unleashed an unspeakable power and then slipped away into the night like gypsies.

Or warlocks.

FAMOUS DISAPPEARING ACTS

There are almost no famous figures who fell into the void over history. The overwhelming majority of the lost were lonely or anonymous, and raised no public questions when they disappeared. Even the best-known figures, such as the residents of Roanoke, are known primarily for their disappearance, rather than for any deeds they performed in life. Those whom the players might recognize were taken by the void far too long ago to constitute members of the Few, and thus have absolutely no memory of who they were... and no desire to learn.

There are only two exceptions to this rule. The first is Amelia Earhart, the renowned aviator who disappeared in 1937 during an attempt to circumnavigate the globe. She and her navigator Fred Noonan were near the end of their journey, en route from New Zealand to the little island of Howland in the South Pacific when radio contact was lost. No trace of them was ever found, despite the largest and most extensive ocean search in history.

Earhart reappeared in *The Edge of Midnight* as "Amy Everling," a freelance pilot and crop duster who now works the farms outside of Central City. Though she has the same questions as other members of the Few, she has chosen not to pursue them to their troubling ends, but instead retreated into her love of flying, which remains undimmed. She associates primarily with the farm hands from the various combines where she works, and has no wish to chat with outsiders.

The second exception is Glenn Miller, the famous bandleader who helped define the musical scene of the early 1940s. Miller's hits like "Tuxedo Junction" and "In The Mood" became a staple of big-band swing, and ensured his status among the giants of that era. He joined the Army in late 1942, founding the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Band in order to entertain U.S. troops overseas. In the late fall of 1944, the band was scheduled to take a six-week tour of Europe, to be stationed in the recently liberated city of Paris. Miller decided to leave ahead of the others, in order to make proper arrangements for their arrival. On December 15, his plane took off from England... and disappeared somewhere en route.

Miller resurfaced in New Eden as "Arlen Eaton," an orchestral promoter whose bands command the spotlight at the city's most exclusive nightclubs. Though he doesn't perform himself, he acts as a mentor to aspiring musicians, dedicating himself to ensuring their success. He has regular dealings with New Eden's various movers and shakers (including several underworld figures and a fair number of warlocks) which helps him to quietly probe areas that interest him. More about Eaton can be found in the New Eden section starting on page 81.

No one who disappeared after July 16, 1945 — famous or otherwise — can be found in *The Edge of Midnight*. Flight 19 had some other final resting place, and Jimmy Hoffa is still part of whatever real world foundation into which he was poured.

CHAPTER NINE: THE WHOLE DAMN MESS

THE GREAT WHATSIT

Although precious few realize it, the circumstances surrounding the shadow world's creation left enough evidence behind that bold (or desperate) characters might possibly piece them together. A few powerful men — warlocks and others — possess some notion of the truth, and have quietly worked (for years in some cases) to find the answers and reap the supposed benefits. Those presuming to follow in their footsteps — either to undermine their efforts or beat them to the punch — will rapidly make some very nasty enemies. GMs are welcome to flesh out the details as they wish; suggestions can be found elsewhere in this book (especially in Chapter Eight and in “the Few” section on page 138), and in future *Edge of Midnight* supplements.

Obviously, the manner and method of revealing this truth is entirely up to the GM, but regardless of how it happens, it should not come easily. The knowledge of this universe's true origins will have a devastating effect on the PCs and the way they view the world. Clues and hints can be dropped across numerous scenarios, building slowly and inevitably as the characters concentrate on more immediate goals. The discovery of a single solid piece of evidence as to who they are and where they come from can be the climax to an entire campaign, and the search for a final definitive answer should serve as the grand finale to any *Edge of Midnight* story arc you have planned.

How you arrive at such a climax depends on your players and the sort of campaign you intend to run. The notion of a huge, overriding conspiracy — of shadowy figures (warlocks, perhaps) who know the truth and seek to hide it from the masses — has a lot of appeal, and can make for a richly satisfying storyline. On the other hand, a less deliberate mystery — something so complex and deeply buried that *no one* has any idea it even exists — can be equally satisfying. In such a scenario, the characters take on the role of trailblazers, slowly assembling clues from a thousand disparate sources. Difficulties arise not because some sinister organization is trying to keep the truth from them, but because the pieces are so disparate and well-hidden that only the most diligent fanatic could ever put them together. Either notion fits in well with the tone of *The Edge of Midnight*, and can make a fine basis for your campaign.

The most important aspect of this storyline, however, is the manner in which you finally reveal it to the characters. At some point, they'll put all the clues together and follow all the threads to their destination... but what will be waiting for them when they get there? Will it be a diary detailing the truth, as seen from the eyes of a madman? Will it be an individual whose memory survived the cross-over, like Victor Walker or Dr. Emile Lanski (detailed on the next few pages)? Will it be a void at the end of the world, a great cliff where the waters of the Columbic and Neptunic spill over into nothingness (with maybe a glimpse of our own Earth on the other side of a great rift)? Maybe it will be a picture of one of the characters in his or her previous life here in the real world, or a careful series of

notes from a member of the Manhattan Project explaining the metaphysical aftereffects of the bomb. The exact nature should depend on your characters, and on what you feel will make the biggest impact.

Whatever it is, it should be stunning, mind-blowing... and yet also strangely ordinary. In *noir*, the truth rarely comes in large neon lights, but rather in mundane and easily dismissed forms: a book, a photo, perhaps an abandoned building that no one has ever seen. To the characters, it will mean everything: astonishing proof that their world didn't exist before about ten years ago. But to anyone else, it will just be an object like billions of others in the world. Its meaning will be utterly lost on anyone who lacks the context to properly interpolate it. To the PCs, it's messianic. To the rest of the world, it's just junk.

In this sense, the warlocks who created the White Light are ideal fulcrums to pull the characters through a long journey to the truth. The nine men who orchestrated the Manhattan Project left a deep impression on the psyche of the shadow world, and a PC-driven search for their identities can easily open up disturbing new possibilities as to its real nature. And yet, those nine men just don't exist here. They remained in the real world — living out their lives as history dictated — and their forms never crossed over to the other side. Only their memory lingers, trapped in the collective subconscious of the shadow world's populace. Copious artifacts and talismans can provide more tangible evidence, however: papers from Los Alamos, pictures of the figures involved, maybe stock film footage of the bomb tests or secret memos from General Leslie Groves (the military director of the Manhattan Project). The more the characters search, the more common such objects will appear, until they finally find the nugget that pieces it all together. There will be no warlocks, however. At the end of the day, characters who attempt to track them will literally be chasing phantoms. The path may lead to full disclosure, but the men themselves are nowhere to be found. That sense of the ephemeral should be a key component to any final revelation you have in store for your players.

So what happens when they learn horrifying truth? What can they do when they finally pull back the curtain and see the Great and Powerful Oz as he truly is? Frankly, not much. There's no real way to escape the void (though the GM could certainly invent one if he chose), and even if they found some means of unmaking the shadow world, what good would it do? Should they return its residents to the unthinking Limbo in which they were trapped? Is nihilism really an alternative to a tangible reality, no matter how compromised or corrupt? Remaking the world in a more positive form should be completely beyond the characters' grasp — even if they possessed the means, what positive event in real life could match the profound physical, metaphysical, and emotional shock of the atomic bomb? — and the notion of unmaking it should be well nigh unthinkable. Any revelation the party experiences should be accompanied by the sober realization that they can do nothing to change it; that the world will remain as it is no matter what they do.

REAL WORLD ELEMENTS AND THE FOG OF THE PAST

When the scientists at Los Alamos detonated the nuclear bomb, it had a metaphysical “transfer” effect, which created the world of *The Edge of Midnight*. In the process, a lot of the institutions and cultural practices of our universe were transferred over in a sort of “flash negative:” a mirror-like distortion of the real world. The stronger and more ingrained the institution, the less distorted it became in *The Edge of Midnight*. Weaker and less well-established notions became warped and fractured, until the smallest and most inconsequential details simply disappeared.

Manifestations can be charted on a roughly linear scale. On one end lie the most deeply entrenched entities: religious institutions, articles of faith, and the like. The Catholic Church, for example, exists more or less exactly as it does in our universe, complete with its traditions, titles, and by-laws intact (though obviously, it lacks papal oversight, since Rome doesn’t exist; more on that below).

Further down the scale, you find governmental principles, technological developments, and deeply embedded pastimes such as baseball. The core of these elements exist unchanged, but the surface details have shifted somewhat. Baseball is still popular, but the teams (and certain rules) are different, and the U.C.’s government, while based on the same principles as those of the United States, manifests in a parliamentary system rather than balancing branches keeping each other in check.

Below that, the distortions become more and more extreme: neighborhoods bear the residual zeitgeist of the originals, but landmarks and other locales have shifted or vanished; artistic movements exist, but the artists express those movements in radically different ways; and so on. On the furthest end of the scale, the smallest and most trivial parts of our world simply don’t exist: particular brands of candy bars, for example (though candy bars in general are still around) or passing fads like goldfish eating.

As a rule of thumb, when bringing elements into *The Edge of Midnight*, consider where they might fall on this scale and what form they will take. Generally speaking, expediency is the key. If it’s fun and adds a new dimension to the game, don’t worry about the hows and whys of its existence. It simply appeared when the shadow world was created.

The key difference, as with everything else in *The Edge of Midnight*, is history. The fog which clouds most people’s memories of the past also clouds the roots of culture and other established institutions, leaving them cut off from the events which shaped them into their present form. They simply exist unquestioned, their development reduced to “traditions” which no one thinks to analyze or explore. People will quote Shakespeare without realizing its source, or eat Chinese food without thinking about its origins (indeed, “Chinese food” is usually referred to as “egg rolls” or “exotic cuisine” rather than by its formal term). The U.C. doesn’t have an Independence Day or similar holiday (though they celebrate the end of the war every July 16, and Christmas and Halloween, along with other religious-based observances, remain intact). The Bible is unchanged, as is the Torah, the Koran, and other key theological texts, but those in *The Edge of Midnight* universe have no context for their references. Israel and Egypt, for example, are ephemeral “ancient kingdoms,” as difficult to place to the average reader as Sodom and Gomorra or the Tower of Babel.

Finally, the notion of immigration, with its transplantation and assimilation of different cultures, suffers from the same disconnect as the rest of the world. While the U.C. contains many immigrant communities (mostly second or third generation), memories of their native countries are hazy and indistinct, relying on half-remembered traditions and distant childhood memories. While immigrants often exude a specific cultural identity, they rarely realize exactly where it comes from. Many of them were refugees from the war, or else escaped persecution from home (at least they *believe* they escaped persecution from home) and have no wish to return to their native land. See page 98 for more information.

On the other hand, the revelation might strengthen the PCs in ways they could never have imagined. Now that they know where they stand from a cosmic viewpoint, they can proceed with their eyes open, and act with certainty where once there was only guesswork. The shadow world is no less valuable despite its status as a cosmic hiccup, and the people who live within it are no less deserving of a better shake. Whether or not the PCs can change the whole thing is irrelevant; they can still do what the Few have always done. A few small gestures here and there, a few lost souls saved... if they can do it often enough, it begins to add up. While the final revelation about the world’s existence is intended as the grand finale to an *Edge of Midnight* campaign, it’s certainly possible to run subsequent

scenarios, where the PCs continue with their mission: once nebulous, now concrete. The world is what they make of it... and their newfound resolve may give them the strength to help make it better.

Of course, the GM could always choose to deny his players the truth in perpetuity: to withhold the final revelation of the world’s existence no matter what the characters do. Such a decision would certainly be in keeping with *noir*, and could strengthen the game’s overall mood and texture. After all, many *noir* protagonists write their own truth, without any help from an uncaring universe. If the PCs never find out what’s going on, they can still effect change, and their efforts can still make a difference.

CHAPTER NINE: THE WHOLE DAMN MESS

SECRETS AND LIES: OTHER EXPLANATIONS FOR THE WORLD'S EXISTENCE

The following is a brief list of alternate explanations for the *Edge of Midnight's* existence. They are presented for GMs who don't wish to use the canonical explanation detailed on the previous pages.

LAST EXIT BEFORE HELL

Money can buy you a lot of things. It can buy loyalty, power, silence, or even death. For Victor Walker, however, it could not buy him the one thing he wanted — immortality. A wealthy industrialist, Walker had built an empire on seizing any opportunity that presented itself, rising from relative poverty and obscurity to command a company of global influence. A greedy and devious man, Walker gained his wealth and power through a combination of blackmail, murder, and betrayal. Unafraid of who he had to destroy to further his ambitions, he ultimately rose high above his more scrupulous competitors. As time wore on, Walker became older, and his dreams became plagued with the torments he had inflicted upon others — torments that were gleefully inflicted upon him by the twisted phantoms of those he had crushed. With each passing winter, Walker's dreams grew worse until he feared sleep as he feared nothing else. In 1942, he was diagnosed with cancer. The doctors thought that he would survive only a few months, though his determination to beat the disease would defy those gloomy predictions. When Walker learned of his steady but inevitable march towards death, he felt fear clawing at his belly. Behind the doctor's shoulder, he could almost see the shadows twist into smiling ghosts. Walker swore then that he would do all he could to cheat death: to snatch his soul from the perdition to which it seemed condemned. Knowing that it was too late for him to repent, he set about contacting scientists and religious scholars. He was honest and forthright with them, stating flatly that he was dying and damned, and that he would do anything for a means by which he could be kept alive. Everyone simply shook their head sadly and walked away, claiming that his wishes were simply impossible, or that the industrialist was insane.

As the months passed, Walker grew desperate. He cast his net far and wide, consulting with scientists dismissed as lunatics by the establishment, and occultists who were shunned even by their fellows. His rivals saw him losing his grip on sanity and circled like sharks. Eventually, in the dying days of 1944, he found what he hoped was a solution. His team constructed a machine in a secret desert complex in Arizona that would allow him to cheat death forever. An unholy blend of science and occult ritual went into the creation of the machine and, on the 14th of December, 1944, Walker was rushed into

its confines after collapsing on the veranda of his Beverly Hills mansion. The machine was activated at the stroke of midnight as the last traces of life bled from the callous magnate.

Unfortunately, one of his rivals had bribed the technicians to perpetrate an all-but-unnoticeable piece of sabotage. The machine backfired on activation, resulting in an explosion that tore through the complex with unprecedented fury, reducing the entire building and its inhabitants to ash. Walker was reported missing the next day, and was never heard from again. Everyone assumed that he was dead.

The assumption was not entirely wrong. Neither was it entirely correct. Walker's spirit was torn from his body by the energies inadvertently unleashed by his competitor's sabotage and cast into a cold and icy void. As he regained consciousness, this formless nowhere took on aspects of Walker's subconscious fears and superstitions, making Walker and all within it tangible and real. Over the next few days, more and more people began to appear on the streets beside Walker: frozen and insensible, culled from the spirits of the dead who had always hovered around his cursed soul. Slowly but surely, the Commonwealth took shape — a twisted and dark reflection of the old man's fears and desires. As the world came into focus, and time began to move, a tram hit Walker, who was standing in the middle of a street in Gateway. Clinging tenaciously to life, he was rushed to the hospital. He survives there to this day, lost in a coma and furious at the fate which spared his life but left him unable to so much as lift a finger.

In Walker's Commonwealth, the population is drawn from the ranks of the dead — Limbo-bound souls who would otherwise be going on to whatever eternal reward awaited them. Here, one man's hubris has interrupted the order of the cosmos. Can his will be thwarted, and the world that subsists on his corruption be brought to an end? And if so, how?

LAND OF DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

Throughout time, the dreams of the living world have had a profound impact on reality in a dimension that has never been able to entirely disentangle itself from Earth. This world, far from a chaotic and sweeping maelstrom of undefined images, maintains a solid and tangible air of reality for the most part, one influenced by the dreams of Earth. When an event is great enough to impact the collective consciousness of humanity, this dimension goes through an upheaval, altering radically at the impetus of the unaware sleeping masses. This world of dreams resembles Earth, but it is different. Things can be real in the dream world that are not real on Earth — things such as gaunts and magic, expressions of the anxieties and fears that drive the world after the end of World War II. Its physical reality is based on the unseen forces that shape the universe they feed on.

The dream world appears as an exaggerated version of the real world: patchy and irregular. In it, streets are narrower and darker. Lights burn brighter, casting much darker shadows. The growing mistrust and suspicion of the post-war world fuel a reflected growth in cynicism and corruption in the dream

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world, which physically changed to reflect this. The weather became more overcast, the people more insular, and strangers took on more surly and untrustworthy aspects.

Each citizen of the Commonwealth is a subconscious extension of a dreaming person in the real world. The two are never aware of one another, and go about their businesses in their relative home dimensions none the wiser. The inhabitants live, work, sin, and die just as they would in the real world without any noticeable impact beyond the fact that, if they die first, their real world counterpart will no longer be able to remember any dreams. Of course, if the real world version dies first, the dream doppelganger slowly fades away until even his friends do not remember him. The only exceptions to this rule are the Few. They are not of the dream world — rather, they are people like you or I who accidentally took a wrong turn or woke up on the wrong side of bed. The reality of the Commonwealth is strong, however, and almost instantly asserts itself on any interlopers, convincing them that they have been there just as long as any other inhabitant. Nonetheless, the truth of their lives sometimes surfaces in their dreams: a truth strong enough to make them question their surroundings.

The Commonwealth feeds on the fears, doubts, and small paranoia of the waking world, growing darker by the day. Whenever good is done, however, the dream world takes notice of the brief flickering spark of right winning out over wrong, and passes it on to those sleepers who drive the existence of the Commonwealth itself, making it a slightly but tangibly better place. Usually, this manifests as a feeling of safety, or simply better weather. Occasionally, buildings may appear further apart or less threatening, even though the regular citizens of the Commonwealth never notice. If, on the other hand, crime runs rampant, political corruption maintains a stranglehold on a city, or an innocent person gets killed, the city becomes a more dangerous and threatening place as the anxieties of the waking population are silently enforced. This danger carries on into the real world, since when the Commonwealth becomes a dark and forbidding place, people find themselves less able to trust those they meet in their waking lives.

One possible difference between this shadow world and other versions of *The Edge of Midnight* universe is that the potential exists for the player characters to break free of it and return to the real world... if they can only remember who they once were. In this shadow world, the potential exists for a return to reality — at least for some.

QUANTUM STUMBLE

At some point in the future of our Earth — the dawn of the 25th century, to be precise — scientists working under the auspices of the Terran Government accidentally discovered the secret of time travel while working on a more efficient method of nuclear fusion. An explosion in the laboratory harnessed energies they were at the time unfamiliar with, propelling them five days into the future. To the outside world, they appeared to have perished in a terrible accident, only to re-appear five days later at the scene of their deaths. To the scientists, not a second had passed. Further experimentation and recordings from the laboratory sensors yielded more stable results, re-



sults that could be controlled. Test subjects were sent forward in time, arriving at the preordained marks right on schedule. Initially, there appeared to be no side effects, and the discovery of time travel was hailed as the greatest triumph in the history of the world.

Then, a few months later, assassins working for opponents of their work attempted to kill one of the scientists, Dr. Emile Lanski. Without thinking, Dr. Lanski threw up his hands, and the bullets simply stopped in midair. The vehicle his would-be murderers were driving also shuddered to a halt where it flew, and spiraled slowly down to ground level. Not even stopping to report the attempted murder to the police, Lanski immediately ran back to his colleagues to tell them what happened. They ran every test known to man on him; all came up blank. The only theory that five weeks of extensive testing could support was that Lanski just *knew* how to alter and disperse fields of kinetic energy. They soon discovered that, with a little preparation, anyone who had traveled through time had similar abilities — they could bend the laws of physics at will. While most of the project scientists were excited about the potential applications of such powers, Lanski feared that this knowledge would plunge the world into an age of war unseen for centuries. He resolved to stop this from happening, and determined to use the prototype time machine in the laboratory one last time, to do something it had never done before — to send him *back* in time and stop the discovery of time travel itself.

Lanski had the best of intentions, and they led him straight to Hell.

CHAPTER NINE: THE WHOLE DAMN MESS

THE LOST PAST

In general, we strongly recommend that players not be privy to the information in this section; it diminishes the power of the revelation when and if the GM decides to show them behind the curtain. In some cases, however, the GM might choose to share the world's true nature with his players before the game begins in order to enhance his particular style of play. If this is the case with your campaign, you might want to ask the players to design the origins of their characters *before* the coming of the White Light — who they were, what they did, and where they came from. Such a “lost past” can enhance the player's understanding of his or her character, and perhaps add a new sense of depth during play.

Assuming you are going with the canonical back-story for the world, then the characters all began life on Earth, holding jobs and positions in our own world before “slipping away” into the void. The PC might have been fighting in the war, or held a civilian position in some (relatively) peaceful country. He may have been a partisan in Europe, a U.S. factory worker, or an Asian villager under the thumb of the Japanese. He might have been a singer, or a clerk in some quiet little government building. As members of the Few, the PCs must have vanished from the “real world” sometime between the late 30s and July 16, 1945 (with all the world a battlefield, it's not hard to make them slip away). Other than that, the players are free to develop the background as they see fit.

In essence, the player will be creating two characters: the one who existed before slipping into the void, and the one who emerged afterwards in *The Edge of Midnight* universe. For most PCs, the differences should be fairly subtle; those who were lost only recently suffered much less “identity distortion” than others, and thus hold jobs and positions eerily similar to those they maintained on Earth. The links between the first and second parts of a character's life should be moderately strong, making the differences all the more pronounced and leading to the same sense of weird distortion exhibited by the rest of the shadow world.

Details of the character's disappearance can be important as well, and the player should be encouraged to flesh them out. Did the PC stumble across a rift in some lonely place or simply fade away? Was he missed when he was gone? Perhaps he recalls the incident in his dreams, or as horrifying, half-remembered memories that he can't quite place. Perhaps it feeds his demons in his current incarnation, leading him to acts of violence or worse. Or perhaps he doesn't remember it at all, mercifully spared the traces of his transition. Whatever its particulars, it can go a long way toward explaining who the character is and how he found himself in the shadow world.

GMs using alternate explanations for their campaign's back-story can use this method as well. The specifics may change slightly depending on the details you use, but the sense of transition — and the loss of former identity — will most likely remain the same. In addition, GMs who don't initially reveal the back-story to the players might allow them to develop a “lost past” for their characters later, once they finally uncover the mystery. That would give the revelation an additional punch, while allowing the players to bring a heretofore unheard-of side of their characters to life.

Finally, the GM might wish to develop his own lost past for the player characters: fleshing out a background and then allowing them to discover the details as they would any other mystery. It diminishes the players' control over their characters (or at least their characters' origins), but if handled properly, can become a rewarding part of the campaign as the newly cognizant characters slowly piece together the clues of their former existence.

He crept into the laboratory late at night and set the coordinates on the machine, overriding every safeguard that he had built in order to travel backwards in time — a feat that had never before been attempted, and one for which there was no theoretical basis. Alarms sounded across the compound where the machine was held, and guards were soon battering at the door as Dr. Lanski activated the field and stepped into the machine itself. By the time they broke the door down, he was gone, vanishing in a power surge that blew fuses across half of North America.

When Lanski opened his eyes, he knew that something had gone disastrously wrong. He appeared back in the laboratory just as the fusion reactor exploded, trapped like a fly in amber as he watched reality distort around himself. The wave of energy hit Lanski just as he emerged from the temporal field, hurling him randomly throughout space and time. He appeared in a thousand places at once, not knowing what he did or said as he wandered the Earth for an age and a second. By the time he regained his senses, Lanski had appeared in America — or

at least, what seemed like America — shortly after the end of the Second World War. To the Doctor's mounting horror, he realized that his meddling in time had shattered the realities and history of Earth, and warped it into something *else*. It had become a world shaped by dark and fearful influences, a world in which the powers he and his colleagues had exhibited were an accepted fact of life (though a reviled and mistrusted one). In Lanski's Commonwealth, the shadow world has become the real world, albeit a real world with fundamental changes. Magic is the result of Lanski's innate knowledge of how to manipulate the laws of physics — infused into the fabric of history through his scientific meddling — and the Commonwealth, as the altered version of the area Lanski traveled from, is the most solid part of the shadow world. Across the rest of the globe, storms rage as what once was is slowly erased, replaced by a new reality wrought by science gone mad. And in a small, dilapidated apartment in Central City, Dr. Lanski works day and night, trying to remember how to rebuild the time machine and put right what he has done.

BEYOND THE STARS

(With acknowledgements to
Alex Proyas and David S. Goyer)

There are forces at work in the cosmos which defy human comprehension. Races entirely beyond the ken of man exist out in the cold, dark reaches of the universe, living their own lives, dreaming their own dreams, and surviving in their own ways oblivious to the existence of our small blue-green rock. Such was the case until one race of ancient beings, far removed from humanity's stage of evolution, discovered our world. For centuries, they watched Earth, unsure of what to make of it. They made observations, recorded their thoughts, and passed unseen among the population. After an extensive study, they concluded that they could not fully understand the humans in the volatile, changing planet which spawned them. They would have to be placed in a more stable environment in order to be properly studied. Possessing neither form nor substance, these strange beings periodically abducted "test samples," keeping them frozen in suspended animation until they had enough to create a viable population for their great experiment. Unexplained disappearances on Earth increased, but not so much or so regularly that the unsuspecting masses of humanity noticed the aliens' presence. Over millennia, they accrued a vast selection of differing types of people. Some were altered to suit their needs, while others were left alone; the final subjects were retrieved during World War II, when the number of missing on the planet increased exponentially.

In the dark reaches of space, the aliens created their research station — a floating planetoid far beyond the reach of any sun, fully enclosed and conditioned to be a suitable habitat for humans. Rewriting many of their subjects' memories, the aliens built a new nation within their vast "snow globe," a mirror image of a society like that the aliens last observed

on Earth. Thus the Commonwealth was created. Robbed of any desire to leave the country, most of the subjects continued to live the sort of lives they may have lived on Earth, though the aliens arbitrarily assigned them to any social position that would best suit their experiment.

They soon found that some of their altered specimens were capable of tapping into the source of the aliens' power, altering the laws of physics in a more subdued and amateurish version of their own abilities. They observed with interest: given the opportunity, humans would use these powers with the flimsiest excuses, bringing their abilities to bear solely for personal gain. Of course, the humans' use of these powers increased the drain on the aliens' abilities, forcing them to periodically feed on a human host for sustenance. An alien requires two weeks to feed entirely from a human host, draining them of their original spirit and transforming them into a gaunt. The feeding process leaves a permanent mark on the new gaunt, resulting in their constant draining of energy from the surrounding environment. This too became a part of the experiment, allowing the aliens to observe how humans reacted to "monstrous" beings within their ranks.

