

HUNTER • BOOK

DEFENDER



A Character Book for Hunter: The Reckoning

VIGIL: THE THIN LINE

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THE THIN LINE

by Dole7

This page is the portal to the Vigil website. This is a place where we can air our views in security. If you found this site while messing about, please bugger off. No offense, it is just that if you do not mean to be here, you are a security risk. Besides, you will not understand.

WHO ARE YOU?

Have you woken up to the fallen state of the world? Do you know what roams the streets and pulls on the door latch, wanting to get in? They sit behind the desks of councilors, the posh wankers who drive past you in their Porsches, and they lurk behind computer screens. Some are police, others lurk in hospitals, more are friends of the law. You have probably learned all this the hard way.

You have seen them. Fought them. But you know there is more to the struggle than killing and dying. If you are one of the few who has stood up for something or someone, then we welcome you. We tend to call what you protect or protected your charge, ward, burden or treasure. (Different people have different terms, but best you learn the lingo now.) These things

are what we are all about. Whatever name you use, these are usually cherished people, and sometimes things. Hold onto them. They are what we have been given to deliver when the fight is over.

If you are only interested in fighting, destroying or worse yet just preserving your own hide, this list is not for you. What you want is probably here: <http://www.hunter-net.org/firelight/> or hunter-net.org. Have fun — just do not come crying to us when you realize the mistake you have made!

WHO ARE WE?

We are chosen for the preservation of humanity and this world, not simply for war and ruin. We want to free this world of its oppressors by protecting what is in danger, and then by taking back what was ours. The ends do not justify the means. We want to defend and preserve. We will fight when necessary, but have learned to pick our fights and make sure that all struggles are on our terms. We must not become monsters to fight monsters. We must not look about after the fight and realize that we are now a part of the problem.

Maybe you are one of us.

If this describes you, hit [here](#) and send us email. Include any "references" you may have. If you do not know what we mean... sorry, you do not get in. Security first. If you are one of us, you will understand.

WHY VIGIL?

So why should you want in? Why do you need Vigil? I will speak plainly. If you are like us, you have something to protect — a charge, as we like to call it. Vigil is your best hope for protecting whatever or whomever you value most. That is what we do, and we seem to be the best at it.

While most of the design, security and maintenance of this site is done by one bone-idle Brit, the contents include articles from around the world — real solutions to your problems. Unless an article has a byline, assume that the material here was created by more than one of us.

ENTER NETWORK PASSWORD

Resource: hunter-net.org/uk/vigil.html

User name or Login:

Password:

Send

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SECURITY PRINCIPLES FOR VIGIL

by Dole7

Our privacy is a matter of life and death. Vigil therefore operates according to certain codes. Since this list is my creation and my responsibility, I make the rules when it comes to security.

CODE 1

In the end, you are responsible for your own safety on the net, and for the security of this service. If you do not know anything about computers, buy a book and read it. Educate yourself. Keep your software updated and keep viruses off your machine. Do not post attachments to the list without prior approval. If you do, they will be stripped before being posted.

CODE 2

Vigil only asks for a username/login to identify you. It does not keep other email addresses or any "demographic" information on file. Password files are kept on separate hardware and updated randomly. This means you will have to change your password often. You can never have the same password twice.

CODE 3

Vigil only gathers information on you when you apply for membership. As soon as you have a login and password, that information is destroyed. Currently, the only way to gain membership is by having an existing member vouch for you. (Usually a member that you have met in the real world or online. I make the final call on who is welcome.)

CODE 4

Vigil will not send you unsolicited email and will make all efforts to weed out spam. I will send you security updates. If you try to be clever and do not install them, you are off.

CODE 5

The email logs are purged at random intervals, when a user is not logged in. Unread email is not purged. Dormant accounts are closed on my whim whenever I get the feeling it has been too long.

damn straight, it's powered by
L I N U X

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>>>POSTED BY DESCENT88

This article comes from a trashy newspaper, but the facts of the case and the "ghost story" are true. I checked into the records in Perth and there were three murders on the same trail almost 70 years ago — stabbings just like this. Any tips on facing a haunt? Any help you can give would be a blessing for whomever pursues this.

THE PHANTOM KILLER STRIKES

The body of 19-year-old Peter Hammond was discovered near Killicrankie on Tuesday. Someone had stabbed the boy several times. His friend David Shaw last saw him alive on Monday night. Shaw found the body the next morning about half a kilometer from their campsite. The victim's friend was interviewed by D.I. Linklater of the Perth police, but was released without comment.

Locals (pub-goers) near Pitlochry claim the murder was the work of a local ghost called the "Lover of the Phantom Regiment." Tales from the area claim that a young woman's lover, a soldier, was killed at the Battle of Killicrankie during the Jacobite rebellion in 1689. The soldier jumped off a cliff rather than fall into the hands of the English. In an act of revenge, the girl killed an Englishman staying at the local inn and then jumped from the same cliff — plummeting to her death just as her lover had done. On nights of the new moon, the phantom regiment can still be found marching the hills, say the locals. Sightings of the lover are less frequent, but locals swear she still seeks revenge on Englishmen. They claim that she was responsible for the death of the boy.

Linklater called this story "Pure rubbish, or worse yet a blatant attempt to profit from the murder of tourist."

Members of the Perthshire Hiking Association were also quick to dismiss the story, claiming that this was the first death on one of their hiking routes in over 28 years — and that it was due to a fall.

Wonder which cliff that hiker fell from?

>>>POSTED BY DOLE7

I lifted this from an email server set up by EuroSun, the company that runs the trains through the Chunnel. Interesting, eh? I thought someone might want to check this conversation out.

To: Security@EuropeSun.co.uk

From: OfficerOne

Re: Late Passengers

Are you sure that the problem is not with the hardware or software? I just cannot believe this has happened for a fifth time!

Our security procedures are tight. When passengers get on train in France they swipe their tickets and they swipe them again in London when they get off. There is no way that two days can pass between one end of the Chunnel and the other. The ride under the channel is only twenty minutes! The software reading the cards must be wrong.

Check it again.

To: OfficerOne@EuropeSun.co.uk

From: Security

Subject: Re: Late Passengers

All I know is the passenger embarked on the 7th and got off on the 9th. I've got him on video on this side, although for some bloody reason there always seems to be something in front of his face! Check your security cameras and see if you can catch

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>>>POSTED BY TRAVELER72

I've been to Flat Rock, but haven't seen any other signs in town or around it. If anyone else is in the area, keep a lookout. This guy must be one of us.

SURVIVALIST'S 'DEATHTRAP' WOUNDS 2 OFFICERS

(Flat Rock, NC) Hendersonville police are searching for Clyde Ponder 0f 334 Stateline Road after two policeman were injured while investigating a disturbance at his home Monday. The officers were responding to a 911 call made by Gladys Kilburn, a neighbor, after she reportedly heard explosions and screams originating at Ponder's house.

Neighbors stated that Ponder was recently fired from Ramcor, a farm-implement manufacturer. The company refused to comment. Ms. Kilburn said that he had behaved strangely in past months, shouting about the end of the world and chasing away alleged trespassers.

Officers called Ponder's home a "deathtrap" that had apparently claimed more than one victim. Police are at a loss to explain the presence of several decomposing bodies in the home, one of which was impaled on a six-foot metal spear fashioned from electrician's conduit and fired from an air cannon hooked to a compressor. Other bodies were found around the house. One was partially dissolved by some form of acid, which also inflicted minor burns to an officer. Deputy Sheriff Jason McKinney suffered a dislocated shoulder after falling through stairs to Ponder's basement.

Police discovered Ponder's truck on Hwy. 25, near the Henderson County line. The suspect is presumed to be armed and dangerous, and authorities urge caution should he be encountered.

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YOUR HOME IS YOUR CASTLE

by Hannibal137

There are two big problems with home security systems. The first is that they make people feel secure. Remember, in our world paranoia = life. No amount of security is enough.

If you do decide to get a security deal, make sure it's deep — that means don't get just one or two kinds of sensors, get four or five. Combine as many different sensors as you can afford. Stay away from the cutting-edge stuff, and don't hire one of those lousy monitoring services (problem #2). The idiots who do the monitoring will be all over your house, poking their noses in where they're not wanted. Do it yourself. Here's how.

SOUND EFFECTS

Buy a pump shotgun. The sound of the action alone will give most critters serious sphincter action. I bet if you record the sound and play it back at the right time and place, it may even buy you some time. Better yet, a blast from one of these babies makes even the biggest bad-ass take notice. I'm a big believer in security, but it's much easier to defend against pieces of your enemy than a whole one. Get it?

Animals — the redneck security system — are also good at making noise. Most big dogs like labs are pushovers. Get yourself a pack of small to medium dogs — much noisier and harder to catch and kill. If you want serious animal doorbells, get 15 to 20 guinea hens. Most likely they'll sleep on your roof. If anything comes near the house — good Lord Almighty you're going to hear it!

THE UNEXPECTED

The unexpected is your best friend. There was a crazy fucker that lived down the road from my folks. One day we drove by his house and he had a big sign out front: "Beware, Tile Gun." No one knew what a "tile gun" was, but everyone stayed the hell away. Weird shit can't protect you forever, but it may put would-be intruders on edge.

I've noticed something else, too. Monsters hate pictures. They scare the critters more than anything. I usually keep one of those disposable cameras with a flash. The flash is important! One, you want the creatures to know you have a camera — you don't want them to have to hear just a click. Two, a flash in the face may just give you enough time to run or fill the bastard with lead.

Better yet is a video camera. You want them to step into a trap? Hang up a video camera. Even if it's not running, they'll spend all their attention on it, not the real threat you have planned.

My uncle, bless his soul, had a great idea that we can use. It gets back to animals. Those PETA wussies will love this. My uncle bred some of the meanest dogs ever, a cross between pit bulls and Newfoundlands. Big, black, and thanks to my uncle utterly silent. He had a bunch of yippy dogs in his yard, but Cletus and Meat lived inside. When they were pups, he cut their vocal cords and he kept their nails clipped. They were mean as hell, black as the inside of a fist, and as quiet as a sucker punch. My uncle died in his sleep. It took days before anyone knew what happened to him. We had to shoot the dogs to get his body for the funeral.

TRAPS, TRAPS AND MORE TRAPS

If you hide out in your house or anyplace else, set up a few traps at the doors and windows — ones that you can set in advance or just trip when you know trouble's coming. Spring boards and even small explosives are where it's at.

Watch out for the crap on the web, though, especially takes on that Antichrist Cookbook. Most of it's made up by high school freaks and will get you killed when you try it — or actually need it.

You can make better and more "natural" traps on your own if you just take the time and think about what you're doing. Weakening select stair treads or replacing them with balsa wood or cardboard works real well. I've even managed to find a few bear traps in old hardware stores! Remember the more complicated a trap, the more likely it will fail.

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SAFETY TIPS

You can't be too careful, and while our knowledge of our true foes is still growing, don't forget that *human* monsters can still hurt the people you try to protect. Sometimes normal people are the pawns of monsters, other times they themselves are monsters in thought and action, if not in form.

DRIVING

There's a lot you can do to protect yourself in your car. Sometimes a car is the only way you can escape an overwhelming threat or find some refuge from a creature. A two-ton car can also be used as a very effective weapon. Just about everything is allergic to mass and kinetic energy.

First off, buckle up — and do it right away. You have a lot better chance of pushing a button and getting out of a seatbelt when you need to than of putting it on while your body is screaming into the windscreen at a hundred miles an hour. Make sure everyone else aboard wears them, too. In our line of work, staying in line and obeying all traffic signals is not always an option. Anticipate the worst.

1. Always keep at least one full car length between your vehicle and the one directly in front of you when you stop. Why? This gives room to maneuver your car — either to retreat or ram a bastard.

2. Only open your window a crack to speak to anyone.

3. Use the vision on any copper who stops you. But don't ignore common sense or your instincts. If something still seems odd, even if the copper looks normal, tell him to call for

another police car. Remember not to open your window more than is necessary to communicate — even for the police!

4. Walking to your parked car is one of the most vulnerable moments of your day. Stay alert and have your keys (and/or pepper spray) in your hand. If a person demands your keys and attacks, give them to him. You have more to live for than your pride. We can't afford to lose our own over the little things of our past lives. Besides, who would be left to protect what's important to you?

Now if one of *them* attacks you, well, you should always be prepared for that. Remember that the monster probably thinks you're just some schmuck. Let the bastard think that and turn the tables on him.

5. When you park at night, always try to park in a well-lit area.

6. If you're being followed, drive to a public area. Churches are a good bet. Protestant churches often have Wednesday night services. Catholic churches are almost always open at dusk.

7. If someone or *something* does get in your car and is stupid enough to let you drive, put on your safety belt and cause a wreck, then hope for the best. Just don't hurt anyone in the process unless you have no choice.

8. Always keep something in your trunk that will let you jimmy the door if you're locked inside. A hidden weapon and a flashlight are also a good idea.

HOTEL/MOTEL SECURITY

Some of us spend a lot of time on the road. It's important to be safe there, too. Your hotel room is not going to be as well-secured as your home. Monsters stalking you or ones unconcerned with the danger of being seen may attack you at any time.

1. Always park your car as close to your room as possible.

2. Use every lock the room provides at all times.

3. Never leave a key at the desk. Ask to change rooms if you lose it. Try to stay in places with electronic keys rather than metal ones.

4. Never trap a motel room. Too many people, like maids and maintenance men, have keys. You'll just get arrested or be forced on the run.

THE STREET

We've all probably learned the ropes of the hunt here, but a few reminders are in order.

1. When walking at night, walk close to the curb, not along any buildings. Avoid entrances to dark alleys or doorways. Avoid the shadows.

2. Avoid talking with anyone suspicious — they're probably just setting you up. It's human nature to drop your guard during a "polite" or "friendly" conversation.

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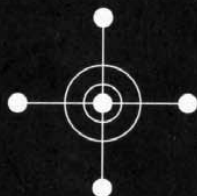
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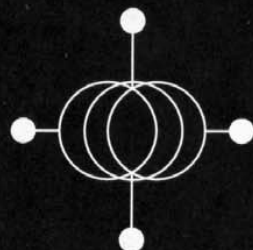
OUR SIGNS

We see them spray painted on city streets and hidden on billboards. You might find yourself scrawling them absently as you debate what to do about the things you've seen... or about how to protect your family. A language? It looks like it could be — or become one. At the least, we seem to understand these symbols and the chosen of various cultures seem to understand them equally, or even know some of their own.

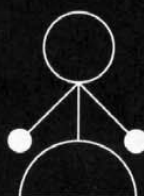
Posted here are some of the symbols list members have seen and used, and that we think are vital to protecting, whether it's people, places, things or ourselves. As far as we know, *they* haven't caught on, so these are our greatest tools for now. It's one thing to stamp your brand as guardian of a neighborhood, but it's another to invite the help of any imbued who happens into the area. We can't protect everything by ourselves, and these signs help us keep the thin line solid.



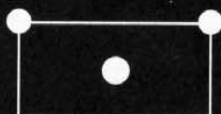
Protection or Defense: Somehow, many of us on this list seem to identify with this sign, as if it epitomizes us. Then again, others on the list don't sense the same ownership. It's as if we're all imbued, but were not all dedicated to the exact same cause. Maybe those differences will bear out in our ongoing discussions... and clashes.



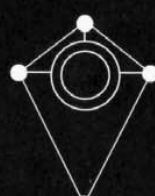
Charge, Ward or Treasure: This sign seems to be the focus of what many on this list are about. We use it to indicate the things we protect above all else. Sure, territory might be our chosen turf, but a charge or ward is someone or something we'd die for. The sign can indicate an object itself or that the subject is inside a room or building. Oddly, only imbued likely to understand or live the notion of charges or treasures seem to understand this sign. That means we should stand up and guard for each other, too.



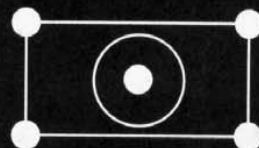
Witch: This one seems to be for those witches and warlocks, like Bookworm55 describes on hunter-net.



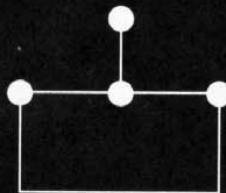
Trap: I've heard that other hunters recognize this one, too, but they seem to attribute a different meaning to it than we might. Others think a trap has been set or a danger is posed by a creature. We tend to use this sign to warn others that we've set a trap. You might use this on your home, for example, so that other imbued aren't harmed by your defenses. We need to spread the word about the different meanings. A misunderstanding could pit us against our own. Maybe we could add our "defense" sign to "trap" for clarity, assuming a hot-head can read any further than the warning itself.



Victory: Apparently used to mark an area where one of us has succeeded in protecting a ward or charge. Maybe a person maintained custody in the face of a threat. Anyway, this sign appears to be our badge of courage, where we stood our ground. One day the world will be our prize. As with "charge," only we guardians seem to know this sign. You other list members, like you bleeding hearts, don't get it, do you?



Help: One of our own needs help, and he's advertising. The threat or problem probably isn't imminent unless the hunter's friends are all dead or something. However, one of us has a problem or is under siege and needs the cavalry. Don't hang around under the sign. Wait and watch to see if someone arrives and loiters. That might be your man. Alternatively, search the area for signs of trouble. Your boy won't be far away, and he's looking for you, too. If you come across this sign and the poster has already fallen, remove the symbol or step into the breach yourself.



Visitor: Put this one up whenever you enter claimed turf, an area that's been marked as "protected" by another imbued. Consider it good manners, something all hunters should be taught for our benefit, since we often seem to be the "protectors."



Alone: Some poor soul has lost his way, whether by circumstance or choice. We've seen this code combined with others like "help" and "allies" to mean a hunter's in over his head. Then again, there have been stories of recluses who use it as a command, not a statement, as in "Leave me..."

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LINKS

These are not adverts — they are meant to be sources of reliable information for the electronic unwashed masses, like you.

OTHERS

We do not fight alone. This page has a lot of crazies in my opinion, but there is some good information, too:

<http://www.hunter-net.org/firelight/>

Here is the mothership. This is the place that got most of us started, and if you have not been there, what are you waiting for?

<http://www.hunter-net.org>.

VIRUSES

Keeping viruses off your machine is not rocket science. There are a lot of free products out there if you cannot afford a good piece of software. Also, there are a lot of false virus warnings, so please do not turn off your brain when you get on the net — do not believe every bit of email you get. Check it out. Here are some pages to get good information and resources:

<http://www.symantec.com/avcenter/index.html>

<http://www.DataFellows.com:80/vir-info/>

TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION

Some of you might get the bright idea that information is your best defense. We are not the only ones with computers:

<http://slashdot.org/>

<http://www.geeknews.net/>

<http://cnet.com>

<http://www.techsightings.com/>

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TECH HELP

I know most of you need some help now and then. Here are some places to get it:

<http://help.com>

<http://www.internettrafficreport.com/>

<http://www.allexperts.com/>

LIFE

This makes it more worth living...

<http://www.football365.co.uk/>

Okay, that may not be for all of you, but this page has a mix of tech and non-technology info that is surprisingly useful:

<http://www.boredatwork.org/>

THE THIN LINE

Jane's has info on all the hardware available and on dangerous hot-spots around the world.

<http://www.janes.com/>

If it is legal for you to own this stuff, these sites have it all.

<http://www.safetytechnology.com/>

<http://www.intercept-spytech.com/Equipment.html>



PROLOGUE: T'URF

Lupe Droin had high hopes for the fare. Two guys, mid-twenties to early thirties, she figured. White guys wearing jeans, T-shirts, nylon windbreakers and uncool sneakers. The short one with the belly and less hair stepped into the street, waving his hand with easy authority. As she pulled over, the taller one slouched toward the curb.

"Good evening," the stocky one said with a smile. A good smile. Professionally distant, just right for a business transaction. A smile that said, "I'm a good customer and hope you'll be a good driver. That's all we need to be to one another." A city smile.

The other's smile was a little more shy. She figured him for an out-of-towner, maybe visiting his cousin in the big city. "Could you pop the trunk?" The tall one was holding a pair of large duffel bags. She nodded.

"Where to, gentlemen?"

"Union Station." Not a long drive, but if traffic was bad this might be her last ride of the night. She spun the wheel and flowed into the traffic of the Magnificent Mile.

"Miss?" It was the short one. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?" Maybe she'd misread his smile. She narrowed her eyes, but saw nothing to alarm her about either man. She shrugged.

"I've lived in Chicago for ten years and I believe you're the first woman cab driver I've met."

Lupe's left hand came up to the corner of her eye and absently rubbed two smooth patches of skin on her cheekbone, each about the size of a pinkie nail. "Yeah, so?"

"Well... nothing I suppose. I guess I just wondered why that was."

"I dunno. Maybe guys are less scared of getting held up."

"Does that happen a lot?" the tall skinny one said abruptly.

"Once is enough." They slid past the lions of the Art Institute, past the mounted Indian chiefs whose bows had no strings. She surged to the right, flicking on her signal as an afterthought.

"Yeah, I can see that," the short one said, grinning wryly. She pulled into the taxi area in front of the station and hit the release to the trunk. The tall one was halfway

out of the cab when the short one leaned forward and pointed at a small symbol on a note card propped against the stick shift. In a low voice, nearly a whisper, he said. "Another question: What's that thing?"

"That? Oh, that doesn't mean much." She turned to look at him. He was counting out bills.

"I suppose I shouldn't ask such nosy questions," he said. "At least, not when I know the answers...." He handed her the money.

Mixed in with the bills was a business card. Hastily penned on the back was a symbol. To Lupe, it resembled a baseball diamond with spidery legs. Nevertheless, she instinctively understood it to mean one of the imbued, a planner or "prophet," as she had once heard it put — not someone quick to fight, like herself.

"Pleasure riding with you... Guadalupe," he said, reading the name off her license.

"My pleasure... Mr. Searle."

* * *

It was a quarter past midnight when Lupe got home. Her father was already in bed, but her sister Ramona sat smoking at the kitchen table.

"Hola," Lupe said. "How goes it?"

Mona shrugged. "Not so bad. You have a good night?"

"Not bad. Didn't have to kill nobody," she joked. In her pocket, her hand tweaked the edge of George Searle's business card. "A couple good tips. What you do tonight?"

"Hector and I went to the movies. I got to pick."

Lupe chuckled. "Hector must have made a move if he was willing to sit through a chick flick." Mona shrugged, irritated. Lupe didn't let it go. Mona was her little sister. Lupe could never let anything go.

"Did he? You don't have that rosy glow on your cheeks. Said 'no,' huh?"

"Hector's just... I don't know."

"Hector's a good boy."

"He's a boy, all right. I think I might want a man."

Lupe snorted. "A man's all right, I guess. If you don't mind as much bad as good. Boys are better. Less trouble. Lots less trouble."

"Maybe I'm looking for more in life than 'less trouble.'"

"I suppose. But when you get in trouble, don't come whining to me."

They were quiet for a moment. Then Mona announced, "Real's back in town."

Lupe's eyes widened and she smiled. "Noshit? Travis Royal came back? I heard he was off at law school or something."

"He's back now. What would you say about him? Boy or man?"

Lupe thought back to Travis "Real" Royal. She'd last seen him when she was a junior in high school. Every girl wanted to marry him, and every precocious high school "woman" wanted to fuck his brains out.

"Real Royal," she said, savoring the words. "Mmm, there was a bit of chocolate you could put your mouth on *all* day long." Mona giggled. Every boy envied Travis, with fathers asking, "How come you can't be like Real, drawing them fouts and making those shots?" or with mothers insisting, "How come you can't get good grades like that nice Royal boy?" But no one could hate him. Most kids wound up stupid and honest, or too smart and mean. Real found a balance somehow. He let himself see the good and bad, both. That made him genuine. It was impossible not to like him.

He'd gotten a basketball scholarship out of Henry Horner Homes to ISU. Lupe remembered watching him play on TV, before lights-out on the cell block. Her hand drifted again to the two smooth, polished scars near her left eye.

"Real," she said at last, "He was more than human. He was fuckin' superman. You seen him?"

"Nah, I just heard he was back in the Homes."

"That can't be right, 'less he's visiting."

"I'm just saying what I heard."

Lupe shrugged. "Real's a good man, but don't let that turn you sour on Hector."

"What you saying?"

"Nothing." But she couldn't leave it alone. "Just don't get your hopes up."

"What you mean, 'Get my hopes up'? You saying I should, what, settle with what I can get? Put up with a boy like Hector 'cause I ain't good enough for a 'man'?"

"Don't give up on Hector is all. He's put up with your bullshit so far."

"Fuck you!"

"He might go to college some day."

"Yeah, like you were going to?" Lupe's fist was clenched and drawn the moment the words were out of Mona's mouth. The younger sister flinched instinctively, hands rising to cover her face.

"Aww, fuck you, too, Mona." Lupe went to her room.

* * *

The next day, Lupe called George Searle's number from a payphone. "Hey, George, it's Lupe. Remember me?"

"Of course." He cleared his throat. "This is my business phone, you know...."

"Sure, I'm calling from a pay phone. Can you call me back here at noon?"

"Let's make it twelve-fifteen."

Lupe grabbed lunch and ate, waiting. By quarter-past, her fries were cold but the call was prompt.

"So, you... uh, *know*, right?"

"Yes," she said. "You on hunter-net?"

"I don't even know what that is. It... it hasn't been long."

He was a local insurance adjuster who'd been in Milwaukee to check the transmission of a rear-ended Pontiac when the graveyard next door coughed up its occupants. They killed two kids before he managed to lure the zombies into the garage's lube pit and trap them under a Nissan Sentra. The official conclusion was that the whole station burned down due to a chemical fire.

She was a high-school dropout who got a pick-up call late one night from a guy who looked like Lon Chaney's ugly cousin. He tried to drink her blood. She shot him eight times with an unregistered revolver. When that only slowed him down, she rammed her wood-handled ice scraper into his heart.

They came from different backgrounds, different parts of town, different lives and different cultures. But as they spoke, just for a moment each of them felt a closeness that neither had felt with family, lovers or friends. She could hear the relief in his voice. She *understood*.

"Look," she told him, "I can't talk all day. Other people use this phone... but I got a beeper number. You can get me through that, okay?" As she told him the number, the beeper on her belt went off, like a sleeping animal waking to the sound of its name.

She hung up and looked at the message. It was from Bike. Shit.

* * *

Bike was one of the chosen, like her. He'd grown up poor, like her, but that's where their similarities ended. He still lived and worked in the projects, where he made money at the one high-paying job his neighborhood offered. He started as a shorty. When he was 13, he killed another boy for stealing his bicycle. Now, at 19, he was an old man to his gang. He'd killed two men, seen at least a dozen die, done two years in juvie and one year in the pen. He'd also staked two vampires, put down five zombies and killed four puppets. His turf was *his*, and he wasn't going to give it up to anyone — living, dead or otherwise.

He met Lupe in an alley behind one of the Henry Horner Homes. Even at noon, the building's shadow made it seem dark out. Something in a dumpster was getting a lot of attention from a swarm of flies.

"One of my homies," he said, jerking his head. Lupe pulled her shirt collar up over her nose to try to cover the stink and looked into the dead gangster's filthy makeshift coffin.

"Can't you pull him out of there?" she asked, knowing the answer before Bike spoke.

"I ain't touching that shit."

Lupe thought, "It's about the only shit here you ain't got a hand in," but she kept her mouth shut. She could see a long, savage wound on the corpse's neck.

There wasn't a drop of blood on his clothes, on his skin, on the dumpster or on the ground around it.

"Yeah, he's been vamped on all right," she said. "Know who did it?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't have called your weak ass. I'd be putting some wood down right now."

Lupe stepped back into the sun and wind to take a breath that didn't stink of death. "All right, lemme think here. You haven't heard anything about a new blood-sucker around, right? So if this fucker just moved in, he's either connected or he isn't. If he's connected, someone's gonna come clean up this body. If not, either he'll come in person or the regular cops will find it, right?"

"Shit, I don't know." Bike shrugged in irritation and looked away impatiently.

"So we wait and watch. If the thing comes back, we spot him. If someone else comes, we know he's hooked up."

"And we can slice on his bitch to find out anything else we need to know," Bike added.

"Or follow him, yeah. 'Course, if it's the cops..." She shrugged. He shrugged back. With the cops, what could you do?

"I'll have one of my boys watch today," he said, "But I want you on it at night."

"What, worried your 'gangstaz' can't take it?"

"My boys can fuck up anything they can see. I just need you to see it for me. You my seeing-eye dog, got it?" Lupe glared, but she knew that, by himself, Bike didn't have the brains to find his own dick. If she wanted to stop this thing before it snacked on the Homes' other residents, she'd have to put up with his bullshit.

She turned to go. He yelled, "You be here tonight, you got me?"

She decided to take the long way home, through the center of the Homes. As she walked, she switched on the sight, hoping to get lucky and spot a bruise.

"Lupe? Hey, Lupe. Long time no see!"

Lupe turned to the sound of her name. "Danita? You're looking good, girl!" Danita looked like shit. Lupe had never seen her look so bad, not even in jail. Her skin, brown like a dead leaf, had pale patches that now looked a ghastly gray.

"I almost didn't recognize you without the tears," Danita said, gesturing to the two round scars on Lupe's face.

"Yeah, well..."

"Outgrew the life, huh?"

Lupe smiled, oddly flattered. "Something like that. You?"

"Oh, you know, staying clean, looking for a job."

Listening to Danita prattle, Lupe wondered if it was crack or the needle, then caught herself. She should be Danita's friend. She should be thinking the best of her.

"You wanna come up? Like, for a Coke or something?"

"Sure." As they walked toward the imposing box that Danita called home, Lupe asked, "You don't know a guy named Real, do you?"

"Uh... I might. How you know him?"

"I went to school with him. Heard he was back."

"Oh, I don't know. I think he might be." The way she said it sent a pang through Lupe. She could tell Danita was lying, that she *did* know and that he *was* back.

Shit, Lupe thought. He'd only come back here if he was broke or on coke. Damn.

They entered Danita's building and Lupe's stomach tightened. For a moment, she was back in prison. The

hallways were lit by slits of dusty sunlight — it was the same jailhouse dark. The peeling gray paint was the same, as well, and the smell... the smell of too many people in too little space, people with too much empty time and not enough hope. It was all the same. Lupe remembered Danita crying when she got turned in prison, remembered gettingshived in the elevator while "Goodbye" Jones covered the ceiling camera. Lupe remembered two years of violence and boredom, fear and despair. It all came right back.

Danita looked back where her guest had paused. "Sorry it's so dark," she said. "They keep smashing the light bulbs."

The apartment was tidy, except for pieces of stuffing that had fallen from the corners of her ratty sofa. Lupe looked around surreptitiously as Danita busied herself in the kitchenette. No steel wool for smoking, no fresh burn marks on anything, no blackened spoons... maybe her old cellmate *wasn't* using.

"Shit, I'm sorry Lupe. I don't got any cola." Danita sounded genuinely upset. "I got... uh, I got some of those coffee bag things?"

"That's fine." As Danita reached to turn on her hotplate, Lupe saw two tiny holes on her wrist and felt a wash of sorrow, thinking they were track marks. Then sorrow was replaced by horror as she realized what they really were.

"Danita..." Lupe took a breath, trying to calm her pounding heart. "Where'd you get those marks?"

"What marks?" Danita pulled down her sleeve. Lupe pushed her away from the hotplate — gently, but firmly — and yanked the cloth back up.

"Who did this?" Danita looked away. "Do you remember who did this to you?"

"No, I... don't."

"Don't you *lie* to me, bitch!" Lupe shook her, but held herself back from hitting. Danita broke easy and was already crying.

"Shit, Danita, don't you realize what that *thing* is?"

"It ain't like you think..."

"Where is it?"

"I dunno..."

"Why you? Where were you when it jumped you?"

"He didn't *jump* me." Tears streamed down Danita's face. "Lupe... it was Real."

"Real? What?" Then she realized.

"Travis Royal did this?"

Lupe slumped into a chair, trying to imagine the high-school hope boy, her superman, sucking blood in the night. "Why?" she whispered, not expecting any reply. Certainly not the one she got.

"Cause I asked him to."

* * *

That night, Lupe hunkered in the shadows by the dumpster. It was well after one when Real showed up, a body slung lazily over his shoulder.

Lupe watched him peek into the dumpster, shake his head and throw the second body on top of the first. She bit her lip, then spun the flint on a lighter.

Real spun around as the little flame sprung up from her hand flared up. She could have used a flashlight, but she knew rots hated fire.

"Hello there," he said mildly.

"Remember me, Real?"

"The name escapes me." He even sounded apologetic.

"Lupe Droin."

"Oh yeah, from high school." He smiled. The gun in her other hand didn't seem to bother him at all. "Were you waiting for me? You won't need that gun, I promise."

"You've been doing a lot of promising lately, what I hear."

"Keeping 'em, too," he replied. As she stood, she caught a glimpse of the body in the dumpster. It was Bike. She whistled.

"Killed Bike, huh? Heard he was coming for you?"

"Nope. I heard he raped up on Rosie Smalls."

Lupe sucked in her breath. "So you had a deal with Rosie? Like your deal with Danita?"

"No... Rosie's mama. I don't ask for donations from anyone under eighteen."

"Donations?" Lupe's mouth worked the word like it was bitter. "That what you call it?"

"I can call it blood if you like. It doesn't bother me."

"Doesn't *bother* you? Shit Real, you're a *vampire*! How could you...?" She couldn't finish. She couldn't say, "How could you do that to us?"

"I'm a vampire. So what? All that means is I'm stronger and faster than scum like Bike."

"All it means is you gotta take *blood* from people!"

"Yeah. Yeah I do, and they give it freely. You know why? Because what's a little blood *here*? Do you know how many women Bike raped? How many kids he hooked — half the time because the choice was that or a beating? Compared to all that, what's a little blood?"

Lupe shook her head in disbelief, but it was just as Danita had said. "I give to him once a month, and he makes sure nothing bad happens to me."

"It's a protection racket, Real. It's just another fucking shakedown."

"It's protection, but not a racket. I got a cousin. He saw a man get stabbed and thrown down some stairs. The guy hit the railing and broke his back. My cousin's *nine* and no one gives a fuck what he saw — that he *had* to see it. To *them*, he's just another youth 'at risk' in the projects, where niggers are shooting each other all the time anyhow. 'So what'cha gon' do?' Well, I know what I'm gonna do."

"You were gonna be a lawyer," Lupe said, weakly.

"You know what I learned in law school? You can be a D.A. and watch the cops put the frame on. You can watch a kiddie raper get bounced after a nickel to make room for more 'at risk' youth — a kid tried as an adult to make sure he got the full sentence for having half a roach hid under his bicycle seat. Or you can be a defense lawyer and watch the frame from the other side, hoping and praying for some big-time crack-lord client so you can afford a house on the North Shore. All that Perry Mason business? It's bullshit. The good public defender getting the honest man off? Huh. Maybe if he's white!"

Lupe felt the need to scratch her scars, where she'd had two tears pounded in with a ballpoint pen and a safety pin. One for each of her years in prison. She scratched with her shoulder so she wouldn't have to drop the gun or the lighter.

"Shit, Lupe, you were in the slam, weren't you? You *know* all this. I shouldn't have to tell you."

"You could have gotten out of here...."

"Yeah, I could have. I could have done contract law, been a token minority, joined the white flight to Oak Park and pretended my mama and daddy didn't still hear gunshots at night. But that's just because I had the strength to say 'no' a thousand times. I grew up with kids who were just as smart, just as good, but they all got dragged down. They said 'okay' just once. In here, you can't make even that *one* mistake."

Lupe drew in a breath to speak, but she knew it was all true. She said 'yes' to a good-looking guy who was into heartbreaking and house-breaking. She knocked off a few apartments and wound up taking the fall for him. She'd have served a full dime if her dad hadn't spent her college fund on a lawyer who played golf with her parole board.

Lupe's arm was loose at her side, her gun pointed straight at the ground. Real nodded and his next words were unexpectedly gentle.

"Lupe... I appreciate what you're trying to do. But this is my turf now."

She nodded. He sighed, and she realized, with a little shock, that he'd only been breathing to speak.

"I'm sorry it has to be this way, but the cops aren't gonna do shit. The gangs are like packs of wolves fighting over a shrinking flock. Someone's got to be the shepherd."

The biblical imagery made her gorge rise.

"Take my blood and live forever? Isn't that how it works?"

He raised an eyebrow. "You know about that? That must have been some prison." He looked at her with a calculating eye. "I could use a good lieutenant...."

"What about Danita?"

"Danita? She's too weak by half. I mean, she's a nice girl, don't get me wrong, but she needs someone looking out for her."

"And that's you? 'Real, the vampire hero?' Like some old-time godfather looking out over Little Italy?"

"I guess."

"And Danita and Rosie? They're just too dumb to take care of themselves?"

Something about her tone made him step back. "I wouldn't say dumb as much as weak." His tone was icy.

"And I could help you with your order? What's in it for me? You get a long line of snacks, but what's my percentage?"

If he'd said, 'You get to live in a safe neighborhood,' she might have let him go. If he'd said, 'You'll know that these kids can grow up without once seeing a man shot, or stabbed, or strangled in the building they live in' — if he'd said that, she might have gone along.

What he said was, "Join me and you never have to die."

Her reply — "Get behind me, Satan" — was drowned out by gunfire. He was flung back as her bullets were joined by those of a web designer from the west suburbs, a bricklayer from the south side and a traveling insurance adjuster. Travis "Real" Royal crashed against the dumpster that held his victims. Their stolen blood flowed from a dozen holes.

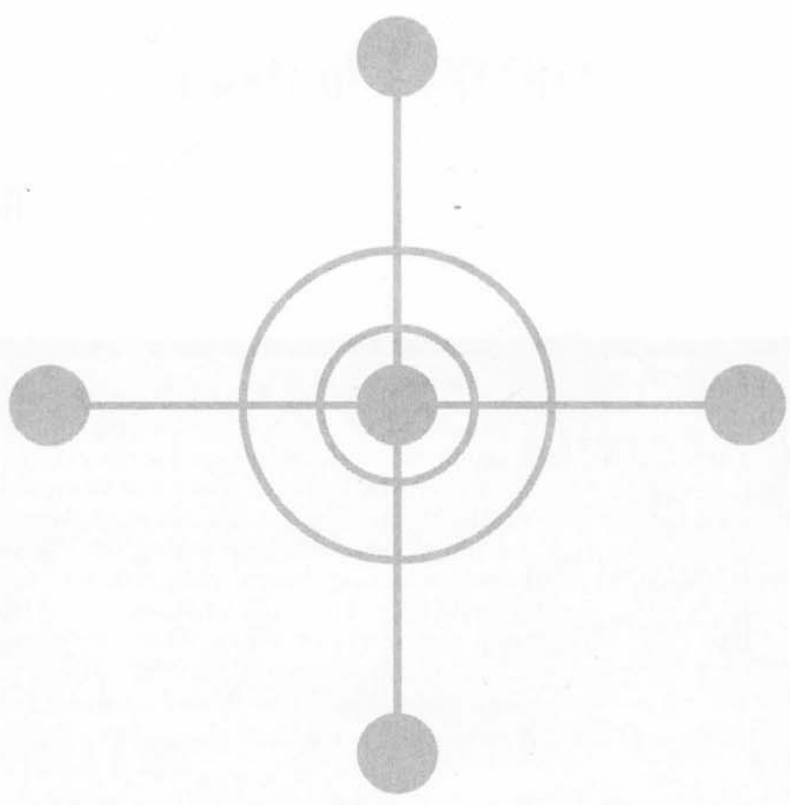
When he tried to crawl away, his attackers clubbed him with blazing torches.

"Almost had me fooled," Lupe said at last. "But this is my turf now."

TM

HUNTER BOOK

DEFENDER



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INTRODUCTION

Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them.

— Ezekiel 38:7

THE THIN LINE

Hunter Book: Defender is a sourcebook that helps you develop a better understanding of the Defender creed and its emerging role in the world of **Hunter: The Reckoning**. As a Defender, you're a family guardian, a neighborhood protector or xenophobic recluse. Confronted with the horrific truth of reality, you instantly and instinctively dedicate yourself to defending and preserving the things and people you hold most dear. Although your life is still important to you, you're prepared to endanger it to ensure that important people and ideals are preserved against monstrous tyranny. But what makes you tick? What could be so invaluable about the world or yourself that you are compelled to stand vigil so relentlessly on the behalf of others, even those who don't even know or appreciate it? This book helps you decide, to determine who your Defender is, before and after the imbuing — and all the creed's new powers and rules don't hurt, either.

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

terrifying to contend with alone. In time, however, as more and more imbued dare meet and make overtures to find each other, individuals with similar attitudes and theories are attracted to one another and develop like-minded circles. These nascent social groups are the foundations for what ultimately become the hunter creeds.

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

It's only after the imbued become fully devoted to or even obsessed with the hunt that their approaches to it become purposeful and refined. Some become determined to save monsters' souls. Others want to see these creatures utterly destroyed. When this distillation is complete, the creeds as social classifications finally arise. Defender recog-

nizes Defender and Innocent recognizes Innocent, all through the creeds' codified values, intentions and goals in the hunt.

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

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

PERSPECTIVES

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

The creed and its members' views evolve constantly as Defenders try to define themselves in a world they no longer understand. With no other frame of reference, the chosen typically resort to the ideas, virtues and philosophies they possessed before their transformation. No two Defenders have the same thoughts about their origins, for example. Thus, the *questions* the imbued ask of themselves and their world — not any specific *belief system* — best illustrate their individual and collective identity.

