

HUNTER: THE VIGIL WITCH FINDERS



YOU CAN'T
TRUST MAGIC.

YOU CAN'T
TRUST A WITCH.

SOMETHING HAS
TO BE DONE.

SIN MUST
BE PAID.

This book includes:

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- Several new advantages for hunters when in battle with images, including new Tactics and Endowments
- A look at Philadelphia from the perspective of the war between hunter and sorcerer.

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HUNTER
THE VIGIL

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WITCHFINDERS

HUNTER: THE VIGIL

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COMING NEXT FOR HUNTER: WORLD OF DARKNESS SLASHER

"Great green gobs of
Greasy grimy girlie guts
Little dirty flirty feet
Mutilated maiden's meat
Scooped-out eyeballs
Rolling down an empty street
But I didn't
Forget my spoon."

-The Sixpence Killer

OCTOBER 2008



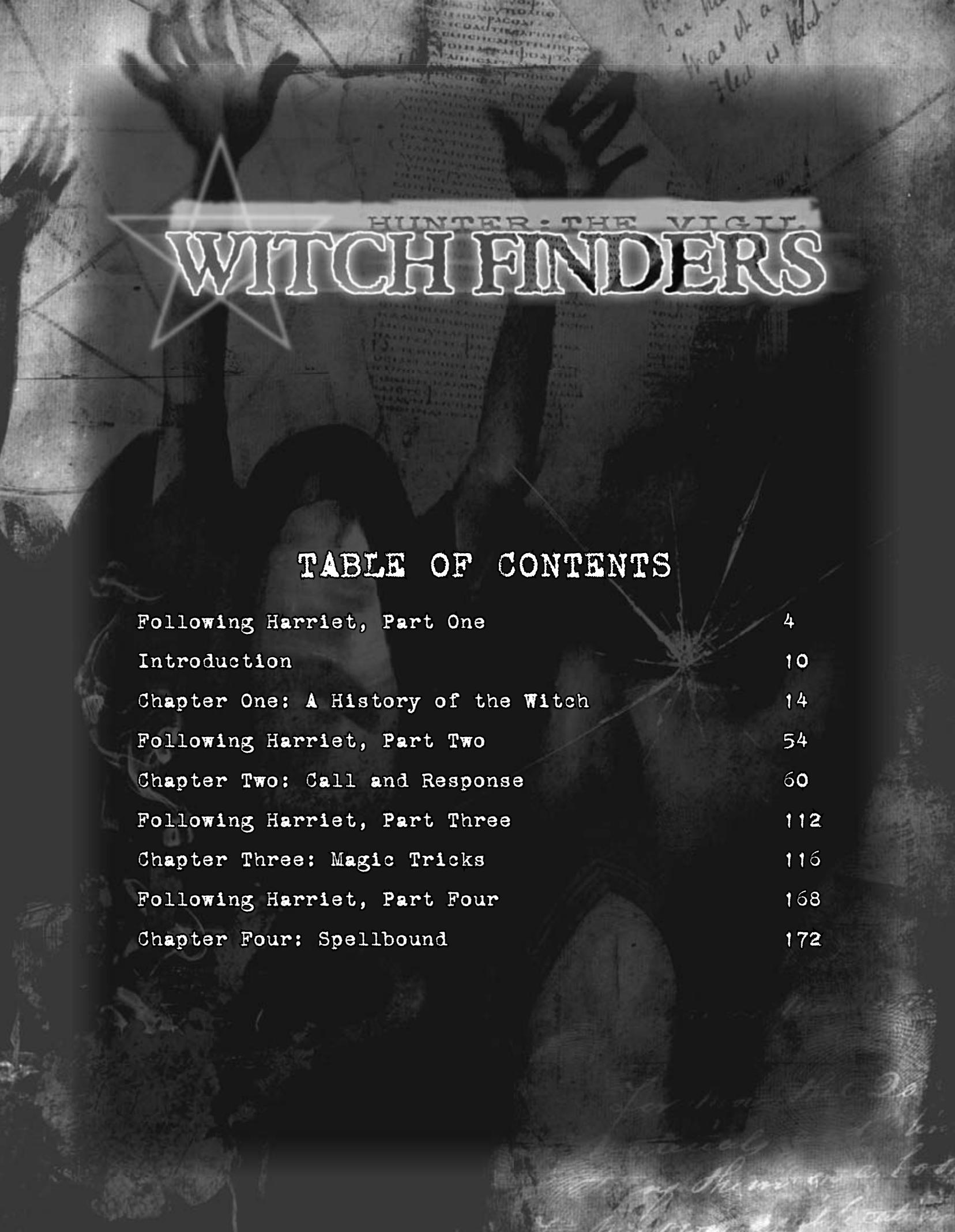
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HUNTER: THE VIGIL