Their experiment proceeded as predicted for almost two years before they noticed the anomaly — some of the subjects demonstrated an awareness that something was wrong, even attempting to leave the Commonwealth. This would not do, and the aliens put a great deal of effort into prohibiting their departure while making it appear as coincidence. This did nothing to assuage the rogue subjects' doubts; if anything, it made them even more convinced that something was deeply wrong with the situation. Thus, the Few were born, giving their alien overseers no end of trouble.

Unable to stop their doubt-ridden test subjects from asking the kind of questions that might ruin the entire experiment, the aliens resolved to physically possess some members of the Few and wipe their memories. The first attempt was a success, but they found that even that did not deter them. So the aliens began possessing and aiding those who had reason to hate the Few, hoping to wipe them out without anyone becoming suspicious. Some attempts were successful, but some were not, and those failures shocked the aliens. Particularly galling were those incidents where the Few were able to kill their possessed persecutors: the aliens had no understanding of death, and the experience of watching one of their own being killed within a possessed host sent a wave of hate, fear, and fury throughout the entire alien population. These emotions were foreign to the aliens, but they were powerful and dangerous.

Now, as the captors of the Commonwealth are slowly corrupted in mind and spirit, they venture further and further into the minds of their subjects. With each move they make against the Few, the world becomes a little bit more hateful and dark... a darkness which the Few can counter with their small acts of redemption. It's an uphill battle, however, and the more the twisted experiment continues, the more the aliens' rage and hatred corrupts the Commonwealth. Perhaps they could be made to understand what they are doing, if only someone knew they were there... or how to reach them.



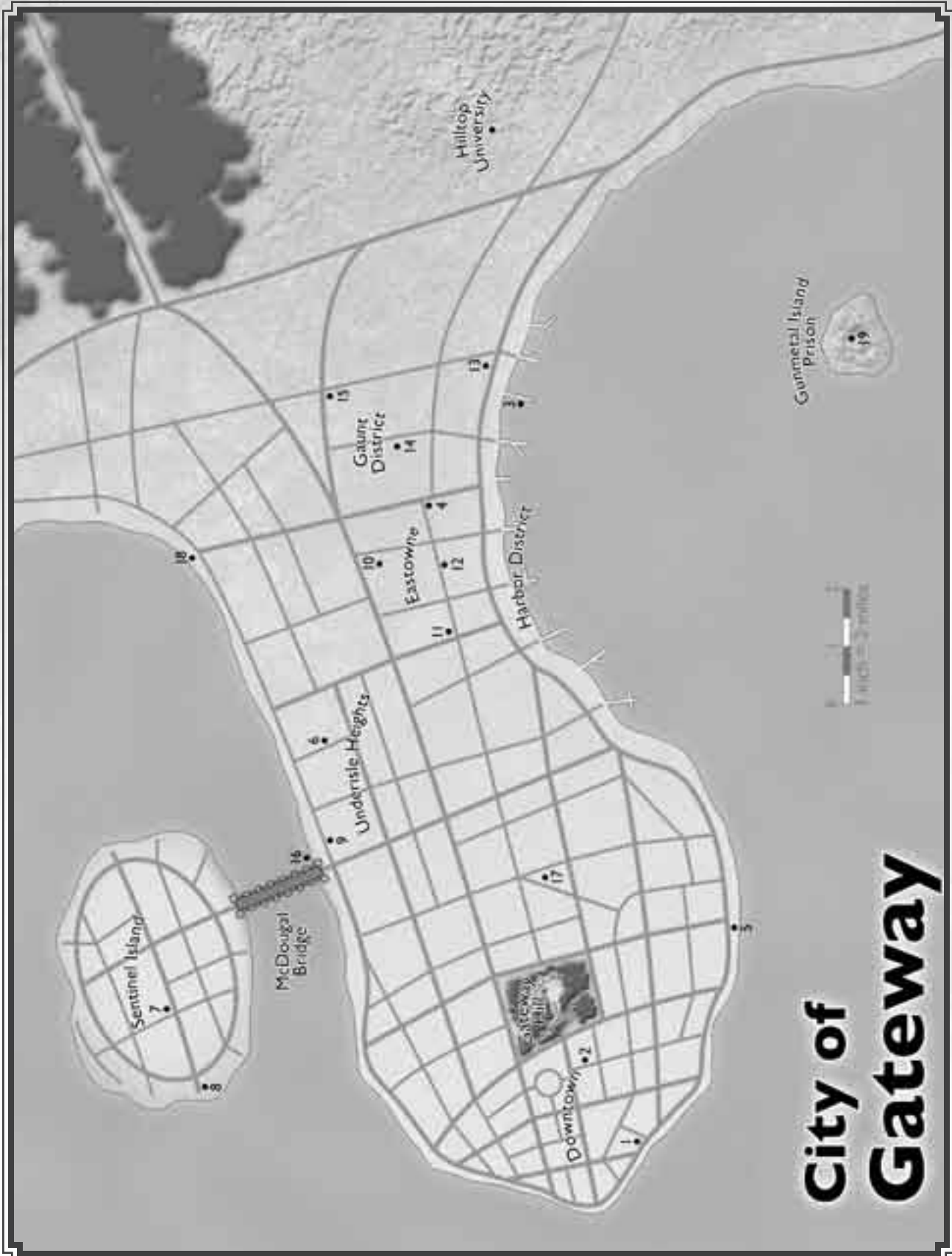
APPENDIX ONE GATEWAY



™The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.}

- Carl Sandburg,
™Fog}





APPENDIX ONE: GATEWAY

OVERVIEW

Of all the cities in the U.C., none exemplifies its character as much as Gateway. A massive port on the coast of the great Columbic Ocean, it holds an eclectic mix of the mundane and the exotic, the trivial and the profound. More detectives call it home than any other city, and its efficient government sits at odds with a most unique criminal underground. The name evokes images of fog-covered hills, romantic interludes, and mysterious influence from foreign shores. The reality, of course, is a little bit different...

This appendix serves as a campaign setting for your *Edge of Midnight* game. It contains a complete overview of Gateway, a description of important locations and NPCs, and a long list of campaign hooks and scenario ideas, as well as a detailed map of the city. The first section covers it in general terms, including its various institutions and overall atmosphere. The second section details six specific neighborhoods in the city, each suitable for scenarios and campaigns of any sort. The third section contains stats and backgrounds for nine NPCs, who can serve as allies or adversaries to your party. Finally, we've included a list of campaign ideas, as well as some quick scenario hooks designed to get your group rolling with a minimum of fuss.

The rest of the U.C. looks upon Gateway as a distant outpost — the furthest point one can go without leaving the country entirely. It lies on a great peninsula, stretching east from the tip and spreading slowly inland. A large bay to the south provides a natural harbor, while the rocky coastline to the north makes for a picturesque drive through the city's famous "crackerbox houses." The harbor waters are cold, and the calm surface hides nasty riptides that can pull a swimmer out to sea. The area is full of hills, which combine with the coastal mist to create heavy fog. Tourists call the fog romantic; those who know better call it smothering, a muffled blanket that turns the streets and neighborhoods into grasping silhouettes.

The city prides itself on its diversity, and from its neighborhoods pours an eclectic mix of cultures and nationalities. Gateway boasts a particularly large Asian (or "Golden") population, concentrated in its famous borough of Eastowne and several other enclaves throughout the city. Jews and other religious minorities are spread along the south shore, along with Gateway's world-class learning institution, Hilltop University. Even the city's gaunts often find opportunities here that they wouldn't anywhere else. Much of this openness comes from Gateway's status as a trade port. From its harbors, ships arrive from across the sea, carrying all manner of cargo for trade with the U.C. Foreign and exotic influences can be seen on every street corner, leading to a sense of worldliness unparalleled elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

Naturally, with all this diversity comes a great deal of friction. Every subset and interest group pushes against every other, hungry for jobs, influence, and territory. This is particularly prevalent among the working class, as scarce employment breeds fierce competition for any available opportunities. The mayor stresses a policy of inclusion and accommodation,

which emboldens the denizens to push harder than they should. The sheer number of divergent viewpoints serves as a balancing factor, keeping Gateway from deteriorating into anarchy as Terminus has done. The governing council is well aware, however, that a poor policy decision might tear the city apart, as the divergent factions rip each other to pieces.

Politics in Gateway is a tap dance through razor wire: an endless effort to maintain control without appearing draconian. Elected officials quickly learn to disappear into the background, to manage things from behind closed doors, and to keep the public happy without providing a target. Bribery is the order of the day, as City Hall uses civic funds to buy off potential problems. Numerous dubious characters thrive on public monies, using dummy programs to hide their fingers in the pie. The council has even taken to paying off criminals, ensuring that the local mobs limit their activities and giving an impression of being tough on law-breakers. Through this, it quietly keeps a handle on the seething chaos, and prevents the city from turning against itself.

On the other hand, when the council needs to display its authority, it prefers very public spectacles. Major arrests, splashy public works projects... anything designed to make a big impression draws politicians like flies. The most astute of them time such events to coincide with unrest, combining a velvet touch with an iron jab to ensure the city knows who's in charge. By carefully spacing them, they project confidence and strength without letting on how chaotic the situation can be.

Sorcery pervades Gateway as in no other city, with the possible exception of Terminus. Its intellectual sophistication, coupled with reasonably tolerant local laws, led to a rapid expansion in warlock activity. The problem was particularly bad among the police, as many cops surreptitiously turned to magic in the hopes of gaining an advantage over their quarry. It became so widespread that the city had no choice but to legitimize it with the creation of the first crystal ball squad (see page 110). Such tacit acknowledgement encourages the more daring warlocks to operate openly, which both soothes public fears (by making people accustomed to displays of magic) and exacerbates them (by reminding them how much damage it can cause). Most residents have grudgingly accepted warlocks as a fact of life... though punishment for those who use magic to commit other crimes is severe.

The city also has one of the highest concentrations of private investigators in the country. Unlike Terminus (where lone operatives are chewed up and spat out), Gateway has enough civic authority to protect P.I.s, while its fractious nature ensures a constant need for them. Detectives work missing persons' cases, assist police inquiries, and act as bodyguards for wealthy patrons. Some become personal retainers for the rich or influential, performing investigations at the behest of a single employer. Most hold stubbornly to their independence, however: serving as their own boss and taking only what cases they wish. A series of rickety storefronts in the Underisle Heights district holds a P.I. office on every corner, earning the neighborhood the nickname "Snoop's Row." There's even been talk of unionizing, though the iconoclastic nature of most investigators will likely prevent that from ever happening.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

CRIME

Crime in Gateway is as prevalent as it is in any other city. The harbor provides a constant influx of goods to be stolen, smuggled, or sunk, and the populace is ready and willing to engage in all manner of illicit activities. The city's economic prosperity has helped mitigate the worst of it, but a large portion of that money invariably ends up in the hands of the local crime lords.

Two primary factions define the Gateway underworld. The Patterson brothers are the largest and most influential crew, though they don't dominate the city the way their counterparts elsewhere do. The brothers, William and Barnard, are an increasingly rare anomaly in the U.C.'s underworld: powerful bosses who employ neither gaunts nor warlocks. They have the unnerving ability to outthink their rivals, anticipating trouble and moving to neutralize it before it comes to fruition. Their minions are smart and well motivated, their methods unorthodox in the extreme. Most up-and-comers make the mistake of underestimating them; their empire is based mainly on passive crimes like prostitution and drug-running, and rare is the Patterson minion who resorts to violence during a crime.

All of it is carefully coordinated by the brothers. They display a façade of harmless corruption, waiting for their enemies to show signs of weakness. When they strike, it's fast, quiet, and utterly devastating — staccato bursts of violence followed by prolonged quiet. Lengthy gang wars never take place with the Pattersons; they end things too completely to lead to bloody conflicts. They solidified their status in Gateway shortly after the end of the war, and show no signs of relinquishing it soon.

Their main competition is a collection of street gangs known collectively as the Tongs, who operate out of the Golden community of Eastowne. The Tongs prey mainly on their fellow Golden, concentrating on gambling parlors and opium dens. Their huge success and recent expansion of operations has brought them into direct competition with the Pattersons, and while open warfare has not yet broken out, tensions between the two factions rise by the day.

The Tongs themselves number about a dozen, loosely controlled by a Dynasty of ruling bosses. They meet semi-regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern and ensure that disputes between them are resolved without bloodshed. They enforce their will with much more violence than the Pattersons, and the local populace lives in open fear of Tong reprisals. Each Tong controls a particular territory (usually limited to few neighborhoods) and trusts the greater collective to handle any external problems. The system has worked well so far, but sooner or later, someone will get ambitious enough to strike out against another Tong and internal warfare could ensue.

Though they lack the numbers of the Patterson gang, the Tongs do have a few advantages over their better-established rivals. The number of new gaunts in Eastowne has risen in the past few years, as an unusual percentage of lifelong residents succumb to gauntism's terrible touch. Many of these new gaunts have joined the Tongs, clinging to the trappings of

Golden culture to help adjust to their condition. Some younger Tongs feature terrifying gaunt members (and a few leaders), a fact which has enraged criminals from the nearby gaunt slums. Leatherbacks outside of Eastowne consider such "turncoats" traitors to their kind and blame the Tongs for "corrupting" those who should be running with them.

The Tongs also utilize a large number of warlocks, who benefit from Eastowne's clandestine nature and back-alley libraries (see page 178). Though they don't get along with the organization's gaunts (no individual Tongs have both leatherbacks and warlocks in their midst), common cultural trappings give them at least a modicum of loyalty, and help avoid open bloodshed. Strangely enough, there are very few prominent warlocks in the rest of the Gateway criminal community. The lax enforcement of the Anti-Sorcery Act has let them play a more prominent role in society, and the crystal ball squad has done an admirable job of tracking down the worst offenders. Some warlocks still ply their trade among the underworld, but outside of the Tongs, they're limited to mid-level operations at best.

Straight gaunt criminals (i.e., those outside of Eastowne) lack the organization to take on either the Tongs or the Patterson brothers, though a few aspiring leaders have the chance to cause trouble. With gambling and racketeering controlled by the larger crews, the gaunts turn to more brutal crimes. Armed robberies, hijackings, and murders for hire are dominated by the leatherbacks, whose underworld careers are as nasty as their demeanors. Thankfully, their activities have limited returns, keeping their influence in check. But one particular gaunt gang, the 5th Street Wreckers, recently completed a stint of spectacular bank robberies, which they hope will buy guns and clout enough to make the larger mobs sweat.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Gateway's most notable contribution to law enforcement was the creation of the world's first crystal ball squad — deputizing warlocks to hunt down their own. The experiment proved so successful that other cities soon followed suit, and the result brought the Gateway police some much-needed respect. They have their fingers deep in City Hall, keeping tabs on who holds the purse strings and making sure the department has enough funds to fulfill its duties. Of course, "fulfilling its duties" often translates to payoffs, kickbacks, and salary padding, but in the cops' minds, they've earned such perks. The department's leadership isn't above blackmailing civic officials whom they catch *en flagrante*, ensuring that the money keeps rolling in.

The relative stability of Gateway's underworld leads the police to adopt a "do as little as possible" philosophy. Some criminals (notably the Patterson brothers) have a knack for manipulating the police into eliminating their rivals, ironically leading to an increase in violence as they move to fill in the gap. The police have learned through bitter experience that doing the right thing often makes matters worse. Instead, they take a stabilizing approach, keeping the various factions at each others' throats and ensuring that no one crew gains too

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much influence. Small arrests are the order of the day, quiet “pruning” designed to maintain the status quo. Spectacular crimes provoke a swift response, while quieter incidents often pass without notice.

Some precincts (like the infamous “Frying Pan” detailed on page 174) can’t afford to take such a passive approach. They fight tooth and nail to hold lawbreakers in check, never dropping their guard for an instant. Most, however, settle into a pattern of kickbacks and saber rattling, content to leave “reliable” criminals in place while rooting out the flashy or the stupid. As a result, Gateway PD gives the appearance of extreme efficiency while lining their own pockets and making sure the underworld stays within acceptable limits.

The police have another trump card in the form of Gunmetal Island Prison, one of the most notorious penitentiaries in the Commonwealth. It holds killers and crime lords from all over the nation, brought in at the behest of other cities (often on the heels of a large honorarium to the Gateway coffers). The police have no qualms about throwing local offenders in with the hard-core gladiators, and many a criminal has turned state’s evidence rather than risk life in Gunmetal. See page 184 for more on the prison.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Gateway locations are divided up by neighborhood, and include descriptions of specific locations within each borough. Each location is marked with a number, corresponding to the sigils on the map on page 168.

DOWNTOWN

From the base of Gateway Hill, the towers of downtown look out across the Columbic Ocean like hawks in the chicken coop. As the center of Gateway’s commerce and administration, downtown bustles with important-looking men and women going about city business. At night, it caters to a different clientele: vagrants looking for a place to sleep and muggers seeking easy prey.

The end of the war brought a new boom in the city’s fortunes, and with it, an increased number of new building projects. Construction on most of them has concluded within the last three years, bringing sweeping changes to the Gateway skyline. City Hall still dominates the area, but it is rapidly being dwarfed by the towers of steel and glass surrounding it. Construction on new buildings continues to this day, and the City Council points to the development as a sign of Gateway’s prosperity.

City Hall sits a few blocks back from the shoreline, its simple white edifice speaking to an older era in the city’s history. The salty air grants the venue a colloquial charm, and Mayor Loomis enjoys holding press conferences in front of the building, where the reporters’ questions mix with the cries of the seagulls (“It’s hard to tell one from the other,” he often jokes). Gateway’s City Council has fifteen seats, elected to three-year terms, who all have offices on the premises. In addition, every major civic service, from garbage collection to fire and police services, has offices in the building, making it a beehive of constant bureaucratic activity.

Gateway’s famous trolley car line operates throughout downtown, taking passengers from one end of the district to the other. The line uses underground cables to pull the cars



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up Gateway's hills, with maintenance corridors accessible through the sewer system. Most everyone who has business downtown uses the trolleys, parking their cars and waiting for the line to take them to their destination. Street cars are forbidden from several prominent avenues, leaving them free for the trolleys and foot traffic; in some cases, the trolley is the only way to rapidly access a given area. The line stops operating at sunset, turning these areas into prime feeding ground for purse snatchers and other petty criminals.

Gateway Hill, or just "the Hill" to natives, is the city's geographical epicenter. It's too steep to build large structures upon it, making it a standout among the glass and concrete surrounding it. Downtown spreads out to the west, and civic planners consider it the unofficial border of the city's heart. The top contains an old crumbling watchtower supposedly erected by the original settlers, though little solid information exists. Tourists gather to gaze upon its imposing walls, but the interior is too dilapidated to allow entry. A winding road spirals down from it before terminating at State Street: the only way up the Hill without traveling by foot. State Street leads straight down to the shoreline, providing the watchtower with a view of the ocean despite the skyscrapers which are rapidly overshadowing it. The high line of sight, coupled with the isolated means of getting up and down, makes the tower an attractive meeting place for ne'er-do-wells. They can flee long before any uninvited guests make their way to the top, and the tower's interior makes an ideal hiding place. It's not uncommon for bodies to appear in the ruins come light of day, and Gateway PD has taken to sending a squad car up there every morning before the tourists arrive to check for "unexpected litter."

1) The Gateway City Morgue

Gateway's least popular civic department sits in the basement of its largest hospital, along with the archives and records. It is accessible through a cavernous ramp in the back of the building, large enough for a hearse or ambulance to drive all the way into the examining room if need be. The morgue itself is divided into three sections. The main offices of the coroner and his assistants are close to the central stairs, letting visitors speak to them without having to view the gritty details of their work. Past the offices is the main examination room, composed of white linoleum tile and holding enough space for a dozen corpses at once. Adjacent to the examination room are the freezers, where bodies can be stored until either loved ones claim them or they are incinerated by the city.

The morgue handles a wide array of forensic duties, including examining bodies at the scene of accidents and crimes, and conducting autopsies if the situation warrants. The operating theater has all the tools they could possibly need, and the Light of Mercy Hospital to which they are attached has a variety of resources at their disposal as well. The site's incinerator is just across the hall from the morgue, allowing attendants to dispose of biological detritus without drawing attention if need be. (The hospital maintains its own morgue on the main floor, which never intersects with the duties of the City Morgue.)

The coroner is a portly man named Gregor Inich, with a curling lip and a shabby hairpiece. He and his assistants (including one gaunt) take great pride in their work and have a keen eye for details... though those details don't always end up in their official reports. Inich hates visiting the field, leaving it to his underlings to scour crime scenes while he stays in his office and fills out the paperwork. The staff has a series of illicit enterprises on the side, ranging from the harmless to the ghoulish. The freezer has been used to hide bodies in the past, and the hospital incinerator can dispose of even the most stubborn corpse in a matter of hours. Attendants can be bribed to look the other way when victims are claimed, to mislabel known bodies as John Does, or to otherwise disguise corpses whose cause of death may prove troublesome. They take care not to indulge in such activities too often, but for the right price, they're always willing to make an exception.

In addition, the attendants regularly engage in more sedate activities, including a running poker game every other evening and a betting pool to determine the physical characteristics of the next arrival (twenty correct descriptions wins the pool). They might be open to PC journalists or P.I.s joining in their sojourns, providing a valuable source of mutual information.

Gregor Inich

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 3, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 8, Evasion 2, Firearms 3, Forgery 6, Lore (Forensics) 9, Medicine 8, Perception 7, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education.

Profession: Academic 1, Thief 1, White Collar Worker 2.

2) Montgomery Building/Hi-Rise Diner

Ground was broken on the proposed Montgomery Building nine months ago in the heart of Gateway's downtown. The skyscraper is the latest in the boom which has gripped the city since the end of the war, and if its builders have anything to say about it, it will be the final word in modern architecture. When completed, the building will stand over 50 stories high (making it the tallest structure in Gateway), and be easily accessible to the trolley line. The latticework already reaches higher than any surrounding building, and construction crews labor amid dizzying heights in an all-out effort to complete the project on time.

The building's owners, however, are in a bit of a bind. The cost of construction is far greater than they expected, and even if they fill all of the completed office space, it won't be enough to offset their expenses. They have reached an agreement with the building contractor, Anton Schrek, who took the project at a reduced rate in exchange for cutting costs at every turn. Gaunt construction crews (who work longer for less) account for over 60% of the work force, and would have accounted for more if the human unions hadn't raised such a

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fuss. Even the money saved on labor, however, can't make up all the difference, leading to dangerous cost-saving measures elsewhere. Equipment is substandard, building materials are purchased from highly questionable sources, and safety protocols are laxly enforced at best. The site is a disaster waiting to happen; already, several workers have been badly injured and it seems likely that the building will claim someone's life before it finally opens.

Across the street sits the Hi-Rise Diner, a long, low edifice that has become a haven for workers at the site. Its doors are open 24 hours and breakfast is served any time of day. The booths and counter stools are always packed with workers, enjoying a cup of coffee or a quick meal following their shift. The Hi-Rise has established a "gaunts only" section in the back — little more than a shack tacked onto the kitchen — which caters to leatherbacks working the construction site across the street. Raw hamburger is available in brown paper bags, and gaunts interested in something more substantive can order lamb shanks and raw beef filets as well. A trio of waitresses works the diner, and each shift draws straws to see who has to service the leatherback section.

Scuffles outside the diner are fairly common, as gaunts and humans vent their work-based frustrations at each other. Schrek keeps everyone on a tight leash at the site, but the sidewalk in front of the Hi-Rise has become the go-to place for picking a fight. Since construction crews constitute the bulk of their business, the owners are willing to let it slide so long as it never enters the establishment.

Anton Schreck

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 6, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 6, Demolition 7, Engineering 8, Etiquette 4, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 5, Intimidation 6, Perception 2, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Rugged.

Profession: Soldier 2, Wealthy 2, White Collar Worker 1.

THE HARBOR

Gateway's harbor district is one of the busiest ports in the world, with hundreds of ships docking every week. Cargo ranges from raw materials up from the Borderlands to exotic items from overseas to arriving immigrants to inauspicious boxes from the east coast whose owners didn't wish to subject them to a cross-country trip. The gentle shoreline stretches along the southern side of the peninsula, leaving room for a staggering variety of piers, jetties, and warehouse space. Fishing remains one of the city's biggest sources of revenue, and deep-sea vessels head out every day to ply the Columbic for fish. A large seafood marketplace, situated near Eastowne, draws tourists and locals alike, while further west, the cargo ships load and unload supplies with endless monotony. The western

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shore teems with pleasure boats and day sailors, and the U.C. Navy still maintains a small flotilla of warships here, though they're more for show than any viable military purpose.

The harbor is controlled by a rabble of longshoremen, representing an eclectic mixture of unions and underworld organizations. Some belong to highly motivated labor groups, while others are little more than thugs laying claim a particular series of docks. The Port Authority has tried to consolidate them into a single entity, but such organization has proven impossible. Instead, they have roughly delineated which group controls which area, as well as establishing a standard for fees and wages in the hopes of preventing open bloodshed. Despite such measures, clashes between groups still occur... especially in the harbor's numerous bars and opium dens. Most have mob ties of some variety or another, and the shipping companies periodically stir up trouble as well (they prefer to keep the dock workers divided).

Within such an environment, it's easy for lone individuals to blend into the background. Those looking to escape the city can often find work on the docks before jumping ship to some other port, and longshoremen groups have been known to conceal acquaintances wanted on some charge or another. The police maintain a permanent presence of snitches and undercover cops, but even their efforts can't prevent fugitives from slipping through the chaos.

Smuggling is also a large problem, as stolen and illegal goods can move through the harbor with little supervision. Again, the Port Authority has taken steps to curb such activity (any cargo box that isn't stamped with their seal may be seized at any time), but as in other areas, they're hampered by the sheer volume of goods flowing through the port. Truth be told, the city doesn't *want* to look too closely at the problem. Prosperity is good and as long as everyone is kept happy, they're willing to ignore whatever goes on along the foggy shoreline.

3) The Thunder and Reign

This huge luxury yacht, owned by the Patterson brothers, is an open affront to law enforcement across the city. Opulent and luxurious, it can hold dozens of guests with ridiculous ease. Its main deck is dominated by a huge casino, featuring slot machines, blackjack tables, and roulette wheels. A radio provides sporting broadcasts when appropriate (limited mostly to boxing, since other sports are day events), and the extensive bar matches anything found on the mainland. Guests can request female companionship to be waiting onboard, and the lower decks have several private staterooms available for a fee. It all stays above the law because nothing happens before the ship reaches three miles out — international waters, where the city's laws do not apply.

The brothers insist on conducting all their business onboard the vessel. It sets sail every Friday and Saturday night from its slip in Gateway Harbor. Passengers arrive by invitation only, and the brothers personally okay everyone who sets foot onboard. Its clientele is carefully screened before being allowed near the ship, and no weapons of any sort are permitted past the gangway. The Pattersons themselves are never seen before the ship departs. Instead, they dock by motorboat once it's safely out to sea (they've even taken to using mul-

tiple motorboats to avoid being detected), arriving from an undisclosed locale at a time of their choosing. Their henchmen inform them who's onboard by radio, and they always leave before the ship returns to port. The strategy has saved them from multiple assassination attempts, and kept their enemies constantly frustrated.