However, bear in mind that as hunter and Defender societies evolve, ideas can seem similar but actually have very different origins or motivation. There's a lot of overlap among creed perspectives. Someone who also believes in protecting normal people might actually be a Redeemer, Innocent, Martyr or Judge — almost any other hunter. Not all voices in this book belong to Defenders, to represent the blurred lines of hunter society, but also to offer some comparison and contrast between guardians and the other creeds.

So, after reading this book, you should have a sense of the drives and ambitions that inspire and motivate various Defenders. You should sense why these people take a resolute stand against monsters, and what influences their relations with other imbued. We also hope that you're inspired to fully develop your character's identity and beliefs, to make him as compelling as possible in his unflinching vigil.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Hunter Book: Defender broadens the World of Darkness as creed members perceive it and offers insights into the hunter psyche. It also presents new rules and powers for use by Defenders and possibly other creed members. This book is therefore ideal to elaborate upon your character, and it helps you better understand her.

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

Chapter 2: Trials and Tribulations covers Defenders' unique approach to their constant struggle and the strategies they prefer against the supernatural. As you'll see, not all methods are well received by other creed members.

Chapter 3: Our Future presents the creed's attempt to define its purpose and destiny in the World of Darkness.

Chapter 4: Hunter Ties describes Defenders' relations with themselves and other creeds.

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

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

LEXICON

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

bleeding hearts: A somewhat derogatory term for hunters who seek to befriend or help monsters rather than protect against them.

called: To be affected or influenced by the Messengers.

charge: A charge is one thing — or several — that a Defender dedicates himself to protecting. A charge may be a person, place, object or even an ideal (at least in theory). Striving to ensure that a subject of protection survives the war to enjoy a free world is a Defender's self-appointed mission. Also, "ward," "treasure," "burden" or "custody."

The following are samples of possible charges or treasures that protectors may uphold. These examples are just the beginning, but they comprise the very meaning of Defender existence.

- **Human Charges:** Organization, sibling, parent, family, a particular gender, children, the elderly
- **Locational Charges:** Neighborhood, town, community, specific building, domain on the Internet
- **Material Charges:** A library, *objets d'art*, historical items, a personal creation, an animal, a species
- **Ideological Charges:** religious belief, scientific belief, human rights, animal rights, a particular racial group, a nationality, a culture

defender: Guardians have not settled on this term, although it becomes increasingly popular among the wider hunter community. Defenders refer to themselves

simply as hunters and occasionally as "protectors," "guards" or "champions."

kamikazes: A certainly derogatory term for hunters who sacrifice themselves wantonly and aimlessly in the hunt, without preserving anything in the process.

recluse: A protector who has gone over the edge and who isolates herself, preferring to protect someone or something "outside the bounds" of normal society.

runaways: A demeaning term for people who witness monsters or events at an imbuing, but who fail to stand their ground.

watch, the: Defenders' purpose and direction in the war. Also called "the mission" or "the calling."

GUARDIANS, NOT MASOCHISTS

This book is dedicated to the Defender creed. When you create or play your Defender character, remember one important thing that differentiates her from other creeds, particularly Martyrs: Your character is not a masochist! Before they're imbued, Defenders tend to be people who value something in life as much as they value life itself, be it family, an ethic, a culture, a locale, a creation, a possession or a community. When these people confront the monstrous reality of the world, their first response is typically not to destroy, negotiate or inquire. They protect something, whether it's that which they cherished most *before*, or anything else they now deem worth preserving in the face of evil. In some instances, such protection may even mean destroying, negotiating or making inquiries, but usually only insofar as guarding someone or something goes.

Yes, Defenders stand in harm's way. Yes, they put their lives on the line for others. They do not do so recklessly, though. Defenders draw a line, dare the enemy to cross it, and fight savagely to ensure that monsters pay the price. However, no victory is won if no one is left to enjoy it. Defenders understand that there are times to fight and times to retreat. They plan and plot, and when their schemes fail, they know to give ground in hopes of fighting again another day. Sometimes that means personal prizes are lost, but others remain under guard and can still be preserved. Defenders thus approach their cause intellectually. They hope to achieve their goals but often know when they can't be won.

Martyrs can seem similar to Defenders and so should be differentiated for clarity. Martyrs also put their lives on the line. They also seek to protect other people, objects and places. In simplistic terms, the difference between Martyrs and Defenders is that the former tend to give of themselves with careless, even suicidal, abandon. They might react to a threat without a plan or objective, simply throwing themselves at the enemy and hoping for the best. They're

inspired emotionally to make internal sacrifices. They don't intellectually rationalize the defense or sacrifice of external things such as loved ones or possessions.

Martyrs' disregard for self gives them power; an opponent must match their passion if it hopes to prevail. It's that very willingness that separates Martyrs from Defenders, however. Martyrs are prepared to give themselves for the cause, whereas Defenders are prepared to give up a charge in hopes of being around to save many more. Defenders constantly seek to dodge and deflect blows to wear down the enemy. Martyrs are prepared to invite the enemy's fangs and claws so that no one else can be hurt.

So, when you create and play your Defender, keep her goals in mind at all times. She protects and preserves them whenever she can, but guardians know to retreat for the greater good rather than entreat death in every little conflict.

SOURCE MATERIAL

There are all kinds of movies, books and comics available that capture the compassion, determination and sometimes feverish resilience of Defenders. Obviously, these sources aren't all about Defenders or fighting monsters, but some of their characters or subject matter come damn close. Just imagine monsters as the enemy.

Aliens: The ultimate kick-ass movie about motherhood. It's a battle to see whose maternal urges are stronger, the alien queen's or Ripley's.

The Guardian: Louis Gossett Jr. plays an ex-military man hired to protect building tenants from criminals. It's kinda over the top, but the dependence that Gossett elicits from the tenants makes him a likely Defender wacko. The modern urban setting is pretty gritty, too.

Strange Days: The epitome of the World of Darkness. Lenny loves Faith and wants to save her from evil. Meanwhile, Mace loves Lenny and wants to save him from himself. Both "Defenders" lose people along the way, but love is still preserved in the end.

The Terminator: Ignore the fact that Reese is from the future. He's a regular guy on a self-appointed mission to save Sarah Connor, his secret love, from an irresistible killing machine. Reese (and Sarah) have to improvise all kinds of weapons along the way, just as any resourceful hunter would. The shitty setting is all about the World of Darkness, too.

Terminator 2: Dismiss Arnold as a hunter candidate. Too many muscles and guns to be human, even if his CPU is a neural-net processor. But Sara Connor's human and determined efforts to protect her son make her an ideal Defender. Now imagine that *your* loved-one "sides" with the enemy and brings him to meet you!

What is it with James Cameron movies and **Hunter**?



M.G.

CHAPTER 1: HUNTER ORIGINS

*But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins
for ever, sat down on the right hand of God*

— Hebrews 10:12

SAME AS IT EVER WAS

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: coach41

Subject: The First?

It's strange that we're so new to this game. I mean, there are a few websites and lists devoted to what we do. All of our lives have been turned upside-down by the things we've been confronted with and can do. Many of us try to share what we've learned. We suspect that the things we've seen have been around a long time. All these changes and revelations in such a short period of time, and yet we all seem so new to the truth. It's almost hard to believe that this is a new thing.

I mean, I've met a half-dozen people like us in and around Atlanta alone, and probably three times that many online, scattered around the world. Yet, the one who seems most capable and claims to have seen the most was "called" just a few months ago. Most of us seem to have a couple months' awareness — from my experience, just enough time to recognize that you're not insane, but the world certainly is.

I can't think this is the first time that people like us have been called. Someone or something is pissed or hungry or both. Someone has picked up the starter's gun and fired a shot that we've all heard. Ready or not.

You can only carry that metaphor so far, though. We're not all out for ourselves, damn the consequences. If we get to the finish line over the bodies of the unwitting and defenseless, what have we won? The best of us know that we're here for a reason — to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

I'm no college professor or preacher, but look back at the stories we all grew up on, of people who defended the weak: the policeman, the nurse, the Good Samaritan. You might as well throw in Superman, NYPD Blue and John Wayne, too!

In short, we must be older than we think. Perhaps, just as stories of heroes are told, re-packaged and told again, so have we come and gone. Slap me if I'm getting too new-agey on you, but what's to say others didn't fight this fight before? If they did, I guess our next question would be: Did we win or lose?

BASTARDS

From: hannibal137

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Re: Bastard Children

Who all agrees with me that we're the bastard children of whatever the hell is going on here? I mean, let's say we're not the first to see what we do or to be able to do what we do. That means the ones who came before got fucked and are dead or they're out there still and we don't know about them. If they do exist, they sure as hell haven't come knocking on our doors with any kind of friendly welcome, you know? So that makes us the bastard children. The red-headed stepchildren. The ones that everybody says look like the mailman.

Fact is, people, that if there were others before us, then they either don't want anything to do with us or they're dead. If they're dead, then it won't do us any damn good to study their methods, and "following in their foot steps" will mean going straight to the grave. Whatever any old fuckers did, it obviously didn't work. Who cares who donated the sperm for us? Who cares who our ancestors were? Fact is, they're gone and we're left holding the bag. Oh, and in case you didn't know, I heard John Wayne was a fag. What do you have to say about that?

KEEPING THE PEACE

From: dole7

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: Those Who Came Before and Rough Trade

Coach, you make some good points. Think about how many times we have heard stories of heroes who pop up for the fight, but never live long enough to see the goodies, like King Arthur or even Moses.

Neither ended up that well did they? Because of their own screw-ups, neither made it to Paradise. I wonder if we will do the same? Not that I am claiming to be a knight of the Round Table in shining armour, just because I am a Brit! That is all crap.

In principal, I agree with Hannibal. I do not much care — for all I can see, we got the shaft but good.

As to Hannibal's queer question, I do not know. I do not sit around and wonder about who is a Johnny. Spend your time however you like, mate. But I do know when one's cruising for a bit of this and that, or when some thick bloke is cruising for a fight. Sit down and have another beer, Hannibal. Save yourself for a real struggle.

This seems to be a good time to talk about a point of conduct. It comes down to this: I do not want to waste time policing the list. If it does not have to do with our task, fighting to protect what is ours, keep it to yourself.

FIRE FROM HEAVEN

I can only name the force that's changed me God. Whether that God is a white man on a golden throne doesn't really matter. I wish I knew, though. It'd make things a lot simpler.

I'm often envious of people like Crusader17. Everything seems so easy for him. Find a couple of quotes from the Bible saying you're an avenging angel, some quick beliefs to excuse thought and there's all the explanation you need: "Kill them all and let God sort them out."

Since when did God not want us to think? Or question?

I have to admit, since the angels called me, I go to church more often than I used to. I've even bought a study Bible hoping to find out if this voice in my head is His.

Other than my gut feelings, what do I have to go on? I have the handfuls of phrases I've heard and the visions I've seen urging me to act, to put myself between people and trouble. Then there are the bizarre things I've done. The things me and my associate Dana have done almost always seem to be about energy or light. So I looked up occurrences of fire in the Bible. Not unexpectedly, there are quite a few — about fifteen. If you want to look at a few try 2nd Kings 6.17, Isaiah 9.18 or 1st Corinthians 3.13. Take your pick. Fire can mean almost anything from the power of God to the Holy Spirit to God's blessing — or maybe His condemnation or the literal flames of Hell.

With so many unanswered questions and so little to go on, how do I understand myself, what's made me what I am, and why? Well, one quote from the Bible stands out to me. And as we go about recognizing what Dole proposes as our society or "creed," this excerpt is even more appropriate. Whether you're Christian or not, take a look at 1st Corinthians 3.13, Apostle Paul's letter to the early Christians of Corinth. It was written when there were few faithful. Paul urges them to keep the faith, unify their purpose and

build the Church. "[T]he work of each builder will...be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done."

Like the early believers, we too must stick together. We won't survive alone and isolated. But the early Christians were building a religion. Our "work" is not a structure like a physical church, but the people of the world. My "work" is embodied by the things and people I protect. If we work together, that means our work is humanity as a whole.

Subject: Fire from Heaven

From: dzidzat155

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

When I was changed, I saw myself aflame. Though it terrified me at first, there was no pain. And even though I was frightened, the urge to save myself passed quickly when I realized that others near me were in terrible danger themselves.

When I think about that night, I am allowed some chance to consider what happened to me. I ask why fire? I am not so sure as to its moral message. I am from Hong Kong. I am not a Christian, so I hope what I have to say does not offend. I merely offer it as an alternative in our discussion.

From what I know of Feng Shui, I know that fire is active, filled with energies. I feel the flames were a symbol of the great transformation I underwent, rather than some sign from heaven of our mission's meaning.

This is not to say that we do not have purpose or that we should not search for purpose in what we must do, simply that there is not one answer. China's myths and legends do not fit together neatly. We are children of at least four great heritages. No, five. (See our difficulty?) We have the great myths and legends of our ancestors, from Taoist tradition to the insights of the Buddha. Measure against those the political thought and practicality of Confucius. And for those of us in Hong Kong are the influences of Christian governments and the ways of the mainland's Communism.

As you can see, there is not one way here. Our culture has a hundred creation myths, a thousand gods with a fiery aspect. So, I do not see the flame as more than a hint to our nature.

I would be reserved in making judgments about our calling. Our fate will be revealed in time.

It is through patience that I know the voice that calls me. It is that of my grandfather. Only he would call me Dzi Dzat, "folded paper," after the little paper symbols of money sold to people for good luck. I remember sitting beside him at his seventy-first birthday as they brought him his dinner. He said, "Dzi Dzat, you may eat of my share. Of all my grandchildren, only you come to see me every afternoon. Only you bring me the candies that my doctor says I can no longer have. Only you look upon this wrinkled face with love and do not turn away. For that I give you this honor." My face burned with pride.

He died just before I left to study in the United States.

But I know his voice when I hear it today.



Certainly the death of creatures is necessary at times, as so many are quick to point out, but I don't think that is my — our — primary mission. The head count of monsters slain won't matter when we're called to a reckoning. The still-beating hearts of those we've protected will be what matters.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

To: oursine113

From: coach41

Subject: A Voice in the Darkness

Yeah, something is up. I'm surprised you noticed, and thanks for letting me vent personally. I don't want Hannibal's comments on this.

I made a mistake Tuesday. I grabbed my wife's cell phone instead of mine. Not a big deal? It meant she had mine. A time bomb was ticking and I didn't even know it.

I always thought Claire might find out if, God forbid, one of the monsters ever found out who I was and tracked me home. That's why I hunt in a city 25 miles away from where I live. I lie to my wife and tell her I'm going to school three nights a week.

I wasn't out hunting that night. I brought Dana, an ally, over to my grandparent's old garage that I've been using in Atlanta. She needed a place to crash since her life had collapsed around her ears. Anyway, we were discussing what to do about a target we'd encountered when /Dana's/ phone rings. That's when the time bomb exploded.

Claire had hit the speed dial on /my/ phone.

"You want to speak to who?" Dana said. "Chad? Yeah, he's right here."

Without thinking, Dana handed me the phone.

That's when it hit us what had happened. Dana and I just sat there, a half-eaten pizza between us, and maps of the Pleasant Hill

cemetery spread over the table. I reached for the phone and my hand was already shaking. Claire had hung up by the time I said hello.

I gave Dana a key to the garage and left.

When I got home, the house was dark. I went to the bedroom and Claire was pretending to be asleep, facing the wall. I sat down on my side.

She spoke without looking up: "Are you having an affair?"

I started to answer, "God no, honey..."

"I called the college. You're not enrolled," she said.

I probably should have just shut up or told her the truth, but I didn't. "I don't know if I can explain right now, but I'm not having an affair. Dana is just a friend."

She said, "Two lies in one night are a little more than I can take right now, Chad!"

With all the pressure I'd been under, I started to get mad. "Shit, Claire I..."

"Don't wake Ben!" she said to me, almost hissing. Then she rolled over to face me and pulled out the big guns. "He misses you when you're not here..."

All I could think to say was, "I don't know what else to tell you, but I'm not having an affair!"

She rolled back to face the wall. I got up and walked out, furious.

I remember thinking, "Screw the angels or God or whatever is torturing me." I walked past Ben's room and I heard him rustling around.

He's almost outgrown his crib. The covers had come off his legs. He's hot natured like me and kicks them off, but he calls out when he gets cold. I try to get up on nights when I'm not too tired. I find him sitting up, groggy, swaying. He doesn't know why he's up.

"Shssh, night time is for sleep!" I said. He leaned against my arms. I lay him down, covered him up and he went back to sleep. All it takes is a hand on the back and my voice and everything is all right for him.

I watched him sleep for some time. My wife started crying in our room. I put my hand on Ben's back and felt the rise and fall of his breathing.

The night's not for sleep anymore is it. Oursine? Not for us.

I wish the angels would come to me now. Give me some power to make things right. I don't know what to do. How can I protect against the things I'm forced to see day and night without destroying my family, the thing I want to save most?

Are we children to the angels, crying in the darkness, half asleep? Do they know the horrors we're going through?

Do they care?

From: oursine113

To: coach41

Subject: Re: A Voice in the Darkness

Oh, mon cher ami. My heart has pain for you. You must remember yourself that you are not alone. I know many others who have also known the same. We try so much to protect those that we love, but some times, we can not. You must talk to your wife. You have nothing to lose. The truth perhaps will save your marriage. If you continue to lie, she will know. The women feel when their husbands have strayed, whether it is to another woman or to a secret life. You risk to lose her if you do not tell the truth, but you risk to lose her also if you do. You love her. She loves you. You risk less by telling the truth.

And also, you do not have to tell the truth exactly, oui? You can make her to understand without revealing all that you know. Dana is a policier, oui? So, explain to your wife that you are helping the police in secret. Tell her the truth, but in a manner that will not make her to think you are crazy. You are smart. You will find the words. I wish you some good luck.

THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE

Why me? I'm not special. I'm a high school history teacher and ex-coach whose marriage and career are on the rocks. What's so special about me?

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: tarjiman220

Subject: Re: To Serve and Protect

I am not Sufi, but I wonder that our task is a matter of karma. Perhaps we were the servants or even the summoners of the demons. I have had horrible dreams of late where I am the beast tearing the flesh from my families bones and this has brought me to a terrible revelation. Perhaps we were demons in a previous life.

If this makes sense, why burden the souls of our friends and families with the deeds we must perform and the sacrifices we must make. I wonder if we all have done great evil and are now being asked to repay the debt of our sins by fighting what we aided previously.

This does not explain why only recently we have begun to exist. Perhaps the evil of this world has just become too great. Perhaps there were always a few of us. We just have not met our elders yet.

Like dzidat, I say patience and prayer will reveal the truth to us. Evil walks like a man. If it comes to us while we hope for truth, we shall still face it.

Can anyone become a hunter, be imbued? Maybe not. Dana says that three other cops were there when she confronted the thing that woke her up. She was the only one who stood her ground.

What seems likely to me is that some of us are capable, but we have to be in the right situation to get the call - or to hear it. If that's true, maybe there are a lot of "players" waiting on the sidelines, not even aware that they're suited up and ready to play.

So why me and why now, not later? Sometimes I think back to when I was young, standing up for others.

"STAND."

That's the first thing the voices told me. I've been thinking about it a lot.

When I was in grade school I had a friend named Dave who was hyperactive. I felt sorry for him because the other kids picked on him, but I wasn't drawn to him out of pity. My family had just moved and I was an outsider, too. Dave was the only one who tried to help me. The teacher saw that I played with him, so she put me in charge of taking him to get his medicine each day after lunch. They gave him speed. (Believe it or not, that's what they give to hyperactive kids to calm them down.)

Each day we had to run a gauntlet from the swing set to the nurse's office - past all the kids who would laugh and call Dave names. Most of the time I just talked louder, trying to drown them out and keep Dave's attention on me, but Dave could never focus on me for long. He'd eventually look at the other kids and then look at the ground, ashamed.

One day, I had enough. Frank Kinkead, a real ugly bastard, was screaming names in Dave's ear. I pushed Frank away and that started a fight. Frank pretty much beat me up and the principle punished us both. But after that, the insults never came like before. Sure, some kids still poked fun - kids are kids - but there was no more gauntlet of insults to run.

I stood up. Maybe somebody was watching then, taking notice.

I'm not on a saint kick. I was no more of a saint at nine than I am at 35, but it still seems like I'm supposed to stand up for people who can't - or maybe even won't. Ironically, something about the intensity of some of our allies just doesn't strike me as right. They remind me sometimes of kids like Frank, ready to fight with the slightest provocation and perhaps without good reason. I know I'm not like them, but was I created to stop them or to stop the worse bullies, the monsters?

TAKE THIS CUP AWAY

There is a moment in the life of everyone when you begin to wonder yourself if you have lost your mind. Sitting in my little white chambre, the one with the bed of metal and the locked door, the bars on the window and the single chair of wood, I wondered myself. My initiation, you see, put me in the psychiatric ward. I made the erreur of to tell to people what I had seen. I suppose that I should rewind and restart at the debut. It is not a pretty story. If I learned anything in my cell, it was that to talk helped, but only with those who had received also the calling.

At that time, I worked at the newspaper in my petit village. I wrote about meetings at the Hôtel de Ville and local fêtes. My story the most exciting was entrusted to me only because the experienced reporter of the paper was on holiday. It involved the impromptue visit of a political speaker who called himself Andrew Von Braun. With my tape recorder and my photographer with me, I went to the Hôtel des Fleurs where Von Braun had promised to give a conference. All was going smoothly, at first. I asked some intelligent questions and received some intelligent answers. Von Braun smiled at me directly.

And then, reality shook. A flash exploded in my face, blinding me temporarily. My head began to pound. I prepared myself for to yell at the clumsy photographer, but

when my vision was cleared, I saw something that made me abandon completely that intention.

Von Braun continued to speak, but I understand nothing of what he was saying. His voice dragged, came out deeper, slow, like a recording on low speed. His body was shadowed in an aura of darkness, and his eye sockets looked like holes of empty blackness with just a pinprick of light at their centers. I could not breathe. The room felt to me heavy. It suffocated me.

I combated my panic and looked around myself. I wondered why no one else worried themselves. The crowd was looking at Von Braun with some mesmerized expressions. Their lips moved in silence with his. The words he spoke did not sound to me like they once did. Now they sounded as proclamations of hatred. That, more than nothing else, frightened me.

I remember a white luminescence that shined on me, like a spotlight, but it was coming from a source unrecognizable. For an instant, the voice of Von Braun became clear, and the words that were coming from his mouth did not match the movements of his lips. It was a voice of the purest evil. He announced, "TRAVERSE THE FLOCK THAT HAS NO SHEPHERD."

His proclamation echoed in my head, and I passed several seconds in confusion. I knew somehow that the well-being of the people there rested in my hands. I knew without doubt that Von Braun was some sort of madman, that his words and his will were provoking hate in these people. And then, Von Braun opened his mouth for to laugh and I saw his teeth, long, white fangs. The laughter exited in slow, too. It rumbled. It made me nauseous. The sound was as black as his tongue. This, then, was my moment of truth. Without thinking, I ran directly to the stage. I combated the crowd, and I am certain that I yelled. The rest passed quickly.

I do not know how, but I ignited the curtains. I knocked over a spotlight, I believe. The fire spread rapidly on the thick velvet. I was not noticing it immediately, but it broke the reverie of the crowd. Screams and shouts echoed around me. I tried to approach Von Braun, but then I saw an old woman in a wheelchair. She was trying to turn herself for to escape the flames. Immediately, I forgot Von Braun and went to help her.

"Get out," someone shouted. A woman screamed nearby.

I abandoned Von Braun, oui. Many among you will censure me for this, but me, I thought that the endangered audience was my primary worry. I braved the smoke and the flames for to help the people to leave the building. The smoke became more thick. It had angry faces in it that I fought to ignore. I saved the old woman and a young boy who could not move for fear. During a long time after, I waited outside and watched the firemen who were spraying water on the blackened ruins. All the people exited with their lives, but it took me a very long time to reconcile my guilt. I had started the fire. I knew it, but no one could identify me as it. I questioned myself whether I had truly saved those people or if I had caused their danger. But the light and the voice rested clear in my memory.

I vowed to myself to reassure that Von Braun would never return to my village. I wrote the article that they never published. In it, I described him exactly as I had seen him. I do not know why I expected that someone else would substantiate it. I do not know why I expected they would believe me. I presumed that I was not the only one to experienced what I did. Now I know I was alone with the weight of responsibility on my shoulders. I did what I had to do.

When they told me they would publish not the article. I fought. I screamed and I cursed.

They locked me in a hospital. They called it a breakdown. They said I had some delusions and some tendencies of suicide. They stole me three months of my life while they tried to make me sane. That which they did not know, and that which I did not know, was that I was more sane than the most of them. I had seen the truth. Only in retrospect do I understand that the voice was my interior self, woken by the new knowing that I had found. I do not know why it is happened. I do not understand why my interior chose that moment to assert itself, but I am content for the chance to return friendship to my community and save them from the monster who, that night, stalked them without mercy.

Even now, in rereading these memoirs, I can not stop myself from thinking that I must sound mad. Happily, I found others like myself, like you, who helped me to know without any doubt that I see with some clear eyes and that I am right. I have gone to a new home. I try to guard the malignant monstres at bay here. In full day, I mix with my neighbors. I smile when I see them to embrace their spouses and to play with their children. Me, I know that I will never have the simple life like them, but I know also that I guard their security and happiness every time that I protect them from the monstres. I do so without regret.

From: hannibal137

To: vigilist@hunter-net.org

Re: Re: Why me?

Why me? I'll tell you why. Because God or whatever knows I'm the omeriest SOB there is. Once I dig in my heels, you can just forget changing my mind or getting me to quit. I'm the stink on shit.

Besides, I like my new "psychic friends" powers, like the one I call Fuck Off. I flick it on and the monsters can't come for me. Sometimes, if I let them get real close first, like five or ten feet, it actually knocks them on their ass!

Now, can we move onto something that counts? For instance, I saw one of those homebuilding shows — there ain't much to watch at 3:00 am. Anyway, this show was about improving the environment by disposing of household chemicals safely. Don't have time for that crap usually, but as an example this guy pours a little brake fluid on a pile of chlorine like what you get for a pool filter. Blam! The shit goes up like white phosphorus, and here's the sauce for the goose — it releases chlorine gas! I figure this would make a great trap, especially if the monsters are real vulnerable to fire or they still need to breathe.

Now, for a real question to you all, will brake fluid eat through a balloon or condom? I want to figure out some way to combine the two chemicals in a trap. Of course, you don't want to be around when these two get together. When someone hits a tripwire, it releases the balloon filled with break fluid. The balloon falls and hits something sharp, just to make sure it pops. You've already spread chlorine around whatever breaks the balloon. You see what I'm getting at?

You could drive a couple of nails through a board, then pile the chlorine pool stuff up over the nails, making a mound. When the monster hits the tripwire, the balloon falls. The brake fluid and chlorine mix — instant fried and gassed monster!

Great idea, huh?

T O SERVE AND PROTECT

It's hard to believe it hasn't even been three months since all this began. I can't think back to that day without realizing how much I've lost since. My wife's trust. The respect of my co-workers. Almost everything I valued before has been ruined or is about to slip through my fingers.

But I will continue my watch, even if the folks I protect think (know?) I'm crazy.

It was fall, October 9th. We traveled to Parker High near Dacula. (No, that's how it's spelled. Look it up.) I was still the cross-country coach then. Most history teachers have to do something else to keep a job these days. It was the final race and Tim, a freshman, hadn't come back. I told the rest of the team to wait on the grass as I ran the course from end to beginning, hoping to find him resting by the edge of the trail.

I was about a quarter of the way through, in a small group of pine trees near the back of the school when I heard a groan or something off to the right. At first I thought the girl was trying to help him. She was so engrossed in her "work" that she didn't hear me coming until I was on them.

I yelled his name and she turned to look at me. There was no shock, no trace of any emotion on her face. From where I stood, I saw that she had a rope around Tim's neck. He'd managed to get one hand through the noose. His fingers were blue and swollen and the skin of his neck was torn and bleeding.

"What the hell is going on here? Stop it!" I yelled. I don't know if my imagination has edited this over time, but I think she cracked a smile at the "h" word. The girl stood up. That's when I realized her clothes were torn and filthy, as if she'd been living abandoned in the woods for years. Her hair was all matted and greasy, and her skin was almost white, sickly in contrast to the dirt smears on her face. She couldn't have been more than five feet tall, yet she held the rope around Tim's neck easily in one hand, slinging him around like a backpack.

She glanced at my track sweats. "Hi, coach!"

With each word, maggots rolled out of her mouth. I stumbled back from her and landed in the pine straw. I was dazed and I guess she would have come to finish me off, but Tim struggled and she turned her attention to him.

I almost ran, but I swear I felt something on my shoulder, like the hand of my dad, and I heard a voice, "STAND. THE DAMNED CANNOT BEAR THE RIGHTEOUS."

"Get the fuck away from him!" I screamed.

I felt something hot rush out of me. It was as if my anger hit the monster and threw her away from Tim and me.

I'm no idiot. I grabbed him and ran. As I carried him out of the woods, I think she tried to get at us, but something kept her back. She must have run off as soon as we were in the clearing. All the other coaches and kids ran for us as soon as we came out.

I was a hero for exactly a day and a half. Then the police hauled me in for questioning. I wasn't stupid enough to tell them that a five-foot-tall dead girl manhandled a 140-pound high school track star. Much less that she put me on my ass. I told them the would-be killer was a big man, and that he ran off as soon as he saw me. I gave as vague a description as possible. Thank God I stuck to it. Tim never saw anything, or if he did his pride didn't let him say so.

The cops had the rope from Tim's neck, but they found no footprints of a big man in the woods. In fact, the only footprints they found were from Tim and me. The only thing that saved my butt from court was that the detectives said any rope held tight enough to do that to Tim would have cut the hands of the assailant. Mine were clean.

That didn't stop them from hauling me in three more times for questioning, though - once in the middle of a school day. It didn't stop them from searching my house, taking my computer, grilling my wife on our private life, and interviewing the whole track team to see if I had ever made sexual advances on them.

In the end, I was asked to step down from being coach. Hell, the only reason the school even kept me on was that I had "tenure."

They never caught the creature.

KNOW THINE ENEMY

When it comes right down to it, we don't know what we're up against in this new world we've been exposed to. I can't say how dangerous that is. A good coach finds out everything possible about the opposing side, learning its strengths and

weaknesses. Way I see it, one of our first tasks on this list is to pool our information on the things we face. How else can we save our friends and families?

MAN-BEASTS

Dana is my only contact who has any real experience with these things. According to her, they're the reason she changed. She hasn't told me her full story, but I assume she knows more about them. She has claimed two surprising things about these creatures. She fought one in Atlanta, so don't assume you're safe in town. I guess that they come in to find victims, maybe when prey in the wilds gets scarce or boring or something.

The amazing thing is that they apparently have some kind of mind control. Normal folk can't remember seeing them. People's descriptions of events get confused. Not too surprising, since they're scared out of their minds. And that raises an important point: We all know the dangers of talking about our watch to people who don't /know/. Oursine's experiences are proof of that. But in the case of man-beasts, Dana says you have to stay tight-lipped. No one can back up your story, even if they saw one.

I suggest that these creatures be last on our hit list, unless you stand directly between one and the person it wants. Cities are already full of enough creatures. Once we secure the places where we live, we can worry about the things in the woods. I guess that's what the angels have in mind. We seem to be capable of dealing with rats and zombies. I have a hard time believing we have the power to take on shapechangers on their own turf.

WITCHES

Not all "creatures" are monsters. I know a few other hunters who would kick my butt for saying that, but it's true. Bookworm55 calls them witches or warlocks. The one I know is a /priest/, and he sometimes works in a soup kitchen. More importantly, he helped me save Dana from a rat. (Well, we thought it was a rat.) I call him Father X, for lack of a better name.

My church was one of the sponsors of a multi-denominational service. Basically, we helped other churches with their charity work. That's how I met the warlock. I helped him in the soup kitchen. At first I didn't know what to think. I had only made the change recently. There I am serving food, when I suddenly just know that he's /wrong/. Not just odd, but /not human/. I ran out of the building. Once I got enough distance and calmed down, I thought about what I saw. Here was a priest, making food for the poor and talking about God. No magic, no spells, no demons. When I came back, he came near and asked if I was all right. I was nervous, and I think he knew that I knew, but he invited me to talk if I needed to, like his religious calling was more important than everything that was wrong about him.

Strangely, it was one of Dana's missions that brought me back there. She had trailed a creature, the murderer of a drug dealer, to an old van parked not far from the Five Points MARTA station. She convinced me to help her. Even criminals need to be protected from monsters, right? She wanted me to use my special ability to keep the beast in the van while she killed it.

I knew the soup kitchen was nearby, so I resolved to see the priest before I met Dana. I guess it was stupid, but I figured he might know something about the creature. I didn't have time to be subtle. I stink at that, anyway. So when I got him away from the food line, I just told him I knew he wasn't human. His eyes bugged out and I got the feeling something /bad/ was going to happen. I told him to calm down, that I just wanted information about the monster we were after. I don't know which revelation shocked him more, but he didn't know a damn thing. I blew whatever cover we both /thought/ we had, and for nothing.

I don't know why, but he wanted to come with me. I thought of Dana's reaction and said no. I just turned and walked out into the rain, frustrated and confused. I guess father X followed. Thank God, as it turns out.

I met Dana at the MARTA station. She went over her plan and we headed off. I was soaked by the time we reached the van at an abandoned gas station.

She flung open the door and I concentrated on the same feeling I had that day when I saved Tim, but the plan fell apart right away. This thing wasn't like the shambling monster we'd faced before, and it wasn't alone. There were three black guys sorting plastic bags. Full of coke, I guess. They all had guns. Meanwhile, the rot seemed to just turn into ash that fell to the van floor.

I thought maybe we had killed it somehow. We weren't so lucky with the crooks. The rot's friends seemed as shocked as we were at their ally's "death," but the shooting started all the same. I ran around the right side of the van. Dana got hit in the hand before she slammed the doors of the van and went around the left side. We both ran into the Father, standing at the front of the van — praying.

"Do you smell gas?" he asked, calmly. He pointed at pools of what had to be rainwater under the van.

Dana screamed, "Who the hell is this?" Even with her wound, she held up a tire iron, ready to brain him.

"Light it," the Father said.

"It's water," I stammered.

"You know this, this..." Dana couldn't finish, shocked that I seemed to have been associated with a witch.

A bullet shattered the windshield, showering us in glass. We dropped flat behind the concrete footings of the missing gas pumps.

Smiling, Father X looked at Dana. "I think these old pump seals are leaking. Trust me," he said.

Dana glared at me. I stared right back at her. "Trust him. We don't have time!"

The van door flew open.

The blood and rainwater on Dana's glove sizzled as she gripped the tire iron. She seemed to ignore the pain. Father X fell backward at the sight, a shocked look on his face. He rose and ran as Dana reached around our barricade and touched the iron to a puddle. Flames immediately coursed toward the van. It exploded and lit up the block. I felt the heat all around me, but somehow we were safe behind the low concrete barrier.

Later that night, Dana asked for the Father's name while I bandaged her hand. I reminded her that he saved our lives. That was all she needed to know, whether she liked it or not. She didn't, but who else did she have to turn to but me?

Understand that I don't trust in every creature I meet, but I try to give them a chance to prove themselves. I figure it's like visiting the zoo. Most of the time the cages that keep us separated from the animals are for the best. I don't plan to pull every tiger's tail.

From: hannibal137

To: vigilist@hunter-net.org

Re: Friendly Fucks

You know what's wrong with the story of your holy buddy, Coach? First of all, you got no idea what the fuck his motives were for "helping." Maybe he was testing you to see just how stupid you are. Maybe he was distracting you so his rot buddy could get away while you and that Dana chick were debating whether or not to listen to him. Maybe he figured you were just a regular guy and he expected you to die. You ever figure on that? Maybe it wasn't Father Fucking X that made the van blow, but it was you or Dana.

Give these dickheads a chance to prove themselves and all they're going to do is prove how quick your blood flows. You trusted the guy, but



maybe he was waiting for you to bend over. You lucked out. Only person I trust is me and my team. You should take that advice and do the same.

THE WALKING DEAD

I'm sure I'm not the only one to notice that most discussions of monsters on the lists are about rots. There seem to be a lot of them compared to other creatures, and they appear in number instead of alone. Maybe the walking dead are the servants of the others? I don't know.

I have another idea. Perhaps the reason we fight the dead on Earth is that the angels want us to "cut our teeth" on them, so to speak. They're forming a team and want to know who makes the cut. For my part, I remember that day, saving Tim, and I find the resolve I need to beat the things again. Are the angels looking for people with enough determination? Does having it mean you destroy enough zombies, only to move up to the next "division," up against bloodsuckers, witches or maybe even the man-beasts?

From what I can tell, trying to categorize "rots," "shamblers" or even "vampires" is almost useless. Bookworm seems to believe, just because vampires look like us and need to "feed," that they must be alive somehow. I don't think so. All of them are dead. That's all we need to know. They're dead and they shouldn't be. If they prey upon people to fake being alive, then we have to save people from them.

It's not that I want to move up to the angels' "big leagues." If these are the minors, I couldn't bear any more. But we can't sit and wonder whether something has the best intentions when it victimizes someone who's alive. At least Father X lives and breathes.

VAMPIRES

I was in the shower this morning when my cracked rib... I don't know... It felt like it popped back into place. Claire was still sleeping. I had to bite the washcloth to cover my scream. Maybe it's good that we haven't been close lately. She would have seen the huge

bruise where the thing hit me. I don't know how I recover so quickly, but I thank God that I can.

I knew that by Monday I would go back to work with little more than a sore chest. It's the other wounds that really take their toll on my sanity and life. I stood there, shaking in a hot shower at the mere thought of it. If we hadn't been headed to church, I would have bailed and stayed home. It's impossible sometimes to act normal anymore. Almost impossible to get up after nights like that and go about my life. But after I do the "normal" things - go to work, mow the grass - I'm always a little stronger.

Earlier I asked if they won or lost when hunters fought this battle before. The answer is clear. The monsters won, just like they did last night at the cemetery.

I had only "worked" with Evan one other time, but Dana vouched for him and had even showed him my garage. She said Evan was running away from some bad fallout in Jacksonville. I don't like to admit it, but I think she had lost some faith in me after the Father X episode and was looking for a new partner. It kind of pissed me off that she would take him to my grandparents' place without asking.

Anyway, this guy was weird. He claimed the Internet and technology are the monsters' tools. Maybe he was the one who burned down that computer hardware warehouse in Florida last month. I don't know. Anyway, I don't think he trusted me, not after he learned I was online a lot and talking about the hunt here.

Despite his ideas, Evan had this impressive ability. He could lock eyes with a monster and paralyze it. He called it Freeze. Dana hoped that between my power and Evan's, we could pin down whatever that thing from the van - she had discovered it was still "alive" and possibly hiding out in Pleasant Hill Cemetery - long enough for her to kill it.



The creature had new guards, zombies from graves that had been vandalized. Dana had faced one and put it down again. She thought the "master" would create more soon, so we staked out the cemetery where the graves had been desecrated.

Subject: Unquiet Ghosts

From: dzidzat155

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

I was attending a meeting with my father. A new mainland company wanted to supply my family's trading house. The representatives of the company and the new provincial government were supposed to attend. When the man from the other company entered, his normal appearance seemed to melt away. He was a creature of translucent skin and black blood. He had a mouth of needles instead of teeth. His fingers were long and the skin split at his knuckles where black horn protruded.

I gasped and almost ran, but then felt the Fire of Heaven, like thunderbolts, and a familiar voice came to me: "PROTECT YOUR FAMILY," it would be translated into English. I am sure it was my grandfather. I struggled to control my feelings and remained in the meeting.

I could feel the creature's evil spread out across the room. It seemed to reach out to my father and quickly gained the upper hand. The prices it wanted would ruin us! It is impolite to speak of money in the open, so my father is in the habit of passing numbers in notes, through a mediator — me. My father whispered a figure, but I disobeyed him. Instead of writing down the price he told me, I wrote something else. The note I handed the creature said, "Be gone demon or I will reveal you." As he read it, I prayed Grandfather would preserve us. The "man" almost fell from his chair. It tore up the paper, said the amount was insulting and stormed out.

I had saved my father and our business, but now it knew me.

We entered the graveyard in the afternoon. Evan picked the lock to a mausoleum where we could hide but still have a good view. It might have been a good place to stay hidden, but it made my skin crawl. Dana climbed up onto the roof with a rifle at dusk. She left us with two wooden baseball bats and gave me one of her "drop" pistols. She'd used acid to eat off the serial numbers. We also had a gas can. Our plan was simple: If we spotted the thing, Dana would shoot it. Evan and I would make sure it stayed down, then we'd use the gas to make sure the bastard was dead, once and for all.

It was a clear night, so we thought we'd have a view of whatever snuck into the cemetery. We weren't ready for what happened, though. Something just tore out of the ground near a freshly dug grave. It stripped off its clothes and started moving around the new soil. Peeking out the mausoleum door, I realized it was a woman. But God, she was ugly. Her skin was the color of ashes and was shrunken to her skeleton. Her breasts hung like tentacles. I looked away. I almost lost it, but I felt that resolve come over me at the last instant. I just came to grips with what had to be done.

It started digging with its bare hands, clods of soil flying up. I lost sight of it then, but Dana whispered that she still had a shot. We waited for what seem like forever before Dana finally fired. I wouldn't have known she'd hit it if I hadn't see one of its arms flail up.

