DEMONGROUND

Reflections of a Darker Future

SEPTEMBER 2002
VOL 15

WEIRD SCIENCE

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CALL OF CTHULHU
Night in the Mountains — Chad Bowser
CHILDREN OF THE SUN
Full Circle — Lewis Pollak
The Harvest — Dan Ross
DARK CONSPIRACY
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ZOMBIES!!!
ZOMBIES 1 & 2 Review — Lee Williams

... Plus A Lot More!!!

ORIGINS AWARD NOMINEE

www.demonground.org

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ORIGINS AWARD NOMINEE 2000

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Next Issue:

HELL ON EARTH

Our sixteenth issue is going to include information on a number of new games (and a couple older ones) that focus on one particular aspect of horror. Whether you refer to it as Theological Horror or Biblical Horror, there's no denying that somebody out there wants to explore these realms of mystery. And we're here for you!

During our visits this year to Origins and GenCon, we noticed quite a few games on this topic. *The End, The Seventh Seal, Heaven and Earth*, and *In Nomine* are but a few games that fit in this subgenre of horror. And many of the games we already cover in DEMONGROUND dabble into these areas as well.

The cover art for the next issue is fantastic. We found Jason A. Engle in the Art Show at GenCon. The piece, titled "The Bleed" seemed like the perfect complement to our Hell on Earth theme. We'll tell you more about Jason and this striking painting next time.

Until then, feel free to keep sending us submissions on any topic. Even themed issues carry material that strays from the theme.

Weird Science

Welcome one and all to our fifteenth issue. This time around we are looking at the theme of technology turned bad, as used in countless movies and stories.

Science: Good or Bad? A question often debated on TV shows and at universities everywhere, and yet one with no simple answer. On one hand, science benefits many people's lives and yet on the other hand it can destroy just as many, just as easily.

Now don't worry, I haven't gone all philosophical on you...however, the science gone bad (or even mad) idea is one that has always been a fertile source in the creative imagination of mankind. Ever since our distant ancestors worked out things like slingshots and bows and wheels, our imaginations have thrilled at the prospect of what technology might enable us to do. Greek myth has giant bronze vulture automatons tearing out a Titan's liver, Hebrew tales have the almost unstoppable Golem. In more modern times, from Frankenstein's creation to Lovecraft's incomprehensible alien devices, we still get a kick out of these ideas. Movies too have a big share of mad technology, things that are done merely because it is possible to do them: Robocop is an obvious one, Event Horizon another, Jurassic Park yet another.

This has carried over into roleplaying games of course, but let us not forget that real life technology can also let us down in spectacular and horrifying ways, or can be twisted to other uses. Einstein's theories were utilized by Oppenheimer and his people to create the nuclear bomb, the Titanic hit the iceberg at the wrong angle, Challenger's boosters were fitted with the cheapest available sealing rings...all of these are prime examples of science and technology that looked like a good idea at the time but proved to be otherwise.

Naturally, roleplaying in the genres that Demonground covers almost begs for the use, misuse and abuse of technology. Whether it be simply hacking into a cultist's mainframe in Cthulhu Now, disrupting a Dark Tek bio-device in Dark Conspiracy or foiling an orbital mind control satellite in Con X, the possibilities are there.

It's up to you to look for them and use them :-)

Before I finish, some other news. As you will know by now Demonground was nominated for the Origins Award for Best Amateur Gaming Periodical, for the second time in a row. However, it was not our turn to collect this year, and the award went to Lee Gold once again for her publication 'Alarums and Excursions'. Congratulations to all who won, especially those who gained their awards for horror game material: Chaosium for 'Unseen Masters' and Journeyman Press/Twilight Creations Inc for ZOMBIES!!!. Check out the review of ZOMBIES!!! elsewhere in this very issue.

Believe me though, we at Demonground will strive to ensure that it's our turn next year...as long as we get the nomination anyway :-) Are you with us, or do we have to set the robots loose??

Lee Williams ❖

"You've got to listen to me. Elementary chaos theory tells us that all robots will eventually turn against their masters and run amok in an orgy of blood and kicking and the biting with the metal teeth and the hurting and shoving..."

- Professor Frink (Early 21st Century Itchy and Scratchy robotics advisor)

The Last Hurrah!

By Mike Marchi

The Wednesday evening sun was starting its descent toward the horizon as I crossed 4th street and approached the southeast entrance to the Midwest Express Center in Milwaukee. The glowing sign over the door cycled through its message loop: WELCOME GEN CON 35 … THE BEST FOUR DAYS IN GAMING …

The crowd was enormous. There were people everywhere. Every bench, step and planting box had someone sitting on it or standing nearby. They were gathering - called once again to the same place to perform a familiar, comforting ritual. Gather. Register. Meet.

People who had not seen each other in a year recalled past exploits. They laughed. The doors opened and several people came out, carrying a small plastic bag filled with gifts. The offerings included booster packs to the Buffy the Vampire Slayer CCG, CD-ROMs containing the Magic: The Gathering Online game, and various flyers – including instructions for this year's time-traveling puzzle game.

I stepped inside the foyer, glanced to my right and a bemused smile turned up the corners of my mouth. He was still there. The security guard statue still stood, head cocked to one side, arms crossed. Glasses still perched on his head. He looked good. As good as the year that MWEC opened - the year we had stood, fascinated when we realized that it wasn't a real guy standing there. It had been two days of avoiding the security guard's gaze before we had noticed. That was before the ropes, of course. I shook my head sadly. *Last time, old friend*.

I followed his gaze across the foyer to the information booth, and the line that stretched down the hall. I tried to see if this was the line for the nearby row of registration booths, or the line for something beyond. As it turns out, beyond took the kewpie doll. It was either the line for Will-Call or perhaps even worse – the line for Event Registration. Either way, it was a depressingly long line, stretching at least the full length of the convention center. *Some things never change.*

I watched someone snatch a cheap, plastic, beaded chain from the information desk, thread it through their laminated player badge, and drape it around their neck. *Bummer*. The metal beaded chain is bad enough, but plastic just seemed wrong somehow – I prefer the clips. Fortunately, my badge had been shipped to me many months earlier. I grabbed two chains off the table and pocketed one for Becky's badge. Looking at the line again, I decided the little bag of Buffy cards could wait. I just needed to find my brother-in-law and his girlfriend, and lead them back to *The King and I* for the traditional pre-convention spice-fest. I always found an odd synchronicity in ordering Thai food with the "Adventurous" spice level before spending four days of serious gaming.

You'll have to forgive me for waxing nostalgic. Unless you've spent the last year under a rock, you know the story. GenCon is moving. This was the last year for GenCon in Milwaukee. Next year, GenCon will be in Indianapolis. A bigger facility. More hotel space. More restaurants. Everything opened longer. It's supposed to be a great thing. I looked at a sign announcing the future dates for the convention. My brow furrowed. "I thought it was going to be the end of August." My companion shook his head. "No. Peter Adkison bought the convention and renegotiated the contract."

For the record, GenCon 36 is going to take place in Indianapolis, Indiana July 24-27, 2003. In 2004, 2005, and 2006, the dates will slip back to the second weekend of August (as we've come to expect). After that, who knows? Popular rumor has the Con coming back to Milwaukee in 2007. Frankly, I can't see that happening. The problems that are carrying it off to another city couldn't possibly be solved by simply disappearing for a couple years. MWEC is still too small. The hotel space is still too limited. GenCon has gotten too big, and looks to be staying that way. At least for now.

For the most part, it seems people are choosing to remain skeptical about GenCon, Indianapolis. Someone from the Indianapolis visitor's bureau manned a booth outside the Great Hall. Armed with a map of the city and a 3d model of the Indy streets, he passed out brochures and basically chatted up Indy to anyone who cared to stop and listen. I did, and I'm strangely encouraged by what I heard. The Indiana Convention Center is 1.9 million-square feet of available gaming space. That's more than triple the space of MWEC. The convention center is attached directly to three hotels, and indirectly (via a connected mall) to even more. They say 2800 hotel rooms are attached directly to the extended convention center complex *and* there's an attached parking garage. There are restaurants, there is shopping and there is even other things to do – plus a city nightlife that continues until about 3:00am every day. Hmmm…

But enough of the future. Let us parley more on the recent past – on the final days of a gentle giant, sliding off to peaceful slumber – to dream, perchance to reawaken in another time and place – a better place? We can dream.

Thursday morning dawned on MWEC, and with it the crowds returned. Only now they weren't gathering outside. They were converging on the third floor, outside the Great Hall. As the 10:00 hour loomed, the crowd swelled. The escalators groaned: *Is it that time again? So soon? My gears… my aching gears…*

There is a distinct electricity that goes through a crowd before an anticipated opening. It was odd, because it didn't come with a shout, or a battle cry. The doors simply opened, and the tone of conversations seemed to drop an octave as all the voices turned as one toward the doors. And we began to move into the maw, with our wallets bulging and our credit cards aching, we entered the dealer hall.

And it was good.

In the four days I was at the convention, I must have walked the sales floor a half-dozen times. And I'm talking *fully* walked it. I tried to pause and look at everything at least once, and most things more than once.

There is nothing quite like the sales floor at GenCon. The mixture of color, costume, sound, music, the press of bodies, the steadily inflating bag of holding, the sore feet, the straining back. For some people, there is no such thing as a local gaming store. For those people, four days of the convention must serve a year's accumulated desires. Hell, for some of us the gaming store exists, but let's face it. It's small. It's so very, appallingly small. It's so very much *not* GenCon.

And there was Gaming to be sure. I don't want to spend a lot of time offering advice on how to handle getting into games at GenCon, or what the pitfalls are. The rules will undoubtedly change before the next one. So let us leave it at this: If you didn't pre-register, and waited in line, nearly everything appeared to be sold out. But if you took a leap of faith and bought the Generic Tickets, and went to the gaming tables at the appointed hour, you were almost never turned away. It seems that the bulk of the gaming masses bit off more than they could chew. With eyes, decidedly bigger than their calendars, they had overbooked themselves, and they blew off session after session with reckless abandon. Such is life. Long live the Generic Ticket!

The old standards were there: the Art Show, the Anime Room, the Auction. The Costume ball ... yes, there were costumes aplenty. Klingon warriors roamed the halls, in search of their prey. And then, when the quarry was cornered, they apprehended, abused and humiliated them in the name of charity. Maidens in period costume – both traditional and – shall we say provocative, wandered the hall. Oh sure, Chainmail Girl was there (isn't she always), but this was the first year I saw Police Tape Girl. Yes, just as Chainmail Girl wears nothing but linked metal rings, Police Tape Girl was clad only in some carefully placed strips of Police crime-scene tape. There were two notably well-appointed knights wandering in full plate-mail. Even the Dark Lord of the Sith himself, Darth Vader wandered the convention.

NOTABLE MOMENTS

Actually, mentioning Darth brings me to my collection of 'moments' from the convention. These were just random occurrences that were simply too good to let slip into obscurity without at least mentioning them.

Funniest Moment: I think my biggest chuckle of the convention was watching Darth Vader almost blunder into the wrong bathroom. The costume was nearly perfect. It detracted a bit to see Darth so obviously unable to see the markings on the door clear enough to avoid the error. I watched him correct his course, then disappear into the men's room – all cape a-flowing and lights a-flashing. The concept of Darth Vader standing at a urinal in GenCon just blew my mind -- talk about destroying the illusions of childhood!

Worst Use of Booth Space: The Dragonball Z Hummer, which sat in the middle of the convention hall, chewing up two booths worth of space with a solid, impassible mass of Military-grade SUV.

Most Visible New Product: That's a tossup. It was either the Buffy the Vampire Slayer RPG, or the Lord of the Rings RPG. I saw people everywhere carrying one or the other of these books.

Most Surprising Celebrity: That would have to be Lisa Ryder (Becca Valentine from Gene Rodenberry's Andromeda). The celebrity autograph table was right next to a main row of the convention, and the line stretched in the other direction, allowing someone who wasn't thinking about it too much, to wind up about four feet away from the celebrity-do-jour. Unlike many of the celebrities I see at conventions, I have to admit that Lisa looked exactly as she appears on TV. No disillusionment here, folks. She's the real deal.

Best In-Joke: Have you ever seen someone who was the embodiment of the spirit of the moment, yet apparently managed to miss the gag? The guys at Tyranny Games were busy promoting their post-revelation biblical horror game, "The End". To do this, every so often, they would send one of their people out into the crowd dressed in a burlap robe, and carrying a huge banner which read simply "The End is Here". When I first saw him, I was convinced it was some sort of editorial comment about the last stand in Milwaukee. *"This is it, folks. We're out of here."* But later, I found their booth, and even purchased their game *(More about that in the next issue!)*.

THINGS I'LL MISS ABOUT MILWAUKEE:

- The relatively short drive - For me, Milwaukee is just a stone's throw from Chicago. Indy is decidedly less convenient.
- The King & I – It has to be, hands down, my favorite Thai restaurant.
- The Safe House – This place is part mainstay, and part rite-of-passage for gamers reaching the age of alcohol consumption. The password? *"You'll Never Take Me Alive, Flatfoot"* (even now, leaving it behind, I can't bring myself to let this joke go – ah the memories of sitting inside watching the poorly informed newbie doing a headstand on the television monitor). I heard that somebody actually tried to get the owners to open a franchise in Indy. The owners have reportedly declined.

THINGS I WON'T MISS ABOUT MILWAUKEE:

- The vague sewer smell in the parking garages – ah screw it. The sewer smell. It's not vague at all.
- The lack of Starbucks (I'm addicted to coffee, what can I say?) – There are reportedly four of them near the Indy convention center.
- Almost every restaurant in town is closed on Sunday.
- Despite the fact that we've learned to tolerate each other, the people of Milwaukee really don't seem to like us very much. It's a pity, really. If anyone from Indy is reading this, make a note to treat the geeks with respect next year. They respond better to the belly rub, than the newspaper to the snout. They tip better, too.

So that's about it: a brief outline of the end of a legacy. As the clock ticked to 4:00pm on Sunday, and the Great Hall closed its doors for the last time, I witnessed another chapter of GenCon history come to a close. I wandered the gaming rooms after that, seeing if any games were still running. A few were reaching their finales. Things were being disassembled. Flyers were being swept up. Garbage cans were being emptied. Even as the crowds dispersed, I couldn't bring myself to feel sad. It really didn't feel like it was over. I firmly believe that GenCon will continue to flourish, no matter where it moves. Gamers are a stubborn lot, resistant to change – but they are still gamers. They go where the games are.

I made a point of walking out past the security guard one last time. *Take care of yourself, buddy. Perhaps we'll meet again.*

Mike Marchi
August, 2002

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"Free thought is a dangerous thing. It doesn't help the corporations or their puppet government if you stop and think about what state the world is actually in. As soon as you do that you realize what a mess they've made of it and you might just want to do something about it.

"That upsets the status quo. Upsetting the status quo is a very good way to meet with a nasty accident. I've seen it happen more times than I care to remember."

- Zena Marley (Early 21st-Century Mercenary-Philosopher)

ZOMBIES!!! AND MORE ZOMBIES!!!

by Lee Williams

ZOMBIES!!!

For 2 to 6 players age 12+
Designed by Todd Breitenstein
Published by Twilight Creations, Inc
www.twilightcreationsinc.com

I think it was during Gen Con UK 2001 when I first heard about this game, although I didn't get to play it until a couple of months later. When I did, I was hooked straight away...I love this game.

It doesn't take a genius to work out what the game is about. ZOMBIES!!! is based on the living/walking/un- dead movies of the 1970s and 1980s, and involves two to six players battling endless legions of zombies in order to win the game. There are two methods of winning; either fight your way to the helipad and escape or be the first to kill 25 zombies. Neither of these is as easy as you might think.

The game is simple enough to learn and has some neat features. The 'game board' is made up of map tiles that are mostly drawn at random, which ensures a different map every game. The exceptions are the Town Square tile, which is always first, and the Helipad, which in the basic game is always placed as the last tile. Each new tile contains a certain number of zombies, which are supplied from a bag of 100 plastic zombie figures...how many other games give you that? In fact, I would have bought the game even without having played it first just for the bag of zombies...a real selling point to a gaming loon like me :-) It is however possible to run out of figures when using just the base game, so it helps to keep a tally on paper in the later stages of the game and place the dead zombies back in the zombie pool.

Each player also draws cards at random from the event deck. These are things that can help you or hinder other players, such as different weapon types and extra zombies. I like this aspect of the game, as it enables you to 'help out' your fellow players...at least until they get in your way. The cards are very well illustrated and match the overall style of the game wonderfully.

Really the only issue my friends and I have had with the game is that it can sometimes go on a little longer than would be ideal. These concerns are dealt with in the rules for the expansion set 'Zombies 2: Zombie Corps (e)'.

There are already a couple of expansions for this game, one called simply 'Bag O'Zombies' which is a bag containing 100 extra zombie figures BUT unlike the ones in the basic game box, these glow in the dark! Woo and yay! The other expansion is 'Zombies 2: Zombie Corps(e)' which is reviewed below. There is also a separate horror game from the same publishers called 'When Darkness Falls', which uses a similar map tile system as well as a certain level of role-playing. More on that game next time, I promise.

* * *

ZOMBIES!!! 2 - ZOMBIE CORPS(E)

An expansion for ZOMBIES!!!
By Todd Breitenstein
Published by Twilight Creations, Inc.
www.twilightcreationsinc.com

This is one of the first expansions for the ZOMBIES!!! game, and was released at the same time as Bag O'Zombies. Zombie Corps(e) (or ZC(E)) is, as the name suggests, a military-themed expansion with 15 new map tiles representing a local army base near to the small town of the original game. Apart from these the box also contains 30 new event cards, some more life tokens (which are (finally) a different color (Red!) than the Bullet tokens unlike those in the original set - a nice touch considering they're pictures of little hearts – no, *real* hearts), half a dozen glow in the dark zombie figures (explained later) and a small rules leaflet detailing new rules and changes to existing ones.

Apart from rules mods, the booklet has ideas for making a game session a little shorter, and I already mentioned that a game of ZOMBIES!!! can go on a bit longer than it should. Some of the suggestions given here include shuffling the Helipad tile into the bottom part of the stack instead of leaving it to last, and ZC(E) includes another helipad that could be utilised in this way. It also states "Feel free to tweak the game as you see fit. After all, you bought it".

Tbe first thing we noticed when we playtested, the new event cards are a teeny bit larger than the originals, although this is not a problem when they have been shuffled in with the others. Apparently this is to make it easier to separate them from the original Event cards after play. To begin using ZC(E), the event cards are shuffled into one deck with the originals and the 'Front Gate' map tile from ZC(E) is shuffled in with the basic set tiles. The other new map tiles are shuffled also but are kept separated from the orignals, giving two stacks. Play goes as normal until the Front Gate is placed on the table. From this point on, players may place map tiles from either the original town stack OR the ZC(E) stack. Military tiles can only be placed next to other military tiles however, and if one stack is emptied then tiles from the other must be used.

There are a couple of special map tiles in ZC(E), the 'Top Secret Lab' and the 'Motor Pool'. The Lab contains six 'government enhanced' zombies, which are tougher and faster than the usual kind. Reminds me of that secret underground base in 'Buffy' for some reason...Anyway, the Motor Pool enables players to double their movement by the simple expedient of 'borrowing' a vehicle. Personally I would have liked to see a 'Bilko' zombie figure for use in the Motor Pool :-)

Anyway, be warned: we ran out of room on the gaming table, which was plenty big enough for the basic game. If space is limited bear that in mind. Overall though, excellent stuff and I wait with anticipation to see what Twilight Creations fevered brains come up with next for this line.

(Thanks to my playtest team: Pete Bowkett, Andrew Cain and Alan White)

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MASTERSCREEN: THE COOLEST NEW IDEA

by Mike Marchi

In the category of 'Best New Idea", comes the following offering from GenCon 2002. The **MasterScreen** by Citizen Games (http://www.citizengames.com/). One look at this simple, yet elegant game aid, and you can't help but think, "Duh!". I mean seriously, how come it took so long to come up with this?

Well the guys at Citizen Games have in fact, created a marvelous tool. A sturdy, tri-fold screen with clear pockets able to hold up to six (6) letter-sized sheets of information. What makes the idea even more compelling is the fact that they've enlisted the participation of a bunch of game companies, who provide a six-page PDF file on their web sites, that you can download, print, and insert into your MasterScreen. Check it out, you'll be glad you did.

"MasterScreen is a traditional tri-fold GM screen constructed of durable vinyl with a rigid chipboard interior, featuring clear plastic (non-stick) pockets on each face (six total) that are specially designed to allow for easy customization. These pockets are used to insert resource documents continuously facing the players, in addition to the inside being used by GMs for quick reference material. MasterScreen will be bundled with GM resource sheets from various established RPGs, in addition to giving manufacturers the opportunity to follow a standardized MasterScreen template for incorporation at anytime. Be a true game master for your players with MasterScreen! $19.95"

http://www.citizengames.com/

View from the Inside

View from the Outside

Participating Companies

Atlas Games
Backstage Press
Bastion Press
Battlefield Press
Clockworks
Driftwood Publishing
Fantages Studios
Gold Rush Games
Goodman Games
Grey Ghost Press
Guardians of Order
Hex Games
Khepera Publishing
Living Room Games
Misguided Games
Mystic Eye Games
Otherworld Creations
Paradigm Concepts
RPG Objects
Sanguine Productions
Scorpion's Nest
Seraphim Guard
Tyranny Games
Wingnut Games
Xig Games

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FULL CIRCLE

Hello everyone,

I've been asked to tell you a little bit about the picture featured on this issue's cover of *Demonground* and what makes it special. To do that I have to tell you a little about who I am and take you on a short trip in the Wayback Machine. My name is Lewis Pollak. A little over two years ago, I left my graduate program to follow a dream and publish a role-playing game. That company is Misguided Games (www.misguidedgames.com); the game is *Children of the Sun*, a dieselpunk fantasy RPG.

November 20th, 2000, sticks out in my mind as one of the most important dates in the development of *Children of the Sun* (CotS). We'd been hard at work for a few months. The system and setting were both starting to develop somewhat. Dan Ross, my business partner and the setting designer for CotS, had been trying to explain some setting ideas to me - important concepts about how he wanted technology to work. Frankly, I just wasn't getting it.

Around lunchtime, I got an IM from a good friend of mine, Joe Carl. Joe asked me if I had ever been to a site called www.demonground.org. I hadn't, so I headed over to check it out. The current issue at that time was number ten. I started poking around the site a bit and noticed right away how nice the artwork was. I was starting to think about what artists we might hire, so I figured I'd look at the other covers. It was when I got to issue number eight that I fell out of my chair.

Okay, so I didn't really fall out of my chair, but if I had, I don't think I would have noticed. *Time for Ceremony* by Jac "Kano" Grenfell was one of the most incredible images I had ever seen in my entire life. This…THING on the cover, this device…I had no idea what the artist thought it was when he created it, but all at once I understood all those things that Dan had been trying in vain to explain to me. I also knew I had to find a way to get that picture on the cover of our book.

To make a long story short, that's exactly what happened. In fact, Jac became an integral part of the design team, creating the logo design, the border design and layout…he's actually listed in the credits under "kitchen sink". More than that, working with Jac has been one of the most incredible and rewarding parts of the last two years, even though he lives on the other side of the planet from me, in New Zealand. We have a simply amazing intellectual chemistry and I'm very proud of the things we have created together.

Fast forward to the Summer of 2001. At Origins, I had the distinct pleasure of meeting two wonderful people you already know, Mike and Becky Marchi. I was ecstatic to meet them and thank them for putting out *Demonground.* I told them about using Jac's art for our game and we talked about possibly promoting CotS in *Demonground* but it didn't seem like a very good fit, since CotS isn't strictly a horror game. We chatted on occasion, but nothing else came of it.

Now we jump forward again, to Origins 2002. Origins is getting to be a place I love because I get to see so many friends and the Marchis are no exception. A big difference this year, though, is that CotS is out and Misguided had a booth. Mike and Becky hung out with us some at the show and I especially owe them for introducing me to Buca di Beppo (www.bucadibeppo.com), a

fantastic Italian restaurant chain. Mike and I were wracking our brains because we wanted to find a way to bring the tie between *Demonground* and CotS full circle. The solution had been staring me in the face for months but I had been too blind to notice.

Since CotS had gotten its cover from *Demonground*, we could complete the circle by having CotS return the favor. The picture we chose was *Harvesters*. This masterful work was created specifically for *Children of the Sun* by John Shannon and has quickly become a signature piece of art in the book. The subject matter is perfect for *Demonground* and it captures, more than anything else in the book, the essence of dieselpunk. Even better, Dan had already written a short story to accompany the picture. The final piece of the puzzle was this column, because I wanted to share the story with you. I imagine every one of the covers that has been used for *Demonground* is special in some way, but these two have changed my life.

Before I depart, I'd like to tell you a bit more about the *Harvester* picture and the man who created it. The Harvesters fall under the general category of spirits in CotS. One of the cool things about spirits is that many of them are unique, with their own personalities and combinations of powers. Even the ones that aren't can have very different properties from one incarnation to the next. It is also easy to make up your own. In this case, Harvesters are kind of like a golem made up of farm implements. They are minor as spirits go, but these mindless automatons can still wreak some havoc on the battlefield with their sickle-arms.

John Shannon illustrated 7 images of creatures for CotS, but everyone I've talked to likes the Harvester picture the best. John has an absolutely remarkable sense of light and color that comes through in all of the work he does. What is most amazing about him though, is that at the time he did these pictures for us, he had been working on becoming an artist for less than a year! Moreover, he has had no formal training as an artist whatsoever. John's influences include Tolkien, Brian Froud, Brom, and Michael Wheelan.

John has also done created work for Mystic Eye Games, Cutter's Guild Games, Gamalocus Studios, The Mountain, and Tree-Free. Living in Malta and working as a chef, when he isn't creating artwork that could give most people nightmares (in a GOOD way, John), he is hoping to continue to get more freelance work and eventually be able to work as an artist full-time. John's website may be found at www.jeshannon.com .

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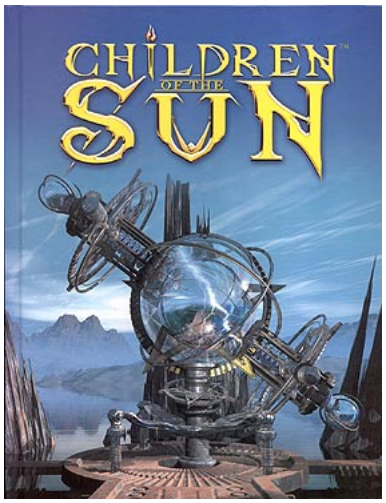

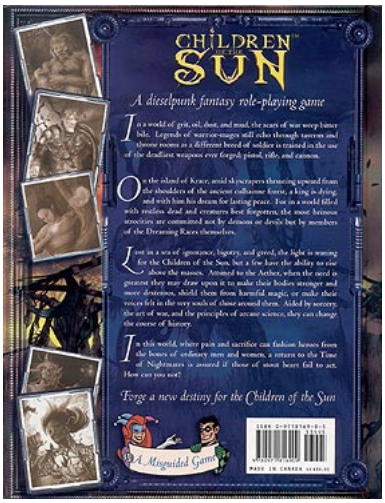

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I'm a man, that's all. Don't ask me about magic. I wouldn't know anything about that. I have never crafted the Aether, nor have I ever seen that which cannot be eaten by mortal eyes, or heard spirits sing in voices made of pure energy. I'm just a guy. A rather plain guy as it were.

I only have one talent. I kill people and I break things. Actually, maybe I do have some magic for you. Listen closely, for this is all I know of magic:

Finger pulls trigger.
Trigger releases hammer.
Hammer hits primer.
Primer fires powder.
Powder pushes bullet.
Bullet hits target.
That is all I know of magic and damn near all I know of life.
My name is Jacob Vulpis, but everybody calls me Gunman.

-- Jacob 'Gunman' Vulpis, Mercenary and Adventurer

The smoke began to clear underneath the oppressive tears of a leaden sky. Small fires in the grass beyond petered out, soaked under the same constant drizzle that chilled us to the bone. I wiped blood and soot from my eyes with the back of my gloved hand and stood, exposing myself on the wall to get a better vantage onto the ruined fields. No shadows moved outside our haven, and I did not detect the creak of wood nor the scrape of metal that would betray Their presence.

"West side clear." I tried to sound commanding, to sound like a general in the field. Between the gauzy fog of water coming from the sky and the fatigue eating at my bones, my voice sounded tired, afraid and alone. I slumped behind the wall and looked around, seeing shadows in the gloom set my skin tightening and my heart racing. Were they-? "I said west side clear, dammit!"

"East… side… clear…" Antonio limped out of the mist, his black hair plastered to his forehead, and his simple, peasant features flushed and crusted on the left side with blood. He was pale, weary. The shotgun I had loaned him from Yorik's dead body hung loosely in his hand, nearly dragging on the weak tile roof he had foolishly crossed to get to me. I would have snapped at the boy. If I thought we were going to survive, I might have. As it was it seemed like I had sentenced him and all the rest to death. Mine was the most grievous sin here. I wrestled myself to my feet and grabbed him before he could collapse and eased him to the wet stone of the parapet. I checked his eyes, and his pulse. I know an awful lot about making live men die, but precious little about making dying men live. What I did know didn't serve to calm me.

"Killian! Killian! Tonio's down!"

Out of the fog I heard her voice come like a child's in the night "Get him to me, Gunman. I'm with Jasmyr, she's – " There was a definite pause of finality. "She's bad."

I struggled with Antonio. His young frame weighing more than it had any

right to. I could feel hell dragging at him in my arms, pulling him to the turf as I stomped heavily down the ruined staircases. Sister Shelia met me and guided me to the light shed by a dozen filament bulbs laid in a careless circle at the center of the burned out monastery. Shelia laid out a pack – couldn't tell whose in the near darkness, but there was blood on it– and used it to prop Antonio's head as she went to work on him. Delicate hands moved up and down his body before pausing to move her flaxen hair from her face, hooking it out of the way over one, pointed ear. After mere moments she flashed a grim smile at me and spoke in that strange, fluid voice of hers. "He's got a concussion, but it's not bad. I can deal with it. Go see if you can help Killian."

I shuffled over to the other edge of the circle as Sister Shelia began to humble herself before Ebrigil, Elder Spirit of justice, and searched the mnemonic teachings of her order for the threads of Aether. I passed five bodies laid out in a row. Friends, all of them, all beyond this now. There was some mercy in that at least, but even after passing ten pairs of sightless eyes it was Jasmyr's crumpled body that nearly broke me.

She had been our scout. Her cat-like Avenderan body silently slipping into and out of patches of brush I swear a leaf couldn't have gone without noise. She had never held herself apart from us, as so many of her people do. Her short, golden hair had always glistened with a particularly lavish light. Her spear had always been wielded in expertly gentle hands. Her eyes had ever been sharp with laughter or wit. Now her eyes were glazed, her fists clenched in pain and one leg was a ruined mass of tattered flesh.

Casting a magical technique is not normally this taxing to someone with the Talent for it, but Killian had been up all night, running all day and fighting right next to the rest of us. Her red hair was wild and trying to escape its complicated braid, and her hands shook as little lights danced into and out of Jasmyr's wound. In the sparkling wake of the wisps, flesh followed, joining to bone and reconstructing missing meat. The mage and her charge were both lost to the rest of the world for the next few minutes, so I walked closer to the south wall and called out to Waisale and got him to come down to me. Killian was done with her healing magic by the time Waisale waddled to me, his short legs pumping more slowly than I'd like.

His leathery green skin was almost mint colored, pale with exertion, but other than a new scar on the front plate of his shell, he looked unhurt. His windy voice came from between cracked lips as he settled down on his haunches, adjusting his overalls and planting the butt of his axe in the soft soil. "Yes, Gunman?"

I hunched down to meet him, sparing my thighs but causing my calves to protest loudly. "How are things on your quarter?"

He shook his hairless head and smiled without mirth. Waisale was always like that. How he found this in any way amusing…

He clapped his thick fingers on his natural chest plate and pointed into the gloom. "There's me, Westin and Floris. East wall has Tristan, Antonio and Killian, whenever she finishes. I see Jasmyr and Shelia are not on the north wall, so who's left there?"

I cursed myself quietly. My brain was turning to mush- no sleep, too much blood. Too much damn blood. "I still need to check."

He affixed his black, endless eyes on me. "You have not heard from Kijer?"

I shook my head and drew my sword. Waisale pulled himself up and hefted his axe. He traced arcane symbols on the haft in a certain order, connecting plates to boards inscribed with physical representations of aetherial bodies. Circuits completed and sizzled. The arcane engine in the aether melded with the physical anchor of the axe and the razor sharp head grew red hot, spitting disdainfully at the slight rainfall coating it's head. He always said it wasn't magic. Not really. He always pattered on and on about his precious science. Right now, I was glad to have it. We marched up the stairs under a starless night and came to the north wall. After a few tense moments, searching for telltale signs of our enemy, Levi came out of the darkness. I sheathed my sword and holstered my pistol. Waisale powered down his heat-axe.

Levi was an ex-Lancer, freshly discharged from the Kracian army. He was young, but determined. At least he had been determined, now he was just grim. As we approached, he struck a smart salute from memory, then shrugged and chuckled. "Gin, Marcus and Abraham are dead, sir."

Waisale and I traded glances. "What about Kijer?"

Levi shook his head and held up Kijer's sword. It was a northman's blade, the almost non-existent crosspiece and thick blade covered in the runes of those people and easy to identify even in the near darkness. Kijer had claimed it had been a priceless heirloom of his forefathers and had attributed to it many strange powers. Killian had looked at it and had proclaimed that it had, indeed been ensorcelled to deliver grave damage to an opponent, but the enchantment was greatly unraveled. Whether the prowess of the blade in battle was any magic wrapped into the mundane steel or the Hu Lenkra's massive arm, she could not attest.

I shook my head and looked around for the body. It should have been easy to spot. The monastery had not faired well over the years and with the roof mostly gone, the elements had eaten away at the third story flooring to leave only a treacherous ring around the top of the crumbling walls. Waisale gripped my arm and asked Levi directly. "Where is his body?"

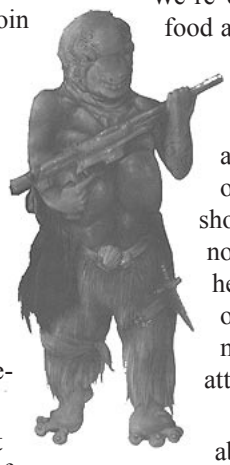
"He's not dead, sir. After the attack, he gave me his sword, told me to use it well, and jumped over the side of the flooring

to the bottom. I think he opened the door below and ran off northwards. I called out to get someone to close it, but with this damned rain…"

I nodded, trying to look calm even as I was slapped in the face with the news. The Hu'Kra of the north are huge creatures, six to eight feet tall. They have powerful, bundled muscles and thick fur that was proof against cold. Kijer had been arrogant, brash and given to drink, but he had also been a faithful ally and stalwart swordsman throughout this entire disaster. If he had run… Waisale shook my arm, bringing me back to here and now. "Levi, go around the parapet and gather everyone at the circle of light."

He nodded and held out Kijer's sword to me, I shook my head. "Keep it, you'll need it."

He stopped himself from saluting, then marched off at a double-time, leaving the Thorqua and I alone, I thought for a few moments as we walked over to my spot on the west wall and I gathered my rifle and ammunition. "Waisale, check the doors and make sure that they are all fast, then join us."



He frowned at me, his reptilian face taking on strange wrinkles that made him look like a caricature of a bald, old man. "Why do I always get the hard jobs?"

"Because you look like a damned tortoise."

"And you, sir, are a naked ape." He smiled again wryly. "You have any idea how to get us out of this mess?"

I forced myself to grin back and pumped my eyebrows twice. "Don't I always?"

As he left, only I knew the truth, well truths. I sent him down because it was my job to carry the bodies of Christine and Gregory to the assembly area. They had died within a few yards of me, and there was nothing I could do but promise them they wouldn't be treated like those villagers… There was that, and the Other Thing; the fact that we were all going to die.

I didn't want this job. I inherited it when Dussandus, the mage that had hired us, died back in the Old Growth Forest. I'm the oldest human here, the most experienced at warfare by far and I think quickly on my feet. The others simply looked at me and expected it. Damn them anyway, I don't want to be responsible for getting them killed. They figure none of them could do better and maybe they're right, but I'm just not build to be a hero.

I walked into the light with one of my friends over each arm and got help from the others to gently lay them next to their fallen comrades. I opened Christine's sightless eyes so that her spirit could see that she was being taken care of respectfully in death, and then took Killian aside to talk to her about Jasmyr. The news was much as I had feared. I sent her back to the circle and soaked in the darkness of night alone. My guts writhed like a basket of snakes and my shoulders hunched as the pressure began to mount higher and higher. Tears squeezed from my unwilling eyes. It was many minutes before I could face the group. If they saw me like this they'd panic and run, sure as hell.

Twenty-five rode out to find out what had happened to the village of Culhainne Hollow. We had thought we were a mighty group; Warriors, mages, a scout, a priestess, an arcane engineer, a driver for the light cargo Phant that had gotten us this far, this fast. Now the Phant was abandoned a good day's walk away, and we were cut off from it by…

Damn.

No sense in wasting any more time, I had to go back and face them. Quiet conversations died as I entered the edges of light. They all looked at me, hoping, hoping I could get them home safely.

Damn. Damn. Damn. "Look; here's the situation, people. We're cut off from our transport and supplies. Pooling food and water, we can last about four days if we ration it. The problem is They are coming, and I don't think they're going to give us four days." My throat clenched, I stuttered, coughed to cover it, and then resettled my sword in its sheath. It was only through clamping down on everything and shoving it deep could I look at them again. "If you run now, you might make it out. I'll keep fires burning here, make them think that we're still waiting. Get out onto the Green Sheath and keep running. You might make it, if I make enough noise and catch the attention of that mad bastard's 'farmers'."

Silence settled in on all of us. I saw them look about, each individual searching the eyes of others around the circle. "It's time to pack up and get going if you are going to make it."

Jasmyr stepped forward. "I can't run on this leg. I'd just slow everyone down."

Levi stepped forward, rubbing at his elbow. "I have some tendons that are about to go, I can't carry her."

Waisale picked up a pebble and studied it so he didn't have to look at me. "Nothing wrong with me, but my legs are too short. I wouldn't run any faster than say," He looked at me and smiled. "a turtle."

"Stop it!" I stood and screamed, every muscle clenching, straining against every other. " Stop it damn you all! I can't get us out of this one. It's done! It's over. I did alright at the castle, but this is now-" I turned to a piece of debris and slammed my steel-toed boot into it in time with my words. " I! Can't! Get! You! Out! Alive!"

One heartbeat.

Two.

Killian moved forward, collecting her hair out of her face

and shrugging. "Those things will be able to smell my Talent from a mile off. I'd get everyone killed. I'm staying."

Sister Shelia laughed her musical, elvish laugh. "And I would offend my patron Spirit if I did not shield those in such dire need of protection."

I felt my heart tearing inside. We had come so far – too far for all of us to die here, now. My voice could only come as a husky whisper that limped across the intervening space between us to die upon their ears. "We are going to die here. They are coming. Remember Them, those things he summoned? They do not bleed, they do not die, the do not breathe, they just run on their wood and steel legs. Blade festooned bodies cutting through the grass, scything arms decapitating plants with long, slicing swings. Do you remember the people of Culhainne Hollow?"

Waisale moved forward, hitching up his overalls, "Gunman-"

"Do you remember seeing them for the first time? Seeing what they had done?"

"Gunman-"

"Eyes hung on trees like cherries, Hearts strung like tomatoes to low clinging vines, feet nailed to trees like fungus-ears, row upon row upon row of human hands planted like grain-"

"Gunman!" I snapped out of my fugue, wiping at my eyes and folding my arms to hide the shaking of my hands. Waisale softened his voice. "We were there, Gunman. We know. You got us this far and for that, we're grateful. But we are not willing to leave anyone here behind."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Tell us how to sell our lives most dearly." He took the sheath off of his axe and flicked it off into the darkness with one stubby thumb. "Help us kill the bastards. Spirits willing, enough that one or two of us can slip off, but that's secondary. We remember the people of Culhainne Hollow. We remember all those who have died so far to get us here."

His eyes mirrored me, swallowed me, gave me some hope as he said, "We remember them all, and someone has to answer for their deaths."

No, not hope. Courage.

I looked from face to face, and saw the Thorqua's words echoed in the eyes of everyone there. They had known what I had tried to keep from them: we weren't going to live through this one. They had known that and had not run off like Kijer. They had decided to die with me.

Pride is a strange thing to feel at a time like this. I certainly did not expect this mixture of grim elation and fierce, vengeful love. I took out a piece of chalk from my hip-sack and drew a map on a large chunk of table-like debris "We're on Monastery Rock, Here's the monastery ruins, bridges and the Gap.

"We can't outdistance these things out on the sheath. The four bridges to the Sheath are too wide to block and too strong to break. We can't hold all the doors and we can't even block off the stairs and doors on what's left of the first floor."

Antonio snorted, "Gunman, why do you always tell us what can't be done before you tell us what we going to do?"

I smiled through my tears "Helps save on arguments with Waisale."

He mimed a gun with his fist and extended forefinger and thumb. "You're only human, Gunman. It's my job to keep the less gifted races in line."

A chuckle rippled through the company. I shook my head. We had looked forward and saw our deaths. All there was left to do was to make them as honorable as possible.

Then it struck me, I looked behind me, above me, at the piles of bodies and weapons the dead could no longer wield, then down at the hasty map I had scrawled. I suddenly saw everything in crystal clarity. I swept away everything I had been thinking and patched together something new on the spot.

Sister Shelia smiled sweetly and bowed her head, hands clasped. Waisale chuckled and nudged Tonio, who was shaking his head in disbelief. Killian wrapped an arm around Jasmyr's shoulders and squeezed gently. Westin, Floris, and Tristan looked around as if a little lost, they hadn't noticed. They were young they would learn, if I was right. Levi smirked at me with a face that said; *You're doing it **again** aren't you?*

Maybe, just maybe, "Ok, Here's the plan…"

* * *

They took their sweet time, which – it turned out, was all for the better. The sky had stopped crying over our fallen and it was almost dawn before they came. We had squeezed every second until it bled to have our preparations complete.

They appeared at the edges of the forest, only visible to Jasmyr and then Sister Shelia in the barest of light that could fight through the clouds. After scant minutes, the rest of us could see them as well. In reality, all we could see were the ghastly outlines of their misshapen bodies, but that was enough. We had spent most of the night fighting them off of the walls at close quarters. We knew how they moved.

I looked at my team and each one nodded grimly at me. They were more than a group of strangers; now they were my family. Whatever would come, we would conduct ourselves bravely. We owed each other that. I raised my finger in the air and spun it in the military manner for a charge. Without words, they walked down the single stair to spread out through the rotting levels of the monastery.

In front of Killian and I were the assembled firearms of the group. Every gun, every bullet was arranged around us, ready to be used. As crazy as it was, I wanted to be with them down on the lower levels, but my place was here. Still, I knew what

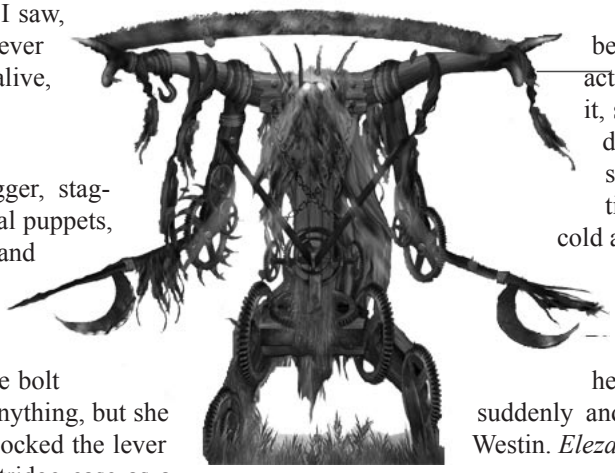
they were doing, below me. I had come up with the plan.

They were taking their stations at the base of the remaining stairs that lead up to this level. Every so often they were coming upon the little cubby-holes we had made for our candles and lamps. They would light the candles and turn up the lamps, letting the wick burn long and hot. They would be wiping at eyes from the smell of lamp-oil that floated everywhere, and checking one more time to make sure the bundles of wood we had scavenged from the rubble were secure.

My thoughts skidded to a halt and, before I knew what I was doing, I had shouldered a borrowed rifle and fired. Down below a half-seen shape lurched a bit and then broke into the light cast through broken windows. They were here.

And they had brought friends.

Blade-festooned limbs screamed in the air as a horde of sixty of those things ran for the wall. I faltered, my mind rejecting the numbers I saw, refusing to believe- we were never going to make it out of here alive, never-



BOOM!

My finger caressed the trigger, staggering one of the wood and metal puppets, and brought me back to the here and now. I ratcheted another round into the chamber and fired again. Killian's borrowed gun spoke beside me, she worked the bolt awkwardly and I doubt she hit anything, but she cursed and tried again. I fired, cocked the lever discarding another smoking cartridge case as a full one loaded in, and sighted, found a target and fired again. I began jacking rounds as fast as I could, watching splinters fly from those… Things. Sight, acquire, BOOM, jack-lever… Sight, acquire, BOOM, jack-lever, Sight-acquire-BOOM-jack-lever-Sight-acquire-BOOM-jack-lever-SightAcquireBOOMJackLever- SightAcquireBOOMJackLeverSightAcquireBOOMJackLeverSightAcquire-Click!

I tossed the rifle aside and grabbed the next. Some, the ones who were here before I think, started climbing the walls, forcing their metal appendages into cracks and crevices in the walls to get purchase. The others did the same thing their wiser companions had last night- they went to the door. They banged, they pounded, unlike last night, there was a creak, a cry of stressed wood. I prayed to whatever Spirit was listening that Waisale had weakened the door enough. A splinter, a crash, and the sound of Westin and Floris yelling a challenge.

They were in.

The creatures on the wall dropped down and swarmed into the open doorway, the easy way to escape my lead rain. Down below, one of them was silhouetted in the light coming out of the broken door. It was a scarecrow made of parts and pieces of farm tools. Bladed instruments and blunt flails, bloody wood held together with barbed wire and twine. Death and evil seethed within its eyes; two almost animated whirls of wood where a man's head would be. Cutters and shears, all collected together into a sickening parody of a human being. They were the 'farmers', the ones who planted the people of Culhainne Hollow like they were crops. These were demons born into living blades. They were the Harvesters.

We reset the remaining rifles around and a scream echoes up from below. Voices called up, the message being conveyed like a bucket brigade –"Two!"

They had reached the second floor.

Killian threw her hair from her face and set before her little ritual circle, made from a trail of gunpowder, lumps of wax and bits of brass- tiny parts of each of the lamps and candles below. She began to concentrate on her Talent.

I could hear the ringing of steel below and my palms itched for action. I picked up a rifle and slung it, snugged the scattergun on my back down into its holster, taking an extra second to make sure the thongs were tight on my pistols. The last rifle felt cold and leaden in my hands.

"Three!" four voices shouted, one after another.

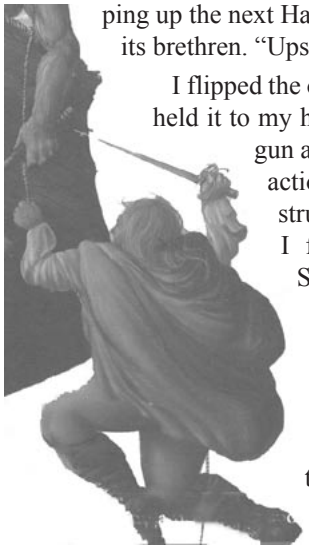
I moved down the stairs and heard a wounded cry that was cut off suddenly and completely. It had sounded like Westin. *Elezabeta, be kind to him, please.*

"Four!" they were moving too fast, just below us, now. I finished the stairs in one jump and turned to find Tonio, Shelia and Floris breathing heavily, and all bearing nicks and scars from battle. Waisale and Levi were on the next downward set of stairs, slinging about their steel with fading vigor and determination. They were backing up, slowly, but were wearing down quickly.