The ship itself is a "Katelyn"-class personal liner, with accommodations for 75-odd guests plus staff. It's maintained in a private slip, guarded by minions in Patterson employ. All Port Authority papers are paid up, and the Pattersons hold the deed through a series of money launderers and dummy corporations. The police know exactly what the *Thunder and Reign* is used for, but can do nothing as long as the hanky-panky takes place in international waters. They have searched the moored vessel numerous times, and haven't found anything worth pressing. To date, they haven't been able to place any undercover operatives on board; the Pattersons are very good at sniffing out rats. Instead, they take careful note of who comes and goes, using the ship to help track prominent underworld figures and potential informants. The *Thunder and Reign's* regulars have taken to arriving surreptitiously, and the Pattersons' men chase off any bulls they catch snooping around. Anyone hoping to report to the police is usually killed and dumped overboard before it returns to port, and attempted saboteurs (there have been three in recent memory) simply disappear, never to be seen again. The Pattersons value their floating pleasure palace, and go to extreme lengths to keep it in good condition.

Typical Patterson Organization Hood

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Demolitions 5, Drive (Boat, Car) 5, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 6, Intimidation 4, Melee 6, Perception 4, Pick Lock 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Gunman 1, Thief 1.

4) 43rd Precinct, aka The Frying Pan

Few police assignments are as arduous as Gateway's infamous Frying Pan, a precinct encompassing segments of Eastowne, the gaunt slums, and the bustling harbor district. Tensions between the Tongs and gaunt street gangs periodically explode into violence, while smuggling, drug dealing, and prostitution are daily occurrences. Against these vices, the cops of the 4-3 stretch their abilities to the limit every day, struggling to hold back the tide.

Because of the high diversity of its jurisdiction, the 43rd Precinct wisely chose to hire policemen which reflect the neighborhood's roots, which helped ease tension with the local residents. Nearly a third of the cops are of Golden (Asian) descent, and the precinct boasts more gaunt officers than any other district in the country. A pair of crystal ball officers are

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on permanent assignment here, investigating any magic-related crimes which the precinct might encounter. Bigotry in the squadroom is kept to a minimum, but squabbles and other flare-ups still occur. The captain has ordered her lieutenants to bring any such problems directly to her attention.

Crime within the precinct runs the gamut from mob activity to prostitution and drug smuggling. Street gang warfare claims new victims every week and the Pattersons' infamous *Thunder and Reign* falls within the precinct's jurisdiction. Beat cops are expected to handle low-grade crimes and keep an ear to the street, listening for impending activity. They keep a lid on the local gangs, while the detectives cover higher-profile crimes such as gangland hits and narcotics issues. In a recent PR coup, the 4-3 conducted a massive harbor raid against a white slavery ring, resulting in a dozen arrests and garnering national attention. Sadly, such operations do little to stem the corruption that seethes through the area like an open sore.

Precinct headquarters is a red brick building several blocks away from the shore. It stands five stories tall and has facilities for nearly 300 officers and detectives. The basement contains a holding block, with cells for nearly 50 inmates should the situation merit (suspects are usually held here until they can be processed and moved downtown). The fourth and fifth stories contain the detectives' bullpen (with numerous desks spread over a large common room), the captain's and lieutenants' offices, and the Precinct arsenal which holds shotguns and other weapons in a large fireproof safe. Clerical offices are on the third floor, with the remainder of the building taken up by booking stations, beat cops' stations, and a locker room/shower for officers to prepare for their shifts.

Captain Rosario Neiman oversees the 4-3 with a world-weary competence that those beneath her find immensely endearing. Though she has no patience for hot shots (who are usually all talk and no action), she has been known to quietly indulge competent officers who bend the rules... as long as they know where the line is. In her reasoning, it keeps the bad guys on their toes. Her lieutenants brief her every morning, and she expects regular progress on their various caseloads. Although the precinct suffers from the usual amount of corruption and compromise, it maintains an impressive arrest record, and local criminals have learned to fear them. The fact that the area hasn't descended into complete chaos is a testament to the job they do.

Captain Rosario Neiman

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 7, Drive (Car) 2, Etiquette 2, Evasion 8, Firearms 7, Intimidation 7, Lore (Law) 5, Perception 6, Puzzles 5, Sport (Long-Distance Running) 4, Stealth 5, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Marksmanship.

Profession: Investigator 1, Officer of the Law 2, Politician 1, White Collar Worker 1.

5) Goodwin Lighthouse

Though the lights of downtown have reduced its utility, the Goodwin Lighthouse still blazes every night, in recognition of the city's maritime culture. Built on a shelf of bedrock that drops precipitously to the sea, it marks one of the few points on the shore dangerous to watercraft. Its light marks the southernmost side of the peninsula, guiding ships into the harbor with steadfast reliability. Unfortunately, the rest of the neighborhood is far less reliable.

Though open to the public, few come out to see the lighthouse anymore. Its locale is cold and often foggy, and the steep cliffs make for an intimidating hazard. Footing becomes treacherous in the mists, and the sharp rocks below make recovering any fallen bodies a near-impossibility. The handful of tourists who venture out here scuttle back to their hotels the minute they get a look at the surrounding neighborhood.

Several years ago, an entrepreneur built a series of box houses nearby, hoping to cash in on the "pristine view." The buildings suffered terribly from weather and erosion, and their owner took a huge loss. They are now little more than bloated wrecks. Their inhabitants keep to themselves: shifty-eyed men and women with faces like pinched nerves. Their presence has done little to encourage visitors, and the entire neighborhood has suffered a drastic decline in fortunes.

The lighthouse, in contrast, is well-maintained and weathers the elements admirably. Vandals have attempted to deface it in the past, but the keeper — a snarling old pit bull named Potter Grissom — chases them off with blasts from his shotgun. A retired naval officer, he rarely leaves the lighthouse except to collect his pension; a small living space has been cleared out on the ground floor. He maintains the beacon without fail, firing it up every night at sunset and whenever the weather dictates it. He claims that the light "keeps the riff-raff away" and refuses to surrender his charge to the slow decay of the neighborhood.

From his perch on the upper story, Potter sees everything that goes on in the surrounding area, and his memory is as sharp as ever. With spyglass in hand and the surrounding fog to match his presence, few realize just how often he looks down on them. He rarely reports any incidents he sees (Grissom has no use for the police), but his neighbors would be shocked to learn how many of their seedy little secrets he's witnessed. Were he to unburden his memory, he could send a good chunk of them to Gunmetal Island.

Potter Grissom

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 7, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Brawl 3, Demolitions 3, Drive (Boat, Car) 4, Evasion 2, Firearms 7, Intimidation 5, Lore (Harbor District History) 9, Medicine 2, Perception 7, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Alert.

Profession: Solider 3, Street Tough 1.

SENTINEL ISLAND AND UNDERISLE HEIGHTS

Essentially one district separated by an inconvenient stretch of water, Sentinel Island and its mainland sister hold hands over the strait by means of the engineering marvel that is the McDougal Bridge. The tall gray structure is the longest-spanning suspension bridge in the U.C., and the only reliable way on or off the island. McDougal Bridge was completed shortly after the war amid great fanfare from the City Council, though to date it has been less than remarkable in achieving its goals — it has had to shut down twice for structural repairs, and despite a toll of 20 cents (waived in the case of military or government vehicles) and a limitless supply of public money, little has been done to improve it. The monies earmarked for the bridge are bled off into the pockets of greedy contractors, investors, hoodlums, and officials, but a concerted show of public apathy has allowed the practice to continue. All the while, ferries dart across the deep cold water, and the stately and salt-weary buildings stare at each other with quiet windows.

The closer one gets to the sea in the Heights, the older the houses get. They crowd the roads by the coast, long ribbons of garden leading down to sweeping views over the beaches and across the bridge to the Island. The Heights was clearly an affluent neighborhood once, and always seems to be in the very first stages of decline. Many specialist shops can be found in the Heights, a telltale sign that the idle rich once considered this place their home. The streets are lined with rare bookstores, dealers in coins, antiquarians, and other such businesses, many of them surreptitiously dealing illegally-obtained goods. The quiet, sleepy houses of the Heights are home to more bitterly fought life-and-death struggles than the worst housing in the gaunt slums, as the last of Gateway's old families cling desperately to the remnants of their businesses and lands. Their schemes fuel politicians and criminals alike in questionable undeclared wars. As they struggle to remain the powers they once were, they slide further and further into the debt of young upstarts, whom they could crush if they only ceased their constant squabbling.

Sentinel Island seems almost identical to the Heights — at least, when viewed from the Bridge. Wide, winding streets sweep down to the sea, and dingy cafés and shabby waterfront stores cluster around the ferry piers. From the seaward side, the Island appears somewhat different. Blocky concrete emplacements crown bleak cliffs and rocky beaches, and polished inert guns point silently out into a foggy sea. Fort Sentinel rests a little way



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back from these, a relic of the Army's hubris and bureaucratic inaction. Further inland, amid dunes of tough yellowing grass, lies the Progress Exhibition site, a remnant of past glories. From the top of its Century Tower, you can see the huddled neighborhoods of the Island and, beyond them, Gateway proper, hidden behind the blinking lights of the McDougal Bridge.

6) Snoops' Row

Snoops' Row has become one of Gateway's defining oddities, a point of pride with the inhabitants and the governing council alike. It houses more private investigators than any other street in the Commonwealth: almost every building holds some shamus or other, most of whom gravitate towards the lower end of the profession's food chain. A far cry from the pristine offices of the big firms downtown, Snoops' Row mostly caters to the independent operator, and the grubby offices jammed into apartments above diners and liquor stores attest to the kind of money that gets made working for yourself.

Competition can get pretty fierce between private dicks, and many are close to pricing themselves into poverty. In the past year, Harry Caldwell of the Caldwell Detective Agency has raised the issue of a Detective's Union at three tenants' meetings, but most of the inmates of the Row took up the private life to get away from such bureaucracy, and they'd like to keep their freedom even if it is bad for business. Unless something drastic changes on the Row, it's likely to stay that way. Indeed, some detectives find it enhances their shadowy reputation, attracting cases that might be scared off by more upscale surroundings.

The number of liquor stores on Snoops' Row is an unfortunate coincidence — more than one owner hoped that they would get knocked over a lot less if they operated next to some affordable law. This has the side effect of making the local P.I.s look like drunks, but a detective on the Row is unlikely to care what others think of him anyway. The portfolios of gumshoes here are more varied than the usual cases a P.I. has to look into — the neighborhood makes news, and many a problem has been solved by the rumpled figures lurking behind their frosted-glass doors. Rumor has it that the Mayor's office offers detectives on the Row a break on the cost of their licenses in exchange for the occasional piece of confidential city work.

Typical Down-at-Heel Gumshoe

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 3, Drive (Car) 3, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 6, Intimidation 5, Perception 5, Pick Lock 6, Puzzles 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Investigator 1, Street Tough 1.

7) The Progress Fair

The Progress Exhibition of 1947 brought tourists from far and wide to Sentinel Island for the rides, the gadgets, and a tantalizing glimpse of what the future might bring. The fair bought up a massive wedge of cheap land on the west side of the Island, erecting wheels, rides, pavilions, movie theaters, its own light rail system, and the Century Tower: a massive needle ringed with searchlights. From the top, you could dine in luxury as you gazed out across the glittering city spread out beneath you like a carpet of diamonds. The fair opened in early summer to good business, and nobody disputed organizer Randy Walters' claim that "every man, woman, and child in the Commonwealth knows the skyline of the Progress Exhibition better than that of their own home town." News of the fair dominated the airwaves; in the end the constant barrage of publicity proved its undoing.

Granted permission from the city to run until 1949, the Fair allowed a newsreel crew in to film footage and drum up interest for the winter season. The crew was on the scene when the support struts of a roller coaster buckled, and shots of a twisted car full of screaming, bloody children made it onto newsreels all over the country. An inquiry found that the park was at fault. As its rise was a media spectacle, so too was its fall, and the verdict ruined Walters and his park beyond any hope of recovery. The Exhibition closed its gates for the final time on the 25th of September, 1947, and it has stood as little more than a silent ruin since then. Today, the fairground is a rusting death trap that nobody ever pays any attention to — which makes it the perfect place to meet, hide, or bump someone off...

Randy Walters

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 2, Build 3, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 6, Demolitions 5, Engineering 2, Etiquette 6, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 5, Forgery 4, Perception 2, Sport (Golf) 7, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Loyal Retainer.

Profession: White Collar Worker 2.

8) Fort Sentinel

Constructed at some point during the war (amid paranoid speculation about the Empire of the Golden Sun), Fort Sentinel is a scattered family of hulking, gray military buildings surrounded by smaller yet otherwise identical houses belonging to the families of servicemen. Just after the war, the colonel in charge of Fort Sentinel — Ben Hathaway — hit on the bright idea of using the whole island as a military base and training facility. In order to facilitate his grand vision, Colonel Hathaway sent the Mayor an order purchasing Sentinel Island from the city for Army use, to which he appended a list of improvements he required the city to carry out, and a check for one

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dollar. Incensed at the gesture, the Mayor got on the phone to Nova Roma and returned with a form requisitioning the time, manpower, and budget of Fort Sentinel to assist the city in carrying out its urgently-requested civic works. After six months of gritting his teeth and watching Fort Sentinel's future disappearing into the morass of red tape, Hathaway could stand it no longer, and asked what he could do to make amends. The next day, the city bought Sentinel Island back for fifty cents.

Today, Hathaway still has command of Fort Sentinel, though every soldier on the base has taken a pay cut because of his scheme. Possibly the most hated man in the Army, he rarely leaves his office anymore. The poverty of the soldiers at his post, however, has made Fort Sentinel one of the easiest places to acquire black market firearms and other illicit supplies.

Typical Enlisted Soldier

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 3, Demolitions 2, Engineering 2, Evasion 6, Firearms 6, Intimidation 4, Perception 3, Sport (Baseball) 4, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Soldier 1, Street Tough 1.

9) The Gateway Clarion

One of the best views in Underisle Heights is from the editor's office in the *Clarion* Building, the beating heart of the city's most-read and most influential newspaper. With a circulation rapidly approaching a monopoly, the *Clarion* has gone from strength to strength in the past two years, but in doing so, it has sacrificed the integrity it once held dear. Under the editorial guidance of Max Findley, the *Clarion* has become little more than a scandal rag, publishing shocking and often-racy material that keeps the public entertained but by no means informed. Findley, though a willing party to the current policy of shock, misdirection, and gossip as news, thinks in terms of sales and publicity above all else. If someone were to put a story to him that would sell papers, he would run it: even if it might put his life in danger. The *Clarion* has inadvertently broken a number of major scandals — sending several genuine wrong-doers to prison — in pursuit of just such a policy.

Editor-in-Chief Max Findley

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 6, Intimidation 6, Lore (Copy-Editing) 7, Perception 4, Puzzles 3, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Alert, Wise.

Profession: Con Artist 1, White Collar Worker 2.

EASTOWNE

Gateway's Asian population — originally hailing from the Empire of the Golden Sun across the ocean — is among the largest in the Commonwealth; though found in every borough and neighborhood of the city, the center of their community lies in Eastowne, a sprawling series of streets just to the north of the harbor district. The population here is almost 90% Asian, and while other areas have their share of Golden influence, nowhere has eastern culture been more thoroughly transplanted than here.

Eastowne's architecture matches that of the Golden Sun's dominant culture (essentially Chinese), with red-tiled roofs, carved dragons, and lanterns hanging from upper story windows. Signs and notices are in Cantonese, which the natives speak exclusively save when dealing with outsiders. Unique traditions are on display at every corner. Makeshift stages host elaborate puppet shows, featuring marionettes of exquisite detail and craftsmanship. Stores sell fireworks and exotic knickknacks while the markets boast strange varieties of herbs and seafood. Every February, the "Golden New Year" is celebrated, with huge parades and performers in astounding costumes. To the unaided eye Eastowne appears to be a piece of another world, cut from its surroundings and transported to the U.C. whole cloth.

Wise viewers know better however. Eastowne is less a product of its native culture than a rendition of that culture made palatable for the Commonwealth. The alluring foreign atmosphere intermingles with the U.C.'s homegrown spirit of business, providing rare opportunities to make money. Everything is a little larger here, a little flashier. Objects and customs are on display that would never been seen outside of the neighborhood. Restaurants are in absurd abundance, serving "westernized" eastern food for tourists and those seeking a bit of the exotic. All of it is provided for the public, a face shown to visitors to place them at ease.

Behind the façade, Eastowne is a very different animal. The "true" culture hides behind locked gates and barred doors: sights of wonder, revulsion, and surprising beauty. Small gardens lie in absurdly tiny patches of land, squeezed between the neighborhood's buildings and yet flourishing under constant ministration. Koi ponds and holy shrines share walls with trash-strewn alleys, while schools can be found teaching eastern philosophy and martial arts. A high level of literacy pervades Eastowne, marked by numerous private libraries and classrooms. Few outsiders are ever privy to such sights; they remain for the natives' eyes alone.

Not all of Eastowne's secrets are so beautiful, however. Sweatshops beneath the streets employ illiterate immigrants as virtual slaves, while opium dens swallow up the weak with their mind-numbing enticements. The criminal Tongs rule the streets, collecting protection money from businesses and ruthlessly destroying those who oppose them (see page 170 for more). The shadows are as deep as any part of the city, made all the more dangerous by their alluring surroundings. Many residents distrust the Gateway PD, and their lack of English makes it difficult for them to approach outsiders. The 43rd Precinct has responded by hiring more Golden (Asian) officers, but even that is just a stopgap to the problem.

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Despite such troubles, Eastowne's residents are a surprisingly grateful bunch. Most recent immigrants in the district arrived shortly after the war. Few speak openly of their past; the journey across the Columbic is invariably difficult, and those who make it want only to settle into their new lives in the Commonwealth. To them, Eastowne is all the reminder they need of their old lives, a piece of history transplanted into their current surroundings. They love it for that, and will go to great lengths to protect the neighborhood's good name.

10) Dr. Chang's Emporium of Oddities

This otherwise unassuming warehouse has been repainted outlandish colors and set with an eye-catching sign announcing "the strangest collection anywhere on the globe!" It houses a museum of bizarre and unusual artifacts, photographs, relics, and other items culled from the corners of the world. The proprietor, Dr. Chang, charges fifty cents per viewing and is available to answer any questions visitors may have. He dresses in traditional Golden Sun robes, his wizened face wreathed by smoke from a long pipe on which he constantly puffs. He speaks in broken English, but his words cast a captivating spell over the items on display.

A hall of mirrors takes up the first floor of the Emporium, disorienting first-time visitors. Those who reach the stairs to the second floor find themselves in more reasonable surroundings: the Emporium's various artifacts spread out on a series of pedestals, cases, and platforms. There is no organization; most appear where they are most readily visible, and each is accompanied by a plaque containing its "absolutely true" history, as documented by Dr. Chang. Most of the oddities are standard flim-flam material — a stuffed monkey passed off as a pygmy, for example, or doctored photos of Siamese triplets. Some of them, however, are genuinely strange (such as the clockwork man unearthed in a Terminus apartment) and some (like a red battle flag purporting to come from something called "The People's Revolutionary Army") would hold tremendous interest to members of the Few.

"Dr. Chang" is actually Billy Wenyi, a Gateway native who trained as an actor and joined the operation as a means of practicing his craft. His boss, Oliver McGonagal, actually owns and runs the place. McGonagal set up the shop in Eastowne because he wanted to capitalize on the neighborhood's "mysterious" reputation, but after a few years of serving as the front man, he realized that his pale skin and blonde hair didn't fit the public perception. He saw Wenyi during a street theater performance and hired him on the spot. The actor plays the part for window dressing; he has very little knowledge of the occult, but can spin tales on the fly that take the breath away, and his faux broken English helps him dodge the more uncomfortable questions.



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Both men have seen enough strange things in their day to start asking questions, though neither is willing to push for answers as far as the Few do. They enjoy their cut-rate carnival, and the steady profits make for a good living. McGonagal is willing to buy anything he can display in the museum, though the story he attaches to it may have nothing to do with the actual circumstances surrounding it. Billy carries a service revolver beneath his robe, and will use it on any customers who get too rowdy. He also has packets of sneezing powder, coughing powder, and “instant smoke,” which he will blow if he needs a quick distraction.

Billy Wenyi

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 4, Brawl 2, Disguise 6, Etiquette 2, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 8, Firearms 6, Forgery 7, Medicine 2, Perception 3, Perform (Acting) 7, Sleight of Hand 9, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Con Artist 2.

11) The E Street Library

This secretive collection of books and scrolls is part of the “hidden” Eastowne that the tourists never see. It lies in a nondescript tenement building, its entrance differentiated from the other apartments only by the red door with black letters etched on it in Cantonese: “Private. No Trespassing.” Beyond the door is a bewildering series of bookshelves and filing cabinets, all fastidiously maintained and organized according to a Byzantine system. Books, scrolls, and even scribbled notepads are gathered here, an unprecedented collection of rare and hard-to-find material. The library includes several treatises on magic use — forbidden since the passage of the Anti-Sorcery Act — and a pair of badly faded books covering history before the war. Water damage has rendered large passages illegible, but parts can still be read and a few pages even have photographs. Those looking for hard-to-find texts can probably locate them in the depths of this place.

The librarian, Wei Yufeng, took over the collection after the Tongs killed her father several years ago. She works a day job at a nearby laundry, and spends her nights maintaining the tomes in her care. She comes and goes through an alternate entrance to the building, and thus none of her neighbors have connected her to the mysterious red door. Its contents are a total enigma, which is how she likes it; the fewer snoops, the better as far as she’s concerned. She does not normally allow visitors, save for a few trusted allies, and it would take a great deal to convince her to let a stranger peruse the collection (though she might be willing in exchange for a hefty favor). Those with Tong connections will receive no help from her; she never forgave them for the death of her father. Many of the

Tongs’ warlocks have spent years searching for the knowledge her library holds. Their compatriots’ rash violence may have cost them the object of their search — hidden right under their noses.

Wei Yufeng

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Disguise 6, Electricity 4, Engineering 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 3, Lore (Magic Research) 8, Medicine 4, Perception 7, Stealth 6, Streetwise 4, Tensile Energy 3.

Backgrounds: Education, Exotic Knowledge, Magic Aptitude.

Profession: Academic 1, Rogue Scientist 1, Thief 1.

12) The Lucky-Best Mah-Jong Parlor

The Lucky-Best attracts hundreds of locals every night, who fill row after row of unadorned tables to indulge in the addictive game. They spend money they don’t have for the privilege, gambling away their meager earnings in the vain hope of striking it rich. Most come back even though they know it’s a futile exercise; the allure of the game is too strong to resist.

The owner of the Lucky-Best is Huan Jinkai, a cadaverous forty-year-old whose lazy eyes hide a malevolent intelligence. A long-suspected warlock, he struck a deal years ago with the Tongs’ Dynasty, offering his establishment as a neutral meeting ground in exchange for certain nebulously-defined favors. The far side of the mah-jong parlor is a thick soundproof wall, hiding a series of rooms and corridors where the Eastowne Tongs meet and discuss matters of policy. The Dynasty gathers here once each month, and individual members may use the rooms to barter their own deals (though it’s considered bad form to do so without informing the other Tongs). Their discussions of late have centered on the Patterson brothers, whom they believe constitute the greatest threat to their autonomy. Huan never listens in on these discussions or any others. Nor does he broker information to outsiders. In his mind, the deal he made is sacrosanct, and to breach it would be a tremendous dishonor.

The Tongs themselves are less scrupulous, and several have debated eliminating Huan in order to destroy the Dynasty’s only secure meeting place. Luckily for them, cooler heads have prevailed. The last Tong member who tried to break the Lucky-Best’s rules was fried to a crisp by Huan’s sorcery. The Dynasty’s gathering policies are strict and rigidly enforced. No Tong member may enter the parlor armed, and each Dynasty member is permitted only three minions to serve as bodyguards. Huan guarantees protection for all those under his roof. His immense wealth and sinister reputation ensures that no one Tong can influence his policy, and anyone foolish enough to attack him will find a phalanx of underlings ready

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to do his bidding (assuming the attacker survives his magic). Several thugs in his employ are sprinkled among the mah-jong players every night, ensuring that no one exploits the paying customers but Huan. At the request of the Dynasty, there is only one entrance to the hidden back rooms; the others have been boarded up or otherwise barricaded

Huan Jinkai

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 2, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 7, Bureaucracy 4, Electricity 8, Etiquette 7, Evasion 5, Intimidation 7, Medicine 7, Perception 8, Puzzles 5, Streetwise 6, Thermal Energy 8.

Backgrounds: Exotic Knowledge, Magical Aptitude, Prodigy.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 2.

THE GAUNT DISTRICT

Often referred to as “Hell’s Cheap Seats,” the Gaunt District contains some of the worst housing in the Commonwealth. Springing up almost overnight, the District looks as if it has yet to be fully accepted into Gateway itself, separated by an almost visible border with the rest of the city. The colorful streets of Eastowne are a far cry from the grim, crumbling buildings of the District just a few blocks away. The persistent, clinging fog adds to its ever-present aura of despair, as do the perpetual fumes that pour forth from the various factories that cluster around its flimsy ramshackle houses.

Over time, the famously tolerant atmosphere of Gateway has brought more gaunts to the city, drifting across the Commonwealth like confused ghosts until they settled here. The District quickly swelled, extending arms that wrap around Eastowne to the west and the Harbor to the south. Today, the Gaunt District is a confusing jigsaw of styles and buildings, few of which are being used for their original purpose. Gateway’s normally strict street grid breaks down here, as shelters are built across boulevards the city seldom finds the funds to repair and new paths are forged through the winding and ruined passages of the uninhabited buildings. Dirty curtains hang over the windows of old storefronts; tenants cram themselves into creaky, indeterminately old buildings. Necessity is the order of the day in the gaunt community, and the underpaid leatherbacks often find themselves relying on their sense of shared misfortune in order to make ends meet. Over a third of all gaunts in Gateway live illegally in the District, shifting from condemned buildings to makeshift shacks, staying one step ahead of the slumlords’ bruisers. The desperate or hunted make their way deeper into the District, turning their eyes to the black heart of the slum.

Maybe, a long while ago, the heart of the District was a desirable neighborhood to live in. The buildings there were once respectable homes for respectable people. Now, the strongest and most vicious gangs have claimed them. They war over

possession of the most prestigious houses, struggles that all too frequently grow into running gun battles. Many houses in the central District bear numerous bullet holes, and few native inhabitants or cops will go into the neighborhood’s heart without a lot of backup. The slumlords know better than to collect from their tenants on Melville Street — last year, the landlord who owned the area was found with his head torn clean from his shoulders in the middle of the road. While the deeds changed hands, his successors have not had the guts or the inclination to clean out the gaunt gangs and turn a profit from the area.