WITCH FINDERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Following Harriet, Part One	4
Introduction	10
Chapter One: A History of the Witch	14
Following Harriet, Part Two	54
Chapter Two: Call and Response	60
Following Harriet, Part Three	112
Chapter Three: Magic Tricks	116
Following Harriet, Part Four	168
Chapter Four: Spellbound	172

THE DAILY SUN

IT'S NOT NEWS UNLESS WE SAY IT IS!



Local man sought in connection with string of murders involving prostitutes.

-pg -15

FOLLOWING HARRIET, PART ONE

"To realize that our knowledge is ignorance, this is a noble insight. To regard our ignorance as knowledge, this is mental sickness."

—Lao Tzu, Tao Teh Ching

You asked, so I'll tell you all about it. I think... it's because of the drugs, right? That I feel this way? Whatever. I don't give a fuck. I'll tell you.

I remember the day I was sitting in my room, playing with these toy horses... I remember their tails had been mostly pulled out, they were so old. They were dirty; most of the color had worn off the plastic. But we loved those fucking horses, Crystal and me. And that day I was sitting in my room, playing with the horses by myself. I didn't want to go swimming. I didn't want to be with my father. Crystal, she was fearless the way only a six-year-old can be sometimes. At school I was the shy one and she'd introduced me to other kids, made sure I was included in games and got invited to birthday parties and shit, even though she was a year younger than me. Yeah, I was quite the introverted little mouse. So she went to the river with my father that day, not scared like I was of that murky water and the slimy things that might be in it. I remember how sunny it was, and I took those horses over to the window sill to look at them in the sunlight. That's when I saw my father coming up the walk. Crystal cradled in his arms like she was sleeping. Her red-and-yellow-flowered beach towel draped over her face.

Ever been around a ghost, doe? It's hard to understand what it's like, if you've never been near one. There's a certain feeling... imagine a light touch across the back of your neck, or the sound of footsteps behind you. Then take away the footsteps, the touch, and leave only the feeling. The day after she drowned, I started feeling Crystal's presence around me. Sometimes I talked to her. Sometimes I dreamed about her. But I didn't tell anyone about it.

The night I "Awakened," as we call it - like there's something enlightening about walking around in a daze while your mind's floating in some higher fucking reality - that night I saw her for the first time since the river. Just for a moment; a little girl, standing in her swimsuit, her stick legs dripping with river water, that beach towel hanging over her face like a veil. And she pointed me towards the river and I walked along the banks until I found the tower. There were ghosts there, and diamonds, and when I came back I was a new person. What you would call a witch, I guess.

I needed a new name when I came back to the land of the living. So I called myself Crystal.

"MY LITTLE GIRL EMILY DIED ON THE OPERATING TABLE."

My little girl Emily died on the operating table. The sky was blue that day: perfect white clouds, sun shining, trees starting to bud. Green pajamas with horses on them... I slammed my hand into a wall, so hard my knuckles were raw and bloody and I didn't feel it. A student nurse, maybe half my age and a third my weight, kept me from collapsing onto the floor of the family waiting room. That day my wife turned to stone, all the emotion and hope and life drained from her face and never came back.

There seemed to be children everywhere; in the waiting room, the hospital lobby, on the street. Everywhere. I thought, why not one of them instead of my daughter? Couldn't help myself.

Sometimes somebody dies and it brings the survivors together. Sometimes not. It took my wife and me six months to see it wouldn't work out between us. Six months after that, I was living out of boxes in a crappy apartment with paper-thin walls and free basic cable. I sold my deli: betrayed the staff that

worked for me since we opened. I cursed at friends and family when they tried to be sympathetic. Eventually they stopped trying. I decided to just... disappear. Drop out of everything. I imagined what would happen. I'd take a bunch of pills, and lie down one last time on that rock-hard mattress. Lock myself in a room with no food. Wander the streets, get shot by a mugger, get hit by a bus. Didn't matter. Then one day he knocked on my door. The "reporter." Jack Blake, or Bleek, or whatever he called