Levi tripped backward, his opponent loomed over him. Pent up rage and fear rippled up my chest and out my throat. "Down!"

The Thorqua dove over Levi, trusting his armored shell to protect them both in case of a stray shot as I rammed the trigger of the .35 Marov 7 rifle home. The greased bolt slid back and automatically shot forward, tossing winking brass into the darkness. Iduum, the Elder Spirit of Storms seemed to laugh in the shots, roaring in amusement as flashes of light licked out to shatter through the ranks of my enemies. Skill had nothing to do with the way they went down in tangled heaps of wood and iron, they were so tightly packed that a child could have hit them.

Instantly, Levi was up, dragging Waisale with one arm as he sprinted up toward me. I tossed the rifle behind him, trip-



ping up the next Harvester skittering over the pile of its brethren. "Upstairs! Everyone! Now!"

I flipped the other rifle off of my shoulder and held it to my hip. My hands began running the gun all on their own, making the lever action sing like a roiling kettledrum struck by a thousand padded sticks. I flipped that one at them, too. Someone called from above, I can not remember who; "They're in, Gunman, They're all inside!"

Turning, I sprinted up the stairs- a sharp tug at my pants cuff told me they were right there – **right there** – at my heels. I clawed the custom 1.13 Wallgar repeating scattergun from the back-sheath, spun and fired, and turned away from the Harvester that had been transformed into a spray of splinters by the round. "Killian do it! Do It!"

At the top of the stairs I held my ground, my friends – my team – was climbing down the ropes thrown over the parapets as quickly as they could. Killian was lighting the gunpowder trail to the first set of lamps, then ran to join them.

As the first wax puddle sizzled above, the candle on the first floor burst into flame, all of the wax searing at once and puddling onto the old, rotten wood we had set up as tinder for it. As the first bit of brass was enveloped in fire, the heated oil from the over-wicked lamp spurt forth, coating more prepared faggots on the opposite side and severing the rope holding the deadfall in place. The only door not blocked by rock was sealed, and the monastery was now on its way to being an inferno.

Still, out of the darkness they came. On long, spindly legs made from logs and tied bundles of sticks they ran like a bladed wind. I waited, listening to my heart slowly beat in my ears. The world had turned into molasses, trapping everyone and everything in a crystal where time distorted, dilated, compressed. Oily orange light winked through the rust on cold, hard metal. My finger jerked.

Finger pulls trigger. Trigger releases hammer. Hammer hits primer. Primer fires powder. Powder pushes bullet.

One hundred round, gray wasps slung from the barrel of the scattergun, each one shredding through wood as it went, caroming off of old steel, and clearing a path a quarter of the way down the stair. I fired again and again, but they kept coming.

More wax on the power trail of powder caught, more candles blossomed like dying stars. Lamps burst with flaming oil and coated the floors below in laughing, mocking tongues of orange and red.

More rounds heated the gun. I could feel it burning my hands where I gripped the stock near the barrel. The gun kicked and bucked and I growled at it to keep in line. Tamed it like a stallion to make it kill who I wanted it to kill, make it not waste a single, precious piece of shot.

It clicked empty before I was ready. I tossed it down at them, then pulled the pair of huge, Morrison .40 revolvers and let them speak as well. Bullets smashed and cracked at things that felt no pain. Still they came.

My pistols were empty.

"Gunman!" Levi pulled at me. He was supposed to be gone, supposed to be safe. "Go! I'll cover you."

He drew Kijer's sword from his belt and backed toward the ropes. Holstering the pistols with practiced hands I dove for the ropes, sliding my body over the broken tops of stones and going down, hand over hand. Four ropes were next to me, but they were all empty.

Levi? The sound of steel batting steel ricocheted over the walls as the damp rope began slipping through my fingers. I tried to climb up - tried to reach him - to help him. All the while thinking: *You can't have him, dammit, you can't have him, you took the others but you can't have* ***him***.

"Le-vi!" More powder sparked and coughed, and more bits of brass and wax popped and smoked, setting more blazes among and around the Harvesters and now Levi. I gripped the rope harder to slow my decent, but I couldn't pull myself up, no matter how I struggled.

I felt something crack deep inside. He was supposed to make it. I was supposed to be the one up there. The roar of fire and the night seemed to swallow my voice. "Levi!"

And then, there he was, looking over the lip at me, smiling. He looked so fulfilled, triumphant, at peace.

"Levi! Come on!"

Still, he smiled, but his eyes lost some of their focus. He lurched and Kijer's sword flew over the side to land on the rocks below. Blood began to trickle from his lips. A warm drop hit me on the cheek.

"No!"

A skeleton of wood and metal loomed over him and severed his head with one stroke from a scythe. His head fell free, and tumbled like a child's lost ball. I watched it tumble by slowly, so slowly…

The sound of an explosion brought me out of my trance. Killian was lobbing small sparks at the Harvesters above, knocking them off the walls where they were trying to chase me. I took my pistols by the barrels and used the grips to hold the rope as I slid down. The shock of landing echoed up my legs, but I managed to grab Kijer's sword and stagger away from the building growing blaze.

Killian looked down at me, her eyes as deep and pained as I had ever seen. "Gunman-?"

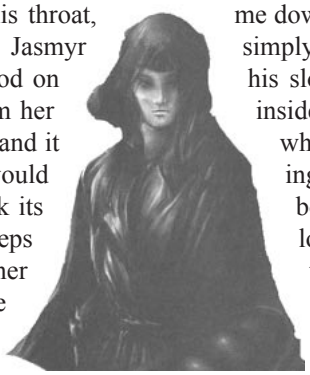
My voice was harsh and bitter even in my own ears. "**DO** it."

She turned to the monastery and concentrated, feeding the flames with magic, turning a simple house fire into a firestorm to rival the burning of Vergisal. The flames danced and ate, splitting wood and parting twine, warping steel and cracking the wet, mossy rocks of the ruin. It built into a fitting funeral pyre for our dead. We seven survivors stared into the flames, hoping that the nightmare was finally over. The flames were mesmerizing, separated from nature by Killian's orderly guidance. It drew us in and held us raptly – then she gasped, and the flames were only flames once more.

A voice with the tone of liquid oak shattered the spell that held us entranced. "I still say that you move more like a swordsman than a gunman."

We spin- the darkness converges- five Harvesters- moving like the wind.

One pinned Waisale, knocking his pyrotechnic axe off into the darkness. One clubbed Killian on the head with a wheat flail and impaled Sister Shelia with a long, rusty blade, lifting her up by her intestines before smashing her into the ground. One tripped Tonio and knocked his blade away, extending a whirling, gnashing metal contrivance next to his throat, threatening to grind his flesh into hamburger. Jasmyr leapt at another, to only be batted aside. It stood on her wounded leg and drew mournful wails from her that she could not stifle. Floris raced to her aid and it spun to face her, twisting its torso in a way that would break a normal man's spine. It lazily drew back its arms, as if a patient parent welcoming the first steps of a toddler. Scythe and sickle arms shredded her before my eyes. The last loomed over me. Its face of whirled wood seemed to smile as my guns clicked on empty chambers like malicious crickets. It would kill me a hundred times before I could reload even a single round.



Fifty yards away he stood, illuminated by the roaring death of the holy place behind me. Barabas Sheathwalker, the man who killed Culhainne Hollow.

I felt like screaming, like crying, like tearing out my hair and beating myself to death on his pet golem. We had come so far, we had trapped his creations, we had survived such odds, only now to die. As quickly as it came, the urge went, and I felt the icy calm of the doomed rush in to fill the void.

I would have felt better if he had an air of malevolence, of death and despair, or if he looked like a specter or killer or madman. He didn't. He was fit, gnarled, in his upper forties, with a long beard and the robes of a priest of Rutana- Elder Spirit of the Wilds.

Whatever his past calling, he worshipped only himself, now. Somewhere along his career, he had begun to think of mankind as a blight, and he had begun his battle to retake the Sheath from the Dreaming Races with Culhainne Hollow. In the Maze of Ophides, in his oversized ruin of a castle home we had once faced him. Dussandus the master mage, me, Killian, all twenty-five of us had tried to face this one man down and only half of us had escaped alive. He lazily drew forth his broadsword, tapping the flat against his robed thigh as if in contemplation. "You know, I am sure you lied to me. You are a swordsman. I used to be quite a sharp man with a blade myself." He chuckled quietly at his own pun. "Why don't you come over here and show me what you can do."

Glancing at my friends, all on the brink of death, I didn't have to ask 'or what'. He'd kill them one at a time, slowly. He'd make me watch them die and then fight me anyway.

I dropped the guns to the turf and picked up the long, dark blade Kijer had left behind. It felt good, too good, in my hand.

"Come now, I have come all this way to find you for a friendly sparring match, the least you could do is show a little spring in your step."

Behind me Tonio yelped as the Harvester that trapped him grazed the skin with its thresher. I quickened my pace to a trot, discarding the holsters and belts that could only slow me down. He smoothly came to *en garde*, as if he were simply an instructor in some fencing academy, and I his slow and truculent student. Memories welled up inside me, times past and wished forgotten. The wind whipped the acrid char of wood and smell of burning flesh over us as I gripped the oversized hilt in both hands and felt old ways returning. Hands that lovingly handled the butts of guns remembered their old ways, their old life, and molded to the sword as if born there.

He smiled, a bit of his feral nature peeking through. "See? I told you, a swordsman."

I struck.

It had been years since I have plied blade to flesh. Years I have tried to put behind me. But at the first shock, the first meeting of metal, it all came back to me. I was going to make him pay for bringing them back.

His sword hissed in the air, and I met it full on. Instructors, long dead, whispered lessons in the back of my brain. They told me; Too close, Too far, Don't over extend, Balance, Ferocity, Timing. I whirled forward like a man possessed. Barabas wheeled back, slapping aside every attack, countering every ploy. I was a talented youth with steel, but he was a man who had studied its use as a matter of survival and vanity. He slapped away my defense, taking bits of blood away with layers of skin, avoiding killing strokes like a cat, so as to make his game last all the longer.

I reached into my core, building up the rage, the hate, the raw need to survive into a hammering storm that spoke through my sword. I felt everything I was, everything I am or

ever will be, balanced on the edge of the blade as it cut and turned in the air. Kijer's sword flicked out, and came back stained with blood.

Barabas kicked my feet out from under me and leapt out of reach, feeling at his face, tracing the stinging cut I had given him. The ground dug into my back and blew out my center, leaving me tired, empty and useless.

He considered his crimson fingers, his eyes darkening like a coming quake. He hissed through clenched teeth. "You bastard. It is The Master of Rutana you have made bleed. Now I will be your master as well before you die."

I had no poetic words, like the bards like to recount, no bits of wisdom attributed to wizards or rogues. So I uttered a vile bit of profanity linking his mother with a barnyard animal.

It was the best I could do under the circumstances.

He went *en garde*, and prepared to kill me. Far away, there was a distant sound that might have been thunder –

But wasn't.

He attacked like a master, taking off a strip of skin from my left arm as I parried a strike that wasn't there. He danced around me, ripping open my shirt and lopping off my right nipple with his sword's tip. I screamed at the pain and dropped to my knees, he kicked me over and backed away shouting "Come on! You've got more to you, don't you, boy!"

The sound grew, almost constant, almost irregular it could have been my heart beating raggedly in my ear.

It wasn't.

I managed to get to my feet but couldn't lift the heavy blade in my hand to stop him from marking my cheek the way I had done his. I felt the blade knick the bone beneath my face and send me sprawling again.

"Get up! You're not done learning WHO YOUR MASTER IS!"

The sound. The sound again. I got to my knees, but had to use the sword as a cane to stand. Barabas flipped my weapon end over end with a deft maneuver and set the point of his weapon at my throat. His smile smoothed over the mask of madness and he leaned close to me, very close, gazing into my eyes like a lover. My hands, hidden behind my body, worked feverishly.

His voice was light, taunting. "Who is your master?"

Almost there, but that sound is closer.

He increased the pressure, leaning forward scant inches. "Who is your master?"

Working with slippery fingers, moved away the pants, prying at the top of my boot.

Closer, closer he leaned in. The point of his sword dug into my flesh and blood began to trickle down the groove in his blade. His smile cracked, his voiced hissed. He was not going to ask again "Who. Is. Your. Master?"

The sound, like wooden logs being beaten as Luparathi drums, but it wasn't.

Barabas turned toward it, toward one of the bridges that arced off this island of rock and onto the Green Sheath. In the slivers of dawn that made it through the clouds, you could barely see the spidery cracked windshield and dented paint that marked two tons of angry shadow.

Barabas pointed and his minions ran toward the beast as it broke through the cover and made the run for the bridge.

It was covered in dings, scratches and dents. The olive paint and been marred with the green of crushed foliage. The headlamps were shattered and useless. The engine, though, was the best that money could buy, freshly installed and the solid rubber tires gripped the ground like dragons' claws to pull itself forward.

It was our Phant.

The Harvesters leapt at it and Barabas began making motions in the air. I jumped forward and planted my boot knife in his thigh and limped off toward the rest of the team. Whatever magic he had tried to work failed instantly, and the Phant rumbled on unimpeded to crash into the ranks of the Harvesters and grind them into confetti.

I heard Barabas crying out in rage behind me. I glanced behind as the Phant ground forward. It's multi tonned body shook the very ground as it's grill seemed to yawn to swallow the rogue priest whole. Barabas removed the knife from his leg and tossed it aside contemptuously, then lifted a single hand –

- and the truck halted.

It did not skid, did not slow, it simply stopped, as if the world and begun moving too fast for it to catch up. Inside my soul, I knew – **knew** that it was still moving, but it wasn't. Barabas began to dust himself off. "Must you people break my toys every time you come over to play?"

He raised his hands to form another magical technique.

"No!" called a defiant voice behind me. Killian was on her knees- focusing all of her energy on the rogue priest, her hands pointing at him like claws. The truck jumped, as if wanting to move, but chained, unable.

"No." a weaker voice whispered. Sister Shelia, sitting up, head bowed in prayer. Tonio was dumping packets of Filidian regeneration powder into her wound and supported her as she focused as well. The gaping gash in her abdomen was slowly closing.

The truck rumbled, it grumbled, it bucked back and forth.

"No!" Strong and proud, Waisale ran forward and arced his pyrotechnic axe at Barabas, chopping deeply into his thigh. Barabas struggled, staggered, the Phant leapt forward five feet, then froze.

I calmly retrieved a pistol, went to my belt and recovered a single round. I could feel the forces at work here, the strain

building as Barabas focused his titanic Talent against all of the stimuli seeking to overwhelm him. Though his blood pumped away he showed no fatigue or pain, only the discomfort of a man on a high wire in a breeze. I had seen him impaled, cut, hacked and burned, but nothing had stopped him. He was more than simply a man now, he was a force of nature. A dark force bent of the destruction of any person he came across.

But I was betting I knew his weak spot.

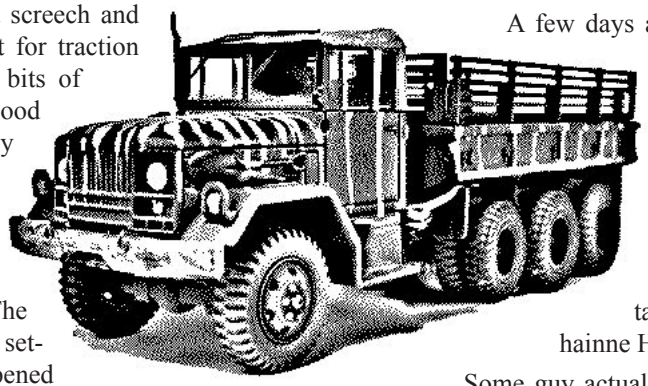
I loaded the Morrison pistol carefully and set the cylinder so the shell was next in line to fire. I took a deep breath and worked the kinks out of my neck. "Barabas!"

He looked at me. Confidence and strength were flooding back into him as he mastered the distracting cut and the power of the lesser magic that constrained him. Then I leveled my weapon at him.

"My name… is Gunman."

I pulled the trigger and blew that vain bastard's face off, snapping his control on the aether.

The Phant leapt forward, crushing his body and reducing it to a fine paste. It reversed, engine roaring, and set its wheels on his chest. With a screech and a spray, the rear wheels fought for traction on his gory remains, and spit bits of bone and flesh in a shower of blood before moving off him. The only thing left mostly intact was his head.



The Phant trundled over the rough ground to deposit its hulking body right by us. The engine roared, whined and then settled down to sleep. The door opened up and a huge, furry head peeked out.

"I **told** you dese tings here didn't looks so hard to drive." Kijer said in his singsong accent. "Now where's my damnt sa-word?"

* * *

We burnt our dead in the pyre adding Floris' corpse to the blaze, as well as what we could find of Barabas. Sister Shelia was a little offended to have his ashes mixing with those of our friends' but Kijer insisted it was necessary. Their ghosts and ashes, he explained, would watch over those of Barabas and keep him dead forever. It seemed fitting.

Watch over his spirit, my friends. Make sure he never comes back.

No one much said anything after that. The seven of us that survived that night, survived to make it home. We had been changed by what we had done and what we had seen, except Kijer of course, who claims that such horrors are common in the Northlands. He says stories of them are used to comfort timid children. I'd call him a liar, but we owe him our lives and as such would seem rude.

He had run all night to get the Phant and drive it back to save us. The weird thing, he said, was that the forest kept opening up for him, as if showing him a clear path to the Phant. Then, on his way back to us, the trees seemed to bend out of the way whenever the old path got too narrow. Well, mostly out of the way, the truck did take a beating. Shelia had just nodded sagely and murmured something about Rutana's will.

We made our report to the Lord Marshal, got paid and drifted apart for a few weeks. I thought things were going to get back to normal, though I'd miss them. I went back to my mercenary for hire business (Hire the Gunman, no job too small, no gun too big!) and I figured everyone else went back to their lives, too.

A few days ago they came knocking on my door. All of them. It seems that, yes, I could make a living as a gun-for-hire, but there are things that need doing, things that need investigating. People are willing to pay to have them done and the work is not bad. Seems we already have a reputation as 'The Survivors of Culhainne Hollow'.

Some guy actually has a map to this lost city in Lysirial that supposedly has some pieces from the national treasury of Salino in it. We get equal shares of the estimated value, we just have to go and get it and return it here. I've heard stories about Lysirial, and all the damned things that live there. As much as my head tells me to walk away and live a quiet, safe, uneventful life (well, quieter, safer and less eventful), I know in my gut that the last few weeks have been kinda pale, colorless, flat.

I may be mad, but if I don't go back out there, I don't know if I will ever feel alive again. Besides, they need a team leader they can trust, and I just can't let my people down. Rest well, my fallen comrades, we remember you fondly. Though we go forward we think of you often.

❖

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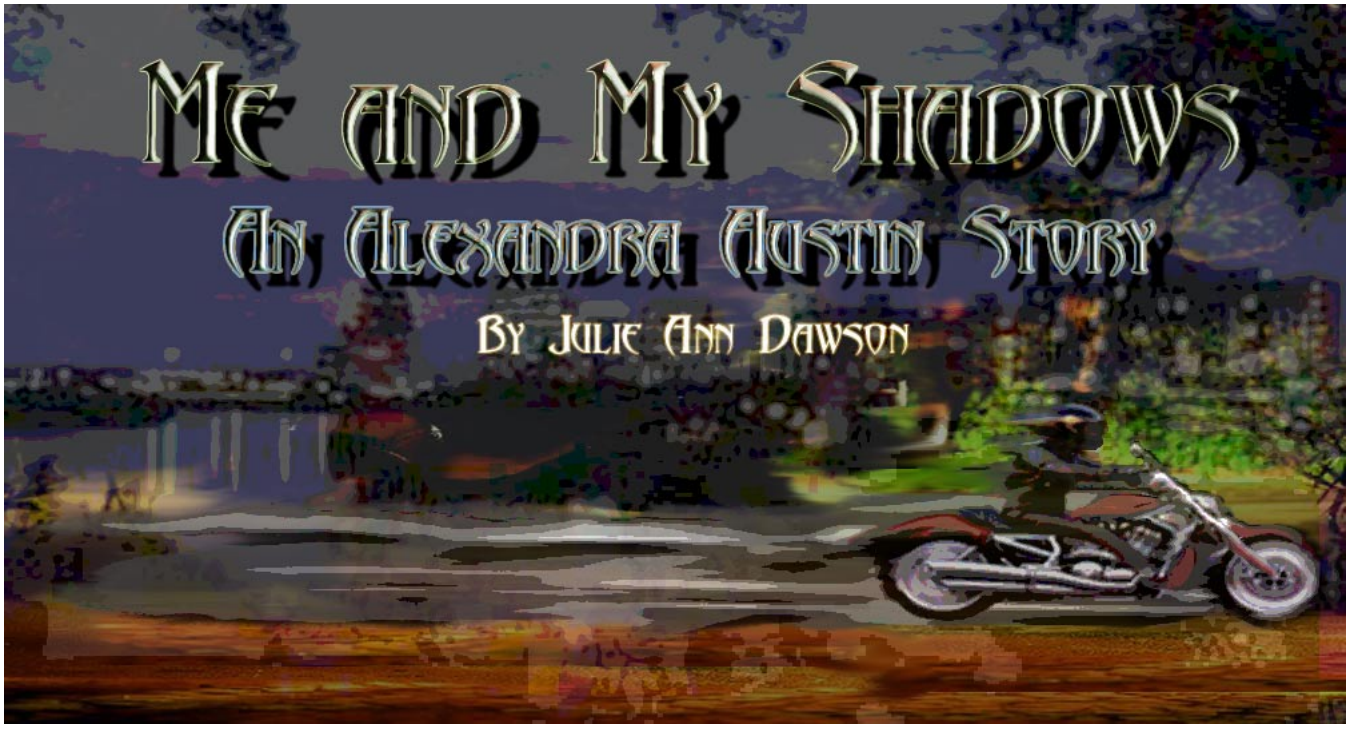


It's nights like this I think about working on my suntan.

I've got an hour before sunup, and I've got a decision to make.

Either try to get to my potential lead now and maybe find a last-minute hiding spot before sunrise, or not risk it and hope they don't get to her tonight.

I wish they made SPF 150.

I hop on my bike, a red and black 1997 Heritage Softail Springer that is anything but inconspicuous. I need speed, not stealth.

Tuwanda Jackson lives twenty minutes away normal time. That equates to 9.5 minutes Austin time.

I park the bike in the Acme parking lot about two blocks from her complex. I walk behind the Acme and jump the privacy fence for the apartment complex. A few guys are killing forties on a back stoop. I surround myself in shadows. I don't think it matters. These boys have been drinking for 10 hours straight from the look of things. But then again a blonde biker-bitch jumping over the fence might still attract attention.

So all they get are shadows.

I get across the street from Tuwanda's apartment and I see an old conversion van in from of her place. 60-year old black women do not drive conversion vans.

I can't win.

So I have to figure that somebody is already there, and probably watching for me. So I pull out my cell phone.

"…911, what is your emergency?"

I place a bomb scare call for a conversion van at 406D 12th street. It's New York, after all. They might drag their feet on a fire in this part of town, but they can't afford to ignore a bomb threat.

So maybe it's a little unpatriotic, I don't have time for patriotism. Besides, I know that at least the bomb squad is under mage, not vampire, control. They haven't received any orders to delay their actions in this area. I know the police and fire departments have.

Within three minutes, a bomb team has practically teleported onto the scene. Me and my shadows move closer to the house and wait for somebody to come out.

Imagine my surprise when I see my old man.

Belistrane isn't technically my father, but he is my sire. So it's the same thing.

I notice he's starting to mind-fuck the bomb squad.

Oh hell no.

I pull my Colt Anaconda out and aim for the head.

Two phosphorous rounds to the cranium.

Soak that, dad.

Shit, it actually dropped him! Cool!

Three Rabble come out of the house bearing fangs and looking for trouble.

This is *not* cool.

I just stay still and wrap the shadows around me. If they see me, I'm screwed. I can't outrun them. Even the weakest Rabble can move at twice my speed, and they're all strong as hell.

So with all my will I just stand still and watch them tear the bomb squad to pieces. At least they killed them quick.

They drag Belistrane's carcass into the van and the other body parts into the bomb squad vehicle and drive off. I go into the house and find the late Mrs. Jackson's blood splattered all over the living room.

The place has been tossed. I don't see a TV or stereo, but I see the empty areas in the entertainment center. I go upstairs to find an empty jewelry box. No purse to be found anywhere. Just another break-in gone awry.

I come downstairs. I hear a slight moan.

She's not dead!

They didn't have time to finish her off, or maybe they thought they did.

But she'll die soon if I don't do something. An ambulance won't get here in time.

I call Martin on the cell phone.

"We have a problem," I say.

"We?" he responds.

"Don't start. You've been at this longer than me. At what point can you feed a mortal blood without making them a vampire?"

There is a long pause. "Why?"

"I thought my contact was dead, but she has a slight pulse. She's gonna die."

"Does she have any color?"

"She's black, Martin."

"Does she look ashy, smart ass?"

"No."

"A little blood won't turn her. But you don't know enough to erase her memory. You're better off letting her die."

"I can't do that."

"Yes, you can. You just chose not to."

I hang up.

I bite down on my wrist and let the blood drip into her mouth. I lick the wound clean and it heals.

Five minutes later, she starts to move.

Twenty seconds after that, she opens her eyes and screams.

I grab her head and force her to look at me. "Quiet!" I command. She obeys.

I look at the clock. 20 minutes.

"Not a word. Just nod if you understand. Do you want to live?"

She nods violently.

"O.K. I want you to live. So we should get along just fine. You need to listen to me. I need you to go to the nightclub Dark Desires on Xavier Ave immediately. Tell the bouncer Alex sent for you. He'll get you a room in the back of the club. Don't call anybody. Don't dawdle. I'm the only one that can protect you. The police won't because they're all paid for. Your friends can't because if you get them involved you'll get them killed. Your minister can't unless he's part of the Inquisition, and even then you'd be putting him in danger. Do you understand?"

She nods again.

"Go now."

I let her go. She starts to run out the front door.

"Wait!" I command. She stops.

I take off my trench and hand it to her with ten bucks for cab fare.

"You one of them, aincha?" she asks.

"Somewhat."

"Why you help me?"

"Because I can. Now go."

I leave behind her, jump the fence, get on my bike and head back to Dark Desires. The sky has just started to change to purple as the sun begins to wake up. I tell the bouncer I'm expecting an older black woman to show up. Get her a room and make sure she eats something.

"Bringing strays home now?" I hear Martin behind me. I walk past him without looking at him.

He grabs my shoulder and tries to turn me around. I grab one of the safety pins in his eyebrow and pull. The skin gives easily, and blood pours down into his eyes. He licks at the blood on his face and laughs.

"ALEX! You do care!" He lets go of my shoulder.

"I'm tired, Martin."

"Can I have my safety pin, please?"

I hand him the bloody pin and wipe my hands on my jeans.

"Now that's a waste…"

"I'm tired, Martin."

He sticks the pin into the regenerating eyebrow.

"He was there, Martin," I say as I start to walk away. "He was there and I couldn't finish it. Now three more people are dead and I didn't even finish it."

"And now he knows you're in New York."

I stop and turn around. "You want me to find another haven? I don't want to bring this shit down on you again."

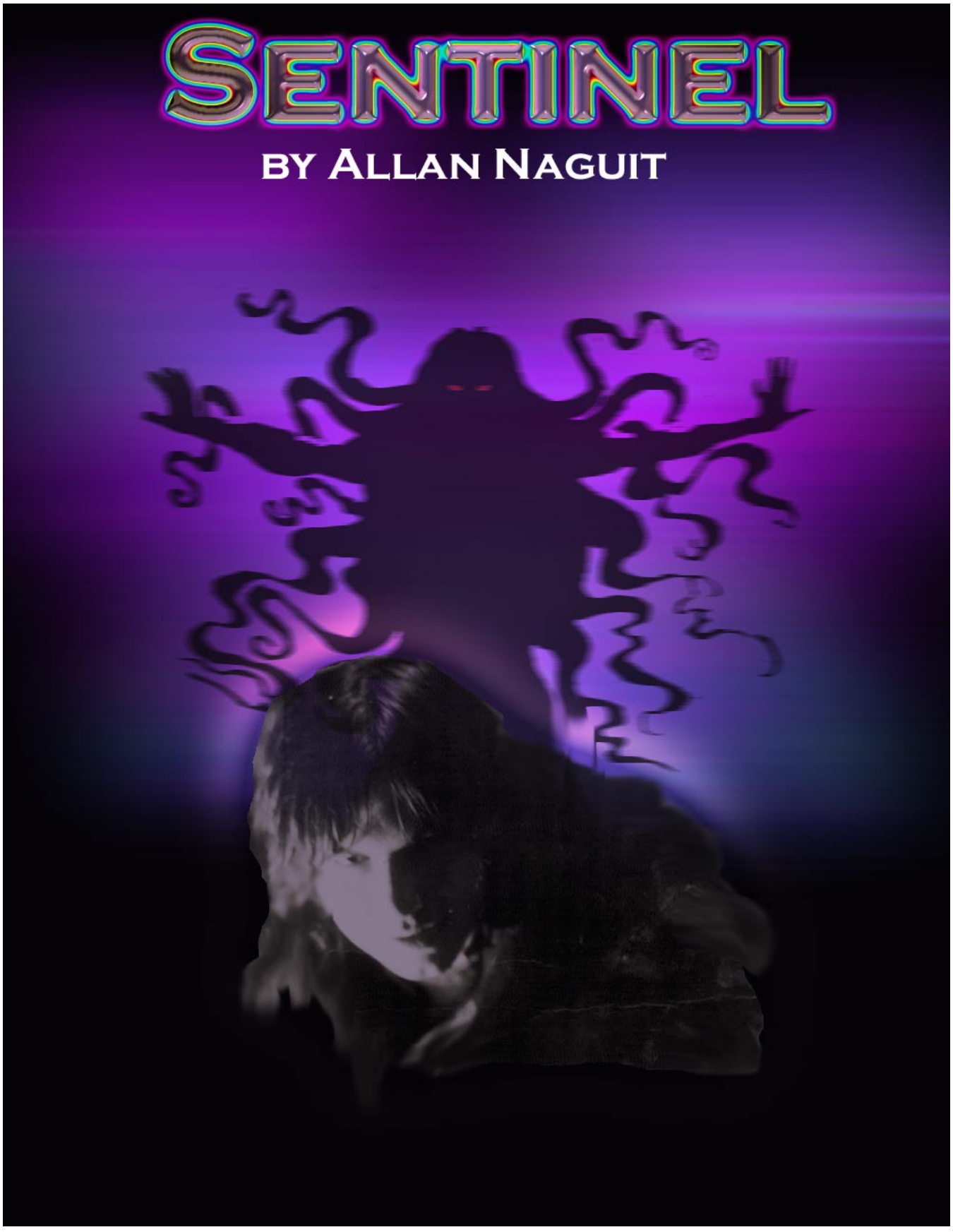
He doesn't answer. He just looks at me for a moment, then tells the bouncer to take care of our guest when she arrives.

We both go to our separate rooms and go to sleep.

❖

SENTINEL

BY ALLAN NAGUIT



It was 3:30 am and Rick was going home. The city was still buzzing with nightlife, and there were plenty of revellers drunkenly trying to flag down cabs, after a big night of drinking and Friday night partying. "Yep, lucky me," he thought, "nightclub doorman extraordinaire, sober as a judge and I still have to fight for a cab to get home. Got to get myself a car!"

He crossed the road and headed up a hill, away from the bright streetlights and long lines of people. There was a spot around the corner where he could avoid the crowd and catch a taxi. It was a hot night, and Rick started to sweat under his black suit, what he called his "ninja suit". He thought it made him look formal yet menacing in the club, and hard to see as well. Good for pouncing on troublemakers. Ah, the fresh air smelled good after the smoky air of the nightclub. His powerful legs pumped him almost effortlessly up the steep hill.

Nearing the top, he heard raised voices near a street lamp. On the side of the road, lit up by the headlights of a flagged-down taxi were two couples, their images strobing from the cab's yellow blinker. Rick slowed down to see what was happening, keeping to the dark patches of the night. How much chest-thumping's going to happen before they clear off, Rick wondered. Gorillas One and Two, he automatically labelled them. Two big fellows, likely drunk, two suffering girlfriends.

"Hey, we were here first. That's OUR ride," Gorilla One was saying.

The other man just stared fiercely back, and opened the back door.

"Back off, man! Helen! Get in!" shouted Gorilla One.

With a contemptuous look, Gorilla Two pushed Helen to the side. She shrieked and sprawled onto the pavement.

Oh, damn. Not my fight, thought Rick, moving in fast anyway.

Gorilla One wound up to punch, but Rick grabbed him from behind, clamping a huge hand on the left shoulder and catching the right arm by the elbow. Gorilla Two, with a savage smile, threw his own punch, only to have it connect with Rick's right elbow. CRACK! Gorilla Two screamed, his face contorted in pain. He staggered backwards, bent over his mangled hand. Gorilla One tried to struggle free, but big as he was, Rick was even bigger, and much stronger. "Take it easy, buddy. I'll let you go now. Why don't you and your girl take this cab? I don't like men who hit women." Shaken but triumphant, the man grinned at Rick as he and Helen jumped into the taxi.

Now where did the other girl go?

Rick swung around to look for her. There was a flash of white behind his eyelids. He found himself face down on the ground, pain just starting to tease him. *My God, what did she hit me with?* He struggled to rise, the taste of blood in his mouth. Turning his head, he heard the cab screech to a halt. There was something wrong with his vision. He felt funny…sick, and somehow too big for his body. Everything was blurred, out-of-focus, as though giving off a red light. The guy with the damaged hand was standing next to Rick, feet pointed towards the stopped cab. *Wow, even his shoes are glowing,* thought Rick, his head spinning. *Get off the ground before he kicks you*, he berated himself as he struggled up into a crouch.

Helen's boyfriend had stepped out of the cab and was shouting something, but Rick couldn't hear properly for the blood rushing in his ears. Rushing? Sounds more like hissing. He shook his head, trying to clear it, but the sharp headache he expected didn't come. *What the hell?*

Helen had stepped out as well, trying to drag her boyfriend back by the arm. Rick looked up, and fell onto his backside. In front of him was the same guy with the broken hand, but instead of cradling it, it hung limply by his side, a dead weight. And his whole body was glowing red. A vicious, roiling red, like blood. *No way this can be real*, Rick thought, heart hammering, mouth instantly dry. *I'm seeing double, that's it. That hit on the head from that girl messed me up!*

But his head didn't hurt.

Rick scrambled backwards, oblivious to his hands scraping on the rough concrete.

He felt the red figure look down at him, but through the haze, saw the actual man hadn't moved; he was standing as still as the dead, blankly staring at the other couple.

"No," Rick gasped. His breath frosted in the air. His skin was goose-pimpling. It's cold. How can it be cold?

Helen's boyfriend was helping Rick up by the elbow and was saying something, but Rick still couldn't hear properly. The man just sounded angry. How can he not be afraid? And the hissing in his ears… it was getting louder. The glowing man hadn't budged, but kept staring, dripping malice. Then he slowly raised his damaged hand and pointed it at them.

What Rick saw then, he would never forget.

The blood-glow around the arm began to change, like it was growing black bubbles, bursting like pus, tens, hundreds, thousands of black bubbles. Yet, he could also see through the ooze that the arm hadn't changed.

Rick was still being slowly helped to his feet. *Can't this guy see what's happening?*

Then it dawned on him. No, he couldn't. *Just me. I'm going nuts.*

The hissing noise lessened. To his horror, it began to sound like sibilant voices, whispering death into his ears. Rick felt his lower lip start to tremble, and felt an irrational urge to cry and yawn at the same time.

The black ooze lengthened and whipped out like a tentacle. It snapped past Rick, and his helper staggered. Rick jerked aside. It had attached itself to the man's stomach. Only

then did he notice the guy behind him had a white aura, and it dimmed rapidly as he watched, the black ooze seeming to leech into the white. The man had a stricken expression, of pain and an utter lack of comprehension. Rick instinctively caught the man, keeping him up, and turned to stare at the other man, trying to understand.

The other man had his head back, whether in ecstasy or agony, Rick couldn't tell. The myriad voices were getting louder.

No way this is happening, he thought.

The black tentacle was getting thicker.

No way.

Cold dread rolled over Rick in waves.

He held his breath.

No way.

Then the creature looked him in the eye…and smiled.

NO!

With every fiber of his being, Rick hurled his defiance at the glowing figure. He saw a bright light from somewhere hammer into it, and the blood-glow dimmed, the black tentacle severing. The man himself took a step back, as though he'd been pushed hard. The black ooze began to reform on his arm. Again Rick hurled his defiance, his horror, his absolute repulsion. And again the bright light shot out and hammered into the figure. Again and again Rick struck, each strike diminishing the blood-glow, not knowing how or why, yet knowing he could not, must not, stop. Finally the aura of blood was gone, and the man was lying crumpled on the ground, the hissing silenced.

"Man, I thought I was going to be sick there for a minute."

Rick turned around. The other guy had a hand to his stomach, smiling weakly, barely visible in the dark. The guy continued. "What the hell happened to that idiot? One second he's pointing at me, the next he's decided to take a nap on the pavement! He's okay, isn't he?"

He never saw a thing, Rick thought, shakily. *Not a blessed thing. "But where's that other girl?"*

"Girl? What other girl?"

Rick didn't realize he'd spoken out loud until the other guy responded.

"There was no other girl here, man. Just Helen."

Whisper-soft, Rick again heard the hissing voices, just before they faded into silence.

"We have marked you. We will find you. We will feed on your soul…"

* * *

It was dawn, just a few hours after the "incident". Helen's boyfriend had checked on the other man. Rick couldn't bring himself to touch him. An ambulance was called. The paramedics pronounced the hand broken, but otherwise, no other obvious injuries. They attributed his lack of consciousness to excessive alcohol consumption, but took him to the hospital as a precaution. Rick caught the next taxi home.

He felt numb. Unreal. He couldn't remember getting home, but knew at the back of his mind that he'd been lying in bed, staring at the ceiling for hours. All the lights in his apartment were blazing. His TV was blaring. Some infomercial was trying to convince him to lose inches off his stomach.

Guess I should turn everything off… the sun's coming in, anyway. God, I'm tired.

His eyelids drooped, only to snap open. He wanted to keep those images away. Did he really see that thing? Did it really happen? His mind was going around in circles, like a tongue playing with a sore tooth.

He decided to have a shower, but had problems washing his face. He would've had to close his eyes to avoid the soap. He got around that by alternating, keeping one eye open at any given time.

What the hell am I doing?

He wasn't hungry, but fixed himself a big breakfast. Bacon and eggs. Very fatty. Very tasty. Normal food for a normal person. He found he was starving, and wolfed down all the food, washing it down with orange juice and a coffee. He was starting to feel better.

What's next? Get the paper, check the mail. See what's happening outside.

Rick headed out of his tiny two-bedroom apartment, down the stairs, and into the quiet suburban street. There were a lot of people out, enjoying the warm, sunny morning. A couple of joggers, an elderly woman taking her poodle for a walk, a kid on a bicycle. No auras, no red bogey men. Much better.

It was a ten-minute walk to the store, and Rick found himself wishing the walk were longer. He bought the paper and stuck it under his arm. Not wishing to return to his apartment just yet, he headed for the park. *Might as well sit in the sun and read the paper*, he thought.

It was an even longer walk to the park; and he was warm by the time he found an empty park bench drenched in sunlight. Checking first for bird droppings, he sat down and folded the paper for reading. He quickly looked around.

Kids playing soccer, an old Chinese fellow doing Tai Chi, a young couple throwing a Frisbee back and forth, more people walking their dogs.

Rick found the background noise soothing. Normal. Turning to the paper, the front page was full of doom and gloom, as usual. He skipped to the light-hearted weekend section.

"Excuse me," came a tremulous voice, "may I sit down?"

It was a woman, old enough to be his grandmother.

"Sure," Rick said, automatically scooting to the side to make room.

"Thank you, young man. I'm feeling quite tired."

"No problem." Rick was reading through the real estate section, an article about holiday homes. He felt like moving into a house by the beach. With a yard. That'd be nice. He could almost feel the cool sea breeze. Like air from an open fridge.

Something nudged his foot. It was a dog. A poodle. His eyes followed the leash to the old lady's hand. She was still sitting there, smiling.

Her eyes were wrong. Solid black. No whites.

"Did you think you had escaped us?"

Rick jumped up in a panic. No! He was still sitting there. Frozen. He couldn't move. His eyes were locked to the old lady's.

"Ah. So young. So fresh. So… untrained."

Rick was screaming inside. A whimper escaped his throat.

"A spontaneous Awakening. Very interesting. Very tasty."

She was talking with a lisp, Rick thought crazily.

"Come with me, young man." She stood up. Her dog stood up without a sound to stand at heel. Rick found himself standing as well, then taking leaden footsteps to follow her as she began to move away.

She stiffened. Rick nearly walked into her. There was someone blocking her way.

"Release him."

It was the old Chinese guy. He was even smaller than the old lady.

The dog was growling a deep growl. Too deep for it's tiny throat.

"Release him."

Rick saw the image in front of him shimmer, like in a mirage. The old lady's form began to change, like she was wearing something on her back… a backpack…or leathery wings.

She shrieked something. Too many voices came out of her throat. It looked like she was breathing out black smoke.

Rick shut his eyes, as the Chinese guy seemed to get taller, brighter. Too bright.

He was being buffeted. He desperately tried to keep his footing as ferocious winds that weren't winds threatened to throw him into the air. He couldn't breathe. His skin was burning. He felt like he was standing on the edge of an abyss, and he was losing his balance. He was crying and he didn't give a damn. *"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners…"*

It was over. It felt like hours had passed, but it could've been just seconds.

"Open your eyes."

He was lying on his back, on the grass. Slowly opening his eyes, he found himself staring into the friendly face of the Chinese gentleman, his black eyes twinkling. Black eyes, with whites around the pupils. Thank God.

"Where is it? What the hell happened?"

"It's gone. And that's kind of right. Hell happened."

"What?"

"Hell. Sit up, and I'll explain what I can. But you won't want to hear it."

He didn't have a Chinese accent. No "that's fried rice, you plick" for this guy.

Rick chuckled.

The Chinese guy said, "For someone who nearly got devoured by Soul Eaters, you're perky."

Rick sobered instantly.

"Was that, was that what it was? That old lady?"

"That was no 'old lady'," the man replied. For the first time Rick noticed the half rings of fatigue under the man's eyes. The man squatted down on the grass beside him. Fell down, more like it.

"We found out about you a few hours ago. We felt someone shake the aether like he was trying to bring down the pillars of Heaven itself."

"You mean, last night…when…" Rick couldn't finish the thought.

"Yes. You burst into the aether, what some people refer to as the astral plane, like a giant boulder thrown into a still lake. You caused a lot of waves, son – made a real splash."

He paused, and then continued excitedly, "A spontaneous Awakening! That hasn't happened in a very long time."

There it was again. "A spontaneous, what?"

The Chinese guy shook his head. Rick noticed he was almost completely bald, with just a few wisps of white hair left. He looked old.

"I warned you, you're not going to like it. But you have no choice. Not really."

"Listen, I'm just a normal guy… I have to…"

"You have to listen to me." Suddenly, the strength was back in that voice, like just before he got too bright.

"Son, when you shook the aether in the middle of the night, you drew a lot of attention to yourself. Some of it good, most of it bad. I'm one of the good. I was the closest, and I was sent to find you. Unfortunately, t*hey* found you first."

After a pause that Rick was too scared to interrupt, the man continued.

"There are a few of us, like you, we can *do* things. Special things. With training, we can become quite powerful, but our enemy outnumbers us. One for one, we tend to be stronger, but they feed in packs."

"Feed?"

The Chinese guy looked him in the eye.

"Feed. They feed on souls."

"Souls. You called them Soul Eaters."

"Soul, life force, whatever you want to call it, they feed on it. If you're lucky, you die. If not… you become one of them."

"Last night… there was a man. He was acting crazy."

"When you shook the aether."

"Yes. I mean… " Rick didn't know what he meant.

"Go on."

"He… attacked someone. So I defended against him. Somehow."

"And…"

"Afterwards, he was lying on the ground. But he wasn't… glowing… anymore."

The man's eyes lit up in wonder. "You mean, this guy was possessed, and you managed to free him?"

"I freed him?"

"Yes, if I'm understanding you correctly, you ran into a case of possession, and you managed to exorcise him. Untrained! You're a bigger talent than I thought. And by the way you pounded around in the aether like a wild bull in a china shop, I knew you had a lot of muscle. Just no finesse."

Rick felt nauseous. *This can't be happening.*

"Son, denial won't get you anywhere. You have to make a choice. Now, can you stand?"

Rick found he could.

"Help me up then. I'm an old man."

Rick yanked him up. His head only came up to his chest.

"Don't measure me by my height, boy."

Rick was looking around. There were still kids playing soccer, people jogging, riding bikes. Everyone was still there. Everyone except… those things. His mind wanted to skip away from the memory.

"Most of the fight took place in the aether. Some sensitive people, psychics, might feel *something*, but only the Awakened actually *see* what's going on. Like you."

Rick felt faint. His knees started to buckle.

"What's your name?"

"What?" The old man was holding him up. His grip was strong. Rick found his footing again.

"What's your name, son?"

"Rick," he replied. "Uh, maybe I wasn't supposed to give you my name? I read somewhere that doing that would give people power over you?" He was babbling and he knew it.

"Well Rick," the man chuckled, "that little old lady didn't need your name to make you follow her like a dog, now, did she?"

"Ah, I guess not."

"Rick, my name's Joe. That's my Western name, by the way. You couldn't pronounce my real name."

"Joe?"

"Yes. Joe. Now, old Joe's going to give you a choice, because we never force people into anything. It's not right, and it's against our Code."

Rick heard the capital letter when Joe said "Code".

"What choice?" Rick felt afraid, but strangely hopeful.

"You can let us train you, and we'll protect you as we do, or you can live as you have, and take your chances."

"Train me?"

"Train you how to use your Awakened powers. But with the training comes responsibility. Very heavy responsibility. We exist to battle the minions of Hell, and it's definitely not pretty. It's a full-time job. It's thankless. You'll be scared spitless almost all the time, and you'll probably end up dead, or worse. And if you go rogue, we'll get you ourselves."

"Go rogue?"

"It's tempting, very tempting, to abuse this power. You'll see, whether you come with me or not."

Rick stood quietly, thinking.

"Well?" Joe said. "If we hang around here much longer, something else might pop up, and I'm still tired from the last fight."

"So I'm going to become some kind of superhero?"

"Superheroes have fan clubs, Rick. Us? No. We fight to protect the weak and the innocent, but we must stay secretive. Fame will get us killed. We fight in the shadows."

"This was in broad daylight."

"But no one *saw* anything. Same thing."

"Nobody," Rick paused. "Nobody saw a thing." After a long pause, a smile quirked a corner of Rick's mouth. "How about money?"

Joe frowned.

"No, don't get me wrong. How do we pay for food? Rent? Electricity?"

"Ah," Joe smiled. Inscrutable Oriental, my butt, Rick thought. Joe's a good fellow.

"Don't worry, Rick. Being one of the Awakened is good for *something*. Don't worry about *that*."

"Well then. Uh, Joe? I do security work. I always wanted to be a cop, but couldn't handle the bureaucratic crap. I guess I'm going to end up as a kind of cop after all?"

"Rick, you're exactly right. Now let's go. We have to move."

❖

THE QUEEN OF LAS VEGAS

A WitchCraft Adventure by Thom Marrion

Queen of Las Vegas is a WitchCraft adventure for three to six players. The six cast members provided can be used if running this as a one-shot. If run as part of an ongoing campaign those characters can be used as supporting cast instead. The adventure is intended to involve Vampyres, so that would still be the best choice for the Cast Members.