Evan and I ran out at the same time. We didn't wait for Dana to climb down. It wasn't dead, just wounded, and it was waiting for us. I was faster than Evan. When I peered into the grave, my gun ready, all I saw was a blur as whatever it was leaped out and knocked me down. Before Evan could react, it bit into his head. I could hear the cracking sound. The only thing I can compare a moment like that to is a car wreck. You know what's about to happen and try to avoid it or watch and wait, but the same thing happens either way. Evan was dead. I didn't save him, and the thing turned on me.

Dana appeared out of the darkness. She shot it again. This time I saw where the first bullet had caught it in the stomach. Her second shot got it in the shoulder and spun the bitch around. When it stopped, the creature was standing right over me.

I tried to find the gun I'd dropped, but it was faster. I guess it grabbed me. Last thing I remember is being thrown.

I woke up in Dana's car. She told me the monster threw me at her. She fell trying to dodge me, and the monster was gone when she stood. So was Evan's body. If only I had protected him. Instead, I failed him, and now I'm afraid we'll be seeing him again.

It's Sunday night and my wife actually talked to me at dinner. I'm alive and I'm with my family. They're safe for now and I'm happy for that, but it's the quiet before the storm. Evan knows who I am.

We must have lost our battle before.



MG.

CHAPTER 2:

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

*Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall
keep thee*
— Proverbs 2:11

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

From: oursine113
To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org
Subject: Charges against Hannibal137

It is with a sad heart that I must stand as accuser against the initiate who calls himself Hannibal137. He killed three innocent men and one innocent woman. It is my belief that he has become insane, has lost all capability for reason and hinders our cause more than he advances it.

I believe that Hannibal137 is a danger to the cause. He acts with neither forethought nor consideration for the safety of other initiated. He has, in this case, murdered four of the very people we attempt to guard from harm. I believe he has acquired a degree of blood-lust that exceeds the call of duty. So, I ask my respected peers to censure him to their fullest ability and banish him from our community. Also, I request that all of us know and treat him in a manner that matches someone who cannot be trusted.

HUNTER TO HUNTER

From: hannibal137
To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org
Re: I beg your pardon, bitch.

Sounds like somebody needs to get laid. I don't know where you get off, lady, throwing around shit like that, but I have to warn you: It hurts a hell of a lot when you fall off that high horse. First of all, you don't know a goddamn thing about my business and I don't appreciate you

fucking in it. I understand that you French people have your noses so far up other people's asses that it's kind of hard to smell your own shit, but where the hell do you get your nerve? Fuck you.

INTRODUCTIONS

I refuse to fall to name calling, Monsieur Hannibal. I disagree with your methods and I have remitted it into the hands of our peers to determine which of us is wrong. If I will owe you an apology, then I will give you an apology. We will see what the others think.

For now, I will simply tell everyone what it is that I know. On a recent visit to the United States, I happened to be in the same town as Hannibal137. I had come in pursuit of a cult leader. A friend of mine had acted very strangely recently and his parents told me that he had joined a cult. They asked me to find the truth, so when he moved to the United States suddenly, I followed. I wanted to get the young man back. The trail took me to an old house in a small village in the middle of the country. The kidnapper of my friend had written the address on a napkin which I found.

I should preface this to say that I saw no signs of any other of our kind in this area. I looked for our marks everywhere, but saw none. I would never intrude the territory of another without making attempts to let others know I was there. I have discovered it is safer that way.

This house was overgrown and tired, and hidden from view at the end of a long dirt road. I believe it was a farmhouse. I went to the house and walked around. Before I reacted, a man showed up. He pointed his shotgun at me and yelled in English to leave his property. I tried to explain that I meant no harm and that I

From: dole7

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Hannibal137

Bloody hell!

I thought we might have a few months of peace before people started getting pissy. You are both acting like children!

Part of me wants to just turn Hannibal over to the police, but we all know that there is no justice in this world. I guess something has to be done. We cannot overlook murdering innocents — if that is true.

I do not like bringing this up, but I was TOLD (Get my meaning?) to start this list and protect it, and I will be damned if I am going to let it break up. I want the rest of you to see if there was a shooting. Let us know on the list. I am not trying to call anyone a liar, but if there was some mistake, then we can end this now. I do not want to piss on our friend from across the Channel, but I want to make sure there was a crime in the first place.

I had delusions that we could come to some agreement on rules and such, but right now that has about as much chance as Wolverton winning the cup. So we are going to do this my way. Maybe *they* will tell me what to do. It does not give me pleasure to say this, but this list is my responsibility. I am calling the shots.

If that makes you want to drop out, you are an idiot. Harsh? Hell yes, but there is no list on this planet that is not owned or maintained by someone. Get over it.

Since we do not have barristers, Oursine and Hannibal, flame on. Let the best one win. Not damn likely that I could stop you from telling your side of things anyway!

In one month's time, I will call for a vote to see if Hannibal should get his John Thomas smacked. If you do not think he deserves punishment, vote "no." If you think Hannibal must be punished, vote "yes." On the same ballot, I will ask you to choose one of three levels of censure that I am capable of enforcing on this list. Each level is worth a certain number of points. All points are cumulative.

Level 1: Warning, 1 point. A "warned" member has a description of his warning attached to all emails to members of this list. Three warnings result in censure.

Level 2: Censure, 3 points. Censure means temporary removal from Vigil and a report to the wider online hunter community, including hunter-net and all subsidiaries thereof. If at the time of censure there are enough points for Anathema, then appropriate actions will be taken.

Level 3: Anathema, 6 points. Permanent removal and warning to the wider community of the hunter's danger to the cause.

If you want off the list over this, and I imagine there will be some of you who do, then send your request to me. But if you think that this crap is only going to happen here, you are fooling yourself.

Let the party begin.

was looking for my friend. The man said he could not help me. He ordered me to leave his property.

I left, bien sûr. When I drove away, I saw a car at the edge of the property. It was stopped and the driver had descended from it. She was putting a sign into the ground. It announced an upcoming auction of the property. I returned to my hotel and telephoned the bank I had seen named. They had to explain it to me, but I understood that they had taken the property because the owner did not pay his debt. They said that they were to auction it.

I went to the bank the next morning and told them I wanted information on the house. A server directed me to a waiting room. To my surprise, the monstre I was pursuing passed me in the hallway. He was leaving and I was entering. He wore a suit, black like a mortician's, but old-fashioned. I didn't look at him. I didn't want to let him know that I knew who he was, not with so many defenseless people about. As he stepped closer to me our arms brushed. A spark of static electricity jumped from him to me. I gasped, nervous. He laughed.

"Pardon me," he said to me.

I looked at his eyes and his smile. His teeth. When I think of them, I shiver with disgust. His teeth had rotted in his mouth. They were yellow or black. They had strings of... something stuck in them, and his gums had receded so that his grin was a skull's grimace.

He was surprised, perhaps by how I looked on my face. For an eternity it seemed we stared at one another. Finally, he was leaving, and I saw the lights reflect brightly on a pendant worn around his neck.

I recognized it. It was a small lion's head. It belonged to the man that I was searching. I could have killed the creature right there, stolen the gun from the guard, perhaps. But I did not. I could have endangered all those people in the bank, the young mother and her daughter at the entrance, the uniformed guard and the servers. I let him go. I understand the importance of patience. My père always said, "You not only must pick your battles, you must choose the place and time." My père was a very wise man.

I met a woman who worked at the bank. I garnered her friendship. She told me many things that she probably should not have.

The house's owner had complained. He claimed that the bank had no right to take the house. He, according to my new friend, had lost his mind. Some records showed clearly that the house's debt was substantial and that the owner had not paid. A court of law had recently said, based on the records, that the bank had every right to take and sell the house. My new friend also told me that someone else intended to bid very high for the house. She said she hated to see the owner lose it, but he would at least get some money after the debt. It was a lot of money. She did not understand why the house's owner wanted so badly to keep it. She did not understand too why anyone would want to buy it. She tried to convince me I should not interest myself.

I began to understand. Later that day, I returned to the house. I was determined to speak to the owner. I wanted to look closely at him. Already, I had decided that he was one of us or most likely one of them. He had no connection of family to the house. He had bought the land under a close situation. But he did have some connection to the man I was following.

This time I went to the house and the man appeared at the front door. He had a gun. He tried to command me to leave but I persisted and eventually I approached close enough that we could look at one another. We talked about the house and I put some



subtle references into the conversation that could let him know what I was if he was one. Eventually, we understood that we were both initiated.

It took us some time to trust — all the afternoon — but eventually, we told our names. He said he called himself "Hannibal" on the web. I explained why I had come to his village and he told me why he refused to lose the house. He showed me why. In the back, there was a door that led into the ground. He took me there, under the house, into a short dirt room. Through another door, hidden behind some boards, there was a tunnel that went to a cavern.

Inside the cavern, little pieces of gold light glowed in the walls. A fog sat on the ground. It was rising from a hot pool of water. I could feel the energy everywhere, all around me. It energized me. Hannibal said it was a very special place. He said the cavern was sacred to Indians a long time ago, and he showed me some paintings that they made on the walls.

I could not deny the importance of the place. I offered to help Hannibal but he refused me. He said that he had a plan and that he was waiting to kill the "bastard" who "faked" his debt with the bank. He would not tell me about his plan.

Very soon, I found out. Two days later, the news were on the front pages of all papers. Someone had entered in the bank and shot people. Four people dead there included two servers, a guard and a manager. I knew immediately what Hannibal had done. The killer had used a rifle. He did not take money. They had nothing stolen. The police said that it was vengeance, evidently committed by an extremely violent criminal. I am sorry, but I must agree.

And that is not the worst. I drove immediately to Hannibal's house. I wanted to see what he would say to me and to see myself exactly how he was insane. I thought maybe that I could help him, counsel him and show him the better ways to do what we do, not killing harmless people. I parked before the house and walked to the porch.

Hannibal came outside, crazed. He was mad. He screamed at me to get off his land and called me terrible names. He grabbed me and shook me. He scared me so.

I tried to talk reasonably to him, to make him calm, but he continued. He dragged me into the house. I resisted and tried to free myself from him. He threw me across the room. I hit my head on the floor.

When I woke up, Hannibal had tied me on his bed. He had gagged me. I was there during the whole night until a man came the next morning and said Hannibal had sent him to free me. He said Hannibal did not want ever to see me again. I left from the house immediately and have not seen Hannibal again.

I returned to my own investigation. It was necessary that I find my friend, the man kidnapped, before I could leave. I passed several weeks looking for him. I found him. He had been killed during the night that I spent tied to Hannibal's bed. The police said that he and two others had died when their car collided with a tree and exploded. In the paper, it showed pictures of three men. One was my friend. Even now, it is unclear how the paper obtained his photo. One other I knew to be the creature from the bank, my friend's kidnapper. I did not know the third.

I called the parents of my friend and they gave me permission to arrange for his body to go home. I used this chance to look at the remains and his possessions. The things were belonging to him, but the body

was very messy. I still did not believe that it was him, and I looked for more weeks, and I had finally to abandon it. The family believed him dead. I was chasing shadows. There appeared to be no one to be protected. I went home.

I believe that if Hannibal had not imprisoned me, I might have prevented the man's death.

TERRITORY

Girl, let me first thank you very much for giving away clues to my location that any fucking three-year-old could follow. You think I can just up and move my shit the way you do? Jesus Christ! Can I call her up on charges for that or some shit?

And regarding your one-damn-sided story, when you first showed up at my place, I didn't know who the hell you were. I was protecting my territory, as is my right. You were on my property. As far as I knew, you were just another one of those high-titted, smooth-talking bank sluts come to fuck with me. You didn't announce yourself. You just started prowling around like fucking Jessica-Murder-She-Wrote, sticking your nose where it didn't belong. No, I don't put those symbols up all over the place because I don't need help and I sure as hell don't want it. I got enough problems without having to worry about covering the asses of whiny women like you. I had the situation under control until you showed up.

COOPERATION

Please do not be so condescending, Hannibal. I do not need it and I do not deserve it. You think you are better than everyone else, n'est-ce pas? You think you are the only one who can be "badass"? Well, I see only an asshole. And all I said was that you were in the United States. It is a big country.

I did not know you were there. Sometimes I look around some places. It is a part of what I do. I never did say you did not have the right to protect your territory or to force me away. I would comment about the manner in which you do mark your territory, but I refuse to make this

into a useless feud. I had a reason for being there at your house. I was investigating the kidnapping of my friend. You could have been much more helpful, but you chose to guard information away from me and to exclude me from your games. We should be on the same side. I could have helped you. We could have helped us together.

Whether you believe it or not, most people like us do work together. They, unlike you, realize that we fight the same monsters and that if we want to survive we must work together. Maybe you think you know everything, but I do not think so. I have learned a lot from discussions on the internet and from the people I know. I am confident that my knowledge helps others, too. I do not want to be immodest, but I have had many experiences with these things.

Hannibal, I have seen things that would make you cry like a child. In particular, I have seen our people lose their minds because of what they have seen. It happens. They become too angry, or too sad, or too confused to continue. They lose control of their hate and start some shooting sprees in restaurants or banks. It happens all the time. We are human, with the sentiments and the hearts that can hurt.

There are others who can help you. I know of a psychologist who has been initiated, too, and who understands the stresses of our life. She has made it her role in our struggle to counsel us who have experienced more loss than we can control. Your anger controls you, Hannibal. It has warped for you the view of the world and made you hard to the people we were initiated to protect.

PERCEPTION

You call me condescending? Jesus, lady, get a clue. Maybe you could have helped me. Maybe you would have died trying. Maybe I shouldn't have given a shit about you one way or the other. Fact is that you had no idea what you stumbled into, and I didn't have the fucking time to explain it. Time is a real luxury to people like you who wander thousands of miles on wild goose-chases. You came all this way in search of your precious little buddy. Why? Did you know what he was messed up in? Did you feel guilty for letting that happen? Is that why you're taking your shit out on me? Am I the scapegoat for your own guilt? You lost him. You let him get away. You let those fucking witches take him. The moment they got their slimy hands on him, he was a goner. Did you know that? Did you know how bad you fucked up?

Honey, I couldn't have helped you if I'd wanted to. There was no salvation for your missing person. None. I knew that the moment you told me about him. Would it have been kinder of me to pretend that there was something we could do? Would it have been more responsible of me to let you fuck up my situation just to fix your broken ego? Would I have been a better team player if I had agreed to share your guilt with you?

For your information, I have tons of contacts out there among the Reality Challenged. Some of them are a hell of a lot more insane than I am, and goddamned better exterminators than you are. I have a team of people I work with. I'm no loner. If you knew me, you'd know that. Only people with death wishes work alone.

Sure, we may not all have the same goals. And our goals may sometimes clash. Like now. But my territory is mine. Yours is yours. If I had thought you and your fucking PMS would have listened to reason, I might have treated you differently, but you came at me with more preconceptions, prejudices and catty-bitch tactics than my ex-mother-in-law. I don't need that shit.

And how dare you imply that I need psychiatric help! If you ask me, you're the one who's "imbalanced." Fucking loon. You may talk pretty and toss around lame passive-aggressive insults as smooth as stealth farts, but that doesn't make you my judge or my doctor.

Let me ask you something, Oursine. Have you ever actually taken out a monster? Have you ever killed anything?

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: coach41

Subject: Report

The Floyd County Sentinel-Reporter has a story on the murder of four people at a local savings and loan. They authorities report that they believe the masked killer to be a local with a grudge, as has been the case in the recent rash of shootings in the US.

Dole, these people had families. Six kids are without parents. One is now an orphan. My God, what a waste.

I'm sorry this took longer than expected. I decided not to involve Dana. I think she would have gone after Hannibal.

I hope none of this is true. I can't believe the angels would allow this. I only hope Hannibal's version clears this up. I've seen what monsters can do to people, how they can infect normal folks and turn them into servants. This has to be the case here. It's just got to be.

Is there no other impartial group of hunters we can appeal to? If the angels sent us to protect people, maybe they sent others to police us.

Report this to the group as you see fit. If he's guilty, I think I will tell Dana. At least she's a cop.

WHAT WE DO

I am not a killer. I am a guardian who sometimes must kill to keep my territory safe. You may think there is no difference, and perhaps there is not, but there is one truth in this: if there will be no humans when it is over, why do we do it? I chose my username Dursine to reflect this. It means mother bear or female bear. As far as I am concerned, we are here for to protect, defend and support people and the world. Very few of us would disagree that we have our own little pieces of the world to patrol. Not many can disagree with me on this, even you, Hannibal. We do disagree, obviously, about our methods.

We have chosen, all of us, the "treasures" that we cherish. These things are as varied as the world. The method behind our madness, taking the custody of something, keeps us from becoming the things we oppose. Also, it reduces the chances that we will interfere or trespass on someone else's territory. Hannibal, your charge, as some call it, is your home and what it hides. Am I wrong? I have noticed this among some of our kind. We are the ones who have found something special that we want to protect or who think our initiations impose the responsibility of protecting a certain something.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate. I have a friend who I will call Jacques. He is one of us, but he has decided to avoid the Internet. He has his own reasons for this and, although I think it will hurt him in the long part, I prefer not to censure him for it. Jacques is a interesting character. I have known him for years, so you can imagine my surprise when he arrived on my doorstep one day, seeking guidance, and I learned that he knew as I did. But that is a story for another time.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Jacques went to the University of Washington, in Seattle. He studied English. It was not very surprising that he finished by living in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. For those who do not know, Jacques tells me that Capitol Hill has the reputation for housing people who embrace individualism. Freedom of speech, alternate lifestyles and artistic expression thrive in this region of the city — a little piece of home. Unfortunately, this type of neighborhood attracts the young and the naive who do not yet sense their own mortality. They do not protect themselves very well.

Only after living there for a little while did Jacques recognize that his adopted home was the hunting ground of a monstre. Jacques chose the neighborhood, or perhaps it chose him, to be its guardian. He could not let the deaths continue. Eventually, he found one of the monstres and tracked it. This is never as easy as one would like. Unless you rely on destiny to make you find them again, you must learn where they live. You must find their hive, and the creatures are never arrogant about their hiding places. The tracking requires that a person to wander in places and look for clues, exactly as I did at Hannibal's house. We have all done this.

And so Jacques thought he had found the building in which the creature lived. He watched for many days to confirm his intuition. He in fact counted three creatures, all living together in an apartment with much security.

To learn their behaviors, Jacques utilized all of his tricks to ensure that the monstres did not see him. This cost him several weeks because he did not hurry. He changed vehicles from time to time and varied the hours he followed so he would not establish any pat-

terns that the creatures would notice. He even took a job at the café across from the building, so that his presence would be more palatable. All these precautions finally were successful.

Jacques has a unique creativity when he deals with our attackers. He is not a very big man, not physically strong. He can use a gun, but he is naturally averse to them and carries one solely for emergencies. If he has his choice, he never actually faces the monstres. Instead, he employs cunning and the society's system to banish the criminals from his territory.

In this case, Jacques had to plan during a month in advance. He scouted the building, all the entrances and all the windows. He seduced a lonely woman who lived within. He used her, yes, but it was for her protection. What is a false heart compared to death? He made a special recording with the help of some friends. He went to the butcher and bought some cow's blood for cooking, but he did not have the intention of cooking with it. And then he put his plan into effect.

One Saturday morning, he rang his lover to ask if he could visit. She pushed the button in her apartment to allow Jacques to enter the front door. Jacques had to work rapidly. He went straight to the apartment where the monstres nested. Carefully, he poured the blood to make it resemble that it was leaking from under the door. And then, he played his tape loudly.

On the tape was the sounds of someone pounding on a door, and then an argument between a man and woman. At its height, the recording had a scream. Having played this, Jacques turned off the recorder, put it in his pocket and approached the creatures' door and shouted, "Someone call the police! Help! Help!"

The neighbors, having heard all the commotion, did as he said. The tenants agreed for Jacques' story. When no one had responded to the police knocks and commands, the door was broken down. Some one — the killer? — attacked the police immediately and was shot. Afterward, they searched for the harmed woman and found *three* bodies. At least, there *were* three bodies, until the police opened the covered windows for light and there was nothing but ash left behind.

The police never asked Jacques for his testimony. They told everyone a big story about drug sellers. They lied to the public as they always do, because someone would not let them tell the truth about corpses that became dust.

Jacques had done his job — or rather, he had let the police do it for him. Cunning and the use of the authorities allowed Jacques to remove the danger from his neighborhood without personal risk. He survived to continue his vigilance. And although he convinced his lover to move out of that building, Jacques continued his affair with her.

After this incident, I asked Jacques if he did not feel guilt for confronting those police with danger. Jacques shook his head and said no. He believed the police are the equivalent of us. Jacques called them a "tool" he uses on occasion when he needs more help. He explained to me that the police know the risk of death demanded by their job, and they accept it because they have a duty to protect — just like us.

So, you see, Hannibal, there are other means of handling the monstres besides killing blindly to stop them.

Right. Obviously Jacques hasn't had to deal with corrupt cops. He will. The day will come when he tries to rely on one of these fucking "authorities" for his life, and he'll find out that they're on the payroll of some witch. Then he'll be screwed. I suggest you see him again soon, before it's too late.

PEOPLE

Jacques has taken vigil of his home. Others might treasure a particular group of people. But I insist that whatever it is you protect, you do not have to kill people — or even monstres — to protect it. For example, I have another associate. I'll call her Lise. Lise has a family extremely large and has many cousins, nieces, nephews and others. She grew up in a very close community in Italy. Lise's "revelation," as she calls it, gave her the job of caring for this community and its descendants. She has constructed a database of these people and she tracks where they move, who they marry and what children they have. She calls the project by a special name and claims that it is an experiment of genealogy and society. She teaches Human Studies at a private university and has made the project legitimate. The university funds it, and she waits to see if others will give her money, too. She has applied with the government, an Italian organization and the Catholic Church.

Despite the clear problems of protecting a group of over 3,000 people — 800 families located across the United States, Canada, Europe and Africa — Lise has done a admirable job. Her most difficult challenge is recognizing when one of these people is endangered. For to help her, she pays the families a small amount to send her regular reports, all part of her authorized "study." She reads every report for any sign of trouble. They pose questions specifically intended to draw clues regarding possible dangers. Each person signed a promise of honesty and Lise ensures them of being

anonymous. Lise instructs the head of the family, mostly a parental figure, preferably the mother, to fill out the form with as much detail as possible.

Lise professes that she simply *knows* when one of her charges is in danger as soon as she sees a report. She told me that when the family has some problems, the paper becomes a sickly yellow. She reads these carefully, to see if she can recognize the problem, and then arranges to visit the family for more close "research." (I have never heard of this skill from another. Is anyone else capable of doing so?)

One such letter arrived last spring. Lise had business and had to delay visiting the family until afterward, but one day in waiting for the bus, she remarked a striking headline at a newspaper. It stated "STUDENT MISSING." When she again looked, she said it was gone, that it read other words. Lise changed plans and called the family. Once they were agreed to let her stay with them, she flew nearly 1000 kilometres to their home. Hannibal, I must guess, would call this "butting in."

The mother, especially, treated Lise like a member of the family. Lise says that this is not terribly strange, because she becomes a confidante to the person who answers the questionnaires. This family had two daughters, one 17 and one 18. The youngest had the charm that attracts many young men, and the elder an athleticism of promise.

At first, Lise presumed the youngest girl was in danger. She learned differently when she went to an acrobatics competition in which the oldest, who I will call Jeanette, was competing. After, they waited outside while Jeanette changed her clothes. Lise described



to me the event in a letter that she sent to me. It is in the English that we use for communicating.

The air dripped with humidity, making the sweat run down the back of my neck. It itched. For that matter, I itched everywhere, as if little bugs had managed to sneak into my clothing and were choosing odd moments to bite. I tried not to scratch too much, but the feeling became unbearable. We waited for at least half an hour before I began to worry. No one else seemed the least bit concerned, but then they didn't have the information I did. Finally, I excused myself, claiming a need to use the restroom, and went in search of Jeanette.

The building was almost completely deserted when I went back inside, and my footsteps echoed ominously. It set me on edge. I went into the gymnasium and headed across to the showers. My guidance came in the form of a message displayed on the electronic scoreboard that had been turned off only moments before. In bright red, it pointed an arrow away from the showers. I followed its lead to the equipment room. Even as I approached, I could hear voices inside, whispers. I desperately hoped that I was about to interrupt some harmless secret rendezvous of lovers. But no. The secret rendezvous was correct, but the harmless was not. When I opened the door, I found Jeanette in the arms of a thing: something between man and animal. At least, that's how I saw him. I don't believe she knew the truth.

I would have acted then and there, but Jeanette seemed herself and in fact said she had to leave, that her family was waiting. The creature made no threats. I followed her out slowly so as not to attract attention.

I confronted Jeanette afterward and told her parents simply of an affair. She hated me after that. She claimed to love him, that they intended to marry. Her parents wanted her to go to college. She rebelled and told them they couldn't stop her. They argued, and all the while that headline flashed in my mind: *STUDENT MISSING*.

I knew in my heart she intended to run away with him or that he intended to kidnap her. Though he demonstrated no ill intent, their marriage might only create more of the things. It also occurred to me that it may be too late, but the pregnancy test I suggested, and that her mother made her take, came up negative.

It became increasingly obvious that direct action would be necessary. Jeanette was 18. We couldn't lock her in her room, and even her parents couldn't forbid her from running away. I decided to take the matter in hand.

Lise tells much detail in the remainder of the story, so I will give only a brief summary. In her letter, Lise dedicates a long section to the thoughts she used to decide what to do regarding the monstre. Her first idea was to simply kill it, but she considered that this would only endanger the family she sought to protect. The final thing that she wanted was for the police to accuse Jeanette's father of killing the "boy" in revenge.

Lise's second thought was to threaten the boy into leaving Jeanette. In the beginning, she had the intent to threaten his life, but she realized that perhaps there was a better method. She studied Jeanette's handwriting and prepared some documents that she planted among the girl's belongings. She found an old doll in the back of Jeanette's closet and put a knife in it. She also found a picture of Jeanette and the boy, stole it and cut an X on Jeanette's face.

Finally, she went to the monstre's house. The "boy" was there alone and was agreeable to talk to her, but it absolutely was not happy to see her. In the salon, she talked to it. First, she tried reason. She explained that it was ruining Jeanette's chances for an educa-

tion and a future. She spoke to it of family and of the problems it had caused. To me, she expressed surprise at the monstre's understanding, but she did not trust it. Despite its politeness and pretended congeniality, in the end, the monstre refused to quit seeing Jeanette. It said it loved her. In many ways, that sealed its fate.

When the boy looked in another direction, Lise let the photo fall and pushed it under the divan with her foot.

When her first attempts did not work, Lise took a more bold approach. She told him that if he ran away with Jeanette that her parents would go to the police and say he had kidnapped her. The police would find him. He would go to jail. Even if eventually he was proven innocent, he would spend time in jail and his family would face embarrassment and shame. She talked about the cost of the courts and the trauma for Jeanette herself. She described a scene of the police catching them and putting him away in handcuffs. Lise promised she had already created evidence that would show Jeanette was unstable emotionally and felt threatened by the boy. She promised to telephone every media in the country and ensure that his family was revealed across the newspapers and television.

And then, she used biggest threat. "I will tell them what you are." Eh well, the monstre could not disguise his surprise. He stared at Lise, sniffed her and growled. Lise had poked a nerve.

Lise knew by his eyes that he had the intent to kill her, but she had bet on the hope that he would not do so in his family's house. She told him she had a packet of information about him and his family that a friend would send to the media if anything mysterious happened to her. And so, the monstre let her walk away. Lise had packed her bags the night before, and she left Jeanette's home that

From: gardener67

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: This list

Please unsubscribe me from this list. I can't believe what I'm hearing here. And you people are supposed to be the cream of the crop? "The called"? I'm sorry, but you scare me. First of all, who gives this Dole guy the right to tell any of us what to do? And what gives any of you the right to judge Hannibal? You toss out people's locations like you haven't realized these lists aren't secure. Realize it, people. Just ask your net-god, Dole. From what I've heard from him, he can tell you just how insecure it is.

I realize that this is all new to us. It's really new to me, too. I've only been in on this stuff for a little while, and have already screwed up big time. I was really hoping to find some guidance and help on this list. So far, all I've seen is people getting all uppity and flaming each other. I don't have time for this. I'm really disappointed.

Hannibal, good luck. I don't envy what you're being put through. Just hang in there. There are people out here who understand why you did what you did. I'm one of them. I'll send you my other email address. Feel free to write any time if you need backup or whatever. Take it easy on each other, folks, or I won't be the only rat jumping ship.

evening so she would not endanger the family if the monstre came for her. She took a room close, in a hotel, until she was certain Jeanette was safe. The next day, she heard that the monstre had broken with Jeanette, claiming that he was doing it for her, that she deserved a chance to go to university and make herself something.

OBJECTS

We all give up many things for the protection of our wards. I have another friend who protects something, but who does not kill anyone but the monstres to keep it safe. "Michel" somehow came to possess a very unique objet. He claims that it has some significance to those we face. He found it in their possession and took it upon himself to keep it from them afterward. Although I have never seen it and I hope I never will, Michel tells me that it is a very old. I believe it is a painting or some such thing. Michel keeps it safely in an iron box and must remain moving as the creatures smell him out. Recently, Michel told me that if something happens to him, he will send the objet to me. This does not thrill me. I have my own charges to protect. For Michel, however, I will try.

Whatever is the objet, Michel has had to defend it with serious risk to his life. Some numerous times they have come to claim it, never even questioning why he possesses it, simply seeking to kill him and have it. Thus, Michel lives far from his neighbors and becomes familiar with no one. He chooses a life of loneliness for duty to what he considers his calling, perhaps his post.

Subject: Oursine

From: jaguar251

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

You confuse me mucho, Oursine. In one note, you say that we must do all that we can to protect ourselves so we be alive to fight again. Then you say that we must be willing to die for our cause. You call them charges, these people that we protect. And you say that our charges are the most important of all and to die for them. Then you say that we must sacrifice for our charges. But then you say that it is more important we not kill humans who are not monsters. I do not think it is so simple. I do not think we should sacrifice our values to keep all people alive.

The beings who make us warriors have said to us what we should protect. They tell me to protect my people. So I protect my people. Sometimes I kill other people to protect my people. These people I kill are not monsters. They are just people. But I kill them because they work with the monsters or because they work against my values. I think that is what Hannibal must have done too. I see nothing wrong with this. Is this correct, Hannibal? These people were working with the monsters?

In Central America's wars, there are many children who die because they carry bombs. If soldiers there kill a child first, then no one else must die. If they do not kill the child, then people die too when the child brings the bomb. I know you have a kind heart, Oursine, but these are not kind times. We are at war. In war, all rules change. I see no wrong committed by Hannibal.

So here, Hannibal, is another example from who you can learn. People do not have to die for your cause. Indeed, only the monstres that clearly confront you or your valued home need be fought.

IDEOLOGIES

Hannibal has said that we can not trust the society's authorities. I have to agree with him on this. However, this still does not justify killing people who have fallen prey to their own greed or ambition. Me, I cherish the concept of Freedom of the Press. After my initiation, and after they released me from the hospital, I began to remark that many of the monstres were influencing the news media. Some stories kept appearing, one after the other, that did not reflect the truth, but rather, that told the story from a point of view that protected or advanced the agendas of these monstres. A brutal murder became a terrible accident. A hostile corporate coup became a merger. Many times, I look at the stories and see the word "LIES" written across them.

In this way, my subconscious reveals to me which stories I should pursue. And I pursue them. I discover the truth for all of them, or for nearly all of them. When I can, I sow doubt in the minds of the police and the reporters. I make them reopen cases or print a story that more closely resembles the reality.

And I do not kill those that I know are being bought by the monstres. If I must, I go to another newspaper. The system works, if you learn how to use it. A newspaper can not afford to be called foolish. They will print falsehoods, but only if no one knows that they are falsehoods. I use this knowledge to blackmail them in very subtle manners. It is complex and each time is different.

I also learned a long time ago that people do not want to know the whole truth. They would prefer to live in blissful ignorance of the evil that walks the streets. Even I cannot reveal the whole truth. So I write it in a manner that makes it acceptable, but more true than the monstres want to see.

I cannot allow these monstres to use our press as a tool. Hannibal would have me to kill all the reporters and editors who write false reportings. I prefer to stall the progress of the monstres. I combat their attempts to change the press from its noble cause — that of balancing the government and reporting the truth. I will not allow them to turn the press into a prostitute who makes money to look fair, entertain and protect those who believe themselves powerful. They are not powerful enough to enslave me. I champion this ideology that the press is sacred and answers to no man or monstre. The press has a responsibility to the people, but most of the time it becomes nothing more than a marionette with strings attached to dead fingers. I work to free it.

Not very long ago, my editor sent me to the scene of a bloody massacre. Ten people were dead. It looked at first like it was a crime war. Approximately eight others went to the hospital with injuries of varying seriousness. The police claimed that two crime organizations had a fight. That is what the press reported as well. I did not understand this. All the victims had on clothes for dancing, not fighting, and there were women in dress shoes among the victims as well. So, I did more investigating and discovered a very different story. One of the injured youth told me that he had gone to the warehouse for a party.

I discovered that what started with a party became a blood bath when a bad gang came and started a fight. One of the attendants suddenly went mad and

cut people with a razor. Many people reported that the monstre did things that required incredible strength. Some of the criminals had guns, which were fired at the monstre. Many found other targets instead, and none of the bullets that hit the creature harmed it.

I learned not to write anything of the supernatural in my stories, because readers think I am mad. So I approached this as if it had been a single, psychotic, drugged murderer. I carefully organized my evidence, took it to the police and also wrote my story for my paper. I had one of the witnesses work with an artist to produce a sketch. I convinced my editor to take a risk. Once the story was released, the police did not the choice but to tell the truth and admit that the victims had not been involved in violent crime activity. The police held a press conference during which the speaker admitted that one man had gone on a killing spree. They did a manhunt for him, but found nothing.

This case was one of my most successful. The monstres will go a long way to protect their reputations and their secrets. I have discovered that they will kill to keep others from betraying them. I have lost some witnesses this way. I have also found evidence which shows that the person I was tracking had suddenly met his or her demise. They have a web of secrecy and if one link has become weak, then they cut that link away. At least, this is what I have seen here.

Some stories have nearly cost me my life. They have tried to protect themselves by killing me. I carry a gun now and take precautions. I do not list my phone number or my address publicly. I have put extra locks on my doors and windows, and I keep many files on my activities. These files contain all the supernatural elements that I cannot expose to my editor. They are in a keyed box and I have instructed in my will that, if I die, the files should become the property of a friend of mine, one of us, who I hope will live beyond me.

From: dole7

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Sod Off Already

Alright, I am becoming tired of being called a tyrant. How much more of an emergency do we all need to have — all of our keyboards bursting into flames perhaps? I was trying to be subtle when I explained why I felt justified in being the boss here. I guess it worked for once.

Okay. In black and white, here it is. Ready?

Are you sure?

The "voices" that many of you claim to hear, well, I do not. *Hear* them, that is. I see words on my screen, instead. *They* told me to build this site and do all this work, even if not in so many words. *They* commanded me to protect my part of it, to help you sorry blokes. That is what I do.

So when Hannibal and Oursine decided to fight on my list and endangered it, I stepped in. Yes, I stepped on a lot of your Labour Party views by throwing my weight around. I am not sorry a damn bit. Six people have already quit. Sod off and hide in your nice little sacred world. Or you can join the rest of us in the muckhouse! You may get dirty, but at least you will be working!

STRATEGIES

In Africa, there's a type of fly that doesn't wait until you're dead to lay its eggs in your carcass. It burrows into open wounds, crawling under flaps of skin or between the swollen walls of cuts. It lays its eggs there when you're not looking. Your body continues to work on closing up the wound, knitting it back together with collagen, scabs and regeneration. The flies count on this process to create soft warm cocoons for their larvae. Eventually, the eggs hatch and the maggots begin to eat. The wound swells and reddens again. It looks infected, and it is. You can cut them out, a nasty procedure that involves digging deeper than the original wound, to get to the larvae that have eaten their way toward the bone. Or you can wait until they outgrow your flesh, splitting open your skin and pouring out.

Alternatively, you can carry the biggest fucking fly swatter you can find and kill the bastards as soon as they come buzzing around looking for some wet, warm hole into your hide.

It's almost orgasmic, isn't it, when you lift your swatter and see that you've squashed a fat fly? Don't deny it. You know you get a thrill. You love seeing those white guts smeared and legs twitching, don't you? I do. Fucking parasites don't deserve to live. Fucking, shit-eating, blood-sucking sons of bitches. God didn't make flies. The fucking Devil did.

So tell me, Oursine, what's all this crap about negotiating with, reasoning with or blackmailing flies? Shoo fly, don't bother me? Please. Give me a break. That works for all of five seconds before the bastards are back, with reinforcements, and all the more eager to eat your flesh. I'm telling you, nothing will stop this plague but the systematic extermination of them all. If your house is infested with roaches, you don't wave a hose under their noses and threaten them with a good spray if they don't leave. You chemical the shit out of them and watch with glee as they turn belly-up. You pull their legs off one by one, and then their wings, and you laugh as they writhe in agony.

Now, I admit, I thought the story about the fella using the cops to break in was damn clever, but what I don't understand is why he didn't just do it himself. I would have. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't have wanted anyone else to do it. I get horny just thinking about cold, dead bodies turning to ash and blowing away on the wind. Next time, Oursine, have your friend call me. I'll come and do his dirty work for him. Fuck, the killing's the easy part. Tell him Hannibal said to try it some time. He just might like it.

We're not what we used to be, Oursine, and the sooner you realize that, the better off you'll be. It sounds to me like you're hung up on being human. It shows in the fucking hypocrisy of everything you say. Maybe inside we're still human, but our mission in life isn't. It's bigger than that and we have to think bigger than that. We have to see the big picture before it topples over and crushes us.

SACRIFICES

So I killed four people. I had my reasons, and that's really what's important here right? I didn't go down to the deli and shoot four uninvolved harmless folks. I killed four people who would have turned on me and put my property into that witch's hands quicker than you can scream, "I'm coming." I had to get back my deed. I had to get rid of that trumped-up mortgage. Those four people could have identified me. I don't have the fucking luxury of being able to go anywhere to protect my shit. It's in one place. It doesn't travel well. So what's more important? Those four pawns or my rook? I know what my answer is.

Sure, I know some of you think I'm a real dickhead. Not like I give a shit, but we do what we gotta do, you know? That's what this is all about. Despite what Oursine may want to believe, I don't go around killing innocent people. Of course, this isn't the first time it's happened, and it won't be the last. And I guarantee that I'm not the only one who's had these ignorant dorks get in the way. If you haven't had it happen yet, it will, I promise. The first time, you'll want to stick your head in the oven and call it quits. Then it keeps happening and eventually you just chalk it up as being part of the job. Shit happens.

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Criminals

It amuses me that so many people who are against Hannibal never had to deal with evil until they were called. Has anyone else noticed this? Where I live, you face danger everyday. Same for my line of work. Anyone you meet could want more than a ride. Until recently, we didn't know that all the criminals weren't human. (Coach, why don't you ask Dana about this one?) But I know from experience that not all criminals are monsters. People hit, rob and kill. Normal people are not the pure little children that Oursine makes them out to be. Actually, I am surprised by her opinions, considering she's a reporter and she sees all the evil that people do. I wonder if Oursine was so shocked to find out that horrible, irredeemable things walk the Earth that she created a hiding place for herself. It's the old "us" versus "them" thing. Unfortunately, not all people are on our side.

FAMILY DYSFUNCTIONS

If I am understanding you correctly, Hannibal, you say that we should give up our morals because the odds are no longer the same in the game. I am not in agreement. I think that we have to hold onto them even more, so that we do not become like the monsters. When I look at the people you call "ignorant dorks," I see families. Some among us, not like you, have families. We have homes. We try to keep an image of normalcy for those we love, because we can not desert them. No one has the right to ask that of us—not even the power that has asserted itself and made us what we are.

Since you are so intelligent and so experienced, tell us how you think we should become killing machines while still maintaining family, friends and jobs. We still must eat. We still need love. Do you know love?

That sounds like a challenge, Oursine. Fine. You asked my opinion. You're fucking going to get it. Before you do anything else, you have to get your shit together. You have to plan. Sure, it takes money to eat, to put a roof over your head and to equip yourself properly. But if the shit I've heard on the list is anywhere near true, you people are out there fucking up, trying to hold onto life as it was and maintaining your status quo.

Your lives went up in smoke the moment you sparked. Give it up! You're dead. You're gone. The women, men, mothers, fathers, wives or husbands that you used to be have disappeared. You've got a price on your head now. You're wanted. Do you really think you're doing anyone a favor by sticking to your old values and pretending to be something you're not? You're kidding yourself and you're setting your loved ones up for a fall. There's a price to pay sometimes, and sometimes that means the loss of lives. Your destiny has sacrificed your lifestyle.

Go ahead, all the same, though. Eat your meatloaves, play your checkers and read your bedtime stories. Just don't be surprised when the flies come buzzing around your little nest.

The big, bad wolf is huffing and puffing at your house. Eventually, it will blow your fucking house down. Your world will crash around your ears. You think I'm kidding? Look around. Look at all those who have already experienced it. No one can live two lives for long. Angel by day. Vengeful whore by night. It catches up.