13) The Coliseum

On the very edge of the District, down by the Harbor, stands the Coliseum: a squat, wide building that is all but indistinguishable from the numerous warehouses that crowd around it. Only the light burning all night above the small guard’s station and the yellow-painted iron door set it apart from neighboring buildings. The door is guarded by two apathetic thugs, and requires a password to open. It is a modified bank vault door commissioned by the building’s owners; nothing short of the password or a tank is likely to budge it. Beyond the door, the Coliseum is a very different building indeed. Peeling mint-green paint lines the narrow walls, flickering light bulbs dance on bare wires in an ever-present breeze, and the fog of cigarettes and sweat permeates the atmosphere. The winding corridors lead past several small rooms — mostly locker rooms or bathrooms — before erupting into the main hub: the ring. Surrounded by three tiers of seats and extensively floodlit, the squared circle forms an impressive and humbling sight, dwarfed by the baying crowds that surround it on most nights.

The Coliseum is home to both gaunt and human boxing matches. It is rumored that every so often an illegal match is held pitting a human against a gaunt, but if this is the case, no one’s telling. Besides the main ring and several sparring rings dotted throughout the building, the Coliseum is also the favored haunt of a number of the smaller gangs and petty crooks. Prominent among the regulars is Sam Sketch, leader of the 5th Street Wreckers. His gang’s violent reputation ensures that Sketch doesn’t lean on the boxers or fix fights — he needs the Coliseum to do business, and if the management doesn’t trust him, he loses out. Other criminals often take their lead from Sketch, leaving the Coliseum a relatively honest place for pugilists to practice their craft. Of course, if a fix really needs to go in on a match, there are ways to make it happen. Most of the time, however, the mobsters who survive in the Coliseum are content just to skim a cut from the bookies, and occasionally shake down the pickpockets who work the crowds.



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Sam Sketch

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 9, Build 7, Gut 8, Moxie 5, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 6, Athletics 7, Brawl 8, Contortions 7, Demolitions 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 6, Engineering 3, Evasion 7, Firearms 6, Intimidation 7, Melee 7, Perception 4, Stealth 5, Streetwise 7, Throwing 6.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Gaunt, Sinewy Joints.

Profession: Gangster 1, Street Tough 2.

Joe Cannino

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 4, Evasion 8, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 7, Forgery 4, Intimidation 5, Perception 6, Puzzles 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Dense Bone Structure, Education, Gaunt, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 2, White Collar Worker 1.

14) Natasha's

388 Melville Street resembles most of the other houses in the area — faded, formerly grand, and weighed down by the scars of gang warfare between the 5th Street Wreckers and the nearby Cannino gang. At almost the exact center of the Gaunt District, the toppling elaborate brickwork of 388 should have been abandoned long ago. But late last winter, a gaunt entertainer calling herself Natasha St. Joan moved in with a couple of crates of smuggled booze and set up shop in the middle of the most violent area of the city. With the right combination of brass, charm, and talent, she has carved out a small but comfortable living as house singer and owner of Natasha's. Her avowed neutrality has allowed her to stay in the good graces of both Sketch and Cannino, and her club is a welcome respite for gaunt hoodlums in Gateway. Guns are usually left at the door in the care of one of the two hulking leatherbacks who arrived with Natasha and who never speak. This is more of a symbolic gesture of trust than a safety measure, since most of the clientele could kill a man with their bare hands. Nonetheless it works, and gang hatreds are also left at the door... though it is almost unheard of for members of two warring gangs to drink at Natasha's on the same night. Natasha and her associates keep an ear to the ground at all times, forever on the lookout for information that the winds of the underworld are blowing against them. She also sells information where she can, playing gangs off against each other while staying in the background and quietly getting rich.

Natasha plays a dangerous game. Her charm allows her to operate without being shaken down, yet it has perhaps worked a little too well with the District's more prominent gang bosses. To put it simply, they adore her. Cannino, in particular, is infatuated with her, but she's not interested — there's no future in leatherbacks. She just wants to get rich enough to leave town and set herself up somewhere far away and warm. Despite her cautious nature, however, she may soon find herself the cause of a bloody gang war, as smitten suitors resort to violence to rid themselves of their competition. More on Natasha can be found on page 192.



15) Gateway Chemical

Smoke belches from the tall chimneys of Gateway Chemical day and night, and harsh yellow lights burn constantly behind the factory's thick glass windows. This bleak red brick giant of industry is one of the principal employers of gaunts in Gateway, and it has climbed ever higher on the labor of its leatherback workers. The mournful sound of the shift change horn is a fact of life throughout the District, and many gaunts strain to hear it wherever they are, timing their lives by its grim bleating. The streets surrounding it smell unpleasant, even to gaunts, and are slowly being abandoned by the natives. Tension between gaunt and human workers at GC is higher than ever, as humans are finding themselves gradually supplanted by leatherbacks, and the gaunts are finding less and less in their paychecks at the end of the week. Neither side wants to antagonize the other, but the gaunts are getting close to breaking point — underpaid, resented, and mistrusted by their fellow workers. Voices of dissent are growing stronger on the factory floor, and talk of a strike is beginning to gather weight among the employees.

Typical Gaunt Agitator

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 8, Gut 6, Moxie 6, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Brawl 6, Demolitions 4, Engineering 5, Evasion 5, Intimidation 5, Medicine 2, Melee 5, Perception 4, Sports (Baseball) 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Mean Streets.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 2, Street Tough 1.

THE SEWERS

Not every activity in Gateway can be conducted in the full glare of daylight. Beneath the city itself runs mile after mile of extensive sewers, storm drains, and maintenance crawlspaces, stretching out in myriad patterns that beggar design and mapping. A small percentage of Gateway's population knows these patterns better than they know their own families. For good or for ill, they make their living from the dark and miserable

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world beneath the city, oblivious to the passage of the sun and working only at their own pace. The largest group of residents in the sewers is the Urchins, a band of tattered thieves who pride themselves on their loyalty and self-reliance. Fugitives and rebels, they hold true to each other but reject the corruption of the city above them. Numbering less than a hundred all told, the Urchins are quite capable of avoiding the other, more aggressive gangs who roam the sewers.

Gateway's sewer system stands in stark contrast to the rigid grid of streets above it: a chaotic maze that can be navigated with remarkable speed by the small and the nimble. Unbeknownst to the population of the city, large sections of the drains and tunnels have been raised, diverted, and turned into illicit storehouses, secret passages from one part of Gateway to another, and even gambling dens. The sewers see a great deal of smuggling activity, particularly from the Tongs, who use the gargantuan outflow pipes to bring illicit goods such as opium quickly and quietly into Eastowne without anyone being the wiser. The many junctures and storm drains serve as navigation points, and any group traveling in the sewers who lose their point of reference could be lost for weeks. The police maintain a patrol in the sewers, but it serves little purpose beyond uncovering the odd corpse before it washes out to sea. With a scant few officers and a constantly roving network of smugglers, thieves, and worse, even the Chief has to admit that patrolling the sewers is little more than a formality: one most unwelcome for the officers who draw the short straw.

The chaotic nature of the sewers often works in favor of those who skulk in their shadows, as voices travel far and can echo deceptively around the unwary traveler. While rival groups can sometimes walk within five feet of each other without knowing it, it is child's play for an experienced Urchin to track and monitor someone through the mossy, sweating, brick tunnels. There are no reliable maps of the tunnels beneath Gateway. Too many departments were involved over too long a period to leave any reliable plans in the City Archives, and no contractor has ever worked on a large enough portion to gain an idea of the overall layout. Even denizens like the Urchins don't know the entire layout, though they can navigate their own "turf" with absolute assurance.

16) Junction 27/H

Possibly the largest junction drain in Gateway, Junction 27/H joins a number of smaller tunnels that run beneath the western part of the city into one larger drain, which empties out into the sea beneath McDougal Bridge. 27/H is roughly cylindrical in shape, a vast drum rimmed with waterfalls, rusted gantries, and slippery brick walkways that hug its sides like the bands of a barrel. Since 27/H accepts drainage from various pipes at staggered levels, it is phenomenally deep. A fall from the upper levels will kill anyone unfortunate enough to slip, if not from impact then certainly from infection or drowning. Sewage from the numerous small outlet drains bursts onto 27/H with little or no warning.

27/H serves a number of purposes besides that for which it was created. The Urchins, the only sewer gang that actually goes so far as to live beneath the city, uses it as their

headquarters. These hermits and outcasts live in a subsidiary chamber at the lowest level, which was walled off and drained long ago. Many of the more unstable wooden walkways and rope bridges on 27/H were constructed by the Urchins from driftwood and stolen supplies.

The current leader of the Urchins is Henri Vosges, a warlock who came to Gateway from Terminus three years ago. Little is known about the enigmatic figure, but he claims that the injustice of the Anti-Sorcery Act has driven him "from the surface." He fervently believes in building a new world far from the light of day — more so than many of the other Urchins, who live here only because no one else wants them. Despite his disavowal of the surface, he frequently speaks out against it at gatherings, and his impassioned speeches have led to a rise in violent crimes perpetrated by the more impressionable gang members. A few of the elder Urchins believe that Vosges' bitter rhetoric will bring them nothing but trouble, and are looking for some way to get rid of him in order to safeguard their numbers.

Henri Vosges

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Contortions 4, Demolitions 6, Electricity 8, Engineering 5, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 4, Gravity 5, Intimidation 6, Lore (Research) 7, Medicine 4, Melee 2, Perception 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Magical Aptitude, Mean Streets, Prodigy.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Rogue Scientist 1.

17) The Highway

This series of raised platforms runs above some of the more level sewer tunnels, and serves as a clearing house for illicit goods. Initially designed to allow inspection teams to move through the sewers without wading thigh-deep in waste, the wide iron walkways and stone terraces have been seized upon by opportunistic black marketeers as places to sell goods without having to bring them into the city proper. A series of high-profile police raids last summer led a number of small-time fences to look for somewhere more unusual to conduct their business. The Highway is where they came. Suitcases and crates line the slippery paths, each attended by at least one nervous-looking individual with a bulge under his shoulder. Drugs, stolen goods and smuggled contraband can be found for a fraction of what they would normally cost, and the crooks who peddle their wares beneath the city just slip back into the shadows after doing business. In addition to dealing in stolen goods, the sharks of the Highway also deal in people. Anyone who needs to get out of town fast can usually find a speedy and silent exit waiting for them down in the tunnels — for the right price. Dealing at the Highway can be risky, however. The sewers are a confusing place, and it's easy to set

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up an ambush. Many a fence has done a nice night's business only to end up face down in the scummy waters after getting jumped by some bruiser looking for an easy score.

Typical Fence

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 7, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Disguise 4, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 5, Forgery 4, Perception 5, Pick Lock 2, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Lucky.

Profession: Con Artist 1.

18) Outlet Pipe 3

This outlet juts precariously from a sheer rock face about a mile north of Underisle Heights, hanging mere feet above the ocean waves at high tide mark. Wide enough for four men to walk along abreast and hidden by rocks from prying eyes, it would be the perfect focus for smuggling operations by any gang that knew about it. At least, it would be had Li Xiang Lao of the Tun Mi Lung Tong not arranged otherwise. A small and weak Tong, the Tun Mi Lung had been struggling to maintain their place in the criminal underworld until the discovery of Outlet Pipe 3. Lao's daughter, Mei Fang, spent two years combing the city for something that would give her family the edge, until she finally discovered the pipe by chance. She set up the operation, destroyed all city records relating to the pipe, and spent months committing the bends and twists of the surrounding sewers to memory. To this day, she is the only person who is allowed to accompany cargo from the pipe to its destination beneath the Tong's headquarters. All others who have tried to discover the path have vanished. With the pipe as an ace in the hole, the Tong has rapidly risen to the top of the pecking order, and now numbers among the most powerful in the city. A number of other gangs, including the Patterson brothers, would pay handsomely to know how the Tun Mi Lung manages to smuggle their drugs right under the noses of the police, but the fate of all those who have tried makes for a nasty deterrent.

Li Xiang Lao

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 3, Contortions 4, Demolitions 5, Disguise 2, Puzzles 3, Etiquette 4, Evasion 7, Firearms 3, Martial Arts 7, Medicine 1, Perception 5, Stealth 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Exotic Knowledge, Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 1, Thief 1.

OTHER LOCATIONS

19) Gunmetal Island

To hear ex-cons talk about it, Gunmetal Island Penitentiary is a vision of damnation brought to unholy life. Perched precariously on a windswept piece of rock in the middle of Gateway Harbor, it boasts a perfect track record: not a single escape has been recorded since the end of the war. The prison is accessible only by boat, and is monitored carefully from the shore. The walls within hold the most brutal, vicious criminals in the Commonwealth. Many are flown in from other cities, held without hope of parole or extradition. Gateway charges a monstrous fee to house such criminals, and benefits from the island's reputation as an inescapable pit.

The facility consists of three main wings and a work plant, where prisoners toil in the laundry or make license plates. The four form a cross with the central processing point as the nexus. Here, prisoners are brought in and assigned to their cells, observed by armed guards watching from shooting galleries along the walls. Prisoners may never move between wings, limited to their own cellblock and the work plant. An exercise yard on the north side of the island provides the only real instance of fresh air for the prisoners, which is at once a blessing and a curse. For while the sight of blue sky and the sound of crashing waves can prove soothing, the yard provides an unobstructed view of downtown Gateway... seemingly close enough to reach out and touch. The tantalizing glimpse of freedom makes the prison itself all the more unbearable.

Gunmetal Island is particularly proud of its warlocks' wing, one of the only cellblocks of its kind in existence. While major offenders are subjected to the same harsh punishments as others of their kind, safer warlock prisoners are contained through less drastic measures. The warden uses grounded rubber floors, rotating sleep cycles and constant monitoring to keep the prisoners from using their magic, and warlocks receive special privileges if they can go extended periods without indulging their talents. Of course, they're never allowed outside of their cells, even to shower (bathing water is brought in) and warlock prisoners never interact with the general population, who avoid them like the plague (magic use has a way of evening the odds in any prison fight). Any warlock found using magic on prison grounds is subjected to a regimen of Antidox. Any warlock using magic in an attempt to escape is shot on sight.

Indeed, escape in any form is considered impossible. Gunmetal Island's stone walls are nearly impenetrable, and not even the strongest gaunt can bend the prison's patented iron bars. Even if someone manages to clear the walls (and several have), the harbor itself has proven a terrifying deterrent. Sharks frequent the waters around the island, claiming anyone foolish enough to take a swim, and even makeshift rafts can be torn apart like matchsticks by the vicious riptides. Unauthorized vessels which approach the island are given a single warning before being fired upon; three ships have been sunk in recent years as part of jail-break attempts. Some day, a criminal may be smart enough or ruthless enough to break out of Gunmetal Island. Until then, it serves as an intractable reminder that actions have consequences, and that a deep dark hole waits for those who flaunt the law.

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NPCs

Typical Prison Guard

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 2, Evasion 4, Firearms 8, Intimidation 6, Lore (Prison Society) 6, Melee 5, Perception 6, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 2, Officer of the Law 1.

Typical Prisoner

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 4, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Contortions 4, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Intimidation 4, Pick Lock 4, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 6, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

MAYOR LOOMIS

Archibald Loomis never had much use for small dreams. He spent long hours of his formative years staring out to sea, wondering what lay beyond it. Surprisingly, he never acted on his yearnings; he didn't have to. Gateway was the greatest port in the world, he reasoned. Why should he travel to the horizon when he could bring the horizon here? Early ventures in the shipping industry proved remarkably successful, and Loomis's business savvy helped solidify Gateway's thriving import economy. Political office was only a matter of time.

He was elected mayor on a platform of inclusion, "a single voice for every street" as his campaign slogan went. He likened governing Gateway to spinning tops; as long as all the pieces kept moving, the city would never lose its balance. Upon entering office, he instigated a series of public works programs, run by neighborhood leaders and employing thousands of local citizens. His greatest public coup was Gateway's crystal ball squad, which he trumpets as a textbook model of minority communities working for the common good. Of course, he



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neglects to mention all of the kickbacks his programs spread around, or the tidy “honorariums” he pockets every time he puts someone on the public payroll, but what does it matter? The city’s working; that’s what counts.

In addition, he hasn’t forgotten his paradoxical desire to see the world without leaving home. Under his tutelage, Gateway’s harbor has expanded to include all manner of traffic, and her museums hold trinkets from every corner of the world (though where exactly is sometimes a matter of debate). He enjoys concerts and art exhibitions, and often hosts black tie soirees to benefit the city’s artists. Under his watch, Gateway’s cosmopolitan nature has expanded to rival anyone save perhaps New Eden. He devours newspapers, and can speak with remarkable authority on any issue in the U.C., from Central City’s labor woes to the latest bill in Nova Roma.

Politically, Loomis is a thundering bully, barking arguments with palpable ferocity. He performs well at press conferences, and can roll with the political punches as well as any man; for all his ferocity, he has a mind like a steel trap. His recent reelection — in which he captured nearly 75% of the vote — speaks volumes about his popularity, which he parlays into fearsome political capital. Those who oppose him do so very carefully, and his foes on the council must often make great concessions in order to get what they want. He thinks of himself as open-minded and fair, which helps keep his ego in check, but he never lets anyone forget how much he’s given to his city. And for all the corruption, Gateway has prospered under his watch. The fact that anyone can organize such chaos is a testament to his keen political skills... and the fact that he hasn’t used it all for personal gain.

Loomis divides his time between City Hall and an imposing townhouse on the city’s north shore. He has several other residences of which he makes use, including a summer retreat in the hills of Paradiso. He has three children whom he rarely sees, and a wife who never appears in public save during the campaign season. His offices occupy an entire floor of City Hall, through which he controls the police department, fire department, and a dozen other civic services... all run by cronies or political allies. He stands about 5’9”, with wide shoulders and a modest pot belly which has begun to expand in recent years. He dresses in conservative business suits, and his close-cropped hair is always neatly parted. He has a penchant for Borderlands cigars, which his shipping company brings in by the boatload. He can always be found puffing one, clenched between his teeth at a jaunty angle which his supporters find utterly charming.

Like any politician, he has skeletons in his closet, but he keeps a tight rein on all of them... all save one. His sexual predilections tend towards the exotic, something his wife (and most of his constituents) would be shocked to hear. Bondage and “light abuse” are par for the course for him, and he’s begun experimenting in even more unsavory practices. He’s very discrete, employing several high-class madams known for their good judgment, but public knowledge could prove politically disastrous... and likely merit criminal charges.

Mayor Loomis

Attributes: Brawn 7, Build 5, Brains 7, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 9, Disguise 6, Etiquette 6, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 3, Intimidation 8, Lore (Gateway Industries) 8, Perception 5, Perform (Oratory) 6, Puzzles 5, Sport (Golf) 4, Sport (Tennis) 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Prodigy.

Profession: Politician 3, Wealthy 3, White Collar Worker 3.

COUNCILMAN CASPER LANG

Gateway may be the only city in the Commonwealth where an admitted warlock can be elected to office. Casper Lang, a “freelance physics professor” with a taste for power, has served on the City Council for nearly eight years and is rapidly becoming a political staple. His lanky frame stands out among the stuffed shirts of City Hall, and his ready smile as a way of disarming even the most fervent anti-magic crusader.

Like most warlocks, he keeps mum about his past. He served combat duty in the war against the Order of Nu, where he became a decorated officer with multiple citations to his credit. He was elected just after the war, following his discharge from the army; his sorcerous behavior was seen as an asset at the time. Once he took office, he toned down his past while working to ease anti-magic fervor in the city. His efforts have paid off. Under Lang and Mayor Loomis, Gateway’s warlocks have enjoyed a gradual increase in rights and privileges.

Naturally, his ascent hasn’t come without controversy. Political opponents paint him as a dangerous radical, and his open arrogance has cost him several prominent allies. He was the subject of intense scrutiny following the passage of the Anti-Sorcery Act, including a hearing before a Praetorium Subcommittee. His sterling record in the war helped exonerate him and the charges were dismissed, though Nova Roma never forgave the smug tone he displayed during the proceedings. His house and office are bugged, a pair of NLEB agents were assigned as constant tails, and he receives death threats on a regular basis. Through it all, he goes on about his duties as if his magic were nothing more than an eccentric hobby.

To be sure, his sorcery is powerful. Casper mastered the art long ago, but he has enough self-discipline to keep the desire to use it in check. He never practices outside of his private residence; there’s no need to add fuel to the fire. Politically, Lang is surprisingly middle-of-the-road. He advocates a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in regards to fellow warlocks, supporting laws against public displays while quietly relaxing restrictions against private study. He proved surprisingly reluctant to embrace the city’s crystal ball squad, until their success eliminated them as a political liability. Though his enemies consider him an unrepentant hypocrite, few can argue with his results. His political savvy is unmatched, and only Mayor Loomis holds more power in City Hall.

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Not all of his opposition has come from the anti-sorcery movement. Some warlocks believe he has done more harm than good, drawing unwanted attention to their community at the worst possible time. A few have even called him a traitor, claiming that he's worse than the crystal ball squads. He responds to such bravado with quiet pressure, addressing his critics personally in circumstances favorable to making a strong impression. Two or three of his most vocal opponents have left the city, frightened off by some unseen threat. Lang denies any involvement in their exile, but confesses that "Gateway is better off without such rotten apples."

Lang is tall, about 6'4", and doesn't weigh more than 175 pounds. His large Adam's apple bobs up and down constantly when he talks, and his tailored suits draw the eye in an utterly disarming way. He shaved his beard when he took office and his face now has a curiously fleshy look, like sliced ham. When he speaks, he uses gentle, measured tones, marked with just a tinge of condescension. His infuriating logic leaves his adversaries sputtering with rage. Lang never married (another political black mark which he's had to overcome), and spends all of his time at City Hall, often working in his offices late into the night. He's become quite friendly with the night cleaning staff, though he never speaks to them in his (bugged) office. Instead, he sees them in the halls or finds them in their break rooms, always willing to listen to their stories. In exchange, they help him out by quietly keeping tabs on other parts of City Hall. Many discarded documents, assumed destroyed by their owners, have miraculously found their way into Lang's hands, a fact which only adds to his sorcerous reputation.

Councilman Casper Lang

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Etiquette 4, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 5, Intimidation 8, Kinetics 9, Lore (Research) 10, Magnetism 8, Medicine 3, Perception 7, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Tensile Energy 8, Thermal Energy 7.

Backgrounds: Magic License, Magical Aptitude, Prodigy, Wise.

Profession: Politician 3, Rogue Scientist 3.

THE PATTERSON BROTHERS

William and Barnard Patterson have memories of growing up amid the rat-infested wharves of Gateway Harbor. Their father worked as local muscle for an unscrupulous mob, and — as they recall — there was no problem he couldn't solve with his fists. His bull-headed approach to life finally caught up with him when he tried to intimidate a brawny ex-boxer. The man beat him to death right there on the dock, breaking over forty bones and rupturing the senior Patterson's vital organs. The brothers took from that a valuable lesson: there's always someone bigger than you, and violence only works when used sparingly.

They began their own criminal careers running numbers, with the elder William gathering bets for the bookies and Barney acting as lookout. By the time they dropped out of high school, they had their own bookmaking operation, which they used to finance prostitutes, opium dens, and drug smuggling. Bribery and nuanced threats were their *modus operandi*, and they rarely made open trouble, leading their rivals to dismiss them as weaklings. Furthermore, they refused to employ either warlocks or gaunts, a piece of open prejudice which they neither hid nor made excuses for. As their empire grew, so too did their list of enemies.

Their first big power struggle ended before it started; a trio of warlocks, angered by the brothers' refusal to deal with their kind, planned to shatter their crew and claim their business. The Pattersons stalled for time, feigning negotiations and looking for all the world like terrified rookies desperate to save their skins. Then a band of assassins, hired from Central City, struck down the warlocks like a storm. The trio were at three separate locations, secure in their belief that the Pattersons couldn't reach all of them. Two were hit by gunfire (one of them from a sniper rifle fired nearly half a mile away), while the third swallowed a cup of poisoned tea. Their underlings were quickly scattered, either wiped out, swept up by the police, or given the chance to join the Pattersons' operation. Suddenly, the threat was neutralized, and the Pattersons' status as weaklings was forever banished.

That was during the war. Since then, the brothers' operation has expanded the same way it was founded: quietly, softly, without a hint of public attention. Their subordinates are among the most ruthless men in the city, but they remain fanatically loyal to their employers, and broke no disloyalty among the ranks. The Pattersons pay their people well and value business far ahead of personal vendettas. As long as things stay quiet, they believe, their endeavors will prosper.

Their patience has been tested recently by the emergence of the Eastowne Tongs, whose casual brutality makes regular headlines and whose membership includes both gaunts and warlocks. The Tongs have complete control over the opium and prostitution rackets in Eastowne, and have recently begun expanding into the Harbor District — a key location for Patterson operations. The Tongs' decentralized organization poses a problem for the Pattersons' "top down" approach, since there is no definable mastermind with whom to bargain or eliminate. Despite the growing danger, the Pattersons' operation remains the largest, strongest, and most profitable criminal organization in Gateway.

Barney is a little taller than his brother, with knobby hands and ears that tend to stick out. His brother William has the lithe moves of a dancer, and exudes more passive menace than the younger Patterson. Both have the same watery blue eyes as their father. They dress like dockworkers, a blue-collar nonchalance that belies their extravagant wealth (as well as making it harder to spot them amongst their henchmen). The two live in a nondescript box house north of Gateway; though outfitted with every comfort and guarded round the clock by enforcers, from the outside it seems no different than any other. They travel through an elaborate series of switched cars, never arriving in the same one twice. They also have several hideaways which only their closest confidantes know about,

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and a pair to which only the brothers themselves are privy. None of their rivals has yet pieced together their homestead, making assassination efforts very difficult. They rarely enter the city proper except to check on their operations, and never announce their plans in advance. They meet associates on their yacht, the *Thunder and Reign* (see page 174), leaving subordinates to control their empire in the city proper. Like feudal rulers, they govern their kingdom from a distance. Some have begun to wonder whether their self-imposed “security” has cut them off from changing trends. They may not be able to recognize a real threat until it is too late.

William Patterson

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 3, Athletics 7, Brawl 6, Demolitions 3, Evasion 8, Firearms 7, Intimidation 8, Melee 8, Perception 7, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 7, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Loyal Retainer, Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 3, Wealthy 3.

Barney Patterson

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 4, Brawl 6, Demolitions 7, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 7, Forgery 6, Intimidation 5, Medicine 6, Melee 5, Perception 6, Puzzles 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Loyal Retainer, Mean Streets.