THE HISTORY OF LAS VEGAS

The Las Vegas Valley has spent most of its existence as a watering hole in the middle of the desert. The Anazasi civilization was based in this area before they vanished (Some Scholars say that it was the influence of a Mad god Cult that caused their society to disappear). The valley came to the attention of Europeans when a Spanish scout named Rafael Rivera stumbled across the relatively pleasant spot and named it Las Vegas (Spanish for "The Meadows"). The United States became aware of it when Captain John Fremont described the place in 1844 and thirty Mormon missionaries were sent to Las Vegas during the next decade. The town of Las Vegas became a railroad stop between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, and a mining industry developed by the end of the nineteenth century.

Las Vegas remained a small desert town until the construction of nearby Hoover Dam caused a population boom in the 1930s. Gambling was legalized and quick divorces could be obtained in Vegas after only six weeks of residency. Ranches were set up to accommodate those people who only wanted to live in Vegas long enough to divorce, and those ranches became the precursors of the Las Vegas casinos.

The Strip, the long line of Casinos along Las Vegas Blvd., began to take its current form in the Sixties. By the Nineties, the relatively simple casinos were being replaced by massive themed mega-casinos like the Luxor and Excalibur. Modern Las Vegas is a brightly-lit tourist destination that cares more about its visitors than its residents. It is a giant playground designed to separate tourists from their money and ensure that they have a good time. Plenty of vices can be indulged here, it is possible to partake of all Vegas has to offer and never see daylight. Millions of visitors come and go all the time.

This makes it a great town for Vampyres.

VEGAS VAMPYRES

Las Vegas has a pretty substantial Gifted and Supernatural population for a city its size. There are over forty non-mundane permanent residents in the greater Las Vegas area. This includes a group of seven Gifted Templars (Who nobody really knows about. They are here, along with twice as many Mundane Templars, to deal with suspected Combine activities in what is popularly known as Area 51, just north of Vegas), two Wicce covens (one is an all female group dedicated to the Earth Goddess, the other is a mixed group that worships the Moon Goddess and her Horned God Consort), a Rosicrucian cohort (Mostly Squires), and a large number of Solitaires.

Vegas also has a large Vampyre population. There are three Iscariot Vampyres, five Thanatoi Vampyres, and five Solitaires who live in Las Vegas year round. The city also sees a dozen or more visiting Vampyres a year. It is the ideal destination for the Undead (If the Players want to use their own characters instead of the Cast Members provided, then they can be a group of visiting Vampyres). Vulnerability to daylight is not a concern in a city where businesses are open twenty-four hours a day, the transient tourist population provides a steady source of victims to prey on, and most people come to Vegas looking for some kind of thrill (Which often makes them willing prey for the Vampyres). If it wasn't for the Sentinels, the town would be perfect for the Undead.

There used to be twenty Vampyres in Vegas instead of just thirteen. The Society of Sentinels in Las Vegas have killed seven. This makes it very dangerous to feed randomly in Vegas, so the local Vampyres make sure that their activities stay low profile. If some visiting Vampyre come to Vegas and kills a few innocents before heading home, the incident is going to be blamed on the local Undead. The Sentinels already know that the Thanatoi operate in town, though they are believed to a monster-controlled death cult. Any Vampyre encountered by the Sentinels will be assumed to be part of the same death cult.

"YOU MEET AT AN INN AND HEAR OF INVADERS FROM THE NORTH..."

As cliché as that may be, it isn't that far from the truth. For the past three years, six members of the Vegas Vampyre community (Otherwise known as the Cast Members) have gotten together every month to discuss any current news that may affect their undead existence. Despite the different attitudes and philosophies of the six, they are all united by the fact that they are undead beings in a city with a lethal Covenant dedicated to eliminating them. At the end of each meeting, one of the six will pick the location of their next gathering. Last month it was Darlene's choice, so the group got together at the Buffet at Harrah's. The food was all right, considering none of them really needs to eat, but the lines were inexplicably long and it took too much time to get a table. This month it is Beatriz's choice, so the six are gathering at the Crown and Anchor Pub on East Tropicana. The Crown and Anchor is an Irish pub that appeals to college students and locals. It also has the advantage of being open twenty-four hours a day (As explained before, Vampyres love the range of establishments that are open twenty-four hours in Vegas).

Ming and Darlene talk about the Renfields that they saved, Valentine and Beatriz talk about living in Bally's and dealing with the Spirits who haunt that casino, Evangilena speaks about her daughter, and Tim is just happy to be alive (In a manner of speaking). As the Cast is catching up on the latest news, a newscast on one of the pub's televisions catches the group's attention. The bodies of twelve bikers were discov-

ered just outside of Yosemite National Park. Investigators have determined that the bikers were killed two days ago (A Simple Intelligence Test will reveal that two days ago was a Full Moon). The bikers were savagely massacred, each one decapitated and most with their hearts removed as well. The official mundane explanation favors a pack of rapid animals, but the more metaphysical aware might suspect anything from Dark Magicians to Ferals.

While the Cast is debating the cause of the deaths (Or possibly ignoring the news report), there is another report of violent deaths. Two families were brutally murdered last night at the Jim Butler Motel in Tonopah, NV. An eyewitness reported seeing a group of blood covered motorcyclists leaving Tonopah and heading south down Highway 95. On a Simple Intelligence Test, the Cast Members will realize that if the bikers stay on 95, they will ride past Nellis Air Force Base and straight into Las Vegas. In fact, if they left Tonopah last night then they are probably in Las Vegas right now. If people start getting torn apart in Las Vegas, then there is a good chance that the Sentinels are going to make the local Undead pay for the crimes regardless of their innocence. At this point, the Cast has four hours until daylight to do what they can.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE MANSION

The Las Vegas Society of Sentinels has also seen the news reports and have already begun searching around town for the culprits. Baltasar and Sol search around town in an unmarked gray van loaded with weaponry, Nephi and Jacob cruise around in their black sedan, and Maria is going through the casinos along the Strip. Each group also has two mundanes in their entourage as back-up. There is a possibility that one of the Sentinels will notice one the Cast Members during this initial search. Cast Members have a chance of recognizing the Sentinels on a Simple Perception Test (Recognizing the local Sentinels is something of a survival trait in Vegas). What the Cast does if seen is up to them, but a confrontation should probably be avoided. The two Iscariots in the Cast are under strict orders from their Covenant leader to leave the Sentinels alone. Since a Vampyric attack on the Sentinels would only bring more Sentinels to town, this is probably a good plan. By the time the Cast comes across one of the Sentinels, they should be more concerned with reaching their respective homes before sunrise than fighting the monster hunters anyway.

REVOLTING PREDICAMENTS

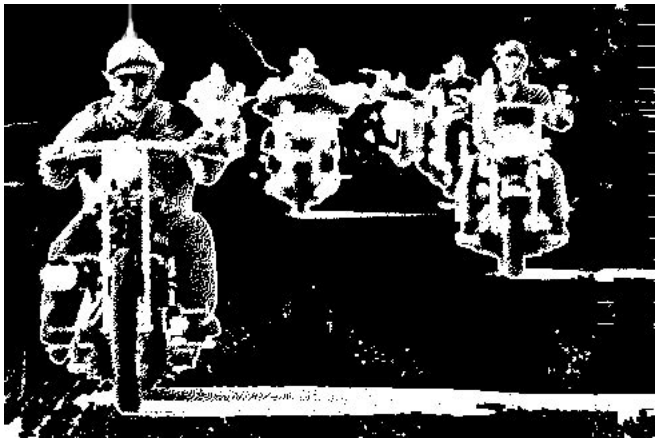
As soon as the sun sets the following evening, any Cast Members who check the news wills see reports of a couple killed at the Sam's Town Casino. Sam's Town is a western motif casino away from the touristy Strip, which is why locals prefer to come here if they feel the need to partake in some casino gambling. The couple was discovered floating in the pool of the Mystic Falls, an artificial waterfall in the glass covered courtyard of the Sam's Town Casino. Now that the murders have come to Las Vegas, things have gotten very serious for the Cast Members.

The City of Las Vegas Police Department will be all over the deaths. The City makes its money through tourists, and if the tourists are afraid to come to town than the town faces hard times. The powers-that-be want this taken care of as soon as possible. Publicly they will be confident in their ability to apprehend those responsible, but they really don't have a clue who did it. Any Thanatoi Cast Members (Especially Valentine) will learn this through Cinnamon because of her contacts with the city government. Once the deaths at Sam's Town are connected with the murders in Tonopah and Yosemite, the FBI will take over the investigation.

Of more immediate concern to the Cast, apart from Sentinels and Mundane Authorities, a Supernatural killing spree is going to bring the Combine in force. Nobody knows anything concrete about the Conspiracy, not even the Iscariots who are supposed to be fighting them, but everyone is fairly certain that there is a large Combine presence somewhere around Nellis Air Force Base (Specifically, the Groomlake Facility in Area 51). If a bunch of Gifted and Supernaturals start tearing up Vegas, the MIBs will probably descend on Vegas in their Black Helicopters like flies on a mutilated cow.

ROUND UP THE USUAL SUSPECTS

The only real lead that the Cast Members have at first is an eye-witness who described a group of blood covered bikers leaving Tonopah after the murders at the Jim Butler Motel and heading south towards Vegas. If the Cast Members roam around Vegas looking for a group of bikers, the first likely group will be found at the Crazy Horse Gentlemen's Club. The dozen Harleys in the parking lot give their presence away. Sadly, these bikers are Mundanes. They are in Vegas as part of a drug deal, so they are by no means innocents, but none of them have ever killed anybody.



The second group of suspects are, three bikers staying at the Luxor who show up as Supernatural to those who can detect such things. The Sentinels have someone at the

Luxor who spends most of her time looking for such beings before they can hurt anyone. The Cast Members will become aware that possible suspects are at the Luxor when they see familiar Sentinel vehicles rushing towards the black pyramid-shaped casino. The three Supernaturals are the Nomad Ferals described below. If confronted in public, they will use Strength of the Beast to defend themselves. If the Cast does nothing, the Sentinels gather outside the Ferals hotel room, break down the door, and shoot the Nomads with an overabundance of silver bullets. The Nomads are in one of the Pyramid Rooms (The hotel rooms built along the side of the actual pyramid), on the nineteenth floor facing the Excalibur. It is possible that at least some of the Ferals might be able to break out of the window and slide down the thirty-five degree slope of the pyramid to the street below, it depends on the actions of the Cast and how much mercy the Chronicler feels like showing a group of wrongly-accused Supporting Cast Members.

The real culprits are an ancient Vampyre named Esÿhar Nasusara and the eight minions she created from bikers whose dead bodies didn't remain behind in Yosemite. Nasusara is an ancient Vampyre who was born in the Hittite Empire. The last time she was active was over a hundred years ago. She has just started to build a small army of vampyric minions, starting with eight of the bikers she killed in Yosemite. The murderous Vampyres are currently staying at the house of a large Colombian family in North Las Vegas. The Vampyres have their motorcycles parked in the backyard and after an hour and a half of torture have killed and eaten the family. If the Cast decides to drive through the lower income areas of North Las Vegas, they will notice the motorcycles on a Difficult Perception Test.

THE QUEEN OF BLOOD

Everything is a bit overwhelming to Esÿhar Nasusara. The last time she was mobile, electric light bulbs and gas powered automobiles hadn't been invented yet. Now she finds herself in modern Las Vegas, the brightest city on Earth. It's loud and bright and confusing, it's a bit like heaven and a bit like hell. Nasusara is constantly faced with sights and sounds that are a bit incomprehensible at first. It's frightening and exciting at the same time.

Nasusara wants it.

She wants it all.

The ancient Hittite Vampyre has decided to terrify the locals like she did in the old days, establish herself as the object of veneration for some dark cult and live in luxury for the next few years. She believes that the relative isolation of Vegas will allow her to get away with this, because she hasn't really grasped the concept that no place on Earth is really isolated anymore. It took her a few days of hiding in the slums of North Las Vegas and feeding from the shadows before she felt confident to walk in public as the Queen of Blood once more.

PYRAMID SCHEME

Like many Supernatural visitors to Las Vegas, Nasusara is drawn to the black pyramid of the Luxor Hotel and Casino. The pyramid is a universally honored metaphysical symbol and many expect there to be some Place of Power hidden somewhere within the casino (There isn't). Apart from a symbolic connection with the Great Pyramids (One of the greater Places of Power on the planet), there is something intrinsically cool about a jet black pyramid with an intense beam of white light shining up from where the capstone would be on one of the great pyramids. (Besides, Blue Man Group plays there and everyone likes Blue Man Group). Nasusara is drawn to the Luxor because, despite its innate kitschiness, it seems somewhat familiar and comforting to the three thousand-year-old Vampyre.

Shortly after the Sentinels try to kill the Nomads, the Queen of Blood and her minions decide to initiate her new reign in the courtyard of the Luxor. She climbs on top of a faux sphinx, flanked by her minions, and raises her hands towards the heavens. She is in her most beautiful form at this point and makes the following proclamation.

"Now is the time of my new reign upon the earth. I shall be your Goddess and this shall be my Temple. I command the heavens and the earth. I wield the power of life and death. Worship me and you shall be rewarded with my mercy. Act against me and feel the wrath of Esÿhar Nasusara, the Queen of Blood, the Divine Goddess of this city."

At the end of her speech, a booming crack of thunder is heard and lightning flashes are seen overhead. This is because the ancient Vampyre has just spent 64 points of Essence on the Weather Lordship Invocation, creating a thunderous downpour extending almost a third of a mile around the Luxor. The summoned storm will last for the next twenty minutes; unless Nasusara dismisses it (Which she has no intention of doing). It is an impressive sight from outside, a violent thunderhead centered around the intense beam of light that shoots from the top of the black pyramid. The storm also gets the attention of anyone in a ten-mile radius with knowledge of what an Elemental Invocation is. That includes the Cast Members Evangilena, Lourdes, Santilannez, and Beatriz Zamora.

The tourists at the Luxor believe that this is all part of some show put on by the hotel and respond accordingly. Some applaud, some laugh, some make disparaging remarks about how hokey the whole thing is. If the Cast Members do not immediately confront Nasusara, she will shift into her more hideous form and start grabbing tourists with her clawed hands. She will use the Wither power on as many tourists as she can, draining six points of Essence per turn (assume the average tourist has anywhere from ten to fifteen points of Essence) until she has either regained the Essence she spent on Weather Lordship or is finally confronted by the Cast Members.

ALL JUST PART OF THE SHOW

As this is happening, a crowd will start to gather around the Queen of Blood and her victims. Most people will still believe that this is some show put on by the Luxor, like the pirate ship battle at Treasure Island (Though what this horror show has to do with ancient Egypt is unknown to the crowd. Maybe it's all supposed to be like some old mummy movie). The Cast Members will be cheered on by the clueless as they fight the Queen of Blood and her minions. If half of her minions are defeated and it looks like she might lose, Nasusara will flee the Luxor by levitating straight up and punching a hole through the glass roof of the Luxor. If the Sentinels show up and start fighting the ancient Vampyre, she will definitely make a strategic retreat.

If the Inspired Monster Hunters do get involved, they will focus their attacks on Nasusara but they won't spare the Cast Members. The Undead using Wither on the tourists needs to be taken out first, but all the Vampyres are monsters as far as the Las Vegas Society of Sentinels is concerned. The Cast may need to make a strategic retreat as well.

Nasusara will work her way up the Strip and use Invocations to weaken her opposition. She will throw Striking Flames from the castle towers of Excalibur and fire Lightning Bolts from the Statue of Liberty at New York New York

> As part of her Elemental Air Invocation, Nasusara can create a lightning bolt that causes D6(3) points of damage per Essence Point spent. Metal Armor Value, which includes vehicles, is divided by five and any machines with electronic parts take double damage. Her base range is 120 yards, but this can be extended by 10 yards per extra Essence spent.

Eventually the Queen of Blood will work her way up the Strip to the Haunted Place of Power otherwise known as Bally's Hotel Casino, which also happens to be the current location of the Thanatoi Chapter House for the City of Las Vegas.

DEAD RECKONING

Once the battle moves to Bally's, the rest of the Thanatoi will get involved with the fight. There is also a chance that the rest of the Iscariots and the Solitaires will choose to make a last stand against the ancient Vampyre in order to preserve their undead way of life. Nasusara will be helped by any minions who still survive (They will have escaped by motorcycle and will in fact still be riding their motorcycles through the hallways of Bally's). The Queen of Blood will also have some unexpected help from the Spirits of the casino. The Apparitions will be manifesting at full force, drawn to the casino by the supernatural battle at hand. The Ghosts will take the opportunity to strike back at the Thanatoi using their Haunt powers.

The guests at Bally's will be treated to marauding bikers riding their Harleys through the casino, burning Apparitions fleeing down the hallways, rooms growing and shrinking, furniture becoming ambulatory and violent (and a soaking wet) three thousand-year-old woman walking through the casino in a torn black dress and bare feet with an insane glare in her eyes as she steals Essence from anyone she can grab.

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED YOUR STAY

What happens depends on how well the Cast Members do against the Queen of Blood and her minions.

If everyone manages to keep the battles isolated and cut down on the amount of collateral damage, the whole event becomes a strange story about Vegas that most people refuse to believe.

If the Strip is a burning ruin with a three thousand year old Vampyre building an army of Undead from the tortured masses, then things will have taken a decidedly nasty turn. The most likely outcome of that scenario is that a cluster of black helicopters fly into town spraying clouds of noxious gas that causes the mundane masses to lose their memory of the past twenty-four hours. Everyone suffers from a bizarre black out and the destruction is blamed on a freak earthquake or some other natural phenomenon. This is an extreme solution reserved for the worst of situations.

The middle ground is that the Undead battle for Las Vegas becomes one of those supernatural events that become increasingly more frequent and unexplainable as the Reckoning draws closer. An unforeseen outcome of all this is that the Sentinels quite possibly become aware of the location of the second Thanatoi Chapter House in Vegas, which means that the House of Thanatos will be looking for a third location before too long. In any case, this won't be the last of the Cast Member's adventures in the City of Las Vegas.

* * *

THE ISCARIOTS

The Las Vegas contingent of the Fellowship of Judas lives in an apartment building in North Las Vegas. It is a low rent affair on the verge of being condemned, a two story building built around an inner courtyard with a filthy pool. There are twelve small apartments. The Iscariot leader Tink lives in two of them, and six more are occupied by the other Iscariots. There is a garage to the side of the apartment building that houses Ming's motorcycle, Darlene's car, and two old vans that can be used by any of the Iscariots.

Brendan Hennasy, aka Ming *
Darlene Mitchell *
Tink
The Renfields

THE SENTINELS

The Society of Sentinels maintains a Chapel House on Sunrise Mountain with an amazing view of the Mormon Temple. Most Chapel Houses are historic buildings like castles or manors, but Las Vegas is not known for its sense of historic preservation. The Vegas Chapel House is a large dwelling originally built in the late eighties, with a massive master bedroom, two additional family bedrooms (All three have their own bathroom), two guest rooms, two servant's quarters, an Olympic sized pool, and a guest house in the back. There is also a racquet ball court that no one every uses and a solarium that has been transformed into a training room.

Baltasar Sandova
Maria Delezon
Nephi Tucker
Jacob Wells
Solomon Parke
Fearless Vampyre Hunters

THE NOMADS

There are three Ferals who have come to Las Vegas for the usual touristy reasons. They want to rest amid the gaudy glory of America's adult playground before continuing onward through the Mojave Desert to Los Angeles and meeting with some other members of their Covenant. They certainly didn't plan on having a bunch of Vampyres or Sentinels accuse them of being serial killing monsters. They weren't even aware of the murders when they came to town and checked in at the Excalibur. They will certainly resent any suggestion that they are the killers. Note that some stats have two sets of numbers; the second represents the character in wolf form.

Bela Keglovich
Emerencia "Mercy" Ivancso
Czaba Ivancso

** Recommended Cast Members*

THE THANATOI

The Thanatoi Chapter House in Las Vegas used to be located inside an old warehouse in the downtown area of Las Vegas. The warehouse contained an extensive occult library and a Gateway to the Wilderness of the Twilight World that was a remnant of the lost Anazasi culture. All that was burned down eight years ago by the local Sentinels who thought the local Thanatoi Vampyres were responsible for a series of murders. The Gateway is still there, but it is difficult to reach now that a new structure has been built over it.

The new Thanatoi Chapter House is actually located within a series of suites at Bally's Hotel Casino. Bally's is located where the old MGM Grand Hotel and Casino stood before it burned down in one of the worst hotel fires in history back in 1980. Eighty-seven people died, resulting in a dozen or so spirits remaining behind. Most of these spirits are Apparitions, but there are a few Ghosts as well (Though none with any significant powers). The severity of the disaster has turned the site occupied by Bally's into a Place of Power, with 10 points of Essence. Of course that Essence is tainted by the fear and pain of those who died in the fire, so anyone attempting to tap into that extra Essence would need to pass a Dismissal Task.

Apart from being the most haunted Casino along the Vegas Strip, Bally's is known for having large rooms and a small casino. The local Thanatoi are not sure what kind of deal their Covenant struck with the Park Place Company that owns the Casino, but they have six Parlor Suites to call their own (Four serve as residences for the Thanatoi and two are for guests of the Covenant). The staff of Bally's have various theories about who the Thanatoi are, members of some obscure royal family being the most popular guess. So far the Sentinels have no idea that the Vampyres are living in the upper levels of the Bally's South Tower, and the local Thanatoi would like to keep it that way.

Valentine Collins *
Beatriz Zamora *
Lemuel King
Christina Bruenig, aka Cinnamon
Kim Sullivan, aka Lady Malaise
The Ghosts of Bally's
The Burned

THE SOLITAIRES

Evangilena Lourdes Santilannez *
Titus Sheridan *
Hannibal Caldwell
Cloven and Charnal

THE QUEEN OF BLOOD

Esÿhar Nasusara
The Minions

CAST MEMBERS

VALENTINE COLLINS

Punker Boy

Vampyre Thanatoi Daredevil

Valentine appears to be a young man of eighteen or nineteen, with spiky bleached hair, multiple tattoos, and a punk wardrobe. He was actually born forty years ago, though he was killed in 1982. Collins was one of the early punkers, adorned in safety pins and listening to the Sex Pistols on a ludicrously massive boom box. One day he got into an argument with a group of dangerously drunk cowboy wannabes outside of a stripper bar. Things turned violent and the young punker was shot dead in the parking lot.

This happened to be a bar where a Thanatoi Vampyre named Cinnamon worked as an exotic dancer (A lucky coincidence for Collins, but he has always had a strange sort of luck in his life). She thought that Valentine Collins was too cute to die in a bar parking lot, so she brought him back. It was a bit of an impulsive decision, but restraint has never been her strong point. His first action was to kill his murderers, which almost got him unraveled by the local Sentinels. The Thanatoi leader Lemuel got him out of a tight spot, but the Sentinels now believe that Lemuel was responsible for the murders instead of Collins.

Valentine has kept a low profile since that time. He preys on willing victims who are seeking out new thrills. It's easier and keeps his new Vampyre family off the Sentinel radar.

Stats

STR	6	INT	2
DEX	6	PER	2
CON	6	WIL	2

Life Points:	73
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	24
Essence:	49

Qualities: Attractive +1, Charisma +2, Fast Reaction Time, Good Luck (2 levels), Hard to Kill (5 levels)

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Lazy

Skills: Brawling 3, Dodging 3, Driving (Car) 1, Haggling 2, Hand Weapon (Knife) 2, Guns (Handgun) 2, Language (Spanish) 2, Play Instrument (Guitar) 2, Stealth 6, Streetwise 2, Surveillance 2

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Manipulate Emotions, Mirage, Increased Essence +5

Possessions: A ridiculously large boombox, a huge vinyl collection of punk albums, an even larger CD collection, punk clothing, a guitar covered in bumper stickers for various bands, and a parlor Suite at Bally's that he shares with his sire (who still thinks he's cute).

BRENDAN HENNASY, AKA MING

Biker Harrower

Vampyre Iscariot Avenger

Ming is a biker with long greasy hair and a Fu Manchu mustache who appears to be in his late twenties. This is because he died at the age of 27 when he overdosed on heroin in a Vegas motel room in 1969. He was part of a motorcycle gang from Los Angeles at the time, but he decided to take his latest love interest (A sixteen year old runaway who called herself Starflower) to Vegas for a special vacation. The holiday was cut short when Starflower discovered Ming dead in the bathroom and ran out before the police arrived.

Ming found himself in the Threshold with a young woman who called herself Tink. He was shown an overview of his life and the mistakes he had made. He was also shown a glimpse of the Pit of Gehenna, his destination if he was to stay dead. Tink gave him a different choice. He could return to his dead body and seek redemption. He could try to make the world a better place.

The biker took Tink's offer and returned as a Vampyre, one of the Fellowship of Judas. In the past thirty years he has helped a lot of people, making them change their lives after a particular vivid nightmare (Courtesy of Ming). He has also seen some very unusual things, things that have caused him to formulate his own theory about what the Combine has been up to. It is all very complicated and involves the alien crash at Roswell, Area 51, George Washington being murdered and replaced with Adam Weishaupt, and the Vatican's plot to kill JFK.

Just because someone is an undead supernatural creature, that doesn't mean he automatically knows the real Truth behind everything that happens in the world.

Stats

STR	7	INT	1
DEX	6	PER	2
CON	7	WIL	1

Life Points:	62
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	26
Essence:	44

Qualities: Acute Vision, Fast Reaction Time, Nerves of Steel, Resistance (Pain, 5 levels), Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Weird Delusion (Conspiracy Theories) -2

Skills: Brawling 3, Dodge 3, Driving (Motorcycle) 4, Humanities (History) 3, Humanities (Conspiracy History) 5, Mechanic 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 4, Survival (Desert) 2

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Mirage, Nightmare

Possessions: Leathers, jeans, a customized 1951 Indian Chief motorcycle, and a wall that is covered in newspaper clippings and hand drawn charts illustrating his personal all-encompassing conspiracy theory.

DARLENE MITCHELL

Suicide Blond

Vampyre Iscariot Survivor

Darlene is a beautiful blond woman who appears to be eighteen, the age she was when she slashed both her wrists in her bathtub in 1988. Her suicide was completely unexpected. She was a cheerleader who was finally old enough to start drawing from her trust fund. Her boyfriend was a Quarterback who was the most popular boy at the very exclusive private school they attended. After graduation, she was going to visit Paris with her boyfriend. She had it all planned out, she was going to finally go "All the Way" with him in the City of Lights.

It was a very romantic idea, except the boyfriend was already going all the way with Darlene's best friend, a fact she discovered when she paid him a surprise visit. The confrontation grew ugly and the boyfriend admitted that he had never loved Darlene, he was only dating her for her money, and that he needed a "real woman". Darlene went home, drew a bath, lit some candles, settled into the warm water, and slashed her wrists open with a carving knife from the kitchen.

She was met in the Threshold by the Iscariot Tink, who told her that death wasn't the answer, the Quarterback was a jerk anyway, and she deserved better. Tink brought Darlene back to her corpse as a Vampyre, and Darlene immediately transferred her money into a Swiss Bank account before anyone realized she was dead. This second chance has given Darlene a strange optimism about life in general. She had killed herself and things worked out ok. Why shouldn't everything else in life work out the same?

Stats

STR	5	INT	2
DEX	6	PER	3
CON	5	WIL	3

Life Points:	54
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	22
Essence:	44

Qualities: Attractive +3, Charisma +1, Fast Reaction Time, Multiple Identity (Michelle Darden), Resources (Well-Off) +2, Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Emotional Problem (Fear of Rejection), Weird Delusion (A strange and perky optimism) -2

Skills: Acrobatics 4, Beautician 3, Brawling 2, Dance (Cheerleading) 4, Driving (sports car) 1, Escapism 2, First Aid 2, Riding (Horse) 3, Seduction 3, Singing 1, Swimming 2

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Mirage, Muse

Possessions: Nice clothes, a red 1988 Ferrari Testarossa, a fake identity, a large Swiss Bank account under that identity, a perky outlook on life, and the knowledge that her High School Quarterback boyfriend threw his knee out before college and recently died of a heart attack at the age of forty-eight on the lot where he had been selling used cars for the past twenty-four years.

EVANGILENA LOURDES SANTILANNEZ

The Civapipiltin

Vampyre Solitaire Survivor

Evangilena appears as an attractive young Latina woman, usually wearing a white dress. She grew up in a small town in Mexico, a simple girl living a simple life. That life became complicated when she fell in love with a boy named Ramil Malgosa. They made love whenever they could, and Evangilena soon became pregnant. It was a huge scandal in her village and she refused to name the father. For his part, Ramil refused to stand by her and joined the villagers in their scorn for Evangilena. The young woman moved in with her aunt, who was a midwife and so able to help her niece through her pregnancy. When the labor pains finally came, there were complications with the delivery. Evangilena died during childbirth.

This was not enough to stop her from looking after her child. Evangilena came back as Vampyre, what her aunt would call a Civapipiltin. She made sure that her daughter, named Ximena, was safe. She also had her vengeful side. When Ramil married a girl from a nearby village, Evangilena killed her while Ramil watched in horror. The villagers gave Evangilena's baby to an orphanage in New Mexico (During daylight of course) in order to draw the Vampyre away from them.

Evangilena has followed her child from Mexico to the orphanage to her foster home. Ximena is now a thirty-eight year old woman in Las Vegas who goes by the name of Maria Anderson. She works as an accountant and barely remembers the lady in a white dress who would visit her when she was little. She hasn't noticed that people who treat her badly have a habit of mysteriously disappearing.

Stats

STR	4	INT	2
DEX	5	PER	4
CON	4	WIL	5

Life Points:	46
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	18
Essence:	44

Qualities: Vampyre, Attractive +2, Nerves of Steel

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Honorable -1, Minority (Mexican), Obsession (Her child), Resources (Hurting) -2

Skills: Climbing 3, Brawling 2, Language (Spanish, Native) 5, Language (English) 3, Myth and Legends (Aztec) 3, Occult Knowledge (Vampyres) 2, Stealth 5, Surveillance 3, Survival (Desert) 2 Tracking 3

Metaphysics: Greater Shifting (Coyote), Greater Shifting (Owl), Greater Shifting (Rattlesnake), Manipulate Emotions, Mirage, Elemental Air 2*, Levitation 2*

**Evangilena's Invocations are her "strong suit", as a Solitaire she gets a +1 bonus to her Invocation Tasks.*

Possessions: A white dress, an obsession about her grown daughter, a crappy little apartment in North Vegas (Paid for with money she takes from her victims), and not much else.

TITUS SHERIDAN

Undead Thug

Vampyre Solitaire Warrior

Titus is a heavily muscled man with a shaved head and a full beard who appears to be in his late twenties, the age he was when he died six years ago. Titus had spent his entire life up until that point living in Plainview, Texas. He had never been any farther away then Amarillo or Lubbock. Then one day he decided to load up his pickup and head to Los Angeles to seek his fortune. He was there less than twenty-four hours when a Vampyre named Mecario Delgado recruited Titus by killing him and bringing him back as one of the Undead. Delgado wanted someone big and stupid; Titus seemed to fit the bill.

Delgado was slowly building a lucrative criminal organization in Los Angeles. He had an unfair advantage over Mundane adversaries, and he took out any Gifted who might stand in his way. Titus was stronger than ever and was learning to be a better fighter, he was even beginning to learn the ways of Tao Chi. Some of Delgado's methods were extreme, but Titus didn't see anything he could do about that.

It all ended when a bunch of ninjas attacked Delgado's home and unraveled him (They were Red Lotus, but Titus is unaware of this fact). Titus fled while he could, relieved to be free of Delgado but unsure of what to do next. He had heard from the other Vampyres with Delgado (All of whom ended up being destroyed by the Red Lotus) that Vegas was a very vamp-friendly town. He decided to try his luck in Las Vegas and has been here ever since.

Stats

STR	8	INT	1
DEX	5	PER	2
CON	6	WIL	2
Life Points:	75		
Endurance Points:	n/a		
Speed:	22		
Essence:	44		

Qualities: Fast Reaction Time, Hard to Kill (3 levels), Nerves of Steel, Resistance (Pain, 5 levels), Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Resources (Below Average) -1, Showoff

Skills: Brawling 4, Dodge 3, Driving (Car) 2, Haggling 2, Hand Weapons (Club) 2, Hand Weapons (Knife) 3, Humanities (Law) 1, Guns (Handgun) 2, Guns (Shotgun) 3, Language (Spanish) 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Surveillance 2

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Chi Mastery 3, Inner Strength 2

Possessions: Heavy boots, jeans, and tees, a pickup with heavily tinted windows, a .38 caliber handgun, a sawed off 12 gauge shotgun, a big old knife, a cheap apartment in North Vegas, a suitcase of money under his bed that Delgado certainly won't miss, and a new start on unlife.

BEATRIZ ZAMORA

Savant Scholar

Vampyre Thanatoi Seeker of Knowledge

Beatriz is a Chicana woman with blond hair who appears to be in her mid-twenties. She was born with the Gift, something she inherited from her bruja grandmother in Mexico. Beatriz had a talent for scholarship and magic, she might have become a Rosicrucian if circumstances were different, but instead she became involved with the Thanatoi. She was one of two token Thanatoi with pulses in Las Vegas.

Things were going well for her until eight years ago when a Vampyre from the East Coast named Gethsemene Ash decided to visit Vegas for a weekend of mayhem. The Sentinels hunted her down, but she led them to a Thanatoi Chapter House where Beatriz was staying with Lemuel King (The local Thanatoi leader), Maccabee, Winter, Viorica (All Vampyres), and a Necromancer named Tarcisco. The Sentinels burned down the Chapter House, slew every Vamp except Lemuel, and killed both Tarcisco and Beatriz. Lemuel managed to escape the conflagration with Beatriz's body and decided that it was not time for her to die yet. He brought her back from the Threshold as a Vampyre.

Beatriz has adjusted well enough to the thought of being post-mortem. It now gives her a unique perspective from which to study the world of the dead.

Stats

STR	4	INT	4
DEX	5	PER	3
CON	4	WIL	4
Life Points:	46		
Endurance Points:	n/a		
Speed:	18		
Essence:	59		

Qualities: Vampyre, Photographic Memory

Drawbacks: Clown, Coward -1, Minority (Mexican-American)

Skills: Brawling 1, Computer 2, Dodge 1, Guns (Handgun) 1, Humanities (History) 2, Language (Spanish) 3, Myth and Legend (Southwest Indians) 3, Occult Knowledge (Undead) 3, Research/Investigation 4, Writing (Academic) 3

Metaphysics: Increased Essence +15, Manipulate Emotions, Communion 2, Farsight 2, Locate 2, Elemental Earth 2, Shielding 2

Possessions: Some casual clothing, books of notes, a Parlor Suite at Bally's that also serves as the Thanatoi Chapter House's library, and the desire to never meet another Sentinel again.

TINK

Vampyre Girl

Supernatural Iscariot Weird One

Tink appears as a petite sixteen year old girl with fair skin and short blond hair that looks like it has been cut by Tink herself while talking on the phone (Which is usually the case). She generally just wears a pastel short summer dress and nothing else, not even shoes. She has been living in Vegas since 1928, though not much is known about where she lived before that time. Nobody in Vegas even knows her real name.

It is known that she was born in France some time in the 1450s. She was turned by another Vampyre who was slain centuries ago. She preyed on peasants across Europe for a hundred years before undergoing an experience that changed her from a Supernatural Predator to a member of the Fellowship of Judas. She has been seeking redemption and fighting the enemies of humanity for the past five hundred years.

For some reason, it seems like some deranged group or other tries to summon a Mad god in the Vegas area every few years. Maybe the rumors about the Anazasi are true and there are spots in the area that still remain conducive to Tainted rituals. Tink came to Vegas in the thirties to stop members of the Cult of Rending Shadow from summoning Lle'Khor to our dimension (This took place in a town that was buried under the waters of Lake Mead once Hoover Dam was built. Rumors suggest that the Templars were responsible for making sure that town became uninhabitable). After the Cultists were defeated, Tink stayed in Vegas.

She has fought with the Rosicrucians from time to time, and has an adversarial relationship with the local Cohort. Tink mistakenly believes that the Rosicrucians are in fact a Combine cell associated with conspiracy activities in Area 51. Tink is somewhat protective of the local Sentinels, even though they believe that all Vampyres (Including herself) are nothing but monsters. Rumors suggest that she had some kind of ill-fated romance with a Sentinel in Edwardian London, and this has left her with a soft spot for the Inspired Monster Hunters. Like much of her past, Tink refuses to talk about it.

Stats

STR	8	INT	3
DEX	9	PER	4
CON	8	WIL	5

Life Points:	78
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	34
Essence:	152

Qualities: Vampyre, Attractive +2, Charisma +2, Nerves of Steel

Drawbacks: Adversary (Rosicrucians) 2, Adversary (Mad God Cult) 3, Child (16), Honorable (1 level), Reckless

Skills: Acrobatics 3, Brawling 2, Computer 1, Dancing (Ballet) 3, Dodge 2, Guns (Handgun) 1, Hand Weapon (Knife) 2, Hand Weapon (Foil) 3, Humanities (History) 4, Language (French, Native) 5, Language (English) 5, Language (Italian) 5, Language (Latin) 3, Language (Greek) 3, Occult Knowledge (Undead) 3, Research/Investigation 2, Riding (Horse) 2, Singing 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Surveillance 2, Theology (Christian) 3,

Metaphysics: Age (5 levels), Increased Essence + 70, Mirage, Muse, Nightmare

Possessions: An assortment of summer dresses, a large hunting knife from 1873, an Italian Foil from 1637, a vast library of books (Some are over three centuries old), an iBook with discs containing information about Combine activity in North America (Vague and incomplete of course), an extensive music collection (vinyl and cd), and ownership of a run down apartment building in North Las Vegas that houses the local Iscariots.

THE RENFIELDS

Potential Hero

Iscariot Survivors

Ming is the one who came up with the nickname of Renfield for those mundane humans who have been helped by the Iscariots and have been retained as part of their Covenant. Each one was on the verge of overdosing or attempting to take their own life when they were saved by one of the Iscariot Vampyres. While most people saved in such a matter go back to their normal lives (Though a little wiser for having survived their ordeal), the Renfields decided to use their second chance to serve the Fellowship. There are currently four Renfields living with the Iscariots. They take care of the things that require a pulse and the ability to walk in daylight with no ill effects.

Geri Hendricks tried to kill herself with sleeping pills and a plastic bag until Darlene saved her, Kenrick Stollings was preparing to overdose on Heroin when Ming saved him, Bunny Fowler would have jumped off the top balcony of Circus Circus if it hadn't been for Tink, and Lillie Schumacher was attempting to shoot herself with her married boyfriend's .45 when Tink also saved her. Now each one works for the Iscariots, wishing to give others the second chance that they were given.

Stats

STR	2	INT	2
DEX	3	PER	3
CON	2	WIL	3

Life Points:	26
Endurance Points:	26
Speed:	10
Essence:	15

Qualities: Situational Awareness, Nerves of Steel

Drawbacks: Emotional Problems (Fear of Rejection), Nightmares

Skills: Brawling 2, Dodge 2, First Aid 2, Guns (Handgun) 2, Hand Weapon (Knife) 2, Occult Knowledge (Undead) 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4, Surveillance 2 and 5 more points worth of Skills.

Possessions: Some clothing, some weapons, room and board with the Iscariots.

LEMUEL KING

Leader of the Vegas Chapter House

Vampyre Thanatoi Weird One

Lemy is a tall thin man who appears to be in his early thirties (Though he was actually born in 1843) with pale blue eyes and a shaved head. He usually dresses in leather pants, sunglasses, and vibrantly colored faux fur coats. Sort of a strange glam rave look (Think Moby in the Westside video looking all ghetto-fabulous). He was turned in Victorian London by a Thanatoi Vampyre who called himself Pen Annwen, simply because Pen thought that Lemy would make a good-looking member of the Undead.

Lemy became part of the Sybarite faction in London, enjoying his unlife to the fullest. When word of an old Anazasi Gateway to the Death Realms in Nevada reached the Thanatoi, Lemy was told to investigate. He came to Las Vegas in 1930 (Two years after the Iscariot Tink decided to stay in the area), and he promptly bought the area surrounding the Gateway and built a warehouse around it. The Thanatoi had hoped that isolation in a remote desert rail stop would help Lemy grow out of his flamboyant ways. They had no idea that Bugsy Siegel was preparing to turn the place into America's Adult Playground.

Lemy was delighted to find himself in the middle of Sin City. Once the Sentinels burned down the Chapter House with the Anazasi Gateway, Lemy called in some favors with his Covenant to establish a new Chapter House in one of the more haunted locations in Vegas (Which happened to be Bally's, right in the middle of the Strip). He is now the leader of the local Thanatoi and along with Tink is seen as one of the leaders of the Vampyre community (Some of the Undead have even dubbed him the Vampyre King of the West). The Sentinels certainly think of him as such, which is why they want to kill him.

Stats

STR	5	INT	3
DEX	5	PER	3
CON	4	WIL	4

Life Points:	46
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	18
Essence:	48

Qualities: Age (1 level), Charisma +2, Resources (Well-Off) +2,

Drawbacks: Adversary (Sentinels) -5, Covetous (Lecherousness) -1, Showoff

Skills: Brawling 2, Bureaucracy 2, Dancing (Rave) 3, Driving (Car) 2, Humanities (History) 2, Occult Knowledge (Death Realms) 3, Research/Investigation 3, Riding (Horse) 2, Seduction 3, Streetwise 3

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Manipulate Emotions, Mirage, Necromancy 2, Death Lordship Level 2

Possessions: Quite the trendy wardrobe, all the resources of the Thanatoi Chapter House (Including a plush Parlor Suite to call his own), and the animosity of the local Society of Sentinels (Who consider him Supernatural Enemy Number One).

CHRISTINA BRUENIG, AKA CINNAMON

Undead Stripper

Vampyre Thanatoi Reluctant Hero

Cinnamon is a very attractive woman with light brown eyes and dirty blond hair. She usually dresses casually in jeans and tee shirts, except when she is working (At which time she usually wears nothing at all). Cinnamon has worked as an exotic dancer since she was seventeen and ran away to Vegas from her hometown of Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1953. A Vampyre named Yves Gautier caught her act in 1962 and decided that it would be a crime to let someone so sexy grow any older. So he took her back to his hotel, turned her into a Vampyre, and promptly left town.

Cinnamon was on her own with no idea how to go about her new Undead existence, all she knew about Vampyres was what she had seen in old movies. It was fortunate that she worked at night, and her job actually provided her with a source of Essence. She found that she was feeding off the energy provided by her customers as they watched her dance. A relatively harmless way to feed, but she would have probably by slain by the local Sentinels if Lemy hadn't discovered her and invited her into his Covenant.

She still dances to this day, spending no more than five years at any one club and then switching to another venue. This is her way of hiding the fact that she hasn't aged in the past forty years. Her Contact Quality represents her regular customers, who are always willing to give her information (Usually in a vain attempt to impress her). She has a few regulars, but the ones that count as her contacts are a variety of midlevel government employees.

Stats

STR	5	INT	1
DEX	8	PER	2
CON	6	WIL	2

Life Points:	63
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	24
Essence:	66

Qualities: Attractiveness +3, Artistic Talent (Dancing), Contacts (Government) 2, Fast Reaction Time, Situational Awareness, Hard to Kill (3 levels)

Drawbacks: Covetousness (Lecherousness) -2, Emotional Problems (Fear of Commitment), Status (Stripper) -1

Skills: Acrobatics 4, Brawling 2, Dancing (Exotic) 9*, Escapism 2, Questioning 3, Pick Pocket 1, Seduction 5, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Surveillance 2

**includes bonus from Artistic Talent*

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Bard, Increased Essence +10

Possessions: Casual cloths, dancer cloths, business cards with her schedules on them, a Parlor Suite at Bally's that she shares with Valentine Collins, and the admiration of a handful of employees of the City of Las Vegas who are willing to tell her whatever they know.

KIM SULLIVAN, AKA LADY MALAISE

Fetish Phobi

Vampyre Thanatoi Scoundrel

Lady Malaise is a pale redheaded woman who usually dresses in skintight black leather outfits. She looks like some kind of dominatrix, which is exactly what she happens to be. Lady Malaise came to Las Vegas in the late eighties and within a few months found herself working as an "escort". It wasn't quite what she had planned for herself when she dropped out of college, but it would do for now. She specialized in bondage fantasies, but things went too far when a visiting Vampyre named Julian Hargreaves tortured her all night until killing her and bringing her back from the Threshold as the sun was just starting to rise.

The Vampyre thought that the Lady would make a perfect companion for him when he returned to San Francisco, and he gave her a quick overview of what she needed to know as one of the Undead. She had other ideas and managed to slit his throat and drag him out to the desert in his black sedan with the heavily tinted windows. She hacked him up and staked the pieces to the dry desert ground before the next sunrise and then watched as her tormenter and sire slowly burned and turned to ash under the bright Nevada sun.

She began to feed off of her customers as they suffered through their bondage fantasies. She finds the whole thing ironic that men (And sometimes women) are paying her good money to absorb their Essence. She met Lemy at a Fetish Ball in 1997 and has been a member of the House of Thanatos ever since. She operates out of her Suite at Bally's. Bally's is not aware that a prostitute is operating out of their hotel, but then again they are also unaware that a Covenant of Vampyres has been living there for the past eight years).

Stats

STR	5	INT	2
DEX	6	PER	3
CON	5	WIL	3

Life Points:	50
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	22
Essence:	69

Qualities: Acute Hearing, Attractive +1, Increased Essence +25, Resistance (Pain) 5, Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Cruel -2, Humorless, Status (Prostitute) -1

Skills: Acrobatics 2, Brawling 2, Hand Weapon (Knife) 3, Hand Weapon (Whip) 4, Intimidation 4, Language (Latin) 1, Occult Knowledge (Death Realms) 2, Questioning 4, Seduction 3, Streetwise 3

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Greater Shifting (Raven), Manipulate Emotions, Nightmare, Sade's Curse

Possessions: Gothy black wardrobe, fetishy leather wardrobe, a parlor Suite at Bally's filled with all sorts of "toys", the black sedan of her sire, and a need to hurt people that would probably get her into a lot of trouble if she didn't have this outlet for it.

THE GHOSTS OF BALLY'S

Beginning Supernatural Solitaires

There are at least three true Ghosts at Bally's, all of whom were killed in the 1980 fire. The Thanatoi have nicknamed them the Preppy, the Maid, and the Old Man. Lemuel King initially used the necromantic power of Enforced Obedience on them when the Thanatoi first moved into Bally's, so now the Ghosts avoid the Vampyres like the plague. Lemy has threatened to expel the Ghosts if they act up, so they usually confine their activities to mischievous pranks. Beatriz and Valentine think that it is only a matter of time before the Ghosts use their haunt powers to strike back at the Thanatoi.

Stats

STR	2	INT	2
DEX	3	PER	3
CON	2	WIL	3

Vital Essence:	30
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	10
Energy Essence:	15

Qualities: Ghost

Drawbacks: Anchoring (Bally's Hotel and Casino, Very Large Greater Binding) and 2 more points worth of Drawbacks

Skills: Dodge 2, Gambling 3, Spiritus 4, Streetwise 2, and 5 more points worth of Skills

Metaphysics: Haunt (Bally's, Very Large)

THE BURNED

Apparitions of the Thanatoi Chapter House

In 1980, the old MGM Grand Hotel and Casino suffered one of the worst hotel disasters in history. Eighty-seven people died and hundreds more were injured as the hotel burned to the ground. This tragedy created a haunted Place of Power with about a dozen associated spirits, most of which were Apparitions of the victims. The Apparitions are usually not active unless there is at least 20 points of ambient Essence. Since Bally's itself is a Place of Power, this means Full Moon Midnights and Days of Power. At such times, the Apparitions manifest as haunting voices or translucent figures fleeing down the hallway. Sometimes a guest of the hotel will awake to a ghostly fire in his room that he will later discount as a dream once all evidence of a fire vanishes.