Yet when it does, there are people who can help you pick up the pieces. You don't have to sleep in the fucking gutter or eat out of dumpsters. Planning ahead helps. Take out very solid life insurance

policies on all your family members and yourself. Do it right now. If any of them get eaten, you'll have the money you need to save the rest and get revenge. If you get eaten, your family's set. Peace of mind, it's called in the infomercials. Of course, I've listed both my removed family (yes, I have one) and a certain non-profit organization as my beneficiaries.

This organization, called the Rose Foundation, helps those like us. It does many other things as well, socially praise-worthy things, which keep it legitimate in the public eye. Its founder and principal benefactor, who chooses to remain anonymous, created the group to get money to those of us who've had our feet, breath and finances knocked out. Don't even bother petitioning for cash unless you really need it. The RF keeps a close eye on us. It knows when you've been naughty or nice. It knows whether you deserve a present or a lump of fucking coal.

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL

If you do try to live two lives, Oursine, I have a question. How are you going to explain when Mommy comes home from a PTA meeting covered in blood, brains stuck in her hair and a 9mm in her purse? The old community theater excuse only goes so far. Are you going to tell your kid that you're an international spy or a government agent? What about your husband? You think they're going to understand? To not want to help? Or worse, not try to protect you from the monsters that are trying to kill you? Go ahead and explain it to them. If they don't have you locked up again, they're going to become even more of a burden than they already are.

Is that what you mean by maintaining a semblance of the old morals, Oursine? Lying to your family? Leading the monsters home to them? Is that what you recommend for the rest of us? That's fucked up. The rules have changed for us all. Turn the page. No, the page was turned for you. Quit trying to be something you're not.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Has anyone besides me noticed that Oursine has finally shut the hell up? What's the matter? Am I making sense to you? You and people like you want to put us all into neat little pigeon holes and make rules for our behavior. I'll bet you're in the French version of the moral majority, aren't you? It's not so simple though, sister. It's never that simple. Maybe once you've been around awhile, you'll understand what I'm talking about.

From: descent88

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Compassion

Jesus, Hannibal. Show a little compassion, will you? I know it's rough out there, but that doesn't mean you have to be so brutal about it. It's not so easy for some people to just turn their backs on their lives. Sure, you have a point that everything changes once you're imbued, but that doesn't necessarily turn us into unfeeling, uncaring people. It doesn't make us "poof" into hard-ass mercenaries. I've known both sides of that coin.

I agree that you have to plan in ways you never thought before. Insurance, a will, the whole kit and caboodle. Our kind are dying left and right. There's no denying that. Some of us feel even closer to our loved ones after our eyes are opened. We realize just how important they are to us because death is suddenly right there, breathing down our necks.

It may not even help to have dealt with the dead before. After your eyes are opened, it takes on a whole new meaning.

I don't get how Oursine can suggest a moral code for us when our jobs are so fucked up. I mean, look at the things we're up against. This isn't one of those Old World polite battles where everyone stops shooting at sundown and takes holidays off. This is the Big One. These bastards don't pull any punches. They use people as cannon fodder. You want somebody to blame, blame the prick who forged those mortgage papers and forced my hand.

We all fight this war differently. What works for Joe Blow usually doesn't work for anyone else. It all depends on what you're protecting and who's coming after it. There are no rules in this war. It's every man for himself.

HOME SECURITY (TRICKS AND TRAPS)

Of course, you can maximize your chances of winning battles with a little forethought, like I tried to fucking do before Oursine came strutting in and shot my trap all to shit. I guess that's the drawback of home security. Good guys can get caught in them just as easily as the fuckers they're intended for.

Around my place, I got all kinds of traps rigged. They all got a different purpose. Some of them tell me if anyone's been snooping around. You can take a knife and cut little slits in your door and doorframe, then string a bit of thread between them. This works better than any expensive-as-shit electronic alarm. If the thread is gone, somebody opened the door. Works on windows, too. Stretch thin thread, the color of your floor, at ankle-level across doorways and on stairs. You get used to stepping over it. Others don't notice. Just don't attach it too firmly to the doorframe or the trespasser will feel it.

Try spreading baby powder on the front steps. Once it's been messed up, it's pretty damn tough to put right again. Nothing sticks to shoes quite as well or tracks better. Sprinkle it on your windowsills, too. Once you've done all this, set yourself a routine of checking them all when you get home. Start outside and move inward. Don't fuck up and forget. The one time you do, you'll be real sorry.

ESCAPE ROUTES

If you live anywhere but on the first floor, get yourself some knotted rope and make ladders — several of them. Pretend you're the fucking fire marshal. Put them in your house wherever you have upper-story windows. This is just common sense. You never know when you'll have to make a hasty retreat. Train your kids to use them. Train your spouse. They hesitate, they're dead. Do drills so they never question you when you tell them to get the fuck out of the house.

If you can, make a hiding place in your house. I recommend closing off a closet and cutting a trap door into the attic. Think about it. You want two exits out of it. You don't want to be trapped in your own hiding place. Put one of those big wardrobe things in front of it and cut a door in the back of the wardrobe to get to it. Supply it. Put in food and water, weapons and a cell phone. Be smart. What's that Boy Scout motto? Something about being prepared? Do it.

WEAPONRY

The best defense starts at a shooting range. Get yourself a gun — a big one that shoots big bullets. Don't fuck around with weapons. I



From: boca177

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Help

I should be so lucky as Americans.

Where do I gets a gun? My friend Massimo he has a bird gun we used, but now the police have come and found that the bullets he has to register, some are now gone to shoot an ogre near Cortona! Now what? He's gone to jail and the creature she know it!

In boca al lupo!

Crepi al lupo!

once saw a shambler tear the head off a girl who had just shot it five times. One bullet even hit it in the face! The dumb bitch was packing one of those pussy purse poppers that girls think are cute. I guarantee she didn't think it was cute when her head was separate from her body. This isn't a fashion show. There's no room for squeamishness in what we do. You have to like the taste of blood or you might as well go down to the funeral parlor right now and pick out your coffin.

Some of us have contacts. If you live somewhere like I do where you can't get an automatic or semi-automatic easily, speak up! It'll probably cost you. Hell, you know it will. But what's your life worth?

You also got to think about where you're gonna keep your guns. Lock them away in a steel cabinet so your kids can't get at them and it's equally hard for you to get at them in a heartbeat. Something to think about, huh?

In the movies the hero always wins. Their families may get fucked up a little, scared a lot or kidnapped or some shit, but they always survive, don't they? Yours won't. There's a reason for that. If you're out killing these assholes, sooner or later, one of them is going to follow you home. You have to think about all this now. Those bastards out there are playing for keeps. It's survival of the fittest and they intend to be at the top of the food chain. Shit, they already are.

JUDGMENT

I killed those people. I admit it. I killed four mindless puppets that plotted against me. They were dead the moment that fucker used them to try to get my property from me. I shot them to shut them up. I got my deed and those forged mortgage papers back, too. And I showed that fucker witch exactly what he was up against. And if you'd left me alone, Oursine, your friend wouldn't have died.

What you didn't know was that me and that bastard had been going around and around for a while, ever since I bought that property out from under him. I knew what was under that house. So did he, and he wanted it bad. He and his asshole friends jumped me a couple times. I almost died protecting that place. But each time he came, I learned a little more about him. I knew what he could do and what he couldn't.

Sure, the locals thought I was crazy, but that's because I never went out. When I did, I wound up with traffic lights changing wrong on me, near accidents, near misses and near death. I'm not stupid. I knew I had a price on my head, and that bastard, the one whose appearance bothered your tender sensibilities, was behind it all.

Then here you come with your self-righteous attitude and your search for this guy who was lost the moment you let him get nabbed,

and you screw everything up. What little Miss Oursine has failed to tell you is that when she showed up at my place, all huffy and ragging about the four people I killed, she walked right into the trap I had set for Mr. Black. She says I was screaming at her, but you should have seen her with her face all red and her screechy accusations. She screamed just as much as I did, if not more. She didn't show up to try to help me. She showed up to fucking nag me up one side and down the other. I know that look. I got an ex-wife.

So, yeah, I pulled her in the house. I had to shut her up. Mr. Black was on his way and I didn't have time to inform my uninvited guest of the plan. I never meant to knock her out. That was an accident, though I got to admit it sure as hell made it easier to tuck her safely away where she couldn't fuck things up. I didn't trust her to back me. As far as I was concerned, her attitude made her a liability. I figured she'd just as soon turn on me in a snit as fight at my side.

Black showed up all right. He killed my helper and snuck in the back while I was making Oursine comfortable. The bastard must've heard all the shouting. He knew I was home. I didn't want him to know that. My trap failed, thanks to Oursine. I lost a good friend. I found his body later.

Black came at me with everything he had. Desperate men do desperate things. Fortunately, I'd rigged the house with tripwires and other alarms, so I heard the bastard coming up the stairs. First thing I had to do was get away from Oursine. No fucking way I was gonna let Black hold her life over my head. Problem was, there was only one way out and Black was coming that way. So, I charged him. I came out shooting and didn't stop moving until I had slammed past him and fallen down the stairs. Hit my elbow hard.

Surprise is a beautiful thing. Don't you forget it. I stunned Black long enough to haul my ass up and run into the kitchen. That's when I learned Black hadn't come alone. He had a new partner. I'd killed all the others. Bastard was in the backyard, getting ready to open the cellar door. I didn't bother to stop him. The explosives I'd rigged there would do the trick for me. Another reason why I didn't want that little lady I'd stashed upstairs wandering around. I hit the deck. The explosion blew out all my windows. It was impressive, I have to admit. Cocky witches think they're invulnerable. Well, old Hannibal showed that one different.

Better yet, Black came into the kitchen just as the bomb went off. He got hit with plenty of glass. It didn't stop him, but it sure helped his looks.

I knew better than to stay down. I hit my feet and started shooting again. I must have put three slugs into Black. The impact sent him into the living room, on his back. I'd have finished him right then and there, but I was out of ammo. I had more guns stashed in the shed outside, so I went to get them. I already knew Black would get up again. He always did. Bastard once had his belly and dick blown apart — by me — and laughed in my face as I watched the wounds close up. They didn't mend nice and pretty, though. They looked all fucked up. I've laughed at that plenty of times since, thinking about how Black would never get laid again. That's probably why he hated me so much.

I made it to the shed, all right. I grabbed what I needed and went to leave, but the door wouldn't open. Black had followed me faster than I'd expected. It started getting hot in there, real hot. I tried throwing myself against the door, but it wouldn't budge. I tried shooting it, but that didn't do any good. I was trapped and starting to sweat. I mean, the sweat was pouring off me. Because of the heat, not because I was scared. I'd always figured I'd bite it sooner than later, and that day was as good as any. But, I wasn't going to die with a whimper. No fucking way.

I tried everything I could think of to get out of that shed. The tin roof started turning red, it was so hot. I realized that was how he was doing it. He was heating up the roof somehow. I smelled something burning. The roof was starting to set the timbers on fire. I had all that ammo in there and I was definitely going out with a bang.

Black started laughing. I guess he figured I had exhausted all my ideas. That pissed me off. I wasn't going to let him get the best of me.

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Guns

I agree that a gun is important. Hell, several guns. I carry a pistol and keep a shotgun, a baseball bat and a knife in my cab. I learned to shoot in Michigan, on the farm of a friend. But even the biggest firepower isn't going to help you if you don't use your head. You go off half-cocked into a nest of monsters and you'll just disappear. I say use whatever means necessary to get the fuckers out of your neighborhood. But not everyone is as macho as Hannibal. We each have strengths and we have to use them to the best of our ability. Like the guy who runs that Rose Foundation. I bet he hasn't blown away more than a handful of rots. He's got a different calling. That's cool by me.

If I was going out, so was he. I was feeling pretty weak by that time. I felt like I was cooking. I guess I was. The shed had a utility sink. I turned it on and wet my hair. That's when I got my idea.

I started shouting, "Let me out of here, you son of a bitch! I got all my ammo in here! It's gonna blow!" I figured that'd make him back off to a safe distance and maybe even get behind something to protect his hide. The heat didn't let off, but that didn't surprise me. One of the beams caught fire. The time had come.

I grabbed a wrench and started unhooking the utility sink. It was a big one, made of stainless steel. I figured I might cook under it, but I had more of a chance there than I did getting blown to bits in the middle of the shed. Unhooking the sink took too damn long, but I got it done. The freed pipe spewed water everywhere, sizzling where it hit. Smoke was filling the shed and I could barely breathe. A shell exploded like a big firecracker. Then another. I turned the sink upside down over a hole I'd dug to hide some guns. I got down into the hole and covered myself. I'm no small man, but I tell you, when your ass is on the line, it's amazing how it'll clinch tight enough to fit into the smallest place. I originally thought to cut some garden hose and thread it through the drain pipe, but I didn't have time. I hoped the explosion would blow out the fire. And that's exactly what happened, far as I could tell. Talk about the 4th of July! My ears are still ringing from the shot and bullets ricocheting off the sink. That was the longest few minutes of my life.

I don't know when I crawled out, but it couldn't have been much later. All I wanted was air. The wreckage was beautiful — smoldering timbers and melted metal. Soon as I was out, a burnt beam gave way and the tin roof collapsed onto the whole mess. I tell you, that's one of those shit-your-pants moments. I didn't, but man, I came close. My clothes and hair were singed. My skin was red and blistered. Hey, I was alive. And I have a talent just like Black's. I can fix myself up with my mind. It didn't put me back to perfect, but it sure helped a hell of a lot. I made myself quit coughing and hocked up a big ball of soot and snot. I made my skin quit burning. Then I went after Black.

It didn't take a genius to figure out Black was already in the cellar. I knew that's where he'd go just as soon as he thought I was dead. So that's where I headed, too. The cellar door explosives had been rigged to blow outward, but it still left a big hole in the ground right where the entry had been. It also collapsed some of the first room of the cellar, but I could see the opening where Black had dug to get to the cavern. Once again, I had surprise on my side and I planned to take full advantage of it.

Now, this part's kind of weird to tell — and I was there! I head down there and what do I find? A bloody, fucked up Black sitting naked in the spring. At first I thought he was dead. He had his eyes closed and he wasn't moving. I watched him a little, trying to figure out the best way to kill him, and that's when I noticed the strange movement of the water and the mist. It looked like it was soaking into him and fixing him up! I couldn't let that happen.

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Hannibal's Story

Now that we have both sides of the story, I would like to make a suggestion. Let's all take a breath, say some prayers for guidance and really consider what we're talking about here. I know it's very easy to get upset when defenseless people get killed. I see it happen every day. It's what we call life. I also know it's very easy to point fingers. I think we should give Hannibal some serious consideration. I mean, he had reasons for doing what he did that seemed right to him at the time. I'm not saying they were good or bad reasons. He just had his reasons.

The last thing I want to worry about when I'm up to my ass in them is whether the people on this list are going to turn their backs on me. There's some serious issues here that we have to think about. We shouldn't make our decision based on anger. Let's take a step back and breathe. Who knows? Maybe Oursine wouldn't even have been around to make her complaint if Hannibal hadn't locked her up.

I had thought it might come this far some day, so I'd hid a revolver down there. Planning ahead, you see. I covered my bases. But when I pushed aside the rock to reach in the hole for the gun, Black woke up.

There was fear in his eyes. He raised a hand and shouted, "Not in here!" or something like that.

You think I listened? I shot him once. That's all it took. Hit him right between the eyes and threw his head and half his brains against the wall. Turns out he knew something I didn't. The bullet ricocheted, but not normal. Fucker just kept going and going, hitting off the walls. I tried to dive out of there but the bullet still found me. It blew straight through my shoulder while I was crawling back up the incline to the cellar. I lay there bleeding for awhile, but I survived.

By the time I got out of the cellar, it was dark. I fixed myself up and tried to put my place back together as best I could. I put Black, all the pieces of his friend and my dead buddy in Black's car. I took it out to Route 9 and ran it into a tree. Then I blew it up. I called a friend of mine and had him let Oursine go. I didn't want to see her. Apparently, she was so pissed she didn't even notice the destruction in the yard. Apparently, she was so pissed that she couldn't see the forest for the trees. Take my advice, girl. Watch your own back and I'll watch mine. Don't come around here again. Next time, I'll really kick your ass.



CHAPTER 3: OUR FUTURE

He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

— Lamentations 3:28

EULOGY

From: oursine113
To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org
Subject: Why?

Mon Dieu, we have lost another of our people. She was a doctor who dedicated herself to helping the rest of our kind. Many considered her a friend. She touched numerous lives in the little time she had after her initiation. I will always believe that she had a special purpose here with us.

She once wrote to me, "We cannot hide in our corners and protect only those precious things for which we received our calling. We must also protect each other. We are not just here to challenge the monsters. We're here to challenge one another." She believed that the real victims in this war are the initiated, us. She dedicated herself to raising spirits that had fallen. In her way, she helped to protect us all from descending completely into the pits of Hell.

I have thought a lot about Hannibal and my charges against him, certainly now that I see others who support him. I have searched myself to see if I truly believe I do the correct thing and I have concluded that I can not give up. I do not believe that Hannibal needed to kill those people. I do not believe that we should kill anyone who gets on our path. My deceased friend did not believe this, either. She hated the killing. She hated to watch what we are becoming.

We were her charge. We have lost one of our best. Because of her death, we are a little closer to ruin. I believe this with all my heart. The monstres have dealt to us a severe blow. I renew my charges against Hannibal because we must all see that we are not the monstres and we do not have to behave like them.

In tribute to my friend's memory, I offer the following discourses. Consider it with all the dedication that one of our fallen gave us. There is nothing more that I can do.

TOMORROWS

Is there a light at the end of this tunnel? Will this dark times ever end? Who are we? What are we? Why has this been done to us? These questions have haunted me from the moment of my initiation. Since then, my life has turned upside-down. I am not unique. Every one of you knows how I feel myself. Although we may express it differently, all of us, we know the anguish, terror and uncertainty that accompanies the responsibility destiny has heaped upon our shoulders.

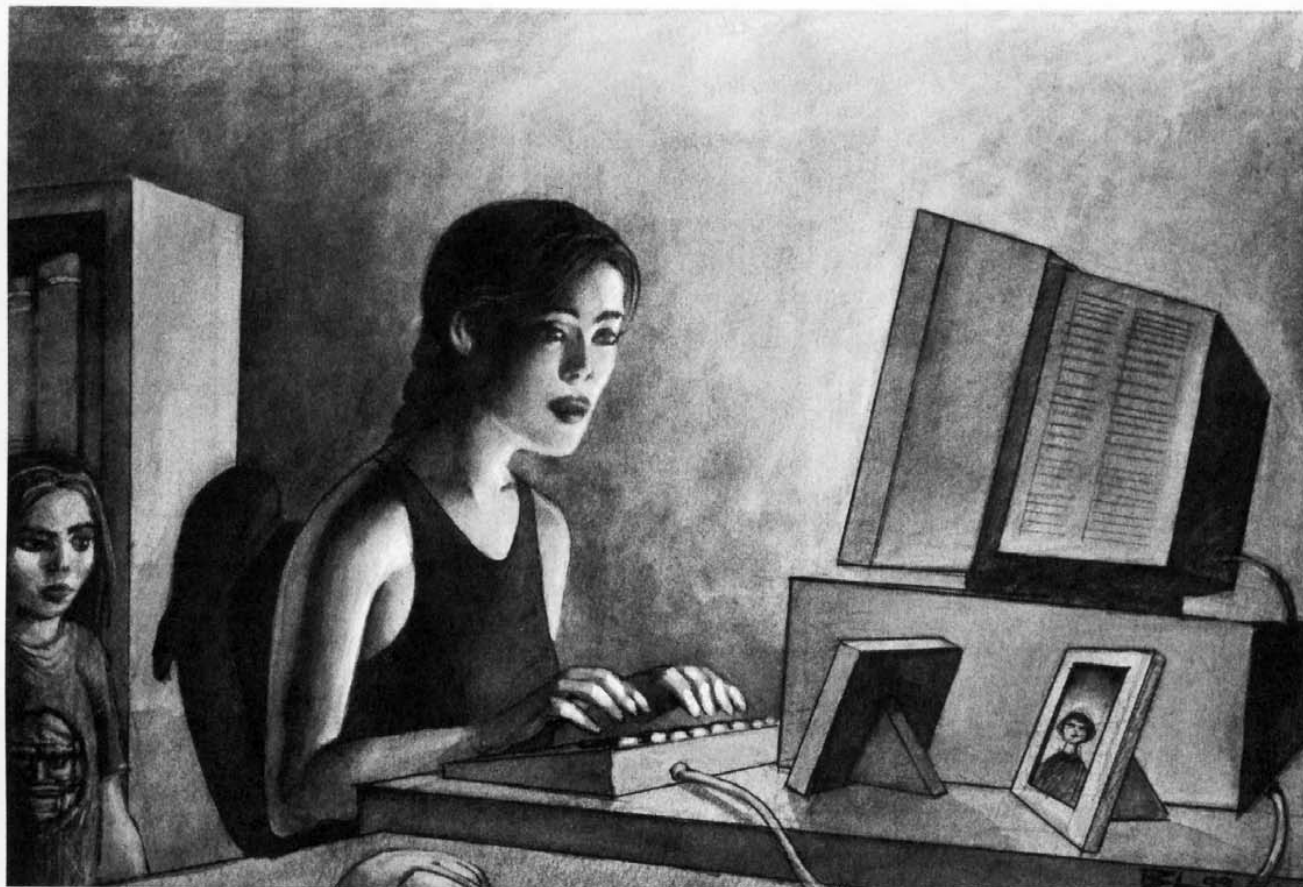
To what distance should we go for to live up to this responsibility? Are there horizons we should not traverse? And more important, why not? It depends of what we hold important. Perspective. Me, I believe that this is the thing the most important to what we do. Perspective. We must sustain it.

In the future, the world will have changed. It is always doing that. It cannot help itself. I worry myself of its

From: hannibal137
To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org
Re: Mourning

You know, I feel real bad that your friend is dead, Oursine. But I got to say, I seriously fucking doubt she would appreciate you using her memory in a personal crusade against me. I mean, shit, where was all this sorrow and sympathy for the dead when I lost my friend to Black? You haven't said a word about that, have you?

Lady, I don't know what kind of emotional comfort you get from your self-righteous and vindictive attack on me, but it sucks. I'm just a guy out here trying to keep my head above water and maybe fuck up the plans of a few freaks along the way.



direction and what it will become. I have heard many different prophecies, some that call for doom, some full of hope. Can we really know what will happen? No. We never predicted what is happening *now*. Before our initiations, we did our daily routines, kissed our children, attended our business meetings, went to the marché without any sense of the place where we would be today or of the information we would know. The same holds true for tomorrow.

Does it matter what tomorrow holds? Perhaps it does. Perhaps it does not. I like well to think that if we had not enjoyed the little things of our earlier lives, we would never fight as diligently as we do. What will arrive if we forget the joy of those simple pleasures? What will arrive if we become hard and without emotion like Hannibal? I ask myself.

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: dragon218

Subject: Re: Why?

Always there be monsters come worry us. There always be suffering. We accept this. In perfect world, they are there. Good and evil fall from balance. We fight regain balance, but we not overturn balance. If overturn balance, we kill us all and we defeat selves. This is way of *Kessanhito*.

Those who Hannibal kill not die with honor. They die in dishonor. Hannibal not give them chance balance self. Is wrong. Some will die in fight. They have much honor. I hope I have good fortune to find death at hand of enemy. If do, I assure, I die not alone.

My doctor friend asked herself, too. She was telling me always to take a walk in the park, to see a film or to have an espresso in the sidewalk café. She said that these things help us to guard our humanity. They remind us of why we must fight. She said many times that, "the tomorrow we envision today will be the tomorrow we enjoy." It bothered her greatly that some among us believe our purpose is to become the next plateau of human growth. "No," she said. "We are not better than those who have not taken the watch; we are more vulnerable." It took me a long time to understand what she meant, but now I believe I do. She meant that the initiation puts us in danger. This danger comes in many forms, physical, mental and emotional.

We are now more likely to have a divorce, to watch friends die violently, or to die ourselves. We do not have the luxury of security or of blissful ignorance. We know what is lurking behind it. We see our grim reaper's face and know his name. When all appears lost, we must look beyond that skeletal visage to a future where all people will live in harmony and security.

WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

I don't got time to think any further ahead than the next attack on my house. I sure as hell don't have time to go wiggle my toes in a field of wildflowers. Sure, I got things set up in case I kick the bucket. Sure, I got things planned for when the next witch comes sniffing around my place, but I sure as fuck don't got any urge to plan for the next couple hundred years. My job is here and now. Seems to me philosophy is a luxury I can't afford. My life is all about bullets and blood and this patch of earth that I protect. I'm happy if I wake up in the morning. I'm fucking ecstatic if I get through a day without some bastard trying to cook me. Fuck. I guess if we have to talk about the future, all I can say is that the future will tell which one of us, me or Oursine, makes it out the other side in one piece.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

We are not obligated to do this. We elect it. Each one among us could sit down and refuse to do anything for the duration of our lives. But we do not. Why? Me, I believe we do it because we all, each in her own way, love the world. The world belongs to us. We feel a responsibility toward it and to all of humanity. We are protective of it, like a mother is protective of her child or a child is protective of her mother. I doubt that any one among us can deny this. Somewhere in our hearts and souls, we hope for a future particularly beautiful for our world.

It is possible that your future does not have the same qualities as mine, but does that truly matter? Your vision is enough to make you combat the cauchemars that threaten it. The choice you made, to save *something*, implies that you have fear of these creatures and that you care enough to defend against them.

Someone has intervened or something has happened to enlighten us and to let us *see*. Why? The answer to me seems obvious. So we can do something about it. Not everyone knows the monstres walk among us. Most of the world continues to live life as if nothing has changed. They worry themselves about their bills, about whether their children are healthy, and whether traffic will make them late to their appointments. If only life were that simple again. I miss those days.

But, for a reason unknown, we the initiated have come of age. We were ready. All the others were not, still are not. They deny what we tell them with all the ferocity of a child who does not want to believe there is no Père Noël. Like parents, we do the ugly work, cut the paper, apply the tape, curl the ribbons, suffer paper cuts and stay up late at night to place the presents under the tree. We eat the cookies. We drink the milk. We do it so that our children will awaken in the morning, run down to see what Père Noël has left for them. We do it so that *they* can still believe.

Why do parents foster a belief in Père Noël? Why do we teach our children to put their fallen teeth under their pillows? Why do we not reveal all the realities of the world? I believe we do it for two reasons. For to instill a sense of marvel in our children. Like this, we invest in the future. And because secretly we wish we could still believe.

It is a shame, no? That we have lost that innocence? Once it is gone, it is gone for forever. You can not reclose the eyes that have opened and seen the truth. The initiation denies us blissful ignorance. What gifts do we receive in exchange? We can watch faces of others, blessedly ignorant light up when the wonder of the world still delights them. We have the satisfaction of knowing that another day or season passes happily and our children, our wards, remain safe from the monstres.

NO CHOICE AT ALL

Why does any parent work his ass off to put food on the table for his family? Not all of them do, but there's guys out there who work two or three jobs to buy cereal, shoes and school books for his kids. Most of the time, he's not thinking about who his kids will marry or whether they'll do okay twenty years down the road. He's thinking about getting them through kindergarten, grade school or high school in one piece, fed and clothed. Maybe those rich fuckers can worry about which college their kid's gonna go to, but most of us poor folk are just trying to keep kids alive. It's day to day, hand to mouth.

So now we all got a better idea of just how cruel a fucking world it is. When we awoke that day and saw the monsters, we all became poor. If any of you used to think you were on top of the world, had your good jobs and your 401Ks... Things have changed, haven't they? You're blue collar now. You're poor and you gotta sweat right along with the rest of

From: howitzer114

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Are we crazy?

Are we? Has it occurred to anyone that maybe we're nuts? Obsessive and compulsively paranoid, if there is such a thing? I mean, listen to us. We're debating what might happen years down the line, and meanwhile there are bloodsuckers, zombies, werewolves, ghosts and things out there right now, getting ready to eat whoever crosses their path. Don't we have anything better to do than gawk with morbid curiosity at other people's misfortunes, wax poetic and criticize our fellows? This kind of diversion may take our minds off the horrible truth for a little while, but... are we crazy?

Maybe we should just come out of the closet as a group. Tell everyone. There's monsters out there that are sucking your blood and eating your kids! No, you can't see them, but we can!

Maybe if we shout loud enough, people will begin to believe us. Wouldn't it be great if some day everyone knew about the monsters? Then again, they might just put us all in straightjackets and call it mass-hysteria. We'd make history. We'd be famous. Maybe we could get a shot on Jerry Springer. And then a day, a month or a year later, all the things would pick us off one at a time.

us, because the bastards rule everything. We've been taken down a notch. That's the cold reality of it. Maybe they didn't take your money or your fancy job, but they sure took away your security, didn't they?

What I'm trying to say is, what's the point of wasting your time picking your kids' college when they need help right here, right now, staying fucking alive? It doesn't do any good to think about the future if you don't have your shit together now. While you're debating where we'll be years from now, the fuckers are out there doing what it takes to destroy us now. We've got to quit talking so much and protect what's ours!

LONELY AT THE TOP

Yes, we as protectors have children, but our children are young *and* old. They're everyone we know. What makes them des enfants is that they do not understand what is happening. Therefore, it is to us to make decisions for them. We have a great deal of power, you know? What we do today decides the future for all people. In many ways, we have the power of life and death on them. How do we choose who to save? Our numbers are limited and we are dying every day. We can not save them all. Who do we save?

It is lonely at the top. The kings and the presidents make decisions of this genre every day. Militaristes do it as well. They understand that there are some who must die and some who will live. Who dies? Who lives? And what impact will this have on the path our future takes? How do we choose? If you had to choose between protecting a teenager or a pregnant woman, who would you choose? Perhaps the teenager will be an important scientist, but the mother and her child will die anyway, killed by a driver a year later. How do we choose?

No one among us can know what the future holds, but we must approach our decisions very seriously. The day will come when we will have freed the Earth of

From: sixofswords29

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: Why?

Who do we choose to save? You may think this is a new question, but it is not. Firemen and policemen make these decisions every day. The answer is simple. You try to save them all, but if you must choose, you choose the one that is easiest to save. Reason for this? Because you want to succeed and you want to get out yourself. You choose the one who is most difficult to save, then you might fail altogether and all will die. It is a very practical question and answer.

Hannibal is very practical. He understands the danger of these creatures, but Oursine does not. She does not see that they control so much of the world. She does not see or chooses not to acknowledge. The conspiracy is vast. The situation is dire. Oursine sets her sights too high and she fails. She tries to save the more difficult victim. In the end, this will drag her down, too.

the monstres. When that happens, we will be the beings the most powerful on the globe. What does that mean? It means that we take care that our children do not have the reason to destroy us.

ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

People are our allies. We must never forget this and always treat them with the respect that they deserve. I talk about them being our children, ours to protect, but the truth does not stop there. Slavers throughout history have taken the view that their slaves would return to savagery if they were not protected and guided. Many people have subjugated others because of the philosophy that they were helping the other race or gender, the "weaker" one. We must not allow ourselves to become trapped by what some of us perceive as our own superiority.

We were all common people at one point — we still are. We are not weak. Humanity is strong, in numbers and in heart. The day will come when they will rise against us, and successfully, if we attempt to place ourselves above them, use them as pawns in our fight or kill them without consideration to their rights.

OUT IN THE COLD

Remember when we were deaf, dumb and blind to all this creepy shit? I do. And I know plenty of people who not only still are, but prefer it that way. That's why the world needs us. Because most people don't want to know, and wouldn't do anything about it if they did.

There aren't many people out there who can help us. Think about all the people you know. The old folks, the young kids, the retards, the dumb fucks who think the most important things in life are their pick-up trucks and whether or not they'll get laid this weekend. How many of them are gonna help us? Not too fucking many. Sure, there are people out there who will. Some who are already doing it, but don't even realize it. But there are plenty of others who work against us and don't know it. These people are useless. Worse, they help to fuck us up. These people aren't worth shit. They're just as dangerous as the bastards who control them, and it's no great loss to get rid of a few of them.

HUMILITY

The Bible says that the meek shall inherit the Earth. Someone I think has badly translated this, or perhaps

the original intent has become lost. People would never have come so long if we had been meek. The frontiers we have crossed were not breached by the weak of mind or heart. Technology would never have advanced to this degree if our scientists and inventors had not dug deep into their souls and found the bravery and initiative to reach. Our world exists as it does because of the bold and the brave, not for the meek.

Perhaps the metaphor means simply that as human beings we must reserve a certain amount of humility. We are all in this together. We are a race of creatures who have risen above all others, or so we have thought. We have the ability for massive destruction. Not only could we destroy the entire world, but we destroy morsels of it as we speak. Because of our attitude of superiority, our pride, we drive any number of animal and plants into extinction. We do this without thinking, without trying. It happens, and that is all. It results from our negligence, our selfishness and our belief that we, human beings, more than all the other species, deserve every luxury.

What will remain to inherit, if we pursue this?

If you add the word "humble" where the Bible claims "meek," you find the old adage has more relevance. The humble shall inherit the Earth. The humble — those who do not think themselves above all others, but who realize they need other creatures — will indeed excel when they finally realize the goal of overcoming their prideful neighbors. Those among us who understand this must protect our world from those who would ravage it. In this respect, are the predators that feed on humans worse than those of us who subject their employees to dangerous work, who commit genocide for political or racist reasons, or who discard waste that makes people sick?

ACTION

I don't know what makes you people think we got such a wonderful world. I mean, take a look around people. Our rivers and forests are all fucked up. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. It's

From: descent88

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: Why?

There are many layers in life. We're not the only ones to fight this war. You might call us the elite forces, but we're no more important than those who combat evil on a very mundane level. Law enforcement agencies such as the police, government agencies, Interpol, Scotland Yard and the American FBI have a more public face and a different subset of criminal targets, but their work is no less significant than ours. Do they kill defenseless people? No. So why would we?

There have been people like us throughout history. From the ancient druids to the Knights Templar, the Rosicrucians to the Freemasons, we have had organizations, secret societies that we theorize delved deeper into the occult than they let on. These organizations may or may not have been our precursors. I have often wondered to what extent their efforts influenced the world. I mean, what if they hadn't existed? Would we even be here? Or would this now be a world run by creatures?

What if our own protectors started shooting us in the streets? You think we'd put up with it? I seriously doubt it. Take a look at Northern Ireland. Is that what we want?

From: dole7
 To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org
 Subject: Vote Form

It is time to make up our minds about the row between Oursine113 and Hannibal137. Think about this. There is no going back once you have made up your mind. All votes are anonymous and you may vote only once. Please email me privately if you have any questions regarding this procedure or the case itself.

Charge: Oursine113 has charged Hannibal137 with unnecessarily murdering four unaware and defenseless people.

In the matter of Oursine113 vs. Hannibal137, I vote:

- _____ Not Guilty
- _____ Result: Defendant exonerated.
- _____ Guilty/Level 1 Warning — 1 point
- _____ Result: A "warned" member has a description of that warning attached to all emails to members of this list. Three warnings result in Censure.
- _____ Guilty/Level 2 Censure — 3 points
- _____ Result: Censure means temporary removal from Vigil for a number of months chosen by Dole7, and a report to the wider hunter community including hunter-net and all subsidiaries thereof. If at the time of Censure there are enough points for Anathema, then appropriate action will be taken.
- _____ Guilty/Level 3 Anathema — 6 points
- _____ Result: Permanent removal from Vigil and warning to the wider community of the hunter's danger to the cause.
- _____ I choose not to vote.

fucking impossible for a regular guy to get ahead. We got computers taking over the world. We got cars stinking up the air because some car-maker witch or oil-baron rot is getting rich off it. We got weapons out there that could turn us all into roach food and they're in the hands of goddamn maniacs. We got perverts in our schools, and our grocery stores carry more chemicals than they do real food.

Who did this? Who decided that we wanted a world like this? I didn't. Most people didn't. So who do you think's pulling the strings here? Who's been pulling them all along? It's time we stood up and took our fucking world back from the bastards who've destroyed it. They've taken almost every damn thing we had and pissed on it, but we're not gonna let them do it any more. And if we can, we'll get back some of what they already stole. We wouldn't have turned our world into a septic tank, not on purpose. Maybe we didn't give enough of a shit to stop it before, or maybe they've just been walking all the hell over us. What's done is done. Now, it's time to fight back. Now we know. Now we see what we've let them do to our shit, and we have to save what's left.

IGNORANCE

I believe that I express for all of us when I say that we do not want to become monstres ourselves. We must become better than they are. Among the monstres, we have some vampires, loups-garous, fantômes, polluters, murderers, those who abuse the children, pyromaniacs and many other predators. We must only regard the world for to see that we have always had the monstres around us, and we

From: descent88
 To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org
 Subject: Oursine113 vs Hannibal137

I'm making my vote public because I feel that everyone deserves to know how I voted and why. I know that most people will vote in private, but I felt a responsibility to be forthright with mine.

I cannot, in good conscience, condone what Hannibal did because those people did not pose a direct threat to him. They had knowledge that could hurt him, but his "Mr. Black" was dead. I believe Hannibal had other options for clearing his deed besides going into the bank during public hours and shooting the place up.

I vote guilty and recommend that Hannibal receive the level 2 punishment. We all, after all, deserve a chance to learn from our mistakes, however grave they may be.

could always see some of them. Now, we see more. We see them more clearly.

It is funny to me how we preferred our ignorance when we lived the ordinary lives. The newspapers filled with stories of murders, rapes and attacks on children. Were we numb? Why are these things better or perhaps I should say more acceptable, than the terrible things the "supernatural" monstres do?

Perhaps it was always the problem of someone else before. We have thought that we could do nothing to stop it. What has changed? We have some capabilities now. That is what has changed. So now we see monstres and we obsess on them. We forget to remember ourselves of the monstres that we have always known.

Are there human monstres? Oui! Is it our responsibility to combat them also? I do not know. For so long, we have relied to the system, the courts and the police to contend with these criminals. It is difficult to regard this in a different manner now. They have trained us well. They tell us we must not become the vigilantes. I agree. They have told us that it is wrong to take justice into our own hands. I agree.

However, the laws allow us to protect ourselves. Liberté, fraternité et égalité. This is the code of France. Let us instead embrace liberty, brotherhood and *security*. The law tells us we have the right to security. In self-defense, we have rights.

Is it our responsibility to protect the people from human monstres? Oui! Why would we question this? It is evident. To protect, oui. To avenge, non. To avenge, it is to distract ourselves from the protection of those who remain. Do not distract yourselves from your goal.

IGNORANT OR HYPOCRITICAL?

So they come in and they fuck up our stuff. They pay off the cops. They control the press. They got their dirty fingers in our governments. Hell, even Oursine agrees that there's fuckers out there who are human and who work against us. So, how come I get reamed for taking a couple of them out? I don't get it. I was protecting my shit!

OUR WATCH

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org
 From: coach41
 Subject: Stand
 "STAND."

That's the first thing the angels told me. I think we can use their guidance to give us some direction. Our first job is to realize what we're fighting for. Revenge? No, it can't be for that. We have to fight for our world, for the people who have been and remain pawns, playthings

and worst, cattle. For some of us that may mean defending a city, a neighborhood or our families. I don't think the scope matters. Like Oursine, I would call this finding your duty or even position.

After we've decided why we stand comes the hard part. Now we have to actually get up on our own two feet and do it. I guess all of us have done that now, but it needs to become our work, our mission. There are victims everywhere. Go out and get in the way of the monsters.

SUPERIORITY

Another saying that I have often heard is that God helps those who help themselves. This proverb seems to directly contend with that which says the meek inherit the Earth—unless you put humble for meek. Several among us imagine that our abilities make us higher in growth or make us gods sent for to lead the weak people to salvation. Hannibal is frightening to me because he seems to believe that he is more special than he is. He thinks that he can kill anyone he wants. I say there are more different methods.

Some among us believe even that we are not only the saviors, but also the sole inheritors of the world. They think that when all is complete, only those who have been initiated will remain. The monstres will kill all the humans, and we will kill all the monstres. They believe that we were not initiated for to save the humanity of today, but to save the world for the humanity of tomorrow. For them, this future humanity resembles us much more than it resembles other people. These initiated see us like a superior race, not as a part of the human race that has special gifts.

What is it that differentiates these racists from the white supremacists, the genocidal leaders, the polluting corporations and the monstres we fight? What if the initiated are not the only humans left once all the monstres are gone? Do we subjugate the others? Enslave them? Do we inherit them, like chattel? I pose these questions because I feel they are important to consider. The way that we think today will choose how our future generations will think. Now it is the hour to establish a constitution of thought to guide our descendants.

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: tarjiman220

Subject: Re: Why?

The Koran says, "True piety is this: To believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels and the Book, and the prophets, to give one's substance however cherished to kinsmen and orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform prayers, and to pay the alms, and they who fulfill the covenant and endure with fortitude, misfortune, hardships and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly God-fearing."

Life is nothing more than a test given to weed out the infidels. The faithful will join Allah. The infidels will suffer eternally. The woman who calls herself Oursine113 understands. It matters not what occurs after we are gone. All that matters is what each of us does in the name of The One God. Allah wants us to "give one's substance" to kinsmen, orphans, needy, travellers, beggars and slaves. To humanity. He has given us the decree. We have but to obey.

I will die doing his bidding and assure myself a place at His feet.

Hannibal is prejudiced. He talks badly about women and makes derogatory commentaries about homosexuals. He is maybe also racist. Is he the kind of man you want to know in the future?