himself. I looked at him and I might have been looking in a mirror, except he was about ten years older than me. But with the same tired eyes, same five-o'clock shadow, same wrinkled clothes and dirty fingernails. Maybe that's why I didn't slam the door in his face. He looked at me for a sec-

ond, and introduced himself. "I'm a journalist," he said. "Could I ask you a few questions?" I shrugged, asked, "What's this about?" He said, "Your daughter." He cleared his throat a lot. He was a smoker, I could tell. I didn't smell tobacco on him, maybe he quit some time

back. But he still had the mannerisms, the twitches. An impression he gave off. Some things stay with you. He waved some kind of card at me, I didn't read it. I turned and walked into the apartment, not caring if he followed. He closed the door and said, "Have you ever heard of Network Zero?"



Jesus, the beds you have in this place. They're like rocks. And I don't like being watched all the time. So what was I saying? OK, so I had a teacher named Bone. No shit, that was her name. Her "shadow name," we call it. It seems so ridiculous now... but anyway, she's the one who told me about the paths and the towers and all that shit and what it all means. I won't go into detail, and not just because that prick Dr. Fromm says that kind of talk reinforces alien thinking. I don't care what kind of security you have here, if I say the wrong thing they'd know, somehow, they'd find me and that wouldn't be good. Oh, damn, this new medicine just makes me feel drunk. So, Bone, she's the one who taught me about ghosts. I was good with ghosts. The first magic I learned, it all had to do with dead things, or things that were never alive. Rocks, ghosts, metals, darkness, atoms, ectoplasm... but I leaned towards the ghosts.

I got into looking at the spirit world, what we call the shadow. I - Christ, I feel dizzy. Fuck. Excuse me, need a moment. OK. I got into looking at people and seeing how death had touched their lives. I'd wander through a shopping mall just to practice spotting the people who'd lost someone recently, or been at the sight of a car accident, or been to visit a cemetery. You can see death, if you know how to look. I mean, it's hard to put into words. I remember when I saw my first vampire... but anyway. It was Bone who introduced me to all this. She made it seem normal. See, when you Awaken, you inevitably end up spending time with others just like you. You spend less and less time with human beings. It's like a cult, really, and soon it seems just normal to be looking at people's auras and hearing the whispers of the dead. Normal, hell, you go out looking for it. You get better at it because it's expected that you will. Do you mind if we stop for a minute? Because everything's spinning.

"MY WIFE WANTED TO SUE THE HOSPITAL"

It was one of the biggest rifts between us. She considered them negligent. When Dr. Geist "became suddenly unavailable" (the exact phrase they used), they should have found a more experienced replacement, she said. I argued against it. I told her it wasn't their fault. Our doctor was the best in the world, and he dropped dead of a heart attack, who could see that coming? Ironic, yeah, but actionable? The surgery couldn't wait. I said we were lucky they found one of the, maybe, three other guys in the world who could do the procedure. She accused me of siding with the people who killed our child.

I accused her of putting her time and energy into revenge instead of grief.

Truth is, I did want revenge; but not against some hospital, or whatever corporate entity owned it. Not punitive legal damages paid out by some insurance conglomerate. I wanted something less abstract. I wanted somebody to hurt for it. Bleed for it. I wanted to grab someone who'd done the wrong thing, shove him in front of a truck, or shove his head into a bucket of water until he stopped thrashing. But there was no such person. Everyone involved did everything they could. Made the best decisions they could. Good intentions all around.

Things had just gone badly: no one to blame.

And then Jack came. To him I was just one more clueless dope who maybe picked up some tidbit of information he could use. He was writing about strange deaths in Baltimore; I don't even know if I gave him any worthwhile information. But he gave me everything. Jack told me what the hospital kept out of the papers and courts, those fucking lying weasels. The surgeon who'd been scheduled to do Emily's heart operation, he hadn't died of a heart attack that morning. It wasn't a heart attack that killed Dr. Geist.

He was murdered.



OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR

REPORT 0

Decedent : Henry Geist
OMI # :
Date report issued : 7/17/06
Place pronounced : Home
County pronounced: : Philadelphia

Cause of Death : Heart Attack

Manner of Death : Coronary Event

Date of Injury : n/a
Place of Injury : n/a
Location of Injury : n/a
How Injury Occurred: n/a

Autopsy performed by : C. Wendig

Death Certificate signed by : C. Wendig
Deputy Medical Investigator : W.C. Brow

District Attorney : ADA Merr
Law Enforcement Agency/Agent: R. Chillo
Hospital :
Other Agency :

Subject: Urgent Matter

Date: 7/22/06

From: Anthony Geist (ageist@padre.net)

To: Cardinal Samuel Gilmore (sgilmore@padre.net)

Conversation: Urgent Matter

Dear Lord, but that sheriff hated me. I tell you this, your Eminence, because you'll probably contact him at some point, if you look for me. He came to 10:30 Mass every Sunday morning and I could just feel the hatred as he glared from the last pew: hatred and fear. Two years ago Brother Benedict and I put down the thing that had crawled out of the Johnson well and into the cribs and nurseries of Moore County... and Sheriff Ames will never forget we saw him break down and blubber like a child when it was done. I expect he'll always hate me for that.

More's the pity, but I needed his help. I wasn't getting anywhere with the Baltimore police. The clergy there aren't very well connected, and none of the detectives were Catholic. So I was counting on the sheriff to circumvent the usual channels. And it worked. Sitting in that cluttered office in the township building, with his hatred of me heavy in the air like oppressive humidity, was a small price to pay for the details of my brother's death.

I sat down in a gray office chair held together by duct tape. He regarded me from the other side of his desk, wiped some mayonnaise off the corner of his mouth, put down his ham sandwich. "I see there are some new altar boys serving at St. Andy's," he said, slowly. "Young ones. I sure hope you and your fellows are keeping your hands to yourselves."

I didn't bother to react to that. "Joe," I said. "I wouldn't have asked for help if this wasn't important. Not just because it's my brother. This is about God's work." It was a phrase I'd often used in Moore County.

He softened a bit. "Well, we all were sad to hear about it around here," he said, and God forgive me, I sensed that mixed with his contrition was a touch of pleasure at my grief. "Not too many heart surgeons come out of Evansville, I guess you know," he added. He picked up a large manila envelope and handed it across the desk. I took the packet without touching any of the grease or mayonnaise stains dotting its surface.

"I'll read it, of course," I told him. "But... tell me, what do you make of it?"

The sheriff lifted his coffee mug, blew into it, set it down again. He wiped his brow. He ran a finger across his upper lip and flicked the sweat over his shoulder. "Well, the detective I spoke with seemed pretty puzzled. But she made it clear that her caseload is way too heavy for her to do any kind of in-depth digging on this." He blew into the mug again, took a sip. His hands were shaking some. I shouldn't have brought Moore County to his mind. It occurred to me for the first time that my very presence here was likely raising some terrifying memories for him. "It's just... my brother," I said. "From what they told me, some things don't add up."

The sheriff was nodding. "They found him collapsed in his office at about 8 AM Tuesday morning," he said. He spoke with a practiced, professional voice now; authoritative, detached. "His office manager found him. Coroner says he died the night before, estimated time of death 7 PM. The card access system shows his staff was out of the office by six, and no one else came in. Security videos don't show anyone on the floor that night, except for the custodial staff, and they didn't go into the office. And no sign of forced entry."

When he didn't continue, I asked, "Cause of death?"

"Coroner says he was strangled. With something flat, wide, like a leather strap, probably a belt."

"No chance it was suicide? He couldn't have hung himself somehow?"

"Well, father, there was nothing around his neck when the found him, and no sign of the — weapon, I guess you could call it — in the room." There was a smirking tone in his voice again. He liked knowing things I didn't.

"Signs of a struggle?"

"Father..."

"Joe, please, I need to know."

"OK, yeah. A definite struggle. Almost the whole room was trashed. Chairs overturned, desk contents

scattered, pictures knocked off the wall... they think..."

"Yes?" He wanted me to ask for details so he could dole them out like treats to a dog.

"They think he spent his last moments trying to open the door; to get out of the room. They found him leaning against the door."

"And how could a killer have left the room, leaving his dead victim leaning against the door he'd just exited."

"That's right. You'd make a good detective, Father, like that TV show about the crime-solving priest." He almost smiled, and then he shook his head.

"I get the feeling there's more you're not telling me."

The sheriff stared into his coffee cup for a moment. "Read the report."

"Joe."

"It was... when they found him. The poor woman who found him, and the guys who took him to the morgue. They said — well, it was his face. An expression of — fear, terror, horror, whatever you want to call it. They all remarked on it. More than the usual rigor mortis stuff." He wasn't enjoying this anymore.