HANNIBAL CALDWELL

Old West Witch Hunter

Vampyre Solitaire Scoundrel

Hannibal Caldwell is a greasy haired man who looks about forty with weathered skin, blond hair, and a scraggly beard. He has the kind of perpetual squint that looked good when Clint Eastwood did it. Caldwell dresses in the same type of clothing that he wore over a hundred years ago, typical Old West garb including boots, a duster, and a Stetson cowboy hat.

Caldwell was born in 1849 in Oregon and went through a variety of careers growing up until he finally settled into bounty hunting as a source of good money. He proved to be talented at it, though it finally caught up with him on New Years Day in 1889. The Bounty Hunter had tracked down a wanted bank robber and cattle rustler named Navajo Joe (Actually the child of Italian immigrants originally from New Jersey, without a single drop of Indian blood) in the Sierra Nevada mountains. What neither Caldwell nor Navajo Joe realized was that the spot they had chosen for their gunfight was actually a Place of Power. January 1, 1889 is also the day that a solar eclipse was observed throughout California and Nevada. Hannibal Caldwell was distracted by the vanishing sun and Navajo Joe killed him with a bullet through the heart.

Somehow, dying on a Place of Power during a solar eclipse combined with Caldwell's desire for revenge allowed the bounty hunter to come back as one of the Undead. The circumstances of his death also gave him the rare vampyric ability to absorb the Essence released through magic. Though at first ignorant of the Supernatural, Caldwell quickly found his niche as a Witch Hunter. He has now spent over a hundred years collecting bounties on the Gifted and the Supernatural, for the right price.

Stats

STR	6	INT	1
DEX	5	PER	2
CON	6	WIL	4

Life Points:	58
Endurance Points:	53
Speed:	22
Essence:	68

Qualities: Vampyre, Increased Essence pool +20

Drawbacks: Clown, Cruel -2

Skills: Brawling 2, Cheating 1, Dodge 2, Guns (Handgun) 3, Guns (Rifle) 2, Guns (Shotgun) 2, Hand Weapon (Knife) 2, Humanities (History) 1, Language (Spanish) 2, Riding (Horse) 3, Survival (Desert) 2, Stealth 2, Tracking 2

Metaphysics: Age (1 Level), Magus, Wither

Possessions: A large horse that doesn't seem to mind being ridden by an ambulatory corpse, boots, duster, Stetson hat, a Bowie knife, a 12 gauge shotgun, a .22 rifle, a .45 revolver, and absolutely no qualms about being paid to hunt people down.

CLOVEN AND CHARNAL

Goths One and Two

Vampyre Solitaire Weird Ones

Cloven and Charnal are a young man and woman often seen at various fringe occasions, especially fetish balls. They both look like they are in their early twenties; they are both pale and skinny. They have identical jet black hair and wear identical black leather outfits. They both wear identical dog collars that are connected by a six feet long chain leash. They are lovers who look eerily like twins. Nobody knows their real names; they appeared in Vegas in the late eighties and have been called Cloven and Charnel since the day they first arrived.

The two are completely devoted to each other and disdainful of everyone else. They were regulars at the Revenant Raves at the old Thanatoi Chapter House, where they look for vampire wannabes who might enjoy being cut. Now the two are forced to seek wannabes at more mundane gatherings. Otherwise they tend to prey on the lonely and hopeless who won't be missed so much if they never return from their Vegas vacation. The local Sentinels have descriptions of them and evidence of their attacks (Though Cloven and Charnel do try to avoid killing anybody, sometimes they get carried away) and will destroy them on sight.

Stats

STR	4	INT	3
DEX	5	PER	5
CON	4	WIL	2

Life Points:	42
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	18
Essence:	44

Qualities: Acute Vision, Acute Hearing, Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Adversary (Sentinels) -3, Obsession (Each other), Weird Delusion (Incoherently out of touch with reality) -3

Skills: Brawling 3, Climbing 3, Dancing (Goth) 2, Intimidation 2, Language (French) 2, Questioning 3, Singing 4, Streetwise 3, Surveillance 4, Tracking 2, Writing (Creative) 2

Metaphysics: Vampyre, Bloodthirst, Necromancy 2. Cloven has Death Lordship 4 and Charnal has Death Vessel 4

Possessions: Black gothy wardrobe, a leash that binds them together at the neck, and a lust for human blood.

BALTASAR SANDOVA

Deacon of Las Vegas
Greater Gifted Sentinel Warrior

Baltasar Sandova is an athletic looking Mexican man in his late fifties with dark skin and white hair. He usually dresses in clean white suits and carries an assortment of weapons, some mundane and some supernatural. Baltasar first manifested the Gift when he turned twelve back in Mexico. He was contacted by the Sentinels and they trained him to be a monster hunter. He proved to be quite capable at that vocation. It was while tracking some Jaguar Ferals of the Nahualli Dark Covenant out of Mexico and through the American Southwest that he first worked with the Las Vegas Chapel House.

It was decided that Las Vegas could use a warrior like Baltasar, so the Society of Sentinels arranged things so that he could stay in the United States. The Deacon of Las Vegas at that time was a charismatic man named Andrew Krohn, and Baltasar served under him for seven years until Krohn was killed by a group of Vampyres in 1976. They mutilated the Deacon and Baltasar swore to kill every one of them (Which he did). He was appointed Deacon of the Las Vegas Chapel House and has lead the monster hunters in Clark County ever since (With a very firm Kill All Vamps policy).

The story of how he got an Orikalk sword is fairly complicated. An Atlantean True Immortal was consorting with a demon, Baltasar banished the demon, killed the Atlantean, and took the sword. Maybe the story wasn't that complicated after all.

Stats

STR	4	INT	2
DEX	4	PER	3
CON	4	WIL	3

Life Points:	48
Endurance Points:	38
Speed:	16
Essence:	58

Qualities: Charisma +1, Fast Reaction Time, Hard to Kill +2, Nerves of Steel, Resistance (Pain, 5 levels), Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Honorable -2, Minority (Mexican), Obsession (Killing Vampyres), Zealot (Sentinels)

Skills: Brawling 3, Demolitions 3, Dodge 3, Guns (Shotgun) 3, Hand Weapon (Club) 3, Hand Weapon (Knife) 3, Hand Weapon (Sword) 3, Humanities (Theology) 4, Language (Spanish, Native) 5, Language (English) 4, Occult Knowledge (Vampyres) 4, Questioning 3, Throwing (Knife) 3

Metaphysics: Divine Inspiration, The Gift, Orikalk Sword, The Binding, Exorcism, Mindhands Art 3, Mindhands Strength 5, Increased Essence +30

Possessions: A collection of white suits, various books on Vampyres and how to kill them (Books with real information, courtesy of the Sentinels), a Range Rover, some explosives, a large hunting knife, a .44 magnum with hollow-point bullets, a 12 gauge shotgun, an Atlantean Orikalk sword (Very useful against Vampyres), the Master Bedroom at the Chapel House, and an obsession about destroying Vampyres to avenge the former Deacon.

MARIA DELEZON

God's Little Gambler
Sentinel Gifted Daredevil

Maria is a petite Filipina woman in her late twenties with long black hair and dark eyes. She works as a card dealer along the Strip (Currently at Luxor); she is often seen wearing black pants and a vest over a white shirt. She also always wears a silver crucifix necklace. Maria was born and raised in Las Vegas, leading a relatively normal life until her Gift manifested on her fourteenth birthday. In a City founded on gambling, she started using her Gift to gain advantage over some of the more skilled card players in town.

She actually came to the attention of one of the Wicce Covens first, but still retained enough of her childhood Catholicism to feel uneasy around them. When the Sentinels became aware of her and her Gift, she had a much easier time fitting in with them. She began working as a dealer in various casinos, keeping an eye out for any Gifted trying to use their talents to win big. Maria doesn't care overly much about anyone trying to make some money in Vegas, but she does try to determine what else a person might be willing to do while in town. The truly dangerous ones are noted and the rest of the Covenant is informed about their intentions (This is a technique that at least two other Covenants, the Rosies and the Templars, employ in order to keep tabs on the non-Mundanes who visit their town).

Maria Delezon currently works at the Luxor, something about a giant black pyramid seemingly appeals to Gifted and Supernatural visitors. She also cruises some of the other casinos on her off nights to scan for any threats.

Stats

STR	2	INT	2
DEX	2	PER	3
CON	2	WIL	4

Life Points:	24
Endurance Points:	29
Speed:	8
Essence:	25

Qualities: The Gift, Attractive +1, Charisma +2, Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Clown, Honorable -2, Reckless

Skills: Brawling 2, Dodge 2, Driving (Car) 2, Gambling 5, Humanities (Theology) 3, Language (Tagalong) 1, Pick Pocket 3, Sleight of Hand 4, Streetwise 2, Swimming 2

Metaphysics: Mindsight Art 3, Mindsight Strength 3, Mindtalk Art 3, Mindtalk Strength 3

Possessions: A monotone wardrobe, the family bedroom closest to the library

NEPHI TUCKER

Monster Hunter

Lesser Gifted Sentinel Avenger

Nephi is a muscular man in his early thirties who stands six and half feet tall. He dresses in a black suit like a Mormon Missionary, though on him it looks more like the suits from Reservoir Dogs. Nephi grew up in one of the many Mormon families in Vegas. He was a decent enough kid who boxed at the YMCA and was determined to do his mission work when he was old enough. On his first day out, he had the misfortune of knocking on the door of a Solitaire Vampyre named Cybele Zengin. Cybele killed his partner Missionary and Nephi barely escaped with his life.

The experience had an understandably profound effect on Nephi. That night Nephi had a dream that the angel Moroni himself appeared in his room and offered him the chance to avenge his friend in the name of the Lord. Nephi was told that it was his decision to accept the Gift, but that doing so would bring him untold hardship and change his life forever. Nephi accepted and woke up the next day able to perform the Miracles of the Inspired. He promptly marched straight to the dwelling of Cybele Zengin and beat the Vampyre to death (Actually beat to a pulp, cut into bits, set the body parts on fire, and then stuck the head outside on a wooden pole that got plenty of daylight).

Nephi was a Solitaire for a few months hunting down monsters to the best of his ability until the Sentinels offered him a chance to join their holy cause. He has been with them ever since.

Stats

STR	5	INT	2
DEX	4	PER	2
CON	4	WIL	3
Life Points:	46		
Endurance Points:	41		
Speed:	16		
Essence:	20		

Qualities: The Gift, Nerves of Steel, Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Honorable -1

Skills: Dodge 3, Hand Weapon (Club) 3, Guns (Handgun) 5, Humanities (Theology) 3, Humanities (Mormon Theology) 5, Martial Arts (Boxing) 4, Occult Knowledge (Vampyres) 3, Streetwise 3

Combat Moves: Punch 4, Roundhouse 4, Counterpunch 4, Jab 4, Suckerpunch 4

Metaphysics: Divine Inspiration, Divine Sight, Strength of Ten

Possessions: A black suit, a .38 caliber handgun, a silver nightstick (Good for beating Ferals), a baseball bat, one of the servant rooms, the Book of Mormon, and a habit of beating the crap out of monsters.

JACOB WELLS

Big Bastard looking

Lesser Gifted Sentinel Warrior

Jacob is a big hulking bald man who wears black suits and dark glasses. Like Nephi, he is trying for Mormon Missionary but ends up looking more Reservoir Dogs. Jacob was just a big dumb kid who got into the occasional fight at school when the Gift manifested at the age of eighteen. He was contacted by the Sentinels soon afterwards, once they became aware of his existence through a Vision.

He isn't the brightest of the bunch, but he is a good person. He is willing to risk himself to save an innocent and he has wiped out his fair share of Supernatural threats. He has become something of a sidekick to Nephi, the two of them patrolling the streets of Las Vegas like the meanest looking missionaries you will ever see.

Stats

STR	6	INT	1
DEX	3	PER	2
CON	4	WIL	2
Life Points:	65		
Endurance Points:	41		
Speed:	14		
Essence:	18		

Qualities: The Gift, Hard to Kill +5

Drawbacks: Attractive -1, Reckless

Skills: Brawling 5, Dodge 3, Driving (Car) 3, Guns (Shotgun) 3, Hand Weapon (Knife) 3, Humanities (Theology) 2, Humanities (Mormon Theology) 4, Occult Knowledge (Vampyres) 3, Streetwise 4, Surveillance 3

Metaphysics: Divine Inspiration, Binding, Holy Fire

Possessions: A black suit, a Black Mustang (It belongs to the Chapel House, but he is the one who drives it the most), a 12 gauge shotgun, a large bowie knife, one of the servant rooms, the Book of Mormon, and a habit of destroying monsters with a fiery wrath.

SOLOMON PARKE

Visionary

Lesser Gifted Sentinel Survivor

Sol is an athletic black man in his early twenties with close cropped hair and an angel tattoo on his back. He dresses in khakis, boots, and tees. He also always wears a silver cross around his neck. Sol grew up in nearby Boulder City, close to the Hoover Dam and away from the craziness of Vegas. Nothing ever really happens in Boulder City, so Sol was surprised at the age of ten when a group Tainted Cultists broke into his home and killed off his family. They were planning to summon a Mad God on the bank of Lake Mead, but that plan was thwarted when the Las Vegas Sentinels were told to come to Boulder City and stop them (Told by one of the Kerubim, the once human "saints" who serve as Lesser Angels in the Host of Heaven).

Sol was severely injured and fell into a coma. During this time he had Visions of the same Angel, a young woman who called herself Zepherine, who warned the Sentinels of the Mad God threat. Sol and Zepherine talked a lot while he was in a coma, though he forgot the details of these conversations when he woke from his coma two weeks later. He woke a completely changed person. He was now an orphan, with no living relatives. He was also now one of the Inspired.

The Sentinels invited him into their Chapel House and ended up raising him. He thinks of Baltasar as a second father and the rest of the Sentinels as his brothers and sisters. The Kerubim Zepherine has visited him in his dreams twice since he was a kid, just to check up on him.

Stats

STR	3	INT	3
DEX	4	PER	3
CON	3	WIL	4

Life Points:	34
Endurance Points:	35
Speed:	14
Essence:	20

Qualities: The Gift, Acute Hearing, Charisma +1, Fast Reaction Time

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Emotional Problem (Fear of Rejection), Honorable -1, Minority (Black), Reckless

Skills: Brawling 3, Dodge 3, Guns (Shotgun) 3, Guns (Flamethrower) 3, Hand weapon (Axe) 3, Humanities (Theology) 4, Running (Dash) 2, Streetwise 3, Throwing (Axe) 3, Throwing (Sphere) 3

Metaphysics: Divine Inspiration, Divine Sight, Touch of Healing, Visions

Possessions: Casual clothing, books about Angels written by people who might know a thing or two about them, a few offensive grenades, a flamethrower, a 12 gauge shotgun, a wood ax, a tattoo of an angel that he thought looked like Zepherine, the other family bedroom, and the desire to help people.

FEARLESS VAMPYRE HUNTERS

Potential Hero

Sentinel Survivors

There are a half dozen mundanes who are members of the Las Vegas Chapel House. They were all victims of Vampyres who were saved by the Sentinels, and now work to make sure others are not preyed upon like they were. Vera and Vivian Kovacic live in one of the guest rooms, Alexander Pavlidis lives in the other one, and the guest house is occupied by Patrick Barnston, David Gage, and Brenda Flanagan.

Stats

STR	3	INT	2
DEX	3	PER	2
CON	3	WIL	2

Life Points:	34
Endurance Points:	29
Speed:	12
Essence:	15

Qualities: Nerves of Steel, Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Nightmares

Skills: Brawling 3, Dodge 3, First Aid 2, Hand Weapon (Sword) 2, Humanities (Theology) 4, Guns (Shotgun) 2, Occult Knowledge (Vampyres) 3, Questioning 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Surveillance 2

Possessions: Simple clothes, room, board, and the tools necessary to kill Vampyres and other Supernatural threats.

BELA KEGLOVICH

The Leader of the Pack

Nomad Lesser Supernatural Wanderers

Bela Keglovich is an athletic looking man in his early thirties with long blond hair, a goatee, and a tattoo of a howling wolf on his left bicep. Except when he looks like a large silver wolf. Of the three Nomad Ferals, he has the most seniority and experience, though he is not a Nomad Chief by any stretch of the imagination. Bela was born into the Nomad Covenant and is a member of the Bekter family through his mother. He takes the teachings of Nanner and Ningal very seriously and will be deeply offended if people start accusing him of eating people from Yosemite to Vegas. As a matter of fact, they came to Vegas after spending the night at the Grand Canyon, pretty much the opposite direction.

Stats

STR	3/6	INT	2
DEX	3/5	PER	2/4
CON	3/5	WIL	2
Life Points:	34/105		
Endurance Points:	29		
Speed:	12/30		
Essence:	25		

Qualities: Charisma +3, Fast Reaction Time, Situational Awareness, Nerves of Steel

Drawbacks: Honorable -1, Cruel -1

Skills: Brawling 3, Dodging 2, Driving (Motorcycle) 3, Haggling 2, Mechanic 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Survival (Desert) 3, Tracking 4

Metaphysics: Wolf Feral, Inborn Feral, Strength of the Beast, Spirit Patron (The Lunar Gods, Covenant Boon)

Possessions: Leather jacket, black jeans, boots, a customized Harley (With an airbrushed painting of Horned Cernunnos from the Gundestrop Bowl across the engine), tools for fixing the aforementioned Harley, and some basic necessities.

EMERENCIA "MERCY" IVANCSO

Wild Woman Werewolf

Nomad Lesser Supernatural Wanderers

Mercy is an attractive young woman in her early twenties with straight black hair and dark eyes. Except when she looks like a black wolf. She and her younger brother were members of a Solitaire Feral family that traced its lineage to a young man who was cursed by his Romany lover in eighteenth century Budapest when he cheated on her. They already had the prerequisite Nomad wanderlust when they meet Bela at a biker rally in North Dakota two years ago. Bela and the Ivancsos had a lot in common; they were all into motorcycles, they were all of Hungarian descent, and they all had the inborn ability to transform into a Wolf. Bela convinced Mercy and her brother to join the Nomads, and they have all worked together in that Covenant ever since.

Stats

STR	2/5	INT	2
DEX	3/5	PER	3/5
CON	2/4	WIL	3
Life Points:	26/90		
Endurance Points:	26		
Speed:	10/28		
Essence:	25		

Qualities: Attractive +2, Fast Reaction Time

Drawbacks: Reckless

Skills: Acrobatics 3, Climbing 3, Brawling 3, Drive (Motorcycle) 4, Haggling 2, Hand Weapon (Club) 2, Seduction 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Tracking 3

Metaphysics: Wolf Feral, Inborn Feral, Spirit Claws, Strength of the Beast, Summon Animal Spirits, Spirit Patron (The Lunar Gods, Covenant Boon)

Possessions: Leather jacket, jeans, thigh-high boots, a customized Harley (With an airbrushed portrait of the Goddess White Buffalo Woman on the side of her engine), a baseball bat for non-lethal violence, basic necessities.

CZABA IVANCSO

Young Feral

Nomad Lesser Supernatural Wanderers

Czaba is a handsome young man of nineteen with long black hair and dark eyes. He looks a lot like his sister Mercy; they both have the wild good looks of their distant Romany ancestors. Except when he looks like a black wolf (Though in that form he looks a lot like his sister does in wolf form as well). Czaba and his sister have been on the road since he was fifteen, when their parents were killed by a drunk driver. Rather than risk being separated from her brother, Mercy took Czaba on the road with her. After two years, they became part of the Nomad Covenant. Now Czaba has gone from having a family of just his sister to having a family of hundreds around the world.

Stats

STR	2/5	INT	2
DEX	3/5	PER	4/6
CON	2/4	WIL	2

Life Points:	26/95
Endurance Points:	23
Speed:	10/28
Essence:	37

Qualities: Artistic Talent (Fiddle), Attractive +2, Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Reckless

Skills: Brawling 3, Dodge 3, Driving (Motorcycle) 4, Play Instrument (Fiddle) 7*, Smooth Talking 3, Stealth 4, Tracking 4

**Includes bonus from Artistic Talent.*

Metaphysics: Wolf Feral, Camouflage, Inborn Feral, Strength of the Beast, Spirit Patron (The Lunar Gods, Covenant Boon)

Possessions: Leather jacket, jeans, boots, a customized Harley motorcycle (With two wolves howling at a red moon on the side of his engine. The two wolves are meant to be him and his sister), a handcrafted gypsy fiddle, basic necessities.

ESŸHAR NASUSARA

The Queen of Blood

Solitaire Greater Supernatural Scoundrel

When Esÿhar Nasusara bothers to appear living, she looks like a pale Middle Eastern woman in her early twenties, often with her flesh manipulated to give her a +6 Appearance. Other times she walks as a rotted corpse that has been twisted to have an Appearance of -8. Esÿhar Nasusara is over three thousand years old, though she has only been conscious a third of that time.

She was born in the Taurus Mountains during the reign of the Hittite King Suppilulimas. She lived the simple life of a rural village girl until a Black Magician captured her for his dark rituals. After a week of ritualistic torture, the young woman was sacrificed on an alter to the Dark Goddess Lamma on the thirteenth night of the Purulliyas Spring Festival. The Magician expected to gain the Dark Goddess as a Spirit Patron, but he was disappointed. Perhaps the Goddess did not approve of the offering, or maybe she just had other things in mind. Whatever the case may be, the victim came back from the Threshold and reanimated her dead body. She came back as a Vampyre and her first act of Undeath was to bleed her captor dry.

She came to be known as Esÿhar Nasusara, the Queen of Blood. This is the name that she currently uses for herself; she doesn't even remember her original name. Nasusara outlived the Hittite Empire in which she was born. She would ravage remote areas and then go underground for a few generations, only to reemerge and terrorize a new location. Sometimes she lived in splendor, as she did in Tyre and Rome when deluded mundanes worshiped her. Sometimes she roamed like a beast, as she did in Attic Greece when the people called her Lamia and feared her passage. In the sewers of Paris she had her first encounter with the Society of Sentinels. Before long she had made an enemy of the Storm Dragons as well.

London in 1870 was her last period of activity. A group of Sentinels discovered her activities in Victorian London and chased her all the way to the New World. Their efforts were joined by a group of Storm Dragon monster hunters from San Francisco. If the two Covenants had worked together she would probably be truly dead, but they ended up hampering each other's efforts. She escaped the monster hunters and hide in a deep cave in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. To elude her pursuers, she placed herself in the vampyric state of suspended animation, remaining dormant until she finally awoke a few days ago at midnight during the full moon. There was a large motorcycle gang partying near the cave. Her first waking act was to slaughter all of them, dragging eight back from the Threshold to act as her vampyric minions.

Stats

STR	8	INT	3
DEX	8	PER	4
CON	8	WIL	6

Life Points:	74
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	32
Essence:	217

Qualities: Vampyre, Fast Reaction Time, Nerves of Steel

Drawbacks: Adversary (Sentinels) 5, Adversary (Storm Dragons) 5, Cruel -2, Weird Delusion (I am a Goddess, Worship Me) -3

Skills: Climbing 3, Beautician 4, Brawling 4, Dodge 3, Hand Weapon (Knife) 4, Hand weapon (Sword) 4, Hand Weapon (Spear) 4, Humanities (History) 4, Language (Hittite, Native) 5, Language (Arabic) 4, Language (English) 4, Language (French) 4, Language (Greek) 4, Language (Latin) 4, Language (Punic) 4, Occult Knowledge (Death Realms) 5, Magic Theory 5, Myth and Legend (Near East) 5, Riding (Horse) 4, Riding (Camel) 3, Seduction 5, Stealth 5, Survival (Desert) 3

Metaphysics: Age (10 levels), Increased Essence + 100, Bloodthirst, Greater Shifting (Python), Manipulate Emotions, Nightmares, Sade's Curse, Wither (1 level), Communion 2, Elemental Air 4, Elemental Earth 4, Elemental Fire 4, Elemental Water 4, Gateway 4, Levitate 3, Shielding 3, Spirit Limbs 3, Weather Lordship 4,

Possessions: Surprisingly little. She has the dusty black Victorian dress that she had been sleeping in for the past century, four rings (Two Greek, one Phoenician, and one Roman), a silver armband (Hittite), and an Etruscan amulet she wears on a silver necklace.

THE MINIONS

Cannon fodder

Solitaire Beginning Supernatural Fanatics

There are currently eight Vampyre minions following the Queen of Blood, the remnants of a much larger motorcycle gang that Esÿhar Nasusara massacred near Death Valley. She brought each one back from the Threshold to become the first of her Undead servants. They serve her with a blind devotion and each one would willingly lay down his unlife for her. Their names are Amp, Cob, Gary, Jell-O, Mouse, Mullet, Tang, and Wally.

Stats

STR	6	INT	2
DEX	6	PER	2
CON	6	WIL	2

Life Points:	46
Endurance Points:	n/a
Speed:	36
Essence:	44

Qualities: Fast Reaction Time, Resistance (Pain, 1 level), Situational Awareness

Drawbacks: Cruel -1, Humorless, Zealot (The Queen of Blood)

Skills: Brawling 3, Dodge 3, Driving (Motorcycle) 4, Hand Weapon (Knife) 2, Guns (Handgun) 2, Guns (Shotgun) 2, Streetwise 4

Metaphysics: Vampyre

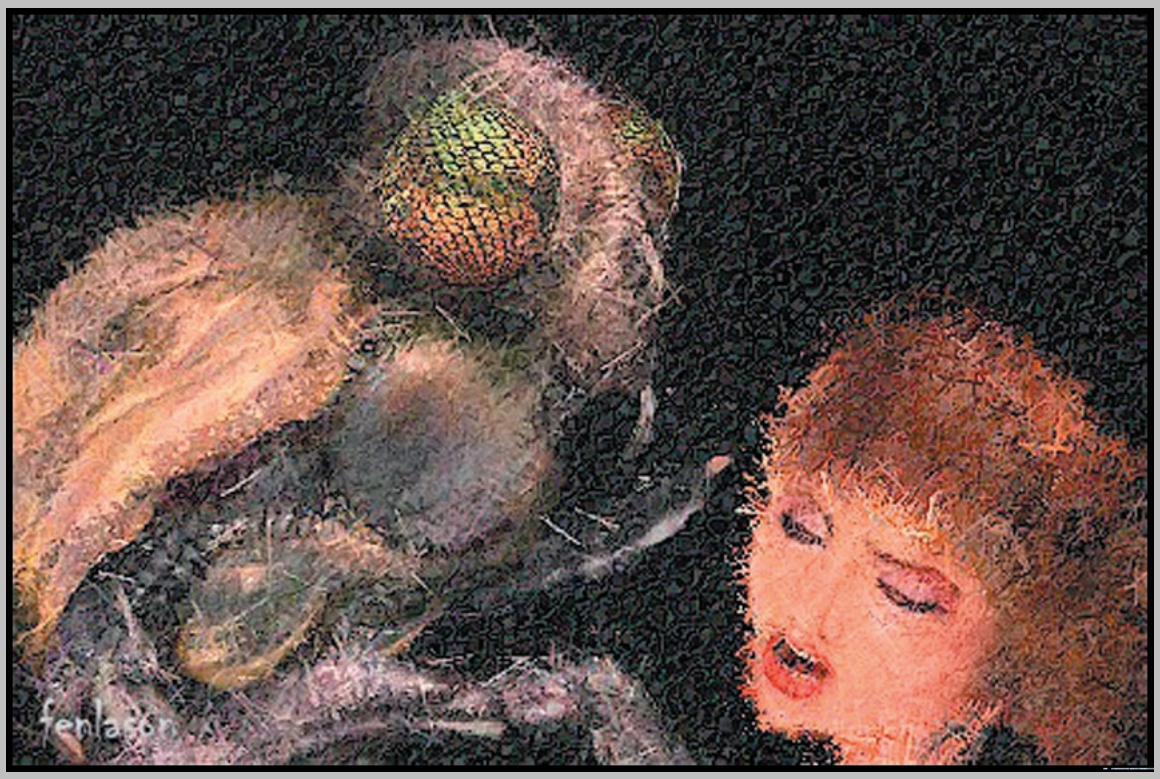
Possessions: Boots, jeans, leather vets that each say "Blood Riser, Born To Kick Ass", knives, three have .38 handguns, one has a 12 gauge shotgun, and all have various customized Harleys.

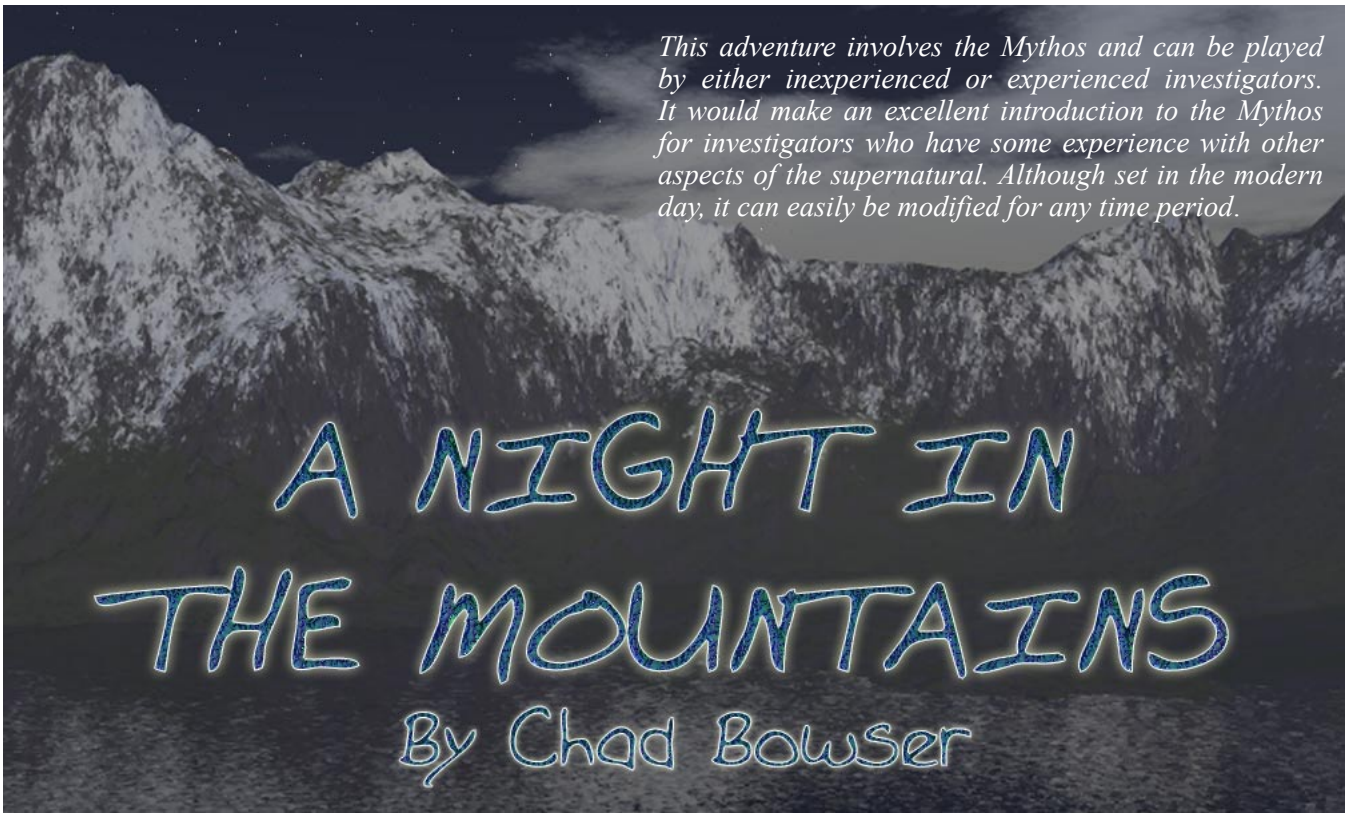
❖

ART GALLERY

This issue, the mighty eye of the Art Gallery falls upon Norm Fenlason, and his twisted vision of an Insectoid "Interrogation".

Some alternate titles we would have considered: "Buzz Off" or "Give me some sugar, Baby."





This adventure involves the Mythos and can be played by either inexperienced or experienced investigators. It would make an excellent introduction to the Mythos for investigators who have some experience with other aspects of the supernatural. Although set in the modern day, it can easily be modified for any time period.

A NIGHT IN THE MOUNTAINS

By Chad Bowser

BACKGROUND

ANCIENT HISTORY

In the early history of the Americas, a small tribe of Mohawk Indians worshipped Nyogtha (The Thing That Should Not Be), and provided it with human sacrifices to sustain it. These terrible acts did not go unnoticed. A neighboring Mohawk tribe, untainted by Nyogtha's influence, attacked and killed the smaller tribe – hoping to cleanse the land of this evil. Nyogtha avenged the deaths of his followers by lashing out at the aggressors. In a single night a living darkness descended on their village. Nyogtha's wrath was terrible, and the screams of women and children echoed across the Adirondacks. The final blow came against the tribe's shamans, who were frantically trying to perform a ritual to banish the Old One. Even as the final blow was struck, the tribe's shamans completed the ritual and sealed Nyogtha into the ground. The only survivor of the battle was a young Mohawk girl who hid in a nearby stream during the carnage. Although she survived, the girl's mind was gone. She stood at the edge of the stream, completely naked, repeating the words of the ritual over and over. She was found several days later by an Algonquin hunting party that took pity on her and brought her back to their village. The Algonquin shaman was fascinated by her state of mind and carefully transcribed the words of the ritual.

When the Europeans invaded and the Algonquin culture was destroyed, the shaman's transcript ended up in Dutch custody. A Dutch cleric, who spent a great deal of time among the Algonquin, translated the shaman's small book into Latin and was driven insane. The town of Albertsville was built upon the very site where the original Mohawk cultist's village had been located. The book has since passed from owner to owner until it wound up in the Albertsville Library, where it remains today. The significance of the translated passages in the book has been lost in time.

In the 1930s, Curtis Johnson, an amateur occultist vacationing in the Adirondacks, accidentally summoned Nyogtha. The god, sensing the stars may soon be right, reached out and, with Johnson's help, converted several people in Albertsville to the worship of Nyogtha. As the years passed, more and more people were converted, and by the 1950s, every member of Albertsville worshipped the dark god. Traditionally, Nyogtha has conferred upon the head priest the ability to cast spells, and grants them access to the ancient tome which summons him. No one else in the cult has the ability to cast spells, but several other have seen the book. Currently, Nyogtha is too weak to break free of his confinement, but the villagers are actively trying to strengthen him enough to break free. The current head priest, Michael Hendricks, is planning a ceremony involving several human sacrifices in a few days that he hopes will free Nyogtha once and for all.

RECENT HISTORY

In 2001, James Bellfield, a retired anthropology professor, began construction of a new home in the Adirondacks.

During his years of research, he had occasionally stumbled

across references to the cult of Nyogtha. At the time, Bellfield filed the references away in the back of his mind. Several decades later, he came across an ancient tome and accidentally made contact with Nyogtha (still trapped underground). When Bellfield's consciousness made contact with the entity, his mind immediately recoiled, saving his sanity, but leaving a lasting impression of evil. He immediately changed the focus of his research from Native American/US relations to the study of cults. The references to Nyogtha were few and far between, but he managed to piece together enough information to determine how the god acted, and how it could be contained, if not defeated.

He eventually tracked down an active cult of Nyogtha by reading and cross-referencing academic periodicals, the Weekly World News, and The Globe, with what he knew of Nyogtha. The cult he found was located around Albertsville, NY, deep in the Adirondack Mountains.

Using amassed knowledge, Bellfield has managed to summon and trap a servant of Nyogtha, a Dimensional Shambler. The Shambler is held in the confines of the elder sign.

Unbeknownst to Bellfield, another creature, a Spectral Hunter has been created by Hendricks to guard his most prized possessions. It stalks the grounds surrounding the high priest's home.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

The characters are invited to a party at the newly built house of a friend, James Bellfield. Although James had never seemed particularly wealthy, the house in the Adirondacks, easily costs $500,000 or more. The house is so new that the phones have not been hooked up yet, and it's far enough into the mountains that mobiles can't find a signal.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

The characters travel along the Hudson from New York City for about four hours before reaching the small town of Albertsville (pop 250). If they choose to stop at the gas station or diner, nothing special will happen. Bellfield's new home is three miles beyond Albertsville, deeper into the mountains.

Upon arriving at the house, Bellfield greets them warmly and shows them around. The tour includes everything in the place except the basement. The party notices an electric keypad lock on the basement door. If pressed, Bellfield will say that the basement is still being finished, and he has only just managed to clean up the construction dust from the upstairs. Besides, the workmen have left their tools laying everywhere, and he is concerned someone might get hurt tripping over something in the dimly lit basement.

Located in the basement are Bellfield's weapons against Nyogtha. There is an elder sign etched onto the floor and a much smaller one etched on the inside of the basement door. In the center of the elder sign is an irate Dimensional Shambler.

During the party a spring thunderstorm rolls across the mountains and a nearby lightning strike knocks out the circuit breakers, and plunges the revelers into darkness. In the ensuing confusion, Bellfield's daughter, Anna, volunteers to go down to the basement and check the breakers. To his shock, he hears the basement door swing open. Apparently the power outage has killed the keypad lock! Bellfield yells across the room for her to stop, but she has already descended the stairs.

The characters upstairs hear a crash (Anna knocking a can of paint over part of the elder sign, breaking its power), followed by a deep, inhuman growl, a girl's all too brief scream, pounding footsteps, and finally a loud crash that sounds like the basement door being ripped off its hinges. Upstairs in the pitch black darkness, no one can see what emerges from the basement. It wades through the panicked guests in its headlong dash for freedom. One character is thrown against the wall while another is tossed through the front window along with an NPC partygoer who is killed when she lands on an ornamental iron landscaping light. Another NPC partygoer is decapitated by the creature as it crosses the living room. It then leaps through the now open window and disappears into the night.

When someone finally gets the nerve to venture into the basement and turn the lights back on the extent of the carnage will be revealed. The first thing anyone in the basement will see is Anna's crumpled body lying beside the partially-obscured elder sign (0/1d3SAN). Upstairs, the decapitated body in the living room will be found, and outside the body of a young woman lying in the flower bed with a landscaping light protruding from her chest (0/1d3 SAN).

Upon finding Anna, Bellfield's mind will snap. He will in effect be overcome by temporary insanity, fixated on hunting down the creature before it can contact Nyogtha. Bellfield's first act after finding this is to run into another room, grab a .45, and take off through the broken window.

PANIC ENSUES

By this time, the surviving party guests will have had quite enough entertainment for one evening. Since the phones are out, there is no chance of phoning for help, so there is little immediate danger of someone calling in the authorities. Any remaining guests will make a decisive effort to leave Bellfield's shattered home. There is a 25% chance that one of them will stop at the Sheriff's office and alert someone to the disaster at the party. Since nobody really got a look at the thing that committed the murders, they will settle on the most likely thing they can think of as the culprit – "A bear! No, a grizzly! Or something even bigger!" If the killings are reported, then the Sheriff will send a patrol car out to

Bellfield's. The extent to which these events are played out is left to the Keeper.

- If the players all set out to follow Bellfield and the creature, they will have little interaction with the police investigation. Any of the deputies will conclude that some sort of large animal tried to seek shelter from the storm outside, and went berserk on the attendees. The significance of the Elder Sign etched in the basement floor will be lost on the deputies. If the Sheriff were to find it however, that would be another matter.
- If nobody reports the events, then the players will undoubtedly have a mess to clean up when they return later.

INTO THE NIGHT

If the PCs go after Bellfield and the creature, they can follow its prints up to the forest edge, where the trees have prevented the ground from becoming soggy. Even without clear tracks, Bellfield charges headlong into the forest, to the place where he initially captured the Dimensional Shambler. The investigators will have a much tougher time following. If they keep looking for tracks while following Bellfield, a TRACK roll will occasionally reveal an inhuman footprint here or there. Both sets of tracks stop at a small cave entrance.

If the PCs don't follow the creature, the Dimensional Shambler will kill Bellfield and then return to the house to finish off the PCs.

THE CAVE

If the PCs head into the cave, they will find it is fairly linear, ending in a basement under the courthouse in Albertsville. It is a four-hour walk if they take it slow and cautious. There is a well-hidden side passage that the PCs can find by making a spot hidden roll –30%, but they have to state they're looking for anything suspicious. The Dimensional Shambler is actually no longer in the tunnel; it has phased back to its home dimension. Consequently, the PCs won't find it in the cave, or in the courthouse beyond. They will however be seen. The security cameras in the courthouse basement will catch the PCs and Bellfield snooping around and they can expect a visit from the Albertsville Sheriff in the morning. Only Hendricks, the Sheriff, and his deputies will know the PCs broke into the courthouse.

SIDE PASSAGE

The PCs will only find the hidden passage by being cautious and stating they are searching every nook and cranny. If they locate it, and decide to follow it, they will discover the underground church dedicated to Nyogtha. There are ten rows of wooden pews, four stone tables, and a wooden podium at the front of the room. A symbol to summon Nyogtha has been etched into the far wall by Hendricks.

Note, it is not necessary for the players to locate the underground church at this time.

THE MORNING AFTER

The sheriff and two deputies will arrive early in the morning to investigate the character's appearance on the security videos. If the police have already visited the house the previous night, then the aftermath of the Shambler's escape should be easy enough to explain. The players will have to deal with how they will handle this situation now. It will take a successful FAST TALK or PERSUADE roll to prevent the Sheriff and his deputies from pursuing the matter at this time. This would be the only opportunity for the Sheriff to personally see the Elder Sign downstairs. If he actually sees it, he will grow extremely distrustful of the players, and all subsequent reaction rolls will need to be adjusted accordingly.

Assuming the other matters are handled successfully, there is still the reason that brought the Sheriff out to Bellfield's place: the incursion into the courthouse.

- If the PCs choose to cooperate with the sheriff, he'll question them as to why they were in the courthouse in the first place, and then ask how they got in. At the conclusion of questioning, they will be urged to leave town and cautioned to never come back: "Yer kind ain't welcome 'round here."
- If they are belligerent with the sheriff, he'll attempt to take them into custody on a charge of breaking and entering. It actually wouldn't be too hard for the party to overwhelm the sheriff and his deputies as their hearts really aren't in the fight. They would much rather see the players leave town, than have to deal with detaining them.

Note that if the Players promise to leave town and don't, they can expect harassment from the sheriff and the other townspeople. The players will suddenly find the villagers very uncooperative, refusing to sell them anything or help them in any way.

After the sheriff leaves, Bellfield will recover from his temporary insanity. The loss of his daughter will weigh heavily on him. He will tell the players what he knows about Nyogtha, and answer their questions about the thing in the basement.

The fact that the PCs were seen emerging from the courthouse's basement will result in the villagers fully exploring the cave, seeing that it comes out near Bellfield's home and posting guards to ambush any non-worshipper who try to go back in via that route. Nyogtha always requires new sacrifices after all.

INVESTIGATIONS

Any PC that goes into the woods near the cave, or into town alone can be ambushed, locked up in jail, or shot (to incapacitate – not kill). They're slated to be the main attraction in the upcoming ceremony. It is even possible that a small group of PCs could be jumped by a group of five or more worshippers to meet the same fate.

If the PCs question the adults in town about the cave and the creature, they will be met with blank stares and disavowals. "Everyone here's a god-fearin' man, stranger."

Children, however, would be willing to talk to the PCs, if the PCs are friendly. They'll make vague references to the "big party," "Pastor Mike" and "getting to meet god soon."

THE LIBRARY

Research at the library can result in a goldmine of information. First, the PCs will not find any books dealing with summoning or contacting Nyogtha. Hendricks keeps all books about Nyogtha that he is aware of at his house. A successful FAST TALK roll will reveal that fact. Remember, not everyone knows the PCs broke into the courthouse, and a FAST TALK roll will snow the elderly librarian into thinking that they're new worshippers. The real mother-lode will come from a successful LIBRARY USE roll, which will turn up the copy of Rex sub Montem, the Latin pamphlet that contains the ritual used by the Mohawk shaman to imprison Nyogtha so many years ago.

HENDRICK'S HOUSE

DIRECT APPROACH

If the characters march over to Hendricks' house (the address is in the phone book) and demand to see the books, he will simply order them to leave his property. If they refuse he'll call the sheriff, who'll try to take the PCs into custody. If the PCs start a fight, neighboring villagers will run to help their priest and sheriff, some with guns, others with baseball bats.

- If the PCs are polite, Hendricks will invite them into his parlor and calmly deny everything, saying that he doesn't know what happened at Bellfield's, but Bellfield must be a very disturbed man to make up stories like that.
- If the PCs are rude, Hendricks may use the Clutch of Nyogtha spell on one of the PCs after they leave.

COVERT APPROACH

If the PCs try to break into Hendricks' house, and he's not there, or asleep, they can find the books about Nyogtha locked in a small safe in Hendricks's downstairs office. If Hendricks is asleep, there's a 50% chance the noise of the break-in will wake him, and he'll come running downstairs with a shotgun. They'll also run into a spectral hunter who they'll have to combat. Gunshots will arouse the attention of anybody outside and quickly bring the Sheriff. An idea roll will reveal this. The spectral hunter's artifact is a highly polished mahogany sphere that Hendricks keeps locked in the safe.

If they successfully steal the books, they'll have the book Bellfield read years ago as well as Hendricks's notebooks detailing the upcoming ceremony to take place "in church" during a new moon. Although the books and notes mention the church, they do not reveal where the church is located. It does reveal one chilling fact. At the front of the church is a large wall, behind which Nyogtha lies - waiting to be released.

SEEKING THE CHURCH

Albertsville does possess a more traditional style church. This building, Albertsville Presbyterian is located at the north end of the town square. If the investigators choose to go there, they will find the building unlocked. A cursory inspection of the inside will reveal dust so thick that it's obvious the church hasn't been used for years.

There are three children playing in front of the church. Two will refuse to talk to strangers. But the third, named Jerry, will answer any questions the PCs have about the church. He knows that it's underground and you get to it by going into the courthouse's basement. He also knows that there is a big ceremony coming soon.

The real church is the large cavernous room at the end of the hidden underground passage. If the players already found the church on the night the Shambler escaped, then they will not have to worry about finding it.

Even if the PCs don't steal the books, they have the information from the children, coupled with the information from Bellfield and their knowledge of the cave.

The next new moon is in two days.

THE SHOWDOWN

When the PCs enter the "church", there will be four people (some possibly PCs if they were captured while investigating) strapped to stone tables. One sacrifice (not a PC) will already be eviscerated. All the people will be chanting. Hendricks, in ceremonial robes, raises his knife above another sacrifice and brings it down into their chest. The majority of the townspeople, roughly 200 people will be deep in chant. If Hendricks is shot by the PCs, most villagers will keep chanting, the deputies (3) will draw their pistols and close on the PCs and the sheriff will pick up the knife to continue the sacrifices.

- The PCs can try to kill the sheriff, at which point someone else will pick up the knife.
- The PCs can detonate the chamber if they have explosives.

- The PCs can deface the symbol, preventing Nyogtha from entering this plane.
- The PCs can use the ritual they found in the Latin pamphlet to keep Nyogtha imprisoned. They'll have to fend off attacks by the sheriff and his deputies during this process.

RANDOM EVENTS

- A villager with a well-placed rifle shot will assassinate Bellfield.
- At some point, the dimensional shambler will attack the PCs.

CHARACTERS

JAMES BELLFIELD

Occupation: Retired Professor

Education: PhD, Princeton

STR:	11
CON:	9
SIZ:	13
INT:	17
POW:	15
DEX:	10
APP:	9
SAN:	75
EDU:	19
IDEA:	85%
LUCK:	75%
KNOW:	95%
HP:	11
MP:	15

Skills

Archaeology: 80%
Anthropology: 95%
Credit Rating: 75%
Fast Talk: 35%
Library Use: 90%
Occult: 45%
Handgun (Colt .45) 35% damage 1d10+2

Spells

Summon/Bind Dimensional Shambler

Roleplaying Notes for Bellfield

James Bellfield is portly and going thin on top. A retired professor, he is highly intelligent, but he is not the absent-minded professor. He is very focused on his research into stopping Nyogtha at this time.