Profession: Gangster 3, White Collar Worker 1.

TENG SHUNLI

The Tong Dynasty has no specific head, but its most influential voice is this cryptic gang leader from the Gateway back alleys. At the ripe old age of 32, he’s practically an old man among the Tongs, but his grasp of Machiavellian politics has helped forge a lasting peace amid the wolf packs that rule Eastowne. Teng came to Gateway as an immigrant at the age of ten. He remembers losing his parents shortly thereafter and resorting to theft to stay alive. In an environment of kill-or-be



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killed, he thrived by using his wits... and reading everything he could get his hands on. He would often turn down promises of easy cash in order to plunder books and other sources of knowledge, which he devoured with breathtaking speed. His intellect, coupled with the ugly circumstances of his environment, soon led him to sorcery. He studied under a local warlock, learning the tricks of the trade before killing the old man in a meaningless dispute. His powers since then have been far more sizzle than steak, but they were enough to cow the other Tong members into accepting his leadership. Years of living on the streets gave him the callousness of a sociopath, but also a brutal clarity that showed him the quickest way to get what he wanted.

The Tongs always maintained an uneasy peace under the Dynasty, and Teng saw an advantage to further stabilizing that condition. He began speaking out for unity at the Tongs' meetings, serving as peacemaker between squabbling gangs and helping to establish territorial boundaries which all members could respect. Along with a trio of other Dynasty members, he set the accords that keep the Tongs united, allowing them to collectively expand far beyond what they believed possible. They are rapidly becoming a dominant power in Gateway's underworld, and have earned the enmity of some very powerful figures. None of it would be possible without Teng's tenacious politicking.

Naturally, the situation is not without problems. The Patterson brothers are starting to take notice of the upstart gangs, which could spell trouble in the future. The Tongs' brutality means increased police scrutiny, especially outside of Eastowne, where they hope to expand their operations. Most distressing is the mixture of gaunts and warlocks in the Tongs' ranks, a mixture which could prove explosive. Teng has noticed these issues and believes that they can be overcome... if the Tongs stick together. That may prove impossible, however. He does what he can by stressing their common problems, and by ruthlessly enforcing territorial boundaries in Eastowne, but he fears it will do little good in the long run. Sooner or later, the peace will be broken, and the Tongs' power will crumble to internal warfare.

Like any good politician, he has a fallback plan. He intends to keep the Tongs together for as long as possible, long enough to break the Pattersons and take over their operations in the Harbor District. His crew, the Wu-Mei, controls territory near the harbor, and would stand to benefit from the Pattersons' sudden removal from the picture. Then he and his band can shift operations to a more secure area, and let his former compatriots slaughter each other as they will. In the meantime, he will keep up appearances and try to prevent his compatriots from ruining the good thing he has.

Teng is a lean, sinewy Asian man with glittering black eyes and long hair tied back in a queue. His well-muscled body is a mass of scar tissue, and he moves with a speed that belies his natural grace. He has tattooed "magical" symbols on his chest and back, claiming that they increase his potency (though they have no effect on any sorcery he uses). As a warlock, Teng is mediocre at best, though he makes the most of his abilities. He mixes magic with some devastatingly effective martial arts, and has gotten so good at it that his method almost constitutes a fighting style unto itself. His leadership abilities are

undisputed, and he hasn't had to fend off a challenge from within for years. Teng harbors no particular grudges or prejudices. He treats gaunts as fairly as his fellow warlocks... and can kill them both with equal efficiency. He judges everyone he meets according to two criteria: whether they pose a threat to him, and whether they have something that he wants. Where you stand on the scale determines how long you'll stay alive in his company.

Teng Shunli

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 7, Demolitions 4, Evasion 8, Gravity 4, Intimidation 7, Kinetics 5, Martial Arts 9, Melee 6, Perception 5, Pick Lock 5, Puzzles 5, Stealth 8, Streetwise 8.

Backgrounds: Exotic Knowledge, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Gangster 1, Rogue Scientist 1, Street Tough 1.

OFFICER HENRY LEWIS

There may be tougher precincts than the 43rd elsewhere in the Commonwealth, but there certainly aren't many of them, and there are few cops tougher than Lewis. It takes a lot of guts to walk a beat in the Frying Pan, particularly when your own kind thinks you're a traitor and your fellow cops never trusted you anyway. Lewis has worked in the 4-3 for three years, ever since he arrived in Gateway on a bus from Central City. He took up residence in one of the derelict buildings in the Gaunt District. Within a week, he had come to the notice of Captain Neiman after he was brought in for brawling with the police. When asked to explain himself, he refused, showing open contempt for the cops of the Frying Pan and demanding to be released. Captain Neiman questioned him personally and discovered that the cop he had fought with was shaking down the gaunts living in Lewis' building. Lewis impressed the Captain with his forthrightness and honesty, and she returned to him several times looking for advice on approaching the gaunt community. After about a year, she offered him a position as a beat cop. Lewis accepted on the spot, and had his badge within the week (Neiman made sure the proper Academy qualifications appeared in his record).

Lewis now walks a beat in the heart of the Gaunt District — in an area few cops will willingly go — and the gangs have learned to leave him alone. One of the biggest gaunts in the city, Lewis elicits the right combination of fear and respect,



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and if a cop is harmed on his beat he will let nothing stand between him and the perpetrator. His experiences taught him that he can't solve every problem with his fists, and that many of his problems can't be solved at all. The insight has served him well in his new duties.

Lewis' problems began last year after he brought down the Hellcats, a street gang who answered to Sam Sketch (see page 182). Sketch saw Lewis, the only gaunt cop in on the bust, and swore he would kill the "traitor." He engineered evidence, making it look like Lewis fed information to and took payments from the Hellcats, and when the gang was tried for assault, robbery, and arson, Lewis' name was dragged through the mud. As a leatherback, it was no great leap of the imagination to believe he may have been helping his fellow gaunts for a little scratch, and he swiftly lost the trust of his fellow officers. The trial went on for months, and Lewis was suspended from the force while Internal Affairs investigated him. Wandering the streets of the District, he found that the gaunt population despised him too — either he was a traitor, or a criminal, or he worked with warlocks against his own people.

Then last winter, the verdict arrived, and Lewis was cleared. The judge cited lack of compelling evidence. Reinstated quietly and with little fuss, Lewis received a sincere apology from Captain Neiman, but many of his fellow officers still mistrusted him. After a couple of incidents in the District, Lewis moved more or less full-time into the 43rd Precinct House, where he spends his spare time either sleeping in a spare storeroom, or working any beat that's short-handed.

A dedicated cop, Lewis is only now beginning to recover the trust of his fellow officers — a recovery that may take years. Even now, he watches his back wherever he goes, aware that he can't count on backup when in danger. Few officers of the 4-3 like him, though they'll grudgingly admit that he's the most fearless man in the precinct. The only officer who would trust Lewis with his life is Lincoln Castor, the rookie warlock who went after the Hellcats with him. He knows Lewis was never crooked, and is on the verge of figuring out who set him up. As for Lewis, he knows Sketch framed him. He made a mistake like that once, long ago, in Central City, and he walked a long and hard road to make things right. He'll be damned if he'll hang for something he didn't do, and now he patiently waits for his path to cross Sketch's. When it does, the law might have to take a back seat. Henry Lewis is a good cop, but there are some things more important than justice.

Officer Henry Lewis

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 10, Build 9, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 45.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 8, Bureaucracy 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 3, Intimidation 7, Perception 4, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Huge, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Officer of the Law 1, Street Tough 1.

MR. SNIDGE

The most successful independent criminal in Gateway, the infamous Mr. Snidge makes a living without owing anything to the big gangs. Snidge, who is known by no other name, is as tough to pin down as the Gateway fog, and that's the way he likes it. He cultivates an air of mystery, passing out fake stories about his past, his operation, and even his appearance until nobody in the city has any clear idea if there even is a Mr. Snidge. Commonly held beliefs about the man vary wildly — he's a government spook rooting out criminals according to one crook and a cabal of fences operating under a single name to another. No two people can even agree on what color Mr. Snidge's eyes are. The truth is buried somewhere deep in a morass of urban legend; digging around for it would take a long time and do nobody any good.

Physically, the actual Mr. Snidge is not an intimidating character, neither particularly tall nor particularly short, neither fat nor slim. He's an average man of average height and average build, with short, neatly trimmed brown hair. He's clean-shaven, with no scars or tattoos, and he doesn't wear glasses. Anyone who passed by Mr. Snidge on the street wouldn't look twice at the ant-like little man with a briefcase, hat, and brown suit. The only affectation Mr. Snidge allows himself is a brushed silk necktie, and even that he views as an unnecessary risk. He does not smoke, drink, chase women, or gamble. He doesn't even seem to care that he possesses none of the vices so common to the underworld. He merely sits quietly at his desk, plotting his next job into the long hours of the night, seemingly working all the more furiously as sleep begins to overcome him.

Behind the placid, forgettable face lurks the mind of a merciless shark. He knows he hasn't gotten where he is without being very careful, and isn't about to throw away the little empire he has built for anything. Mr. Snidge boasts a pair of hidden bank accounts — held under aliases — that contain over half a million dollars. He holds the lease to a building on Snoops' Row (where he works) and a house overlooking McDougal Bridge. These assets were not things Mr. Snidge came to by chance, and diligence and forethought are the watchwords of his operations. Every contingency is planned out thoroughly in advance with a degree of forethought that borders on clairvoyance.

Mr. Snidge is a hitman, the best in the city. He passes no judgment upon his targets, taking any job that meets his standards. When he agrees on a target, he spends every waking moment getting to know them, observing them, chatting with them in elevators, hiring P.I.s to assemble dossiers on them (never the same agency twice; he usually poses as an insurance agent). He pursues them doggedly, cutting no corners and taking no easy route to them. He will not assassinate a target until he knows everything worth knowing about them. Four filing cabinets full of extensive files on his targets line the walls of his office on Snoops' Row.

Of course, nobody springs fully formed from the ether, and Mr. Snidge is no exception. His distant, cold, untouchable persona is a product of great sadness and loss, as is his merciless nature. Long ago, life ceased to have any value to him, and the

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ghosts of his past — of a life he no longer has any conscious memory of — return by night to torment his dreams. In other circumstances, he may have joined the ranks of the Few, but the disconnect was too great. Once, he had a happy life, but it vanished long ago, and the pain of that loss — or its perceived loss — took his soul and compassion with it. When he lost his life, he eradicated every last trace of it with methodical thoroughness. Whoever Mr. Snidge was, that has gone now, replaced with the patient little monster that ends lives with the unthinking efficiency of an office clerk.

Mr. Snidge

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 8, Moxie 3, Smoothness 9.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 6, Contortions 5, Demolitions 8, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 10, Forgery 6, Lore (Poison) 8, Melee 3, Perception 7, Puzzles 4, Sleight of Hand 8, Stealth 8, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Marksmanship, Small.

Profession: Gunman 2, Investigator 1, Wealthy 3.

ROSA BENITEZ

Rosa Benitez may be the last honest reporter in Gateway, a fact she takes little pride in. A petite woman in her late 20s, Rosa has been working on the staff of the *Clarion* for four years and can remember when it used to actually feature news. As lead crime reporter, she once broke stories that turned heads, won awards, and made a difference. Since the paper's change of editorial direction, Rosa has found the focus of her work shifting. The owners wanted crime portrayed differently. More specifically, they wanted no emphasis at all on organized crime, corrupt officials, or corporate malfeasance. The crime they wanted to show was shocking, lurid, and above all, a product of the poor. Desperate times showed in the pages of the *Clarion*, and Rosa turned her considerable skills as a journalist to making people fear those less fortunate than themselves. As the *Clarion* called for tougher measures against criminals and whipped a nervous public into a frenzy of suspicion, the real crooks went about their business unnoticed, victimizing whomever they chose, and making a fast buck out of any number of illegal activities.

Rosa happened upon such an activity several years ago, when she stumbled across records indicating that some of the worst slum housing in the Gaunt District belonged to a front company held by a City Councilman. Several unsuccessful attempts to shake her off the trail later, Rosa arrived with her

story at the *Clarion* offices. The editor looked at it, nodded, and filed it away. The next day, Rosa found her desk moved to the Society office, and the story was nowhere to be seen. Whoever had it in for her must have considered the matter closed, and six months of interviewing dowagers and debutantes would have crushed the spirit of any enterprising reporter. Any reporter, of course, but her.

Last summer, a story published anonymously in the *Sentinel Island Guardian* accused Councilman Harris of selling city land in the Gaunt District to himself in order to make a profit. There was just enough evidence in the story to prompt an inquiry, and Harris' career was finished. Before he was sent to prison, he sent two of his cronies around to pay Rosa a visit. Her name had never been linked with the case, so her death would be just another murder in the big city. Rosa won't speak about what happened that night, but her apartment burned down, and she was found wandering barefoot across McDougal Bridge by police at 2 AM. She was rushed to hospital suffering from blood loss and concussion, and her left cheek bore a nasty cut leaving a scar that drew her mouth into a crooked smile. The thugs who had called on her earlier weren't so lucky: they went up with the apartment building. That night, Councilman Harris hanged himself as the police broke down his door.

If anything, the incident strengthened Rosa's resolve rather than broke it. She may never recover from the trauma of that night, but it has brought with it a desire to see justice done at all costs. She has seen a lot of bad things in her time, but continues to face them all with determination and verve... even if she is still forced to cover debutantes. She hasn't been fired or threatened, and Findley has said he would like to see her out and about more. Rosa has been known to work as an assistant for some of the P.I.s on Snoops' Row, asking little in return for helping out with any investigation that interests her. She has become less reckless in confronting any corruption she sees, and tends to cover her tracks more than she did before. As a result of her silent crusade against corruption, however, more than one public official or company vice-president has been ruined.

While no longer the great beauty she once was, Rosa is still striking, and dresses to compliment her scar, which she views as a badge of honor. On quiet nights, when she looks out over the shoreline, she cannot help but wonder what is wrong with the world. Like so many others, she may never receive an answer to that question.

Rosa Benitez

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 6, Gut 7, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Contortions 6, Disguise 4, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 5, Lore (Business Law) 5, Lore (Journalism) 6, Perception 6, Pick Lock 3, Puzzles 7, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Rugged.

Profession: Investigator 2, White Collar Worker 1.



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NATASHA ST. JOAN

She came out of nowhere like a fresh mountain breeze in the smoky shadows of the District, and she stole the hearts of her customers with one sultry look. Singer, entrepreneur, and information broker, Natasha is the toast of the Gaunt District's underworld. Standing well over six feet tall (an unusual height even for a female gaunt) she wears a long black wig draped over one eye, making her look like the terrible distortion of a movie star. Natasha is never seen in anything less than the most glamorous dresses, and never appears in public without a pair of long silk gloves (usually a rich, deep maroon). Her appearance is very important to her, and most of the profits from her club, it is guessed, are blown on her extensive wardrobe. In the gaunt community, her vanity is legendary, and signed photographs of the singer fetch money as far away as Central City (where it is rumored that some of the big bosses have invited Natasha to sing for them privately). Locally, Natasha is adored by many leatherbacks, the most vocal of whom are the gang bosses Sam Sketch and Joe Cannino, with whom she deals very delicately. The last thing she wants is bloodshed over her.

Natasha's mysterious appearance at the heart of the District may have been the only thing that prevented open war on the streets between the various gaunt gangs, and she has been quick to profit from the lull in the violence. Her club — founded in the abandoned home of the leader of the Hellcats — has been an enormous success, and gaunts of every affiliation come every night to see her sing, and drink without the threat of being shot. Natasha, backed by her two enormous goons, has made it clear to the patrons that they are welcome only so long as they do not assault each other or discuss their business. So far, this rule has held, more from fear of being overheard by a rival than from Natasha's edict. One could argue, however, that that was her intention from the start. By creating a no man's land where all of the city's gangs were welcome, she has also created an uneasy truce that continues to permeate the District. While gang fighting is still common these days, it is considerably less frequent.

Natasha walks a tightrope every day. She makes a reasonable amount of money from her club and singing, but her real strength lies in gathering and selling information. She cultivates the image of a vain but naïve singer, creating another persona for herself. Beneath the façade she is always listening, and the information she learns (either personally or through a network of informants) is sold to third parties: betraying the activities of the gaunt gangs to their rivals, the Tongs, or the Pattersons. As well as netting her a tidy profit, it keeps the gangs from gaining an advantage over one another. That was the plan when she moved to Gateway — keep the gangs even and at each other's throats, and make a profit before moving on. It was a good plan, but one she now finds increasingly difficult to maintain. Gateway's Gaunt District is a terrible place, and the people here have a hard life. The gangs run roughshod wherever they please, even when they're just trying to get along. The Tongs and others like them are a corrupting influence, fighting wherever they get the chance with the District's gangs and not caring who gets caught in the crossfire. Nata-

sha sees people who are above the law exploiting those who have never had a chance, and she stands right in the middle of it — making a stack of dirty money from her own people by keeping them in a state of perpetual agitation. Despite herself, despite a string of bad experiences, despite a cynical streak a mile wide, Natasha feels remorse. She is determined not to let it get the better of her, however, and continues to play her game while she gets rich enough to leave Gateway forever and retire. She only hopes that no one dies for the sake of her fortune, but that might not be an option.

Natasha St. Joan

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 8, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Appraise 6, Athletics 5, Brawl 3, Contortions 4, Disguise 4, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 6, Intimidation 4, Medicine 2, Melee 4, Perception 4, Perform (Sing) 8, Sleight of Hand 6, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Dead Zone, Gaunt, Reduced Light Vision.

Profession: Femme Fatale 1, Performer 3, White Collar Worker 1.

PLOT HOOKS AND CAMPAIGN IDEAS

Below is a series of ideas that can serve as the basis of a campaign set in Gateway, as well as some brief plot hooks which can easily be expanded into complete scenarios.

THE FRYING PAN CAMPAIGN

Gateway's 43rd Precinct is the perfect location for player character cops, either as a few members of a more diverse group, or an entire squad of policemen based in the city's most tumultuous district. Scenarios can center around their case load — new crimes or potential crimes, which they must solve and/or thwart — and as the campaign proceeds, they may find themselves both rising in rank and becoming further entangled with the myriad plots which surround the Frying Pan. Campaigns set in the 4-3 will likely match the feeling of gritty cop shows like *Law and Order* or *Hill Street Blues*, as the PCs seek the clues that will unravel the mysteries to which they are assigned. PCs who don't belong to law enforcement can act as consultants, informants, or "outside operatives" assisting the officers during any scenario focused on the 4-3, and the campaign can easily shift away from the precinct to focus on other characters in the nearby neighborhoods.

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The Frying Pan certainly doesn't lack for intrigue. The machinations of the Tongs are a constant worry, as are the plethora of gaunt criminals who plague their resident district. The harbor brings in all manner of strange materials; it wouldn't take much for an enterprising cop to stumble upon a smuggling ring, drug courier, or something even odder. Gamblers and card sharks make their home in the 4-3, and the *Thunder and Reign* sits docked in the harbor, thumbing her nose at their authority. Mayor Loomis has shipping interests here, as well as a house of ill repute which he visits every now and again. All of them fall under the Frying Pan's jurisdiction... to say nothing of a thousand smaller schemes, plots, killings, and robberies that take place every day.

The luxury of a campaign set in the Frying Pan — or any other police department, for that matter — is that is can involve any number of storylines, from stolen goods to underworld warfare, to political schemes designed to net millions. It can also accommodate lengthy plot arcs recurring over multiple scenarios while still allowing one-shots on a regular basis. "Side" scenarios unrelated to the main campaign can easily be inserted without disrupting the larger picture — Captain

Neiman simply assigns them the case — allowing the GM to shift the mood or make a change of pace for a few sessions. The campaign's goals will likely be nebulous, since the characters are unlikely to eliminate (or even significantly diminish) the precinct's penchant for criminal mischief. But if the officer characters perform well, they can advance through the ranks and make a name for themselves... and in the process, perhaps uncover a few clues as to the real nature of the world.

LIFE IN EASTOWNE

Few locales make a more interesting base of operations than the colorful borough of Eastowne. Its denizens are pleasant and hard-working, but hide dark secrets, and the scent of danger lingers constantly in the air. PCs can leave its confines for a few scenarios — exploring the other aspects of the city — but something about these exotic street corners keeps calling them back.

Parties based in Eastowne can blend with the neighborhood more easily than the players may suspect. Round eyes stand out here, which might make some PCs easy to spot; on the oth-

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er hand, the large number of gaunts in the community means fewer prejudices against them than elsewhere, and warlocks are more accepted than most. Eastowne's strange diversity makes it easy to get eclectic PCs together in the same party, as well as giving them a common background besides their status among the Few.

It also gives them a unique locale through which any number of scenarios can spring. Eastowne is governed by its own invisible laws, unspoken rules and traditions that have nothing to do with the edicts in City Hall. Residents know which streets to avoid, and how much they will need to pay the Tongs every week for the privilege of breathing. They know what days the markets get fresh fish, and they know which restaurants are for the tourists only. They know that the "fireworks" shop on the corner actually sells nothing of the sort, but rather women whose love comes by the hour. And they know which doorways you never knock on, for fear of what may lay beyond.

Most such mysteries can be picked up in a short amount of time; the rest take a lifetime to truly understand. A few scenarios set in and around Eastowne will give the characters a good notion of how things work... and should also remind them just how much they *don't* know about their surroundings. There should always be a hint of the enigmatic in any scenarios set here: a sense that someone or something is lurking just out of sight.

Campaigns can revolve around anything from taking on the Tongs to collecting rare objects in search of the truth about this world. Warlock characters can find secret knowledge here, free of the Anti-Sorcery Act and attendant suspicion.

Gaunts can find more of a fair shake — positions that don't insult their dignity quite as much. And those hoping to forget their past can find respite within her confines. Of course, all of these things come with a price... which always arrives when the players least suspect it.

Whatever goals the players choose to pursue, they will have a fair amount of leeway within Eastowne's confines. Law enforcement here is much more deregulated than elsewhere. The police do what they can, but too many people distrust them — not that they fear the police, but they simply believe that the police cannot help them with their problems. The PCs can move as they will with few fears of legal repercussions, which should suit them just fine. On the other hand, their foes are similarly unrestricted, and the phalanx of Eastowne's unspoken laws is bound to catch them sooner or later. One missed step, one violated taboo, and the characters will find themselves in a world of hurt. That precariousness only worsens the deeper the characters probe beneath the surface. The puzzle box extends deeply into the culture here; every time they think they've figured it out, it changes to reveal another layer. An Eastowne campaign should ultimately confirm that some riddles can never be solved, and that some mysteries are best left as they are.

CAPO DI CAPO

Criminal characters have reasons of their own to like Gateway. No one faction holds dominance over the city, and yet the current balance makes for a certain stability. Up and coming ne'er-do-wells can make quite a name for themselves... if they're willing to take it by force.

An underworld campaign will likely involve the party as members of their own syndicate — a street gang or perhaps something a little more established — seeking to carve out an empire amid their rivals. Early scenarios might revolve around taking down scores — plotting robberies, smuggling stolen goods, or perhaps attacking their rivals — with power and domination the ultimate goal. The exact nature depends on the PCs motivations and specialties. Bank robbers will concentrate on knocking over the local savings and loan, for example, while con men might plan a scenario around fleecing a wealthy mark. There's room for anything in Gateway, and whatever they do will be felt by someone.

Small-time criminals will have to pay protection from one of the bigger outfits; probably either the Pattersons or the Eastowne Tongs, though lesser gangs will likely be less demanding (and give the characters a better chance for promotion). The characters are usually the direct agents during the initial stages of such a campaign, either executing their own capers, or doing so at the behest of their superiors. And there's more to worry



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about than just pulling off a score. Police investigators can prove surprisingly dogged — especially if the crime involved killing a cop, which prompts a brutal response from Gateway PD — and criminal rivals/bosses will seek to fence them in at every turn.

As the characters grow in power, the emphasis will shift to more esoteric means of procuring wealth. Instead of entering the action themselves, they will dispatch minions and underlings to do it for them, while they concentrate on political jockeying and identifying potential threats. When action does come, it often targets them specifically: a mob hit, for example, or some other form of assassination. If they belong to a larger group, they might wish to break off and found their own gang, which will create problems with their higher-ups. New enemies will appear — young turks hoping to cut some pieces off of the big fish — and ambitious underlings might itch for the top spot. Better-established organizations like the Pattersons will consider them an active threat... to say nothing of Gateway PD, which loves making big splashy arrests. If the PCs wish to survive, they may need to permanently take such heavy hitters out of action — or at least subjugate them beneath their thumb.

No one is pure in *The Edge of Midnight*, but by extension, no one is completely corrupted either. Campaigns involving underworld PCs can easily de-emphasize their status as the Few, but it needn't necessarily be the case, especially in a city like Gateway. Those who view the social system as inherently corrupt will naturally seek to detach themselves from it, defying its hypocrisy in an ultimate act of rebellion. They might do "good" by crushing other criminals, disposing of their rivals and avenging numerous victims in the process. Underworld figures also have access to knowledge, and can seek answers in areas where law-abiding citizens wouldn't think of looking. With all the strange things coming through Gateway, it's no stretch to land a few bizarre objects in the hands of a smuggler or drug-runner. If the PCs aren't careful, a seemingly simple pay-off may lead to secrets bigger than they can imagine.

DOWN AND OUT IN THE DISTRICT

The grim streets of Gateway's Gaunt District, choked with drifting fog and the stinking presence of Gateway Chemical, seem perennially quiet, though filled with shuffling, evasive gaunts. The atmosphere is one of downtrodden acceptance and poverty, but beneath the crumbling exterior lurks a world of valor and vice, death and glory, honor bound in a parcel of ugliness. The District can be a good base of operations for campaigns on the wrong side of the law, whether they're primarily gaunt-focused or not. It is a lawless and chaotic place populated by hermits, outcasts, and the underclass. The people of the District keep their loyalties close to their chests. Outsiders — particularly non-gaunts — are mistrusted as a rule, and any warlock who is discovered in the District is unlikely to ever be seen again.

Parties based in the District will probably be involved with the criminal activities of the gaunt gangs who constantly jockey for position and territory, as well as the neighboring Tongs who war with the gaunts for control of the District's vices. The

District is a place of great physical danger — gaunts are more ready to solve problems with their fists than the inhabitants of, say, Eastowne. While the violence in a District-based campaign will be more overt, there will at least be an accompanying sense of honesty — displays of strength are expected and admired among the gangs, and a group tough enough to stand against them will be accorded the respect of the leatherbacks. In a campaign where the PCs form a gang, they will find themselves thrown into a world where survival of the fittest is the only law that matters, a world in which they must constantly struggle against their enemies and their own dark impulses to stay sane and good, a world where blind social injustice and the truths that fuel it will drag them down more swiftly than a pair of cement shoes.