NO SECOND CHANCES

The way I figure it, every man or woman, and I mean human, gets the chance to prove himself to me. He fucks up, I don't trust him. They got a thing in the law too that they call guilt by association. If you're buddy-buddy with a witch, I'm not gonna ask questions. I'm gonna cover my ass and shoot yours.

Yeah, we may just be cannon fodder for whatever powers put these guns in our hands, but we're one of the few things that stands between people and the enemy. We got chosen because we're smarter than everybody else. We all know that. I mean, fuck, what percentage of people out there ever pull their heads out of their asses long enough to realize it doesn't belong there? These are the dumbasses we're here to save, because they can't save themselves. And besides, who in this future world will bag your groceries for you? We need the dumbasses, but only if they're on our side.

INFERIORITY

We are expendable. That is not clear? I have often asked myself if we were not chosen because we had so little else to offer aside our lives. This does not make us superior. It makes us inferior. A friend of mine said it best when he wrote, "Every age has had its armies made up of those who can't do anything else. The 'rank and file' have no value aside from their ability to die for the cause and hopefully take a few of the enemy with them."

Typically, the guards protect the valuables. They are important only because they stand between what is truly important and the thieves who want to steal or destroy these prized objects. We are the guards. We patrol and place our lives in jeopardy in order to protect people. If one guard dies, another steps forward. Our sudden awakening tells me that, for now, the thieves are winning. They have created a rift and we have advanced for to fill it. When we die, others will take our place. We have no faces. We are expendable.

MAKE UP YOUR MIND

So either there are bad humans or there aren't. You can't have it both fucking ways, Oursine. It's okay to protect yourself from murderers, rapists and fucking child abusers, but it's not okay to protect yourself from people who threaten you in more ambiguous ways? Shit. Don't I wish it was that fucking simple. I can't wait for the day when you have to choose between shooting a normal human and losing your fucking "charge." I want to be there for that, believe me. If you ask me, you're the one who's naive here. Some day somebody's gonna really fuck you and then that sweet little moral cherry of yours will pop so hard your head will spin. When that day comes, remember old Hannibal, will you?

DEATH AFTER LIFE. LIFE AFTER DEATH?

In the secret places of our minds, we all know that some day we will depart this world. Where will we go? Will we go to Heaven? Will we reincarnate into new bodies so we can continue this battle? Will we simply cease to be? We all have death in our futures.

Some among us believe that we win our place in Heaven by serving God and denying the devils. Are we the shepherds, leading and protecting the flocks? Some among us believe that we are earning better circumstances for our next life. Some believe that this is our only opportunity. I do not know what I believe, but I do know that I fear to die. We all do, but we persevere. We must, for even for our short time here, some one must protect the things we love. Some among us even put ourselves in danger for our future afterlives, hoping for a future that is brighter.

Death, it is the one thing that we know with certainty will be a part of our futures. The thought of death directs our

choices. It controls even those who deny it, who refuse actively to consider the possibility. These people spend a lot of energy on their denials, and their choices reflect it. Deep down, they know, like us all, that someday they will end. The worst cruelty is that we will not be able to reap any benefits from investments we could make in this one sure thing.

RESPONSIBILITIES

What a double-edged sword our initiations have handed us. They imbued us with gifts of power, but they also stole from us our lives and our security. They heaped us with responsibilities. For whatever reason, we have succeeded to touch a part of the reality that most people never know. Our minds are expanded. Many of our experiences resemble each others. This tells me that there is an underlying truth to what is happening. For me, it is a law of nature not discovered. Cause and effect implies responsibility. Something has made this occur for a reason. We must only to lift ourselves to the challenge to find out why.

We humans did not arrive where we are today by facing each trouble with fight or flight. Our ancestors have used their minds. They have created communities and helped one another. They have developed technologies that improved their living conditions and eased their burdens for them. They have bartered for goods and services. They have fostered communication. They have established democratic societies.

Most importantly, they have passed their acquired knowledge down to their descendants. Those who have followed have accepted that wisdom and added to it, adding their own experience and molding the old ways to fit an ever-changing world. Now, it is to us to place a new addition on that legacy. The world has changed again.

FINAL SAY

You know what pisses me off the most? It's that none of us have any fucking clue what's going on, but we prance around like we do. I mean, how can any of you honestly say that I didn't do the right thing? You can't. You got no idea how bad this situation is. Of course, I don't think we'd be here if it weren't pretty fucking bad. We're stumbling around in the dark, bickering at each other to try to establish some sort of goddamn pecking order, and pretending we've got some mission that's going to save the fucking world. It's damn funny when you think about it, because chances are we'll all be dead before any of this shit we're talking about will matter to anyone. And the fuckers who come after us will just change it all again anyway, because they'll have final say in how things will be done.

GUIDANCE

We must leave a legacy for those who will follow us. Some among us believe that we are not the first of our kind. Others believe we are. It does not matter, in my opinion. What does matter is that we have found no tomes or instructions to teach us. Any initiated who came before left us nothing. We must change this. We must not leave our descendants to fumble in the dark as we do.

In normal life, we build security throughout our lives in hopes of passing it over to our children and grandchildren. We give our wisdom. We teach. In more ancient times, we raised walls and ramparts to protect our families. We made the walls tall and strong. We acquired lands. We saved for the dowries and inheritances. We must continue to do this, now, for the initiated who will come after us. If we do not, our battles and our deaths mean nothing.

We must form a community of ourselves. We are the forefathers. Those who will come after us will live or die by the standards that we provide. Here, on the Internet, we have begun this process. Through making

contact and sharing our histories, experiences and successes, we strengthen, we *organize*.

I do not think I have ever heard anyone describe us by that word, *Organization*. It has two meanings. Perhaps we should try to fulfill the two.

Already I see some factions who are forming from the many different viewpoints expressed on the lists. Many of us here believe that our mission is to protect. I fall in this category. However, among us there are other factions that split us even further.

ISOLATIONISTS

Some among us believe that Armageddon is upon us. These people keep their own little section of the world safe, to hell with the rest of us. I have heard them called *recluse*. They build their fortresses in the mountains, in the forests or in fortified buildings in the city. Like badgers, they burrow down and come out fighting only when a predator threatens their territory. They intend, from what I have heard, to simply weather the storm, to survive. Hannibal is like this. Consider the paranoia and insular thinking of his posts.

In truth, I have had moments where I thought that these initiates, even Hannibal, were correct. During these times when I had the most fear, I wanted nothing more

Subject: Re: Why

From: dzidzat155

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

It is true that heaven and earth are not in balance, and that frightening creatures of hell walk the land. We Chinese have always lived with demons, though. It is the way of the ages.

Perhaps my uncle's training as a fang shi gives me a different perspective than even most citizens of Hong Kong, but I find it most gratifying to see the people of the West grappling to comprehend that the beasts of Yin and Yang have been there all along. Even though I too fight them, it does my heart good to see the shoe on the other foot!

With help from my uncle I have banished several kwei ghosts from my neighborhood for fear of what they might do to my family. I do not understand though the mindset of killers like Hannibal. The spirits are everywhere. As he would so colorfully say, "get used to it."

Since the Great Ancestors have spoken to me I feel like we are meant to restore balance, not commit murder. Things have fallen from balance, and as the Ancestors told me, it is the fault of the fallen shen. We have been chosen to restore that balance. Harmony must first be restored at home, then beyond.

This is not always done by destroying beasts. The creatures are necessarily creatures of imbalance. Restore the balance of your home and the evil creatures will no longer feel at peace there. They will flee, change or die. This can be accomplished in mundane means. Cleaning, aligning yourself and dwelling with the forces of nature, being kind to one another, honoring your traditions, and responsibilities, restoring your faith — all of these ways are more effective than using weapons.

than to lock the windows, pull the shades and barricade the door. Who am I to say that these people will not be the only ones standing when all is finished? Perhaps they will crawl from their burrows one day to find the smoking heap of rubble. The irony is that when that happens, their responsibilities will be even greater than they are now. The badgers will have to rebuild, each on his own, for each will fear and retreat from all others.

PRIORITIES

Sure, we got some sort of major job to do here. You might think it's to nix all these bowel-sucking bastards. Well, I disagree. You assume a hell of a lot if you think that. The biggest mistake any of us could make is that we can kill them all off. We can't. We won't. The smarter we get, the smarter they'll get. They'll eventually go underground. Yeah, so humanity has gotten really good at wiping out whole species, but most of those didn't know their assholes from a hole in the ground. They didn't know any better than to eat packing peanuts. If it don't taste good, don't eat it. That's why humans are near the top of the food chain. We got brains.

Problem is, so do these rotted, creeping, witch bastards. They're not dumb and they've got time on their side. Some day, they're gonna get wise to us and then we'll be up shit's creek. That's why we have to plan ahead. We have to gather info on these bastards before they figure out what we're doing, before they start feeding us false information or cutting off our sources altogether. Before they get proactive on our asses. We gotta choose very carefully what we protect and how.

Me, I got my house. I'm not an "isolationist," like Oursine would have you believe. I work with a group of hunters from time to time, but I do have my hands full with this place. Other people got their own troubles. We can't all take care of everything and everyone. We've got to set fucking priorities. My priority is my house.

But, believe it or not, I agree we should share what we know. We should help each other out when we can. I emphasize when we can. There's plenty of people out there like us who do nothing but help. It's what they do. You need help, go to them. I haven't got time for you. Those guys seem to think helping is their duty, or their "treasure," as Oursine says.

The future's in our hands. It's here. It's now, and it's got a bad attitude. When you cut out a tumor, some good cells have to go, too. That's life. The other choice is to leave the cancer where it is or only get part of it. I'll tell you, this ugly, fucked-up lump of clay that we call the present is going to become either a piece of art or an ugly, fucked-up vase. But we have to trim off some of the excess. That's about as poetic as I get. You know what I mean.

PURISTS

Some initiates who recognize the importance of security and safety believe that we are the future, to hell with the rest of humanity. They choose to guard only those who have been initiated. They protect their own futures. They have agendas that finish ultimately with our kind on the throne of the world. Benevolent royalty.

Maybe they are right. Maybe this is our destiny. I do not know. Perhaps the time will pass and more and more of us will initiate. And eventually, all survivors will be capable of that which we are. Maybe we are only the first. We can choose who persists and who does not. Some among us believe that we have the duty to eliminate the undesirables from this population of humans who, one day, will awaken. They could be right. Can you imagine what our powers might be like in the hands of a Milosevic or the American John Wayne Gacy?

DETERMINISYS

Still others on this list seem to conclude that our change has no rhyme or reason other than to bring more chaos to our lives. They think that either some gods somewhere amuse themselves with us, or nothing has any meaning. According to them, the future is not only unwritten, but something will arrive to throw even the best

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: soyboy134

Subject: Re: Why?

I would like to thank Oursine for her /long/ and in-depth treatise. I want to comment on one section of what she said. The world took a considerable turn the day you had your Dream, saw your first lobo and took up the cross, but you're no god. Just because it's new to you doesn't mean it's new to the world. The Big Six have been in here for a long time, looking for the last pure soul. We're just now finding out that we're not at the top of the food chain anymore.

And Hannibal, before you go off being a vigilante, you better figure out exactly what the hell's going on.

Maybe there's a reason nobody left behind a guidebook on how to be one of us. We have to find out what's going on before we start making plans for the future. Who knows, maybe the Big Six dreamed us up themselves, just to have a few toys around to make their lives less boring. Must get damn dull hunting sitting ducks. Ever consider the possibility that we're playing right into their hands with our zealous over-protectiveness? I bet they're laughing their asses off as they watch us run around like children playing Dundee. What does that say about our future?

plans into chaos. These initiated have the values the most complex that I have ever seen. They even conclude that they will fail one day for some unforeseen coincidence or bizarre occurrence. But still they persevere in trying to protect the people and things to which they hold tight.

SELF-RULE

We must establish our own laws. Normal society rules do not apply to us. We cheat. We steal. We kill. Our initiations have put us above the laws dictated by our legislators. For this reason, we must create our own regulations regarding what behaviors we will accept and the ones we will not. Dole has already begun to do this in creating Vigil to protect us from ourselves. All organizations must have some laws.

This one is still too young to fully know what sorts of crimes our people might commit against us, but again, we have already seen some examples. It was an initiate who betrayed one of our own in Baghdad for to advance his own political goals. Another initiate lost his control and killed twelve people in a *marché* in Munich. In America, an initiate changed his loyalties and became a mercenary who would work for anyone that paid him, including the monstres.

Me, I believe that we have a responsibility to punish and eliminate our betrayers. They endanger us all in many ways. We are still human and thus susceptible to blackmail, grief, rage, insanity and greed. This organization must send a message that betrayal and inhumane behavior are not tolerated. Our future depends on it. We must protect ourselves from ourselves. We entrust ourselves to everyone on this list and presume that they will maintain its security, but what are we going to do as someone betrays us?

First we should ensure that this does not happen. We should protect ourselves. One way to do this is to express very little tolerance for those who do betray us. Such a person should face repercussion that



matches the degree of the crime. The repercussions will perhaps deter another from doing the same.

MORE AND LESS

I will die. All of us will. I hear footsteps on the stairs outside and I ask myself if the killer will knock first or simply break down the door. The telephone rings and I wonder who is looking to see if I am at home. I stand at the window, see a shadowy figure and wonder since when it has watched me. This is not a good life.

DOES IT MATTER?

Some day we're all gonna kick the bucket. Whether it's in our sleep or on the end of some fucker's fangs. It doesn't matter how it happens so much as what you were doing before it happened. Personally, I choose not to spend my life worrying about what everyone else is doing. I take care of yours truly. I make sure I've got my shit together and expect everyone else to do the same. If every person in the world kept their own noses clean, instead of sticking it up other people's butts, we'd have a much tighter world.

GOALS

I studied at university a course that relayed different methods of time management. The one bit of advice that the teacher repeated over and over was to write down your goals. He told us that for better to understand where we were going, we had to establish short, mediate term and long goals. We must, together, determine our goals and all follow them.

We must decide what we want to pass to our descendants for the future, and we must call our enemies by their names. If we do this, we will know what to guard

and what to reject. We, the guards, must maintain the foresight to do this for all the others who have only revenge or blood-lust in their hearts. We are the only ones who can retreat a step, count our blessings and recognize the advance of our enemies from afar. We plan. We construct our defenses. We do not rush for the joy of the kill. We have the perspective that the others of our kind lack. The duty to set goals is ours.

In this time, some among us want to keep their duties small. I can not blame them for this. It is difficult to think about saving the world. All of the world. This thought makes me afraid. My hands are so occupied that I do not know if I will ever manage to do anything, show any great truths. This is the reality. Yes, we must have our personal goals. We know them at our initiations—family, friends, hopes. Every one is different. Everyone is perhaps of equal import. Would we die to protect them? Some among us would.

But, is there some things that are as important as our charges? Me, I think that yes. I think that we can protect our personal treasures, but we must always remember that we do it not for the prize itself, but for all people. Why bear our burdens? Why protect them? For humanity in all. What good is a house? Hannibal protects his to keep it from the hands of our enemies. Why? So that they can not use it against us, to preserve it for humanity. And so, Hannibal has killed some of the people for who he is protecting his house. He has forgotten the purpose of the protection.

We must not do this. It will finish badly for us if we do. No treasure is worth harming people. We must always remind ourselves of the final goal.

OUR PLAN

I have made a list of thinking that I believe will help us to make ourselves a success. Perhaps that the order is

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: soyboy134

Subject: Justice

With regard to killing criminals as well as the Big Six, I get very uncomfortable when people start talking like they're judge, jury and executioner. Who are we to measure these people that way? Haven't you ever heard of the wrongly accused? What if one of us goes off the deep end and kills someone's father just because his daughter accused him of touching her wrong? What if that kid was just pissed because her father wouldn't let her go away on holiday with her friends? This kind of thing makes me very nervous.

We have judicial systems for a reason. Just because we have strengths doesn't mean we aren't a part of human society anymore. Vigilante justice is what they call what you're talking about. What if you're wrong about somebody?

It's damn hard to be wrong when you see somebody's skin peeling off or when they have forked tongues or goat's hooves. Those are the enemy, no doubt about it. Kill those wankers. But among humans, it isn't that simple. Just ask any attorney or judge. We, the human race, have worked for generations to establish our legal systems, and we still don't have it exactly right. So what makes you think you're so special that you can judge these people on your own?

not exactly perfect, but this gives us something on which to reflect. We must make these things our goal.

1. Discover your charge. This seems the first step for many of us. It happens naturally. These are the people or places that we cherish and devote our lives to saving. They must endure for our future generations, and to sustain our sanity in the new world revealed to us.

2. Embrace your treasure. To do any other is to deny yourself. Do not hate your wards because fate has chosen you to protect them. Do not give yourself to resentment. Our charges are vulnerable, and so very important to us. If not, we would not be needed to guard them. Each is precious, whether it is your family, friends, nationality, race, neighborhood, village, a whole city or even a philosophic concept. Small or large, touchable or only imaginable, it makes no difference, your treasure is the reason for your initiation.

3. Establish every defense for your charge. There are people who can advise you how to do this. There are people who will help. But the most important thing to remember, it is that you are an extension of your treasure. If you do not survive to guard it, then it is imperiled. Your defenses must protect you as well.

4. Know yourself. We have all some special talents. You are different from me. I am different from some others. We must all find our strengths and weaknesses, how far we are willing to go in saving our prizes, and when we will sacrifice them. It is necessary that you be honest to yourself about this. Know your limits, physical, mental and moral.

5. Know your enemy. There are so many. I know. Perhaps what you must learn most is how far the creatures are willing to go to have your treasure. If you cherish your family, the monstres may want them no more than any other person. Or you might hold some-

thing of extreme importance to the creatures, and they want it, and you as a result. If you wish to save your prize, you must know what the monstres will do to have it, and you must do more to stop them.

6. Prepare for loss. You must do this so that it does not work like a weapon against you. We will have much loss. I do not doubt it. Already, I see much sadness in my life. I lose friends, family and even some strangers that make me cry. You too, will lose some people. Do not let the monstres use this to weaken you. You may even lose that which you protect. Though this will be hurtful, you still live on. There will be much more in the world still to save, and the world still needs your vigil.

7. Share your knowledge and wisdom. We are stronger together than apart. Let us all share what we know and what we learn. Every morsel of information regarding the monstres that we understand is a stone in our wall.

8. Embrace those who stand with you. There are some among us who would die to protect you. We must never forget it. If one of us needs help, do not refuse him. One day, you may need help and then you will find yourself alone. If we are going to construct the most solid defenses, then we must stand hand in hand against the monstres.

Remember, though, that to die for the cause without winning the war can be fruitless. You may die to save your charge this day, but it is left defenseless tomorrow. And who will take up your cause when we each have our own? There is word among the lists of initiated prepared to give of themselves for *every* cause, but these people can have no treasures. If they did, they would know to choose their battles.

9. Establish every defense for those who stand with you. I think that we are all agreed that we must guard our anonymity. The future depends on it. The day will arrive that some one among us will be discovered. It is already happened several times. We must never betray our peers. Never. This, it is the ultimate sin.

10. Discover the greatest treasure: humanity. One day, we must understand that we battle for humanity. Our personal ideals are important, oui, but we finally guard them for other people to enjoy. We must not lose sight of the importance of people.

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Repercussions

There's a big difference between security and the charges against Hannibal. I don't see where he has put any of the rest of us at risk in any way. He hasn't betrayed any of us. If anything, he went out of his way to keep Oursine from getting hurt at his place.

I can sure agree that we need to punish anyone who betrays us. Very seriously. Somebody gives us away, fuck 'em. They might as well be on the side of the monsters. Hell, they are on the side of the monsters if they do that. But what do we do about them? Do we kill them?

According to Oursine, we can't kill them, because they're human too. But even though they betrayed us, they're not on our okay-to-kill list? I'm not saying she's wrong, I'm just asking, because I've got some really mixed feelings about it. Personally, I'd be tempted to cut the balls off somebody who sold me out.

Indeed, we must strive in our guardian role to act always in a manner that does not harm people. We must take all precautions for to ensure that our activities do not endanger the children, both young and old. They do not know what they do when they help the monstres. They do not deserve to die for it. We are cunning. We can find other methods to make them see the evil they aid.

10-STEP PLAN FOR DYING

Oh, isn't this neat! The ten steps to dead! Jesus, Oursine, do you realize how stuck-up you sound? Christ. You talk a bunch of talk, but there's so much bullshit flying that you can't see enough to walk the walk.

1. **Discover your charge.** You think you're talking to kindergartners? Please, people! Tell me! Am I the only one who thinks Oursine is the most condescending bitch you've ever heard?

2. **Embrace your treasure.** That's right. Don't hate your loved ones, people. Don't resent them. They're vulnerable. So, here's a prime example of where Oursine contradicts herself. According to her, our valuables are really, really, really fucking important, but don't kill anyone to protect them. That's bad.

3. **Establish every defense for your charge.** Blah, blah, blah. More of the same. But mostly, protect yourself. Isn't that what you're saying, Oursine? Don't kill nobody. Don't get killed. But don't let anybody take away what's important to you, either. Like anybody ever could steal away your precious ideology. You still haven't noticed that the press was whipped a long time ago.

4. **Know yourself.** Really, Oursine. You should have a Saturday morning kid's show or something. Know yourself? Men are from Mars? Women are from Venus? I love you. You love me. We're a happy family.

5. **Know your enemy.** Thanks for the advice, Miss Oblivious.

6. **Prepare for loss.** Prepare to lose bank managers too, because if any more work for the enemy and fuck with me, they're going down.

7. **Share your knowledge and wisdom.** Allow me to translate Oursine's message for you: Share your knowledge and wisdom, unless it conflicts with mine.

8. **Embrace those who stand with you.** I really have to laugh at this one. Oursine's hypocrisy stands on its fucking own: "One day, you may need help and then you will find yourself alone. If we are going to construct the most solid defenses, then we must stand hand in hand against the monstres." Wanna hold my hand, Oursine?

9. **Establish every defense for those who stand with you.**

Oursine: We must never betray our peers. Never. This is the ultimate sin. Me: And especially, don't ever give clues to another hunter's location!

10. **Discover the greater treasure: humanity.** So we're supposed to hold the hand of all people, even the ones who betray us to our besiegers? Spare the rod and spoil Oursine's "child," I say.

SACRIFICES

Not all of us are saints who are initiated. We're people first, but we try to be saints because we can't watch while harmless people are hurt and tormented by the monstres. Being human means making the mistakes. My friend who was killed was not always so kindly or even virtuous, but she looked upon the initiation as a second chance from God. She died choking on her own severed fingers.

I apologize for being as morbid. I am cold at the inside. My friend is dead, but men like Hannibal continue to commit horrors and justify them with self-righteousness. I am disgusted by this. Can we allow these things to occur without censure? I say no. We must hold ourselves to a higher measure.

We make the example for those who follow. We are the first. It is a vast responsibility, oui. But I have some confidence that we can lift ourselves to it. Consider what I have said. I beg you. We must establish our code of honor, of morals and of expectations — for our future.

A WASTE

This whole "trial" isn't doing us any good. All I ever fucking wanted was some place where I could get online and get some information or something.

FINAL JUDGMENT

From: dole7

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Hannibal137 — Judgment

Bugger it all. I hate having to do this, but Hannibal is off the list.

The vote went as follows:

- 4 Not Guilty
- 3 Guilty — Level 1
- 2 Guilty — Level 2
- 6 Guilty — Level 3

Four more refused to vote at all.

I sent him private mail, so he is not even reading this. Not out of spite, but for our own protection I attached a nice little document containing a virus. It will seek out any and all Vigil-related material on his hard-drive and corrupt it. But to be safe, you must all change your passwords and I will dump all the mail in one hour. I have also warned my counterparts on hunter-net and will post a message as to our decisions to all the other hunter lists I know of. In the wake of this disaster, we need some people to come up with better rules on how to work through a cock-up like if this happens again. Or should I say when? I will not serve on that committee.

I didn't sign on for this shit. I would've stayed on hunter-net if the pussies weren't so rampant there, squealing that we have to talk to the witches and try to save them! I thought I would find better here, where people seemed to know how to stand their ground. Too bad I'm not a masochist or I might get off on the criticism and threats. Which reminds me, Coach. Go ahead and tell your precious cop to come after me if she's got the balls. Traitor.

I'm tempted to just get off this list on principle, but I have a feeling there are some here who understand what I've been talking about all this time. You've got to know what's yours, what's important, and not let any fucking critter take it. So I'm gonna ride this out. But Dole, you have no say over me. Kick me off. See if I give a shit. There's plenty of others out there who don't wear silk boxers and who don't expect that the world's gonna bow down to them. All this trial has done is split us up and made some of you look like complete idiots.

I got my responsibilities and they don't include wiping your asses.

DECISIONS

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: coach41

Subject: Re: Vote Form

I've been trying to keep it cool in this free-for-all, but I've had it. Just because someone has some morality left after the calling scares the crap out of you, doesn't it Hannibal?

I bet you've been itchin' to turn loose on the "ignorant dorks" all your cowardly life. Now someone's given you power and purpose and you've turned into one of /them/ — a monster ready to kill regular people. You've never come out with proof that the employees at your bank were working with the enemy. I don't think they were. They were just doing their jobs, and that meant saying "no" to you. So you killed them. You killed the band at the football game.

Dole, here's my vote: Hannibal's guilty as sin itself.

> ☒ Guilty/Level 3 Anathema — 6 points

> Result: Permanent removal from vigil.list@hunter-net.org and warning to the wider community of the hunter's danger to the cause.

My only regret is that Dole's list of punishment only goes to three.



CHAPTER 4: HUNTER TIES

Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.

— Psalms 82:3

JURY OF PEERS

From: dole7

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Hannibal137

If you have been to hunter-net, you know we are getting our bollocks flattened. Hannibal is on that list and people there are flaming our asses for kicking him out. Someone even asked Hannibal to join another one called Firelight.

As promised in our list of punishments, I have been in touch with the techies at hunter-net, but they have no plans to throw Hannibal off. They see their role as "support only." To me, that means they will not stand up for what they believe is right. Screw them. They cannot switch off a light without "procedural review."

Not everyone on hunter-net is a blighter, though. Some applaud our efforts to "police our own" and protect people from "wackos" (not that I want that job). Some have even sworn to bring Hannibal to justice. I'm not sure how I feel about that.

You may want to check out the following thread, as exemplified by:

>**Subject:** RE: Defeatists

>**From:** memphis68

>**To:** Hunter.list@hunter-net.org

>I can't believe these self-righteous "protectors." Personally, I think

>the term "defeatists" is much more appropriate. Can't they see

>they're playing into the hands of the creatures by selling out their

>brothers? Now's the time to be fighting the enemy, not each other.

>Hannibal, I'd be happy to have you at my back. Screw the rest of them.

VOICES IN THE DARK

One thing we could say for Hannibal, he was one of the most vocal posters to this list — almost as frequent as our own esteemed Oursine. Believe what you might about Hannibal's methods, his posts at least inspired thought and generated communication. Better that someone post something — almost anything — than there be a deafening silence while the rest of us see to our own charges. To facilitate communication, I have asked Cabbie22, one of our enduring members, to offer her thoughts on the watch, and in light of recent events, her impressions on our own relations. Many of you seem to respect her opinions, she has proved frank and sincere in the past, and she appears to have a strong sense of community, whether it's her own or this one.

THE HUNTER COMMUNITY

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: coach41

Subject: Hunter Organization

Responses to the "Hannibal solution" on hunter-net have helped reinforce several opinions about us that I bet most of you share. First, distinct groups of hunters seem to be forming, apparently differentiated by our perspectives on what's important in our mission and how we should go about it. Second, we need to get organized or we're going to be dragged into the largest schoolyard brawl ever. I'm not talking about fighting monsters. I'm talking about fighting each other! Third, if we're able to define and organize ourselves, we need to come up with better ways of dealing with problems like Hannibal when they arise. I hate lawyers as much as the next guy, but we need laws, police and judges. Dole was right about that all along, and Hannibal paid the price.

We're not all the same. I bet your reaction to that is something like, "Sure, but what's your point?" That in itself is a damn big realization if you think about it. Hunters are /not/ all the same. We seem to have different positions to play on the same team — just like members of a football team. Everyone appears to have a job to do.

We have offensive squads and defensive squads. And within those groups we appear to have smaller, more precise jobs, like receivers and line backers. Get it? Whomever "the owners" may turn out to be, they have assigned us different roles. Perhaps most importantly, I believe they have selected certain people to "imbue," the ones who best suit the positions that need to be filled.

Look at the recent discussions on our list. There has been a lot of talk about the strange abilities that most of us seem to have. There's a bunch of us here, but those of us who find a natural appeal for the "charge" or "custody" concept form the core of the group. We have some similar outlooks, despite how far we're willing to pursue them (Hannibal and Oursine are good examples of opposing ends on the same defensive line). So I wonder how similar our individual capabilities are, too. It's time for us to share our abilities, to find out just how different and similar we are. Maybe like a defensive squad, we can train to work as a team, helping us to better protect the people we cherish.

But before we can work on tactics or training, we need to know who's in our squad and who's in the others. We should try to learn our (and their) abilities, personalities, strengths and weaknesses. If nothing else, we have to know who will be a security risk in our struggle, who will help us protect our charges and who will turn their backs on them - and us.

DEFENDERS

I can't help but think of us as the team's defense. We have people, places and things at heart when we get in the game. Not to diminish the war being fought against the creatures of the world, but perceiving it as a game and us as the "D" is the best analogy I can think of. We stop the other team from getting at our zone, the things we hold most dear. I've also heard us described as protectors, guardians and sentries. It's all the same, in the end.

To me, we are the obvious choice to organize the others, to be team captains or even coaches who also play. Only we have the correct perspective on the hunt. We're kind of like a goalie. We look at the whole game, wherever the action is on the field or ice, and see who's doing well on our team, and who among the enemy is getting the upper hand. When they do, it's our job is to eliminate the creatures, the ones that pose the greatest threats to our communities, and we set traps for the ones stupid enough to mess with us. We defend the defenseless.

OUR ROOTS

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: We the people...

You know what pisses me off? From time to time I hear some of you talk about us being something other than human, that we're not people. I have a message for you all: We are human. I defy anyone to prove otherwise. We were all born from a normal mother and father, whether we were wanted or not. We all grew up, some went to school, and we all learned that life is not fair, but you get to live, if only for a little while.

I cannot and will not believe that the change that has come over us now makes us something other than we've always been. Just because God or something we don't understand has touched us, doesn't mean we've risen above or fallen below what we used to be. We're still our parents' children, and that makes us still human. If you ever forget that, you need to put the hunt aside. Everyone who still understands his or her own mortality and inherent goodness has what it takes to fight for mankind as a whole. If you lose sight of the need to protect people because you are a person, you haven't risen or fallen, you've just forgotten what you really are.

AVENGERS

The easiest group to spot is the one defined by folks like Hannibal137, Crusader17 and even Dana, my partner. They tend to be the ones who run in with guns blazing. I admire their decisiveness and to an extent their aggressiveness, but some of them seem psychotic and end up risking the lives of the people we've been called to protect.

I think I've encountered two kinds of these hunters. I call them loose cannons and running backs.

People like Hannibal and Crusader17 strike me as loose cannons. They're wanton killers. Many of these hunters are no more than drive-by shooters. These idiots don't care if they have to kill people to get at the monsters beyond. Hannibal talked this way, but at least he also thought he had something to save and protect. He just went too far. What's the point of our duty if we kill those we've been sent to protect?

There can be no peace between loose cannons and us. Unless we can show them the errors of their ways, I anticipate even more confrontations with these freaks. If radical hunters like this continue to appear, I see us having to protect our loved ones and ourselves from /them/ in the future. That might mean fighting our own kind - offense turning on defense while the other team "scores."

Way I see it, we can't turn our backs on the enemy or the loose cannons. If a confrontation with our own must occur, we have to wait till the enemy is on the run. We can always resolve our "differences" with maniacs later, in the locker room.

Running backs are another kind of offensive hunter on our team, but they seem to have some perspective on the game, and some utility as a whole. They're gung-ho, but at least they know they're killing for a reason. They're aggressive, but disciplined. They can work with others by being fed the ball, receiving a pass or even subbing for the QB. My partner Dana is the best of this squad I've ever met. Although she's not on hunter-net, she agreed with what we did to Hannibal. She would gladly have taken him in.

Don't expect running backs to understand us completely, though. Sometimes they keep running plays after the whistle's blown. I once saw Dana pursue a rot relentlessly, even after we drove it from town. The danger was over, but she couldn't stop. She came back days later, arm in a sling and bruises all over her. She came out on top, but it was like she won the game and then went after the other team's families in the stands.

Running backs are first-string players. Heap a little responsibility and glory on them and they'll work their asses off to win. A good coach knows how to rein them in when they get too fired up. Running backs must learn that they have to bow to the goals of the team; the ball isn't always fed to them. If you give them too much room, chaos and death will follow. With our perspective on the watch, we're the ones to give these people direction.

From: oursine113

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: The View from the Battlements

In our discussions, we have often said that which we think of the monstres, but we do not often say that which we think about us. So now, we start to talk because of Hannibal and me. Me, I think that this is good. We start to look at what makes us different. Different as a group, because Dole chose us from among all the others for our similarities in philosophy. Different as individuals, because we have shown here that even among us who are here we have various opinions regarding important matters.

How can a group so diverse ever begin to make strides toward being unified? Me, I think we can because we are all of agreement on one thing. We all seem to know that our ultimate goal is to protect humanity. Non, it is not so simple as that. We dispute the methods and to which extremes we may go to protect them. This diversity will, in the end, either destroy us or make us more strong. Me, I prefer to believe that it makes us more strong.

I also believe that when it is all done and the monsters are gone, those like us will be still here. I am not very certain of the others. They are rash and quick to run into the unknown. This is not our way. It should not be our way. We build our fortresses, our castles and our ramparts, and we reject the enemy when he comes to attack. But it is not so simple as that, either. I understand.

Despite the critique that some among you have given me, I will not regret what I have said about Hannibal. The votes say that the majority agrees with me. This is democracy.

A good defense begins at home. We must protect ourselves. If no, then who will protect the people?

INNOCENTS

Some of our most vocal supporters on hunter-net have been hunters I call bush leaguers. These folks seem nearly as defenseless as most people. From what I've heard, they don't fight very well, and can even excuse creatures' crimes or attacks! We cannot accept this. We can't just turn the other cheek while our charges are threatened, but at the same time we can't let these folks become victims.

You have to be very careful when dealing with bush leaguers. I wouldn't count on them to back you up, at least not yet. I'm not saying they're untrustworthy. They just haven't had the experience we have and don't know how to react to the dangers we respond to instinctively or strategically. They're in the "minors." Hence my name for them.

Personally, I think these imbued need to be protected as much as people who haven't heard the call. These are our pro players of the future. They'll take our place when we fall. Or maybe we're meant to make peace with some creatures, the ones that don't try to ruin what we stand for, and these folks are supposed to show us the way. I must admit, Father X never did anything but help me.

JUDGES

I would call these people refs, but they're not. Anyone who thinks they know it all, doesn't. No one likes to be arbitrarily told what to do and when to do it. Unfortunately there are some among us who are all too quick to do that. At least referees have rules to work by. These hunters seem to make up the rules as they go.

Now, some of these folks have great insights into the weaknesses of creatures. Like the core group on /this/ list, they plan their strikes against creatures, but often as not they're likely to call off an attack or change their minds. I don't know what drives their decision-making, but once you call a play, you can't take it back. The plan should be simple: First deal with the creatures that pose the most threat to our values. Then remain on guard for any future threats.

I strongly suggest you take what these people say with a grain of salt. I've met one guy in person whom I would lump into this group. I'll call him the Colonel. He's on the city council of a small town near Atlanta. From what he said, the Colonel found out about me from the assault case that surrounded my calling. I don't know what tipped him off, but he first contacted me when they were raking me over the coals about what happened. He really helped at first. He recommended a good lawyer and helped me understand what I had become.

A few weeks later he introduced me to Dana. The Colonel had a lot of connections and money, but definitely wanted to run the show. For a while Dana and I followed his lead, but he didn't lead from the front. That eventually wore on us. What really blew me away was that he didn't deal with hunter-net. In fact, he considered folks there outsiders. Something about too scattered to be of much use!

We called it quits after two months, and the Colonel never batted an eye. Dana says he thinks we're going to come crawling back to him. I don't know. He was a great help at first, but then his true colors started to show.

I haven't heard from him since.

MARTYRS

"Kamikazes" is the only word I can think of to describe hunters who seem hell-bent on their own destruction. What troubles me about these

people is not the impulse for self-sacrifice — any of us can understand that feeling. What I question are their motives. Some of these people's effort seems to come from the same self-absorbed mania that inspires many teenage suicides — an inability to look beyond the immediate concerns of self. Their own motives and feelings become their only driving force, skewing their perspective. They don't want to accomplish any goal or save anyone. They just seem to throw themselves headlong into trouble and hope for the best, without even knowing what that will be.

Strangely, some of these people seem to like the pain they inflict on themselves. I hope we can turn their heads to focus on the true mission, but I'm not sure it's possible. Dana introduced me to a woman named Clarise that fits into this kind. I won't work with her anymore after what happened. Nor do I think I can protect her from whatever possesses her to throw her life away.

Dana tries to keep tabs on a group of monsters somehow attached to an army/navy store north of Atlanta. She thinks the folks there work for or hide the creatures that were part of her awakening. All I know is the papers reported that wild dogs killed a bum behind a bank downtown. Dana was doing undercover work or something and witnessed the attack. She says they weren't dogs, and that the "victim" wasn't a bum. Whatever they were, the things were fighting it out. She didn't know who was what, so she went for them all. She hurt some, some hurt each other and the pack's target was killed.

A month after we met, Dana introduced me to Clarise. Dana had tracked the bum's trail to this store, and wanted the two of us to come with her. I don't think Dana knew then what Clarise was capable of. When we arrived at the place, Dana went inside while the two of us waited. We could see Dana talking to some guy. It all seemed harmless enough.

That's when a shitty old truck pulls up. This ratty looking redneck is behind the wheel. He looks at Clarise and I like we've got the plague, and sees Dana inside flashing her badge to the storeowner. By that time I was starting to get a sense of when to look more /carefully/ at people, and I gave him the look. There was definitely something wrong about him. I guess Clarise had done something similar, because she started muttering something like prayers and was staring at the redneck like a mad dog.

That's all the guy needed. He slammed his truck into reverse. I looked to see where Dana was and if she knew what was going on. Meanwhile, Clarise is out the door, screaming at the "guy." But instead of try to grab him through the open window or chase the truck, she throws herself behind it as if she can stop it with her body!

From: oursine113

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: The Lost Soldier

I understand that we all have different strengths that we bring to the struggle. We are an organization of many various beliefs. I recognize that we can not all fight in the same manner. But, I also know that some methods weaken us. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Yet, a chain will hold much more in its arms than a single link. No one among us needs to be alone. Even if you are isolated by your geography, you have methods for utilizing the resources of the complete organization. This email list and the Internet are proof of that.

I believe that we must all try to find the lost guardians who do not know us. We must bring them into the chain. We must help them and go to them when they need aid. They must be able to rely on us just as we rely on them. Not all initiates must be on the Internet, but we should welcome them into our human fold, as people to protect and who help us protect.

She could have died. Fortunately for her, the back tire only ran over her arm. The truck tore off. Dana came running out. I told her to go after the guy while I called an ambulance for Clarise. The ambulance arrived before Dana came back. Whoever that guy was, he had lost her on back roads. The storeowner seemed normal to the sight, and claimed to not know who the redneck was. Dana's been spending a lot of time up north since.

The point is Clarise's suicide attempt. Even if she did stop the truck, there's no telling if we could have done a thing to whoever or whatever that redneck was. And even if we did face him down, were we going to start a fight in broad daylight with all kinds of people driving by? Clarise wasn't thinking five minutes into the future. She just reacted with what little she had — her own body. That's insane. What purpose would her death serve if no one was left to care for the things she did?

REDEEMERS

Bleeding hearts are a very real security risk, but a possible windfall in the long run. I identify these people as the ones on hunter-net who support Hannibal, not because they said he was right to kill everyone in sight, but because they wanted to give him a second chance. They wanted to "cure" him. Do they think the same of the creatures they meet? God, I hope not. They'll get killed. One thing might want to talk, I guess, but another is going to offer its hand while it hides a knife behind its back. We can't forfeit defenseless people's lives while we look for cures for creatures and wacko hunters. That's stealing from Peter to pay Paul.

Maybe if these bleeding hearts miraculously found a cure for creatures, I could see a whole new role for us as protectors. We could actually be proactive, searching for infected things and administering the cure. That way we'd be saving our charges before any danger could be posed to them. That seems pretty far-fetched, though. Learning how to cure monsters and then apply it means getting the upper hand over them. From all the creatures I've seen, and given that we know so little about them, I don't see getting the chance to let my guard down even for a minute. I might go off on a crusade only to find that my family has been killed in my absence.

THE BIGGER THEY ARE...

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Re: The View from the Fortress

I'm not sure what to say to Oursine, though I sure as hell want to say something. She's right that we are all unique. We've all had different experiences. I don't necessarily condone what Hannibal did, but on the other hand, isn't it a little too soon to be kicking our allies out? Oursine says that we must protect ourselves first. Well, that's a really nice thought, isn't it? I'll bet it makes some of you sleep a little better at night that Oursine has condoned self-preservation above all else. It's not so simple.