MICHAEL HENDRICKS

Occupation: Mayor/Cult leader

Education: B.A.: SUNY-Albany

STR:	15
CON:	13
SIZ:	13
INT:	14
POW:	25
DEX:	10
APP:	16
SAN:	38
EDU:	12
IDEA:	70%
LUCK:	99%
KNOW:	60%
HP:	13
MP:	25

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Skills

Cthulhu Mythos: 28%
Credit Rating: 75%
Fast Talk: 65%
Law: 45%
Occult: 70%
Psychology: 59%
Shotgun (16 gauge): 50% damage 2d6+2/1d6+1/1d4

Spells

Summon/Bind Dimensional Shambler,
Clutch of Nyogtha,
Summon Nyogtha,
Summon/Bind Spectral Hunter

Roleplaying notes for Hendricks

Hendricks is completely devoted to the cult of Nyogtha and will do anything in his power to keep the investigators from stopping the ritual. Although he borders on insanity, he is still very cagey, and as a result will not do anything stupid if the investigators interview him at his house or office. He will not hesitate to use one of his spells to put a crimp in the investigators' investigation, or in an investigator.

SUPPORTING CAST

SHERIFF AND DEPUTIES

Occupation: Law Enforcement/Cult flunkies

Education: Albertsville High

STR:	16
CON:	13
SIZ:	15
INT:	10
POW:	12
DEX:	13
APP:	12
SAN:	60
EDU:	9
IDEA:	50%
LUCK:	60%
KNOW:	45%
HP:	14
MP:	12

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Skills

Dodge: 55%
Drive: 57%
Fast Talk: 45%
Law: 45%
Psychology: 25%
Handgun (9mm): 65% 1d10
Rifle (.22): 45% 1d6+2
Shotgun (12 gauge): 50% 4d6/2d6/1d6

AVERAGE ALBERTSVILLE RESIDENT

Occupation: Cultist

Education: Albertsville High

STR:	12
CON:	11
SIZ:	12
INT:	12
POW:	13
DEX:	14
APP:	12
SAN:	65
EDU:	10
IDEA:	60%
LUCK:	65%
KNOW:	50%
HP:	11
MP:	13

Damage Bonus: None

Skills

Dodge: 45%
Drive: 40%
Fast Talk: 35%
Baseball Bat: 45% damage 1d8
Handgun (.38): 35% damage 1d10
Rifle (.22): 25% damage 1d6+2
Shotgun (16 gauge): 40% damage 2d6+2/1d6+1/1d4

OCCULT AND MYTHOS TOMES

REX SUB MONTEM

This Latin translation of the original Mohawk work is twenty-page pamphlet. It contains the following relevant information: Indicates that Nyogtha is currently imprisoned underground, needs ceremonies awash in blood, can be imprisoned with a special chant.

Cthulhu Mythos: +2%
Sanity Loss: 1d3/1d6
Study time: 3 days
Spell Multiplier x 3

Spells: Summon Nyogtha, Clutch of Nyogtha, Summon\Bind Dimensional Shambler, Summon\Bind Spectral Hunter, Dispel Nyogtha

HENDRICKS'S NOTEBOOK

This small notebook details all the information that Hendrick's knows about Nyogtha. It refers to the church where the ceremony will take place, but does not give the location of the church. It also provides a detailed description of the ceremony to summon Nyogtha. The ceremony requires four human sacrifices performed during the new moon, accompanied by a chant. There must also be a sacred symbol etched on the wall where Nyogtha will enter.

This adventure picks up where Dead Man's Hand Act One ended…

INTRODUCTION

The PCs are about to go through a special type of dream. The dream - created by Muli, the Indian shaman - is meant to simulate the original Adventurer Journey. It is not time travel, so nothing the PCs do in the past will affect the future. Do not, however, inform the players; hopefully, by thinking they can change the future, they will try to adhere to the original journey as much as possible. When a character purchases items, they will only be able to purchase from PL3-4 and then only of poor quality, usually imposing a +1 penalty.

SETUP

For Act Two, GMs are encouraged to utilize soundtracks from Wild West movies such as Tombstone, First Draw, and Unforgiven. It's also important to emphasize the difference between day and night; the day is hot, dry and safe, while the night is cool - if not cold - dry and dangerous.

For the Gambler's prize, have a set of poker cards ready if the PCs decide to play a game during the night.

SETTING: HUTCH TOWN, AZ

Hutch Town is a tiny town only 24 kilometers away from Canyon de Chelly. Originally built by 20 or so Mormons, this town has slowly begun to increase in population with American, Mexican, and Spanish settlers. Most of Hutch Town's inhabitants live on the farms and plantations surrounding the town. Like many towns in the southwest, it is very dry and arid, with lots of dust and little vegetation. It also reeks of horse manure and unwashed animals.

Time: 1864

Population: 200

Political Figures: Mayor, Sheriff, Deputies:

SHOPS AND PLACES OF INTEREST:

Livery: The Livery is one half stable, and one half blacksmith shop. Built like a barn, entry to the Livery is through its heavy double doors. Inside the barn, 3 stalls cover the right wall, while a furnace, anvil, and smithing tools on the left. Outside, a small pasture contains a trough for feeding the animals within the pens.

Morgue: Built to the left side of the Sheriff's office, the morgue gives off a ghastly smell around high noon. Inside the morgue, the entrance has a front desk that blocks access to the workstation and several designer coffins. The workstation has all the tools a mortician needs to prepare and pack the recently deceased.

Sheriff's Office: Opposite the bank, the Sheriff's office is in the center of the town. It is in dire need of a new paint job and carpentry work. Inside, the single roomed office has three cells, a drunk-tank, a desk and a locked cabinet containing three rifles.

City Hall: The largest building in town, city hall was built at the northern entrance to town. Right outside the hall is a working gallows, a constant reminder to what happens to criminals within Hutch Town. Inside the Hall is set up like a courthouse, with the Mayor's chambers in the very back.

General Store: The general store is well stocked with dry-goods and salted meat. It also sells canteens and mining supplies including rope, pickaxes, dynamite, and other miscellaneous supplies.

Miss Kitty's Saloon: The saloon is the only two-story building with in Hutch Town. Miss Kitty's is also the only place in town that sells alcohol. The top story is an inn with eight rooms, and the ground floor is a bar with a stage, piano and 5 tables. Miss Kitty's is frequented at day by the town folk, but at night is a hang out for drifters only.

Bank: The bank is the only completely brick building, and has been freshly painted. Inside the bank are three barred teller windows and a metal door leading to the bank vault.

Pharmacy: Newly opened, the Pharmacy is stocked with the latest in snake oils and wonder medications. Only about 10% of the medicine works and about 3% of those are toxic.

Barber: One of the most popular places in Hutch Town, the barber is the place where the men folk go to relax and socialize. There is only one barber chair with in the shop, but most people are willing to sit and wait.

SCENE ONE: A GAMBLERS PRIZE

The player characters (PCs) start in Miss Kitty's Saloon right as day breaks. The PCs have until nighttime to explore the town and associate with its inhabitants. While socializing, allow the PCs to make Interview rolls at a +2 penalty, as most people do not like strangers. If the PCs get a success, choose a random rumor from the rumor list.

Once nightfall hits, the town changes completely; the inhabitants clear the streets and return to their houses. Drifters come out to play. If the PCs talk to the Drifters, 70% are heading to Miss Kitty's, while the other 30% were already there and too drunk to socialize.

This scene can be done as a group or one by one with a different awaking sequence per PC. The PCs are all suffering from a severe hangover, so play it to its fullest. It can be quite amusing to have the PCs wake up in the body of someone of the opposite sex. Alternatively, have two of your PCs wake up naked next to each other.

Unless your PCs have knowledge of the old west and how to dress like a cowboy, the simple act of dressing can be an experience unto itself. Make things as complicated and embarrassing for them as possible.

Shaking your head only manages to replace the abnormal dazed feeling with a pounding headache and a bitter taste in your mouth. Bright sunlight penetrates dirty curtains to your right, illuminating what appears to be a hazy "Old-West" style room. Focusing your vision onto the light brings that pounding headache back with a vengeance. Whatever the Ancient Indian Magi gave you must have been quite potent; you did not even feel them lift you up and move you to this room.

Trying to gather your wits about you while attempting to sit up, you notice your left arm trapped under a warm, dead weight. Glancing to your left, you look into the face of a young girl not much older than 17. Trying to remove your arm from beneath the girl's pillow only manages to knock the bed sheets away, revealing that both of you are quite naked.

Sitting up only causes the headache to pound harder. So does standing. Once out of bed, you notice that your clothes have been replaced by what can only be described as pulp western style clothing. Collecting the clothes that have been tossed about the room, you manage to don the strange garbs.

Unsure of how good a job you did, you search the room for a mirror. A small desk in the corner of the room sports a dirty rotating mirror built on top. Wiping the excess filth from the mirror reveals an unfamiliar face. With a sudden flash of inspiration that causes your headache to nearly overwhelm you, you understand what the Ancient meant by reliving their lives.

GETTING THE MAP

After nightfall Miss Kitty's Saloon becomes Hutch Town's "Las Vegas", complete with gambling, drinking and prostitution. It is here that the PCs have their first chance to get the original copy of the Dead Man's Hand map.

Eventually, one or more of the PCs may decide to sit down and play a hand of poker. If not, the night comes to an end. If using real cards, allow the games to go on naturally; if not, have the PCs make Char/Luck roles to see who wins the hands. Feel free to add as many NPCs to the poker table as you want, but do not exceed five people at one table.

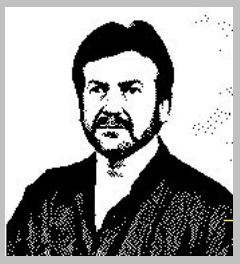
Around 11:00 a Spaniard will enter Kitty's, get a few drinks at the bar, and sit down at whatever poker table the PCs

are sitting at. The Spaniard is not a very good poker player and makes many dumb plays. He is also very unsociable and is more interested in playing poker than talking.

Have him lose up to 25 dollars before he offers up the real treasure. For a special touch, have a pre-stacked deck of cards representing the final hand of the game. Give one of your PCs an obviously winning hand and give the Spaniard something that is not quite as good. If you don't think you'll be able to pull it off with real cards, then just allow each player a luck roll and give whoever wins the best hand. The Spaniard will keep raising the stakes until he has to ante his most prized possession: the Dead Man's Hand map. This should be a sign to your players to stop raising and call.

At this point, the Spaniard slaps his cards down on the table, laughs and reaches for the pot. Showing the Spaniard that he lost causes him to go mad, calling the player a cheater, and drawing a knife on the PC. If no one fights back, the Spaniard grabs the pot, dumps it into his saddlebag and walks off *(see Getting map 2 & 3 if this happens)*.

SPANIARD



Level 3 Free Agent
Str 11
Int 9
Dex 9
Wil 10
Con 13
Per 8
Durability: 13/13/7/7 Action Check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4, #Actions:2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: 2
Attacks
Unarmed 13/7/3 d4s/d4+1/d4+2 LI
Knife 13/6/3 d4w/d4+1w/d4+2 LI/O
Revolver* 12/6/3 d4+1w/d4+2w/d6m HI/O
+1 penalty to revolver due to quality
Defense
+1 resistance mod vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance mod vs. ranged attacks
Skills
Athletics [11]; Melee [11]-blade [13]; Unarmed [11]-brawl [13]; Modern [9]-pistol [11]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [13]-endurance [14]; Knowledge [9]-language; English [12]; Awareness [10]; Street [10]-criminal [11]; Interaction [8]-intimidate[10].
Gear
Pistol .45, Knife, Saddlebag, $100

If the PCs fight, make the Spaniard character an equal to the parties' best fighter. The fight will last five rounds or until either the PC or the Spaniard is killed or knocked unconscious. On the fifth round, the Sheriff arrives with five deputies to break up the bar fight, shooting anyone who doesn't listen. He then arrests whoever was involved in the fight and locks them up until the following day. The next day, they are released with a $25 fine and loss of weapons. If they can't pay, they will be released in five days. The Spaniard cannot pay and is stuck in jail for the full five days.

If the PCs allow the Spaniard to walk away with the map, there are two more chances to obtain it. First, they can steal it from him, by finding out what room he is staying in, by either bribing or talking to Miss Kitty.

The Spaniard is in a drunken stupor in his room so as long as the PCs can pick the poor quality lock and pass a Sneak check they will easily be able to get into his room. His saddlebag is under his bed and will take a Sneak test (with a +1 penalty) to get it without him waking up. If the PCs remove the map from the Spaniard's bag then place the bag back under the bed, they will not have any more trouble with him.

However, removing the bag from the room will cause the Spaniard to wake up the next night and attempt to hunt the PCs down for vengeance. If the PCs fail one or more checks, the Spaniard will wake up in 1d10 seconds. The PCs must either run away or silence the Spaniard, before he wakes up and alerts the Saloon to the thieves. If they kill him, they have 20 minutes to get out of town before the Sheriff and his five deputies come. Anyone who is caught is locked up until they are hanged in 5 days.

Alternatively, if the PCs stick around in town for three days, they will hear a rumor of a man killed outside of town. Investigating the crime reveals it was a Spaniard, who drifted into town two days ago. Investigating the crime scene allows the PCs to make an Investigation roll; a success reveals the map, half buried in the sand.

GUIDANCE

With the original copy of the Dead Man's Hand map, the PCs are ready to seek out the canyon. The only obstacle they have is finding a guide who will take them out to Navajo territory. At this point in history, the Navajo Indians are still committing raids upon American settlements. Understandably, people are scared and apprehensive about leading a group of people out to their territory.

Luckily for the PCs, the town has one of Arizona's bravest trackers living within its borders. The PCs may have already heard about Muli if they socialized with any of the town's folk. If not, the PCs asking for a guide about town and making a successful Interview check will be directed to Muli. The PCs can also meet Charles Winterford, if they have not already (see Meeting Charles Winterford).

MEETING CHARLES WINTERFORD

Charles can be encountered at anytime throughout the PCs' stay in Hutch Town. He can also be used to point the PCs in the right direction, if they still have not picked up the map. The meeting with Charles comes in two forms.

The first is encountering him without the map. This occurs the day after the PCs have a chance run-in with the Spaniard. Winterford approaches the heroes in any fashion that might endear himself to them. This may mean buying a drink for them, loaning money to a player without any, etc. After Winterford has acquired a comfortable social situation with the PCs, he suggests a small business opportunity. He introduces himself as an Antique collector. Recently he became aware that a Spaniard - by the name of Jesus Galvan - gained possession a very old map. Now while the map itself is worthless to Winterford, he will pay top dollar for anything the PCs find using it. If the PCs have not encountered the Spaniard yet, Winterford points out that he has a bad gambling habit, see Getting Map 1. If the PCs have already had an encounter with the Spaniard, see *Getting Map 2 & 3*. After the PCs obtain the map, continue with the following.

The second encounter occurs after the PCs have received the map. If the PCs have already met Winterford, he suggests they find a guide out to the canyon, and he'll wait .patiently for their return. Charles is actually planning on following the characters out to the canyon and stealing whatever they find. If the PCs have not met him, run Encounter one. However, skip his suggestion about getting the map. Charles may also be willing to fund the player's journey with a successful Bargaining check by a PC.

Muli lives just within Hutch Town's borders, in a self-made cabin. In order for Muli to agree to be their guide, the PCs must either show him the map, or make a successful Bargain check to hire him. His rates are a bit steep, at about a $0.75 a day. Once Muli agrees to the trip, he will tell the PCs it will be a single day trip (around 12 miles) and they should return to him when they have supplies. He also suggests that the PCs leave a little before dusk.

See General Store for pricing on equipment.

Depending on how long the PCs took to get the map, they may have serious time problems. Remember, the PCs have a total of seven days to follow the trail of the original adventurers, before the Shaman's magic wears off.

CANYON TRAVELS

The travel to the canyon is uneventful, taking slightly over 12 hours. Once at the Canyon, Muli will lead the PCs to where the two canyons fork. Here, the PCs have a choice of route. This adventure covers the two most likely routes; Muli, however, is open to any reasonable plan.

The first route takes the PCs along the edge of the canyon, which makes them less likely to be caught; the disadvantage is they may have trouble climbing to the caves below. The second route is along the canyon bottom, which will allow easier access to the cave. However, it increases their chance of being caught. Each route has its own numbered map describing events that occur when the PCs reach the assigned area.

CANYON EDGE ROUTE

1. Canyon Descent

Muli suggests the PCs descend into the canyon, so they can climb the other side. The PCs will be able to take the horse into the Canyon, but not ride them up again. Any PCs attempting to descend the canyon on horseback must make an Animal Handling-Animal Riding check with a -1 step difficulty. Failure results in the horse bucking and refusing to descend the cliff. On a critical failure, the player is bucked off the horse unless they make another Animal Handling check to stay on the horse, with +2 step difficulty. A bucked off player sustains d6s damage and has a 40% chance of tumbling down the cliff for d4w. PCs walking down need only to make a simple Movement check to avoid stubbing toes or spraining ankles.

2. Up Again

Once down in the valley, the PCs will have to wade through the Canyon River to get to the other side. The river is barely two feet deep here and can be navigated easily. Once across, the PCs are faced with climbing back out of the canyon. Most of the climb is not up sheer cliff, but instead involves skirting narrow ledges. In order to succeed, the PCs will have to make five Athletics-Climb checks at a -1 difficulty (or -2 with make-shift climbing gear).

3. Horse Tracks

While traveling around the canyon's edge, any PC can make an Awareness-Perception to pick out several shoed horse prints.

4. Soldiers

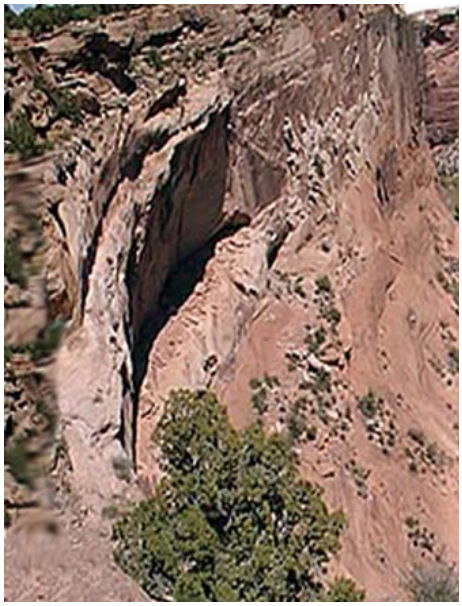
Have the PCs make Awareness-Perception checks (with a -1 step bonus if they spotted the horseshoe prints earlier). Any PCs who succeed hear the sound of horses ahead. Investigating the scene require a Stealth-Sneak check, to approach the soldiers unnoticed.

There are four soldiers (use the marginal soldier template on page 99 of GM guide). They are not openly aggressive to the PCs, if they are caught or approached openly. However, they have been ordered to not let anyone travel further up the canyon.

If Muli is in the lead, the soldiers are hostile toward him. The soldiers can be bypassed through three routes. They can be attacked, in which three will fight and the fourth will ride back for reinforcements. They can be bribed to move out of the way through a Deception-bribe check paying based on success of roll ($5.00/$3.00/$1.00 each); or the guards are on high alert since they have heard how Indians can move like ghosts, the PCs must make a Stealth-sneak +3 diff. 5.

5. THE MASSACRE

Halfway down the canyon, the PCs will start to hear rifle shots. When the PCs get to location five, they observe a scene of destruction. Men line the sides of the canyon, continuously firing downward at a group of Indians on the floor of the canyon. If the PCs attempt to disrupt the firing in any way, they are mistaken for an Indian sneak attack and fired on. There are five groups, each with 10 marginal soldiers, that fire in an offset pattern. This is not difficult to circumvent; the PCs must make another Stealth-sneak -1 diff, to leave unnoticed.



6. MASSACRE CAVE

Once the PCs arrive at the outlook over Massacre Cave, they have the daunting task of getting down. The path the PCs used in the future does not exist here, so they must find another way down. The use of ropes requires a Technical Science-Invention check, modified by the available supplies. If they desire, the PCs can make a sling to lower a character down. Alternatively, an Athletics-climb check, with a +2 step difficulty, can be made if they are lowering themselves down 25 meters.

INNER CANYON ROUTE

1. Canyon Descent

See Canyon Edge Route

2. Horse Tracks

See Canyon Edge Route

3. Bodies

The ground at three contains the bodies of four soldiers each mutilated with arrow and knife wounds. Nothing of any use remains on the soldiers' bodies.

4. Rain of Bullets

As the PCs approach location four, they begin to hear the distant sound of rifle shots. As they get closer, they see the horrifying scene of a group of Indians being picked off like fish in a barrel. The adventurers have two choices: attempt to cross the hail of bullets, or wait until the shooting stops.

If the PCs attempt to make the run across, any characters on horseback need to make an Animal Handling-Animal Riding, with a +2 step penalty, due to the chaos. Critical Failure causes the player to be bucked and have the chance of being shot as a walker. Failure means the horse may be used as a shield, reducing the chance of being shot by 5%, but it means that the horse cannot be ridden across the battlefield. Success lowers the chance of being shot to 5/10/15%.

Walkers may either roll Stealth-sneak, Acrobatics-dodge or Movement-race, lowering the chance of being shot by 3%, 9%, or 12% respectively. The base chance of being shot is 30%.

If the PCs decide to wait out the fight, they are in danger of being flushed out by the scattered and angry Navajo, or the soldiers. PCs must make three successful Stealth-sneak checks to remain hidden and make it to the Massacre Cave.

If a player fails one of the checks, they encounter either 1d4 soldiers or 1d4 Navajo (use marginal soldier templates but substitute modern-range for primitive range and a short bow w/6 arrows).

5. Massacre Cave

It does not take much effort to get into the massacre cave unless the PCs are still dodging bullets.

INSIDE MASSACRE CAVE

The cave smells of earth and mildew, hints of gunpowder waft in from outside. An eerie cold hangs with in the unnatural darkness of the cave. Unless the PCs have a self-contained light source - such as a lamp or matches - they will have to feel around blindly.

The piece to the Locator can be found with an Investigate-Search, with +2 step penalty. If any of the PCs succeeds in the search check, they locate a fist-sized hole in the ground at the back of the cave. It is impossible to see anything inside, so they will need to plunge their hand in regardless. The hole is filled with caked-up spider's web, which has a sticky feeling, but can be pushed through easily.

When the PC's arm is down the hole to the elbow, their fingers close over a smooth metallic object. But before they can withdraw their arm, they feel as sharp pain as a spider bites them on the hand. The affected PC must make a Con check with a +2 step penalty. Success causes no damage, but the player feels sick and woozy. Failure has the same affect but does d4s damage. Also the player's hand has become paralyzed and they are unable to release the piece, which is a dark obsidian triangle.

BETRAYAL

In order for this scene to play out correctly, it is important to have the players' trust. As the PCs turn to leave the cave, Charles Winterford and four muscular men brandishing revolvers confront them.

I see you've captured my prize for me. Now hand it over and y'all can go free.

Despite anything the PCs may say, Winterford wants the piece and will do anything for it, including cutting the player's hand off. Luckily, things won't get that far. The PCs have a chance to fight back before their companion's hand is severed. It doesn't matter if the PCs live or die. All that matters is that since the PCs have survived to this point, they will achieve their goal of finding out what happened to the piece.

COMBAT

During the amazing phase of the second round of combat, thousands of spiders begin falling from the ceiling. These spiders relentlessly bite everyone (use a good neurotoxin), slowly knocking everyone unconscious. There is no way to escape the spiders, so even if the PCs try to run outside, they are still bitten enough to knock them out.

SPIDER'S LAIR

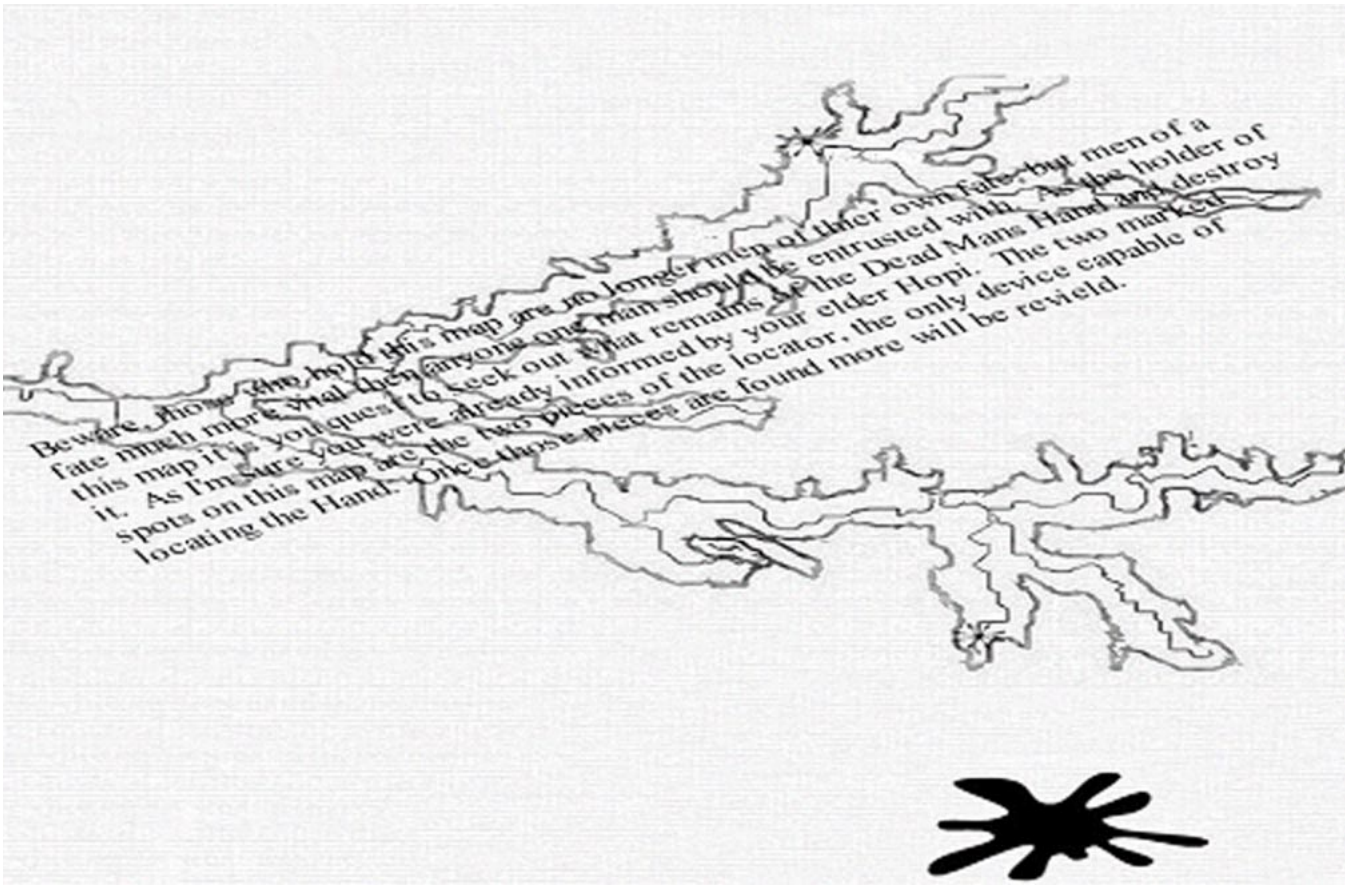
This is from the point of view of the person who holds the piece of the locator:

Awakening is hard and moving is even harder. It feels as if a strong steel cord is wrapped around your entire body, constricting your breath. Forcing your eyes open, you are overcome with extreme vertigo, even though all you can see is darkness. Struggling to free yourself from the bonds, you can feel a warm moist breath on the back of your neck. In your ears, you hear a soft woman's voice:

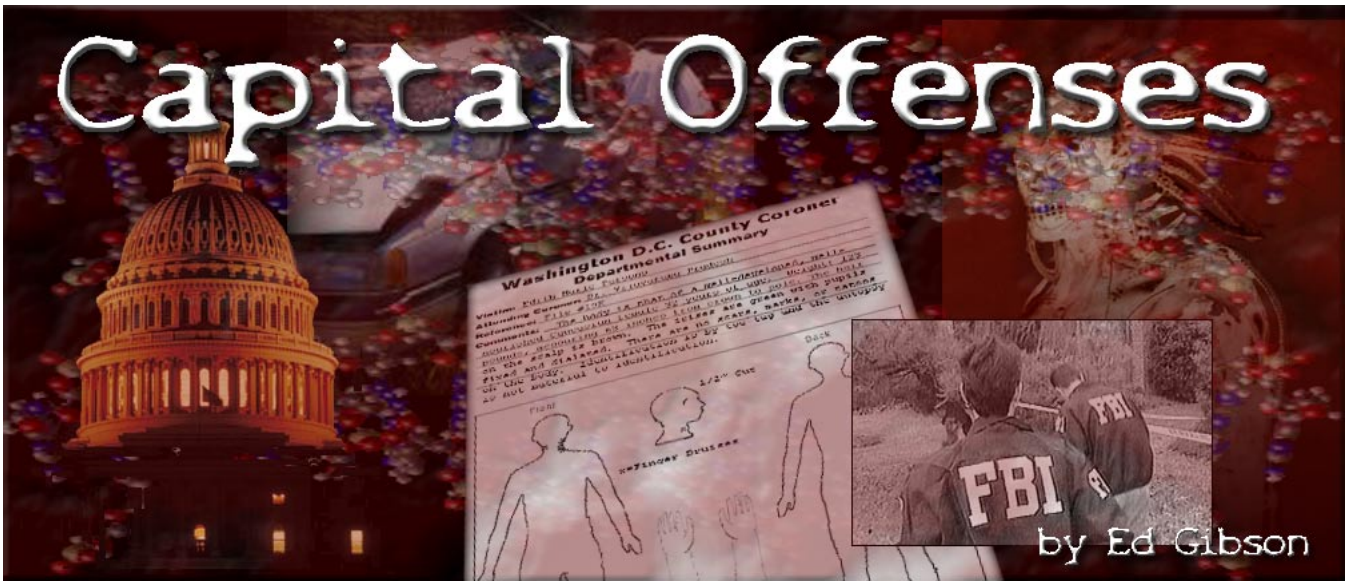
"Here in the Spider's Lair I shall wait for your rebirth, for now your flesh is mine. Good night, warrior."

END OF ACT TWO

❖



PLAYER HANDOUT - Translated Map *(See Dead Man's Hand Part 1 in DEMONGROUND Issue 13 for additional* handouts.



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INTRODUCTION

The Players have been summoned to a briefing room deep within the bowels of National Security Agency headquarters in Fort Meade, Maryland. The room is plain: a large table and seven chairs are the only furnishings. The walls are painted an institutional beige and there are no decorations to break up the monotony of the walls. In fact, the only notable features of the room are two telephones, one black and one gray.

The gray phone is a secure line, used for discussions of classified information. The black phone is not secure and is used for casual conversations. Entrance to this room is through a pair of heavy steel doors, which form an airlock. There are red and green lights above the inner door. The red light is illuminated when the room is not secure, the green light goes on when the room has been secured. The meeting is held on Monday, August 28, at 09:00 A.M.

The in-depth inspection which you underwent before being admitted to the briefing room implied that this meeting was of a highly sensitive nature.

(Pause and allow the characters to interact for a few minutes, if they are so inclined - then continue with the following text).

After a few minutes, two men enter the room. The younger of the two men checks the room for listening devices, while the older man waits impassively. Eventually, the younger man finishes and nods to the older man. The older man does not speak until the younger man leaves the room and secures the doors behind him.

Finally, the green light above the door illuminates and the man addresses you:

"Welcome, I am Deputy Director Ross. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a problem. There was a traffic accident in Washington D.C. three nights ago. One driver was killed instantly, while the other driver fled on foot. The body of an adult female was found in the trunk of the second car. This body was subsequently identified as Edith Parsons, senior aide to Senator George Amberlee (R-La). The medical examiner said that Ms. Parsons was strangled prior to the accident. The manner of her death was not released to the public; instead it was announced that she died in an accident.

"Your group will be furnished with FBI badges and documentation to investigate this case. The official reason for your involvement is concern for national security due to Ms. Parsons' position. The senator is the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and has been briefed on many of America's covert projects.

"The truth is more disturbing. The driver who fled the accident did so after being ejected through the windshield. The medical examiner reported that the quantity of blood at the scene indicated that an artery had been severed. There was a pronounced blood trail for approximately 100 feet - then the trail stopped. The medical examiner thinks the subject got into a car, but we suspect it wasn't that simple. Our scientists detected the alien DNA in the blood samples. We have checked our records and the only individual who has undergone the Proteus treatment and who was in Washington at the time was Reginald Carmichael III. He is a known associate of the victim and has undergone alpha level Proteus treatment. Your mission is to take Mr. Carmichael into custody. Any questions?"

Give the players handouts 6, 7 and 8 (background information on Mr. Carmichael, Senator Amberlee, and Ms. Parsons). The PCs are not forbidden to investigate further, but it is made clear that their first responsibility is to arrest Mr. Carmichael. If he is questioned about other suspects in the crime, Mr. Ross states that if it is not Mr. Carmichael, then one of Sil's offspring must have moved into the area. The players are encouraged to be discreet, and Mr. Ross implies that any publicity will be detrimental to the characters' careers. The players do not know it, but each agent treated with the alien DNA has a small transmitter implanted in his body during the treatment. The Agency learned that the only individual with a transmitter in Washington at the time of the accident was Mr. Carmichael. Mr. Ross does not reveal this information, but is obviously confident that Mr. Carmichael is the guilty party.

The players are on their own. The following locations may be investigated by the PCs. If they go to an undefined location, they are only going to discover the most general information; use your judgement as to what they find (if anything). Note that unless they first obtain the clues from somewhere else, they are not going to be able to identify some of the important locations. Encourage the players to stay together for your own sanity. If the players get stuck or side-tracked, try to subtly get them back on track. (Some of the MasterBook (MB) cards are useful for this). If necessary, the deputy director can point out errors in their thinking or order them to investigate important locations.

LOCATION 1:
WASHINGTON D.C. POLICE HEADQUARTERS

It is assumed that the PCs know how to find police headquarters. The information the players obtain from police headquarters and how long they have to wait for the material will depend on the attitude they exhibit to the sergeant on duty.

Sgt. Walton's normal shift is during the day (7:00 AM to 3:00 PM). If the PCs visit during the afternoon (3:00 PM to 11:00 PM) or night (11:00 PM to 7:00 AM), they find that Sgt. Walton has been forced to work a double shift due to an illness, and is more irritable than usual. Sgt. Walton is known (without affection) by the other police officers as "Mr. Personality". He considers the characters, FBI, courts, Congress, criminals, news media, and victims as wasting his time. He doesn't like anybody.

If approached in a friendly manner and asked for assistance, he complains for a while, but eventually (one hour total) provides all the police reports (player handouts 3 to 5). He says the autopsy report hasn't been received from the medical examiners office and suggests the PCs visit the medical examiner.

If the PCs barge in and demand the reports as FBI agents, they receive less cooperation. He starts by claiming that he has a staff meeting, and asks the characters to wait (or return) in an hour. He then provides the accident report (player handout 3). If the PCs ask about additional materials, he informs them that the medical examiner (location 2) has more information. If the medical examiner sends the PCs back here for the detective reports, Sgt. Walton says that the PCs asked for police reports, not detective reports. He furnishes the crime scene reports (player handouts 4 and 5) an hour later, (explaining "someone must have misfiled them").

If the players want to speak to the officer or detective who wrote the various reports, they find out that those individuals work the 11:00 PM to 7:00 AM shift. If the PCs insist, the police personnel can be called in during their time off, but it takes an average of 90 minutes for them to travel to police headquarters. They are reasonably cooperative, since they'll receive compensatory time off for coming in. They can clarify information in the report, but have nothing new to add.

The crime lab results are available at 4:00 PM Tuesday. If the characters visit police headquarters after this time and ask for the lab results, give them player handout 9.

Note on fingerprints: Despite popular perception, finding fingerprints does not enable you to magically determine who made the fingerprints. Fingerprints are virtually useless, unless you have a suspect in the crime and want to see if his prints show up at the scene. The senator's fingerprints are not among those located in the apartment or the car. Several of the apartment fingerprints are from Reginald, but it's no secret that he has spent time in Edith's apartment. The rest of the fingerprints are unknown (plumber, TV repairman, apartment manager), it doesn't matter. The hand print above the passenger window on the car is where a man braced himself as he leaned in to steal Edith's purse from the floor of the car. He'll be found in the burned out building, but this is more of a hint for the players to ask themselves under what circumstances would a print like this be produced?

LOCATION 2:
WASHINGTON D.C. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

It is assumed that the PCs know how to find the medical examiners office. They are greeted by a receptionist who asks how she can help them. Assuming they tell the truth, the receptionist states that they need to speak to the chief medical examiner. He works from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM and is on-call if needed (for a crime, not the FBI). His name is Dr. Vijayarama Pradesh and he is a native of India. His English is much better when discussing medical topics than in normal conversation. If the PCs arrive during his working hours, the receptionist states Dr. Pradesh just began an autopsy, and he should be finished in one to two hours. If the players don't want to wait, they may sit in during the autopsy and ask questions, as long as they don't disturb the doctor. If the characters want to watch the autopsy, ask the PCs for Willpower rolls (difficulty number 8 to 15, depending on character background) in order to keep their composure during the procedure.

Dr. Pradesh provides a copy of his report (player handout 2). He can answer questions on the report. His answers clarify the report, the ONLY new information which he reveals is that Ms. Parsons was four months pregnant. This information is in the full report which will be used in case of a trial, but was omitted from the condensed report in order to protect the deceased's reputation.

If the characters ask about any other reports, the doctor states that detectives prepared reports on the trunk and apartment crime scenes. He doesn't have copies of those reports, but as FBI agents they should be able to obtain the reports from police headquarters. If the characters ask about the current location of the body, he tells them the body was turned over to the Wainwright funeral home for embalming and burial after the autopsy and necessary tests were completed.

LOCATION 3:
REGINALD CARMICHAEL'S APARTMENT

If the characters call or visit Mr. Carmichael's office at the Pentagon, they learn that he has taken the day off to attend Ms. Parson's viewing. If the PCs try to talk to his co-workers, they learn that he was a hard-working and well-liked young man. Good role-playing (or use of the appropriate cards) enables the characters to learn that Mr. Carmichael seemed to live above his means (i.e. he spent more money than he was making).

The apartment building is two stories tall and contains four two-story town-houses. Reginald's apartment is the last unit on the right when viewed from the parking lot. Each unit has its own front door. There is a red BMW convertible parked out front.

Note: Reginald Carmichael cooperates totally with the players, so no statistics are required. He will not attack the PCs even if provoked.

Reginald is arrogant and cultured. He sees the characters as insignificant little gnats who are not worthy of his notice. If the characters make any sort of mistake, he cheerfully points out their mistake and will continue to mention the mistake until the PCs are ready to strangle him. By the end of this encounter 1) the PCs should hate Reginald Carmichael and 2) be driven to succeed in their investigation because they are sick and tired of being ridiculed. If the characters mention Project Proteus, alien DNA, or his status as an alpha agent, he recognizes that they are not FBI agents, but are from The Agency. This is a major security breach, which he points out repeatedly.

Reginald has only heard the official word that Edith Parsons died in a traffic accident, so he is wondering why the characters have come to see him. Even after the PCs state that she was strangled, he still doesn't know why they are here. He scoffs at the assertion that he killed her, since he truly loved her. If the characters start to question Reggie about Edith's death, he points out that if he is a suspect in her death, the characters must give him his Miranda rights (assuming that they didn't think to do this). This is another opportunity to belittle the characters as inferior. The players should be able to do a reasonable approximation from years of television, but Reggie helps them if need be: *"You have the right to remain silent. If you give up this right, anything you say, can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have an attorney present during questioning. If you can not afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you. If you agree to answer questions now, you may choose to stop answering questions at any time. Do you understand these rights"*.

If questioned, Reginald reveals that after he left the Pentagon at 5:00 PM on Friday, he went to Jacobs' Clothiers where he has a part-time job selling men's clothing. He worked from 5:30 to 9:00 PM when the store closed. One of his best customers came to the store to be fitted after the store closed. The customer arrived at 9:30 PM and left at 10:30 PM after purchasing three suits. If the PCs ask, they realize that there is no way to get from the store to Edith's house to 39th and T streets in time to have an accident at 11:00 PM.

The store owner is Irving Jacobs; he corroborates Reginald's story through 9:00 PM. He states that Reggie has a customer who comes in after hours because he doesn't like crowds. Irving says that the customer buys 10-12 suits a year, at $1500 and up, so he doesn't mind giving the customer special treatment.

Reginald is reluctant to divulge the name of his special customer, since he's afraid that the customer may go elsewhere in the future. If pressed, he gives the characters the name of a very famous entertainer (you may choose which one). He provides a phone number and can put the PCs in touch with the person, who verifies the Friday appointment and times.

If the PCs questioned Reginald, they may realize that Reginald is innocent and start to investigate the crime at this point. If the PCs drop Reginald off at headquarters and don't continue to investigate, they receive a call from the Deputy Director an hour later. He informs the characters that Reginald's blood type (A+) didn't match the sample (O+), and the PCs need to investigate the crime and find the real killer.

Note: If the PCs ask about Edith's pregnancy, Reggie says he was unaware of her condition. He states that he is sterile. If he knows the PCs are with The Agency, he says it's due to the alien DNA treatment; otherwise, he says it's due to a genetic abnormality.

LOCATION 4:
THE ACCIDENT SCENE

The intersection of 39th and T streets is in a run-down and undesirable section of town. There is a functioning traffic light at the four-way intersection. Alter the description

according to the time the characters visit. The inhabitants of the area are: homeless people begging for money to buy alcohol, junkies begging for money (or looking to rob people with money) to buy drugs, prostitutes offering their services for drugs or money, and drug dealers selling various illegal substances. If the PCs stay in a group, no one attempts to rip them off, but people are also reluctant to talk to them. Money goes a long way to obtain cooperation from these people.

If the characters talk to the prostitutes about the accident, they learn that the women heard the crash, but didn't see it happen. When the police and medics arrived, the women moved a block away (flashing lights are bad for business). However, if they are questioned about unusual happenings, one speaks up. "My name is Velvet, sugar, and I might have something to tell you. If you're going to reimburse me for taking time away from my business". If she is given at least $20, she says that she saw a man flag down a cab, about two blocks over. The cab wasn't going to stop until the man jumped in front of it. He talked to the driver briefly and then got into the cab. The man was noticeable because he was well dressed and covered in blood. She identifies the cab company as Yellow Cab.

A boarded up building is on the northeast corner. Investigation shows that the building is not occupied. On the southwest corner is an empty lot overgrown with weeds and tall grass. Trash is strewn across the lot and two junked cars sit rusting on concrete blocks. On the southeast corner is a warehouse. The warehouse operates from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM and armed guards are present during that time. At other times, the building is securely locked. The warehouse is used for storing steel and is filled with large coils of steel for use in manufacturing.

On the northwest corner is a burned-out building which was boarded up in the past. Investigation shows that the boards have been tied on with ropes, so the building appears to be secure, but is open. Pieces of old syringes and broken crack pipes crunch underneath the character's feet as they approach the building. The building smells of sweat and urine.

If the PCs enter the building, they see a half dozen old mattresses in the light of their flashlights as the cockroaches scurry for cover. There are four old men lying among the mattresses. The men look up as the characters approach, and ask what the PCs want. It's hot and nasty in this building, especially during the day. The men deny knowing anything about the crash. If offered a bribe ($10 each) or the characters have an appropriate card, they say that they heard the crash and went out to see what had happened. They just caught a glimpse of one figure running away from the wreck. They didn't get a good look, but believe it was a male, stocky in build, and about 6' tall. The driver of the other car was moaning and said "Why did he do that?", then he made a choking sound and was quiet.

The men are not telling everything. One of them stole Edith's purse and they split the money. Bribery combined with the proper MB cards and an agreement not to prosecute, or good role-playing (especially if they have picked up on some of the other clues) obtains the rest of the story. Joe says he saw a purse on the floor of the car, and the driver had run off, so he leaned in and picked it up. They took the money (about $80) and tossed the purse in a dumpster down the street. Then the men went off and got drunk. If the characters search the dumpster, eventually they come up with the purse:

(Roll perception, DN 15, one roll per character per ten minutes spent searching)

Right after the PCs find the purse, four members of a local gang, The East Georgetown Posse, shows up to harass the players. Go to rounds. They tell the PC's they're trespassing in the gang's territory and if they give up their money and valuables the gang will let them leave. If any of the player characters surrender, they are taken up to the top of a nearby eight story tall building and thrown off.

EAST GEORGETOWN POSSE (4)

Agility 9
- Dodge 12
- Maneuver 10
- Running 10
- Melee Combat 10

Dexterity 9
- Fire Combat 12
- Lock Picking 10

Endurance 9
- Resist Shock 10

Strength 10
- Lifting 11

Toughness 11 (13)

Intellect 8
- First Aid 9
- Perception 10
- Trick 9

Mind 7

Confidence 10
- Con 11
- Interrogation 11
- Intimidation 13
- Streetwise 12
- Willpower 12

Charisma 6
- Taunt 8

Life Points 1

Equipment: Two have UZI SMGs (Damage 19) and the other two have sawed-off M500s (Damage 21). They are wearing Soft Leather (+2/17). Each has a knife (Str+4/19) and about $100 in cash.

Falling damage value is (7 for distance + the character's weight value + a bonus number) and only two points of armor count (MB 91).

If the characters are in danger of being wiped out, the Washington police show up and the gang members flee.

Edith Parsons' wallet is in the purse. The characters find her drivers license, credit cards, and senate identification cards, but no cash. She has a receipt from the Westwood Motel for $50 in her wallet, dated August 23. Her planner is in the purse along with other irrelevant materials. The Wednesday meetings are listed as 4:30 PM / Consultation WM.

Friday's doctor appointment is found to be with a Dr. Vivian Gray. The only information the doctor provides over the phone is that Edith Parsons was her patient and she had an appointment on Friday. She tells the agents that if they show up at her office with identification, she is willing to speak to them. The PCs can determine that her specialty is OB/GYN by asking her or looking in the phone book. The characters may learn who the doctor is by going through the Washington phone book, but barring the use of an appropriate card, it is eight hours of work for one person going through the phone book.

Dr. Gray checks the character's identification and is willing to answer most questions. The basic information she has is that Edith Parsons came in for an examination because Edith wanted to confirm that she was pregnant. Edith never said who the father was, although she did say that she was planning to ask him to marry her later that day. Edith was approximately four months pregnant. Edith seemed happy to be pregnant and was in high spirits. This is the extent of what Dr. Gray knows. She can't shed any light on who fathered the child.

LOCATION 5:
EDITH PARSON'S APARTMENT

The apartment buildings are two stories tall and have two apartments on each floor. Edith's apartment is the top left unit when viewed from the parking lot. Entrance to the units is from a central entry way. The entrance door is electrically locked and visitors are buzzed in by the occupants. There are four mail slots and four call buttons.

If the PCs visit Edith's apartment, they discover that the apartment is locked, and is sealed with yellow tape reading "Police Crime Scene - Do Not Enter". If the characters break in, two Washington D.C. police officers show up and catch them in the apartment. Once the PCs explain what they were doing, the officers point out that the characters may have contaminated vital evidence. If the players contact the police, an officer arrives to open the door in 30 minutes.

The apartment has two bedrooms: the main bedroom and a smaller room which appears to be used for storage. The storage bedroom has boxes of clothes, Christmas decorations, old books, and miscellaneous stuff.

There is a kitchen, a dining room, the living room, and one and one-half bathrooms. A washer and dryer are located in the half bathroom.

There is nothing for the PCs to learn from the apartment. The master bedroom and living room are as described in the police reports. Black finger print powder can be observed on the coke can and plate, although the food has been discarded. There is no personal phone directory or other personal correspondence in the apartment.

If the characters speak to the neighbors, they find that the apartment opposite Edith's is vacant and the one below that is occupied by four flight attendants (Stella, Carol, Gina, and Fawn). The flight attendants were in Dallas on Friday night. Their flight was delayed and then cancelled due to mechanical difficulties. They are single and are reasonably receptive to dinner invitations.