Of course, gang violence is endemic in the District, and something the police are powerless to stop. But that doesn't mean it should be allowed to continue. A group of PCs could take on the roles of disenchanting mobsters, rogue warlocks, or independent investigators working to lessen the influence of the gangs in the District and allow other gaunts a fair shake for the future. Scenarios in such a campaign will be based around stopping or foiling gang crimes, stealing supplies, setting up prominent gang members for arrest, possibly setting rival gangs against one another by using the delicate power structure of the District against them, and keeping the influence of the nearby Tongs out of Hell's Cheap Seats. All this must be accomplished while keeping a low profile and making sure innocents stay out of harm's way.

Ultimately, a campaign set around the District should convey the mixture of despair and hope that cling to the ruined buildings: the fundamental honesty of the population and the horrifying brutality of Gateway's street crime.

SNOOPS' ROW

Snoops' Row contains more private detectives along its length than any other street in the U.C. In terms of locations for a group of iconoclastic PCs, there are few places more suitable. As a rule, the detectives of Snoops' Row don't pry into each other's business, and don't ask any questions of their fellow detectives. Nonetheless, it would not be unreasonable for a group of detectives to band together for mutual protection and assistance or to crack a particularly tough case. Answering to no higher authority and working on their own terms, detective PCs based around Snoops' Row often have a great deal of freedom. The players are free to create varying types of shamus without stepping on each other's toes, and the Row has enough variety to allow for plenty of other options as well. Perhaps a player wishes to play a gaunt bodyguard, or a crusading reporter, or a member of the armed forces out of Fort Sentinel, or even a rare coin dealer who got wrapped up in the wrong situation. Each idea is feasible, and brings in more plot opportunities to the campaign. And Snoops' Row makes an ideal gathering place for them all.

As investigators, the campaign can easily take on a very diverse theme — they need to help out their clients, unravel mysteries, and make sense of the unfathomable in order to put bread on the table. Every so often a case is bound to turn

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up that's more than just taking photographs of a philandering husband, and even the most cautious or hard-hearted detectives can be drawn into a world of hidden danger, callous mobsters, and poison wrapped up in a red dress. While the PCs may have one objective that they carry throughout the campaign — such as taking down a major criminal or avenging the murder of a friend — scenarios can branch off with ease. The watchwords of any campaign set around Snoops' Row will be truth and determination, possibly backed up by a healthy dose of cynicism and a heart of gold. Ethics will be the most prized possessions of your PCs, as will their independence. Only by answering to no one can they be themselves.

POLITICAL BUSINESS

Players with a penchant for the Machiavellian can find fertile breeding ground in the bowels of City Hall. The Gateway Council controls every aspect of civic services, funneling an ocean of money into every conceivable corner. Dark interests surround anyone with power; organized crime dips its fingers into the city pie, buying votes through intimidation and expecting significant returns on the investment. Political machines run out the vote in every election, using blatantly illegal means to pack the ballot for their chosen candidates. Once the election ends, the victors squabble over the spoils. Favors are called in, deals brokered, and no one is above a little low-key extortion to get what they want...

Characters in such a campaign can play members of the City Council or more shadowy figures — advisors and associates of

the figureheads, pulling the strings from behind the scenes. Alternately, they can approach things from the other end, as gangsters or other outsiders hoping to exert influence over the movers and shakers in City Hall.

Scenarios set in such surroundings involve far more character role-playing than action. The players will invariably make enemies whom they cannot confront directly, but rather must jockey for power within an ever-changing configuration of favors and slights. Personalities become the driving force of such a campaign, requiring well-developed NPC allies and foils with which the characters must constantly interact. Success comes not in a hail of bullets, but with a maneuver that trumps or stymies the players' opposition.

Which isn't to say that scenarios need be all talk. Politics is a dirty business, and if the players wish to thrive, they're going to have to get down in the mud. Stories can revolve around such elements as acquiring damaging facts about their rivals (perhaps by bargaining with the criminal who holds the information), covering up embarrassing incidents of their own, and even engaging in quiet blackmail or other below-the-boards maneuvering. An increased crime wave (engineered by the players or their allies) can spell political trouble for the police chief and his supporters, while a reduction in crime (or even a few high-profile arrests to which the PCs contribute) can make him untouchable. There may even be an assassination attempt on a prominent Councilman, which the characters must race to prevent, solve, or even orchestrate.

Campaigns can center around an entire political season, beginning with the characters (or their boss) winning the election and ending with the next election, where their progress is either refuted or confirmed. Within that framework, the GM can establish opponents, let the PCs pursue their goals, and allow for the unintended consequences of their actions to bite them on the ass. Gateway's stability hides untold depths, and when the player characters go stirring things up, who knows what will emerge?

The players' motives will have a huge impact on how such a campaign proceeds. If they're political neophytes — interested in doing good with their position — they will be in for a rude shock, and the campaign might center around their efforts to survive in the shark tank without losing sight of their goals. Alternately, they could have nothing but power on their minds, and seek to control Gateway to the exclusion of all else. Or they could chart a middle course, reaping personal benefits while still managing to do some good. Regardless of the motives they espouse, their approach will dictate the sort of difficulties they face and how the campaign will proceed.

PLOT HOOKS

Tong Wars

Raymond Xiaomin is an up-and-coming Tong leader who chafes under the boundaries placed on him by the Dynasty. He has decided that comfortable stability simply won't do, and aims to break the peace between the Tongs. With a little finesse, he can arrange for the murder of a gaunt Tong member, with evidence pointing to a warlock leader from another band

THE GATEWAY CITY COUNCIL

The council is currently controlled by the Plebians (the left), who enjoy a healthy majority of nine seats to the right-wing Citizens' six. Mayor Loomis is a Plebian, while Casper Lang belongs to the Citizens. The other council members are briefly mentioned as follows. The list is presented for completeness purposes only; you're welcome to fill in any of the names with NPCs of your own devising, or PCs who have attained that position.

- Martin Canfield (Plebian), Council Chairman
- Xiang Chang (Plebian)
- Nancy Fong (Plebian)
- Walter Jeunet (Plebian)
- Gale Markenbaum (Plebian)
- Noel Miller (Plebian)
- Wendall Richman (Plebian)
- Miguel Romero (Plebian)
- Curtis Whale (Plebian)
- Eileen Conway (Citizen)
- Maria Gonzalez (Citizen)
- Horace Goodman (Citizen)
- Casper Lang (Citizen)
- Patrick Lockhart (Citizen)
- Gerald Mackey (Citizen)

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(possibly Teng Shunli, see page 188). The peace will shatter and he will be free to move against his rivals. He's confident enough to believe that the Eastowne underworld will be completely united under his thumb by the time the smoke clears.

The characters may become involved in several ways. Criminals will obviously have a vested interest in the outcome (especially if they belong to the Patterson faction), and peripheral figures may be easily drawn in as well. Perhaps someone witnesses Raymond's men kill the gaunt and now needs protection, or perhaps the characters themselves witness it and complicate Raymond's scheme. A key piece of evidence — the warlock patsy's scarf, for example — may have been stolen, and end up in the PCs' hands. Raymond needs to recover it if his plan is to work. The characters might even be hired by other Tong members, who need outside resources to contain the damage. How the PCs respond to such developments is entirely up to them.

Dirty Politics

Mayor Loomis's extracurricular activities have finally gone too far. Several prostitutes were left maimed and battered, and the madam in charge decided that a single payoff wasn't good enough. She began extorting money from him, threatening to sell photos of the deed to the press if he didn't make regular payments. For a brief period, Loomis dutifully sent the cash. Then one of his cronies decided to solve the problem. He hired a warlock to execute one of the madam's girls — letting her know that those in power will not be trifled with.

The call girl washes up in the harbor and the players are tasked (in any appropriate fashion) with finding her killer. She sports fading cuts and bruises, several weeks old, but they

aren't what killed her. At first her madam feigns ignorance, but then she too ends up dead (she grew frightened and tried to sell the photos in exchange for protection), suggesting something far more sinister than a trick gone wrong. The path to the truth can wind through any number of subplots, from the warlock criminals protecting the hitman to the mayor's aide protecting his boss at any price. What the player do when (or if) they uncover the truth could shake Gateway to its core.

Hot Potato

The player characters perform a job (possibly another scenario entirely), and are rewarded with a briefcase full of money. Unfortunately, the money doesn't belong to their employer. It was stolen from the Pattersons, and now the brothers want it back. When

the characters' employer balks, they destroy his business and run him out of town. Then they turn to the PCs, who by now have spent a fair chunk of the funds. The Pattersons' request is simple and reasonable: return the money and all will be forgiven. Oh, and it has to be the *original* money which the characters received. The bills themselves.

The money is counterfeit, part of a new endeavor by the Pattersons to increase their revenue. But the method hasn't been perfected, and if the bills land in the hands of the NLEB, it could spell big trouble for the brothers. In order to retrieve the bills, the characters will have to retrace their steps to each and every person they paid off between the time they got the money and the time the Pattersons contacted them. This could lead them in any number of directions and land them in all kinds of trouble.

Of course, most PCs will just tell the Pattersons to blow it out their ear, which carries its own form of trouble...

Organ Thieves

A body in the morgue shows up with his heart and kidneys missing. A piece of paper in his hand contains the name and address of one of the characters. The party has never seen the victim before, but the police suspect them of the murder. They need to find the real culprit before they take the fall.

The dead man's name is Paul Murdock, a transient farm worker who was targeted by a band of criminals. They sold his organs to a nearby hospital, a practice which they've engaged in several times before. They usually pay off a coroner's aide to ignore the missing organs (the bodies are cremated without much fuss), but this time is different. One of the gang is an old

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foe of the characters who decided to kill two birds with one stone by framing his old adversary. The characters can track him through the coroner's office, the hospital to which he sold the organs (Murdock's is a very rare blood type), or even Murdock's fellow hands, who may have seen the organ harvesters lurking around the peach farm where he was employed. If they don't reach the real killer, they may find themselves doing time for a crime they didn't commit.

Lost Book

The characters come across an old scroll, written in an Asian dialect which none of them recognize. If they don't think to sell it, then a man comes by a few days later — ostensibly on some other business — and offers a substantial sum upon catching sight of it. He will attempt to steal it at a later date if they do not acquiesce.

The scroll is a treatise on gravitational magic and belongs to the E Street Library, ordered at great expense from the Golden Empire by Ms. Wei. It was intercepted en route from the ship to her domicile, and passed through several owners before ending up in the characters' hands. Their buyer is Norman Novak, a "gray market" warlock who needs the knowledge it contains. Novak frequents the Underisle Heights district, and enjoys the occasional boxing match — especially gaunt fights, which give him a smug sense of superiority. The path to him can be as simple or complicated as the GM requires.

Wei is eager to get the scroll back, but doesn't wish to reveal the location of her library. If the party begins searching for it, she will surreptitiously aid them under the condition that they turn the scroll over to her once they find it. She should appear fairly sinister and mysterious at first, only revealing her gentler side as time goes on. Should they prove themselves worth her trust, she will allow them to study the scroll... and perhaps even show them her late father's collection.

Illumination

The characters receive a call from Potter Grissom (the keeper of the Goodwin Lighthouse; see page 175), asking for their help. Several members of the surrounding neighborhood have disappeared without a trace; a few weeks ago, he noticed them burying something in the field next to the lighthouse, and suspects it is tied in to their disappearance. He believes that their pursuers are still in the vicinity (though he doesn't know who they are) and that they will kill whoever produces the object his neighbors buried. Grissom is understandably afraid to dig it up himself, but curiosity has finally gotten the better of him. He'll gladly let the characters have whatever it is as long as he gets a good look at it.

The buried object can be stolen money, a rare artifact, a severed head, or anything else the GM can come up with. The trick is getting to it without alerting the unknown parties in search of it... or perhaps smoking them out beforehand. Luckily, the pursuers have to cover more ground (they don't know where the object is) and might tip their hand by letting some key detail slip during an otherwise innocuous conversation. For a nasty twist, have the characters engage in a brutal game of cat-and-mouse... only to have the object in question be ut-

terly worthless. Or perhaps it is valuable, and the missing locals who buried the object (hardly model citizens themselves) want it back once they return from hiding.

Border Skirmishes

One of the gaunt gangs' leaders has gotten ambitious, and paid two out-of-town hitmen to kill one of the Tong leaders, and set up a smaller Tong to take the fall. He hopes to use the ensuing war to wipe out Tong operations in the District and take over some of their coveted vice and smuggling operations in Eastowne. One of his lieutenants approaches the PCs with this information, fearful that a Tong war will spill into the District. The PCs have only a few hours to track down the hitmen and prevent the assassination, all the while pursued by members of the gaunt gang loyal to their leader (who suspect the lieutenant of conspiring with the Tongs). While there may be no love lost between the PCs and the gangs, they have a common interest: stop the hit before the streets of Eastowne and the District run red with blood.

Dungeon Crawl

A nervous young man approaches the PCs one afternoon, spouting wild tales about his fiancée being abducted by monsters from beneath the city. Leading them to the scene of the crime — a storm drain on the outskirts of the city — he can show them signs of a struggle ending with drag marks leading down into the sewers themselves. He will insist on accompanying the PCs to rescue his fiancée, but an astute observer will realize something isn't quite right about him.

An enemy of Urchin leader Henri Vosges has tracked him from Terminus; the young man is actually an accomplished warlock sent to kill Vosges by his old cabal. The "fiancée" in question is in no real danger, and has left marks suggesting a fight and kidnapping in order to seek out the Urchins' lair and lead her associate there. The PCs have been duped into this as hired muscle, but conversation with the young man or observation of the marks made in the sewers may make them suspicious. It is up to them to confront the assassins or wait until they have found who they are looking for and capture the killers when they have more backup. Of course, how the Urchins react to them is another matter entirely...

Truth or Consequences

One of the detectives on Snoops' Row, possibly someone the players know, has been making a handy living blackmailing his clients, and one of those clients has come to the PCs to prove the detective's guilt. As the players begin tailing the detective — ransacking his office and accumulating evidence against him — the client gets jumpy and murders the blackmailer, taking steps to pin the killing on the player characters. They will find that any written agreement they had with the client has vanished, and any alibis mysteriously falling through. It is up to them to clear their names and redeem the reputation of Snoops' Row before they take a long, dark trip to Gunmetal Island.

APPENDIX TWO
INSPIRATION

™If this is anyone
but Steve Allen,
you're stealing
my bit!§

- Krusty the Clown,
The Simpsons

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

FILMS

The following films are those from which we drew the most inspiration during the writing process. Not all of them are *noir* — and some are better than others, to say the least — but they all made at least a small contribution to the essence of *The Edge of Midnight*. Those marked with an asterisk are particularly noteworthy, and/or very close to the spirit of the game.

- After Dark, My Sweet** (1990, dir. James Foley; with Jason Patrick, Rachel Ward, and Bruce Dern).
***Angel Heart** (1987, dir. Alan Parker; with Mickey Rourke, Lisa Bonet, and Robert De Niro).
***Asphalt Jungle, The** (1950, dir. John Huston; with Sterling Hayden, Louis Calhern, and Jean Hagen).
Bad Day At Black Rock (1955, dir. John Sturges; with Spencer Tracy, Robert Ryan, and Anne Francis).
Batman (1989, dir. Tim Burton; with Michael Keaton, Jack Nicholson, and Kim Basinger).
***Batman Begins** (2005, dir. Christopher Nolan; with Christian Bale, Michael Caine, and Morgan Freeman).
Big Clock, The (1948, dir. John Farrow; with Ray Milland, Charles Laughton, and Maureen O'Sullivan).
***Big Heat, The** (1953, dir. Fritz Lang; with Glenn Ford, Gloria Grahame, and Lee Marvin).
***Big Sleep, The** (1946, dir. Howard Hawks; with Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, and John Ridgely).
Black Dahlia, The (2006, dir. Brian De Palma; with Josh Hartnett, Aaron Eckhart, and Scarlett Johansson).
***Blade Runner** (1982, dir. Ridley Scott; with Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer, and Sean Young).
***Blood Simple** (1984, dir. Joel Coen; with Frances McDormand, John Getz, and M. Emmet Walsh).
Blue Velvet (1986, dir. David Lynch; with Kyle MacLachlan, Isabella Rossellini, and Dennis Hopper).
***Body Heat** (1982, dir. Lawrence Kasdan; with William Hurt, Kathleen Turner, and Richard Crenna).
Bound (1996, dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski; with Jennifer Tilly, Gina Gershon, and Joe Pantoliano).
Brazil (1985, dir. Terry Gilliam; with Jonathon Pryce, Robert De Niro, and Michael Palin).
Brick (2006, dir. Rian Johnson; with Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Lukas Haas, and Nora Zehetner).
Bugsy (1991, dir. Barry Levinson; with Warren Beatty, Annette Bening, and Harvey Keitel).
Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The (1920, dir. Robert Wiene; with Werner Kraus, Conrad Veidt, and Lil Dagover).
Cape Fear (1962, dir. J. Lee Thompson; with Gregory Peck, Robert Mitchum, and Pollu Bergen).
Cape Fear (1991, dir. Martin Scorsese; with Robert De Niro, Mick Nolte, and Jessica Lange).
Casino (1995, dir. Martin Scorsese; with Robert De Niro, Sharon Stone, and Joe Pesci).
***Cast a Deadly Spell** (1991, dir. Martin Campbell; with Fred Ward, David Warner, and Julianne Moore).
Caveman's Valentine, The (2001, dir. Kasi Lemmons; with Samuel L. Jackson, Colm Feore, and Ann Magnuson).
Cercle Rouge, Le (1970, dir. Jean-Pierre Melville; with Alain Delon, André Bourvil, and Gian Maria Volonté).
Chicago (2002, dir. Rob Marshall; with Renée Zellweger, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Richard Gere).
***Chinatown** (1974, dir. Roman Polanski; with Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, and John Huston).
***Close Your Eyes** (2002, dir. Nick Willing; with Goran Visnjic, Shirley Henderson, and Miranda Otto).
Collateral (2004, dir. Michael Mann; with Tom Cruise, Jamie Foxx, and Jada Pinkett Smith).
Confidence (2003, dir. James Foley; with Edward Burns, Dustin Hoffman, and Rachel Weisz).
Conversation, The (1974, dir. Francis Ford Coppola; with Gene Hackman, Frederic Forrest, and Cindy Williams).
***Criminal** (2004, dir. Gregory Jacobs; with John C. Reilly, Diego Luna, and Maggie Gyllenhaal).
***Crow, The** (1994, dir. Alex Proyas; with Brandon Lee, Michael Wincott, and Ernie Hudson).
D.O.A. (1950, dir. Rudolph Maté; with Edmond O'Brien, Pamela Britton, and Luther Adler).
D.O.A. (1988, dir. Annabel Jankel and Rocky Morton; with Dennis Quaid, Meg Ryan, and Daniel Stern).
***Daredevil** (2003, dir. Mark Steven Johnson; with Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, and Michael Clarke Duncan).
***Dark City** (1998, dir. Alex Proyas; with Rufus Sewell, Jennifer Connelly, and Kiefer Sutherland).
***Detective Story, A (from the anthology "The Animatrix")** (2003, dir. Shinichirô Watanabe; with the voices of James Arnold Taylor, Carrie-Anne Moss, and T.C. Carson).
Detour (1945, dir. Edgar G. Ulmer; with Tom Neal, Ann Savage, and Claudia Drake).
***Devil In a Blue Dress** (1995, dir. Carl Franklin; with Denzel Washington, Jennifer Beals, and Don Cheadle).
Diabolique (1955, dir. Henri-Georges Clouzot; with Simone Signoret, Véra Clouzot, and Paul Meurisse).
Dick Tracy (1990, dir. Warren Beatty; with Beatty, Al Pacino, and Madonna).
Dirty Harry (1971, dir. Don Siegel; with Clint Eastwood, Andy Robinson, and John Vernon).
***Dirty Pretty Things** (2002, dir. Stephen Frears; with Chiwetel Ejiofor, Audrey Tautou, and Sergi López).
Donnie Brasco (1997, dir. Mike Newell; with Johnny Depp, Al Pacino, and Michael Madsen).
***Double Indemnity** (1944, dir. Billy Wilder; with Fred MacMurray, Barbara Stanwyk, and Edward G. Robinson).
Escape From New York (1981, dir. John Carpenter; with Kurt Russell, Adrienne Barbeau, and Donald Pleasance).
Farewell, My Lovely (1975, dir. Dick Richards; with Robert Mitchum, Charlotte Rampling, and John Ireland).
Frantic (1988, dir. Roman Polanski; with Harrison Ford, Emmanuelle Seigner, and Betty Buckley).
***Fugitive, The** (1993, dir. Andrew Davis; with Harrison Ford, Tommy Lee Jones, and Julianne Moore).
***Gangster No. 1** (2000, dir. Paul McGuigan; with Malcolm McDowell, Paul Bettany, and David Thewlis).

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- Get Carter** (1971, dir. Mike Hodges; with Michael Caine, Ian Hendry, and Britt Ekland).
- Get Carter** (2000, dir. Stephen T. Kay; with Sylvester Stallone, Miranda Richardson, and Mickey Rourke).
- Getaway, The** (1972, dir. Sam Peckinpah; with Steve McQueen, Ali McGraw, and Ben Johnson).
- Getaway, The** (1994, dir. Roger Donaldson; with Alec Baldwin, Kim Basinger, and James Woods).
- ***Gilda** (1946, dir. Charles Vidor; with Rita Hayworth, Glenn Ford, and George Macready).
- ***Godfather, The** (1972, dir. Francis Ford Coppola; with Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, and Diane Keaton).
- Godfather, Part II, The** (1974, dir. Francis Ford Coppola; with Al Pacino, Diane Keaton, and Robert De Niro).
- Godfather, Part III, The** (1990, dir. Francis Ford Coppola; with Al Pacino, Diane Keaton, and Andy Garcia).
- ***Good Thief, The** (2002, dir. Neil Jordan; with Nick Nolte, Ralph Fiennes, and Nutsa Kukhianidze).
- ***Goodfellas** (1990, dir. Martin Scorsese; with Ray Liotta, Robert De Niro, and Joe Pesci).
- ***Grifters, The** (1990, dir. Stephen Frears; with John Cusack, Annette Bening, and Angelica Huston).
- Gun Crazy** (1949, dir. Joseph H. Lewis; with John Dall, Peggy Cummins, and Berry Kroeger).
- ***Heat** (1995, dir. Michael Mann; with Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, and Val Kilmer).
- ***History of Violence, A** (2005, dir. David Cronenberg; with Viggo Mortensen, Maria Bello, and Ed Harris).
- ***House of Games** (1987, dir. David Mamet; with Joe Mantegna, Lindsay Crouse, and Ricky Jay).
- Infernal Affairs** (2002, dir. Wai Keung Lau and Siu Fai Mak; with Andy Lau, Tony Leung, and Eric Tsang).
- Insomnia** (1997, dir. Erik Skjoldbjærg; with Stellan Skarsgård, Maria Mathiesen, and Sverre Anker Ousdal).
- Insomnia** (2002, dir. Christopher Nolan; with Al Pacino, Hilary Swank, and Robin Williams).
- Jackie Brown** (1997, dir. Quentin Tarantino; with Pam Grier, Robert Forster, and Samuel L. Jackson).
- Kansas City** (1996, dir. Robert Altman; with Jennifer Jason Leigh, Miranda Richardson, and Harry Belafonte).
- Key Largo** (1948, dir. John Huston; with Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, and Edward G. Robinson).
- Killer's Kiss** (1955, dir. Stanley Kubrick; with Frank Silvera, Jamie Smith, and Irene Kane).
- ***Killing, The** (1956, dir. Stanley Kubrick; with Sterling Hayden, Coleen Gray, and Vince Edwards).
- ***Kiss Me Deadly** (1955, dir. Robert Aldrich; with Ralph Meeker, Albert Dekker, and Maxine Cooper).
- Kiss of Death** (1947, dir. Henry Hathaway; with Victor Mature, Brian Donlevy, and Coleen Gray).
- Kiss of Death** (1995, dir. Barbet Schroeder; with David Caruso, Nicolas Cage, and Samuel L. Jackson).
- ***L.A. Confidential** (1997, dir. Curtis Hansen; with Russell Crowe, Guy Pearce, and Kevin Spacey).
- ***Lady From Shanghai, The** (1947, dir. Orson Welles; with Welles, Rita Hayworth, and Everett Sloane).
- Lady In The Lake, The** (1947, dir. Robert Montgomery; with Montgomery, Audrey Totter, and Lloyd Nolan).
- Last Man Standing** (1996, dir. Walter Hill; with Bruce Willis, Christopher Walken, and William Sanderson).
- ***Last Seduction, The** (1994, dir. John Dahl; with Linda Fiorentino, Peter Berg, and Bill Pullman).
- Laura** (1944, dir. Otto Preminger; with Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, and Clifton Webb).
- Layer Cake** (2004, dir. Matthew Vaughn; with Daniel Craig, Colm Meaney, and Michael Gambon).
- Limey, The** (1999, dir. Steven Soderbergh; with Terence Stamp, Lesley Ann Warren, and Peter Fonda).
- Little Caesar** (1931, dir. Mervyn LeRoy; with Edward G. Robinson, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and Glenda Farrell).
- Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels** (1998, dir. Guy Ritchie; with Jason Flemyng, Jason Statham, and Dexter Fletcher).
- ***Long Good Friday, The** (1980, dir. John Mackenzie; with Bob Hoskins, Helen Mirren, and Dave King).
- Long Goodbye, The** (1973, dir. Robert Altman; with Elliot Gould, Sterling Hayden, and Nina Van Pallandt).
- ***Lord of Illusions** (1995, dir. Clive Barker; with Scott Bakula, Famke Janssen, and Kevin J. O'Connor).
- Lucky Number Slevin** (2006, dir. Paul McGuigan; with Josh Hartnett, Morgan Freeman, and Ben Kingsley).
- ***Maltese Falcon, The** (1941, dir. John Huston; with Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, and Peter Lorre).
- ***Man Who Wasn't There, The** (2001, dir. Joel Coen; with Billy Bob Thornton, Frances McDormand, and Scarlett Johansson).
- Manchurian Candidate, The** (1962, dir. John Frankenheimer; with Frank Sinatra, Laurence Harvey, and Angela Lansbury).
- ***Manhunter** (1986, dir. Michael Mann; with William L. Peterson, Kim Greist, and Tom Noonan).
- Matchstick Men** (2003, dir. Ridley Scott; with Nicolas Cage, Alison Lohman, and Sam Rockwell).
- Matrix, The** (1999, dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski; with Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, and Laurence Fishburne).
- ***Mean Streets** (1973, dir. Martin Scorsese; with Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel, and Amy Robinson).
- Mechanic, The** (1972, dir. Michael Winner; with Charles Bronson, Jan-Michael Vincent, and Jill Ireland).
- ***Memento** (2001, dir. Christopher Nolan; with Guy Pearce, Carrie-Anne Moss, and Joe Pantoliano).
- Mildred Pierce** (1945, dir. Michael Curtis; with Joan Crawford, Jack Carson, and Zachary Scott).
- ***Miller's Crossing** (1990, dir. Joel Coen; with Gabriel Byrne, John Turturro, and Albert Finney).
- Minority Report** (2002, dir. Steven Spielberg; with Tom Cruise, Colin Farrell, and Samantha Morton).
- Mona Lisa** (1986, dir. Neil Jordan; with Bob Hoskins, Cathy Tyson, and Michael Caine).
- ***Mulholland Dr.** (2001, dir. David Lynch; with Naomi Watts, Laura Harring, and Dan Hedaya).
- Murder, My Sweet** (1944, dir. Edward Dmytryk; with Dick Powell, Claire Trevor, and Anne Shirley).
- Naked City, The** (1948, dir. Jules Dassin; with Barry Fitzgerald, Howard Duff, and Dorothy Hart).
- ***Narc** (2002, dir. Joe Carnahan; with Jason Patrick, Ray Liotta, and Krista Bridges).
- ***Nightmare Alley** (1947, dir. Edmund Goulding; with Tyrone Power, Joan Blondell, and Coleen Gray).