I recently faced a bloodsucker who was preying on an inner city neighborhood. I suspected who he was — I knew him before. Facing him was one of the hardest things I ever had to do. He was smart, even sympathetic. We had similar ideals. We both wanted the best for the hood, only his vision came at a human price. Mine didn't.

The thing is, I had the time and opportunity to decide how to approach the danger. I could have killed him outright, but then I'd never have known what his plans were. I could have given in to him and supported his bid. But then who would have been there to cover for me? Or I could have heard him out, given him enough rope to swing or hang himself. He made the choice for me, and I did what I had to protect my turf.

The point is, we don't always get to reason through our choices. Sometimes the shit hits the fan and you do



the best you can. I think you were all too hard on Hannibal. In time, you'll know what I mean. You'll have to make some hard decisions, the best ones that you can, and all you'll have is the time it takes pull a trigger.

Sure, we all need to stand up for something or someone, but if you think you won't falter from time to time, your fall will be the farthest.

VISIONARIES

These folks, like bush-leaguers, really need our help. While there was some insightful support for what we did to Hannibal, there was just as much concern for how he went over the edge, and whether the enemy pushed him. I guess this kind of consideration is important to the hunt. After all, it's just that which makes us understand the importance of preserving something in the war, rather than just attacking. Extrapolated out, that kind of thought may reveal the big picture. Thinkers like this may even help us form a stronger online community where situations like Hannibal's can be avoided in the future.

Personally, I wish Dana and I had one of these people in Atlanta. We could do so much more with someone watching our backs and making sure we stayed on course for our goals. The Colonel seemed like that at first, but I don't think he had his head on straight.

Fact is, Dana's pretty good about the detective stuff as long as the monsters are out of sight. It is just hard for her to back down from a fight. Maybe if she knew more of what was at stake in the war, she would find it in herself to step away when necessary. I'd try to talk her down more often, but I don't know that I always have that kind of clarity, especially when I have my own battles to fight.

WHO TO TURN TO

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Helpers

Coach's talk of clarity and knowing others' weaknesses makes me think of something important. We're all human and we're all in this together. Not just you and me and all the rest of you who can read these words, but everyone. Yes, even those who haven't heard the call, gotten the goose, had their pipes cleaned, awakened, initiated or whatever the hell you want to call it.

Okay, so some of you have issues with the idea of letting these people in on the truth. You think they're too weak or too scared to help. Well, I don't know where you get your friends, but I'd say it's time you broadened your horizons. It's like somebody on this list said, there have been people fighting this battle for ages, and in the dark, too. Maybe the cops and doctors and army didn't know what they were up against, but they've been out there busting their humps trying to make this world safe, against really lousy odds. I think we should give them some credit. I mean, hell, what's scarier? A guy with fangs or a guy with a gun?

There's plenty of normal folks out there who have balls. Everyone of us could stand to learn something from "pylons." I learned a lot about guns from a regular guy. No, I didn't tell him what I was going to use them against. He didn't need to know. And that's the point. We should protect the people we love and need, but we should be able to draw support from them, too. They don't need to know the whole truth. They wouldn't understand because they can't see it. However, you can still look to them for moral support, a safety blanket and as a reminder of what life's really about. If they love you back, they'll just trust in you, no matter what happens.

BYSTANDERS

Every teacher has students who seem to know better, yet can't help but screw up. Whether it's drugs, a bad family life or peer pressure, they make the wrong choices and end up in trouble time and again. Life just overwhelms them.

In the same way, there are people who don't stand when they hear the call. They're on the scene when you're imbued. They seem to know what's happening, but they don't /do/ anything. In fact, sometimes they can run away like everyone else. Some of us even call them "runaways," or maybe they just mean "without parents." Either way, these folks may be cowards, but I doubt that all of them are. I think they need our protection and guidance. They may be the "B" team now, but with help and coaching I bet we can turn them into starters. And if not, then hell, we need all the help we can get.

Every teacher who stays in the business has at least one kid who he really knows he helped. Mine was a kid named Kevin. He was a third-time ninth grader when I found out that he could run (so maybe being a "runaway" is actually a good thing). I worked with him after school and got the other teachers to cut him slack in return for some Saturday tutoring by me. Eventually I got him on the track team. By the end of the season, he placed in all three events he competed in. He never won a race, but he tried.

So don't tell me that these people can't be turned around. I don't believe it.

This isn't to say that we need to be parents or big buddies to everyone who /hears/ the call but turns a deaf ear. You can't. Just like teachers, you can help, but at a distance. If you don't, you'll burn yourself out and endanger everyone else by telling too much to someone who might not want to hear, ever. Teachers have to learn this lesson, too. If you try to love every student like your child, you run yourself thin. Pick the likely candidates to bring into the fold, but even then help from arm's length. In the end your "student" has to do the work, and maybe you can help him from runaway to guardian.

To: vigil.list@hunter-net.org

From: cabbie22

Subject: Goonies

Let's talk about us and them. There's a reason we're fighting the monsters. They're them. Humans aren't them. Humans are us. So, it's okay to let the humans help, but let's never forget where that line is drawn.

Coach is right. We're not here to make friends or set any diseased minds straight. The object of this "game" is to keep the monsters, them, at bay. Any of you who disagree with me have no idea what these fuckers are capable of. They're not kids who got a raw deal and need our love and kindness to see the light. They're thinking, plotting, manipulating sons of bitches. The moment you trust them, they stick a knife in your back. Don't think for a moment that they don't have their own goals and their own power hunger. That's what it's all about, you know? Power. They play their little games because it makes them feel like gods. They may put it in pretty words that make them sound like saints, but don't be so naive. You ever been lied to? You ever lied to anyone? It happens. And they're masters.

We haven't even begun to understand what they can do. Every day, someone comes on this list and describes some trick or toy or tool that a monster used to get the one-up on one of us. And we sure as hell don't know why they do what they do. This isn't grade school, people. We can't all just get along. So get over it. Protect your shit first; ask questions later. If you don't, you won't be around to ask anything.



M.G.

CHAPTER 5:

NEW RULES

Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great.

— 2 Samuel 22:36

As a Defender, your character has one of the most difficult roles in hunters' war against the supernatural. He seeks to defeat and even destroy monsters wherever he confronts them, but must always remember the reason that he stood his ground against the abominations in the first place. Your character endures the nightly torments of the watch and subjects himself to the tortures of witnessing evil made manifest because something dear to him is at stake. It might be family, friends, a community, a place or something as intangible as a value — honor, for example. Regardless of what your character cherishes, he recognizes that the only thing standing between that prize and the hordes that would destroy it is him. Your character is the last line of defense.

This self-appointed role is a desperate one because it means absolute dedication to your character's charge. Although he might see an opportunity to strike at the enemy's heart, though he might falter in his stand, though he might see a way to escape his duties, he must always weigh such possibilities against the loss of his treasure. If there's the slightest chance that a pause in his vigil might mean the loss of his prize, the price is too high. The watch must carry on and your Defender must remain resolute.

As a Defender, your character is a proponent of Zeal. His values and purpose lie somewhere between those of the cold and impartial Judges and the wrathful Avengers. Defenders pick sides where Judges weigh options. Defenders consider where Avengers rush in. As adherents of Zeal, Defenders are not alien to the Merciful or Visionary, though. Guardians understand compassion and dedication, like the former, and they recognize the need for planning and purpose, like the latter. After all, if nothing is valued and preserved in the war, why was it fought in the first place?

This chapter is dedicated to the Traits common to and unique to Defenders. It introduces new Archetypes, Abilities, Backgrounds and Edges that you can assign to your character and that the Storyteller may include in the chronicle. Some new Traits and rules are strictly the possessions of protectors, while others become available to the hunter community at large as word of mouth and mutual spread support among the creeds.

CREATING DEFENDERS

Defenders often come from people who value the lasting things in life, not money or power, but family, duty or love. They realize that the loss or compromise of such valuables would leave life empty and meaningless. Champions also tend to have endured or witnessed the ravages of brutality and abuse in their previous lives. They know the psychological as well as physical damage that victims endure. Would-be Defenders know that violence outlasts the initial act, breeding more and spreading like a contagion.

If the best things in the world are to remain, or the world is to be turned from its path of darkness and despair, the cycle of pain and suffering must be broken. Defenders vow to preserve what they have or win back what was stolen, and to make the enemy pay if it's foolish enough to continue its reign of terror.

NEW ARCHETYPES

The following Traits may be added to your game as Natures or Demeanors.

ADHERENT

The Adherent dedicates herself completely to one or a few purposes or hopes in life, and constantly seeks to preserve

or remain true to those values. Her primary focus might be a religion and arranging all actions and beliefs around that institution's tenets; a particular lifestyle, embracing certain behaviors and dismissing others; or a goal, such as becoming a professional athlete and recognized performer. The Adherent doesn't admonish others for behaving or living differently, she simply refrains from practices that don't reinforce her focus. Perhaps only the harsh realities of the hunt can distract an Adherent from her ends, and then only in part.

— Regain Willpower whenever you remain true to your objective against significant adversity.

MEDDLER

A Meddler constantly interferes in the business and activities of others, whether invited or not. She may not even know the people whom she intrudes upon, yet she seeks to get involved anyway. Meddlers often believe they know what's best for others, whether genuinely or not. They often delude themselves into thinking that they interfere to help others to better people's circumstances, but that rationale is often simply a justification to continue their intrusive ways.

— Regain Willpower whenever you can publicly prove that your meddling results directly in positive ends.

MONGER

Greed rules the life of a Monger. She treasures only one thing, be it money, fame or even a particular object. Such a person does whatever is necessary to protect the object of desire, or to obtain it if it's lost. A workaholic business person, an obsessive collector or even a street person with painfully limited possessions are examples of Mongers.

— Regain Willpower whenever you successfully preserve or reclaim whatever you value.

PROVIDER

The Provider may prize work, wealth and friends, but family is paramount to life. When push comes to shove, the welfare of spouse and children comes first. Dedicated parents and loyal sons and daughters are examples of Providers.

— Regain Willpower whenever you preserve your family's well being, whether physically or emotionally.

DEFENDER CAMPS

All Defenders hold something dear in life, and most importantly on the watch. That quality unifies them. What differentiates them is the extremity to which they go to preserve and protect their prizes. For some, the loss of anything other than their charge, including lives and the valuables of other hunters, is a small price to pay. Others might relinquish their treasures if a greater good results, even though the loss may be personally devastating. Finally, some Defenders hold too much dear. They can have trouble saving any one thing because they try to save everything and fail on all counts. These three camps are called aggressive, temperate and tolerant, respectively.

AGGRESSIVE

Aggressive Defenders often concentrate on the attack and operate on the "best defense is an overwhelming offense" theory. In the spectrum of hunter society, they operate somewhere between Martyrs and Avengers. That is, like

Martyrs, aggressive Defenders may be willing to die to defend their charges from monsters, but like Avengers they never lay down their lives without great cost to the enemy.

Aggressives are still Defenders, though. They plan or prepare for assaults, and might retreat if the fight looks hopeless; dying to save a treasure is worthwhile, but futile if others will go unprotected. And yet, these Defenders are more willing than others of their creed to take personal risks to guard their valuables, even to the point of attacking monsters directly and without preparation.

Before the imbuing, these guardians might have experienced or witnessed the terrible price others paid for meekness in the face of cruelty. Maybe they were plagued by deep-seated feelings of impotence in the presence of persecution, which compels them to act now. Aggressives are often cold and aloof. They rarely seek out personal connections; the loss of such would be too great to bear. Their self-appointed charges are often items or places.

Favored Attributes: These Defenders focus on Physical Traits, often Stamina, Strength and Dexterity, in that order.

Favored Abilities: These hunters rely on combat and security-oriented Abilities such as Alertness, Brawl, Endurance (see p. 67), Firearms, Intimidation, Security, Survival and Traps (see p. 68).

Favored Backgrounds: Arsenal, Iron Willed (see p. 71), Resources, Stronghold (see p. 71)

Other Favored Paths: Beyond following the Defense path, aggressive Defenders often take Vengeance edges to aid in fights. The Judgment and Martyrdom paths also have combat applications.

TEMPERATE

Temperate Defenders are not so much defined by their opinions on and methods in the hunt as they are by their lifestyles. These Hunters often seek to preserve their "old" lives after the imbuing. They construct some method to hunt that will not interfere too much with their previous existence (or at least the appearance of it). Living two lives is difficult at best. Most fail in their efforts, because the realities of the calling cannot be denied at any time. The mounting stresses and dangers of the watch simply intrude too deeply on any previous normality. Friendships are strained, loves are tested and jobs are endangered. Yet, successful temperates find their normal lives to be a source of great strength, not a liability, in their stand against the darkness.

Temperate Defenders are a bit more studious than their aggressive brethren. Temperates do not shirk fights, but stand only when the fight is on their terms. These Defenders often grow to become master plotters and tacticians who lure monsters to their doom or ambush them when the enemy least expects it.

These Defenders often treasure family, friends and neighborhoods. The same tendencies/philosophies/beliefs that make them temperate Defenders have also led them to careers in service-oriented professions such as teaching, medicine or emergency assistance. The greatest dilemmas these hunters face is the choice between saving a loved one or neighbor at the risk of more lives or widespread damage. Sometimes the

needs of the many outweigh the needs of the individual, and the temperate Defender must choose who suffers.

Favored Attributes: Temperate Defenders must be very careful, hardy and quick to make decisions. They therefore favor Perception, Stamina and Wits (or Dexterity).

Favored Abilities: These hunters must balance a sense of surroundings with practical skills: Alertness, Athletics, Empathy, Expression, Research, Stealth, Traps.

Favored Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Fraternity (see p. 70), Influence

Other Favored Paths: These Defenders almost always stay within the pure Defense path, straying only into Judgment territory for the capacity to identify supernaturals (Discern) or to capture them (Burden). A temperate character may acquire Vengeance edges when warrior allies are not plentiful enough to finish monsters off. The Visionary path also offers information about creatures that might harm a Defender's treasures.

TOLERANT

Tolerant Defenders are more open to other paths and perspectives than are many other Zealots, and also comprise a wider spectrum of personalities than do other kinds of Defenders. If they had to choose a motto, it would be, "Best to live today to fight another day." Tolerant Defenders are thoughtful, rather like Judges. They plan every stage of a hunt and attempt no action without thinking it through first. Sometimes the easiest solution to a danger isn't right before your eyes, but it reveals itself with consideration, they rationalize. Other creeds—and creed members—sometimes misjudge these Defenders as cowards, but it's more accurate to say that a tolerant is unprepared for a confrontation at that particular time.

Ironically, tolerant Defenders may be the closest of the creed to monsters themselves. That is, these guardians can identify with the dark side of all people. Perhaps their role as Defender is actually an effort to make amends for actions or even crimes committed in the past. Acting rashly in the face of the enemy might rekindle old habits. Alternatively, reckless steps might get a tolerant killed and prohibit him from absolving himself of past sins.

Some of these protectors have no particular treasures other than their own existence. Others deify objects, hoping to find in them purpose or meaning in this confusing new existence. Many are so confused about the nature of the struggle or have such widespread concerns for the world's safety that they do not know who or what to protect. These last tolerant may fight many battles, but they are likely to celebrate few victories. And yet, who will protect the little people and things that are overlooked by other Defenders?

Many tolerant Defenders mistrust the Heralds or at least question them extensively. If hunters are created with a purpose, why isn't it made absolutely clear? No one pays the price for such ambiguity but the defenseless, and they're not even party to the war raging around them.

Many in this camp have careers that involve inquiry, such as psychology, psychiatry, social work, self-help and education.

Even though tolerant Defenders gather reams of information before acting, they are not completely ineffectual on the fly. Push these people into a corner or threaten their

charges directly and they are just as reactionary as Avengers. Indeed, that fiery response is perhaps their greatest strength: People and monsters underestimate them.

Favored Attributes: These Defenders trust their intellect above all else. Perception, Intelligence and Wits are their most common Attributes.

Favored Abilities: Tolerant Defenders explore Abilities such as Alertness, Awareness and Empathy that may help them understand events. Ones that survive learn more practical skills for the watch, such as Dodge, Firearms and Traps.

Favored Backgrounds: Destiny, Exposure, Patron

Other Favored Paths: Tolerant Defenders may take Visionary or Judgment paths to aid them in gathering information and protecting themselves and their charges from monsters. Even the Innocence path, anathema to most Zealots, is acceptable to these camp members.

TRAITS

Defenders are typically territorial in their approach to the hunt. They either draw the enemy into a fight of the hunters' own making, or they keep monsters off their turf at a strategic cost. The execution of these approaches results in the development of or requires new Abilities and Backgrounds. These Traits are not necessarily exclusive of Defenders, but are appropriate to the creed. Other hunters may develop these qualities, but should not at the expense of any protectors' individuality in your troupe. The Storyteller has final say on which hunters have access to these characteristics.

TALENTS

ENDURANCE

"You still up? Did you take Frank's watch, too?"

"No, I took them all. Get the others up. If we're going into that thing's den, we're going in at first light."

Your character has the capacity to withstand long-term exposure to harsh conditions or deprivation of sleep and sustenance. This Ability is particularly helpful for hunters who subject themselves to long vigils, whether guarding family, friends, a neighborhood or simply when following a creature's trail.

Endurance rating determines how long your character can suffer a hardship covered by this Talent. The higher his rating, the longer he can go without sleep, water or food, for example, before you have to make a Willpower roll to persevere. A rating of 1 allows him to go without for 24 hours before a Willpower roll is made. Every point thereafter adds 12 hours to that duration, so that a character with 4 Endurance can go 60 hours before checking for exhaustion or collapse. Characters without this Trait undoubtedly succumb to the abuse long before, as decided by the Storyteller.

Once your character's designated time period elapses, make a Willpower roll to determine if deleterious effects set in. Should an initial roll succeed, your character carries on, but the Storyteller may ask for subsequent Willpower rolls whenever circumstances warrant. Say, your hunter (2 Endurance) goes without sleep for 36 hours. He manages to stay awake even after that period (your initial Willpower roll succeeds), but the

Storyteller decrees that all demanding actions performed thereafter require a Willpower roll to even attempt. Thus, if your character's quarry suddenly comes out of hiding and your hunter wants to chase him, another Willpower roll is required to determine if he even has the strength to try.

The Storyteller decides what the effects of hardship are when they do kick in. Perhaps they're unconsciousness, increased difficulties to actions, artificially imposed wound penalties, or levels of bashing damage. These conditions apply until the hardship is alleviated (your character gets much-needed sleep, eats or finally finds water, for example).

Spending a point of Willpower might forestall hardship-imposed effects for one turn, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Endurance can also replace or be added to Stamina to determine how long your character can hold his breath (see *Drowning*, **Hunter**, p. 207.). The Talent may also be applied to resisting the effects of poisons or drugs.

This Talent cannot be used to ignore wound penalties.

- Novice: You're naturally resilient.
- Practiced: "You Nancy-boys can't take a little overtime? Go on home to mommy!"
- Competent: You would make a good private eye.
- Expert: Sleep is for the weak.
- Master: "Yeah, I've done Everest."

Possessed by: Parents, Marathon Athletes, Members of the Armed Forces, Stoics, Buddhists, Muslims, Blue-collar Workers, Programmers, Detectives

Specialties: Fasting, Holding Breath, Sleep Loss, Work Past Exhaustion

SKILLS

TRAPS

Hannibal stood at the edge of the pit. The rot stared back at him with its remaining eye. Three of the foot-long spikes had found their mark. Another stuck through its left calf. The third had done the trick. It protruded from the left breast of the creature's gray silk suit. Hannibal was lucky.

"My apologies to your tailor," he said, smirking as he unscrewed the cap to a gas can.

While explosives, designer ammo and bizarre edges are certainly more exotic than a good old pit, your character knows the low-tech approach to hunting is still effective. Gravity and inertia continue to rule the day (and night) in this monstrous world, and low-tech traps can surprise even state-of-the-art opponents.

Your character always looks for ways to make these tools and tricks more effective. He searches out lore on monsters' weaknesses, whether classical such as a stake through the heart, or derived from Pinpoint, the level-two Visionary edge. Your character is quick to exploit these flaws, and traps make excellent testing grounds for creatures' weaknesses. It's not too difficult to set up some cameras to record the proceedings.

While not the same as Demolitions, this Skill can be used to set antipersonnel mines, grenade pits or other "pre-packaged" explosives that are used as traps. However, this Ability does not confer knowledge of how explosives work, nor does it allow your character to acquire or build explosives (see **Hunter**, pp. 111 and 207).

There are thousands of types of traps, including gravity ones. These may be pits, chutes or objects that fall on a victim. Some traps involve guns, springs or bows that shoot a victim. Projectiles can also be poisoned. Jaw traps are illegal for most recreational hunting nowadays, but antiques can still be found, and a competent blacksmith or machinist could make a jaw trap capable of snaring a human-sized victim and shattering bone.

While it is definitely easier to dig a pit in the country, an urban setting has its own advantages where this Skill is concerned. Stairs or strategic sections of floors can be weakened from below or above. (A creature might detect a weakened floor beneath its dead feet, but what about the wall or roof about to fall on it?) Derelict buildings burn quickly, stairs collapse, and the combination of electricity and water can have interesting results.

The Storyteller may require that your character possess other Traits or Backgrounds to create some traps. Arsenal might supply military explosives and gas weaponry. Demolitions may be required to create complex explosive traps. Streetwise or Contacts may be necessary to gain firearms or illegal chemicals or pharmaceuticals.

- Novice: That dog-eared copy of *The Anarchist's Cookbook* pays off.
- Practiced: Survivalist freak
- Competent: Armed-forces trainee
- Expert: Navy Seal, Green Beret, Special Forces
- Master: Rambo

Possessed by: Trained Members of the Military, Trappers, Aboriginal Peoples, Wilderness Dwellers

Specialties: Pits, Steel Traps, Snares, Urban, Rural

TRAPS SYSTEMS

Potential trap victims should get a chance to detect the danger before falling prey to it, but only supernatural creatures with active powers of amazing speed or luck have a chance to avoid a trap that has already been sprung. Detecting a trap is a resisted roll. When the trap is set, roll Intelligence + Traps, difficulty 6, and record the results. The Storyteller makes a Perception + Alertness roll, difficulty 6, for a potential victim to recognize the threat. If you, as trappers, have more successes, the victim walks into your pit. The Storyteller can also modify the difficulty of either roll due to conditions such as darkness, rain or availability of equipment (for the trapper). If successes are tied in the resisted roll, the potential victim spots the trap and avoids tripping it.

As for creatures with powers of speed or amazing luck that are active when a trap is sprung, another resisted roll is made. The Storyteller decides what's appropriate for the monster. Perhaps Dexterity + Athletics, maybe with one extra die for each extra action gained that turn for activating a speed power (see the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**, under the appropriate creature's "Power, Speed and Endurance" sidebar). If the creature's successes tie or exceed the trapper's original ones, the monster escapes harm.

Once your character sets a trap, he can't necessarily undo it and try again. (You can't roll Intelligence + Traps repeatedly in hopes of getting a better result. The pit has been dug and

can't be moved two feet to the right, for example.) If your character has plenty of time to plan his creation, however, he can make it as effective as possible. Three days devoted to setting a snare allow him to put it right where it will be most useful. The Storyteller can reduce the difficulty of your Intelligence + Traps roll as he sees fit, but by no more than your character's Traps rating. Thus, the difficulty of your Intelligence + Traps roll may be reduced by up to three if your character has 3 Traps and ample time to create a device. Conversely, the Storyteller may raise the difficulty to set a trap if time or materials are limited.

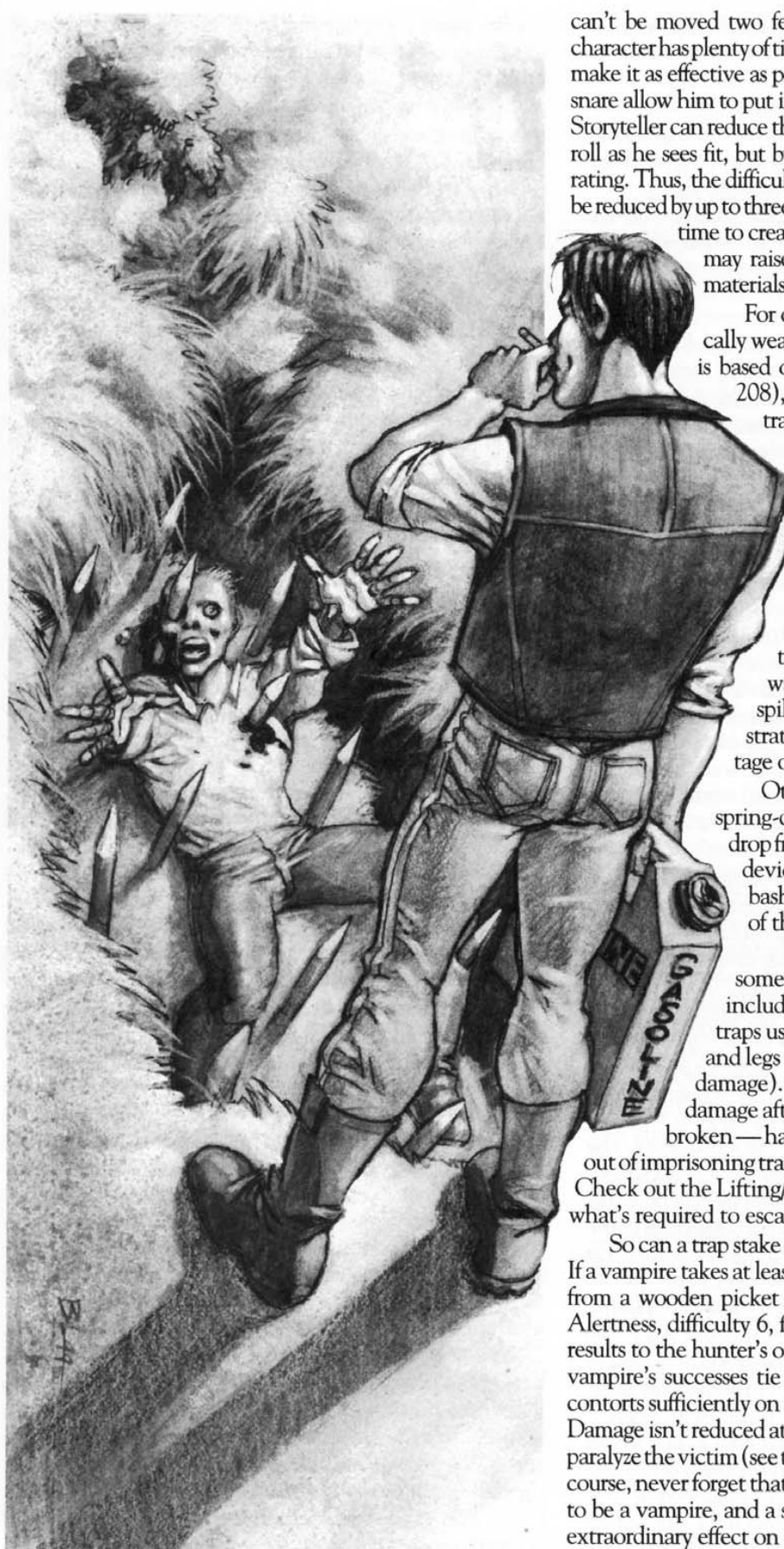
For our purposes, pit traps include strategically weakened structures in buildings. Damage is based on the falling height (see **Hunter**, p. 208), be it a victim dropping into a trap or a trap dropping onto victim. A 10-foot pit trap does two dice of bashing damage.

But line the bottom with stakes and you can add up to three dice and transform the damage from bashing to lethal! (The Storyteller decides whether there's room or opportunity to reduce damage by grabbing objects or by tumbling upon impact.) Variations include fire pits, ones featuring walls lined with downward-pointing spikes to keep the prey inside, and pits with strategically placed spikes to take advantage of a monster's weakness.

Other traps include levers that release spring-driven spikes or blades, and weights that drop from above. Damage from these kinds of devices varies between five and 12 dice, bashing or lethal, depending on the nature of the effect.

Most traps are meant to kill, although some are meant to hold a target. The latter include cages, snares or even mechanical jaw traps used for animals. Jaw traps break ankles and legs with ease (three to eight dice of lethal damage). If they inflict three or more levels of damage after the victim soaks, consider the limb broken — halve movement until healed. Breaking out of imprisoning traps is usually just a measure of Strength. Check out the Lifting/Breaking rules in **Hunter**, p. 183, for what's required to escape.

So can a trap stake a vampire? Yes, but not automatically. If a vampire takes at least three levels of damage, after soaking, from a wooden picket trap, it *might* be staked. Roll Wits + Alertness, difficulty 6, for a vampire victim and compare the results to the hunter's original Intelligence + Traps roll. If the vampire's successes tie or exceed the hunter's, the vampire contorts sufficiently on impact to avoid being properly staked. Damage isn't reduced at all, it's just not distributed correctly to paralyze the victim (see the **Storytellers Companion**, p. 31). Of course, never forget that a zombie or other creature might *seem* to be a vampire, and a stake through its heart might have no extraordinary effect on such a being.



Any trap that punctures the skin can deliver poison (*Hunter*, p. 208). Poison can do one to three levels of bashing damage per turn or scene. The effects last until an antidote is administered. Unfortunately, it is challenging to find a poison that's effective against most monsters, such as the walking dead and vampires. Many hunters have to learn that fact the hard way.

If your Intelligence + Traps roll for setting a device botches, your character might be caught in his own creation.

KNOWLEDGES

TACTICS

Coach waited till the last moment to reveal himself. He darted from behind the dumpster and took shelter next to the rusted-out hulk of a car. His suspicion that the dead thing had an inkling of intelligence proved correct. The dead kid eyed him suspiciously, with what eyes it had left anyway, and faltered momentarily in its approach.

"Come on, you can do it," Coach muttered to himself. The dead student seemed to regain its resolve as it lumbered forward once more. Coach waited a second longer before he darted to the entrance of his grandfather's garage, and slammed the door behind him.

Dana tossed him the shotgun while they both waited, breathlessly. The walking corpse started pounding on the door, shaking it on its hinges. Coach waited for a pregnant pause, then chambered a round loudly. The sound accomplished what he had hoped: The pounding stopped altogether and the dead kid shambled away.

Moments later, Coach heard the sweet crashing sound that he'd hoped for all along. The engine block suspended above the back door came crashing to the ground, pinning the walker under a massive chunk of corroded metal.

"See," Coach said, beaming, "you don't have to be in a game — or have any ammo — to call a play."

Your character has studied strategic and tactical approaches to real-world problems. She is likely to have been a member of the military, the police or other branch of law enforcement or government, or she has simply received or immersed herself in paramilitary training. Combine this Trait with Intelligence to discern the best approach to enter an enemy's lair, either with or without knowledge of what's inside. Apply Tactics to Perception to recognize good places to set ambushes — or to anticipate where the enemy might await your character. Combine Tactics with Wits to recognize the fastest, safest route out of a hot spot or danger. The Storyteller might point out how a Tactics roll applies by indicating the best door to use to gain entry into a building, for example. Basically, you get to ask direct questions of the Storyteller as to the best way to approach a situation, such as the least dangerous route into a bloodsucker's lair. Tactics successes, if any, illuminate advantages, dangers or pitfalls, and the Storyteller may limit information conveyed to the nature of the question asked. The best route into a lair might be through the back loading door, but that doesn't necessarily take into account the puppet watching from the roof.

When Tactics is used to set up an attack, activity or plan, the number of successes gained on the Tactics roll may also be applied to the first turn of the actual event. The Storyteller could raise a target's difficulty to recognize trouble by a number equal to the Tactics successes achieved.

Tactics successes could also be extra dice rolled to determine your character's initiative; the highest roll is used.

This Knowledge allows your character to study and anticipate the best way to organize her own and others' actions, coordinating events so that they proceed as she intends. Ultimately, the Storyteller decides when it applies, and may even make rolls on your behalf in case failures or botches result. Your character might *think* she knows the best way to approach a mission, but may actually set the stage for disaster.

- Student: Officer in the making.
- College: Officer.
- Masters: Experienced Bodyguard
- Doctorate: Special Forces
- Scholar: General

Possessed by: Trained Members of the Military, Militia Members, Police, Government Agents, Survivalists, the Paranoid

Specialties: Securing Locales, Penetration, Recognizing Traps, Anticipating Actions, Coordinating Others

BACKGROUNDS

FRATERNITY

"Who was that?" Lupe asked as she walked from the bedroom to the kitchen. She was wearing a T-shirt and cradled her bandaged right arm with her left.

"Fed Ex guy," Mona answered, disinterested. "He left this." She held out a thick white envelope toward Lupe. The older sister paused from scratching her back against the doorjamb, raised her injured arm and glared at Mona as if her younger sister were an idiot.

"Sorry!" Mona declared ingenuinely as she tore open the package.

Lupe crossed the kitchen and fished for a coffee cup. She had started to pour when she realized Mona hadn't said anything.

"Well, what is it?" she demanded as she turned. "Dios mio!" Lupe dropped the cup.

Mona stared down at the contents she had dumped onto the table: three thick stacks of bills — all hundreds by the look of them. She held a small card, like the ones that come with flowers. "It says, 'For your cab.'"

Your character has secret or mysterious supporters among the growing ranks of the imbued. While the Heralds might guide these people to some extent, the supporters are human... or seem to be. Perhaps the secretive Rose Foundation has a stake in your character's fate, or she has friends among the techies who maintain a hunter listserver. Although these folks may occasionally come up with money, gifts or assistance to pull your character's fat out of the fire, they cannot be counted on. Another hunter might be impressed with your character's posts online and emails her with a strange or disturbing offer of unsolicited support — but not actual teamwork. Maybe your character is spotted on the hunt by someone who wants to back her, but for unknown reasons.

Your character might or might not have direct contact with her supporter. If she does, there's never a guarantee that he/ she/ they will come through or even respond. Maybe an "informed" backer is reachable only through a post-office box or untraceable email address. Or perhaps gifts just *arrive*, as if your character is under surveillance. The Storyteller decides the true nature of the relationship, how the supporter operates, and why.

- Someone comes up with enough money to cover your rent from time to time.
- You occasionally receive funding or supplies to replace equipment that's important to your hunt.
- Someone provides you with fake documents.
- Perhaps you need to leave town and plane tickets and a visa arrive coincidentally.
- Someone outfits your hunt, but who and why?

IRON WILLED

The demon sneered as he twisted the blade in the young woman's gut. He licked his fangs with a black tongue as he felt the warmth of her blood flood over his hand. Her eyes began to roll back into her head, and he let her weight rest upon the stairs against which he had her pinned.

The smell of the blood welled up from the floor — a generous bouquet. He closed his ancient eyes and drank in the scent. They snapped open only when the broken haft of a banister support pierced his lung.

"Don't you ever close your eyes on me, fucker!" the girl screamed. She was still pinned beneath him, but now one hand gripped an impromptu stake thrust through the creature's back. Her other hand clumsily tried to hold in her gurgling organs.

Your character doesn't let pain slow her down. Even before, she could call upon her will to accomplish amazing feats when she should have stayed down, whether because she was raised by hard knocks, just *had* to survive or endured grueling military training. Now that your character knows the truth about the world, her tenacity is doubled. When an opponent thinks your character is down, she has him right where she wants him.

For every dot in this Background, your character can ignore the effects of one wound level and any effects of "lesser" levels. The dice and movement penalties normally imposed at those levels are *not* applied to your character. This bonus is not automatic, though. A successful Willpower roll, difficulty 6, must be made to receive the benefit for one turn. For each turn after the first that you wish to continue negating wound penalties, the difficulty of the Willpower roll increases by one (so it's 7 in the second turn, 8 in the third).

Once a Willpower roll fails, wound penalties cannot be ignored with this Background for the remainder of the scene. However, your character can always ignore wound penalties for one turn at the expense of a Willpower point (see **Hunter**, p. 126).

At level five of this Trait, your character can even stave off incapacitation for a time by making Willpower rolls, as above. She can't attack, run or perform physically demanding actions, but she can walk, speak and perhaps use some edges. The Storyteller has final say on what kinds of actions can be performed while your character should otherwise be "out."

This Background does not help your character heal injuries. Nor does it prevent her from losing more levels due to blood loss from lethal damage or lack of medical treatment. It might help her stay conscious and mobile long enough to stagger for help, however.

- Ignore Hurt wound penalties.
- Ignore Injured wound penalties.

- Ignore Wounded injury penalties.
- Ignore Mauled wound penalties.
- Ignore Crippled wound penalties. Incapacitation may be staved off for a time. Rasputin wishes he had been so tough.

STRONGHOLD

"What is this place?"

"It's my grandparent's old business. My Papa used to let his Shriner buddies work on their cars here. I've made a few modifications, in case I need a place to hide my family... or in case I get visitors."

"You're welcome here, too, Dana. There's ammo, flares, food and two cell phones. The place is alarmed and booby-trapped, so be careful. Don't ever use the back door. I moved trash cans full of compost in front of it to stop kids and vandals. There's an engine block above the door. If the bars are broken or anyone steps inside — splat!"

Your character has invested time and resources to preparing the ultimate workroom for his plans and protection. It's filled with maps, tools, books and maybe even computers useful to plan, secure and defend the place and to maintain the watch. More importantly, this hideaway serves as a supernatural bomb shelter. It's rigged with traps and security devices, and is stocked with enough food supplies and perhaps weaponry (depending upon Arsenal) to outfit the hunter and perhaps several other besieged people.

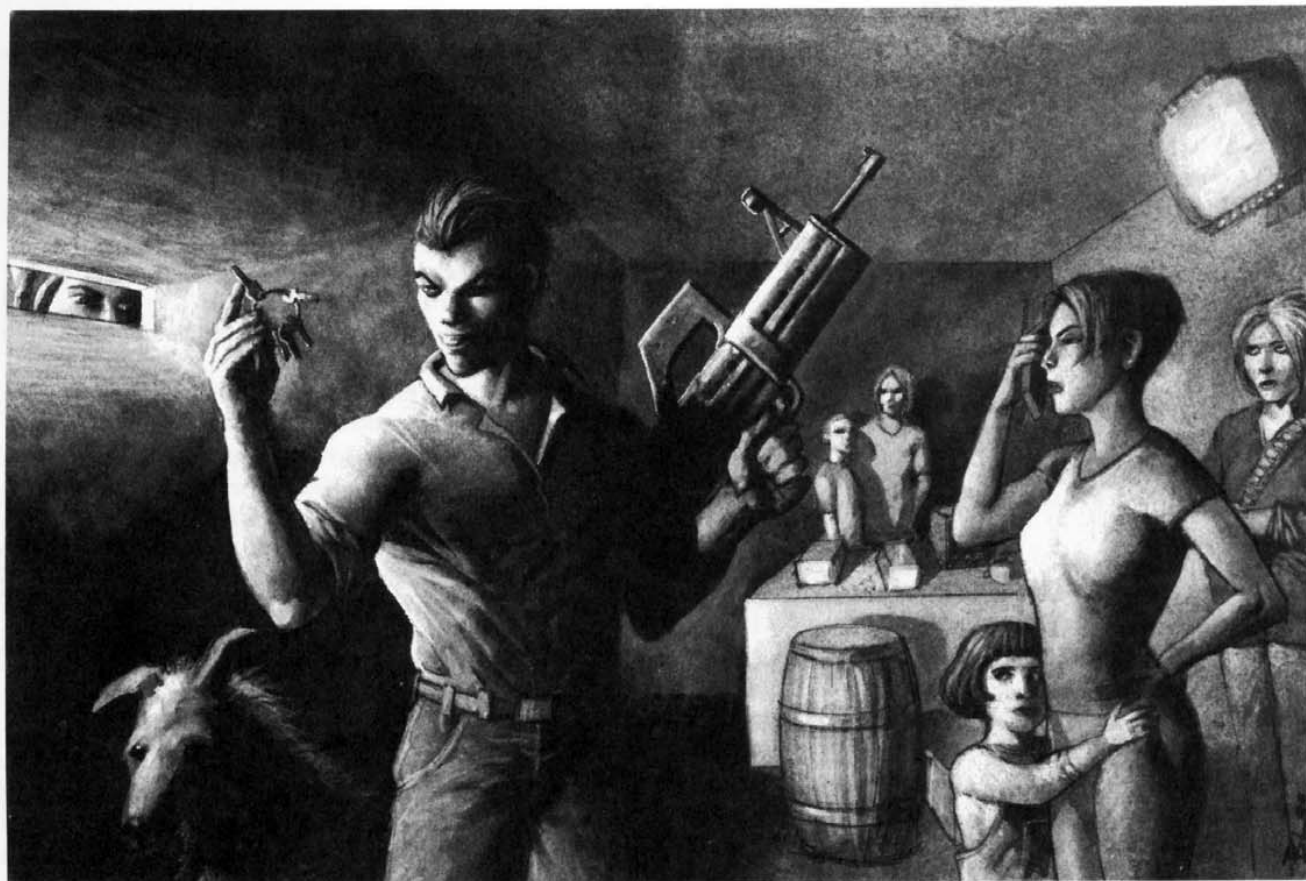
Design one trap for each dot of Stronghold. The Storyteller must review them to ensure that they're reasonable and within your character's means.