"What about suspects? Motives?"

"They just have one 'person of interest' they call it. His daughter Harriet... you know, I honestly forgot he even had a daughter."

"They've been estranged for so long. I always hoped I could find a way to get them into each others' lives again."

"Apparently she came to see him the day before; at the hospital. They had an argument, people heard the shouting. Anyway, the detectives really want to find her, but there's no record anywhere of where she's living, and no one seems to know where to look."

I started hanging around with this group, we called ourselves Deep Glass because of this dream Velvet had... Velvet was kind of our leader. She was all right, smart, you know? But bossy, naturally. And there was this guy, Archimedes, who I really didn't like, right from the beginning. I wish I'd called him on some of his bullshit before it was too late. But we did our best to get along. And Red Sunday - Sunny we called her. Poor Sunny. A sweetheart. She had some kind of sex thing going on with Archie that I never did understand. And then Chain, who barely talked to anybody, but that was OK because you felt like you could trust him and tell him anything. And me. We all kind of fell in together, long story. We lived in this house near the university. Thing is, I was never 100% comfortable with these guys. I was the last to come along, so they all kind of knew each other. That was awkward, sometimes, them having this shared history. And they looked at me like the baby of the group. You're supposed to pull your weight when you're in one of these cabals. But the others didn't have much appreciation for what I could bring to the table. They were always after me to fucking fix things, or make things. I could do it, yeah, but I didn't have much interest in working with matter. The shades, the ghosts - those I wanted to learn more about. But the group didn't see much use to that, especially Sunny, who could call on spirits at the drop of a hat - she was really good at it. So what did we need ghosts for? Sorry. Spaced out there for a minute. You can't imagine the shit that happened to us. The first week we moved in together, this other cabal of fuckheads decided to push us out because they wanted something that was buried underneath the house. And they were really well connected, I mean in the Awakened community, so we had to be careful about fighting back. It went on for months, them sniping at us, us sniping at them... fuck, it was tense. I hated it. In the end we dug up this thing they wanted, turned out to be a fucking coffin under the cellar floor, and the thing in it just about killed us, but it turned on them and that was it. Then there was the time... Velvet had lost her mind... turned out she was under the control of this... well, I'm having trouble with my words I guess. We got Velvet back to normal. Shit, I don't like thinking about her... what am I, gonna cry? I guess I do miss her. Fuck.

Through it all, I really only wanted one think, think, thing, and that was to talk to my sister again. I could feel her presence stronger than ever, but even though I'd managed to deal with other ghosts of all sorts, I could only ever catch the barest glimpse of her. Like I'd see her in a, a glass-thing - a mirror. From the corner of my eye, her skinny legs and arms, and that stupid towel hiding her face. I wanted to see her eyes again, her hair. The rest of the group was no help with that. It made me feel like I had something to prove. This one night I went to a cemetery and started calling out the walking dead, just to show I could do it. But I didn't think it through. The things, the, the written things - the papers were full of grave desecration stories the next day and the whole house was mad at me.

Please, can you tell Dr. Fromm not to give me that electric therapy shit today? I'm still vomiting from the last time. And it hurts. It fucking hurts.

"SUDDENLY, THERE WAS A FIRST CAUSE."

A prime mover. Someone who threw the punch that smashed my life to pieces.

Jack can sound so reasonable. His theories about what happened to the doctor were crazy. But witches and magicians and curses, he made them all seem plausible: secret society; occult conspiracy; supernatural power. He never said those words. He implied them. He

sketched the edges of this shape too large to be seen in its entirety. He told me about the witches, everywhere, pretending to be human beings. His sources hinted to him that it was black magic that took Dr. Geist by the throat and squeezed the life out of him. And I guess I wanted to believe it. I think Jack felt sorry for me a little, sorry for

opening my wounds. When I practically begged him tell me what he knew about it, he did, and then he told me some more about Network Zero and this ring of web sites they had. I know he figured I'd poke around a little and give up. It would be needle in a haystack time, trying to find some nameless witch. He didn't realize how much time I had on my hands.