The Whitcombs live in the unit below Edith's apartment. Laurel Whitcomb is a busy-body; she complains about the lack of morality among the young people. She knows that Reggie regularly spent the night with Ms. Parsons, despite the fact that they weren't married (acts shocked). She denounces the flight attendants as bimbos, and provides lurid details about their immoral behavior (most of which is fabricated). She doesn't provide any new information. Walter is very uncomfortable talking with the FBI agents. In fact, the PCs should get the idea that he is concealing something. He is very nervous and suspicious, so the characters may think that he knows more about the murder than he has said. In actuality, he has over $2,500 in unpaid parking tickets and is afraid of being arrested. He can clarify that it was a large car that nearly struck him, but has no new information.

LOCATION 6:
SENATOR AMBERLEE'S OFFICE

If the characters visit the senator's office on Monday, they discover he is at home. The senate is in recess during August and the senator is mourning the death of his top aide. The PCs are greeted by the senator's secretary, Jean Hathaway. Ms. Hathaway confirms the background information on the senator. Jean is loyal and supportive of the senator. Although she suspects that the senator and Edith were having an affair, she would never say so. She is unaware that the senator's spinal injury is improving.

If asked where the senator is on Wednesday afternoons, Jean says the senator has a standing appointment at 4:30 PM with his physical therapist. He works on trying to develop strength in his legs. He also swims and works out on weight machines. The physical therapist is Dr. Daniel Drake; if contacted, he refuses to answer any questions. He states that since the senator is a patient under his care, he can't comment on anything relating to the senator. He won't confirm or deny the senator's appointments.

If asked where Edith was on Wednesday afternoons, Jean says Edith was attending classified intelligence briefings on the senator's behalf. This is a dead end, since no one will comment on these briefings. The senator went with Edith on a few occasions when important topics were being discussed.

If asked about Edith's activities on Friday August 25, Jean reports that Edith arrived at 6:00 AM and worked until 3:00 PM, when she left for a doctor's appointment. Ms. Hathaway does not know the name of the doctor. Ms. Hathaway mentions that Edith was compulsive about recording names, phone numbers, addresses, and appointments in her daily planner. She carried the planner everywhere she went. If the agents find the planner, they could learn which doctor she went to see.

The senator arrived at 8:30 AM and worked until 4:00 PM. He left for the National Aquarium, where he was attending a retirement party for a former business colleague of his. If asked, the colleague's name was Donald Peters. Mr. Peters is listed in the phone book. He confirms that the senator attended the party. The senator arrived shortly after 4:30 PM and stayed until the party ended. The senator was drinking, but not so heavily that his driving was impaired. The party broke up about 9:00 PM. Mr. Peters doesn't know what the senator did when the party ended, but his pager had gone off shortly before 9:00 PM.

The players will not be able to get information from the phone or pager companies during the course of this module. Both require a court order before they will provide information.

LOCATION 7:
SENATOR AMBERLEE'S HOME

The senator lives in a large house in the Washington suburbs. The senator is home Monday, but is in his office Tuesday through Friday. The senator is happy to meet with the characters if he is home. His office is luxurious, with leather furniture and oak panelling. The entire house is wheelchair accessible.

The senator remains in his wheelchair during the visit. On a perception check (DN 15), a character observes that the senator is not wearing a watch, although tan lines show where a watch was worn. (If asked, he says that he took it off to wash his hands at a party Friday night, and forget to put it back on. When he went back later, it was gone. He changes the subject to greater punishment for thieves).

The senator has the following scores for use in interaction with the players:

Perception	10	Persuasion	16
Confidence	12	Intimidation	14
Con	16	Willpower	18

Once the senator hears why the characters have come to visit him, he encourages them to find Edith's killer. He is very much against crime and says that the courts are too soft on criminals. He'll tell the PCs about how he was mugged a few years ago. He had gone to the theater with his wife and on their way back to the car, they were jumped by four punks. The punks didn't think he had enough money for them to steal, so they kept beating him. He tells the characters the criminals were never apprehended. The senator tells the characters if they do a good job on this case, he'll put in a good word with their superiors. He asks to be kept updated on whatever the agents discover.

If asked about where he is on Wednesday afternoons, he considers it insulting, but states that he visits his physical therapist for treatment and exercises. He also exercises at the Senate health club on Saturday mornings. If asked about his whereabouts on Friday night, he says that he went to a retirement party after work and stayed until 9:30 PM or so. If asked who paged him, he says it was Edith's number, but she didn't answer. He thought he had a bit too much to drink, so he decided to take a short nap in his car. When he woke up it was 12:30 AM. He was parked in the municipal garage near the National Aquarium, which is patrolled. If the characters inquire, they find that no one from the garage can prove or disprove the senator's story. The senator drives a dark blue Ford Crown Victoria with hand controls (and handicapped plates).

If the senator believes he is considered a suspect, based on the PCs questions, he calls some people, uses a few favors, and arranges for some people to make life difficult for the characters - use location 11: Ambush, whenever you can fit it into the story-line. The Deputy Director also calls the characters to suggest that if they suspect the senator, they had better have some very strong evidence.

If the characters talk to the senator's wife Mary while the senator is around, she defers to her husband. If questioned when her husband is at work, her story corroborates her husband's. Mary does say that her husband called her on Friday to let her know that he would be home late. She's not sure about the time, but she thinks it was after 9:00 PM. He made it home about 1:00 AM, he had just gotten into bed when the phone call from the detective about poor Edith came. She considers Edith to be a sweet, intelligent, hard-working girl and thinks that it's horrible that someone would hurt her. She doesn't suspect that her husband was romantically involved with Edith. She does say that her husband's therapy has been showing results, where he used to hold himself up with his arms and drag his legs, he is now capable of taking 3-4 steps on his own. She says that he really started to improve after an experimental treatment about ten weeks ago. (She doesn't have details of the treatment and no one else is talking).

If asked about the watch, she says it was her present to her husband on their 25th anniversary, and she is very upset

that her husband lost the watch. She describes the watch as a large gold Rolex with diamonds which cost $2,500 when she purchased it (12 years ago). She only mentions the inscription ("To GA from MA on 25 years") if specifically asked about identifying marks. If asked about the suit the senator wore on Friday, she says that he must have taken it to the cleaners because it's not in the closet. (The senator threw it in a dumpster Saturday morning on his way to identify the body).

LOCATION 8:
THE WESTWOOD MOTEL

When the characters obtain the receipt for the Westwood motel from Edith's purse, they may decide to investigate the motel. The manager of the motel is Vinny Wilson. Vinny is aware that most of the motel's customers are prostitutes, adulterers, and minors, so he isn't overly inclined to cooperate with the FBI. If threatened, he refuses to cooperate, asks for a lawyer, and won't allow the PCs any access to the motel without a search warrant.

If the PCs do not threaten him, Vinny talks if he is given the right incentive ($). It's possible playing the right MB cards gives the players the information they want. Otherwise, for $20 he identifies Edith Parsons (from a photograph) as a regular visitor. He shows the characters where she signed the motel register (using her real name and address). For another $20, Vinny says that Edith came to the motel with an older, gray-haired man. Vinny never got a real good look at him, he stayed in the car while Edith took care of the room. Vinny can't identify the man from a picture. If asked whether the man had difficulty walking, Vinny hems and haws around while waiting for another $20. If the characters pay up, he says that the man didn't seem to have any problems walking, but he did have handicapped license plates and always parked in a handicapped spot. (He didn't notice the license number).

Edith and the man have been coming to the motel off and on almost a year. However, for the past six months, they consistently checked in on Wednesdays about 4:30 PM and left at 10:00 PM. They usually requested room #179, it's located on the back side of the motel, right next to a handicapped parking spot. The man's car was a black Ford Crown Victoria. The PCs can rent room #179 for further investigation. The cost is $25 an hour or six hours for $50. The room is seedy, the furniture is falling apart, and there are no further clues. None of the other guests at the motel cooperate with the player characters.

LOCATION 9:
THE WAINWRIGHT FUNERAL HOME

If the characters check the obituaries in the newspaper, they discover the body of Edith Parsons was taken to the Wainwright funeral home. The medical examiner can inform the PCs that the body was turned over to the Wainwright funeral home. A visitation will be held on Tuesday August 29 from 7:30 PM to 9:00 PM. The ceremony is closed casket. After the ceremony, the body will be shipped home to Louisiana for private family funeral services and final burial.

There is no reason for the characters to want to see the body, but if they insist, it is permitted with the following stipulations: the PCs must show their FBI identification, have a logical reason to examine the body, and a funeral home employee remains with them during their examination. The examination must be completed by at least one hour before the visitation. These stipulations are not negotiable. The funeral home will not turn the body over to the PCs without the family's permission (the medical examiner was done with the body or it would not have been embalmed) and the family does not grant permission.

The body in the casket matches the description of Ms. Parsons, the fingerprints of the corpse match Ms. Parsons' fingerprints, and alien DNA can not be detected in the body. There is nothing else for the characters to learn at the funeral home.

LOCATION 10:
THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

If the PCs come here with Reginald Carmichael as their prisoner, the deputy director asks if the prisoner gave them any trouble. He also wants to know what the prisoner said. He takes Mr. Carmichael into custody and lets the PCs do what they want. If the PCs aren't continuing to investigate the crime, they receive a call from Mr. Ross in one hour. He informs the characters that Mr. Carmichael's blood type doesn't match the blood from the accident scene. It is up to the players to continue the investigation and hunt for the killer.

If the PCs come here because they believe they know who the killer is, Mr. Ross asks the following questions:

"Who was the killer?

"What was the cause of death?

"When was the murder committed?

"Where was the murder committed?

"Why was the murder committed?"

If the players don't have reasonable answers or supporting evidence for any of these questions, Director Ross tells them that it's an interesting theory, but the District Attorney doesn't want interesting theories, he wants answers and he wants evidence. Mr. Ross suggests the characters continue their investigation.

If the players have all the right answers, they still need to answer one last question:

"The senator's injury is known to prevent him from walking more than ten feet without assistance. How did he run 100 feet with serious injuries?"

If the PCs have been clever (possibly tossing a dummy hand grenade into the senator's lap) they may have evidence to prove that the senator's injury seems to be substantially healed. Otherwise, the PCs need to establish that the injury is gone. If time is running out, Director Ross asks where the alien DNA came from in the blood at the scene? Senator Amberlee is not involved with Project Proteus. This question should lead the PCs to the correct answer.

Senator Amberlee, as the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee received a briefing on Project Proteus. The senator used some favors and twisted some arms in order to receive a minimal (less than delta) dose of the alien DNA two months ago. While he has not gained any animal forms, he has developed the regeneration ability. This allowed his spinal injury to heal. He has become sterile and is subject to the fatal disease and antidote dependency that all foreign DNA recipients suffer.

THE ACTUAL COURSE OF EVENTS:

9:30 PM Senator answers page, finds Edith needs to see him.

9:33 PM Senator calls wife and says that he'll be home late.

9:35 PM Senator leaves for Edith's apartment.

9:55 PM Senator arrives at apartment and interrupts Edith's dinner.

10:00 PM Senator and Edith retire to bedroom for a discussion. Edith informs the senator that she is 4 months pregnant with his child and she wants him to leave his wife and marry her before the child is born. Senator cries "What" as heard by Mrs. Whitcomb. Senator tries to persuade Edith to wait until after elections the following year. Edith refuses, the senator fears the scandal would cost him the election, so he strangles her.

10:25 PM Senator wipes off his fingerprints from everything he remembers touching. He wraps Edith's body in the comforter and puts it in the trunk of her car, takes her purse, and takes the car. He plans to torch the body and the car in a Washington slum district.

11:00 PM Accident occurs. Senator hurled through windshield and flees on foot.

11:30 PM Senator catches a cab about 1/2 mile away. He tells the driver he came to this part of town to buy drugs and was beaten up and ripped off by the drug dealers. He gives the driver his Rolex watch for a ride to an office near Edith's apartment complex.

12:10 AM Arrives at Edith's apartment complex and heads for home in his car. He almost runs into Mr. Whitcomb on his way home.

12:55 AM Arrives home, just in time to get phone call from detective.

Once the PCs have discovered the complete truth, go to Conclusion.

LOCATION 11: AMBUSH

Run this encounter once the senator believes that the characters suspect he had something to do with Edith's death. You should fit this encounter in when it seems most appropriate. A good choice would be the next time the PCs go to see the Deputy Director.

Make perception or intellect rolls (DN 15) to determine

ASSASSINS (2)

Agility 9
- Dodge 12
- Maneuver 10
- Running 11
- Stealth 13
- Unarmed Combat 12

Dexterity 12
- Fire Combat 16
- Heavy Weapons (LAW/HMG) 14
- Thrown Weapons 13

Endurance 9
- Resist Shock 12

Strength 7
- Lifting 10

Toughness 10 (17)

Intellect 9
- Camouflage 11
- First Aid 10
- Perception 12

Mind 7

Confidence 9
- Streetwise 10
- Survival (Urban) 11
- Willpower 13

Charisma 6
- Disguise 8
- Persuasion 7

Life Points 3

Equipment: One has a LAW and an UZI SMG the other has an HK21. Each has a Glock 22 (Dam. 18), Smoke grenade, Light Kevlar (+7/22)

if the PCs are surprised or use an alertness card if someone has one in play. Tell them that they see a man stepping out of an alley (from behind a car/from the open door of a van) and pointing something at them. Go to rounds.

> The first opponent shoots at the car with a LAW (Damage Value 27, 4 meter radius). The character's car has toughness 17 (for resisting damage to the car), the characters have +6 to their personal toughness for the car body. The second opponent aims for the driver with an HK21 (Damage Value 24). After the LAW rocket has been fired, the first man draws an UZI SMG (Damage Value 19) and attacks. Each of the opponents has a smoke grenade which he uses to cover his retreat, if necessary.

In addition to their weapons and armor the assassins have a set of keys to a brown delivery van. The plates on the van are reported stolen and do not belong to the van. The van and weapons are also reported stolen if run by their serial numbers. The assassins are not carrying any identification or other documents. The police arrive on the scene within three minutes of the attack. The police take any prisoners into custody. The attackers will not talk to the agents or the police. Their fingerprints aren't on record anywhere. Once they go on trial, the case will be dismissed because there are no witnesses (remember that the PCs are using fake FBI badges).

LOCATION 12: YELLOW CAB COMPANY

If the characters contact Yellow Cab, they learn that none of the 30 drivers who were working Friday reported picking up a fare in that part of town. Cab drivers are not employees of Yellow Cab, so it is difficult to know when one individual will show up for work. If the PCs go to the Yellow Cab company at the start of the night shift, allow each a charm roll (DN 18) to find someone who knows about the incident and who is willing to talk (relevant cards may also be used). Eventually, they find a cab driver who says he was the driver who picked up the guy they're asking about.

He'll describe the man as being heavy-set, older, well-dressed, but covered in blood. The driver says he was afraid of being robbed in that neighborhood, but the man offered his watch for the fare. He's seen expensive watches on some of his fares, and this was the real thing. The man said he had gone to that neighborhood to buy drugs, but the dealers had beat him up and robbed him. He dropped the man off at an office building. A deduction check (DN 13) identifies that building as being about a quarter-mile from Edith's apartment. The cab driver isn't wearing the watch (it's at home). If asked politely (and if he has been well treated) he checks the watch later and calls to say the back is inscribed "To GA from MA on 25 years". Mary Amberlee confirms that this was the inscription on the watch she gave to her husband. This cab driver cannot identify a picture of the senator as his passenger, because the man was covered with so much blood.

The players should recognize that this is circumstantial evidence, it doesn't prove anything on its own. It helps build a case against the senator, but at best, it's the cab driver's word against the senator's (and the senator will look much better on the witness stand). The Deputy Director will point this out, if the players don't realize this fact.

CONCLUSION

When the players finish explaining to Deputy Director Ross why they believe that Senator Amberlee murdered Edith Parsons and that they believe the senator was treated with the foreign DNA used in the Proteus Project, the Deputy Director excuses himself and leaves the room. He returns ten minutes later.

> *"I have discussed this matter with my superiors. It appears that the truth is much as you surmised. However, prosecuting the senator for this crime would raise awkward questions. Questions that certain powerful individuals don't want the public to hear. This investigation is terminated. Turn over any evidence which you've gathered to me before you leave. I hope you realize that the people who don't want these awkward questions raised will not be happy if your future conduct brings these questions into public view. Do I make myself clear?"*

At this point, your players are likely to do one of three things. First, they may decide to assassinate the senator. If the PCs attempt to kill the senator, they succeed (The Agency is actually supporting their efforts). However, any PCs involved in the assassination are killed by other Agency personnel. (They are convenient scapegoats, and just like the senator, they are too dangerous to be put on trial). Second, the PCs may try to undermine the senator. If the characters are discreet, this is tolerated. If the PCs fail to exercise discretion, the most visible troublemaker is eliminated as a warning to the others. The third option is to do nothing. In this case, the senator falls ill in a month, and dies of a rare disease in another month.

THE END

PLAYER HANDOUT 1

SPECIES BACKGROUND

In the World of Species, two messages were received by radio-telescope from a remote region of space. The first message identified a chemical catalyst which allowed methane to be produced cheaply. The second message detailed a foreign DNA string and provided instructions on how it could be combined with human DNA.

Since the first message provided a plentiful supply of low-cost fuel, scientists believed the second message would also be beneficial. They were wrong. Project Proteus was the name given to the experiment of combining human genetic material and the foreign DNA. The resulting child, named Sil, developed at a remarkable rate. She grew to maturity in less than three weeks. At this point the scientists became worried and tried to "terminate the experiment"; however, Sil escaped from the laboratory into the world outside. Her priorities became survival and reproduction: she was driven to ensure the survival of her race.

The authorities put a team together to eliminate Sil. The team believed she was destroyed in the sewers of Los Angeles, but evidence of the foreign DNA was found at a crime scene in North Carolina. Nobody knows whether Sil escaped or if she had managed to reproduce, but aliens were on the loose and someone had to stop them.

This is where The Agency came into the picture. The Agency was formed in 1953 to investigate extraterrestrial contacts. Its charter was later broadened to include any unexplained phenomena. The Agency is headquartered in a section of the National Security Agency complex in Fort Meade, Maryland.

In order to combat the aliens, whose abilities surpassed those of normal humans, Project Proteus went into a new phase. Human volunteers were injected with reduced doses of the alien DNA. Many died or went insane in the process. Some survived, gaining the ability to change their shape and other alien characteristics. The volunteers received differing amounts of the alien DNA, in decreasing order: alpha, beta, gamma, and delta. The more foreign DNA received, the more powerful the alien abilities gained, but the more difficult it is to control the alien instincts.

Permanent sterility is one side effect of the treatment process. In addition, a fatal disease is engineered into the genes of the volunteers. As long as the antidote is received monthly, the disease is dormant. After one month without the antidote, the agent falls ill, and death results in another l - 3 months. The antidote is only available from The Agency: it's their little insurance policy to keep agents from striking out on their own.

Certain rare individuals are able to do things with their minds which are beyond human understanding. These mysterious individuals are physics. The Agency recruits these individuals whenever it has the chance.

PLAYER HANDOUT 2

MEDICAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

Edith Parsons' body was positively identified by her employer, Senator Amberlee, at 7:10 AM on August 26, 1995. The autopsy began once the body had been identified. Detective Marc Hollis of the Washington D.C. Police Department observed the autopsy.

Prior to the autopsy, the following evidence gathering procedures occurred. Scrapings were taken from beneath the fingernails and sent to the crime lab. The body was finger printed. The standard tests for sexual assault were conducted.

I performed an autopsy on the body of Edith Parsons at the Washington D.C. Medical Examiner's Office at 7:30 AM on August 26, 1995. From the anatomic findings and pertinent history, I find the cause of death to be asphyxia resulting from strangulation. In my opinion, the death occurred between 9:30 and 10:30 PM on August 25, 1995.

External Examination:

The body is that of a well-developed, well-nourished Caucasian female stated to be 32 years old. The body weighs 123 pounds and measures 63 inches from crown to sole. The hair on the scalp is brown. The irises are green with the pupils fixed and dilated. There are no scars, marks, or tattoos on the body. Identification is by toe-tag and the autopsy is not material to identification.

A one half inch cut runs diagonally across the right temple. The cut appears to be a postmortem injury. There is bruising along the top and both sides of the throat. The pattern of the bruising is consistent with compression by a hand. The bruising appears to have occurred antemortem.

Clothing:

The body was not clothed when discovered.

Internal Examination:

The body is opened with the usual Y-shaped incision. Exposure of the body cavities reveals the internal organs in their usual anatomic locations with their usual anatomic relationships. No free fluid or blood is found within the pleural, pericardial, or peritoneal cavities. There are no internal injuries to the thorax or thoracic viscera, or to the abdomen or abdominal viscera.

Opening the skin of the neck revealed severe bruising, the hyoid bone was broken, and the thyroid cartilage was crushed. There are five distinct areas of extreme bruising; these were consistent with the digits of a human hand. The thumb impression is on the right side of the throat, while the marks of four fingers are found on the left side. In my opinion, this was the cause of death.

Two black fibers were found in the hair and submitted for testing. Upon removal of the scalp, examination of the skull reveals no fractures or other damage. In my opinion, this was a non-fatal superficial cutting wound of the scalp which occurred after death, as a result of the vehicular accident.

The right lung weighs 300 grams; left lung 290 grams. The external appearance and that of the sectioned lungs show no injuries.

The heart weighs 275 grams and is anatomic in size and configuration. The right side of the heart is heavily congested with dark blood, while the remainder of the heart is unremarkable.

The stomach, large and small intestines, bladder and kidneys, pancreas, adrenal gland, and reproductive system were dissected, weighed, and examined as part of the autopsy. No injuries or other conditions of significance to the cause of death were discovered in these organs. Representative portions of various organs were placed in a storage container containing 10% formaldehyde.

Dr. Vijayarama Pradesh
Chief Medical Examiner
August 26, 1995

PLAYER HANDOUT 3

ACCIDENT REPORT

At 11:05 PM on August 25, 1995, I was dispatched to the intersection of 39th and T streets on the report of a personal injury crash. I arrived on the scene at 11:08 PM where I discovered a two-car accident in the intersection. A vehicle travelling northbound on 39th street had struck a vehicle travelling westbound on T street in the driver's side door. The broken windshield of the northbound vehicle was consistent with ejection of the driver due to the crash. Although a large quantity of blood was present on the windshield and across the hoods of both vehicles the driver of the northbound car was not found at the scene. The side of the westbound car buckled upon impact and folded around the driver and the front of the northbound vehicle. The driver did not show any signs of life, but I was unable to reach him due to the wreckage. Medics arrived on the scene at 11:11. They removed the car's roof to reach the trapped driver and begin life support, but he was pronounced dead at 11:15.

The medical examiner was contacted. Traffic lights at the intersection were working properly and the pavement was dry when I arrived. The area where the accident occurred is run down, many of the buildings are boarded up, and the few intact structures are warehouses. I found discarded drug paraphernalia (broken syringes and pipes, discarded screens) and old mattresses in a condemned building on the corner indicating that drug addicts frequent the area, but I was unable to locate any witnesses to the accident.

Based on my visual observation of the scene, I would estimate that the northbound car was travelling 50 to 60 MPH and the westbound car was travelling 40 to 50 MPH The posted speed limit is 35 MPH The obvious conclusion is that one of the drivers ran a red light, but with the one driver dead, the other missing, and no witnesses, no ruling on which driver was at fault can be made at this time.

The medical examiner reported that the driver of the westbound vehicle probably died instantly due to massive crushing injuries to the head, chest, and abdomen. A blood test revealed no alcohol in his blood. The medical examiner reported that when the driver of the northbound vehicle was ejected, an artery was severed, probably in the neck. His opinion was that an individual with this type of injury would be unconscious due to blood loss in 10 to 20 seconds and die within a minute. A blood trail led about 100 feet from the vehicle, before it ended. A passing motorist may have picked up the driver, but a check of the local hospitals failed to locate anyone with this type of injury.

An inventory was conducted prior to towing the northbound vehicle. During the inventory, a body was found in the trunk. Homicide detectives were called to the scene to conduct an investigation.

The northbound vehicle was registered to an Edith Parsons. The vehicle has not been reported stolen. Attempts to contact the Parsons residence were unsuccessful.

The westbound vehicle was registered to Jamal Cranston. This matches the identification found on the body of the driver of this vehicle.

I left the scene at 4:45 AM, after homicide detectives had completed their investigation.

Officer Jimmy Dunne #1178 Washington D.C. Police Department

PLAYER HANDOUT 4

CRIME SCENE REPORT FOR APARTMENT

At 10:35 AM on August 26, I proceeded to the apartment of Ms. Edith Parsons (2119 Whispering Springs #1) in the course of my investigation into Ms. Parsons' death. The apartment had been secured by Officer William Goetz (#1299). He informed me that he had been at the scene since 1:35 AM and no one had entered or left the apartment.

The doors and windows were found to be locked, and there were no signs of forced entry. The apartment was very neat and no signs of a struggle were observed. Ms. Parsons' purse and identification were not found in the apartment.

Investigation of the bedroom revealed that the bed was unmade and the sheets were in disarray. No blankets were present. Observation revealed a number of black and gold threads on the sheets. A total of 31 threads were collected and submitted for testing.

The television set in the living room was on and tuned to channel nine. An open can of coke (warm and half empty) was present on the cocktail table in the living room next to a half-eaten plate of macaroni and cheese. This food was consistent with the stomach contents of the body as observed during the autopsy. Samples of the food and drink were collected for testing. An evidence specialist was summoned to check the apartment for finger prints.

I questioned the neighbors to see if they had seen or heard anything unusual the previous night. Laurel Whitcomb, the downstairs neighbor reported she had heard a shout, shortly after 10:00 PM. She thought it was a cry of "What", but nothing further was heard. She reported that Ms. Parsons had a boyfriend who drove a red BMW convertible. She believes his first name is Reggie. She hadn't seen his car the previous night. Walter Whitcomb, Laurel's husband, reported that he had gone to a party the previous night. When he returned home at around 12:30 AM, he nearly collided with a dark colored car, driving without lights, which sped out of the apartment complex.

None of the other neighbors had seen the red BMW or a suspicious dark colored vehicle. I left the apartment at 1:15 PM en route to the station to log the evidence in the case.

Detective Marc Hollis #268 Washington D.C. Police Department

PLAYER HANDOUT 5

CRIME SCENE REPORT FOR TRUNK

At 12:35 AM on August 26, I was called to the intersection of 39th and T streets on the report of a body being found in the trunk of the car. Officer Dunne showed me the body of the deceased and said the scene had not been disturbed. The car was a black 1993 Pontiac Bonneville. When I ran the vehicle's registration, it returned to an Edith Parsons, female Caucasian, age 32, 5' 3", 123 lbs, blonde hair and green eyes. Dispatch phoned the Parsons residence, but no one answered. The body was wrapped in a comforter bearing the logo of the New Orleans Saints.

Upon the removal of the comforter, the body was found to be that of a nude female which matched Ms. Parsons' description. No identification was found with the body. There was a small cut on the forehead. Bruises were also visible on the throat. The medical examiner was already on the scene. Based on the liver temperature of the body, he estimated that death had occurred between 9:00 and 11:00 PM. The hands were enclosed in paper bags to preserve any evidence until the autopsy occurred. The woman's employer, Senator Amberlee, was contacted by phone at 1:25 AM. He agreed to come to the morgue at 7:00 AM to identify the body.

After the body was removed to the morgue, the trunk carpeting was combed for additional evidence. A small amount of blood was observed near the right trunk hinge and a sample was taken for testing. Three black and gold threads were found, these were collected for testing.

The car was towed to the police impound yard where an evidence specialist will check it for fingerprints. The victim's body will be finger printed for comparison purposes once any debris has been collected from under her fingernails. The autopsy is scheduled for 7:30 AM on August 26, 1995. I left the crime scene at 4:20 AM en route to the station to log the evidence in the case.

Detective Marc Hollis #268 Washington D.C. Police Department

PLAYER HANDOUT 6

REGINALD CARMICHAEL III

Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 205 lbs.
Age: 26
Hair: blonde
Eyes: blue
Office Address:
The Pentagon
Office 3516
Washington, DC
(202)555-3616
Home Address:
2810 Potomac Landing
Apt. 4
Arlington, VA
(703)555-2187

Reginald Carmichael III was born Richard Carmichael in a lower middle class Boston neighborhood. He had a minor criminal record as a juvenile, but he straightened his life out when he received an athletic scholarship to Boston College. He was a solid, but not spectacular football player. After graduation, he changed his name and joined the navy. While in the navy, Reginald served as an attache for Rear Admiral Forrest Walker and was engaged to the Admiral's daughter, Tiffany. When Reginald's tour of duty was completed, he resigned and obtained a civilian job at the Pentagon. (The Admiral strongly influenced this decision). Reginald and Tiffany married, but were divorced six months later due to financial disputes.

Reginald was recruited by The Agency and underwent the Proteus treatment at alpha level. This was done 15 months ago in order to develop a reliable source within the Pentagon. He is known to have developed the ability to shape change into winged lion, snake, and shark forms. He can fly, breath water, and has formidable natural weaponry (teeth and claws). He should be considered armed and extremely dangerous.

He dated Ms. Parsons for six months, starting shortly after his divorce became final. He has a fine work record, with near perfect attendance.

PLAYER HANDOUT 7

SENATOR GEORGE ARTHUR AMBERLEE

Height: 5' 9"
Weight: 165 lbs.
Age: 62
Hair: gray
Eyes: brown
Office Address:
Senate Office Building
Suite 311
Washington, DC
(202)555-3245
Home Address:
35651 Sylvan Way
Arlington, VA
(703)555-6741 (Unlisted)

This republican senator has represented Louisiana for the past 17 years. Before running for office, he parlayed the family oil business into a billion dollar chemical company. He was elected to the Senate in his first run for public office. He has received generous financial support from business groups in his state. In addition, his formidable negotiating skills have enabled him to bring major federal projects to poorer areas of Louisiana, helping him to be re-elected for two more terms. He became the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee after the 1994 congressional elections. None of his expected challengers pose a serious threat to his chances of being re-elected in 1996.

He has two grown children: Susan, age 26, and Robert, age 35. He and his wife Mary have been married for 37 years.

The senator was badly beaten during a 1991 mugging in downtown Washington and suffered permanent nerve damage. He has been confined to a wheelchair since that time. His assailants were never caught. Since his injury, the senator has introduced a number of bills to fight crime and punish criminals.

PLAYER HANDOUT 8

EDITH MARIE PARSONS

Height: 5' 3"
Weight: 123 lbs.
Age: 32
Hair: blonde
Eyes: green
Office Address:
Senate Office Building
Suite 311
Washington, DC
(202)555-3245
Home Address:
2119 Whispering Springs
Apartment #1
Washington, DC
(202)555-6325

Ms. Parsons was a lawyer at a Louisiana law firm which did some work for senator Amberlee. She worked as a fund-raiser for the senator's last re-election campaign and was hired as an assistant two years ago. She was known for her ability to judge what concessions (or considerations) could be obtained from another senator, the president, or anyone else who wanted Senator Amberlee's support. (It is believed that she had undisclosed psychic talent in the area of empathy). She rapidly became the Senator's chief advisor.

She normally worked 16 hour days, and had almost no social life. She was not exceptional looking, but was above average. Her only known romantic involvement was with Reginald Carmichael.

PLAYER HANDOUT 9

CRIME LAB RESULTS

FOR PLAYER HANDOUT 2 (AUTOPSY)

No foreign materials were found in the fingernail scrapings

No evidence of sexual assault was found

No alcohol or drugs were detected in the body of the victim

The fingerprints of the body matched those on file for Ms. Parsons

The two black fibers matched those of the comforter (trunk)

FOR PLAYER HANDOUT 4 (APARTMENT)

The 31 black and gold fibers matched those of the comforter (trunk)

The food sample contained no drugs or toxic material

The drink sample contained no drugs or toxic material

Fingerprints on the can were Ms. Parsons'

Various partial and full fingerprints were taken from the interior of the apartment. Of these, all but seven were Ms. Parsons'

FOR PLAYER HANDOUT 5 (TRUNK)

The 3 black and gold fibers matched the comforter

The comforter was found to be the source of all the black/gold fibers

The blood on the trunk hinge was Ms. Parsons'

A complete handprint was discovered on the trunk of Ms. Parsons' vehicle - this was found to belong to Officer Jimmy Dunne (#1178)

Various partial and full fingerprints were taken from the interior and exterior of the vehicle. There was a complete handprint on the roof above the passenger side window which could not be identified. The remainder of the prints were found to belong to Ms. Parsons, Dr. Pradesh, and the police and medical personnel at the accident.

CHARACTER SUMMARY

CHRISTOPHER "CHRIS" WALTERS - PSYCHIC

Advantages: Contact (CI): You're on good terms with your medical school professors; Fame (CI): Graduated from medical school at 16; Law Enforcement (CI): You have a federal firearms permit; Additional Skill Adds (CII): +2 to medicine; Special Effects (CIII): Psychic Potential; Skill Bonus (CIII): +1 to bonus number for all psychic skills.

Compensations: Advantage Flaw (CI): Psychic Hypersensitivity; Advantage Flaw (CI): Psychic skills don't work if you are out of sight of your twin; Age (CI); Employed (CII): The Agency; Quirk (CIII): Workaholic; Sense of Duty (CIII): You would give up your own life to save the life of your twin.

CHRISTINA "CHRIS" WALTERS - PSYCHIC

Advantages: Contact (CI): You're on good terms with your medical school professors; Fame (CI): Graduated from medical school at 16; Law Enforcement (CI): You have a federal firearms permit; Additional Skill Adds (CII): +2 to medicine; Special Effects (CIII): Psychic Potential; Skill Bonus (CIII): +1 to bonus number for all psychic skills.

Compensations: Advantage Flaw (CI): Psychic Hypersensitivity; Advantage Flaw (CI): Psychic skills don't work if you are out of sight of your twin; Age (CI); Employed (CII): The Agency; Quirk (CIII): Workaholic; Sense of Duty (CIII): You would give up your own life to save the life of your twin.

DR. STEPHEN BENNET - PSYCHOLOGIST

Advantages: Additional Skill Adds (CI): +2 to Abnormal Psychology; Law Enforcement (CI): You have a federal firearms permit; Wealth (CI): You have outside income from testifying at trials as an expert witness; Additional Skill Adds (CII): +2 to Science (Psychology); Skill Bonus (CII): +1 to bonus number for Trick, Con, Charm, Persuasion and Taunt; Contacts (CIII): You've done some work for the FBI and made a few friends at the bureau.

Compensations: Debt (CI): You're still paying off the lawyer for your divorce; Enemy (CI): The families of some of the victims whose killers your testimony set free are out to get you; Infamy (CI): You have testified on behalf of several depraved killers; Employed (CII): The Agency; Quirk (CII): Dependency (chocolate); Quirk (CIII): Phobic (blood).

DAN JOHNSON - TEAM LEADER

Advantages: Equipment (CI): You own a large car; Law Enforcement (CI): You have a federal firearms permit; Skill Bonus (CI): +1 to bonus number for Fire Combat (pistol, rifle, or shotgun); Additional Skill Adds (CII): +2 to dodge; Trademark Specialization (CII): +3 to bonus number (Alien Abductions); Additional Skill Adds (CIII): +3 to Scholar: Extra-terrestrials.

Compensations: Enemy (CI):Aliens; Infamy (CI):People think you are crazy; C1:Poverty; Employed (CII):The Agency; Quirk: Mild Paranoia; Quirk (CIII); Dependency (dogs). Referee Note: His dog does not detect any aliens during this event, unless a mistaken identity sub-plot card is turned up.

JIM VAN ADAMS - DELTA AGENT

Advantages: Additional Skill Adds (CI): +1 to Climbing; Law Enforcement (CI): You have a federal firearms permit; Skill Bonus (CI):+1 to bonus number for acrobatics, climbing, stealth; Additional Skill Adds (CII): +2 to shapeshifting; Additional Skill Adds (CII): +2 to Dodge; Shapeshifting (CIII):Delta.

Compensations: Advantage Flaw (CI): Sterilization; Advantage Flaw (CI):Delta - Allergy I (perfume); Quirk (CI): Alien Instinct; Employment (CII): The Agency; Quirk (CII): Schizophrenia; Quirk (CIII): Dependency (Major - Chemical Antidote).

SUSAN TILLOTSON - BETA AGENT

Advantages: Additional Skill Adds (CI): +1 to Unarmed Combat; Law Enforcement (CI): You have a federal firearms permit; Additional Skill Adds (CII): +2 to shapeshifting; Additional Attribute Point (CIII): +1 Strength; Shapeshifting (CIII):Beta.

Compensations: Advantage Flaw (CI): Sterilization; Employment (CII): The Agency; Advantage Flaw (CIII): Beta - Cultural Allergy I (Cooked Meat), Cultural Allergy II (Kissing), Nutritional Requirement (Live Prey); Quirk (CIII): Alien Instinct; Quirk (CIII): Dependency (Major - Chemical Antidote).

Cybernetic Augmentation

By Lee Williams and Norm Fenlason

AUGMENTATION DURING PLAY

Cybernetic Augmentation can occur at two times in the course of play. If a PC has access to facilities and sufficient cash, she can be augmented in game context. However, the recovery is long, on the order of months and years. The second method, by selecting the Cyborg Escapee at character design time, is covered in another article.

QUALIFIED FACILITIES AND MEDICAL PERSONNEL

In order for a PC to become augmented during play, she must have access to an adequate facility. The surgery for most of the augmentations is extensive and requires major recovery facilities and monitoring. There is a risk that the patient may die. In addition to the facility requirements, installation requires qualified medical personnel. While the operation requires no minimum medical skill, the survival of the would-be cyborg depends upon the medical team operating upon it.

AUGMENTATION POINTS

The would-be cyborg has a number of augmentation points available equal to its Charisma and Empathy attributes times ten: (CHA+EMP) x 10. This is the total number of points available to the PC without severe negative effects. The absolute maximum number of augmentation points is 160 for humans. For other species the maximum number of points is ten times the sum of the species-maximum Charisma plus the species-maximum Empathy: (max CHA + max EMP) x 10. No augmentation beyond this maximum is possible, and represents a condition where the CHA and EMP attributes are 1 and 0, respectively. However, losses this severe result in a newborn cyborg losing identity with others of its species.

Any augmentation points not used during the current installation are lost. For example, the PC gives up 2 points of CHA and one of EMP to get 30 augmentation points. She selects augmentation costing 26 points. The other four points are lost and cannot be held until a future augmentation.

MONETARY COST

The monetary cost of each augmentation must be paid before installation. The costs listed in the device tables may change due to the Bargain skill or due to increased cost from better medical facilities. Or the costs may be lowered when obtained from a body shop. The costs for both normal availability and availability through an appropriate contact are given in the augmentation list. However, the GM always sets the final price.

DARKLING USER COSTS

Each augmentation has a DarkTek User cost associated with it. These are listed in the 1st edition DarkTek sourcebook as well as the 2nd edition Referee's Guide. Each augmentation will have one or more of the following user costs: Feed, Control, Detection, and Recharge. Most costs will be of the Control and Detection variety, but some recharge costs may be listed.

SELECTING THE AUGMENTATIONS

The would-be cyborg may not have enough cash or opportunity to purchase a complete system, however they can still purchase and install *components* of a system. If the installed augmentation requires another component to operate, the installed augmentation can remain installed and subject to DarkTek user costs, but inoperative. When the missing components are installed, the system can operate normally.

INSTALLING THE AUGMENTATIONS

After selecting the augmentations to install, a series of three Medical skill checks are made to determine the survival of the patient, the success of the installation, and the final effectiveness and quality of the augmentation.

STEP 1: BIOLOGIC COMPATIBILITY CHECK

The first task check is a Difficult: Medical check. Success indicates that the patient survived the procedure. Failure indicates that an emergency medical procedure was needed to insure the patient's survival, but the patient did survive. The following Installation success task check is raised by one difficulty level to Formidable: Medical. An Outstanding Success indicates that the installation actually agrees with the patient and the installation success test is made at one level improved difficulty, Average: Medical. Critical Failure indicates that a life threatening condition has interrupted the installation. The patient must immediately make a test of Difficult: CON. Success indicates the patient's constitution is hardy enough to withstand the surgery, but still makes the Installation test harder. Failure indicates that the installation has failed, while a Critical Failure indicates that the patient died under the knife.

STEP 2: INSTALLATION CHECK

Given a healthy patient, the surgical team installs the augmentation with another Difficult: Medical test for Installation success (unless modified by the survival test). A failure indicates a modifier against the following Quality test. The outcome of the quality test is modified one level to the worse. Success indicates that the installation was successful with no modification of the quality test. Critical Failure indicates that the installation was a total failure. The system is installed, but will not operate as planned. The actual effect of the failed installation is up to the referee. Inoperative or badly operating augmentations still suffer the listed DarkTek user costs. An Outstanding Success increases the quality of the installation determined in the next step.

STEP 3: QUALITY CHECK

The final test is a quality test. The medical team makes a task check versus the medical skill. The level attained effects the quality of the operation of the installation. The previous installation success may modify the final outcome, moving the attained level up or down. The referee ultimately sets the quality of the system and its final effectiveness.

The newborn cyborg must now recover from the difficult and extensive surgery. Sometimes the surgery procedures themselves can have negative effects on the patient. A test versus the patient's constitution must be made regardless of the outcome of the surgery. To recover from the surgery, the patient rolls an Average: CON test. Success indicates that the recovery is normal with no further effects. Failure indicates that the recovery time is doubled. Critical Failure indicates that the newborn cyborg's constitution has been permanently damaged, doubles the recovery time, and reduces the CON attribute by one. An Outstanding Success causes the recovery time to be halved.

SYSTEM QUALITY

The quality of the least effective or lowest component in a system determines the final quality of the system. For example, Johnny B. had a nano-controller installed but the quality was degraded. The nano-controller was to be used to process audio sounds received from a normal quality amplifier ear. While Johnny's ear may have improved listening to allow him to hear low-level sounds 200 meters away, the nano-controller causes him to suffer a one-level degradation to the listening task check. Alternately, the referee may determine Johnny's improved hearing has been reduced to a distance of 100 meters, depending on the nature of the level degradation. Like empathic skill results, the referee may maintain the final quality of a system, unknown to the PC.

RECOVERY

Given a normal installation with no recovery effects, the normal recovery time is one month per augmentation point installed. If a would-be cyborg installs 36 points of augmentation, it takes 36 months to recover. If the recovery check indicates, this time can be halved or doubled depending on outcome.

EFFECTS OF INSTALLATION

There are two effects due to installation: the physical effects of having exposed and visible hardware, and the impact to the personality of the newborn cyborg.

The rare nature of augmented humans causes difficulty in personal interactions with strangers. Cyborgs will be treated as freaks causing these charisma-based tasks to suffer a difficulty modifier based on the Profile of exposed augmentation. All charisma-based task checks suffer a -1 difficulty modifier for each visible, low-profile system. For each visible high-profile augmentation, the cyborg suffers a -2 difficulty modifier. For augmentation with a None listed in the profile, no modifiers are applied since these systems are always hidden from view.

Additionally, the cyborg's personality is changed as a result of the installation of too much augmentation. If the cyborg has more augmentation points installed than the sum of his original EMP plus CHA times 10, all task checks involving these attributes are modified by -1 per additional 10 augmentation points installed. The original CHA and EMP scores should be recorded for comparison. See Alice's example for more details.

When additional task difficulty modifiers are received as a result of excess spending, the additional difficulty levels also

EXAMPLE – ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANY MORE

Alice has the following statistics:

Strength:	3	Education:	5
Constitution:	5	Charisma:	4
Agility:	8	Empathy:	2
Intelligence:	3	Initiative:	1

Alice decides that in order to confront the Dark Minions on their terms she needs augmentation. She has access to funding from her Empathic cell. They send her to a secret facility for augmentation. The staff has a combined Medical skill of 16.

Alice has a base of (4+2) x10=60 augmentation points to spend on cybernetics. She is concerned about the medical procedures and only takes 18 augmentation points. This costs her two attribute points, which she takes from EMP, giving her an EMP attribute value of zero.

Later, Alice is desperate for another weapon against the dark minions. After having a couple of teammates shredded right in front of her, she decides on extended augmentation. She has the contacts and the cash, and decides to spend 80 points. She reduces her CHA to 1 by spending 30 points. The other 50 points brings the total that Alice has spent to 98 points. Alice survives her surgeries and recovers normally. However, she has one difficulty factor for each 10 points above her originally 60 points. This gives Alice a -4 difficulty factor to all communications and other CHA-based skills. Alice's own mother would have a hard time asking Alice how her day was going. Alice's empathic cell has succeeded in robbing another victim of their humanity.

apply to the cyborg's native spoken and written language. Once the number of difficulty levels exceeds the Impossible level, the cyborg has become completely unintelligible and cannot communicate effectively at all. To human friends, their once vibrant companion has become a machine whose motivations are indecipherable.

LIFE THREATENING HEALTH EPISODE

A life-threatening episode occurs whenever an attribute reaches below the species minimum (e.g. 1 for humans). (Within the context of Augmentation, this check only applies to the CON attribute. The EMP and CHA attribute changes are covered under the installation procedures.) To determine the effects of the life-threatening crisis, the player rolls 2d6 for an 8+. If an 8 or above is rolled, the attribute returns to a 1 and the crisis is avoided. If the player fails the roll, the PC suffers a health crisis. The attribute is returned to 1, but the character is confined to a wheelchair, bed, or other ambulatory device. The character may not move about unaided until treated for the condition. The character has three options: physical therapy, psychic healing, and augmentation. Physical therapy for 2d10 months will overcome confinement, but the character will probably need a cane. Psychic Healing will also remove the confinement the same as physical therapy. Augmentation that improves the challenged attribute above 1 also removes the confinement. When treated through augmentation, the PC needs no cane or other assistance to move about.

TAKING DAMAGE

Systems that replace body parts take damage the same as the original body part. Systems that replace portions of a body location are rolled to see if the damage applies to the installed system. When there are multiple systems in a body location, the affected system is randomly determined. Cybernetic replacement systems have the same damage allocation as the original body part, unless otherwise stated.

WOUND EFFECTS

Wounds to a body location containing a cybernetic enhancement, whether the system is damaged or not, affect the cybernetic system's performance. Every level above Scratch causes an increased difficulty level when attempting to use the system. This shift is added to all attempts to use the system: Easy becomes Average, Average becomes Difficult, etc. Tasks using the system that were once automatic become checked at the Easy level. Once the body location moves to the Critical wound state, the system no longer operates. For armored systems, wounds to the Serious level cause the armor value to be halved and rounded down. At the Critical level, armor systems no longer provide protection at that body location. An additional assessed damage-level to a system already at the Critical level destroys the system.

MAINTENANCE

Normally cybernetic systems need to be performance tuned every 6 months. Failure to maintain a system causes a difficulty shift in operation and performance. This shift is determined by the GM and may not be known to the player. The appropriate skill is required to maintain a specific system. Should the system miss two maintenance cycles, a year, there is a potential for a permanent difficulty modifier, as a form of damage, levied until the system is repaired. The GM may or may not notify the PC of the system's degradation.

REPAIR

Only persons with the appropriate skill can repair cybernetic systems. Some systems also require specific facilities, operating rooms, nano-laboratories, tissue cloning setups, micro-lasers, etc. The GM makes the requirement for these facilities. Each difficulty level levied on the damaged system requires a successful difficult-test versus the appropriate skill and a week per damage level to recover. An Outstanding Success either removes two damage levels, or halves the recovery time. A Critical Failure either further damages the system, or doubles recovery time or both subject to the GM. If the damaged system is at the Critical level, this Critical Failure renders that system useless.