Your character's rating also forms a dice pool from which you can draw when the hideout is attacked. These dice can be added to any roll used to harm or repel intruders in the scene, as long as the Storyteller agrees and the application makes sense in regard to the fortress (the player should be allowed to rationalize how bonus dice apply in the setting, explaining events narratively). You might add dice to initiative in the first combat turn, for example, because your character has strung fishing line outside and attached it to tin cans. Or you might add dice to Ward because there's only one way into the place and intruders must use it. Stronghold dice may apply to a single action or may be added to a die roll that's made all scene long if the circumstances apply. The previous two situations exemplify short- and long-term dice-pool bonuses. Once Stronghold dice are assigned to an action or event, they're spent for the scene.

For example, Gary's level-three hideout is under attack by zombies. His player Dave decides to assign Stronghold to add three damage dice to the flame-thrower trap installed in the corridor. The dice are added directly to the damage roll. Dave explains, "Gary's been playing with the flame-thrower's mixture." The Storyteller approves.

Because he assigns all his Stronghold dice at once, Dave cannot assign them elsewhere in this scene. However, the Storyteller decrees that the dice are applied to all flame-thrower damage for the remainder of the siege. And of course, Dave can apply the dice differently the next time his fortress is imperiled.

Stronghold dice can be divided among different rolls, as well. Dave might have assigned one die to initiative and two to flame-thrower damage, as long as he didn't exceed his limit of three.



- Your workroom is located in your house. It might have a high-speed (ISDN) Internet connection with an adequate firewall to keep out mid-level hackers. You have enough provisions to last one or two people for a few days.
- Your citadel can feed and supply two to five people for a week.
- You have state-of-the-art security equipment and enough food to last six to eight people for two weeks.
- Your hideout has a sealed environment and is the size of a large house. It can withstand assault for a few months, if it's you alone under siege. A dozen people can be protected for a month, but times are lean and cramped.
- Your fortress is a bunker. It has multiple rooms and secret entrances. You and a handful of others could live there for several months.

THE HIGH COST OF COMMITMENT

Defenders can be among the most reserved and cautious of Zealots. They have a great deal at stake in the war and dedicate their lives to preserving their values and valuables. Whether punishment is delivered and justice is served is relatively unimportant to them. What really matters is that loved ones and cherished things survive to see a free world won by the imbued. Defenders do not embrace the hunt for themselves, but for others. They

must therefore be vigilant against the enemy, but also against their own excesses, distractions and extremes.

SPENDING CONVICTION

Defenders do not usually pursue battles with monsters, preferring to make monsters come to them under controlled conditions (and, it's hoped, away from protectors' charges). Defenders therefore tend to hold onto their Conviction points rather than spend them rashly. Keeping a reserve of Conviction is good planning. Also, you never know when danger might loom over loved ones or treasures, so some reserve of Conviction is always advised. Never spend your last two Conviction unless absolutely necessary, as when charges are endangered.

When your Defender accumulates 10 full Conviction points, you must make a choice: cash in for a higher Virtue rating, more potent edges (since most edges involve a Trait + Virtue roll), and perhaps a new edge; or hold onto those points as more bricks in the wall. The former might be likely if your character senses a respite from the enemy or if a prominent creature has just been run off, its tail between its legs. A full 10 Conviction points might be held onto if your character senses imminent danger to himself or his charges, or if paranoia rules his life.

REGAINING CONVICTION

Protectors gain strength in the war when they successfully resist the dangers and threats of the supernatural by preserving the things that they cherish most in the world. Their purpose falters when they themselves do, when the enemy is allowed to pass or when harm befalls someone on their watch. The

following actions apply specifically to Defenders in terms of gaining and losing Conviction. As always, the Storyteller has final say about how Conviction points are gained through character actions. Each of these deeds should confer no more than one Conviction point per game session. Indeed, one point may be all that a character gains from pulling off a number of these actions in a single chapter.

- Gain a point of Conviction when leading hunters of other creeds in the successful defense of a charge.

- Gain a point of Conviction if your Defender prevents a physically superior monster from reaching an intended target or accomplishing an intended goal.

- Gain a point of Conviction if your Defender outwits a monster in a way that immediately denies it the opportunity to harm a specific person or thing (using traps to confound a flicker's efforts to kidnap a child, for example).

- Gain a point of Conviction if your Defender withdraws from a pointless or losing fight, without compromising his own charges. Such a retreat does not mean wets himself and runs away. A withdrawal means an orderly extraction, usually a costly one for foes, in which protected people or items are still preserved.

- Gain a point of Conviction if your Defender successfully manages to keep his normal life separate from his imbued life (if that is a goal of your character). As a Defender takes up the mantle it becomes increasingly difficult to lead a normal life. For some Defenders, a normal life is their inspiration. Your character is going to be put in situations that endanger one life or the other, and he could be rewarded for negotiating these twists effectively.

- (Optional) *Lose* a point of Conviction if your Defender makes a stand but fails to stop a foe from passing, evading or getting the better of him.

- (Optional) *Lose* a point of Conviction if your Defender fails to preserve a designated subject from harm or loss. More than one (all?) Conviction can be lost if that subject is your character's personal charge.

- (Optional) *Lose* a point of Conviction if your Defender gives too much of himself to protect a relatively undeserving subject, or if he strays from his self-assigned duties. Remember that your champion is a Defender, not a Martyr or Avenger. If he becomes badly hurt or dies pointlessly to save something inessential to his personal charges or to the greater war, no one remains to preserve what was truly valuable in his life. Likewise, he might abandon his "post" in pursuit of an unrelated goal, such as venting his rage on a fleeing opponent, and put his valuables in jeopardy as a result.

ALLOCATING VIRTUE POINTS

Because Defenders draw a line in the sand, they must be steadfast and capable. They can therefore be liberal in their approach to the paths of other creeds. If a Merciful power can help a guardian stand his ground, that's a valuable tool, the opinions of hotheads and firebrands be damned. Defenders are thus inclined to acquire Virtue ratings beyond Zeal, particularly in Mercy, which offers such capabilities as hiding in plain sight and making a monster see the inherent value of human lives. Although a Vision rating is helpful for allowing

a Defender to recognize the overall direction of the war, it isn't as useful in preserving people and places in the here and now. Defenders' relative egalitarian perspective on the other paths makes them the stoic, dependable rocks of their Virtue.

Also, see the "Other Favored Paths" of the various Defender camps, pp. 66-67.

THE PRICE OF EXCEPTIONAL VIRTUE

Defenders are perhaps the most down to Earth and stable of Zeal's adherents. They can't afford to indulge themselves in crazed attacks. Nor can they be coolly aloof to circumstances or people's needs. They feel the personal compulsion to fill the breach and save lives. That means they must be prepared, capable and constant. Defenders' role in their hunt is perhaps the most taxing of all hunters', maybe even more so than their fellow Zealots'. They have something personal at stake in the war. The thought of losing that prize compels them to stand up and fight, and its actual loss can be their undoing, whether by throwing a guardian into a spiral of depression or turning him into a crazed lunatic.

Accumulating a Zeal (or any Virtue) rating of 7 or higher causes a Defender to exhibit the mental and emotional side effects of her cause. In time, the burden of saving others and compromising self is too much to bear. Your character develops derangements. However, traumatic scenes, anguishing personal loss or personal torment suffered along the way can impose derangements, as well, whether temporary or permanent. The first type are inflicted by the hunt and the Messengers' otherworldly intrusion into mortal life; the second type occur simply as the results of being fragile humans in overwhelming circumstances.

At truly high Virtue levels, your protector almost seems to transcend her former life. Even previous charges may lose meaning or become unimportant while new ones assume vast significance in ways that are inconceivable to other creed members or creeds. Perhaps your hunter seeks to protect the very creatures that he once combated; preserving their miserable existences becomes valuable by some means. The transition seems to suggest that your Defender extremist understands concepts and realities beyond normal human comprehension.

Of the derangements detailed in the **Hunter** rules, obsessive/compulsive, paranoia and fugue are relatively common among Defenders. Others detailed below are particularly fitting, however. These derangements may also be suffered by hunters of other creeds. They're simply more likely to afflict champions.

The Storyteller and player should work together to determine whether the situation is ripe for a derangement to take hold, and it should be roleplayed fully and realistically. The derangement may be treated, but only through grueling effort, psychiatric care and/or complete detachment from the hunt. (But who will protect a Defender's treasures then?)

MUNCHHAUSEN BY PROXY

Your character is so obsessed with exposing the true natures of monsters that she begins to emulate them, perhaps even harming the very people she hopes to protect in an effort to open the public's eyes. The pervasiveness and evasiveness

of creatures overwhelms your character. Winning battles doesn't seem to win the war, so your hunter decides on another strategy: reveal the enemy by posing as it. She may fake the signs of a monster's passing, work strictly at night, shy away from silver and fire (or anything else believed to harm creatures) or even dress up as a monster and hurt people, all in hopes of awakening the ignorant masses to reality. She does not kill, at not least initially, but if her message goes unheard she might raise the stakes. Your character is utterly convinced of the righteousness of her cause.

If your character's ruse is ever revealed, she attacks her betrayer or must spend a Willpower point each turn to resist doing so. If not captured, she may flee to resume her false life elsewhere.

PHOBIAS

Phobias are intense and persistent fears of certain objects or situations. These apprehensions are totally out of proportion to the true situation. Worst of all, your character could be completely aware that his behavior is irrational yet be terrified anyway.

Your character does almost anything to avoid the object of his fear, leading to a sense of slavery to the phobia itself. A powerlessness pervades his life. Confronting a phobia initiates feelings of dread accompanied by one or more physical symptoms: nausea, diarrhea, frequent urination, choking, perspiration, tremors, stomach disorders, rapid heartbeat and/or fainting. The dice pools of anything save perhaps reflexive actions could be reduced by one to three during exposure, as the Storyteller sees fit.

Confronting a fear calls for a Willpower roll, difficulty 8. Spending a Willpower point might allow your character to remain in the subject's presence for a turn or scene, depending on how intense exposure to the object is. Dice-pool penalties still apply, however.

You and the Storyteller should decide the object of your character's fear, based on the circumstances that induce the ailment. The loss of a son or daughter on the watch might result in a phobia of children or, more accurately, a phobia of forming a bond with them. Defending a home religiously might result in a fear of open spaces. Constant exposure to the enemy and determining who is a threat to treasures might result in xenophobia.

Agoraphobia: The fear of open spaces. Defenders, especially those with strongholds, often become so attached to their fortresses, and so aware of the dangers that await outside, that they can no longer leave comfortably.

Claustrophobia: The fear of enclosed spaces. Some Defenders take the opposite view of those with Agoraphobia. Their homes become tombs, the places they know the monsters will attack. They feel safer in the open where they can see what comes for them.

Nyctophobia: The fear of darkness and night. This phobia is perhaps the most common among the imbued, given that some monsters rise after sunset and most come out to hunt under the cloak of darkness. Defenders tend to fear the night because that's when their treasures are endangered most and the enemy is hardest to see.

Spectrophobia: The fear of ghosts. This phobia is most punishing to hunters because ghosts are among their most numerous opponents. Defenders develop fears of spirits because, of all monsters, ghosts can be the most difficult to anticipate and protect against, as they are largely invisible and able to pass through walls. Spirits can even possess guardians' wards, thus turning prized objects and people into the enemy.

Some observant and thoughtful hunters speculate that protectors are the most likely among the imbued to return to the world as ghosts; Defenders' obsession with saving items, places and people might create restless spirits that cannot find their final reward.

Triskaidekaphobia: The fear of the number 13. This phobia is a catch-all for a hunter's irrational subscription to (and fear of) common folk beliefs involving bad luck. This includes the fear of the number 13, black cats, walking under ladders and breaking mirrors. Not only are victims of this phobia wary of such transgressions, they take steps to stop others from falling prey from them, too, even to the extreme of interfering in a larger issue. A victim of triskaidekaphobia might grab the wheel of a car to avoid crossing a black cat's trail, for example — right in the midst of trailing a fleeing walker.

Xenophobia: The fear of strangers. New people represent one of two things to a Defender with this ailment: a possible creature in hiding that must be protected against, or a possible ward that must be protected, either of which adds to the hunter's responsibility and burden. When the pressure of either situation becomes too much for a sentry to bear, she snaps and seeks to avoid all strangers.

EDGES

The powers of Defense are not the same in hands of all hunters. Here is a list of new edges in the Defense Path. Debate rages on the net and among the guardians who have sought each other out in the greater world as to the origins of these capabilities. Do these edges arise due to societal or cultural differences among the called or are they part of a constantly evolving phenomenon? Those who believe the latter suggest that further contact with supernaturals and exposure to their attacks will breed new defenses to respond to those dangers.

Some Defenders develop these powers instead of the more commonly displayed ones listed in **Hunter**, or acquire a mixture of edges from various sources. Ongoing discussion of new possibilities and the manifestation of new powers in broader hunter circles will eventually spread these edges to other imbued, even those of other creeds.

• ALARM

Alarm is used to create an invisible security perimeter, warning your character if supernaturals approach. By walking the boundary of the protected area, your hunter becomes intimately familiar with that zone. He develops the same sense for it as he has for his "personal space." Creatures that cross the perimeter inspire an unpleasant feeling for your character. The intensity of this sensation increases as the number of creatures that cross the perimeter increases. One monster might inspire mild discomfort. Two might instill nausea. Three or more give your character that feeling likened to someone walking on her grave.

When a monster crosses the boundary of the effect, your hunter knows the general direction of the creature. The edge does not register the proximity of any supernaturals “caught” in the area when the perimeter is established, unless those creatures leave and then attempt to return to the zone. Neither hunters nor humans activate a Defender’s alarm perimeter.

Alarm applies to all monsters from noncorporeal ghosts to wizards to goblins. Even people such as vampires’ puppets who have been bestowed supernatural gifts trigger the effect.

System: Make a Perception + Zeal roll, difficulty 6. Compare the successes achieved to the chart, below, to determine how large an area your character can affect. Your hunter must walk the perimeter of the area he hopes to protect. He can always choose a smaller area than the chart describes. Once this edge comes into more common use, Visionaries who possess it will speculate that the walking of a perimeter is a mere trapping to make the power comprehensible to the human mind. After all, spirits could intrude from almost any angle or direction; the (typically) flat plane a guardian walks really has no bearing on the efficacy of the edge.

Your character can sense the crossing of all intruding creatures. Trespassers awaken a character from sleep if a separate point of Conviction is spent when the perimeter is established. Some Defenders call this effect “putting in a wake-up call.”

Alarm does not pinpoint a monster’s exact distance or location, but its general direction is indicated. The difficulties of Perception rolls to find a monster that has tripped the alarm are reduced by two, as long as the creature remains within the designated area. So, if a monster walks in and leaves, the Defender might be able to tell where it intruded and the direction in which it left.

Alarm does not provide any information as to the nature of intruding creatures. “Something wicked this way comes” is the extent of your hunter’s information.

Alarm persists for one full day or until the creator leaves the protected area. The Defender must remain within the perimeter for the edge to function. He can’t create it from the outside and walk away to “observe” from a distance. Should he cross the perimeter while the edge is active, the alarm collapses and must be re-created. The alarmed area does not move with your hunter. Spending a separate Conviction point when a perimeter is walked purchases one additional day of duration.

If the zone’s creator is ever Incapacitated, his perimeter persists for its normal duration, but intruders are not sensed while he’s unconscious. Your character can establish only one perimeter around an area at a time; multiple applications of this edge have no cumulative effect.

• • Lock

Lock seals anything — a door, window, book, safe, car or even a computer hard-drive against supernatural passage, intrusion or observation. Monsters simply find entryways impassable, as if a door is jammed or an invisible barrier exists. The view beyond a window is impenetrably black. A computer just won’t turn on or can’t be accessed.

System: Roll Stamina + Zeal, difficulty 6. Each success renders the subject (which must be touched — the com-

Successes	Area
1-2	Small room or 10-foot circle
3-4	Apartment
5-6	House
7-8	Apartment building
9-10	City Block

puter in the case of all files on it) resistant for a day. A supernatural intruder must gain more successes on an appropriate roll (probably Strength to force a door, Perception + Alertness to see through a window, or Intelligence + Computer to open a file) to break the seal. Normal people (those without any supernatural gifts or abilities) and other hunters are not affected by the power. Thus, a person could open and walk through a door, but a puppet couldn’t. A ghost could easily circumvent a protected door by passing through a wall. However, a possession victim is blocked from opening and passing through that door. Not even destroying a door or object will allow a monster entry.

The seal persists even if the creator is rendered Incapacitated. Your hunter may apply Lock to only one item at a time. The effect may be terminated before its natural duration expires, if the creator so chooses.

• • • Guard

Guard allows your hunter to monitor someone, safeguarding her from a distance. Your character can immediately

STORYTELLING STARTING EDGES

Hunters’ very first edges — the ones they manifest at their imbuing — typically have overt effects that kick in intuitively when characters are first faced by monsters. For example, a Defender confronted by a monster can activate Ward and not think about or even know she’s done it until the creature is mysteriously held at bay. However, as new edges emerge in the hunter community, not all low-powered ones (that is, level one) are so intuitive. Some are esoteric or fulfill hunters’ subtle rather than overt needs. In the case of Alarm, how does a hunter know to walk a perimeter to create a protected area, for example? Doing so probably doesn’t just occur to him unassisted.

The Storyteller can offer hints as to how subtle powers such as Alarm work. Maybe a Defender suddenly senses monster incursions in frequently inhabited places, and comes to understand that familiar locales (or ones made so intentionally) can be alarmed against inhuman intrusion. Alternatively, established hunters might acquire subtle powers such as Alarm and sense possession of them simply by benefit of their experience on the watch and with repeated exposure to the Messengers’ intervention.

The bottom line is, the Storyteller should assign overt and intuitive starting edges to the newly imbued. More complex or less obvious ones can come later, or steps must be taken quickly to show starting characters how such edges work.

tell if that person is in danger of being affected or harmed by a supernatural being, and possibly gain time to prevent the effect. The observed subject doesn't have to know that she is monitored or in danger, but a creature must be directly attacking or using some supernatural power to cause harm to or influence the person. The warning comes to your character as a strong feeling of dread for the safety of the guarded person.

Many hunters believe this edge works by asking the Heralds to watch over a subject. Others interpret it as an extension of Defenders' own devotion to protecting and saving; their driving goals start to assume real-world application. This edge can function over any distance, but Defenders usually try to stay within running distance of a target. It does no good if the hunter can't come to the rescue quickly or has no allies who can do so.

There are no known variants of this edge that apply to places or objects; only people can be defended. Perhaps as time passes and greater understanding of the enemy is achieved, some imbued may be able to apply this power to sympathetic creatures. Only one person can be so monitored at a time.

System: Your character must touch the subject. The edge affects only normal humans, bystanders and other hunters, not supernatural creatures of any kind. The subject does not have to be willing or even aware that she's under surveillance.

Roll Perception + Zeal, difficulty 6. The connection persists based on successes rolled, as indicated on the following chart.

Successes	Duration
1-2	One Day
3-4	Three Days
5-6	One Week
7-8	Two Weeks
9-10	One Month

When does Guard work and not work? A warning is delivered the moment a supernatural power or attack of any kind is directed at the subject. The power used on the subject might even be to her benefit, such as some kind of supernatural healing. Guard does not differentiate between benevolent and malevolent uses of monsters' powers; it registers use of all effects as a danger (and yet, hunters' edges used on a subject do not register with the monitoring Defender). A monster may even use its claws or bite against the subject. That action also alerts the guarding hunter.

Guard works even if a creature does not intend to hurt the subject in *particular*, but the subject is in a danger zone by chance. If a bunch of fiends decide to slaughter everyone in a supermarket and the monitored person decides to stop in to use the bathroom, your hunter knows the subject is in danger the moment she is in the creatures' proximity.

Guard does not work if a monster directs non-supernatural thugs to rough up the subject. Normal people gifted with any kind of supernatural capabilities are considered "a threat."

Once the subject is exposed to the supernatural — and not before — your character intuitively knows her direction and distance. This direction sense is not constant. It kicks in only when the person is subjected to supernatural effects.

Note that this edge does not protect a subject from harm in any way. If your character can't or doesn't arrive in time, the subject is affected, harmed or killed all the same. The initial threat, such as a bite, might even be delivered. With luck, your character arrives in time to halt any further harm.

Guard makes no judgment calls about the malice (or benevolence) of an action taken against a subject. If a creature seeks to help the subject for whatever reason, your guarding hunter must make his own judgment about the creature's intentions. Few Defenders give creatures that much latitude, though other imbued might.

Guard's duration may be terminated prematurely if your character wishes. If your character becomes Incapacitated while Guard applies, the power resumes for its normal duration and may alert your hunter of trouble after he regains consciousness, if any duration remains.

••••• PROTECT

Protect makes your character naturally resistant to harm from the attacks of supernatural creatures and their "magical" powers. Blows simply seem to glance off or stop cold on impact. The effect *doesn't* interfere with mundane attacks, such as a punch from a normal person or a bullet fired by a bloodsucker. It *does* interfere with monsters' claw and bite attacks, and with harmful powers that affect your character's body (tricks or spells that affect your character's mind or emotions are not deterred).

A hunter using second sight or a perception edge such as Discern, Witness or Illuminate, or a monster with some heightened sense, sees your character outlined by a nimbus of energy.

System: Spend a Conviction point to activate this power. Your character's Zeal becomes a protection pool that may be drawn from and added to soak rolls for the remainder of the scene. You can add these dice to your soak rolls as you please, maybe two dice against one attack and three against another. They are cumulative with soak dice offered by your character's Stamina and any armor worn. Protect dice resist bashing and lethal damage. In the latter case, roll these bonus dice alone or in combination with any from armor worn that also resists lethal damage (hunters' Stamina is not usually applied against lethal damage). Once assigned to a soak roll, dice offered by Protect are lost for the scene, even if those extra dice turn up failures in the soak roll.

If your Defender ever becomes Incapacitated, any unassigned Protect dice that remain are all dedicated to the next attack he suffers, if any. Protect can be activated and used only once per scene. Any Protect dice that remain unused at the end of a scene are lost.

Protect has no die roll of its own. However, Conviction can still be risked in any one Protect-enhanced soak roll in the scene.

••••• BLAST

When this edge is activated, a ring of electrical energy erupts from the surface of your character's body and expands outward. A hail of miniature lightning bolts showers any monsters that the ring contacts. This effect is visible to all hunters and supernaturals. It does not affect normal humans or other hunters, and they may take shelter in your character's proximity.

System: Spend two Conviction points. The barrier erupts from your character's body and expands instantaneously to a radius of Zeal in yards from him. When a creature contacts or crosses the barrier, roll Zeal + Stamina, difficulty 6, as lethal damage (there is no attack roll). The power affects even noncorporeal spirits that seek to cross.

A creature that somehow teleports *inside* the area is not affected by the power. However, any creature within this power's radius in the turn that it's activated is subjected to harm as the energy expands outward. Once inside the perimeter, the creature does not continue to take damage. It is harmed only once, unless it chooses to exit and cross the boundary again. Creatures take no damage from *leaving* the area.

The effect lasts one turn, plus an additional turn per point of Conviction spent when the edge is activated. Your Defender may also choose to terminate the effect prematurely. If your character moves or becomes Incapacitated, the edge comes to an end. No other actions may be performed while Blast is active.

Blast can be activated only once per scene.

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Defenders' ultimate mission in the hunt is to save lives and to protect cherished items or places. The need to preserve and protect is the immediate instinct and reaction these imbued have when they first witness abominations. That mission also inspires them to continue the struggle, despite the overwhelming odds against freeing a world long dominated by monstrosities. Perhaps the reason that most Defenders are able to carry on at all is that they realize they can't save everyone and everything. Hard choices have to be made on the watch, and only a few valuables can be preserved to appreciate the better place hunters hope to create.

It's in these moments of clarity that some Defenders understand the big picture of the war and their role in it: They must do what they can, and that is enough. Incredibly, these insightful few are able to turn this comprehension into an actual tool to use against the enemy. Or more accurately, they can turn their revelation into a tool that helps protect the things they value most.

Some protectors have taken to fashioning token objects that bestow an unusual element of resilience to the people who receive them, or to the objects or locales with which these tokens are placed. It's almost as if the creator's determination to see his charge through all harm actually lends the subject some protection. Defender tenacity is made manifest. Such creation actually alleviates the guardian's burden somewhat, freeing him to preserve as many people and places against supernatural abuse as he can, with the reassurance that his determination alone still keeps his most prized charge safe.

Thus far, the creation of such protective tokens is limited to a handful of Defenders. The harried who fight every defensive retreat and perceived threat lack the wisdom, reflection and insight to pick their battles and to create the simple tools that can help them. No amount of counseling or advice from other champions is sufficient to focus these distracted Defenders. Such

people must discover the means of manifesting their determination in the real world in their own way and time.

The sentries who have discovered this technique speculate that the Messengers imbue them with the capability to fashion protective tokens. Others believe it's a product of their own will or insight, made real through sheer intensity. Still others look upon the craft as a predecessor of a burgeoning edge. Ultimately, the origin of creating protective tokens doesn't matter. What matters is that they help Defenders carry on their vigil and preserve the most important things in life.

Thus far, no hunter outside the guardians' creed knows how to create "good-luck charms" that keep possessors from harm. Other creeds may be capable of creating their own empowered gifts, but the items do not endow the same protection that Defenders' creations do. (Creating protective items is exclusive to the Defense creed. Other hunters can possess edges in the Defense path, but they cannot fashion protective tokens, unless the Storyteller decides otherwise.)

METHOD

No Defender undertakes the creation or identification of a gift or token with the thought, "This will help protect her." Defenders barely understand who they are, what they're capable of doing and the extent to which evil pervades the world. Knowing implicitly and matter-of-factly that they can design or designate "magical items" is beyond them. It's also silly and beneath the *human* focus of **Hunter**.

The actual force that empowers a creation or item is a Defender's hope. He wishes above all else that his charge will survive the war against the supernatural unharmed. Inspiration for the creation or choice of a defensive token therefore derives from any number of very personal sources. He might give a gift to his child, reassuring her that, "If anything ever happens to Daddy, this bracelet will keep you safe. You have to wear it all the time. It means I'll always be with you. Understand?" Maybe a fishing lure that always brought the hunter luck *before* now has all the more meaning because it represents a fond memory of a simpler time. Bestowing that gift upon a fishing buddy brings him the same "luck" that the Defender had. Or perhaps planting a tree in a grove represents the Defender's hopes for the locale's future, an investment of his own will to ensure the place's survival.

Many Defenders create the items they share. They can be hand-fashioned or existing items that are altered or added to. Tokens can also be existing objects with immense personal value to the Defender and the recipient, such as a family heirloom passed down through the generations or a hockey trading card prized equally between brothers. In the case of offering an existing object, the bestowal of the possession typically comes with significant meaning — a sacrifice made or an enormous act of generosity. "I've had this for years. I know you've always liked it. Here, it's yours."

Some Defenders go so far as to engrave a hunter code symbol onto an object, such as that for "Defender," "Protected," "Hope," "Charge," "Victory" or "Safe Haven."

Regardless of what item is offered and why it's chosen, the donation and its symbolism are the keys to any protection

conferred. The item represents a bond, and that connection is what's truly important, not the object itself. Remember that when your character creates or chooses a token, it's not shared without meaning. Any item passed flippantly or without sufficient significance is useless. The Storyteller decides when a token has enough personal weight. An ingenuine Defender (and his charge) learn a lesson the hard way.

SYSTEM

Before a Defender can manifest his passion for a charge into a real-world item, he must understand the significance and greater meaning of preserving his charge, and of the watch as a whole. "Guarding stuff" isn't enough. Your character must know why some things must be preserved, and that they sometimes have to be sacrificed if the greater good is to prevail. In game terms, this insight truly develops when your character possesses at least one dot in each of Zeal, Mercy and Vision. When your Defender possesses those scores, he is ready to create or choose tokens to protect his charges.

A token bestows extra soak dice to the person who receives it. As long as that item remains in the subject's possession, the extra protection is retained. "Possession" doesn't have to mean "on her person at all times," but it does mean "remains her property." If it's ever stolen or lost, the protection is lost and doesn't return until the item is reclaimed (a thief or any subsequent owner receives no benefit).

As for a charge that's an object or locale, the token must be left at an appropriate place and must remain at the site to bestow its protection. That item or area receives extra soak dice if any are applicable, or it gains extra structural levels (the equivalent of health levels) to resist being destroyed.

The choice or creation of an appropriate token takes some time, usually a matter of days, weeks or even months, depending on how often and for how long your character works on it. At any time of your choosing, remove a number of Conviction points from your character's current pool. You can record that number in the margin of your character sheet or the Storyteller can record it for you. For every five points set aside, the token bestows one extra soak die to its possessor. Each point set aside also represents about one hour's creation or search time. So, if your character sets aside 10 points over the course of three months game time, he spends 10 hours in that period making a final gift. The sooner the token is offered, the more quickly the beneficiary enjoys its defense, but your character's Conviction pool might be drained as a result. The longer it takes to create a token, the longer the beneficiary goes without extra defense, but your character is able to carry out his day-to-day hunt more effectively.

Conviction points set aside for the creation of a token are considered unavailable to your character thereafter. They cannot be spent to activate second sight and supernatural defenses, to activate edges or to invest into powers. Likewise, Conviction points cannot be risked in the creation of a token. Nor can Willpower points increase an item's protection rating.



The maximum number of extra soak dice a token can offer equals your character's Zeal rating at the time of the object's creation. Thus, if his Zeal is 3, no more than three extra soak dice are bestowed to the subject. Creating a token rated 3 also costs your character 15 of his own Conviction.

Your hunter can create a token that offers fewer extra soak dice than he might be capable of. He might not have the time or resources to devote his full Conviction to the task. For example, a Defender with 4 Zeal might have saved up only 15 Conviction for his token. If he can't wait any longer to bestow the gift, the result is an item with a 3 rating.

No particular Crafts score is required to create a token. The actual craftsmanship of a manufactured item is less important than its symbolism or meaning for the parties involved.

If your character ever acquires more Zeal points after granting a token, he can increase the item's rating, but to do so he must have it in his possession for an amount of time appropriate for the extra points added. Thus, if a token rated 3 is increased to 6 (your character's current Zeal), 15 more Conviction must be invested and the subject goes without the item for the period that those points are accumulated. In the setting, such time can be spent adding features to the token or meticulously carving a hunter code symbol into it. Of course, the beneficiary has to be willing to relinquish the item for the duration, too. If it has significant sentimental value, borrowing it may not be possible.

In the chronicle, any time dedicated to creating a token must be set aside by your character. You can't necessarily be traveling, tracking a puppet, and creating an intricate token at the same time unless the Storyteller agrees. If downtime dedicated to the process is minimal, the Storyteller may extend creation time.

The extra soak dice conferred by a token are permanent. They apply whenever the subject is exposed to bodily harm through any kind of supernatural attacks, including claws, bites, magical lightning bolts or undead blows. Damage from mental or emotional attacks or influence is not affected.

A token's extra soak dice don't diminish each time the dice are rolled. They also apply to bashing and lethal damage. If lethal damage is incurred, the subject's Stamina is not rolled, but the token's soak dice are, along with those from any appropriate armor that might be worn.

In the case of objects or sites, the token offers extra soak dice, as above, or extra permanent structural levels. In the latter case, no amount of supernatural damage can overcome the extra levels gained. Thus, the glen mentioned earlier would always survive a magical fire. A family portrait could not be shattered by a shapechanger's monstrous grip. If the offending creature or force is truly potent or ancient, however, it might receive a Willpower roll, difficulty 6, to overcome the item's protection. Even then, a number of successes in excess of the token's rating must be achieved before the item can be damaged or destroyed.

Bear in mind that a token's protection applies only against supernatural harm. Attacks or destruction performed by regular people or normal forces of nature are

resolved as usual, with the person or item's own Traits. Normal bullets fired by a zombie also strike normally.

A token's protective value applies only to normal humans and mundane objects and places. It is not relayed to fellow hunters, supernatural creatures or mystical items or sites. From the bearer's perspective, she seems inordinately lucky, assuming she's capable of understanding anything that occurs in the presence of a horrifying creature (or during her consequent "fainting spell").

A hunter using second sight notices something strange about a token, but not any specifics. A perception edge such as Discern, Witness or Illuminate offers more information. Perhaps the item is warm to the touch or a hunter code sign appears that's not of the creator's design. Regardless of what's detected, the object *does not* radiate the menace or inhumanity of the enemy.

Your Defender can create or choose and bestow only one token at a time. He can create or share as many in total as he has Zeal points, however. Thus, your character might choose a token for his wife at one time, but he can have passed out three in total, equal to his 3 Zeal. Each token encompasses your Defender's hopes for the future and cannot be transferred from recipient to recipient. It's made for a specific person, place or treasure. The token possesses no particular resilience of its own, so if it's ever broken, it loses its unusual properties and all Conviction invested into it is lost forever. Your Defender can make another token thereafter.

The amount of care, attention and emotional investment that goes into bestowing a token grants your Defender a limited sense of each token's status. If a token is ever lost or destroyed, your character simply knows, whether a sense of loss overcomes him or he suspects that his intended charge is vulnerable. Your character doesn't know, in such a case, when a recipient is in trouble, simply when she is no longer protected by his creation. There is no range limit to this sensation, and no more detail is conveyed.

A lost token may restore protection to a subject when the item is returned to its proper owner. If it is not returned, your character can revoke the protection offered by the device and create a new one to replace it. If a recipient is ever killed, her token can be revoked as well, allowing your Defender to create another for someone or something else, to the limit of his Zeal. All Conviction dedicated to a revoked token is lost.

A person can possess only one token from any Defender at one time. Multiple hunters cannot bestow multiple tokens on a single person for cumulative soak dice.

If your Defender is ever killed, his token continues to relay its protective powers as long as it is not destroyed or lost.

Storytellers, use common sense when deciding what are legitimate charges that can receive a token's protection. Likewise, consider what a reasonable token is. A Defender can't add structural levels to Planet Earth because his wedding ring exists there. Nor is a toaster-oven likely to preserve a hunter's cousin unless there's a really good *human* story behind the appliance. Make the player work to draw the connection.



CHAPTER 6: DEFENDERS AT LARGE

Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.
— Psalms 32:7

It takes a certain breed of person to become a hunter — someone willing to confront the monsters when their terrible visage is first exposed. Defenders are born from even sturdier stock. They take it upon themselves to stand in harm's way, not for themselves, or for the creatures' sake, or to vent their own indignation, but to save others, to preserve anything of value left in a decaying world. They therefore have a great deal to lose in the struggle against the supernatural. Surely their thin line can hold only so long before it's overwhelmed — and what will survive the carnage if they finally break? The following characters represent some of the regular people who have what it takes to defy monsters and stand guard over humanity. They can be the inspiration for or foundation of your own character. Just fill in the blanks to make one of them your own.

I just happened to be walking by... and I overheard them fighting.

BUSYBODY

Prelude: Life has been... well, life. You discovered sex in high school, got pregnant, dropped out, married and started working at Charlie's Deli Mart. A year later, you were pregnant again. You and your husband went on welfare, and you quit your job to care for the kids. The following year, you added a third little monster to the brood.

Eventually, finances improved. Your kids grew, and you took a job at the textiles mill. Fifteen years had passed in the blink of an eye. You and your husband bought a double-wide. Your eldest made you a grandmother at 36.

About that time, you found Jesus and gave your life over to Him. By then, you knew half the people in town. You knew their business and felt it your duty to point out their mistakes. When Teri Green started sleeping around on her husband, you thought it was only right that someone inform the poor man. When you caught the minister taking a nip of whiskey prior to his sermon, you couldn't keep it to yourself.

God must have been pleased with your efforts, because one night He let you in on a big secret. You heard a car drive slowly past your trailer, and you peeked out the window to see who it was. The car stopped down the street, at Missy Cameron's trailer. Missy was going through a divorce. She had men coming and going all the time. You knew. You watched. Missy was behaving shamefully. She had a two-year-old.

As you spied, the man got out of his car. You turned off the lamp to see better, and even considered getting your binoculars. You had good reason. The man looked odd. Missy got out of the passenger side, laughing. She was drunk — again. You got a good look at the stranger under the porch light. At first you thought he was wearing a costume. He looked like he had the plague. It turned your stomach.

They went inside. You couldn't stand it. You had to know what was going on. Just walk by. That was all you intended, but when you arrived at Missy's trailer, you couldn't see inside. You had to tie your shoe, anyway, so you casually walked over to prop your foot on the steps. By then, you'd

figured it wouldn't hurt to pop in. You opened Missy's door and knocked as you stepped inside.

That's when you heard the voice: "THE BEAST HAS TAKEN FLESH." Something loomed over Missy's body, tormenting her while she sobbed hysterically. You scrambled toward the kitchenette, stunned. The next thing you knew, your hand was on a frying pan. You flung it, scattering cold food, and hit the demon in the back.

Others in the park must have heard your shouts, because they came out of their homes. The demon ran at you as if to knock you aside, but something stopped it cold, like it feared your righteousness or couldn't bear that you knew its secret. That's when it jumped through the screen window, got to its car and drove away. Missy lived, and you got plenty of attention at church for saving her from her "abusive boyfriend." You would have told what *really* happened, but even you know that some stories just can't be believed. Since then, you've taken up the vigil in earnest. God has given you a mission.

Concept: You've always been more interested in other people's lives than you are in your own. You're proud of how much you know about their activities. Now you see that God intended it all along. You're the guardian angel who sticks her nose in everyone else's business. You're the one who protects them from themselves by pointing out their indiscretions.

Roleplaying Hints: You're God's tool. Your curiosity leads you to find out things about people. If you think they're messing up, you say so. Everything is your business. You're not above grilling someone on their personal life, nor are you above sneaking around to spy. And now that you know you're not the only one, you keep your eyes open and call your appointed allies at the first sign of trouble.

Equipment: Binoculars, notebook, pen, Holy Bible, station wagon



HUNTER-BOOK DEFENDER

NAME:

NATURE: **Meddler**

PRIMARY VIRTUE: **zeal**

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR: **Caregiver**

CREED: **Defense**

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: **Busybody**

STARTING CONVICTION: 3

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

MENTAL

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness (Suspicious Behavior) ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●
Intuition ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

SKILLS

Animal Ken ●●●●●
Crafts (tailoring) ●●●●●
Demolitions ●●●●●
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ●●●●●
Firearms ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Performance ●●●●●
Security ●●●●●
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival ●●●●●
Technology ●●●●●

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ●●●●●
Bureaucracy ●●●●●
Computer ●●●●●
Finance ●●●●●
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ●●●●●
Linguistics ●●●●●
Medicine ●●●●●
Occult ●●●●●
Politics ●●●●●
Research ●●●●●
Science ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

	NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
<u>Allies</u>	<u>Ward</u>	<u>Defense</u>	●●●●●	
<u>Contacts</u>	<u>Rejuvenate</u>	<u>Defense</u>	●●●●●	
<u>Fame</u>			●●●●●	
<u>Resources</u>			●●●●●	
			●●●●●	
			●●●●●	
			●●●●●	

EDGES

VIRTUES

	Mercy	Vision	Zeal
	SCORE SPENT	SCORE SPENT	SCORE SPENT
1	0	0	1 ● X
2	0	2 0	2 ● X
3	0	3 0	3 ● X
4	0	4 0	4 0
5	0	5 0	5 0
6	0	6 0	6 0
7	0	7 0	7 0
8	0	8 0	8 0
9	0	9 0	9 0
10	0	10 0	10 0

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

I don't care if he got to. You can't touch the girls. I know where you've been.

BOUNCER

Prelude: Life hasn't been very good to you. There isn't a lot to grow up and hope for on the wrong side of the border, south of San Diego. Your family always worked the tourist trade, cheating gringos out of their cash by selling rugs and crap at outrageous prices. The tourists had no idea how to haggle, or that they were being ripped off, even though the guy down the street was selling the same shit at half the price. It wasn't your problem, though. If people were dumb enough to get cheated, that's what they deserved.

Although you quietly hoped for a different life, you never expected it to come to you — and certainly not the way it did. Your girlfriend Conzuela decided to earn easy money by working the bar strip. Thank God she wasn't interested in working the back alleys, like all the cheap whores. She got a job at a high-priced club, the kind filled with leering gringos, the ones who hoped to get something special in return for a lousy tip.

The money she got was good, but you still didn't like the idea. Other men shouldn't see *your* girlfriend that way, *your* way. She wouldn't quit, though, no matter how loudly you insisted. That's when you got a job as a bouncer, to make sure no one went too far with her. Working there only made more problems, though. Conzuela felt crowded by you standing guard right next to her tables. When you picked a fight with some fat asshole with lots of money and greasy hands, she dumped you. You kept working after that just to piss her off. Besides, there were other girls there too, and you noticed the looks they gave you.

It wasn't long afterward when your reasons for staying changed altogether. You were looming near the crowd as usual one night, surveying the shit-bag customers when a voice came over the loudspeaker: "THE DEAD COVET THE LIVING." The voice spoke in perfect Spanish, but Juan the DJ was supposed to speak in English. That's when you noticed Juan was at the bar. No one was in his booth.

Your irritation changed to a pang of terror when you looked across the crowd for the troublemaker and truly *saw* them for the first time: The audience was dead. At least, all the men sitting, watching were like rotting corpses or were dead-looking, with other faces,

like ghosts', hidden in their real ones. You started to panic, but a strange calm came over you, along with a realization: None of the girls or the bartenders or the other bouncers were wrong — just the crowd. Everyone else carried on like nothing had changed. Only you knew!

Something had to be done, but how? Without getting the real people hurt? You had to protect them, if only because they were alive and these things... weren't. Outwardly calm, you walked over to the main dance floor, mid-song, and held out a hand to the performer. Confused, she took it and stepped down. Juan, now back in his booth, stopped the music abruptly as if to shout at you, but he didn't get a chance. You simply turned to the crowd and announced: "Conozco tu tipo." — "I know what you are."