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- ***Nine Queens** (2000, dir. Fabián Bielinsky; with Gastón Pauls, Ricardo Darin, and Leticia Brédice).
No Way Out (1987, dir. Roger Donaldson; with Kevin Costner, Gene Hackman, and Sean Young).
***On the Waterfront** (1954, dir. Elia Kazan; with Marlon Brando, Karl Malden, and Lee J. Cobb).
***One False Move** (1992, dir. Carl Franklin; with Bill Paxton, Billy Bob Thornton, and Cynda Williams).
***Out of Sight** (1998, dir. Steven Soderbergh; with George Clooney, Jennifer Lopez, and Ving Rhames).
***Out of the Past** (1947, dir. Jacques Tourneur; with Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer, and Kirk Douglas).
***Out of Time** (2003, dir. Carl Franklin; with Denzel Washington, Eva Mendes, and Dean Cain).
Panic (2000, dir. Henry Bromell; with William H. Macy, Neve Campbell, and Donald Sutherland).
Panic in the Streets (1950, dir. Elia Kazan; with Richard Widmark, Barbara Bel Geddes, and Jack Palance).
Paper Moon (1973, dir. Peter Bogdanovich; with Ryan O'Neal, Tatum O'Neal, and Madeline Kahn).
Payback (1999, dir. Brian Helgeland; with Mel Gibson, Maria Bello, and Kris Kristofferson).
***Phoenix** (1998, dir. Danny Cannon; with Ray Liotta, Anthony LaPaglia, and Angelica Huston).
Point Blank (1967, dir. John Boorman; with Lee Marvin, Angie Dickinson, and Carroll O'Connor).
Postman Always Rings Twice, The (1946, dir. Tay Garnett; with Lana Turner, John Garfield, and Cecil Kellaway).
Postman Always Rings Twice, The (1981, dir. Bob Rafelson; with Jack Nicholson, Jessica Lange, and John Colicos).
Presumed Innocent (1990, dir. Alan J. Pakula; with Harrison Ford, Raul Julia, and Bonnie Bedelia).
Professional, The (1994, dir. Luc Besson; with Jean Reno, Natalie Portman, and Gary Oldman).
Public Enemy, The (1931, dir. William A. Wellman; with James Cagney, Jean Harlow, and Edward Woods).
***Pulp Fiction** (1994, dir. Quentin Tarantino; with John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, and Uma Thurman).
***Raging Bull** (1980, dir. Martin Scorsese; with Robert De Niro, Cathy Moriarty, and Joe Pesci).
Rear Window (1954, dir. Alfred Hitchcock; with James Stewart, Grace Kelly, and Raymond Burr).
***Red Rock West** (1992, dir. John Dahl; with Nicolas Cage, Lara Flynn Boyle, and Dennis Hopper).
***Reservoir Dogs** (1992, dir. Quentin Tarantino; with Harvey Keitel, Tim Roth, and Michael Madsen).
Ripley's Game (2002, dir. Liliana Cavani; with John Malkovich, Dougray Scott, and Ray Winstone).
Road to Perdition (2002, dir. Sam Mendes; with Tom Hanks, Jude Law, and Paul Newman).
Rounders (1998, dir. John Dahl; with Matt Damon, Edward Norton, and Famke Janssen).
Salton Sea, The (2002, dir. D.J. Caruso; with Val Kilmer, Vincent D'Onofrio, and Deborah Kara Unger).
Samouräi, Le (1967, dir. Jean-Pierre Melville; with Alain Delon, François Périer, and Nathalie Delon).
Scarface (1932, dir. Howard Hawks; with Paul Muni, Ann Dvorak, and Boris Karloff).
Scarface (1983, dir. Brian De Palma; with Al Pacino, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio).
Score, The (2001, dir. Frank Oz; with Robert De Niro, Edward Norton, and Marlon Brando).
Sea of Love (1989, dir. Harold Becker; with Al Pacino, Ellen Barkin, and John Goodman).
Serpico (1973, dir. Sidney Lumet; with Al Pacino, Jack Kehoe, and Jack Randolph).
***Seven** (1995, dir. David Fincher; with Brad Pitt, Morgan Freeman, and Kevin Spacey).
***Sexy Beast** (2000, dir. Jonathan Glazer; with Ray Winstone, Ben Kingsley, and Amanda Redman).
Shadow of a Doubt (1943, dir. Alfred Hitchcock; with Joseph Cotten, Teresa Wright, and Macdonald Carey).
Shaft (1971, dir. Gordon Parks; with Richard Roundtree, Moses Gunn, and Charles Cioffi).
Shallow Grave (1994, dir. Danny Boyle; with Ewan McGregor, Kerry Fox, and Christopher Eccleston).
Shanghai Triad (1994, dir. Yimou Zhang; with Gong Li, Wang Xiaoxiao, and Baotian Li).
***Silence of the Lambs, The** (1991, dir. Jonathan Demme; with Jodie Foster, Anthony Hopkins, and Scott Glenn).
***Simple Plan, A** (1998, dir. Sam Raimi; with Bill Paxton, Bridget Fonda, and Billy Bob Thornton).
Sin City (2005, dir. Robert Rodriguez; with Mickey Rourke, Bruce Willis, and Clive Owen).
Snatch (2002, dir. Guy Ritchie; with Jason Statham, Stephen Graham, and Brad Pitt).
Sorcerer (1977, dir. William Friedkin; with Roy Scheider, Bruno Cremer, and Francisco Rabal).
***Spanish Prisoner, The** (1997, dir. David Mamet; with Campbell Scott, Rebecca Pidgeon, and Steve Martin).
Strange Love of Martha Ivers, The (1946, dir. Lewis Milestone; with Barbara Stanwyck, Van Heflin, and Kirk Douglas).
Strangers on a Train (1951, dir. Alfred Hitchcock; with Farley Granger, Ruth Roman, and Robert Walker).
***Sweet Smell of Success** (1957, dir. Alexander Mackendrick; with Burt Lancaster, Tony Curtis, and Susan Harrison).
Talented Mr. Ripley, The (1999, dir. Anthony Minghella; with Matt Damon, Jude Law, and Gwyneth Paltrow).
Taxi Driver (1976, dir. Martin Scorsese; with Robert De Niro, Cybill Shepherd, and Jodie Foster).
Terminator, The (1984, dir. James Cameron; with Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Biehn, and Linda Hamilton).
***Thief** (1981, dir. Michael Mann; with James Caan, Tuesday Weld, and James Belushi).
Things to Do In Denver When You're Dead (1995, dir. Gary Fleder; with Andy Garcia, Christopher Lloyd, and William Forsythe).
***Third Man, The** (1949, dir. Carol Reed; with Joseph Cotten, Alida Valli, and Orson Welles).
***Touch of Evil** (1958, dir. Orson Welles; with Welles, Charlton Heston, and Janet Leigh).
Training Day (2001, dir. Antoine Fuqua; with Denzel Washington, Ethan Hawke, and Scott Glenn).
True Romance (1993, dir. Tony Scott; with Christian Slater, Patricia Arquette, and Dennis Hopper).
Two Jakes, The (1990, dir. Jack Nicholson; with Nicholson, Harvey Keitel, and Meg Tilly).

APPENDIX TWO: INSPIRATION

Untouchables, The (1987, dir. Brian De Palma; with Kevin Costner, Robert De Niro and Sean Connery).
***Usual Suspects, The** (1995, dir. Bryan Singer; with Gabriel Byrne, Kevin Spacey, and Chazz Palminteri).
Wages of Fear, The (dir. Henri-Georges Clouzot; with Yves Montand, Charles Vanel, and Peter Van Eyck).
***White Heat** (1949, dir. Raoul Walsh; with James Cagney, Virginia Mayo, and Edmond O'Brien).
Witch Hunt (1994, dir. Paul Schrader; with Dennis Hopper, Penelope Ann Miller, and Eric Bogosian).
With a Friend Like Harry... (2000, dir. Dominik Moll; with Sergi López, Laurent Lucas, and Mathilde Seigner).

BOOKS

The number of books — both fiction and nonfiction — dedicated to *noir* is almost beyond counting. Visit any mystery section in any bookstore, and you'll likely find dozens of authors and hundreds of titles who have contributed to the genre. Listing them all would take a book in and of itself. Instead, we have selected those which had the most impact on *The Edge of Midnight*, or which we used as reference while designing the game.

Borde, Raymond, and Etienne Chaumeton, **A Panorama of American Film Noir** (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002).
Axelrod, Alan, and Guy Antinozzi, **The Complete Idiot's Guide to Criminal Investigation** (Indianapolis: Alpha Press, 2003).
Azzarello, Brian, **100 Bullets, Vol. 1: First Shot, Last Call** (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2000).
100 Bullets, Vol. 2: Split Second Chance (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2000).
100 Bullets, Vol. 3: Hang Up on the Hang Low (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2001).
100 Bullets, Vol. 4: A Foregone Tomorrow (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2002).
100 Bullets, Vol. 5: The Counterfifth Detective (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2003).
100 Bullets, Vol. 6: Six Feet Under the Gun (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2003).
100 Bullets, Vol. 7: Samurai (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2004).
100 Bullets, Vol. 8: The Hard Way (New York: Vertigo Publishing, 2005).
Boertlein, John, ed., **Howdunit: How Crimes Are Committed and Solved** (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2001).
Cain, James M., **Double Indemnity** (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
Mildred Pierce (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
The Postman Always Rings Twice (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
Three By Cain: Serenade, Love's Lovely Counterfeit, The Butterfly (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
Capeci, Jerry, **The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Mafia** (Indianapolis: Alpha Press, 2002).
Chandler, Raymond, **The Big Sleep** (New York: Vintage Press, 1988).
Farewell, My Lovely (New York: Vintage Press, 1988).
The High Window (New York: Vintage Press, 1988).
The Lady in the Lake (New York: Vintage Press, 1988).
The Little Sister (New York: Vintage Press, 1988).
The Long Goodbye (New York: Vintage Press, 1988).
Playback (New York: Vintage Press, 1988).
Copjec, Joan, ed., **Shades of Noir** (New York: Verso Press, 1993).
Corvasce, Mauro V., and Joseph R. Paglino, **Modus Operandi: A Writer's Guide to How Criminals Work** (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1995).
Dargis, Manohla, **BFI Modern Classics: L.A. Confidential** (London: The British Film Institute, 2003).
Ellroy, James, **American Tabloid** (New York: Vintage Press, 2001).
Because The Night (New York: Vintage Press, 2005).
The Big Nowhere (New York: Warner Books, 1998).
The Black Dahlia (New York: Mysterious Press, 1987).
Blood on the Moon (New York: Vintage Press, 2005).
Brown's Requiem (New York: Dark Alley Press, 1998).
Clandestine (New York: Dark Alley Press, 1999).
The Cold Six Thousand (New York: Vintage Press, 2002).
Killer on the Road (New York: Dark Alley Press, 1999).
L.A. Confidential (New York: Mysterious Press, 1990).
Silent Terror (New York: Blood and Guts Press, 1986).
Suicide Hill (New York: Mysterious Press, 1986).
White Jazz (New York: Vintage Press, 2001).
Faron, Fay, **Rip-Off: A Writer's Guide to Crimes of Deception** (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1998).
Goodwin, Archie, **Batman: Night Cries** (New York: DC Comics, 1998).

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- Hammett, Dashiell, **The Dain Curse** (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
The Glass Key (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
The Maltese Falcon (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
Red Harvest (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
The Thin Man (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).
- Highsmith, Patricia, **The Blunderer** (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001).
The Boy Who Followed Ripley (New York: Vintage Press, 1993).
Cry of the Owl (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989).
Deep Water (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003).
A Dog's Ransom (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002).
A Game for the Living (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988).
The Glass Cell (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004).
Ripley's Game (New York: Vintage Press, 1993).
Ripley Under Ground (New York: Vintage Press, 1992).
Ripley Under Water (New York: Vintage Press, 1993).
Strangers on a Train (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001).
A Suspension of Mercy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001).
The Talented Mr. Ripley (New York: Vintage Press, 1992).
This Sweet Sickness (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002).
Those Who Walk Away (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988).
The Tremor of Forgery (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988).
Two Faces of January (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988).
- Hjortsberg, William, **Falling Angel** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
Nevermore (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
- Hyde, Stephen, and Geno Zanetti, ed., **Players: Con Men, Hustlers, Gamblers, and Scam Artists** (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002).
- James, Nick, **BFI Modern Classics: Heat** (London: The British Film Institute, 2002).
- Kaplan, E. Ann, ed., **Women in Film Noir** (London: The British Film Institute, 1992).
- Krutnik, Frank, **In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity** (London: Routledge Press, 1991).
- Leonard, Elmore, **52 Pickup** (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Bandits (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2003).
Be Cool (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Cat Chaser (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2003).
City Primeval (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Freaky Deaky (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Get Shorty (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Glitz (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Gold Coast (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
The Hunted (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2003).
Killshot (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2003).
LaBrava (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2003).
Maximum Bob (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Moonshine War (New York: Dell Publishing, 1985).
Out of Sight (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Pagan Babies (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Pronto (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Riding the Rap (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Rum Punch (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Stick (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
Swag (New York: Dell Publishing, 1978).
The Switch (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002).
- Loeb, Jeph, **Batman: Dark Victory** (New York: DC Comics, 2001).
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Recoil (New York: Vintage Publishing, 1993).
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TELEVISION

Television has seen an explosion in crime shows and *noir*-themed works of late, which were immensely helpful as inspiration. In addition, many older shows helped lay the groundwork for *noir* as it currently stands. Those marked with an asterisk are particularly noteworthy, and/or very close to the spirit of *The Edge of Midnight*.

***Alfred Hitchcock Presents** (1955–1962, prod. Joan Harrison, Alfred Hitchcock, and Norman Lloyd; no permanent cast).

America's Most Wanted (1988–present, prod. Kenneth A. Carlson, Alissa Collins, et al; with John Walsh).

American Gothic (1995–1996, created by Shaun Cassidy; with Gary Cole, Paige Turco, and Jake Weber).

***Batman: The Animated Series** (1992–1998, prod. Alan Burnett, Paul Dini, et al; with the voices of Kevin Conroy, Efrim Zimbalist, Jr., and Mark Hamill).

Cagney and Lacey (1982–1988, created by Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday; with Tyne Daly, Sharon Gless, and Al Waxman).

Cold Case (2003–present, created by Meredith Stiehm; with Kathryn Morris, Jon Finn, and Jeremy Ratchford).

Columbo (1971–1978 and TV movies through the present, created by Richard Levinson and William Link; with Peter Falk).

Cops (1989–present, created by John Langle; no permanent cast).

***Crime Story** (1986–1988, created by Chuck Adamson and Gustave Reininger; with Dennis Farina, Anthony Denison, and Paul Santucci).

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (2000–present, created by Anthony E. Zuiker; with William Peterson, Marg Helgenberger, and Gary Dourdan).

CSI: Miami (2002–present, created by Anthony E. Zuiker, Ann Donahue, and Carol Mendelsohn; with David Caruso, Emily Proctor, and Adam Rodriguez).

CSI: NY (2004–present, created by Anthony E. Zuiker, Ann Donahue, and Carol Mendelsohn; with Gary Sinise, Melina Kanakaredes, and Carmine Giovinazzo).

***Dragnet** (1951–1959, 1967–1970, created by Jack Webb; with Webb, Ben Alexander, and Harry Morgan).

Equalizer, The (1985–1989, created by Michael Sloan; with Edward Woodward and Robert Lansing).

***Fugitive, The** (1963–1967, created by Roy Huggins; with David Janssen, Barry Morse, and Bill Raisch).

Hawaii Five-O (1968–1980, created by Leonard Freeman; with Jack Lord, James MacArthur, and Zulu).

***Hill Street Blues** (1981–1987, created by Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll; with Daniel A. Travanti, Barbara Babcock, and Taurean Blacque).

***Homicide** (1993–1999, created by Paul Attanasio; with Yaphet Kotto, Richard Belzer, and Andre Braugher).

***Hustle** (2004–present, created by Tony Jordan; with Adrian Lester, Marc Warren, and Robert Vaughn).

Inspector Morse (1987–2000, prod. Ted Childs, Rebecca Eaton et al; with John Thaw, Kevin Whately, and James Grout).

Ironside (1967–1975, created by Collier Young; with Raymond Burr, Don Galloway, and Don Mitchell).

Kojak (1973–1978, created by Abby Mann; with Telly Savalas, Dan Frazer, and Kevin Dobson).

Law and Order (1990–present, created by Dick Wolf; with Sam Waterston, Jesse L. Martin, and S. Epatha Merkerson).

Law and Order: Criminal Intent (2001–present, created by Dick Wolf; with Vincent D'Onofrio, Kathryn Erbe, and Courtney B. Vance).

Law and Order: Special Victims Unit (1999–present, created by Dick Wolf; with Christopher Meloni, Mariska Hargitay, and Richard Belzer).

***Miami Vice** (1984–1989, created by Anthony Yerkovich; with Don Johnson, Philip Michael Thomas, and Edward James Olmos).

***Mike Hammer** (1984–1987, created by Larry Brody; with Stacy Keach, Lindsay Bloom, and Don Stroud).

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

- ***Millennium** (1996–1999, created by Chris Carter; with Lance Henriksen, Megan Gallagher, and Terry O’Quinn).
Monk (2002–present, created by Andy Breckman; with Tony Shaloub, Bitty Schram, and Ted Levine).
Moonlighting (1985–1989, created by Glen Gordon Caron; with Bruce Willis, Cybill Shepherd, and Allyce Beasley).
***Nowhere Man** (1995–1996, created by Lawrence Hertzog; with Bruce Greenwood, Megan Gallagher, and Murray Rubinstein).
***NYPD Blue** (1993–2005, created by Steven Bochco and David Milch; with Dennis Franz, David Caruso, and Jimmy Smits).
Perry Mason (1957–1966 and TV movies through 1994, prod. Ben Brady, Gail Patrick Jackson et al; with Raymond Burr, Barbara Hale, and William Hopper).
Peter Gunn (1958–1961, prod. Blake Edwards, Byron Kane, and Gordon Oliver; with Craig Stevens, Lola Albright, and Herschel Bernardi).
Prime Suspect (1991–2003, created by Lynda La Plante; with Helen Mirren).
Remington Steele (1982–1987, created by Robert Butler and Michael Gleason; with Pierce Brosnan, Stephanie Zimbalist, and Doris Roberts).
Rockford Files, The (1974–1980, created by Stephen J. Cannell and Roy Huggins; with James Garner, Joe Santos, and Stuart Margolin).
Saint, The (1962–1969, prod. Robert S. Baker, Monty Berman, et al; with Roger Moore and Ivor Dean).
***Shield, The** (2002–present, created by Shawn Ryan; with Michael Chiklis, Glenn Close, and Catherine Dent).
***Sopranos, The** (1999–present, created by David Chase; with James Gandolfini, Edie Falco, and Lorraine Bracco).
***Streets of San Francisco, The** (1972–1977, prod. Quinn Martin, Russell Stoneman, et al; with Karl Malden, Michael Douglas, and Darleen Carr).
Thief (2006–present, created by Norman Morrill; with Andra Braugher, Mae Whitman, and Clifton Collins, Jr.).
***Twilight Zone, The** (1959–1964, created by Rod Serling; no permanent cast).
Twin Peaks (1990–1991, created by Mark Frost and David Lynch; with Kyle MacLachlan, Michal Ontkean, and Lara Flynn Boyle).
Untouchables, The (1959–1963, produced by Leonard Freeman, Quinn Martin, et al; with Robert Stack, Nicholas Georgiade, and Bruce Gordon).
***Wire, The** (2002–present, created by David Simon; with Dominic West, John Doman, and Frankie Faison).
***Wiseguy** (1987–1990, created by Stephen J. Cannell and Frank Lupo; with Ken Wahl, Jonathan Banks, and Jim Byrnes).
X-Files, The (1993–2002, created by Chris Carter; with David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, and Mitch Pileggi).

JUST FOR FUN

The following satirical titles are a good tonic if one ever needs to deflate the genre’s hoarier pretensions.

Films

- Anonymous Rex** (2004, dir. Julian Jarrold; with Sam Trammell, Daniel Baldwin, and Faye Dunaway).
Big Lebowski, The (1998, dir. Joel Coen; with Jeff Bridges, John Goodman, and Julianne Moore).
Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid (1982, dir. Carl Reiner; with Steve Martin, Rachel Ward, and Reni Santoni).
Dragnet (1987, dir. Tom Mankiewicz; with Dan Aykroyd, Tom Hanks, and Christopher Plummer).
Fletch (1985, dir. Michael Ritchie; with Chevy Chase, Tim Matheson, and Dana Wheeler-Nicholson).
Midnight Run (1988, dir. Martin Brest; with Robert De Niro, Charles Grodin, and Dennis Farina).
Naked Gun, The (1988, dir. David Zucker; with Leslie Nielsen, Priscilla Presley, and Ricardo Montalban).
Naked Gun 2 1/2, The (1991, dir. David Zucker; with Leslie Nielsen, Priscilla Presley, and George Kennedy).
Naked Gun 33 1/3, The (1994, dir. Peter Segal; with Leslie Nielsen, Priscilla Presley, and Fred Ward).
Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (1988, dir. Robert Zemeckis; with Bob Hoskins, Joanna Cassidy, and Christopher Lloyd).
Zero Effect (1998, dir. Jake Kasdan; with Bill Pullman, Ben Stiller, and Kim Dickens).

Books

- Adams, Douglas, **Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency** (New York: Pocket Publishing, 1991).
The Long, Dark Tea Time of the Soul (New York: Pocket Publishing, 1991).
Garcia, Eric, **Anonymous Rex: A Detective Story** (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2003).
Casual Rex: A Novel (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2002).
Hot and Sweaty Rex: A Dinosaur Mafia Mystery (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2005).
Wolf, Gary K., **Who Censored Roger Rabbit?** (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982).

Television

- Barney Miller** (1975–1982, prod. Danny Arnold, Roland Kibee, et al; with Hal Linden, Abe Vigoda, and Max Gail).
Police Squad! (1982, created by Jim Abrahams and David and Jerry Zucker; with Leslie Nielsen, Alan North, and Rex Hamilton).
Sledge Hammer! (1986–1988, created by Alan Spencer; with David Rasche, Anne-Marie Martin, and Harrison Page).

APPENDIX THREE
MISCELLANEOUS

™ See, Mr. Gitts, most people never have
to face the fact that, at the right time
and the right place, they're capable of...
anything!]

- Noah Cross (John Huston),
Chinatown

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

SAMPLE NPCs

The following NPC statistics are intended for Game Masters who need to generate a character quickly on the fly.

Bartender

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Drive 2, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 4, Melee 5, Perception 4, Sleight of Hand 4, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Street Tough 1.

Cabbie

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 2, Brawl 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 8, Engineering 5, Evasion 5, Intimidation 4, Melee 4, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Racer.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

Bookie

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 3, Brawl 2, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 4, Lore (Boxing) 7, Stealth 4, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Small.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Thief 1.

Call Girl

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 5, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Disguise 2, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 5, Melee 2, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Thief 1.

Bum

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Disguise 2, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 2, Intimidation 3, Lore (Hobo Signs) 6, Sleight of Hand 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: None.

City Official

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 7, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 5, Intimidation 5, Perform (Oratory) 5.

Backgrounds: Charismatic.

Profession: Politician 3, Wealthy 1.

Bureaucrat

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 7, Brawl 2, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Etiquette 6, Evasion 4, Lore (Law) 5, Perception 5, Puzzles 3.

Backgrounds: Education, Loyal Retainer.

Profession: Politician 1, White Collar Worker 2.

Con Artist

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 6, Brawl 2, Disguise 5, Etiquette 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 3, Forgery 4, Stealth 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Small.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Thief 1.

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Cop

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 5, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Perception 3, Pick Lock 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Marksmanship, Mean Streets.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Officer of the Law 1, Street Tough 1.

Gangster (Crime Lord, Normal)

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 7, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Appraise 4, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 2, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Firearms 6, Intimidation 7, Melee 3, Perception 6, Puzzles 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Mean Streets.

Profession: Gangster 3, Wealthy 2.

Coroner

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Evasion 3, Lore (Anatomy) 6, Lore (Poisons) 6, Medicine 6, Perception 8, Puzzles 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education.

Profession: Academic 1, Investigator 1, White Collar Worker 1.

Gangster (Underling, Normal)

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 4, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 6, Demolitions 3, Drive (Car, Truck) 3, Evasion 5, Firearms 6, Intimidation 4, Lore (Sport) 4, Melee 4, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Gangster 1, Street Tough 1, Thief 1.

Debutante

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 6, Drive (Car, Light Aircraft) 5, Etiquette 7, Evasion 3, Firearms 5, Lore (Gossip) 6, Perform (Piano) 4.

Backgrounds: Loyal Retainer.

Profession: Femme Fatale 1, Wealthy 3.

Hitman

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Demolitions 5, Disguise 4, Drive 2, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 7, Perception 4, Puzzles 3, Stealth 6, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Marksmanship.

Profession: Gunman 2, Investigator 1.

Doctor

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 6, Evasion 5, Medicine 8, Perception 5, Puzzles 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Education, Prodigy.

Profession: Academic 1, White Collar Worker 2.

Industrialist

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 6, Drive (Car, Light Aircraft, Sailboat) 7, Engineering 4, Etiquette 7, Evasion 4, Firearms 4, Forgery 5, Intimidation 4, Lore (Stock Market) 6, Perception 4, Puzzles 4, Sport (Golf) 5.

Backgrounds: Education.

Profession: Wealthy 3, White Collar Worker 2.



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Journalist

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 15.