AUGMENTATIONS

System	Location	Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Controller/Processor	Head	4	Detection: 10; Control: 1	None	$155K + $75K per level (-/-)
Computer Implants	Head	5	Detection: 20; Control: 2	None to Low	$2,220K + $125K per ROM (-/-)
Data Storage	Head	5	Detection: 5; Control: 1	None to Low	$85K + $15,500 per level (-/-)

CONTROLLER/PROCESSOR

SK Research Special Purpose Controller, Model 720Y through Model 1060F. The system nano-controller is a single-purpose computer controller usually dedicated to a single cybernetic system. An additional system may be controlled for each level installed.

COMPUTER IMPLANTS

Auslander Dynamics Cerebral Computer Chassis (3C). It is possible to install a small computer system into the body. The system consists of several tiny interconnected modules, as a single implant would be too large. Output from the implant is accessed by either an Eyeball Display, a speaker implant in the ear, or direct brain interface if the user has a Neural Socket. The functions of a Computer Implant can include data storage and retrieval, direct access to other computers, and fuller analysis of data from other implants (e.g. Infra red Eyes, High Frequency Ears etc.). The implant can also be optimized for use in a particular situation by the use of ROM chips, which are pre-programmed with data on a certain topic. Only one ROM chip at a time can be used, and they require the use of a Neural Socket. Users who have the Computer Empathy skill may not have an implanted computer, although they can access systems using Neural Sockets.

DATA STORAGE

Digimax Storage Systems, PQ3200 Nano-Storage Device. The data storage is similar to a normal computer implant in that it allows data to be stored in the user's head. Unlike the standard computer implant, the user has no access to the data through internal means, and the output is usually encoded with keys to which the user does not have access. The data storage module includes an external jack through which only the stored data can be accessed. Storage is rated in Gigabytes of data.

SENSORS, ACTIVE

System	Location	Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Active Infra Red	Eyes	4	None	Low	$250K (-/-)
Active Ultraviolet	Eyes	4	None	Low	$250K (-/-)
Active Sonar	Head	8	None	High	$370K; w/integrated controller $520K (-/-)
Active Radar	Head	10	None	High	$550K (-/-)

ACTIVE INFRA RED

Quantalux SV7300 Active IR Receiver. The active IR system allows IR vision at up to 60 metres. The eye glows red, and others with IR-enabled vision can see the user's beams and its reflections.

ACTIVE ULTRAVIOLET

Quantalux SV7200 Active UV Receiver. Similarly to the active IR system, the active UV system allows UV vision at up to 60 metres. The eye glows a pale blue, and others with UV-enabled vision can see the user's beams and its reflections.

ACTIVE SONAR

Maximus Avionics Personal Sonar System. Like a bat's range finder or a dolphins imaging system, the active sonar enhancement uses sound to get information from the environment. The active sonar without a nano-controller installed can perform range-finding only. With a controller installed, the sonar can be used to map the surroundings in real time. This allows the user to *see* using sonar only. Since two receivers are needed, the installation is high profile.

ACTIVE RADAR

Maximus Avionics Imaging Radar System. Similar to the active sonar enhancement, the active radar sensor provides information from the environment, but uses radio frequency (RF) instead of sound. The active radar enhancement operates in the 30-60 GHz RF range and is susceptible to RF noise in that range. An included nano-controller is required to process the radar returns. However, a clear mapping of the immediate surroundings is possible with very accurate range information to about 1000 meters.

SENSORS, PASSIVE

System	Location	Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Telescopic Vision	Eyes	2	None	Low to High	$172K plus $85K per level (-/-)
Passive Infra Red	Eyes	3	None	None	$182K (-/-)
Video Record/Playback	Eye	3	None	Low	$500K (-/-)
Amplifier Ear	Ears	3	None	None	$135K (-/-)
External CyberEar Antenna	Head	4	None	Low	$35K (-/-)
Receiver Ear	Ears	2	None	None	$25K (-/-)
Sound Dampener Ear	Ears	4	None	None	$92K (-/-)
Low Frequency Ear	Ears	3	None	None	$220K (-/-)
High Frequency Ear	Ears	4	Low	Low	$280K (-/-)
Recording Ear	Ears	2	None	None	$32K (-/-)
Eye-Ear Combination	Head	8	Control: 1	High	$650K + cost of other options (-/-)
Touch Enhancement	Hands	12	Detection: 10	None	$1,200K (-/-)

TELESCOPIC VISION

KHI-Kodak GoldenI. Allows magnification of distant objects. Zoom is controlled by squinting. Installation includes 40X magnification per level installed. However, above 200X, the installation becomes *high profile*.

PASSIVE INFRA RED

KHI-Kodak NightOwl. Allows I.R. vision up to 30 meters but may blank out in rain or falling snow.

VIDEO RECORD/PLAYBACK

Tojicorp Mini-Kapture Video Recording Eye. A personal version of the popular Kapture II camera, the cybereye can hold thirty minutes of film on a micro-cassette which is located in the left shoulder and removed by opening a small door (with an electronic lock). For an extra $200,000, the cybereye is shielded from metal detectors though an x-ray will still pick it out.

AMPLIFIER EAR

Maximus Avionics, Mk IIa Aural Amplifier. Amplifies sounds clearly at up to 100 meters distance.

EXTERNAL CYBEREAR ANTENNA

AMS Big Ear External Antenna. The Big Ear Antenna is an external antenna that extends the range of the internal Amplifier ear. An optional jack for the Amplifier Ear allows connection to the big ear antenna. Profile rating is for the jack that connects to the Amplifier Ear. The Big Ear extends the range of detectable sounds to 1000 meters and requires an installed amplifier ear.

RECEIVER EAR

Maximus Avionics Receiver Ear. The receiver ear is an implanted speaker, used with other systems, such as a communicator.

SOUND DAMPENER EAR

Quantalux NF107 Noise Filtration System. The sound dampener ear allows a specific sound or voice to be detected in a noisy situation. The user can also dampen *all* sounds allowing him to work in noisy environments without negative difficulty modifiers due to noise.

LOW FREQUENCY EAR

Quantalux LF100 Low Frequency Aural Receiver. The low frequency ear allows subsonic vibrations to be detected. If two ears are installed, or only one and a sound-processing computer is installed, the direction can also be determined.

HIGH FREQUENCY EAR

Quantalux HF210 High Frequency Aural Receiver. Allows hearing of extremely high frequency sounds (above 20kHz) such as bat calls, dog whistles etc. The high frequency receiver operates the same as the low frequency model.

RECORDING EAR

Digimax Akkutrak RT8050. The recording ear allows up to 60 minutes of sound to be digitally recorded for later playback through either a receiver ear or through an external jack.

EYE-EAR COMBINATION

Quantalux Integrated Head Installation. This is an obviously synthetic alteration replacing both the eye and ear on one side of the subject's head. No attempt at cosmetic disguise is possible. Up to two high-profile enhancements for the eyes or ears can be installed. For example, both options can be either for the eye or the ear, or one for each of them.

TOUCH ENHANCEMENT

FiberAge Synthetics MicroTouch Sensory Enhancement System. Neural amplifiers are attached to the nerve paths for a specified body part (usually the hands). This allows the user to detect small micro-variations on surfaces, surface temperatures, friction, and the presence of moisture. (For example: warmth and fingerprints to determine who held an object and when.) The Touch Enhancement improves agility-based skill task difficulty for micro-tasks – dexterous activities like threading a needle, etc. Costs are given per hand.

INPUT/OUTPUT

System	Location	Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Eyeball Display	Eyes	2	None	None	$198K (-/-)
Holographic Eyeball Display/Readout	Eyes	3	None	Low	$500K (-/-)
Nerve Input Editor	Head	6	Detection: 5; Control: 2	None	$800K + $450K per level installed (-/-)
Neural Socket (Jack)	Head	3	Control: 1	Low	$1,300K (-/-)
Nano-Jack	Head	4	Control: 1	Low	$1,100K (-/-)
Target Link	Eyes	6	Control: 1	None	$890K (-/-)
TargetLink	Eyes	8	Control: 3	None	$2,750K (-/-)
Neural Learning Enhancement	Head	8	Control: 2	None	$2,750K + $950K per level installed (-/-)
Synaptic Memory Interface	Head	10	Control: 3	None	$3,010K + $1,100K per level installed (-/-)
Empathic Computer Interface	Head	26	Detection 100, 1000; Control: 5	Low	$5,500K (-/-)

* when used

EYEBALL DISPLAY

Quantalux IDX40. The eyeball display allows projection of data directly onto the retina, similar to heads-up displays in aircraft. Data can be displayed on another video device via an external jack.

HOLOGRAPHIC EYEBALL DISPLAY/READOUT

KHI-Kodak Holovision. The holographic eyeball display is similar to the eyeball display except that the data readouts are presented in a 3d form. The unit also acts as a projector allowing recorded images to be projected holographically.

NERVE INPUT EDITOR

DK Research Nerve Cancellation System. The NCS edits out a selected range of nerve inputs, including pain. The unit is specialized for a specific range of nerve inputs with another level installed for each additional range. Originally developed to allow terminal patients relief from chronic pain, the NCS has received renewed interest from the military.

NEURAL SOCKET (JACK)

Auslander Dynamics Neural Socket. This is a socket, usually mounted in the temple or for cosmetic reasons at the base of the neck, and is used to establish a direct brain to computer interface. When "jacked in" to equipment, all tasks using the equipment are reduced by one Difficulty level. When jacked-in to mainframe memory banks, Education is increased by three points. Only one may be fitted.

NANO-JACK

Digimax NJAX. The nano-jack is similar to the neural socket but provides access to an internal nano-controller. It, too, is usually mounted in the temple or at the base of the neck, but only provides an interface to internal computers and not a direct brain interface.

TARGET LINK

Auslander Dynamics Target Link. The target link displays targeting data for weapons which are fitted with an Electronic SmartSight. Must be used in conjunction with a Neural Socket, to which, the Electronic SmartSight is connected by a thin fiber optic cable. A *pipper* is displayed showing where the weapon is currently being aimed.

Auslander Dynamics Dead Eye Personal Target Acquisition System. The Dead Eye consists of a Target Link, a dedicated nano-controller, a neural socket, and a SmartSight. The system can be integrated to any weapon to which the SmartSight is fit. All firing tasks are one difficulty level easier when the Dead Eye is operating. In addition to a targeting pipper, a target's movement vector in 3d is displayed with numerical speed readouts, as well as range information.

NEURAL LEARNING ENHANCEMENT

FirstMental Learning Enhancement Kit. The neural learning enhancement is a high-speed, special-purpose nano-computer programmed for advanced logic techniques. The speed of the computer and the programmed logic provide the user a +1 to INT for each level installed. However, normal species maximums cannot be exceeded (e.g. human INT 10). This system must be *activated*. Once activated, the DarkTek user costs are also active. Originally designed to boost mentally challenged workers for more complex tasks, the Kit is being widely used in industrial espionage to boost a covert operative's ability to steal trade secrets.

SYNAPTIC MEMORY INTERFACE

FirstMental Synaptic Memory Enhancement Kit. The synaptic memory interface is a high-speed, special-purpose nano-computer programmed to access memory locations within the brain. This provides eidetic recall (photographic memory) and an increased ability to learn. The synaptic memory interface increases the Education attribute by one per level of device installed. However, normal species maximums cannot be exceeded (human: 10).

EMPATHIC COMPUTER INTERFACE

Auslander Dynamics Special Purpose Interface. The empathic computer interface provides an interface between machines (including bio-machines) and the human brain through empathic abilities. The physical components of the interface consist of a jack in the head similar to the Neural Socket and a biological construct that is wrapped around the pineal gland in the brain. The socket is connected to the construct to allow external access. The user must have an EMP 1+ to use the empathic computer interface. Any Computer Empathy skill level is reduced to 0 once this device is installed and no more skill levels can be taken. The interface provides

the user access to a computer using the Computer Empathy skill at 1 per level installed. This interface superceding the Computer Empathy skill. The empathic computer interface also provides an interface to DarkTek bio-computers whose nature is immediately known to the user. The full nature of the installed biological construct is not known. This installation is really DarkTek and should be relatively hard to locate.

SUBSYSTEMS

System	Location	Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Chronometer	Head	1	None	None	$35K (-/-)
Inertial Navigation System	Head	3	None	None	$1KK (-/-)
Laser Rangefinder	Eyes	4	None	High	$400K (-/-)
Electronic SmartSight	External	4	None	N/A	$950K (-/-)
Vocal Modulator	Head	4	None	None	$350K (-/-)
Vocal Amplifier	Head	2	None	Low	$78K (-/-)
Vocal Emulator	Head	9	None	None	$1,400K (-/-)
Vocal Analyzer	Head	6	None	None	$1,100K (-/-)
Gill Implants	Chest	8	None	Low	$950K (-/-)
Filter Lungs	Chest	6	None	Low	$890K (-/-)
Radio Communicator	Chest	4	None	None	$275K (-/-)
Sonic Dampers	Head	4	None	High	$445K (-/-)

CHRONOMETER

Maximus Avionics Clock Display Unit. The CDU is a date and time clock with a stopwatch function. It can be used as a programmable timer, but for conscious access to the date/time readouts, the CDU requires an Eyeball Display.

INERTIAL NAVIGATION SYSTEM

Maximus Avionics Inertial Measurement Unit. The IMU is a miniature inertial navigation and positioning system. An eyeball display must be installed to use this item. It displays current heading, and also the bearing of up to five previously set positions. There is also a simpler version, which generates varying pitches of sound to guide the user.

LASER RANGEFINDER

Quantalux SV8200 Laser Rangefinder. Accurate to within 1% up to 5000 meters but must be used with an Eyeball Display. Counts as high profile due to size.

ELECTRONIC SMARTSIGHT

Auslander Dynamics Nanotronic SmartSight. This device is a sighting system for weapons that can be plugged into a neural socket. The SmartSight increases the Short Range band of a weapon by 20 meters when carrying out Aimed shots. It also reduces Task Difficulty to hit by one level at Extreme range with Aimed shots. In addition, the system allows firing at night using its built-in light amplification and image enhancement capabilities, though the Range bonus is not applied to unaimed fire in this case. SmartSights are as yet too big to be fitted to weapons with a Bulk of 3 or less. The current model weighs about 500 grams. Maximum visibility range is 500 meters at night.

VOCAL MODULATOR

TWSF Media Vocal Enhancement. The vocal modulator increases the recipient's vocal range by 1 octave per level installed. Usually installed in entertainers.

VOCAL AMPLIFIER

AMS Public Voice Amplifier. Serves to amplify the recipient's voice the same as a PA system. Users with a vocal amplifier installed have an odd bulge in their throat where the amplifier is installed.

VOCAL EMULATOR

DK Research Voice-Pattern Emulator. The vocal emulator changes the voice pattern using a preprogrammed parametric voice imprint set. The quality of the voice data determine the quality of the match. The emulator can be linked to a vocal analyzer to perform real-time vocal emulations. DK Research was under contract to supply a voice activation system for combat pilots to enable control functions. The DK Research approach avoided the voice learning problem by altering each pilot's voice to one the receiver's understand. DK Research is selling this system to espionage organizations to defeat voice recognition systems.

VOCAL ANALYZER

DK Research Voice-Spectrum Analyzer. The vocal analyzer analyzes voice patterns heard through a required amplifier ear implant. Sounds and voices can be catalogued for use in analysis. Voices can be compared to the catalogue in real-time for identification. Small stress-induced changes in a voice can also be detected and analyzed for truthfulness. Onboard storage provides patterns for 4 voices. Each dedicated additional nano-controller level adds four more voices.

GILL IMPLANTS

AMS Human-Aquatic Adaptation. Gill implants allow the user to extract oxygen from water. They require enlargement of the thoracic cavity with the gills clearly visible on the sides of the user's neck.

FILTER LUNGS

AMS Toxin Rejection System. Filters and air scrubbers are implanted in the air passages, allowing the user to breathe tainted air without ill effects. Whilst in use, the filters have to be cleaned regularly. This is done by simply blowing the nose, thus forcing the toxins out. The filters are not actually in the lung but the name has stuck.

RADIO COMMUNICATOR

Maximus Avionics Nano Communicator. A tiny radio transmitter/receiver is mounted in the abdomen. It has a microphone that is attached to the larynx, and it must be used in conjunction with a Receiver Ear. The range is approximately 3000 meters.

SONIC DAMPERS

DK Research Sonic Damper. The sonic damper is actually an active noise cancellation system. Using an expert system located on an embedded nano-controller, the sonic Damper detects and measures noises emitting in the local area. Signal processors then produce sonic fields, which exactly cancel noises originating in the immediate area. The installation appears externally the same as the high-frequency receiver ear. The net effect is to improve Stealth task checks by 1 difficulty level.

KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
One-liner Chip	Head	2	None	None	$2,300K (-/-)
MultiSoft Socket	Head	4	Detection: 100; Control: 1	High	$1,700K (-/-)
WOROM Socket	Head	8	Detection: 100; ontrol: 1	High	$8,300K + $2,300K per WOROM chip (-/-)
Subject ROMs	Existing Socket	6	None	N/A	$500K per subject skill level (-/-)

ONE-LINER CHIP

TWSF Media Quip Chip. Once the personality is destroyed from too much augmentation, communication with others is significantly diminished. The one-liner chip can be used to select from a list of responses and come-backs to emulate normal communication. “I’ll be back.” This chip is an addition to an already installed neural computer, which is required.

MULTISOFT SOCKET

FirstMental Multisoft Socket. This is an experimental device designed to increase the capacity of a neural socket. It holds up to four ROM chips, any of which can be instantly accessed by the user at will. Although only one ROM chip can be accessed at a time, seconds are saved by not needing to unplug one chip and find another, which may be useful in high-risk situations. The MultiSoft Socket resembles the cylinder of a revolver and fits any standard Neural Jack (required). It should be noted that the MultiSoft device is still under testing by FirstMental who has not declared the side effects with the Federal Drug Commission, so there may be unforeseen usage effects. FirstMental is proposing the device to store multiple personality information for common access by all the partitioned personalities of a multiple-personality disorder (MPD) patient. FirstMental believes this will break down the barriers between the personalities and merge them into a composite.

WOROM SOCKET

Auslander Dynamics Write-Once ROM Socket. The WOROM socket is an extension to the MultiSoft Socket that allows recording of mental state and data information. The WOROM Socket holds a single-chip socket that holds a special WOROM chip. Up to 32 hours of a user’s mental information can be stored on a single WOROM chip. The WOROM chip can then be installed on another user’s WOROM or MultiSoft socket and accessed directly. Side effects to date include warping of the user’s personality when playing another user’s WOROM chip. Auslander Dynamics defends this side effect claiming that the system allows psychologists to more fully understand the workings of deranged minds.

SUBJECT ROMS

Special Subject ROM. Subject-oriented ROMs have been produced by a number of different firms. These cover many subjects and at varying levels of expertise. The monetary costs given are nominal and should be changed by the referee to reflect availability and play balance.

STRUCTURAL

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Strength Enhancement	Arms, Legs, and Body	3 per level	Detection: 10	Low	$1,750K + $500K per level installed (-/-)
Agility Enhancement	Arms, Legs, and Body	4 per level	Detection: 10; Control: 1	None	$2,150K + $800K per level installed (-/-)
Skeletal Enhancement	Arms, Legs, and Chest	22	Detection: 10	Low	$1KK + $180K per level installed (-/-)
Cybertorso	Chest	19	Detection: 10; Control 1	High	$1,780K + $150K per level installed (-/-)
Cyberhead	Head	15	Detection: 10; Control 4	High	$850K + cost of installed options (-/-)
Trunk Storage	Chest	1	None	None	$55K (-/-)
Leg Storage	Leg	2	None	None	$35K (-/-)
Small Storage	Arm, Leg, or Chest	1	None	None	$25K (-/-)

STRENGTH ENHANCEMENT

FiberAge Synthetics Muscle Augmentation. Strength can be enhanced to species maximum through the installation of special electronic stimulators, which cause the muscles to contract past the genetic failsafe point achieved by normal electro-chemical stimulation. The stimulators are coupled with special synthetic reinforcement to muscle attachment points. The installation is completed with special augmentation muscle fibers that respond to the electronic stimulators. The installation has a low profile due to the increase to the user's bulk. The installation provides an increase to STR of +1 per level installed to the species maximum (humans: 10).

AGILITY ENHANCEMENT

FiberAge Synthetics Nerve Transmission Enhancement. Special nerve sheathes are implanted that release special neurochemicals much more quickly and conduct the electro-chemical stimulation impulses much faster. This results in faster response in eye-hand coordination and increases AGL by +1 per level installed up to two times the species maximum (humans: 20). For each point above the normal species maximum, the user gets a +1 to base movement rates.

SKELETAL ENHANCEMENT

Zeiss-Krupp 99G Steel Skeletal Enhancement. Plates, bone sheaths, reinforced joints, and other structural enhancements to the natural skeleton make up a skeletal enhancement. As a framework for strength additions, a skeletal enhancement is similar to the cybertorso. The 99G provides its user with a maximum Strength of species maximum plus 80% (humans: 18), overriding its species maximum to allow other augmentations. The enhancement provides its user with base hit points of 40 to the chest and 20 to the arms and legs plus three hit points to each body location per level installed. A skeletal enhancement does not provide armor to a body location as the cybertorso does.

CYBERTORSO

Tojicorp Dragon Three Cybertorso Prototype. This cybertorso is still in the testing stages and is used by the Japanese Internal Defense Cadre cyberninjas. Augmented Strength attribute are purchased in levels, just like a cyberlimb, with a maximum of 150% species maximum (humans: 15). The user operates at a Strength attribute rating equal to the lowest Strength rating of the cybertorso and the limbs. As long as a user has all four limbs and torso at an equal strength level, he operates with an attribute rating equal to that number. The Dragon has 40 hits with an additional 3 hits per level. It has an effective armor protection of 2 (with a plus 1 per 3 installed levels). The cybertorsos operate with a faint mechanical whirring as the tiny (but powerful) electric motors crank the parts around. The cyberninjas use an active noise cancellation system to counter this noise. An ANCS is extra and not included in the base price.

CYBERHEAD

Tojicorp Dragon One Cyberhead Prototype Extension. The cyberthead is still in the testing stages and is part of the ensemble for the Japanese Internal Defense Cadre cyberninja. The cyberhead is an all-metal construction providing a casing for additional sensory augmentations. It has special installations for up to 4 separate nano-controllers or computer implants. It can also be fitted with the face plates required for the Doppelganger head facial disguise system. The design of this system was heavily influenced by Dark forces and is subject to a large Control DarkTek user cost.

TRUNK STORAGE

AMS Internal Storage Unit, Torso. This implant provides the recipient with an internal biological storage space. The available volume is equal to $0.1m^3$ per level installed to a maximum of $0.5\ m^3$. The container uses special stealth technology to deceive normal metal detectors but not x-ray machines.

LEG STORAGE

AMS Internal Storage Unit, Leg. The special cavity is similar to the trunk storage, but containing less volume. A Bulk 1 weapon can be hidden in special biological compartments. Metal items are shielded from detectors.

SMALL STORAGE

AMS Internal Storage Unit, Small. The same as the Leg Storage but can only hold a Bulk 0 weapon, small items of papers.

PERIPHERALS

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Power Jaw	Head	3	None	High	$125K (-/-)
Jaws Of Death	Head	4	None	High	$175K (-/-)
Chainsaw Hand	Arm	2	None	High	$75K (-/-)
Grapple Hand	Hand	4	None	High	$180K (-/-)
Hand Socket	Arm	2	None	Low	$150K (-/-)
Utility Arm	Arm	6	None	High; storage compartment: None	$223K (-/-)
Power Legs	Leg	9	None	High	$320K w/cybertorso; $550K w/o cybertorso (-/-)
Speed Legs	Leg	11	None	High	$290K w/cybertorso; $380K w/o cybertorso (-/-)
Leg Cannon	Leg	14	None	Low	$870K (-/-)
Implanted Stunner	Arm	10	Detection: 50; Control: 2	Low	$160K (-/-)
Enhanced Prosthetic Limb	Arm, Leg	8	None	Low	$200K + $20K per level installed (-/-)
Enhanced Prosthetic Limb	Arm, Leg	9	None	High	$350K + $50K per level installed (-/-)

POWER JAW

Schlaeor Power Jaw. This involves the complete replacement of both the upper and lower jaws and teeth with a synthetic material. Strength is mechanically enhanced which allows the user to bite through a variety of materials, and inflict 1 D6 damage if used to bite a hostile character.

JAWS OF DEATH

Schlaeor Jaws of Death. This is a hardware option consisting of oversized jaws with enlarged teeth which allows the user to make armed melee attacks in the same way as predatory animals. Jaws of Death inflict 2D6 damage. Unfortunately, having this peripheral installed causes an automatic increase of one level difficulty for all Charisma-based checks.

CHAINSAW HAND

AMS Chainsaw Manipulate. A 30cm chainsaw replaces the hand. In melee combat it causes 2D6 + STR damage.

GRAPPLE HAND

Auslander Dynamics Grapple Hand. The grapple hand is connected to the arm by 50 meters of fine but very strong cable, and can be fired 20 meters in any direction. The cable is rated up to 200 kilos and can be reeled in or out at will.

Weapon : Grapple Hand						--- Recoil ---		
Ammo	ROF	Damage	Pen	Bulk	Mag	SS	Burst	Range
Grapple	SS	1	Nil	1	1i	4	–	20

HAND SOCKET

Auslander Dynamics Hand Socket. The hand socket allows the use of several different, interchangeable, artificial hands. While socket hands can be permanently fitted to the user's arm, the hand socket allows the user to change hands in one combat round. If a user has a hand fitted without a socket, then that hand is permanently attached. Socket hands are listed separately – **not all artificial hands are socket hands!**

UTILITY ARM

AMS General Purpose Utility Arm. The utility arm replaces the entire arm. The arm confers an Agility penalty of -1, and a Strength bonus of plus two. The utility arm is equipped with an integral hand socket and has a small, built-in and concealed storage compartment.

POWER LEGS

Tojicorp T-Rex PowerLeg Model 2012. The power legs allow tasks to be carried out as if the user's Strength was 16, as long as the task uses only the legs. They also allow a standing leap of 4 meters or a drop of 8 meters without injury. A person with Power Legs cannot run, but can trot. If used to kick in melee, the power legs have a Hit Modifier of +2 and do double the user's Unarmed Melee damage. This model of power leg mates to the Tojicorp Cybertorso. If installed without the cybertorso, the user must install additional structure to replace the hips. Costs are given for with and without the cybertorso.

SPEED LEGS

Tojicorp Gazelle SpeedLeg. The speed legs increase the user's running speed from 30 metres per turn to 50. Similar to the T-Rex PowerLeg, the user requires additional structure if installed without the cybertorso.

LEG CANNON

MilTech Ltd. Covert Leg Cannon. There are two variants of this bizarre device. One has the weapon installed in the lower leg and shoots through the heel. The second is installed in the upper leg and shoots through the kneecap. Both hold a magazine of four 12-guage, auto-loaded rounds.

Weapon: Leg Cannon						--- Recoil ---		
Ammo	ROF	Damage	Pen	Bulk	Mag	SS	Burst	Range
12-guage	SA	4	2-3-Nil	5	4	7	––	6
Short	SA	9	Nil					
Medium	5x10	1	Nil					

IMPLANTED STUNNER

ArnoldCorp IPSS6. An implanted weapon, the IPSS6 is a variant of the human/ET constructed Sonic Stunner. This weapon is extremely dangerous (since it incorporates some DarkTek) and has other, unpredictable properties. It is in all other ways identical to the Sonic Stunner, and may be implanted in a cyberlimb or natural one.

ENHANCED PROSTHETIC LIMB

CyberGene LA22 Enhanced Prosthetic. Available for any limb, the LA22 is the best cyberlimb manufactured anywhere in the United States which is incredible since CyberGene only dabbles in cybertech research. Each limb must be purchased separately, and then in STR ratings with each rating adding +1 to the user's Strength attribute (with a maximum of +12) for use with that limb only. Even then, unless the user has had his entire skeletal and muscular system replaced (or a cybertorso) he won't be able to lift more than his basic strength will allow. (Just because you have super strength in one limb doesn't mean your bones can stand up to lifting super human weights.) The LA22 has a base hit point rating of 20 points, with each additional installed level adding 2 hits. The LA22 also has an effective armor protection of AV1 (plus 1 per 3 installed levels).

Zeiss-Krupp XD44A Hydraulically Boosted Cyberlimb. More powerful than the CyberGene LA22, the Z-K limb uses an advanced hydraulic system that can achieve a strength twice that of the LA22 (+24 limit). All of the rules of the LA22 apply to the XD44A. The XD44A has the same armor value and hits as the CyberGene LA22.

SOCKET HANDS

Socket Hands

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Hardfist	Socket Hand	2	None	Low	$15K (-/-)
Knuckle Blades	Socket Hand	3	None	None	$21K (-/-)
Pistol Hand	Socket Hand	8	None	Low	$21K (-/-)
Pistol Hand	Socket Hand	10	None	None	$45K (-/-)
Power Hand	Socket Hand	3	None	High	$17K (-/-)
Torque Hand	Socket Hand	3	None	High	$25K (-/-)
Surveillance Hand	Socket Hand	6	None	Low	$50K (-/-)

HARDFIST

Schlaeor HardFist Mk X1. The HardFist inflicts double damage in melee due to heavy reinforcement of bone structure. There is a +1 difficulty level penalty (Average becomes Difficult) to Agility-based tasks when using this hand normally.

KNUCKLE BLADES

AMS Tiger Claw Manipulate. Four 10cm blades are fitted into sheaths on the back of the hand. They are fully retractable. Melee damage is 1D6 plus half Strength. There is a +1 difficulty level penalty (Average becomes Difficult) to Agility-based tasks when using this hand normally. The blades are fully encased in the arm, artificial or natural. The skin on the hand heals over the holes from which the blades extend causing 1 point of damage to the arm every time they are extended.

PISTOL HANDS

MilTech Ltd. Gun Hand. An artificial hand conceals a 9mm five shot pistol. The used cartridge cases are kept within the hand for later disposal. The index finger is not fully flexible. The hand suffers a +2 difficulty level penalty (Average becomes Formidable) to Agility-based tasks when using this hand normally.

Weapon : Pistol Hand		Recoil						
Ammo	ROF	Damage	Pen	Bulk	Mag	SS	Burst	Range
9mm P	SA	2	Nil	0	5	5	--	10

MilTech Ltd. Assassin Hand. This artificial hand conceals a .22 caliber 12 shot pistol. Similar to the Gun Hand, the used cartridge cases are kept within the hand for later disposal. This is a more articulated artificial hand and provides greater concealability for the weapon. The inner workings are non-metal and with special .22 magnum caliber ammunition, the cartridges are as well. The system then is undetectable to metal detectors. The hand suffers a +1 difficulty level penalty (Average becomes Difficult) to Agility-based tasks when using this hand normally.

Weapon : Assassin Hand		Recoil						
Ammo	ROF	Damage	Pen	Bulk	Mag	SS	Burst	Range
.22 Magnum	SA	1	Nil	0	12	2	--	10

POWER HAND

Schlaeor Hand of Death. The power hand uses a mechanical ratchet to give up to 10 times the gripping power of the human hand, allowing objects to be crushed. The ratchet can be locked enabling the user to hang suspended or hold objects for an extended period without suffering from fatigue.

TORQUE HAND

Schlaeor Torque Hand. Schlaeor's Torque Hand allows the artificial hand to rotate at high speed in either direction at the wrist. The fingers can be locked in place like the power hand, allowing the hand to be used as a torque wrench.

SURVEILLANCE HAND

PoliceTech Ltd. Digital Surveillance System. The surveillance hand consists of a 2nd generation artificial hand with each digit on the hand having the capability to double as a surveillance camera. With the camera system installed to a digit, the fingertip can be removed and extended using a fiberoptic cable. The camera head in the fingertip can be pointed in any direction. Normal operation allows the camera to be inserted under a door or into a duct to provide tactical intelligence to on-site operatives.

ARMOR

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Subdermal Cranial Armor	Head	3	None	Low	$115K (-/-)
Subdermal Thoracic Armor	Chest	4	None	Low	$332K (-/-)
Subdermal Thoracic Plates	Chest	2 per level	None	Low (AV 1-2); High (AV3)	$240K per level installed (-/-)
Protective Armor Add-on (Arm)	Arm	2	None	No additional	$97K per arm (-/-)
Protective Armor Add-on (Leg)	Leg	3	None	No additional	$105K per leg (-/-)

SUBDERMAL CRANIAL ARMOR

Schlaeor Cranial Armor. Thin layers of very tough materials are laid between the skull and the skin. This is equivalent to one point of armor (AV1). Treat shots to the head the same as with helmets. Roll 1d6: 1-4 hits armor, 5-6 misses armor. This treatment cannot be fitted over a skeletal enhancement or a cyberhead.

SUBDERMAL THORACIC ARMOR

Schlaeor Subdermal Body Armor. The armor materials are layered over the ribcage but under the skin. It protects only the chest, the abdomen is unprotected. The armor has a rating of 1 point of armor value (AV1).

SUBDERMAL THORACIC PLATES

Schlaeor Subdermal Armor Plates. Similar to the subdermal thoracic armor, but consisting of plates instead of continuous coverage. The plates cover the chest only and not completely. On a 1d6 roll of 1-4, the round hits the armor protection. On a 5-6 the armor is missed. The armor has a rating of 1 AV per installation level to a maximum of 3.

PROTECTIVE ARMOR ADD-ON (ARM)

Schlaeor Armor Add-On (Arm). Advanced materials specialists Schlaeor provides an armor add-on that can only be fitted to the Utility Arm or the LA22. It provides the equivalent of one point of Armor Value to the entire arm.

PROTECTIVE ARMOR ADD-ON (LEG)

Schlaeor Armor Add-On (Leg). Schlaeor's leg armor add-on is only available for general purpose cybernetic legs, like the LA22. It gives protection of one point of Armor Value (AV1).

SYSTEMIC

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Reflex Booster	Chest	18	Detection: 100 when used	None	$2,500K (-/-)
Supercharger	Chest	21	Detection: 100 when used	None	$1,800K (-/-)

REFLEX BOOSTER

DK Research Reflex Booster. This mechanism was developed by the Russian military to increase reaction times in critical combat situations. It was soon copied in back-street labs and workshops, ready to be sold to the gangs and low-life troublemakers. Some of these street gangs were renamed Boostergangs, as the device soon became very popular. It actually works by giving a minor charge to the nervous system and simultaneously boosting the production of natural adrenaline. This occurs in less than 0.2 of a second. In game terms, the user's Initiative is increased to 6 for three Combat rounds. The boost cannot be repeated more often than once every three hours.

SUPERCHARGER

Auslander Dynamics Supercharger. This is a device used to store some of the endorphins that the body naturally produces. The endorphins are saved for re-introduction into the body to add extra oxygen to the bloodstream, and to remove fatigue toxins from it. The Supercharger is installed in the kidney, and only one can be fitted. When in use, it increases the user's Constitution by two points. This has the effect of temporarily improving the user's hit capacity and improving constitution-based task checks.

ENDOCRINE

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Camel's Hump	Chest	2	None	Low	$375K (-/-)
Blood Filters	Chest	7	None	Low	$700K (-/-)
Ovulation Controller	Chest	21	Control: 1	None	$380K (-/-)
Contraception Implant	Chest	18	Control: 1	None	$275K (-/-)
Metabolic Control	Chest	25	Detection: 100; Control: 1	None	$680K level 1; $1,100K level 2 (-/-)
Nanomite Blood Clotting System	Chest	22	Detection: 100; Control: 2	None	$125K (-/-)
Empathy booster	Head	33	Detection: 500, 2000 when used; Control: 4	None	$10KK + $300K per level installed (-/-)

CAMEL'S HUMP

FirstCare Camel's Hump. This implant to the bladder, filters urine and recirculates the water into the body. The uric by-products are collected in a pouch that is cleansed by drinking several liters of clean water. The recipient may go for up to 5 days without water in this fashion. FirstCare calls its', the Camel's Hump due to the bulge the collection pouch makes to the back just below the rib cage.

BLOOD FILTERS

FirstCare SanguiScreen. This implant filters impurities and toxic substances from the blood stream. Toxic by-products are collected in a pouch that is cleansed externally by passing water through it. External spigots located in the abdomen are provided for this purpose.

OVULATION CONTROLLER

Auslander Dynamics Ovulation Controller. When triggered, this controller causes the production of an egg, which starts immediately down the fallopian tubes. The trigger can be internal and controlled by the user or through an external device. Multiple triggers will cause multiple eggs to be released. The lack of a trigger will prevent an egg from being released, acting as a contraceptive. When this device is triggered, and all other conditions are present, the chance of impregnation is 99%. This implant is obviously installed in the female of the species only.

CONTRACEPTION IMPLANT

Auslander Dynamics Contraception Implant. This implant acts much like the ovulation controller, except that it can only prohibit normal egg or sperm production. The user has an internal or external controller that can turn on or off the ability of the user to conceive.

METABOLIC CONTROL

DK Research Metabolic Feedback Controller. Control over bodily functions can be maintained for extended period with the Metabolic Feedback Controller. The MFC controls heartbeat, breathing, and other metabolic functions. These functions can be slowed to a nearly imperceptible level of activity, effectively feigning death. When coupled with an internal Chronometer, these functions can be programmed for reactivation after a fixed duration. The chronometer allows the advanced model (level 2) to suppress mental functions as well. This can fool even the most advanced medical specialists into belief that the user has expired or is brain dead.

NANOMITE BLOOD CLOTTING SYSTEM

FirstCare Nanomite Clot Control System. Clots blood exiting the body very quickly. Critical wounds do not need to be treated immediately. The Nanomites have a short lifespan and must be regenerated for each use. This system includes an internal module that generates the Nanomites. A hypodermic can inject a series of Nanomites ceasing even arterial blood flow. FirstCare intended the Nanomite system to be an emergency room treatment that minimized triage time spent on critical patients. However, there have been reports of the clotting system being used to kill its recipient.

EMPATHY BOOSTER

Auslander Dynamics gamma-Booster. In a similar fashion to the Empathic Computer Interface, a set of biological constructs are implanted in the brain. One is installed surrounding the pituitary gland with the other one around the pineal gland. If an empathic computer interface is installed, this system is not allowed and vice versa. The Empathy Booster provides a boost to the EMP attribute of +1 per level installed. There is no maximum to the empathic level attained through this installation.

As the empathic energy flows through the user, the biological constructs enlarge – the more empathic energy, the greater the enlargement. The user takes one point of damage to the head per empathic power level attained. Control of the implants is difficult and loss of control is dangerous. The user must also make an Average:Willpower test. Failure of this test causes double the damage to the head. Critical Failure causes the user's head to explode in a dramatic and stomach-wrenching manner.

A previous Auslander attempt, the alpha-Booster, had the same effect as the gamma-Booster, but caused 15 points of damage to the body for each use in addition to the gamma effects. It also caused neurosis similar to a Neuropath failed *push* result. The delta-Booster provided double the effect, 2 EMP per level installed, but carried the additional DarkTek User Cost of Feed: 5.

SKIN ENHANCEMENTS

System	Location	Augmentation Cost	User Cost	Profile	Price
Thermal Sensors	Skin	6	Detection: 10; Control: 1	None	$980K (-/-)
Chameleon Skin	Skin	9	Control: 1	Low	$2,900K (-/-)
Stealth Skin	Skin	6	Control: 1	Low	$4,500K (-/-)
Pressure Skin	Skin	14	Control: 1	High	$1,700K (-/-)
Doppelganger Skin	Skin	23	Control: 2	None after change; High during change	$6,300K (-/-)
Doppelganger Hands	Skin	20	Control: 1	None after change; High during change	$5,200K (-/-)

THERMAL SENSORS

FiberAge Synthetics MicroTherm Sensory Enhancement. Detailed and calibrated nano-thermocouples allow the user to detect very small changes in ambient temperature. The nano-thermocouples are installed across the body's skin. An integrated nano-controller (required) integrates all the thermocouple inputs and computes changes to the ambient temperature to within 1 degree C. This allows the user to sense which passage was most recently traveled (by warm-blooded beings, of course).

CHAMELEON SKIN

FiberAge Chameleon Skin. The chameleon skin provides the same benefits as the chameleon suit listed in the DarkTek supplement. When in motion, the skin confers a 1 level benefit in the Stealth task check. When motionless, the benefit is 2 levels.

STEALTH SKIN

Schlaeor Stealth Derma Treatment. The Schlaeor dermal is similar to the chameleon skin, but more effective. The Schlaeor treatment also addresses the rustling and other sounds that made during motion. The skin is also more effective in concealment. The benefit to Stealth task checks is 2 levels at all times.

PRESSURE SKIN

FiberAge Pressure Resistant Skin. A course fibrous skin with a metallic patina completely encloses the body. This skin is resistant to both vacuum and high pressure environments.

DOPPELGANGER SKIN

Auslander Dynamics Doppelganger Head. A permanent version of the DarkTek Facedancer using current technology and not DarkTek. Motorized plates under the skin provide a change in facial bone structure. An external programming source can be used to shape the facial bones and tissues. An internal holographic eye can provide near-real-time data to program the face as well.

Auslander Dynamics Doppelganger Hands. Similar to the Doppelganger head, the hands provide a means of reproducing fingerprints. A pre-programmed source or a holographic eye changes the imprints on the hands to a desired target.

❖

"Yeah, but your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should"

- Dr. Ian Malcolm

"You know we're sitting on four million pounds of fuel, one nuclear weapon and a thing that has 270,000 moving parts built by the lowest bidder? Makes you feel good, doesn't it?"

- Rockhound

"Alright, you primitive screwheads, listen up: THIS... is my BOOM STICK!"

- Ash

[Klaxon sounding] "I remember that sound. It's a bad sound!"

- Gwen DeMarco

"If my calculations are correct, when this baby hits eighty-eight miles per hour ... you're gonna see some serious shit."

- Dr. Emmet Brown

Augmented Agents

Careers and Equipment

By Michael Nanney

AUGMENTED AGENT

The Enemy is always improving. Your enemies may be members of rival corporations, soldiers serving in a hostile foreign army, or even recruits from other agencies. One thing is for sure: Your opposition is getting tougher… but YOU have an edge. Your superiors finally recognized your dedication, and rewarded you with various 'enhancements'. You still don't fully understand the techno-speak, but the prospect of cybernetic limbs or nano-augmented vision is too good to pass up.

Entry: CON +6, Must have spent at leas one term as Corporate Security, Elite Military forces, or government agency. PC's must choose to begin with either Mechanical Augmentation or Nano-Augmentation.

MECHANICAL AUGMENTATION

First Term: The player may choose two separate items from *Group A*. Character begins the term with an INFOLINK installed.

Group A:

RM Leg Assembly
Talus Actuators *(Speed Increase)*
AMF Musculature *(STR +2)*
Synaptic Accelerator *(AGL +2)*
Optical Targetting Overlay *(Vision Enhancement)*
I-GPS
PeRSI Unit
Plasteel Body Armor (1 location)
Mortonium Fist Shods *(UCD +2)*
Ocular Implants

Subsequent Terms: Each term, the player is allowed to choose two separate items from group A. Note that AMF musculature can be taken repeatedly in multiple terms.

Each term, subtract 1 from Empathy or Charisma, player's choice (Charisma is not allowed to reach 0.) If this makes any skill governed by these attributes higher than the attribute, those skills must be reduced as well.

NANO-AUGMENTATION

First Term: The player may choose either three items from *Group B* or one each from *Groups B* and *C*. The player begins the term with an INFOLINK installed, a Mnemonic Data Core, a 10cc injection of NaNT, and two extra hypo-syringes (10cc's NaNT each).

Group B:

Bioregeneration
Pneumonic Re-circulator
Sudden Death
(HAIR) Reaction Boost
(HAIR) Agility 88
(HAIR) NMS
(HAIR) Sentinel 3

Group C:

VESPak
Dermoptic Camo
Protuberance Shell

Subsequent Terms: Each term, the player is allowed to choose two items from *Group B* or one item from *Group C*.

Each term, subtract 1 from Empathy. If this makes any skill governed by the Empathy attribute higher than the actual Empathy score, those skills must be reduced as well.

Special (both): Money made during this career is ¼ normal. You could never have funded the cost for your enhancements on your own. Your organization owns you. They know it and so do you. Augmentations take time and training in order to learn their safe and proper uses. Thus, no secondary activities are allowed.

CROSS-AUGMENTATION:

Agents who desire both mechanical as well as nano-augmentations must take them in separate terms. Each term, they must choose from the appropriate lists ONLY. Each Term spent as a cross-augmented agent, suptract either 2 from empathy, or 1 from empathy and 1 from charisma (player's choice).

Some Extras: Augmentations is not for everyone. Though the benefits are not be denied, the ramifications of tinkering with the body are numerous. Mech's often find that their ultra-high tech parts and pieces are like any other machine – sometimes they need repair and servicing. Nano's suffer various side effects from constant use of NaNT – yellowish, bloodshot eyes, sleep disorders, and an extremely low tolerance to alcohol, just to name a few. Both types often feel that their new abilities have somehow made them less human. Some Nano's have claimed that their consciousness is growing closer to a bleak and horrid end… but what do you expect? It's a Dark World (round down)!

GENERIC AUGMENTATIONS

Infolink: An infolink is a small, heavily shielded transceiver that is implanted in the skull of an augmented agent. It provides silent one-way communication from a command center to the agent while he or she is in the field. It can transmit audio and video data, though it can receive audio information only.

Special: An agent that has a Mnemonic Data Core can receive video information as well as computer data through the Infolink provided they have a free data slot to store the information. Once viewed/used, the data can be deleted.

Passive IFF ROM: A subdermal chip (about the size of a dime) that is used to identify someone as non-hostile to a Passive IFF device. They are commonly used by wealthy MegaCorps to help increase security (employees often receive the implant so they can be easily screened). Some Ultra-high-tech vehicles (usually military) support active IFF, comparing possible targets to a large database for on-the-fly threat analysis. Since they are normally only made available as needed, price reflects black market.

Price: $10,000 - $100,000 (as forged security pass)

MECHANICAL AUGMENTATIONS

RM Leg Assembly (Speed Increase): Though the procedure is extremely painful, the results are amazing. Most of the bone and much of the muscle tissue in the legs is replaced with an ultra-high-tech, variable hardness plastic known as Reactive Malacia. Powered by a sealed nuclear-decay battery and an impressive array of logic circuits, the enhanced legs can handle amazing stress. Average individuals (STR 5, AGL 5) with this augmentation can walk, trot, and run at 1.5x their normal speed. As an example, an augmentee with the STR & AGL scores listed above, could run 45m, trot 21m, and walk 12m as a single action. An agent with this enhancement can also run at 2x normal running speed for a number of combat phases equal to his agility, provided he succeeds at a Difficult Level task vs. Agility. Failure means the subject cannot control the RM Legs at that speed, and must slow to 1.5x speed or less. Catastrophic Failure means the augmentee has suffered internal damage to remaining tissue. Each leg takes 10d10 damage, minus 1d10 for each point of constitution (note: regardless of the character's CON, each leg will suffer a minimum of 1d10 damage). The subject may suffer additional damage from falling or impact injuries. An agent augmented with RM Legs can jump to a height in meters equal 1.5 times his body height as well as purposely drop/fall a distance up to 3 times his body height (provided he lands on his feet).

Talus Actuators (Stealth Improvement): Electro-Magnetic Weight Dispersion coils are grafted over the bones in the ankles and feet, allowing the augmentee to move over typically noisy terrain (twigs, puddles of water, etc.) while remaining quiet. All stealth Tasks rolls become one level easier. Note that an individual without any skill points in stealth makes the modified task check on percentile dice as usual.

AMF Musculature (STR +2): Advanced Microfilament Musculature is a fairly recent innovation in the field of augmentation. Variable resistance titanium microfilaments are threaded though available muscle and bone tissue, increasing the effective Strength of the augmentee by 2 points. The benefits are immediate as soon as the procedure is finished; however, the procedure cannot be repeated for quite some time as It takes nearly four years for the surrounding tissue to fully assimilate the microfilaments. This augmentation CAN be taken again in consecutive terms.