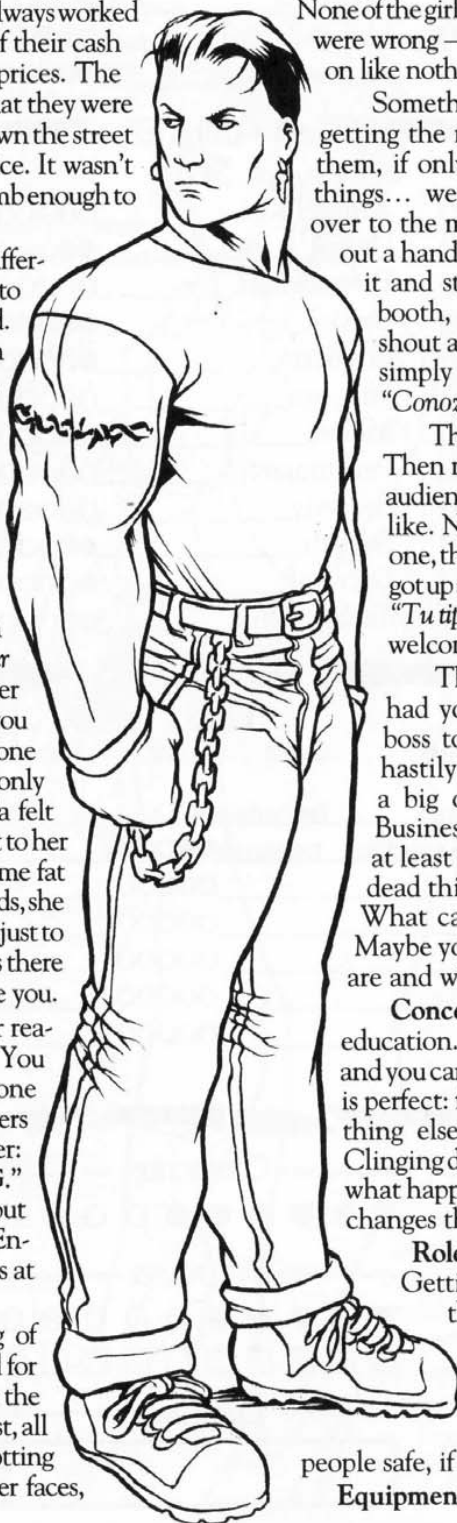
There was a moment of painful silence. Then ripples of concern washed through the audience. Heads turned, some real, some wispy-like. Nervous murmurs spread. That's when one, then another and finally the whole crowd got up and left the club. Energized, you shouted "Tu tipo no es bienvenido." — "Your kind isn't welcome here" — after them.

The rest of the staff was stunned. What had you done? You barely convinced the boss to let you keep your job, explaining hastily that there had been talk of "a fight... a big one." Now you're on the shit list. Business hasn't been near as good since, but at least it's been *alive*. You've also seen more dead things since that night — lots of them. What can you do when there are so many? Maybe you should just worry about where you are and what you've got.

Concept: You're a regular guy without much education. You're lucky, though; you have muscle and you can take care of yourself. Being a bouncer is perfect: free drinks, pretty girls. It's just everything else in your life that makes no sense. Clinging desperately to your old habits helps, but what happens if things change — or if *something* changes things for you?

Roleplaying Hints: You don't judge people. Getting along with your co-workers and the club's human audience is proof of that. Sure, you can muscle your way around, but you know how to talk people — and some corpses — down, too. Your main goal is to keep living people safe, if only on your tiny bit of turf.

Equipment: Billy club, T-shirt, jeans, sneakers



HUNTER-BOOK DEFENDER

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Gallant
DEMEANOR: Bravo
CONCEPT: Bouncer

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Zeal
CREED: Defense
STARTING CONVICTION: 3

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength <small>(Throwing)</small> ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness ●●●●●	Animal Ken ○○○○○	Academics ○○○○○
Athletics ●○○○○	Crafts ○○○○○	Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Awareness ●○○○○	Demolitions ○○○○○	Computer ○○○○○
Brawl <small>(Pinning)</small> ●●●●●	Drive ●○○○○	Finance ●○○○○
Dodge ●●○○○	Etiquette ○○○○○	Investigation ○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○	Firearms ●○○○○	Law ●○○○○
Expression ○○○○○	Melee ●●○○○	Linguistics <small>(English)</small> ●○○○○
Intimidation ●●○○○	Performance ○○○○○	Medicine ●○○○○
Intuition ●○○○○	Security ●○○○○	Occult ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○	Stealth ●○○○○	Politics ●○○○○
Streetwise ●●○○○	Technology ○○○○○	Research ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○	Traps ●○○○○	Science ○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	EDGES	VIRTUES
NAME	CREED LEVEL TRIGGER	Mercy Vision Zeal
		SCORE SPENT SCORE SPENT SCORE SPENT
Allies ●○○○○	Alarm Defense ●○○○○	1 0 1 0 1 ● X
Contacts ●●○○○	Lock Defense ●●○○○	2 0 2 0 2 ● X
Resources ●●○○○	○○○○○	3 0 3 0 3 ● X
○○○○○	○○○○○	4 0 4 0 4 0
○○○○○	○○○○○	5 0 5 0 5 0
○○○○○	○○○○○	6 0 6 0 6 0
○○○○○	○○○○○	7 0 7 0 7 0
○○○○○	○○○○○	8 0 8 0 8 0
○○○○○	○○○○○	9 0 9 0 9 0
○○○○○	○○○○○	10 0 10 0 10 0

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

Close your eyes, open your mouth and say, 'Aaaaaah.'
It will hurt only for a second.

Doctor

Prelude: You watched the Soviet armies march by your window when you were a little girl. They moved as one unit, all alike in their precise uniforms. You remember thinking how you wanted to join them in their march across the world.

Unfortunately, in your youthful exuberance you failed to realize that the army had few jobs for women. What a revelation that was, spoken so quietly by your mother. She explained that women were meant to make babies, to care for family, while men did the things that required strength and intelligence.

Eventually, based on your test scores, you were chosen to go to a women's medical school. They wanted you to become a nurse. On the day of graduation, you were assigned to an army medical unit. You underwent more training to handle medical care in battle, but also learned self-defense, military protocol and how to handle firearms.

Over the next few years, you carried out your duties in battle-torn areas. You followed the Soviet army wherever it led. Then came the "great betrayal," as you call it. Military conflicts occurred less frequently. You spent more time playing cards and emptying bedpans than you did repairing bullet wounds or picking shell fragments from tattered bodies.

Eventually, your final orders arrived. Soviet officials had appointed you to a veteran's home. A hospital for tired old soldiers! At first you thought it was a mistake. But in the days that followed, you came to realize that your loyalty to yourself outweighed your loyalty to the USSR.

You defied your orders. It wasn't difficult. You simply walked away one night, headed into the hills of Croatia. From there, you found a ride across Slovenia and entered Italy near Trieste. You were fortunate. The trip, which took only a few days, was short enough that your countrymen did not notice your absence until it was too late.

You stayed in Italy for nearly a year. Without help, you would have had remained for some time. You met a man who fell in love with you, however, and he gave you money

to travel to England. Once there, you applied for citizenship and a license to practice medicine.

Then a new war found you. Shortly after you received your British citizenship, you were in the vicinity of a bomb explosion at a business. Another political act of terrorism. You were showered with glass and thrown to the ground, your mind flashing back to your days in the service. Instinctively, you sought out any injured. That's when the sensation struck you. Something *wrong* was nearby. Something dead, but not someone killed by the blast. Something evil.

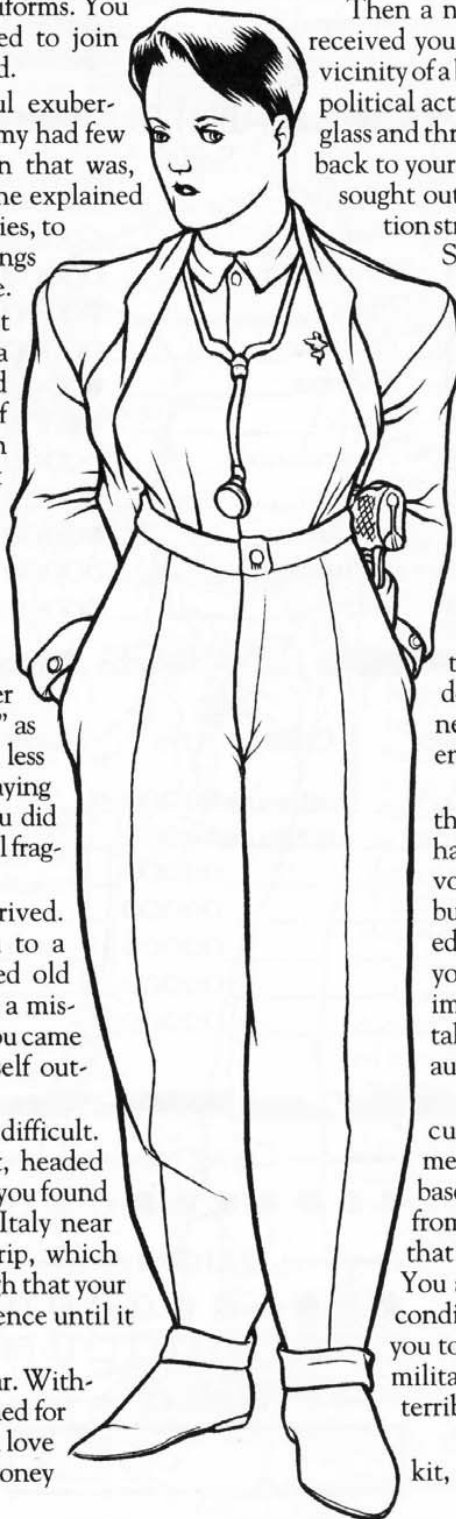
You spotted a shambling figure. It appeared to be a badly decayed person walking through the carnage. Its eyes met yours. Inky blackness spilled like tears down its cheeks. In that timeless moment, you knew there were far worse things in the world than mankind. You knew that there was another war brewing, one that had been kept secret from you — until now.

Although your anger demanded that you pursue the abomination and destroy it, you could not. The injured needed you more. There would be time enough to wage a private war... later.

Concept: You have always believed that you had a greater purpose, and you have always sensed that it somehow revolved around war. Medicine came later, but you have embraced it as wholeheartedly as part of your military calling. Now you combine your pursuits in the most important mission you have ever undertaken, and this one is not for any faceless authority. It is for yourself.

Roleplaying Hints: Perhaps you focused your maternal instincts into medicine. Of course, those old gender-based stereotypes mean little to you, aside from the occasional childhood self-doubt that keeps you from truly taking charge. You are organized and cool under stressful conditions. Growing up in the USSR made you tough and turned you into an excellent military doctor, but it also cultivated your terrible bedside manner.

Equipment: Fully equipped doctor's kit, Glock 9mm, uniform-style pantsuit



Incapacitated ☐

I know you want the kid, but I said 'No,' and I meant it.

PARENT

Prelude: There's something that *really* sucks about coming from the stereotypical dysfunctional family. Sure, everybody's alcoholic mother passes out with a lit cigarette at least once. Everyone's father splits with a younger woman. Whose kid brother doesn't make trouble? The thing is, you have to hold it all together.

So, when the time came for college, you were ready to start your own life. Your mother had cleaned up her act. Your kid brother could feed himself. They didn't need you anymore, so you left. Shitty part is, at college all you did was make needy friends. If anybody had to go to the hospital or get bailed out of jail, somebody called you. In the long run, you didn't mind. Old habits die hard.

Not even your reputation as a "nice guy" bothered you too much. Sure, it put you on the "just friends" list of most women, but you didn't have time for that anyway. You had to drive your drunk friend home, keep your buddy from picking fights with Neanderthals, help your roommate study for his math test, and keep your eye on that depressed kid.

One night, the fire alarm went off in the dorm. By that time you had made resident assistant, which meant that you were "in charge" of your hall. You settled disputes, watched out for drugs and booze, and enforced the curfew. You blew off most stuff unless an infraction was blatant. You did have to make sure everyone in your hall left the building during a fire alarm, though. You knocked on the doors, one by one, then opened them with your key to make sure everyone was out.

Number 220. You'll never forget that number. The door was covered with stupid cartoons and pictures of supermodels. Bill Jenkins and Michael Chen lived there. When you knocked, someone shouted, "Get th'fuck outta here."

"C'mon, man. You know the rules!" you responded. "Fire alarm. You gotta clear out."

There was no reply, and you almost turned away. If there was one thing you hated, it was confrontation. But then, a word bubble in one of the cartoons caught your eye. It said, "COWARD! HE'LL DIE!" A shiver ran down your spine. You put the key in the lock.

"Bill? Mike? I'm comin' in!" The door opened just enough for you to see inside. Something growled and slammed it shut. You took it on the chin and staggered back into the hall, but you barely noticed the pain. You knew what you'd seen: Michael lying on the floor in a puddle of blood.

You didn't question what you had to do. Someone needed you, now more than ever, as if your entire life of helping other people had led up to that moment.

You searched for a weapon in 219, Tom's room.

He had a baseball bat in the corner. You picked it up. But then a reading lamp suddenly flickered on over his bed. It highlighted a silver crucifix Tom had hanging on the wall. The religious significance didn't matter to you. To your eyes it just looked sharp — like a knife. You left the bat behind.

The rest happened quickly. You didn't give yourself time to think or be afraid. This time you didn't announce yourself. Instinct took over. It was huddled in a corner when you came in. The fight was over quickly. With the crucifix stuck in its chest, the thing crashed through the window.

They never found Bill. Michael survived, but he'll never be the same. You visit him on weekends at his mom's. Looks like you traded in your dysfunctional family for a dysfunctional world.

Concept: You've always taken care of people. It's what you do best. You're the responsible one who protects those who can't protect themselves. For the first time in your life, you not only feel genuinely needed, but that someone is watching out for you, too. You're not alone anymore. You've received "the sign." Some guiding hand has touched you. It has faith in you.

Roleplaying Hints: You're ever vigilant for any hint that someone is in danger, and you're prepared to come to their aid. You don't like to kill, but you will if you must. Quick-witted and cool in stressful situations, you focus primarily on getting a victim to safety.

Equipment: Silver crucifix dagger (you got your own), portable first-aid kit, wire cutters, baseball cap, jeans, running shoes, beat-up Toyota Starlet



HUNTER-BOOK DEFENDER

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: **Provider**
DEMEANOR: **Caregiver**
CONCEPT: **Parent**

PRIMARY VIRTUE: **zeal**
CREED: **Defense**
STARTING CONVICTION: 3

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

MENTAL

Perception (Alert) ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●
Intimidation ○○○○○
Intuition ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

SKILLS

Animal Ken ○○○○○
Crafts ○○○○○
Demolitions ○○○○○
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ●●●●●
Firearms ○○○○○
Melee ●●●●●
Performance ○○○○○
Security ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ●●●●●

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ●●●●●
Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Computer ●●●●●
Finance ○○○○○
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics (Spanish) ●●●●●
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ●●●●●
Politics ○○○○○
Research ●●●●●
Science ○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ●●●●●
Destiny ●●●●●
Patron ●●●●●
Resources ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Ward	Defense	●●●●●	
Demand	Martyrdom	●●●●●	
		○○○○○	
		○○○○○	
		○○○○○	
		○○○○○	

VIRTUES

Mercy		Vision		Zeal	
SCORE	SPENT	SCORE	SPENT	SCORE	SPENT
1	● X	1	○	1	● X
2	○	2	○	2	●
3	○	3	○	3	○
4	○	4	○	4	○
5	○	5	○	5	○
6	○	6	○	6	○
7	○	7	○	7	○
8	○	8	○	8	○
9	○	9	○	9	○
10	○	10	○	10	○

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

SURVIVALIST

A freakin' army of mouth-breathers couldn't make it in here. Let 'em try!

Prelude: Your grandparents were old-fashioned country folk who cut their own firewood and ate the game they hunted and killed. Your grandfather passed his skills and interests on to his children. Although you didn't come along until much later, your dad made sure you knew all the ins and outs of the wilderness, too. He took you fishing and hunting, showed you the proper way to handle a gun, and taught you how to live off the land. When your family went on vacation, that meant camping.

After they retired, your parents moved to Florida and left you the house. You worked at the local restaurant, had a few girlfriends and got drunk on the weekends. Those were the good ol' days.

Then one night, you were running the register when a group of punks came in. They were trouble, the kind who loosened the salt shaker lids and put your tip under a glass of water turned upside-down. You hated jerks like that. The waitress didn't want to deal with them, either, so you were stuck serving them. They talked too loud, laughed too loud and shot the papers off their straws at other customers. One of those customers happened to be a tired truck driver who wasn't in the mood. He got up and threatened them. Of course, the punks laughed at him and called him names. When he went back to his seat, one of losers pulled it out from under him.

The trucker was pissed. He went after the nearest one, the one he figured moved his chair. You turned away for a moment to call the manager. When you looked back — the whole group had turned into *things*. Some had skin falling off and messed-up faces. One had sores all over and another had a huge mouth with horrible teeth. The last broke a bottle and waved it around. Two of the creatures grabbed the trucker, who was about ready to shit his pants.

To top it all off, the jukebox started to skip at that moment, repeating, "SAVE HIM. SAVE HIM. SAVE HIM." It's good that it did, because the "message" snapped you out of a daze. Suddenly you knew that you had to do *something* or the trucker would be hurt.

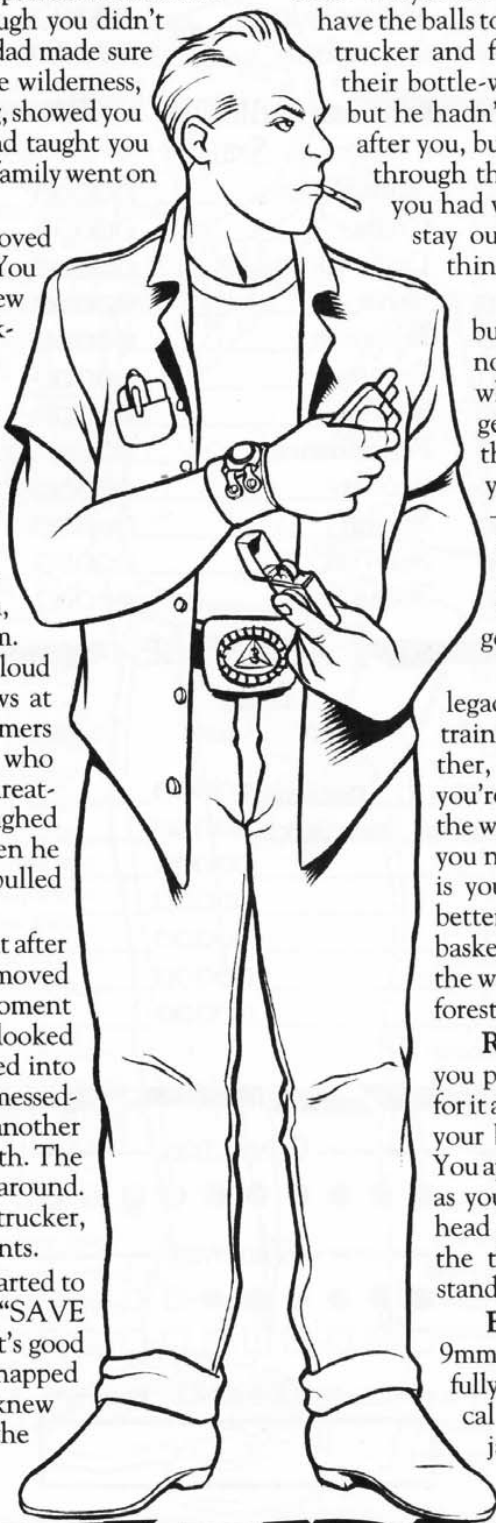
You grabbed a pot of hot coffee and rushed from behind the counter as you yelled, "Get the hell out of here!" Maybe the things weren't expecting anyone to have the balls to get involved, but they dropped the trucker and fell back from you. They dragged their bottle-wielding friend outside with them, but he hadn't had enough. He moved to come after you, but somehow he couldn't get back in through the door. It wouldn't budge, and all you had was one hand on the handle. "And stay out," you warned. That's when the things finally ran off for good.

You finished your shift that day, but things were never the same. You noticed more *things* after that, people who were wrong. Some seemed dangerous, some innocuous, but none of them right. That's when you realized your family's home — and the woods — were the safest place to be. You started amassing guns and supplies, preparing for the worst. Everyone who used to know you thought you'd gone crazy. Yeah, crazy like a fox!

Concept: It's as if your family's legacy has all been for you. Without the training passed down from your grandfather, you'd probably be dead now. But you're not. You're alive, you know that the world is wrong, and you have the skills you need to survive it. Your family home is your fortress for now, but you know better than to put all your eggs in one basket. You have hiding places all over the woods. They'll have to burn down the forest if they want to get you.

Roleplaying Hints: You know that you probably can't just hole up and wait for it all to blow over, but you do know that your best chance lies in a good defense. You approach every problem with survival as your primary concern. You're no hot-head and you don't rush into danger for the thrill of it. You'll be the last one standing, no matter what.

Equipment: Shotgun; .22 caliber rifle; 9mm handgun; homemade pipe bombs; fully stocked shelter, including basic medical supplies; camouflage pants; leather jacket; steel-toed boots; Chevy van



HUNTER-BOOK DEFENDER

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: **Survivor**
DEMEANOR: **Rogue**
CONCEPT: **Survivalist**

PRIMARY VIRTUE: **zeal**
CREED: **Defense**
STARTING CONVICTION: **3**

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina (tireless) ●●●●●

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

MENTAL

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intimidation ●●●●●
Intuition ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

SKILLS

Animal Ken ○○○○○
Crafts (Engines) ●●●●●
Demolitions ●●●●●
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Performance ○○○○○
Security ●●●●●
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ●●●●●
Traps (pits) ●●●●●

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○○○○○
Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Computer ○○○○○
Finance ○○○○○
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ●●●●●
Politics ●●●●●
Research ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

	NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
<u>Arsenal</u> ●●●●●	<u>Ward</u>	<u>Defense</u>	●●●●●	
<u>Stronghold</u> ●●●●●	<u>Lock</u>	<u>Defense</u>	●●●●●	
<u> </u> ○○○○○			○○○○○	
<u> </u> ○○○○○			○○○○○	
<u> </u> ○○○○○			○○○○○	
<u> </u> ○○○○○			○○○○○	

EDGES

VIRTUES

	Mercy	Vision	Zeal
	SCORE SPENT	SCORE SPENT	SCORE SPENT
1	0	0	1 ● <u>X</u>
2	0	0	2 ● <u>X</u>
3	0	0	3 ● <u>X</u>
4	0	0	4 ○
5	0	0	5 ○
6	0	0	6 ○
7	0	0	7 ○
8	0	0	8 ○
9	0	0	9 ○
10	0	0	10 ○

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised □
Hurt -1 □
Injured -1 □
Wounded -2 □
Mauled -2 □
Crippled -5 □
Incapacitated □

PROMINENT DEFENDERS

Some guardians and protectors have already made names for themselves through the hunter grapevine. Whether through word on the street or on the Internet, these people have received recognition among their own kind or other imbued for being resolute in their stand against the monstrous hordes. Or, these people have been decried by their own or by hunters who fail to recognize the importance of drawing a line. Some chosen simply don't understand that preserving certain people or places must occur at any cost, even other people or hunters. The infamous among these champions usually choose not to explain themselves when their stance is questioned or their territory is intruded upon. Defenders weather the siege, but sometimes it breeds a siege mentality.

GUADALUPE DROIN, AKA CABBIE22

Lupe Droin's story isn't particularly strange or uncommon, for the first 20 years of her life, anyway. She was born to parents living in Chicago's Henry Horner Homes — a housing project once described as "the boxes that misery comes in." She had a childhood that was fairly uneventful by the standards of her community.

Her father worked hard. He was lucky; he enjoyed work for work's sake. Even luckier, his job (assembling counterfeit designer clothes) was illegal but safe, so he could salt away money without fear of losing his housing subsidy. When he moved out of the projects, it was on his own terms as co-owner of a small restaurant. He worked 14-hour days and saved industriously, always telling his daughters that they were going to college some day.

For her part, Lupe worked fast food, got into a few fights, saved her wages and blew them on overpriced clothes. She learned to drive her dad's car and got severely punished for getting into a fender bender. She

had a number of boyfriends, got drunk some, got stoned some, but was never really a "bad girl" or a "good girl."

Then she met Jas.

Jas was nothing special... to anyone else. A flashy punk with good abs, bedroom eyes and more luck than sense. He was well on his way to being a second-rate second-story man when he met Lupe.

He thought she was pretty, and that's all it took. At the time, she thought it was fate. Now she dismisses it as lust. Whatever it was, the two of them were crazy together, and he got her to do some wild things with him.

She had a blast for a while. Breaking into houses was fun. Until the day the cops knocked on her dad's door and they found stolen property in her room. Until the day she had to go to court and listen as Jas testified against her for a reduced sentence. Until the day she watched her father cry in public.

She was 18 when she went to the penitentiary.

The big surprise came when her father forgave her. He'd saved for years to send her to college. That money went to hire a lawyer and get her out of jail.

Lupe has thanked her father, but she remains unsure how to repay him and, more importantly, how to win back his trust. She started by getting a job, by staying clean, by getting her gang tattoos removed. Now she drives a cab and lives at home with her father and younger sister. Lupe and her father almost never speak.

PROFILE

Lupe feels that the imbuing has given her a second chance to make up for the mistakes of her youth. At the same time, she's torn. She knows what her father must think of her strange hours, her pager and her forays into gang territory. She also fears it will destroy him if she's killed "in the line of duty." But her faith-bred guilt involving her father also won't let her stop her hunt.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Computer 1, Dodge 3, Drive (Urban Acceleration) 4, Firearms 2, Investigation 1, Law 1, Linguistics (English) 1, Melee 2, Security 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 4, Fraternity 2, Resources 1

Edges: (Defense) Ward, Rejuvenate; (Vengeance) Cleave, Trail

Zeal: 6, **Conviction:** 8, **Willpower:** 9

JACK HARMON, AKA HANNIBAL137

Jack Harmon grew up in a poor area of Floyd County, Virginia, where folks trying to lay low went to escape proper society. Jack's father left when the boy was a few years old, leaving him, his mother and his younger brother, Brian, to cope with poverty.

When Jack was 14, Brian disappeared. Jack obsessed himself with finding his brother. He spent days combing





the woods, far longer than the half-hearted police and a handful of concerned neighbors did. They didn't find Brian. Eventually, even Jack had to admit defeat.

Jack's anger over the loss engulfed him. He became a troublemaker. He'd been arrested twice by the time he was 16. He dropped out of school at 17, got a girl pregnant and was saddled with a loveless marriage. He lived off his mother for nearly a year after that, spending his time frustrated and drunk. That is, till the police called with information that Brian's body had been found. A county worker had found the boy partially exhumed in the back 40 of the Kendrick place. Even the locals considered the Kendricks "hillbillies." Some stories were even less... gracious.

Jack didn't wait for the police to investigate. He decided to take justice into his own hands and went to the Kendrick place himself. There was a dog in the yard, but Jack took care of it. Some kid answered the door and Jack beat him aside with a bat. His shouts of "Who killed my brother?" went unanswered as other family members overwhelmed him and nearly beat him to death. Jack recovered in police custody. The sheriff did his usual lame-ass job investigating the family and turned up no connection to the dead boy. Meanwhile, Jack went to prison.

Not surprisingly, jail time didn't do anything to alleviate Jack's anger. If anything, the abuse he suffered inside hardened his heart and soul. He was determined to make his brother's murderers pay, but he wasn't sure how to go about it without winding up in jail again. It would have to look like an accident....

When Jack was finally paroled, he really hadn't learned any lessons. He went back to his hometown and learned what had changed in his absence. His mother had died. His ex-wife had moved on. He had no immediate family left. All he really had was a taste for revenge, and he was pleased to hear that at least some of the Kendricks still lived up in the hills.

This time Jack went better armed. Turned out he didn't really need to be. The only members of the family still living there were old and senile, grandparents wallowing in their own shit. They didn't even have the presence to confront him when he barged into the dilapidated house.

Although the couple were past their prime, their legacy lived on. Jack found a box in the bedroom filled with a shitload of money. That was a start, he thought. He felt only slightly more mollified when he emptied an oil lamp and started a fire that burned the place to the ground.

Although the face of the local law had changed, its dedication hadn't. Harmon was questioned as to his whereabouts during the fire, but he couldn't be placed there. When no other Kendricks could be found to inherit the land, it went up for auction. As the ultimate irony, he used the money he'd stolen to buy the property and build a house on the foundation of the old one.

It was during this time that Harmon discovered the cavern hidden off the root cellar. Bizarre, terrible visions of child torture and murder assailed him, as if the ghosts of the dead wanted their story to be known. He was confronted with the horrible acts that had been perpetrated there in the past. He buried the remains of the bodies he'd found and hoped he'd laid their souls to rest. He finally understood what might have happened to his brother years before, and he vowed never to let it happen again.

Little did he know that not all the Kendricks' kin are dead or gone. At least one has returned to discover the loss of the property, house and cavern, and has tried to take it back by trickery and force. Fortunately, Harmon's years of hardship and bitterness have made him a dogged, ruthless defender of his home and his brother's memory.

PROFILE

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Crafts (Improvised Tools) 3, Demolitions 1, Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Intuition (Hidden Motives) 4, Medicine 1, Melee 2, Occult 2, Security 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1, Survival 3, Technology 1, Traps (Stairways) 4

Backgrounds: Arsenal 2, Exposure 1, Iron Willed 3, Resources 2, Stronghold 3

Edges: (Defense) Alarm, Ward, Rejuvenate; (Judgment) Discern, Burden

Zeal: 7, **Conviction:** 5, **Willpower:** 7

Derangement: Xenophobia

XIAN QUAN, AKA DZIDZAY 155

Quan is the heir to a sizable business in Hong Kong. While his family is wealthy, they are newly rich. Quan's grandfather started his family along the golden path. His father quadrupled the wealth that he received, and no less is expected of Quan.

The transfer of political power back to Mainland China has increased the pressure on Quan to guide his



grandfather's company. Like many Chinese family businesses, it is a diverse lot: chicken farms on the mainland; CD factories near Shanghai; and the foundation of its prosperity, a small import business in the New Territories dealing in opals and jade. The company is the pride of Quan's beloved grandfather, the hope of his immediate family, and the sustenance and security for over a thousand workers. He takes this charge and his responsibility for it very seriously.

Quan grew up between East and West. Educated by traditional tutors and English public schools in Hong Kong, he attended college at George Washington University in the United States. Once he returned home, he worked middle management for five years. Only recently has he been invited to come to the headquarters and join his father at the head of the company.

Quan's substantial burden has doubled since he was imbued. His grandfather has told him stories of gods and unquiet spirits haunting the living. Then, one day, he found himself seated across from one of those very things at a business meeting. Quan drove away the ghost masquerading as a Chinese businessman, but not without a cost. A week later, a walking corpse attacked him as he traveled between Kowloon and the New Territories. The pragmatic Quan immediately contacted the "businessman" and apologized for his rudeness. But rather than do business with the creature, Quan pointed him to a competitor, even though he knew he would lose money as a result. Quan subtly took over this father's calendar thereafter and started "screening" all appointments, searching for a pattern among the creatures he saw, and looking for a means to protect his family business.

Indeed, when Quan was imbued, his eyes opened to streets filled with supernatural creatures. A business trip to Beijing proved that the beings were not confined to Hong Kong. He will long remember the sights of the Forbidden City, a city of the dead.

The pervasiveness of creatures has made Quan's hunt subtle, so as not to draw their attention to him or his loved ones. For now, protecting the business is his primary duty, but he understands even that his battle is a losing one. Something more — something proactive — must be done.

THE ROSE FOUNDATION

No one knows what man, woman or group is behind the seemingly philanthropic Rose Foundation, although theories are exchanged among the few hunters who have encountered the institution. The foundation's influence was felt before it was ever identified online or by presumably isolated imbued. Word of its first unsolicited acts of hunter charity included money donated to Cabbie22 to repair her wrecked taxi. It also supposedly financed an expedition into the Congo to track down a "serial killer." Someone else reported that the organization donated food and medical supplies to a group in Chile that was fighting zombies in the wake of an earthquake. These gifts appear to have come completely out of the blue, and no one requested that the recipients make reparations.

According to recent posts on hunter-net by someone going by the handle Rose21, the organization's founder(s) established it "to offer financial support to the world's inheritors." Since that cryptic message, the person or people behind the name have offered no further information, nor has anything more about the group been revealed. Indeed, Witness1 has cautioned the chosen online not to invest too much faith or enthusiasm into these seeming patrons, due to the lack of knowledge about their identity, intentions or motivation.

Needless to say, many imbued have swamped hunter-net with requests for funding. In response, the Rose Foundation seems to turn a deaf ear, perhaps simply lurking in search of truly deserving individuals to receive assistance (if any do at all). If contributions ascribed to Rose thus far are any indication, there's no fanfare involved. Rose's motives would seem to transcend thanks or adulation, but no one can say for sure.

Indeed, the Rose Foundation's anonymity disturbs many on the list, despite their own facelessness there. Demands that the group explain itself and reveal its founders have met with silence. Some posters even request that Rose be removed from the list, for fear that his/her "generosity" is actually a distraction from the activities of an invading enemy. The fact that Rose seems to know information about other imbued, as proved by the unsolicited contacts made, is held up as testament to these hunters' concerns. Nonetheless, the occasional hunter receives an unexpected delivery from time to time, a gift of money, information, documents or directions that allows him to continue the watch.

WALLACE SIMS, AKA DOLE7

Wallace Sims is not what you would expect of a computer nerd. Wallace was blessed with intelligence, but to him it has always seemed much more like a curse. Wallace's father and grandfather worked in the steel mills



near Sheffield, England. He expected to follow suit. A regular job and good pay. That would have been enough. Yet, his parents and friends noticed the difference in him; he could do better. The more they pushed him to excel academically, however, the more he rebelled by picking fights and hanging out with the wrong crowd. Once Wallace was finally out of school and ready to start at the mill, disaster struck: His father had secretly entered him in competition for a scholarship, and he won. Wallace obediently went away to school to please his father but couldn't take the pressure. A few fights later, he was kicked out.

Family relations fell apart after this final disappointment. Not even the death of Wallace's father turned the son around. He grew even angrier at the lot that life had dealt him. More often than not, he sat at home and drank or went 'round to the pub. He even turned his back on his friends in time, to get away from the life he wanted to forget.

Finally, under threat of being cut off the dole, Wallace grudgingly signed up for a retraining class for laid-off workers. Surprisingly, he enjoyed computers and soon outstripped his classmates. He might have stuck with it, but the instructor singled him out for extra attention, so he quit. But this time, rather than make the same old mistake, he stole a computer and some books with which to continue to teach himself.

Within a few years, Wallace's name got around on the net, and he was offered jobs designing databases and websites. He managed to keep his business quiet, since he was still living off the dole. Then a hacker broke into his machine. Rather than infuriating Wallace, the intrusion intrigued him. Keeping the hacker out became a game, and the anonymous person began to leave hints about technique and how Wallace could do the same against others. He had found the best teacher he had ever known, and his skills improved by leaps and bounds.

Then, one day, the tutelage came to a crashing halt. When Wallace booted his machine one morning, there was a crackle of electricity and a message appeared on the screen: "BEHOLD THE MASTER!" Suddenly an image flashed of a hideous creature, an amalgam of man and machine, slaving as it pecked at the keyboard with cracked, pointed nails.

Wallace shoved his computer to the floor in terror and fled his flat. He stayed away for days, uncertain of what to do and whom to turn to. Finally, he worked up the courage to return to his home. As he approached, a car pulled alongside him. The driver rolled down his window and called in a snide tone, "Wallace, your latest project is late." As the man removed his sunglasses, Wallace saw the metallic, reflective eyes of the creature that had appeared on his screen. Amazingly, people on the street saw nothing and went about their business.

Wallace ran for his apartment. Surprisingly, his machine was still on and working where he'd left it on the floor. Repeated line after line across the screen was "KEEP THE EVIL AT BAY." Wallace immediately set to keeping his intruder out, once and for all. The electronic battle heated and he had to replace fried modems and fused motherboards. But such defeats didn't deter him. If he was going to free himself at last, he'd have to prevail. Finally, the attacks ended. He had won and could keep his monstrous intruder outside the wall.

Not only that, now he knew about *them*....

Wallace has never "heard" the Messengers. He has discovered the burgeoning hunter community online and suspects the Heralds have contacted him electronically, although he doesn't know how they do it. His experiences with creatures online have taught him how to elude and confound them, sometimes in ways that not even he understands. He has confided some of his secrets to fellow site moderators, but otherwise devotes himself to assisting fellow "imbued" online, primarily ones who demonstrate a similar calling for protecting what little they have, whether in life or online. The Vigil website and list are the results.

PROFILE

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence (Puzzle Fiend) 4, Wits (Sharp-Tongued) 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 4, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2, Intuition (Inspirational Flashes) 4, Investigation 1, Leadership 1, Melee 1, Research 1, Science 1, Security 3, Streetwise 2, Technology 3, Traps 1

Backgrounds: Patron 3, Resources 1, Stronghold 3

Edges: (Defense) Alarm, Lock, Brand; (Visionary) Foresee, Pinpoint

Zeal: 7, **Vision:** 3, **Conviction:** 6, **Willpower:** 7

Derangement: Paranoia

HUNTER BOOK™ DEFENDER

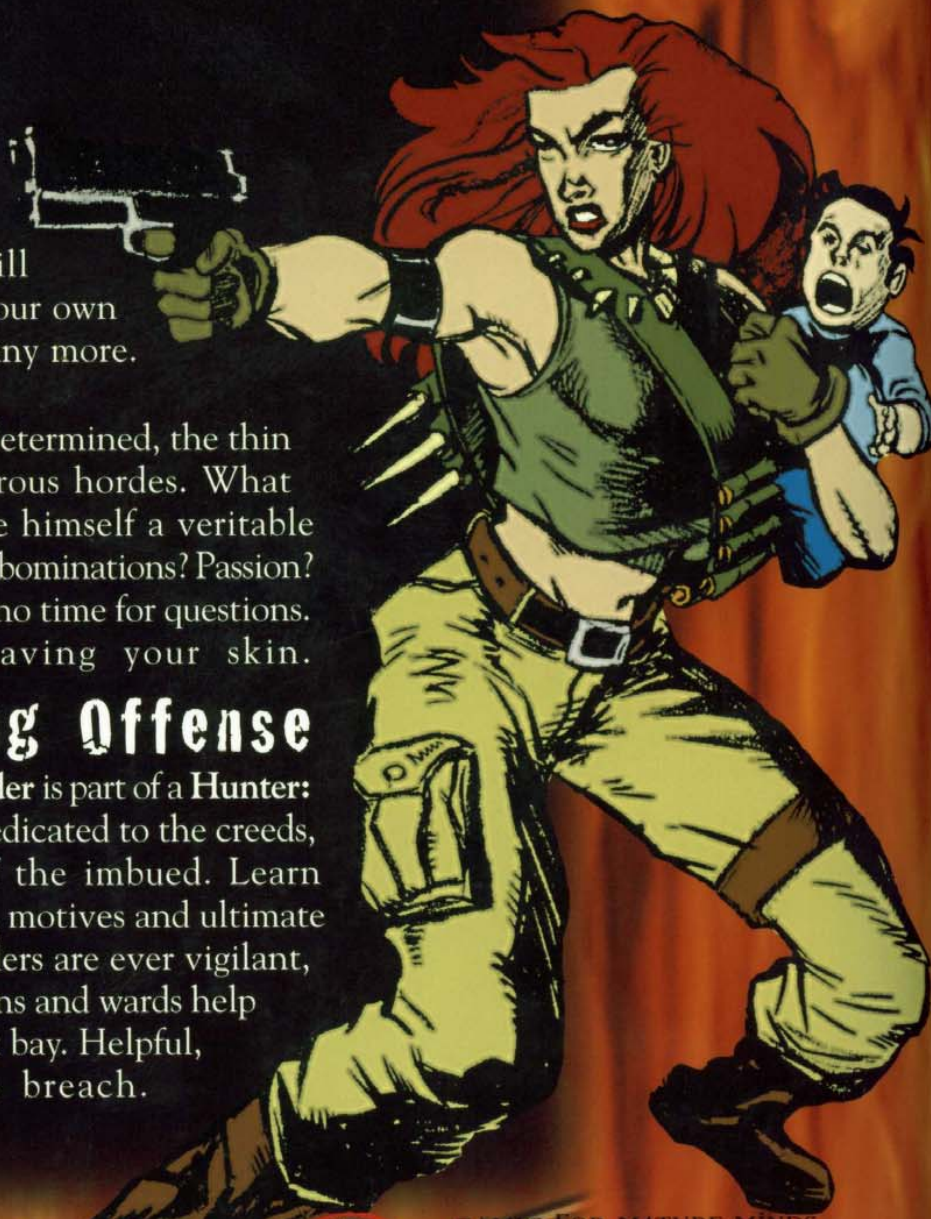
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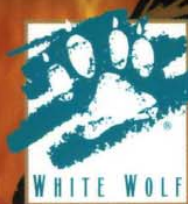
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