Skills: Bureaucracy 5, Contortions 4, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 2, Perception 7, Puzzles 5, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Small.

Profession: Investigator 1.

Private Investigator

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 35.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 2, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 5, Melee 5, Perception 6, Pick Lock 4, Puzzles 4, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Investigator 1, Street Tough 1.

Judge

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 5, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 20.

Skills: Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 6, Etiquette 7, Evasion 2, Intimidation 5, Lore (Law) 8, Perception 7, Puzzles 2.

Backgrounds: Wise.

Profession: Academic 1, Politician 2, White Collar Worker 2.

Snitch

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 15.

Skills: Appraise 5, Brawl 4, Drive 2, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 3, Perception 5, Pick Lock 4, Sleight of Hand 6, Stealth 6, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Wise.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Investigator 1, Thief 1.

Musician

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 25.

Skills: Brawl 3, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 3, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 4, Lore (Local Music Scene) 7, Perception 3, Perform (Piano) 7, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Performer 3.

Torch Singer

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 25.

Skills: Appraise 2, Brawl 2, Disguise 3, Etiquette 3, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 4, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Perception 5, Perform (Singing) 7, Stealth 2.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Mean Streets.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Femme Fatale 1, Performer 1.

Pawnbroker

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 25.

Skills: Appraise 8, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 5, Forgery 6, Lore (Fenced Goods) 7, Perception 5, Sleight of Hand 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Small.

Profession: Con Artist 1.

Tong Member

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, Vigor: 30.

Skills: Athletics 6, Contortions 4, Demolitions 3, Evasion 5, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, Martial Arts 6, Medicine 3, Perception 4, Puzzles 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Exotic Knowledge.

Profession: Athlete 1, Gangster 1.



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GAUNT NPCs

Gaunt Boxer

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 9, Build 8, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Brawl 8, Contortions 2, Evasion 6, Intimidation 7, Lore (Boxing) 6, Medicine 3, Perception 4, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Huge, Rugged.

Profession: Athlete 1, Street Tough 2.

Gaunt Crime Lord

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 5, Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Etiquette 4, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Intimidation 7, Melee 6, Perception 5, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Dead Zone, Gaunt, Reduced Light Vision.

Profession: Gangster 3, Street Tough 1, White Collar Worker 1.

Gaunt Hood

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Demolitions 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 4, Evasion 3, Firearms 5, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Perception 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Mean Streets.

Profession: Street Tough 2.

Gaunt Laborer

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 8, Build 9, Gut 4, Moxie 3, Smoothness 3.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 45.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 6, Demolitions 5, Evasion 3, Intimidation 5, Sport (Baseball) 4.

Backgrounds: Dead Zone, Dense Bone Structure, Gaunt.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Street Tough 1.

WARLOCK NPCs

Warlock Cabalist

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 4, Brawl 2, Evasion 3, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 5, Electricity 5, Firearms 4, Forgery 6, Kinetics 6, Perception 5, Puzzles 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4, Tensile Energy 6.

Backgrounds: Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Academic 2, Gangster 1, Rogue Scientist 2.

Warlock Dilettante

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Bureaucracy 2, Disguise 5, Evasion 4, Etiquette 8, Fast Talk 4, Lore (Warlock History) 4, Perception 4, Sport (Tennis) 6, Thermal Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Magic License, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Femme Fatale 1, Rogue Scientist 1, Wealthy 3.

Warlock Professor

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Drive 1, Evasion 3, Gravity 6, Lore (Physics) 8, Medicine 4, Perform (Public Speaking) 3, Puzzles 5, Stealth 4, Tensile Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Education, Magical Aptitude, Wise.

Profession: Academic 2, Rogue Scientist 1.

Warlock Savant

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 8, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Contortions 5, Evasion 6, Engineering 3, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 4, Magnetism 7, Perception 5, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 7, Stealth 5, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Fanaticism, Lucky, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Con Artist 2.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

CHARTS AND TABLES

The following four pages contain the pertinent charts and tables from the system rules in Chapters One, Two, and Three. They are gathered here for ease of reference during play.

WEAPONS

NAME	COST	BASE RANGE**	SHOT CAPACITY	DAMAGE
Automatic pistol, concealable	\$60	15 feet	4	3d10
Automatic pistol, small	\$60	30 feet	9	4d10
Automatic pistol, large	\$70	30 feet	15	4d10
Pipe gun ("zip gun")	—	15 feet	1	3d10
Revolver, small	\$60	30 feet	6	4d10
Revolver, large	\$70	50 feet	6	5d10
Rifle, hunting	\$100	100 feet	10	5d10
Rifle, sniper's	\$200*	350 feet	10	6d10
Shotgun, break open (scatter gun)	\$80	10 feet	2	6d10–1d10/10 ft.
Shotgun, pump	\$80	10 feet	6	6d10–1d10/10 ft.
Submachine gun	\$300*	45 feet	30–50	4d10
Machine gun	\$900*	60 feet	100 (belt-fed)	5d10
Hand grenade	\$25*	10 feet	N/A	Special***
Brass knuckles****	\$5	0	N/A	As Brawling + 3
Baseball bat/club	\$1	0	N/A	2d10 + Brawn
Knife*****	\$3	10 feet	N/A	1d10 + Brawn
Nunchuks	\$100	0	N/A	1d10 + Brawn
Sai	\$300	10 feet	N/A	1d10 + Brawn
Sword/axe	\$500/\$40	0	N/A	2d10 + Brawn

* This weapon is generally only available through the military. The price listed is its black market cost; use of them outside of military hands is horrifically illegal.

** The listed number is the weapon's range at which an attack may be made without penalty. The weapon's maximum range is three times the listed distance. Penalties for attacks between the base range and the maximum range can be found on page 43.

*** See page 48, "Explosions."

**** Many improvisational weapons also fall into this category. For example, pistol-whipping someone or hitting them with a roll of nickels in your fist would both produce effects similar to using brass knuckles.

***** Shivs, broken bottles and other improvisational cutting and impaling weapons inflict damage like a knife but the TN to use them is +1.

See Chapter Two for more information on combat and inflicting damage.

POISONS AND THEIR EFFECTS

TYPE	INITIAL EFFECT	CONTINUING EFFECT	TN TO RESIST
Contact	1d10/2 wounds (rounded up) (2 minutes after exposure)	1 wound per hour until poison is cleared	10; 1 check per 15 minutes
Ingested	1d10/2 wounds (rounded up) (10 minutes after exposure)	1 wound per hour until poison is cleared	12; 1 check per 10 minutes
Knock-out	Unconsciousness lasting 1d10 hours (1 round after exposure)	None	10; 1 check upon exposure

APPENDIX THREE: MISCELLANEOUS

COST OF LIVING EXAMPLES

High-class evening wear	\$75
Nice clothing	\$25
Cheap clothing	\$10
Shoes/boots	\$9
Hat	\$10
Postage stamp	\$0.03
Movie ticket	\$0.20
Baseball ticket	\$1
Record player	\$50
Record	\$0.50
Camera	\$5
Hotel room, luxury	\$10 per night
Hotel room, average	\$4 per night
Hotel room, dump	\$1 per night
Apartment	\$50 per month
House, run-down (mortgage)	\$75 per month
House, small (mortgage)	\$100 per month
House, average (mortgage)	\$175 per month
Meal, nice	\$2
Meal, greasy spoon	\$0.50
Pack of cigarettes	\$0.25
Pint of beer	\$0.25
Quart of milk	\$0.25
Medical equipment/first aid kit	\$20
Crowbar	\$4
Lock picks, set	\$2
Stout lock	\$1
Saw	\$4
50 ft. of rope	\$6
Suitcase/steamer trunk	\$10
Flashlight	\$5
Binoculars	\$30
Tool kit	\$8
Dynamite	\$2 per stick
Taxi fare	\$.25-\$3
Cross-country bus pass	\$10
Cross-country train ticket	\$20
Cross-country plane ticket	\$100
Telegram	\$1 per 50 words

VEHICLES

Biplane	\$3,500
Luxury car (Hermes Champion)	\$5,000
Motorcycle (Lancer two-wheeler)	\$200
Roadster, 2 door (Bester Hornet)	\$2,000
Sedan, used 4-door (SSG Thunderbolt)	\$500
Sedan, new 4-door (SSG Thunderbolt)	\$1,000
Truck, commercial	\$2500

EXPERIENCE COST

Increase an attribute	current rating x 3
Increase a scientific skill	current rating x 2
Increase a non-scientific skill	current rating x 1
Purchase a new skill	2
Increase the level of a profession by one	current level x 5
Purchase a new profession	10
Purchase a new background*	5

* After character creation, backgrounds may only be purchased with the GM's approval.

EXPLOSIVES DAMAGE

EXPLOSIVE	PRIMARY RADIUS	SECONDARY RADIUS
Gunpowder	0-3 feet	3.1-6 feet
Molotov cocktail	0-5 feet	5.1-10 feet
Stick of dynamite	0-6 feet	6.1-12 feet
Hand grenade	0-10 feet	10.1-20 feet
Dynamite bundle	0-20 feet	20.1-40 feet

DAMAGING OBJECTS

OBJECT	TOUGHNESS	VIGOR
Handkerchief	2	5
Book	3	10
Wooden box	4	25
Cane or baseball bat	6	30
Knife	6	40
Chain	6	40
Tire rubber	6	50
Padlock/door hinges	7	50
Pistol	7	60
Rifle or shotgun	7	75
Wooden doorway	7	75
Fire escape	8	75
Automobile part (engine or car door)	8	125
Standard wall (drywall)	9	125
Brick/stone wall	10	175
Steel safe	9	175
Vault door	10	200



THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

A COMPLETE LIST OF AVAILABLE SKILLS

Appraise	Magnetism**
Athletics	Martial Arts*
Brawl*	Medicine
Bureaucracy	Melee*
Contortions	Perception
Craft	Perform
Demolitions	Pick Lock
Disguise	Puzzles
Drive	Sleight of Hand
Electricity**	Sport
Engineering	Stealth
Etiquette	Streetwise
Evasion*	Tensile Energy**
Fast Talk	Thermal Energy**
Firearms*	Throwing*
Forgery	
Gravity**	* Indicates a combat skill
Intimidation	** Indicates a scientific
Kinetics**	skill, which is used in
Lore	practicing magic

A COMPLETE LIST OF COMBAT MANEUVERS

Blind Fighting	Quick Draw
Deadly Aim	Sucker Punch
Defensive Fighting	Superior Defensive
Disarm	Fighting
Grapple	Unbalancing Attack
Haymaker	
Leap Up	
Lightning Reflexes	

MULTIPLE CONTESTED ROLLS

TASK	NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL ROLLS REQUIRED TO WIN
Playing a game of chess	5 rolls
Holding a door closed	1 roll per round
Chasing someone on foot	3 rolls per 50 feet of initial difference between pursuer and pursued
Chasing someone in cars	3 rolls per city block (or 250 feet) of difference between pursuer and pursued.
Hiding from someone	1–5 rolls

HEALING

Every hour, a character may make a Build roll with a TN of 6 in order to regain 1d10 vigor points. Additionally, every second day, a character may make a Build roll with a TN of 6 to heal one wound. Characters with the Medical skill can aid the healing process (see page 22). Injured characters in a hospital or other facility automatically receive the benefits of a successful Medicine skill check once each day.

A COMPLETE LIST OF PROFESSIONS

Academic
Athlete
Blue Collar Worker
Clergy
Con Artist
Femme Fatale
Gangster
Gunman
Investigator
Lady Killer
Officer of the Law
Performer
Politician
Rogue Scientist
Soldier
Street Tough
Thief
Wealthy
White Collar Worker

A COMPLETE LIST OF AVAILABLE BACKGROUNDS

Accelerated Immune System*	Magic License
Acrobatic	Magical Aptitude
Alert	Marksmanship
Bone Spurs*	Mean Streets
Charismatic	Prodigy
Dead Zone*	Racer
Dense Bone Structure*	Reduced Light Vision*
Education	Rugged
Enhanced Teeth*	Sinewy Joints*
Exotic Knowledge	Small
Fanaticism	Wise
Gaunt	
Huge	* Indicates a background
Loyal Retainer	which may only be
Lucky	purchased by gaunts

APPENDIX THREE: MISCELLANEOUS

SAMPLE TNS

#	DIFFICULTY
5	Easy (climb a rope or hotwire a car)
8	Average (climb a rock wall or rebuild a car engine)
10	Difficult (free-climb a rock wall or build an engine from spare parts)
15	Extremely difficult (climb a rock wall during a storm or invent a new kind of car engine)
20	Once in a lifetime (scale a glass wall with no equipment or discover groundbreaking technology)



MODIFIERS IN COMBAT

The following situations increase or decrease the TN to hit with an attack during combat:

CONDITION	MODIFIER
Bad lighting (fighting in a poorly lit ally)	+1 to +2
Heavy rain or fog*	+1 to +2
Unable to see (fighting in the dark or when blinded)	+3
Drunk or similarly incapacitated	+2
Target has:	
10%–25% cover	+1
26%–40% cover	+2
41%–60% cover	+3
61%–80% cover	+4
81%–95% cover	+5
Target is prone	–2
Taking an action	+2
Point blank range (target is less than 3 feet away)	–1
Medium range (target is outside of the weapon's base range)	+1
Long range (target is outside of the weapon's base range x2)	+2
Extreme range (target is outside of the weapon's base range x3)	+3

Note: Range modifications apply only to the Firearms and Throwing skills.

*This normally only applies to ranged combat

MAGIC ADDICTION

Each time a warlock generates a magical effect, his Brains attribute increases by +1; his Brains may increase beyond 10 in this manner, with no upper limit. However, during the same period, his physical attributes (Brawn, Smoothness, Build) all decrease by 1, with an attendant drop in corresponding attributes. The effects of this last for a period of time — called a “Debilitation Period” — dictated by the level of the magical effect generated:

LEVEL	DEBILITATION PERIOD
1	1 minute
2	5 minutes
3	15 minutes
4	1 hour
5	2 hours
6	5 hours
7	12 hours
8	24 hours
9	36 hours
10	48 hours

DETECTING THE USE OF MAGIC

Magic doesn't leave any supernatural residue in *The Edge of Midnight* — no fairy dust, glowing letters, or the like. However, it does leave more mundane traces of passing, which, while harder to detect, can still point to magic use. It is possible to examine a scene and draw the conclusion that magic has been used with the Perception skill; crystal ball squads excel at it and even more mundane detectives can spot obvious signs. For example, if Gravity magic were used in a certain area, it might pick up all the dust from the floor in that area. A circle of dust-free carpeting at a murder scene would therefore indicate the use of Gravity magic.

Determining that magic was used is a normal use of the Perception skill. The TN is increased by 2 if the character wishes to determine exactly what effect was generated. Those who possess the scientific skill upon which the effect was based may ignore this penalty, and may make the skill roll using the pertinent scientific skill instead of Perception if they wish.

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

MAGIC LEVELS

The following lists cover the six scientific skills and the type of magical effect can be generated at each level.

Electricity

ELECTRICITY LEVEL	POWER LEVEL
1	10 watts
2	25 watts
3	75 watts
4	150 watts
5	325 watts
6	650 watts
7	1,250 watts
8	2,500 watts
9	5,000 watts
10	10,000 watts

Gravity

GRAVITY LEVEL	WEIGHT AFFECTED
1	5 lbs.
2	15 lbs.
3	30 lbs.
4	60 lbs.
5	125 lbs.
6	250 lbs.
7	500 lbs.
8	1,000 lbs.
9	2,000 lbs.
10	4,000 lbs.

Kinetics

KINETICS

LEVEL	SPEED INCREASED/DECREASED
1	1 mph
2	3 mph
3	5 mph
4	10 mph
5	15 mph
6	30 mph
7	60 mph
8	125 mph
9	250 mph
10	500 mph

Magnetism

MAGNETISM LEVEL	WEIGHT AFFECTED
1	1 lb.
2	3 lbs.
3	5 lbs.
4	15 lbs.
5	30 lbs.
6	60 lbs.
7	125 lbs.
8	250 lbs.
9	500 lbs.
10	1,000 lbs.

Tensile Energy

TENSILE LEVEL	OBJECT
0	Powder
1	Tissue paper
2	Notebook paper
3	Cloth
4	Glass
5	Drywall
6	Mahogany
7	Sheet metal
8	Brick/concrete
9	Granite
10	Steel

Thermal Energy

THERMAL LEVEL	MATERIAL AFFECTED
1	Water
2	Paper, alcohol
3	Light wood, rope
4	Cloth (cotton, wool)
5	Oak, nylon
6	Tin
7	Aluminum
8	Glass
9	Gold
10	Steel

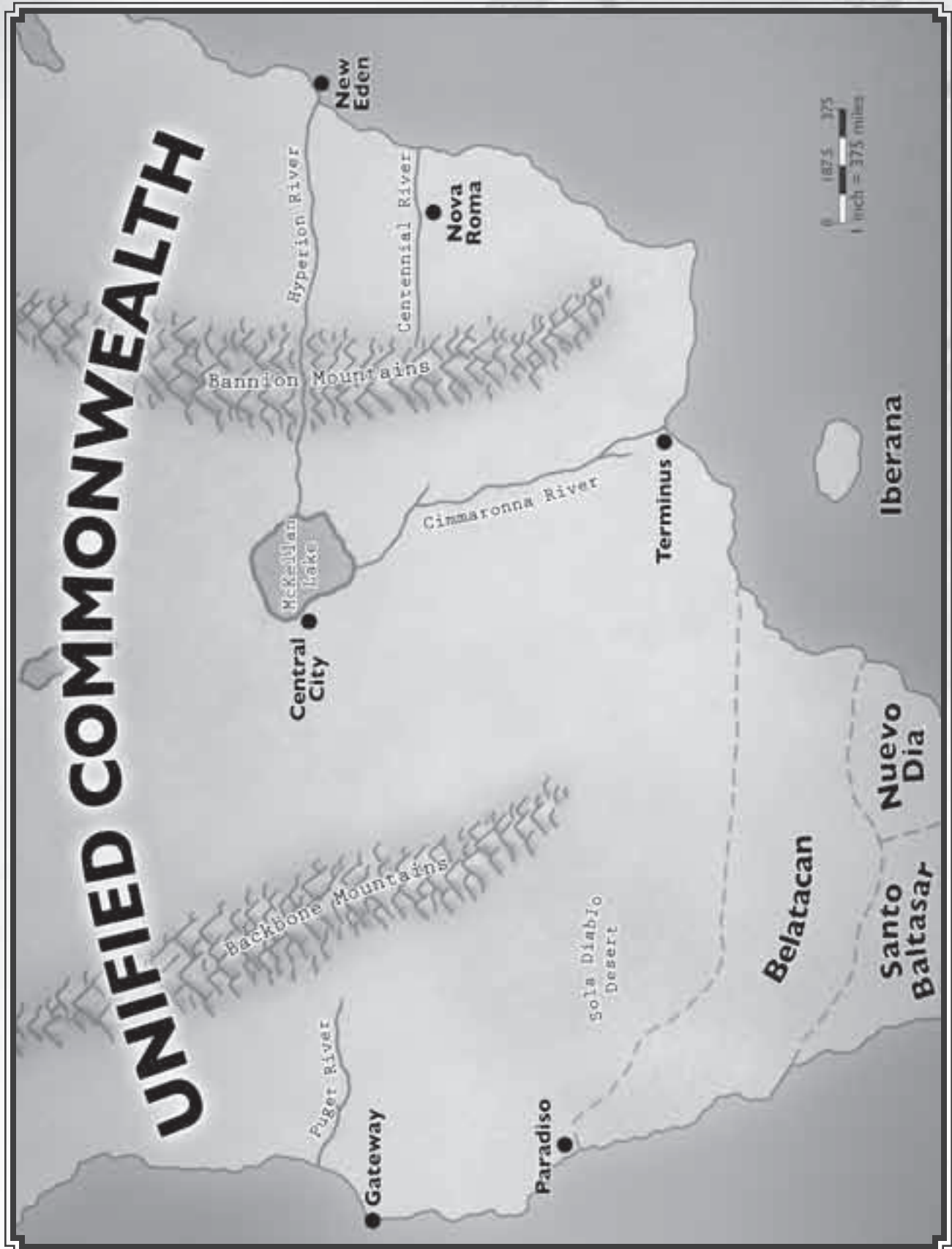
THE MARK

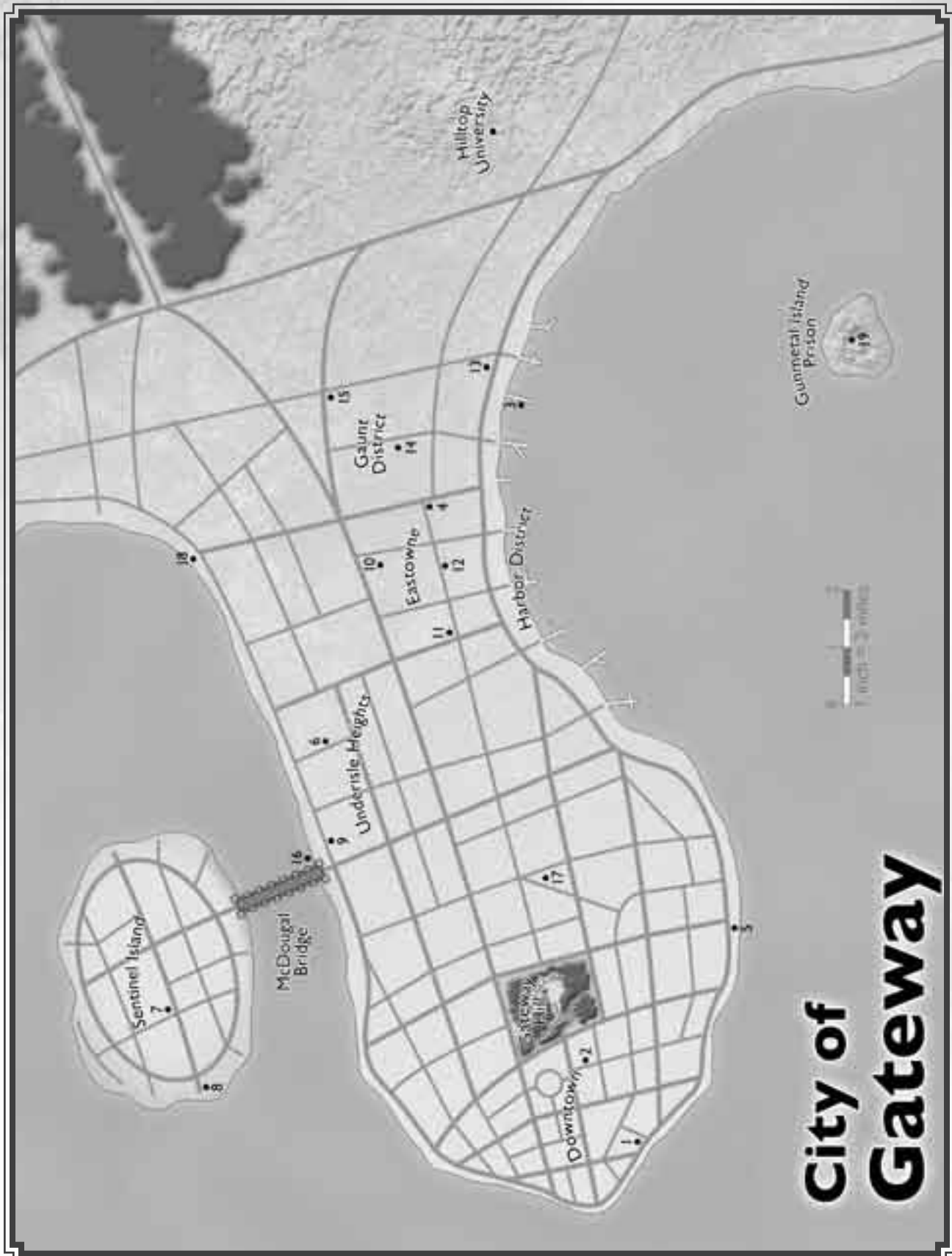
Every time one or more attributes are reduced to 0 through the effects of magic addiction, the warlock gains a "mark:" a sign of the magic he has misused. To determine the exact nature of a mark, roll 2d10 and add the results, and then consult the table below (the GM may choose an entry if he wishes). Unless otherwise stated, the effects last for 1–5 (1d10/2, rounded up) days before fading.

ROLL	EFFECT
2–3	The warlock's eyes become unnaturally colored — yellow, purple, or some similar shade — and glow slightly.
4	The warlock's skin becomes pale and slightly luminescent.
5–6	A sixth finger or toe develops on one extremity (GM's choice).
7–8	An odd-shaped birthmark develops on the warlock's body.

9	The warlock develops an unnatural aversion to cats.
10	The warlock develops an unnatural aversion to water.
11	The warlock develops an unnatural aversion to moonlight.
12	The warlock can consume only raw eggs.
13	The warlock can consume only raw meat.
14	The warlock can consume only fresh milk.
15	The warlock can consume only white or red wine.
16	The warlock periodically (once every 3d10 hours) excretes (sweats, cries, etc.) blood.
17–18	The warlock gains an unnatural aura that makes others uncomfortable (+1 TN to all Moxie-based rolls involving positive social interaction).
19–20	Roll again, rerolling if this result is achieved. The determined effect is permanent.

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APPENDIX THREE: MISCELLANEOUS

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CHARACTER INFORMATION

CHARACTER NAME _____

Age _____ Sex _____ Ht. _____

Wt. _____ Eyes _____ Hair _____

ATTRIBUTES

BRAINS _____

BRAWN _____

BUILD _____

GUT _____

MOXIE _____

SMOOTHNESS _____

VIGOR AND DAMAGE

TO BE HIT _____

TOTAL VIGOR _____

WOUNDS _____

DAMAGE RECEIVED: _____

SKILLS

GENERAL SKILLS

Appraise _____

Athletics _____

Bureaucracy _____

Contortions _____

Craft _____

Demolitions _____

Disguise _____

Drive _____

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

Engineering _____

Etiquette _____

Fast Talk _____

Forgery _____

Intimidation _____

Lore _____

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

Medicine _____

Perception _____

Perform

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

(_____) _____

Pick Lock _____

Puzzles _____

Sleight of Hand _____

Sport _____

Stealth _____

Streetwise _____

COMBAT SKILLS

Brawl _____

Evasion _____

Firearms _____

Martial Arts _____

Melee _____

Throwing _____

MAGIC SKILLS

Electricity _____

Gravity _____

Kinetics _____

Magnetism _____

Tensile Energy _____

Thermal Energy _____

EXPERIENCE

LUCK DICE

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

CHARACTER SHEET

BACKGROUNDS

PROFESSIONS

LANGUAGES

MONEY

Salary \$ _____ /wk.

EQUIPMENT

WEAPONS

Name	To Hit	Rng.	Shots	Damage
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____