Synaptic Accelerator (AGL +2): Small bioelectric relays are implanted near the brain stem and in the base of the spine, increasing muscle reaction time. Joints and cartilage are shaved, reshaped, or replaced to give maximum mobility and range of motion for an augmentee's particular body type.

These enhancements increase the Agility of the recipient by two points. Due to maximum limits of body type and size, this augmentation MAY NOT be taken more than once.

Optical Targeting Overlay: This vision and targeting enhancement utilizes an ultra thin, complex LCD mesh that is surgically attached to the lens of the subject's eye. This is an incredibly compact augmentation – all working circuitry is housed in the transparent mesh. The biggest downside of this enhancement is the obvious pink tint to the sclera (white part of the eye).

The different features of the targeting overlay are listed below. Note that these functions are independent of each other, and cannot be used simultaneously:

Display: Shows range and elevation of current target up to 100 meters. Task rolls for firing heavy weaponry within the 100meter range are made one step easier.

Scope: Functions as a digital-zoom sight for rifles lacking an optical scope.

SRA Tracking: Short Range Auto Tracking is designed for use with small arms (pistols and rifles), and can be used in single-shot or semi-automatic fire. SRA Tracking is active up to 40 meters, and enables a single aimed shot to be fired, even if the previous action phase was not spent aiming the weapon. If used in conjunction with a semi-automatic weapon fitted with a LASER sight, a total of 4 aimed shots could be fired (assuming the previous phase was spent aiming).

Controlled eye movements handle the various functions of the augmentation. Any weapon the augmentee wishes to use must be sighted for use with the targeting system. Sighting a new pistol, rifle, or other small arms is an Average Task vs. Small Arms skill. Calibrating the overlay for use with any form of heavy weaponry is a Difficult Task vs. Heavy Weapons Skill. If attempting to sight in a weapon while under stress (under enemy fire, for example) the task level increase by one level of difficulty. Sighting in a new weapon for use with

the Optical Targeting Overlay takes 30 Minutes. A different weapon of the same make and model must still be sighted separately, as each gun may have slight variances in accuracy and range.

I-GPS: The I-GPS (Internal Global Positioning System) is a useful enhancement for any agent. First, a cranial GPS is installed (a small, visible plate approx. 4x4cm, usually implanted behind an ear). Second, a simple LCD mesh is implanted on the lens of an available eye. This displays a map and the augmentee's current position anywhere on the globe. Coordinates can be entered, and will show on the map overlay (the location of the nearest safe house, for example). The I-GPS can also broadcast the agent's position to a command center. All Tasks vs. Navigation become one level easier than normal.

PeRSI Unit: Probably the only augmentation regular people would recognize. Developed for Neo-soviet Covert OPS by Magellan Communications, PeRSI units are already being implemented by Corporate Elite. PeRSI Units, or Personal-Range Satellite Imaging, allow the subject access to quick satellite snapshots of the surrounding area. The PeRSI unit consists of a small transceiver implanted near the trachea, while a small fold out LCD screen with speaker are implanted behind an ear (looks much like a hearing aid when not in front of the eye). Live operators at Magellan Communications handle the entire system. Requesting a map is as simple as giving them your PeRSI # and pass code. Snapshot downloads take 2 phases (1 pinpoint the agents location, and 1 to download). Only one snapshot can be displayed on the LCD screen at one time. The snapshots cover an area 30m/30m.

This device has become a symbol of prestige among Minion Hunters. Sometimes, the hunters become the hunted, and it's nice to have a map of the way out! This item is also gaining popularity with the wealthy, and with top-of-the-line bodyguards.

Price $75,000 (--/R)

Plasteel Body Armor: Works like Integral body armor from pg. 39 of handbook.

Mortonium Fist Shods: Metal plates made of Mortonium (an extremely dense material) are inlayed over the knuckles, fingers, and back of the subject's hands. This increases the Unarmed Combat Damage of the character by +2

Ocular Implants: Ocular implants can only be installed if both eyes are physically removed. Large spherical optical sensors replace both eyes, and a small data processor is interfaced with remaining optic nerve fibers. The device has three vision modes, detailed below:

Standard Vision: Perfect vision (20/15). Works with all other vision modes.

Optical Zoom: Functions much like a pair of 8x variable zoom binoculars. Works with Standard Vision and Nightvision functions only.

Nightvision: Typical IR Nightvision, 30m range. Works with the Optical Zoom and Standard Vision functions only.

Improved Peripheral Vision: Grants 270º field of view. Would-be surprise attackers make Task rolls vs. stealth at the next hardest difficulty for the situation. This mode cannot be used in conjunction with the nightvision function or Optical Zoom.

The augmentation can also be programmed to support passive IFF (Friend or Foe Identification) for organizations that utilize that technology. For this reason, Ocular Implants are fast becoming popular augmentations for ultra-HiTek coprorate security needs.

NANO-AUGMENTATION

Characters who undergo nano-augmentation have millions of quasi-organic robot-computers introduced throughout their entire body system. These tiny molecule-sized machines (known as nano-processors, or 'Nanites') can be programmed to perform certain tasks. Running a nano-script (basically a computer program) allows the nanites to follow a given set of instructions. Since the nanites work on a sub-cellular level, they can affect changes in the subject's body (both mundane and extraordinary). A crude example: giving a group of 200,000 nanites instructions to stimulate an agent's adrenal glands, thereby increasing his aggression level, strength, and reflexes.

Integral to nano-augmentation is the Mnemonic Data Core, and NaNT (listed below).

Mnemonic Data Core: All subjects who undergo nano-augmentation must have this device installed. The 'core' is a gelatinous egg shaped ball (roughly the size of a large marble) with hundreds of stringy neural fibers hanging from the base. Metal circuitry can be seen under the translucent 'skin'. It is alien in appearance, and probably DarkTek in origin. The core is installed adjacent to the empathic centers of the brain, and a small interface jack (about the size of a current day USB port) is placed on an external location (usually behind an ear or under the hair).

The Core's most important function is it's ability to store data, especially Nano-scripts. The core contains nine (9) memory modules, or 'slots'. Regular data (video, audio, etc.) can be stored, and later retrieved or deleted as necessary; however, nano-scripts are chemically 'hard coded' into the memory modules, and cannot be erased or overwritten. Standard nano-scripts take up one existing memory slot. Some of the more complex scripts require permanent allocation of TWO or THREE slots in order to be utilized.

The Mnemonic Data core can handle playback of video and audio information, display still images and show text. It is NOT a standard computer operating system and therefore cannot run typical programs (though software could be downloaded the 'core, transported, and then uploaded for later use).

Each memory slot can store up to 1GB of data. Data transfer rate of the interface port varies between 15-20MB/sec. Thus, it takes about two combat turns (1 minute) to fill a memory slot. A simple eye-controlled LCD mesh (overlaid on the agent's lens) controls the 'Core as well as the functions of the various nano-augmentations.

NaNT: Short for Nanite Neural Transmitter. It is a transparent, slightly yellowish fluid composed of acetylcholine, Tri-norepinephrine 3, and even colloidal gold (just to name of few of the ingredients). When a nano-script is activated, millions of instructions are sent throughout the nervous system of the augmentee. The nanites manage to perform their tasks thanks to the high-speed chemical communication made possible by NaNT. Without it, nano-scripts cannot be run, and thus nano-augmentations cannot be activated.

More complex nano-scripts eat up more 'chemical bandwidth'. Nano-scripts that take up one memory slot use 1cc of NaNT/phase while active. Active scripts that take up two slots use 3cc of NaNT/phase. A script that utilizes 3 memory modules requires 5cc of NaNT/phase. *(HAIR scripts are an exception to this rule - see below).*

NaNT usage is allocated for every phase in which a script is active. Example: John activates bioregeneration in phase 4. At the end of phase 4 he heals 1 point and uses 1cc of NaNT. In phase 3 he also heals 1 point/uses 1 cc. After his action in phase 2 he shuts down the script. At the end of phase 2, he heals 1 point/uses 1cc. In phase 1, no scripts are running.

NANO-SCRIPTS

The following is a list of scripts available for nano-augmented characters. Allscripts have a number in parenthesis. This is the number of memory slots that must be permanently allocated to the program.

Most nano-scripts can be run simultaneously with others. The NaNT usage is additive. Some nano-scripts cannot be run while others are active - This will be noted in their description. Some nano-scripts are activated immediately, while others take longer.

VESPak (2): Utilizing ultra-high compression algorithms, nano-scientists at Tojicorp Research Division managed to squeezed together three complex data scripts into the space of two. This Vision Enhancement Script Package, or VESPak, takes up only two memory slots. The three vision enhancements available are:

Lowlight Vision: Nanites widen the iris and hyper stimulate the retina to allow enhancement of available light sources. WARNING – Bright, sudden light can cause temporary blindness while using this augmentation.

Ultravision: Nanites alter the properties of the lenses in each eye to stop the filtering of Ultraviolet light, allowing the augmentee to see into the UV spectrum (the UV gets through… people CAN read by ultraviolet light without a real lens). At the same time, the nano-processors regenerate the retinal tissue being damaged by the incoming UV light.

Thermalview: Nanites chemically alter the vitreous fluid and surface of the eyes to respond to heat and temperature variants in the surrounding environment. This is true 'Thermal Vision'. As this is a significant alteration in physiology, it takes an entire phase for this change to take effect. Furthermore, the augmentee's eyes are GLOSSY BLACK in appearance (scary!).

Only one vision mode can be active at a time. NaNT use is 3cc/phase, due the data decompression routines that must be handled by a moderate percentage of nanites.

Bioregeneration (1): This script instructs every nanite in the subject's body to start repairing damaged cells and body tissues. Due to the inclusive nature of this augmentation, no other scripts can be run while Bioregeneration is active. Healing occurs at the rate of 1 point per phase, and CAN be directed to a specific body part. Wounds in the CRITICAL range heal at the rate of 1 point per TURN (6 phases) until SERIOUS condition is reached, at which point the standard healing rate takes over.

Dermoptic Camo (3): First conceived and tested by US Army Special Forces, the concept of Dermoptic Camo was thought to be a failure. Where the military researchers failed with skin-suits and holograms, scientists at Serengeti, Inc. succeeded with nanotechnology. Nanites emerge from augmentee and attach themselves to the surface of the subject's body, where they immediately begin altering the refractive properties of the body's external tissues. The process is extremely unnerving to watch, as the skin becomes translucent right before the change occurs - muscle tissue and organs are often visible. It takes one phase (5 seconds) for change to take effect.

The end result is an agent who is nearly invisible in darkness, and difficult to see even in daylight. This augmentation only hampers visual detection. Thus, dogs can still smell the agent, others can hear him, and he can be spotted by UV light. Clothing and weaponry are unaffected by this augmentation (i.e. the subject must go nude, or risk easy detection). Thus, This augmentation is usually only given to agents heavily trained in hand-to-hand combat.

Stealth task rolls become one level easier as a character still has to move quietly (combining this script with the Talus Actuators makes stealth tasks TWICE as easy). Furthermore, it is a Formidable Task vs. Observation to spot someone using Dermoptic Camo at night, and a Difficult Task in daylight. The GM is free to adjust this as necessary if the subject is causing a disturbance.

Pneumonic Re-circulator (1): This nano-script was recently developed in a top secret US Navy research facility. The nano-processors in the blood flock to the lungs where they begin synthesis of $C0_2$ into oxygen. When active (and with air filled lungs) Augmentees may hold their breath for a number of minutes equal to their CON score + swimming

skill level, while still exerting themselves normally. Extreme exertion (underwater combat?) reduces the time by half. Characters in a relaxed state can spend 2x that long holding their breath. Excess elemental carbon is carried away from the lungs and deposited into the digestive system where it passes through the agent as waste (and aids in digestion!).

Protuberance Shell (2) [FCC Warning: This device ~~may~~ WILL cause harmful interference]: Originally developed by Miltech Ltd. to discourage eavesdropping, the technology was found to be too difficult to control. Purchased from Miltech Ltd by the US Military, Protuberance technology has seen its most recent use in the acquisition (and termination) of mech-augmented agents who have gone rogue. When this script is activated, the nanites produce a localized and highly specialized electro-magnetic field around the agent. This "Protuberance Shell" can be used to disrupt electronic devices, based on the agent's distance from the device or his length of physical contact (listed below). Use of an agent's InfoLink while the 'Shell is active is unreliable at best. Use of this nano-script also tends to disrupt Passive IFF and I-GPS. A list of ranges, and their effects

5m – 3m: Mild static in a video device, and an annoying hiss in audio devices.

3m – 1m: Moderate static in video, bad hisses and pops in audio devices.

1 meter-touch: Severe to total static in video displays/ devices, completely distorted audio, 50% of data loss in unshielded magnetic media.

Touch/Contact (1phase): Basic electronic devices can be shorted (TVs, video cameras, etc), mild to moderate disruption of heavily shielded electronics (25% change of data loss in hard drives, etc), 100% loss of unshielded magnetic media.

Contact (1 turn): Severe to total disruption of heavily shielded electronics, 100% loss of all but the most heavily shielded and resilient magnetic media.

Contact (2 turns): Heavily shielded electronic devices can be shorted out. If an augmentee has the NaNT to spare (and can physically hang on), he could probably short out a RamTech Bot.

Sudden Death (1): This is a script of last resort. When activated, it begins to immediately convert available brain tissue for emergency NaNT use. Upper hierarchy nanites, which usually handle operations within the Mnemonic Data Core, leave their protected environment and begin harvesting the brain tissue. They search out the most suitable tissues first, which unfortunately happen to be the empathic and reasoning centers of the brain. This is extremely dangerous, and can easily result in mental damage of the augmentee.

A point of EMPATHY is lost, but an agent continuously produces 10cc/NaNT per phase for the next hour or so. After the hour the script auto-deactivates and the surrogate NaNT quickly breaks down. If the character's empathy score is 0, the script will remove a point of INTELLIGENCE from the character instead of empathy.

HAIR Scripts (1 slot each): Nicknamed "Blondies" by the scientists at TojiCorp, these efficient programs were designed back when NaNT was nearly impossible to synthesize, and are some of the first nano-scripts ever written. HAIR stands for Heightened Awareness / Improved Response. HAIR scripts are extremely simple and take up minimal NaNT resources. The following scripts are available:

Reaction Boost: Nanites stimulate various areas of the limbic system, increasing the character's flight or fight response. Initiative score is improved by +1 while the script is active, though initiative is never allowed to exceed 7

*Agility 88: T*his script orders nanites to take up positions along 88 specific nervous system pathways. By speeding up the throughput of electro-chemical signals, the overall agility of the augmentee is increased by +2. Agents who have undergone Synaptic Acceleration for improve agility (See Mechanical Augmentation section above) do not benefit from this script. Research shows that joint pain is associated with this enhancement, so it is recommended that agents take a mild analgesic twice daily.

NMS (Neuro-Motor Stabilizer): Intuitive physics algorithms allow nanites to quickly stimulate nerve endings and muscle tissues in the arms, shoulders and hands. When active, the agent's reaction to recoil is improved. The effective recoil of semi-automatic weapons is reduced by 1 point, and fully automatic weapons have their recoil reduced by 2 points.

Sentinel 3: The Sentinel 3 causes minor enhancement in visual, olfactory, and auditory senses, giving the augmentee greater awareness of his surroundings. It reduces all Tasks vs. Observation by one level of difficulty.

HAIR scripts use 1cc of NaNT per day each. Though they are considered 'always on', they can be deactivated (to run the Bioregeneration script, for example). Activating a HAIR script utilizes 1cc of NaNT immediately, and 1cc every 24 hours thereafter.

CELL PHONE ZOMBIES

by Norm Fenlason

No, they are not the morons driving in front of you with their cell phones glued to their ear. But then again, maybe they are…

A Cell-Phone zombie is an ambulatory human that is clinically dead. The beastie that creates the Cell Phone Zombie is a small creature that can dictate its offspring's shape.

The creature lives its life through two main cycles – the vector and the parasite. The vector infects the human victim, kills it and infects it with the second stage: the parasite. The parasite controls the undead human and spawns new vectors. These infect new hosts and the cycle continues. Each parasite has the ability to control the shape that the vectors are born into. Genetic memory ensures that the most successful shape is used in succeeding generations. Having selected technological humans as their prey, the creatures often appear in the shape of small electronic devices, enticing the unsuspecting and technology-hungry humans to pick up the creature.

After picking up the little beastie, tendrils shoot out into the hands of the victim. These tendrils work their way into the flesh very quickly and shoot up the arm following the major nerve pathways. Stronger tendrils then emerge, securing the beastie firmly to the palm of the hapless victim. For this reason Minion Hunters often refer to them as "Palm Pilots".

In the next minute, the nerve-following tendrils reach the organ cavity.Some tendrils pause here to form nodules while others continue on to the spinal column. From there, it's a straight shot up to the brain. Once infestation begins, it takes only 1d3 minutes before the tendrils release a potent toxin that dissolves brain tissue. The victim is brain-dead within another minute. The tendrils absorb the dissolved brain tissue and pipe it to the growing nodules in the organ cavity. The victim falls over dead.

If the tendrils are severed before they reach the brain, the victim only suffers 1 point to the head, 2 points damage to the arm, and 1d6 damage to the chest. If severed after reaching the brain, the victim takes 1d6 damage to the head, 1d6 damage to the afflicted arm, and 2d6 damage to the chest. The victim also suffers some form of brain damage that should be determined upon by the GM.

After the victim dies, the nodules in the organ cavity continue to grow – very rapidly – by eating its victim's internal organs. Additional tendrils are sent to the skull cavity to take over motor functions by attaching to the nerve endings. The organ cavity continues to be digested by the nodules. An additional 2d6 nodules start to form in the organ cavity causing the stomach to bulge grotesquely. (although, the victim's clothing may cover this aspect).

The beastie that originally infected the victim dies, but is held in place by all the stout tendrils still wrapping the hand. It still looks very much like a personal electronic device, but it no longer flashes.

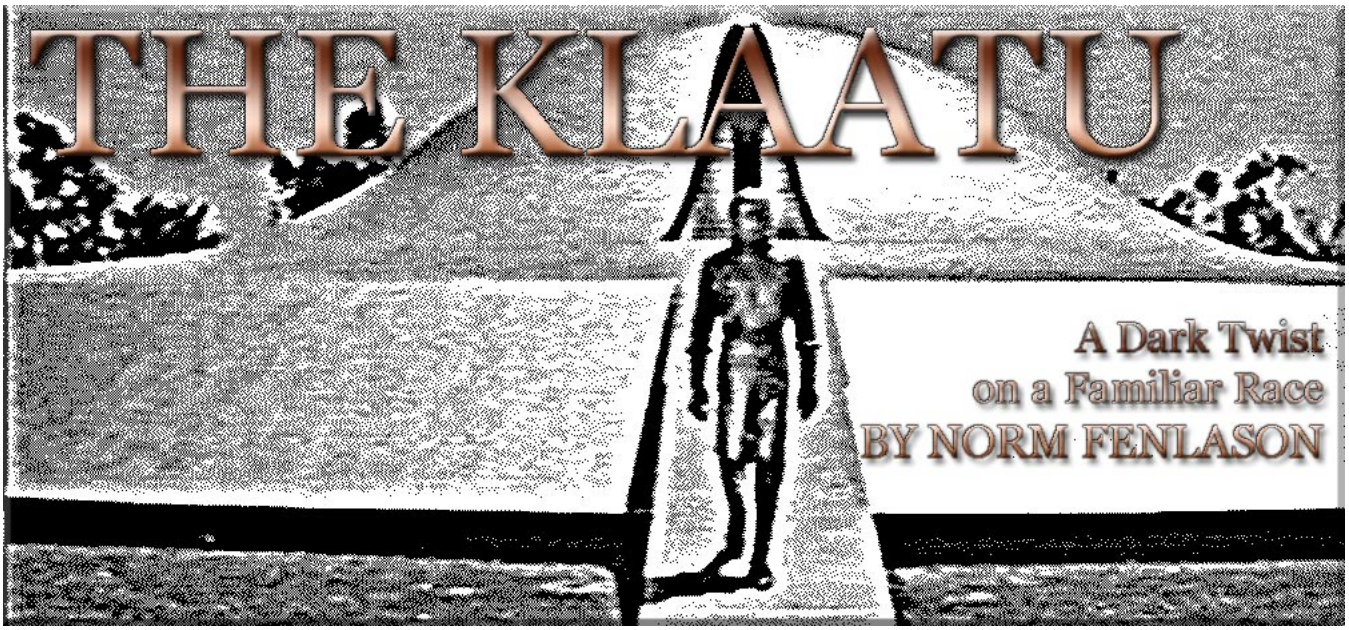
After 2d6 minutes, the victim gets up and starts moving around – a newly formed undead under control of the parasite in the organ cavity. The beastie driving the new cell phone zombie inherits its parent's memories and intelligence. These memories include how their prey moves about, the best way to avoid being caught as a zombie, and what form the next generation should take.

The next phase lasts 1-3 days. The zombie has human-level intelligence with two overriding imperatives: protect the young in the stomach and feed them on organ tissue. To protect its young, the creature stumbles around constantly moving, looking for a place to settle. Whenever possible, it will attack other humans and animals to feed the burgeoning offspring in its stomach. The creature attacks victims smaller or weaker than itself (usually) by wielding its dead parent, the vector, still attached to its hand, like a club, doing 1d6+3 damage. After beating its victim senseless, the creature tears the victim apart andfeeds on the internal organs. The more organs the zombie eats, the faster the young nodules inside come to term. Given a plentiful supply, the young will be ready to be born within 24 hours. Having less to eat takes longer up to a maximum of three full days days with no food.

At the end of the creature's ludicrous pregnancy, the tendrils controlling the victim's motor functions stop working and quickly dissolve away. The main nodule in the organ cavity develops a long ridged protrusion which it thrusts through the stomach. The bowels erupt in a rush of organic matter and stench of decay. The zombie falls over mid-stride into a pool of mucous-like goo and a pile of…cell phones. By this time the 2d6 nodules have transformed themselves into small electronic devices, all blinking and flashing and looking attractive to a tech-head.

These newborn cell phones do not necessarly infect the first person that picks them up. They are selective about the conditions under which they will attempt a takeover. They

Continued on page 100...



"I think she's out, now. We can proceed," Dr. Lundgren told the anxious spectators.

Abbey's husband, Paul leaned forward, and nodded absently in agreement as Dr. Lundgren put away the custom-built lighting device he used to induce the deep hypnosis required of his trade.

"Now we can begin."

Paul Locke glanced nervously at his friend and those strange people his friend calls hunters*, whatever that was. They looked surprisingly violent to be involved with this sort of New Age mumbo-jumbo. But if Abbey's suffering ended, Paul could tolerate them.*

Dr. Lundgren's voice droned into a litany of questions directed at the reclining Abbey. "You are back in the car, now. What do you see, Abbey?"

A frown danced lightly across Abbey's face as she started to answer.

"Andrew Vicker of Kind Hearts and Button Hooks*, you know…that Media 6 show, is walking up to my car. What is Andrew Vicker doing out here in the middle of nowhere?" A puzzled look creased Abbey's forehead.*

"What does Andrew do now?" the doctor asked softly, reaching to lower the light still more.

Abbey pours out in a rush "He…he opens the car door… I…I try to tell him he shouldn't do that, b-but he just looks at me and it's suddenly all right. He sits there on the passenger side and looks into my eyes.

"He takes me to this field near the road. The air in the middle of the field is shimmering and then there is a huge ship there…triangle-shaped standing on end. Like those old fifties science fiction shows. There is an open hatch…"

Abbey continues, "He takes me inside. Up ahead is a brightly lit room with a table in the middle. Andrew tells me to lie on the table. I have to obey. He then joins me…"

Dr. Lundgren looks at Paul expectantly. Dismayed, Paul looks at Abbey and takes her hand in his, worry unabashedly painted on his very vulnerable face.

" I am putty!…I cannot resist!…I am screaming inside, but nothing comes out…" Abbey continues. "He reaches to undo my blouse…I just look into his eyes. Those eyes…"

"Enough!" Paul stood up glaring at the doctor then sweeping a scathing gaze across the others in the room. "This is a crock! You guys are…" Dr. Lundgren raised his hand silencing Paul. The others fidgeted nervously.

"Abbey? You are going to sleep for a while, and when you wake up you will not remember any of what happened. You will enjoy that freedom, and feel refreshed." Dr. Lundgren spoke clearly but softly to Abbey. The tension in Abbey's face washed away in a wave of relief. Dr. Lundgren put the light out all the way, and motioned the group to follow him into his adjoining office.

The tall one, named Robert and dressed in black, went to the sidebar in Dr. Lundgren's office and Paul heard the clink of glasses. He was a strange one with his priest's collar and shoulder holster. Paul took the offered seat while Robert pressed a glass of amber fluid into his hand.

"Drink this laddie," Robert said. To the doctor "Well Nils. Is it what I think it is?"

The other man, Paul also, if memory serves, and the other, a totally out of place middle-aged woman ironically named Agnes, focused their attention on the doctor waiting for the prognosis.

"Yes. I am afraid it is. It has all the signs of the Klaatu. Your wife, Paul, has been seduced by a Klaatu*."*

POPULAR CULTURE

No one knows for sure where the Klaatu come from. Those claiming to have talked to them say Rigel; others say Betelgeuse, still others claim Altaire as their home planet. Spirit channeling mystics claim the spirits say the Klaatu are from Lyra. The only consistent story is that they have been on Earth for tens of thousands of years.

Conspiracy theorists in a rush to explain the appearance of the Klaatu in popular mythology have dubbed them *Nordics* due to their generally Scandinavian appearance. The Klaatu are human looking – perhaps too human looking. They are extremely attractive from the human perspective with very high charismas.

The Klaatu are named after the Nordic-looking alien who gave the famous message to the Hollywood world in the motion picture *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The attractive, benevolent, human-looking alien uttered the famous words "Klaatu borada nikto." The character, Klaatu, was actually very close to the popular concept of the Nordic aliens, and may have been inspired by encounters of the day.

In the 1950's and 60's, reports of abduction and seduction abounded. The Klaatu were reported to have taken abductees to their spacecraft where they engaged in sexual relations with their hapless "victims." Later, in pre-Depression western culture, the Klaatu were oftimes mistaken as angels or some other mystical and benevolent being.

In popular culture of today the Klaatu are also known as Atlanteans, Altairians, and Lyrans. They are reported to be at war with reptilian aliens over the fate of planet Earth and generally benevolent.

AFTER THE GREATER DEPRESSION

In the world of Dark Conspiracy, the Klaatu are from Lyra. Having arrived on this planet before the First Ice Age, the Klaatu found a race of interlopers already here. The Reptoids were openly hostile and warfare between the two ETs erupted immediately. The Klaatu found the Reptoids actively engaged in genetic manipulation of the local fauna. To counter the genetic manipulations of the Reptoids that resulted in the Neanderthals, the Klaatu intervened with the introduction of the Cro-Magnon. Their war goes on still, although in muted form.

Unlike the Dark co-opted alien races, the Klaatu are not directly aligned with the Dark. Although they considered themselves aligned with the Greys before the opening of the Io gate, the turning of the Greys by their Dark Master has changed that relationship. The Klaatu do not rely on telepathy as much as the four canon ET races, and were spared the initial Dark onslaught. However, fearing that those Klaatu on Earth would be co-opted by a Dark Master, the Klaatu withdrew all their faster-than-light ships from the vicinity of Sol, stranding some of their brethren in the process. The numbers of Klaatu left on the planet is dwindling even though the Klaatu are extremely long-lived.

RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMANS

The Klaatu do not have direct animosity for the humans on Earth. Neither do they have any real love. Their attitude towards humans is one of disdain, like that for any bottom tier life form. Although some Klaatu take special interest in one human or other, their lack of consideration for humanity often leads to cruel and destructive acts; much as the person that keeps pigeons and has a favorite bird, but still eats squab on Sundays.

For this reason and a general difference in the direction Klaatu intellect has evolved, humans often find the motivations and actions of Klaatu indecipherable.

KLAATU DARKTEK

With an almost genetic understanding of science, the Klaatu are, by Earthly standards, off the technological scale. Unfortunately for the Klaatu, the great withdrawal has left them lacking in technical equipment. When faced with any advanced technology, human or alien, they can sort it out and use it with no ill effects. Although they use and understand advanced technology very well, they are not overly attached to it.

THE WAR OF THE AGES

When the Klaatu arrived on Earth, the dinosaurs had just given up the ghost and left the planet to the mammals. In the Klaatu surveys of earth, they discovered signs of genetic meddling. They inferred the presence of an undiscovered alien presence and went looking for it. They found the Reptoids.

The Reptoid intention for Earth was and still is to develop a slave race using genetic manipulation and long generations of human husbandry. The Reptoids had started the spread of their Neanderthals when the Klaatu discovered an underground

Reptoid base. The Klaatu attacked the base and destroyed it, but the damage to the ecosystem and the dominance of the Reptoid hominid was done. To combat the Reptoid presence in the world's ecosystem, the Klaatu introduced their own genetically manipulated hominid – Cro-Magnon. Every time the Klaatu discovered a Reptoid facility, they would strike it hard, preventing the Reptoids from assisting their champions in the hominid wars. The Cro-Magnon not being designed for enslavement, were built with more initiative and aggression and eventually won against the Neanderthals.

The war between the Klaatu and the Reptoids was interpreted by most of the primitive humans as a war of light versus dark. For every Sun God, there was a God of the Dark. Prophecies of apocalypse had sources in an ultimate conflict between the Reptoids and the Klaatu. Although the Klaatu were not interested in humans, per se, they had a strong desire to thwart the Reptoid plan. Using stories and legends, the Klaatu vilified the Reptoids in human mythology. From Eden's Serpent to George the Dragonslayer, humans were turned against the Reptoids. The Klaatu-lead human uprisings against Reptoid warrens resulted in perpetration of atrocities on the demon wyrms. This drove the Reptoids even further underground.

The atrocities against the Reptoids were not without retaliation. One famous act of vengeance came when seven Reptoids combined empathic skills and attacked a Klaatu ship maneuvering over the Siberian wilderness. The Klaatu were mapping portions of the continent for the expansion of their Tsarist proxies. The Klaatu flagship exploded over Tunguska in the Siberian wilderness, killing the head of the Klaatu delegation and her whole staff. With the loss of his Klaatu support, the regime of Tsar Nicholas II foundered leading to his death in the Bolshevik rebellion. The Reptoid-backed Bolshevik Soviet replaced the Tsar's empire.

In retaliation the Klaatu sponsored Hitler's armies against the Reptoid-backed Soviet Union. Hitler's fears of Soviet Reptoids and ETs in general made him prematurely attack the Grey-backed Western powers. The Klaatu assisted in an early victory over France, but urged Hitler to quickly attack the Soviet Union. The Greys, recognizing that the wartime was a good time to transfer technology to the West, allowed the war to drag on. Alas, no alien presence backed Imperial Japan, so their doom was certain and accelerated the United States entry into the war. The Klaatu were unprepared for the strength of the Soviet Union or the entrance of their Grey allies against them. Hitler's rogue actions and a loss of interest by the Klaatu ensured the demise of the Third Reich.

After World War Two, the Klaatu emphasis moved from the ruins of Europe to the relative bliss of the new industrial US. From the rising US hegemony, the Klaatu saw the opportunity to engage the Reptoid menace. Thus the Cold War began. The War of the Ages shifted to another arena – the world of entertainment.

THE WAR IN ENTERTAINMENT

In the world after the Greater Depression the Klaatu, with their raw human magnetism, are firmly entrenched in the entertainment industry. Out of a form of *ennui*, various Klaatu are trading their looks and charisma for relief from boredom. For this reason they are dominating the media industries. In fact, there is a 40% chance that any given media star is actually a Klaatu. Not only that, they have been doing it for ages.

In the heyday of the atomic age and the flurry of nuclear testing during the 1950's, the Klaatu enjoyed a resurgence in their sponsor activities. It was at this time that the Klaatu enjoyed almost total dominance of the entertainment industries. Fearing the powerful Klaatu entertainment lobby, the Reptoids developed a plot of their own – McCarthyism. The workings of Senator Joseph McCarthy subjected the Klaatu dominance to a short but intense threat. Only by involving the US Army did the Klaatu avoid a more serious Reptoid plot. This time also featured the rise of the most famous Klaatu known to humankind: the King, the Hips, none other than Mr. Blue Suede Shoes himself, Elvis Presley.

In taking the War of the Ages to the Klaatu in the entertainment industries, the Reptoids have enlisted the assistance of other dark minions. To combat the image that the Klaatu sponsored in popular culture, the Reptoids sponsored equally disruptive popular icons. They enlisted and still do use the Dread Sidhe as rock musicians and promote subliminal programming within their music and lyrics. The hard rock movement grew rapidly in counter to the Klaatu-sponsored forms of entertainment, which had no programming, to the point of legal battles being raged from one point of view or the other.

CENTERVILLE:

A real nice place to raise your kids

As part of the Cold War in the 1950's, the Soviet Union and later China openly tested their own nuclear weapons. The Klaatu had given up trying to influence the Communist regimes, which they suspected were fronted by the Reptoids. Once nuclear testing started, the Klaatu figured that no place on earth would be safe from their adversaries. The Klaatu are not very empathic, but with the assistance of their newfound friends, the Greys, the Klaatu found and moved into their very own splinter proto-dimension. This was before the Greys had been suborned by the Dark after the opening of the gate on Io. Enamored with American culture at that time, they took a blueprint from middle America and created Centerville.

Centerville is a splinter protodimension that can only be arrived at through a special device that the Grey-Klaatu scientists created. The device is a small metallic box with a red button that opens and closes a portal to Centerville. Centerville, itself, appears as a normal day in *Leave It To Beaver's* neighborhood. Pony skirts, button-down shirts, Edsels – a snapshot of 50's lifestyle – the effect is complete.

The Klaatu use their special handheld device to open a portal to Centerville that allows them to take goods with them, including automobile-sized items. All their goods including their automobiles are from the golden age of the 50's and early 60's. The Klaatu modes of speech, dress, and behavior are stereotypical of those good old days. Centerville's particularly annoying (to the Klaatu) assimilation effect turns the Klaatu into "fine upstanding citizens" of Centerville. In short order after returning to Centerville, visitors are converted into *Father Knows Best* perfect stereotyped cutouts. After the break with the Greys and on retrospect, some Klaatu think that the assimilation effect is a Grey joke on the Klaatu, not that the Greys have not demonstrated any known sense of humor. It takes as long as a month for a Klaatu to revert to normal form and lose their annoying tendency to use out-of-date references in their speech.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Klaatu are fair, light-skinned humanoids averaging two meters in height – hence the term Nordics. They look like the Nazi concept of Aryans. In fact National Socialist genetic superiority theories were the result of a severe misunderstanding of encounters with the Klaatu and their technology. The Klaatu have blonde to light brown hair and little to no body hair. They are usually muscular, and by human standards very attractive and charismatic.

The Klaatu are anatomically similar to humans as a result of the genetic manipulations of the Cro-Magnon – similar enough to use humans to satisfy their seemingly insatiable lusts. Some human women that have encountered the occasional Klaatu male have claimed being impregnated by them and raising their children. These claims for the most part have been unsubstantiated. Indeed, the almost mystical sensual control the Klaatu have over humans is most likely the source of the succubus and incubus midnight seduction myths.

MODUS OPERANDI

Many abductees claim to have been taken by tall blonde humanoids dressed in high-tech form-fitting metallic clothing. The abductors are claimed to have exerted some form of mental control over the captive, who was supposedly taken to a ship where the alien completed the seduction. In fact, the Klaatu exert a form of mental charm on their captives through their extremely high charismatic abilities. This charisma the Klaatu understand and leverage on their human animals. They, in fact, do seduce humans regularly.

PLOT HOOKS

Conspiracy hooks – the Klaatu have a history of sponsoring governments and large corporations; and have their own, if incomprehensible, agenda.

Abductee hooks – Klaatu have snatched and seduced someone the PCs know. Perhaps an hybrid offspring is being threatened by other dark forces. (The Klaatu wouldn't care.)

Entertainment hooks – perhaps a Klaatu enlists the aid of PCs to expose a Dread Sidhe. Or vice versa.

War of the Ages hooks – Reptoids dupe the PCs into attacking a Klaatu facility. Or vice versa.

Elvis hooks – there's always Elvis. This time he is more than just seen.

Centerville hooks – darkling competitors enlist the PCs in an attempt to obtain one of the transfer devices. Or what are thought to be Men in Black are actually Klaatu.

KLAATU STATS

Strength:	6+1d6
Constitution:	3+1d6
Agility:	8+1d6
Intelligence:	6+1d6
Education:	3+1d6
Charisma:	8+1d6
Empathy:	1d3-1
Initiative:	2+1d3
Move:	3/5/18/40
Skill/Dam:	8/6
Hits:	30/60
# Appear:	1 or 2*

**When 2 appear, they will be male and female.*

The Klaatu perform combat as Veterans or Elites. They have multiple knowledge skills as a Specialist. They can speak any language.

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DARK MATTER PRE-HISTORY

BY DAVID K. TORMSEN

The Hoffmann Institute has for years suspected that there were events of great significance in our arm of the galaxy before the dawn of human civilization. However, no-one in the position to know anything about it has ever divulged any information. Through a careful and extensive program dubbed Project Genesis by the Antiquities division, the Institute has formed a hypothetical outline of the events of the distant past. However, as this information was taken from many different sources (pieces of Kinori lore, reconstructed Grey historical data and the writings of unknown pre-Egyptian human civilizations) this outline is tentative at best.

THE STELLAR WAR

15 thousand years ago, the balance of power in our section of the galaxy was disturbed. The empires of the Greys and the Kinori were destroyed in interstellar warfare, and Maldek, a planet between Mars and Jupiter that was believed to be inhabited by the Luciferans, was annihilated. The protagonist is still unknown, but both the Elohim and the Bering Demons are believed to have been involved.

THE KINORI ALLEGIANCE

The Kinori Allegiance, rather than being built on a foundation of technological prowess, relied mainly on its FX abilities. Centered on Sabek, they crossed from world to world and dimension to dimension via Doorways and exerted control over dozens of planets. Their arcane abilities were extremely powerful and dynamic and allowed them to cure disease, communicate over vast distance, and even incite destructive reactions akin to a thermonuclear explosion. This empire was accused by the Elohim of working with the Bering demons (in truth the relationship between the Kinori and the Demon Princes was quite strained, as the Kinori would often travel to Limbo in order to bind and enslave lesser and least demons and put them to work for their own purposes), and was largely destroyed by the advanced Elohim armies.

After their destruction at the hands of the Elohim, the Kinori Allegiance was dispersed. They wandered as nomads from world to world, until a small group was able to move through to Earth in 9000 BC. Whether other groups of Kinori still exists remains to be seen, but it is most likely small enclaves scattered across hundreds of planets and dimensions.

THE AHOTTI IMPERIUM AND THE ILTAN CONSULATE

The twin empires of the Greys spanned across many star systems. By using their psionic powers and their technological advantages they were able to maintain control over the populations of those worlds. The Imperium was a conservative Byzantium, whilst the Consulate was a smaller but much more dynamic body. The Consulate was only able to stop being engulfed by the Imperium by the latter's continual struggle with Ziljir terrorists and colonial rebellion. Although there were almost constant skirmishes between the Ahotti and the Iltan, they would almost always stand together against outside threats.

When the Stellar War broke out, the Greys were the de facto allies of the Elohim (as they did not practice any form of FX), fighting both the Kinori and the Luciferans. The war let loose detrimental psionic influences on the Grey homeworlds, and their nations crumbled around them (the name Iscii ba Fan appears a lot in records pertaining to this). City ships rushed to escape their cursed systems, and they were separated as they fled to various systems known to the Greys. One of them came to Earth, but whether the others have survived is unknown.

THE ELOHIM

As today, the Elohim were always mysterious figures in the ancient times. When Genesis archaeologists first came across descriptions of the Elohim in former times, they were believed to refer to a completely different species altogether. They were described as sentient pillars of flame that traveled in gigantic wheel-shaped craft that burned even in the cold darkness of space. However, reports of their behavior seems consistent with reports of Modern-day Elohim, as they wielded burning swords, sought out and punished FX adepts (especially Diabolists and Hermeticists), and seemed to hold a deep-seated hatred for the Luciferans.

MALDEK

An ancient planet situated between Mars and Jupiter, Maldek was at least marginally habitable, though it was heated more by internal magma than by the sun. It is unknown whether it possessed any native inhabitants, but it was believed to have been colonized by both Luciferans and

humans (how these two species got to the planet is anyone's guess). This world came under severe attack by the Elohim during the Stellar War, and was completely destroyed, thus becoming what is now called the Asteroid Belt.

DARK MATTER LEVELS

At the time of the Stellar War, the dark matter levels in this arm of the galaxy was said to be incredibly high. Though such a high level has never happened since, Hoffmann scientists believe that if the current increase in dark matter is sustained, we will have reached a level comparable to that of the War by at least 2013 (Refer Antiquities File 2-34/Mayan prophecies). The possible outbreak of another war on such a large scale is a threat that the Institute is taking very seriously, as are the Kinori and the Greys.

PROJECT GENESIS

An offshoot of the Institute's Antiquities division begun in the 1920s, Project Genesis collects relics and information from around the world in the hope of furthering the Institutes understanding of the hidden history of Earth and our nearby star systems. It is a very difficult operation, as there are many forces that are as eager to keep the secrets of the past hidden. Some groups are more unscrupulous and powerful than others, and Genesis missions can often be quite dangerous.

Project Genesis is deeply connected with the Barcelona Antiquities Office, and draws its agents mainly from the Department of Antiquities. Genesis is very interested in agents that concentrate on Social Science and Lore skills, and employ a wide range of archaeologists, anthropologists, xenologists, linguists, forensics scientists and antiquarians. However, as the occasional dangerous situation does arise, combat-orientated heroes are also prized among the Genesis teams.

Project Genesis is currently recruiting. Any Hoffman Institute agents or independent researchers who are travel-orientated, experienced in the relevant fields, and willing to get a bit dirty are welcome to apply.

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Cell Phone Zombies (continued from 94)

will wait until they are left somewhere for the next unsuspecting victim. Sometimes they even wriggle when no one is looking to fall off a table or out of a pocket to further them being found by a suitable victim…

The Uncontrolled Zone Minion Hunter GlobeNet forum has hosted quite a few discussions lately about a new M.O. for the "Palm Pilots". Instead of seizing the hand and working their way into the nervous system, some of them will chirp remarkably like a cell phone. In addition to lights and flashing numbers, the cell phones can ring. The vector waits until the victim holds the cell phone to its head before striking. A single hard and powerful tendril shoots into the skull though the ear cavity, locking the cell phone to the head and the hand. The tendril injects its toxins while more tendrils move into the brain and on into the organ cavity. Within 1 minute the victim is brain dead.

Cell phone zombies have been seen driving, with at least one Minion Hunter reporting that she followed the goon's car for the whole gestation period. Her flamethrower supposedly eliminated the offspring once they erupted, but her posts to the Uncontrolled Zone indicate she is worried about how many other cell phone zombies may be driving around.

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IAN: "God creates dinosaurs.
"God destroys dinosaurs.
"God creates Man.
"Man destroys God.
"Man creates Dinosaurs..."

ELLY: "Dinosarus eat man...
"Woman inherits the Earth!"

THE LOOSE ENDS

DG15 CONTRIBUTORS

ARTICLE AUTHORS

Chad Bowser
Julie Ann Dawson
Norm Fenlason
Edward Gibson
Mike Marchi
Thom Marrion
Allan Naguit
Michael Nanney
Lewis Pollak
Dan Ross
David K. Tormesen
Lee Williams

COVER ART

John Shannon

BANNER ART

Mike Marchi

INTERIOR ART

Norm Fenlason
Becky Marchi
Mike Marchi

INTERIOR GRAPHICS

Becky Marchi
Mike Marchi
Geoff Skellams
Lee Williams

NEW ZENA MARLEY QUOTES

Geoff Skellams

DG15 EDITORS

Mike Marchi
mikemarchi@demonground.org
Geoff Skellams
geoffskellams@demonground.org
Becky Marchi
beckymarchi@demonground.org
Lee Williams
leewilliams@demonground.org

NEXT ISSUE

Layout of Issue 16 will begin shortly. We hope to have it available by Christmas. The theme for Issue 16 is "Hell on Earth".

The deadline for submissions for Issue 16 is September 30, 2002

Remember, submissions do not have to be limited to the theme. What are you waiting for? Send something in, today!

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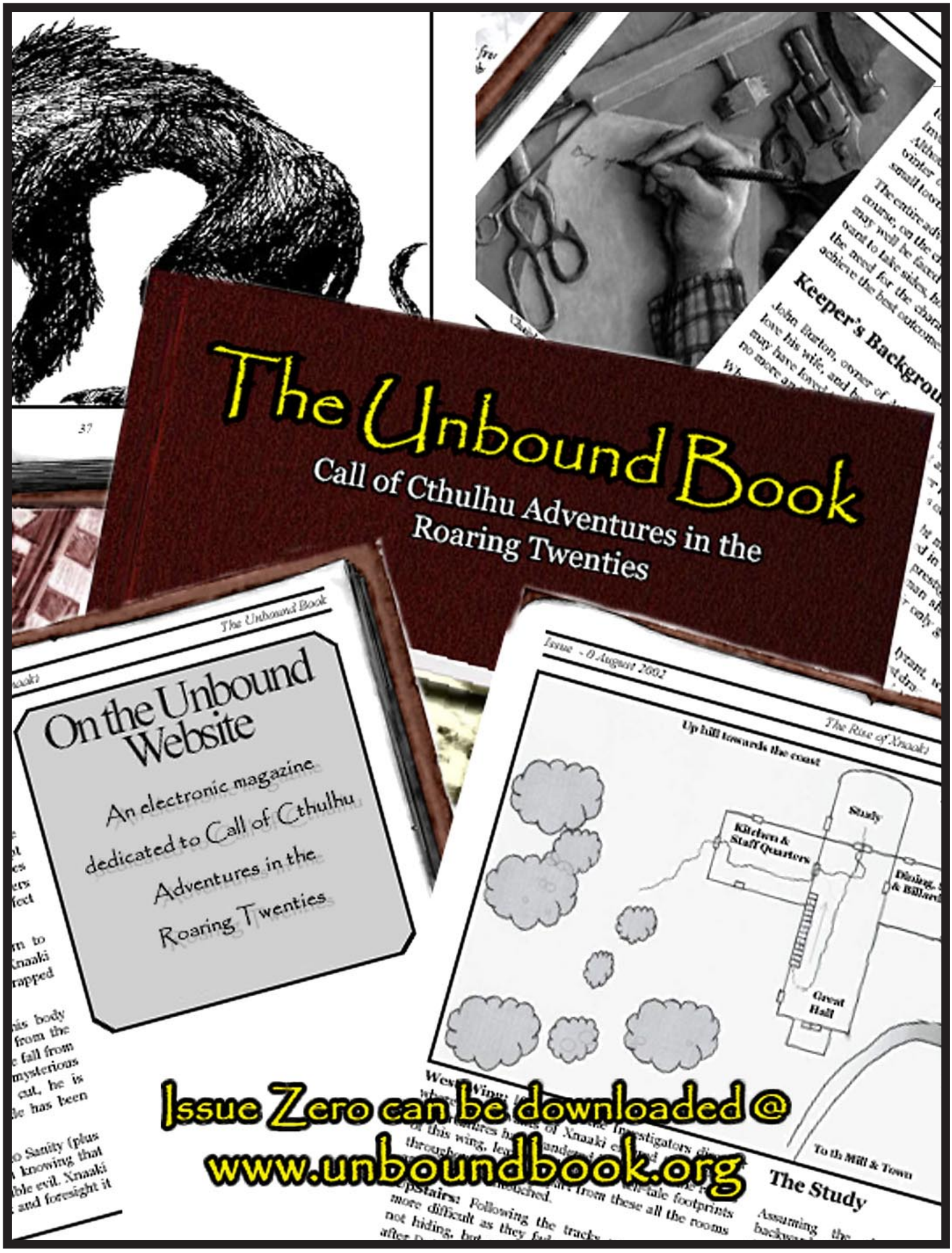
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