Subject: RE-Urgent Matter

Date: 7/22/06

From: Anthony Geist (ageist@padre.net)

To: Cardinal Samuel Gilmore (sgilmore@padre.net)

Conversation: Urgent Matter

My brother and I grew up in terror of our father and his rage. We sometimes slept on the kitchen floor at night, so we could leave for school in the morning without waking him. I became religious at an early age, and it was something my father didn't understand. He feared it a little and left me alone, and the punishments he inflicted on Henry were doubled. I thought, when Henry started a family of his own, that he'd finally know peace, finally enjoy the blessings he deserved after living with so much suffering. And then his daughter drowned. And he lost his wife to cancer. And his surviving daughter left home with no intention of returning. I'd tried to keep track of her over the years, my shy and bookish little niece, who I'd baptized, who I used to read to before bed, who used to go on long, quiet walks with me through the streets of Evansville. But she'd slipped away from me.

I don't believe God curses His creations, but: I've seen pictures of my brother's corpse, his dead, swollen tongue hanging from his mouth, his neck red and raw where the garrote had cut into his skin, his eyes wide and bulging, and his hair, which had been black as shoe polish the week before, now show white. Ghost white.

I wonder where I would be if I didn't have prayer. I wonder how my brother got along without it. They let me into the morgue to see my brother's body. I asked the attendant for some privacy. I knew it was wrong, Eminence, I knew that the Benedictions are not for personal use. But this was my brother. So I knelt by his body and whispered the Benediction of Saint Dysmas. And I asked the one allotted question:

"Henry, who killed you?"

His lips did not move. The answer resonated from some cold, deep place inside his corpse: "My daughter."



[Walton] was found, after a day's work, in a field, lying underneath a willow tree. There was a look of utter terror upon his face. His own pitchfork was driven through his neck, nearly severing the head... a cross-shaped wound had also been torn across his throat and chest with... Walton's slash hook, which was then lodged between his ribs... In their investigations, [they] discovered that an ancient defense against a witches' spell was to cut the witch above the nose and mouth, and also to spill the blood, which would neutralize the curse or spell. This further substantiated the fact that the unfortunate Walton had been the victim of somebody who believed the old man to be a witch.

—Anthony Masters,
“The Devil’s Dominion”

The unambiguous truth about reality is that reality's laws are quite ambiguous. They are mutable, these laws — though rarely broken, they are often bent. A star drawn in frozen blood on a freezer door commands the temperature in the surrounding area to never climb above 32 degrees Fahrenheit. A subtle glance from a beautiful woman (paired with a whisper that only secret gods can hear) shackles hearts to her own so that she may command the many men who suddenly love her. Ancient runes from a long-forgotten civilization carved across the keys of a laptop yield a bounty of data thought permanently wiped. A snap of fingers stirs a gale wind; a blubbering entreaty to dire powers conjures a comforting demon.

This is magic, and it is the tool of the world's hidden witches and traitorous sorcerers. See, hunters know of another unambiguous truth: magic is dangerous, and the witches that wield it are not to be trusted.

Witch Hunt

History and folklore is clear on the nature of magic and those who wield it (or perhaps more appropriately, those who serve it). Ancient Roman law held provisions against curses, incantations, and spells. Hammurabi's earliest codified laws made clear that magic is a deadly tool and its unjust use must be tested and punished. Early Judeo-Christian texts are unequivocal on magic: it's an abomination, it's evil, and those practicing it must either be exiled or killed.

Certainly some could argue that magic has its uses, and is ultimately neutral: like a knife or a bullet, it can be used for good or used for evil. Problem is, just like knives and bullets, magic falls all too often into the wrong hands. A shaman may work to mediate disputes between his village and the spirits outside it, but soon they whisper in his ear that they can offer him a taste of true power. A witch thinks to shackle a demon she needs to learn the Devil's weaknesses, but the only thing she's really doing is inviting iniquity and temptation into her heart. A magician hopes to turn fate on its ear (as well as the dice at a crap table) so that he can earn a bit of money to go toward the soup kitchen he runs... but the allure of magic is deep and fast, a swift-moving stream, and soon he contemplates all the things he could buy with the fat stack of cash in his pocket.

Hunters know this. They have glimpsed the effects of magic on man, and recognize the danger it represents. Witches, the bearers of magic, must be examined. Some must have their magic taken from them, effectively castrated from their seemingly limitless power. Others just need a bullet to the back of the head.

The Struggle

It seems easy to suggest the true solution is to destroy the witches and sorcerers. And for some hunters, that's true. Their powers are unnatural, magic opens the door to evil, and so the only answer is to bury them six feet under. The Aegis Kai Doru in particular recognizes that magic has a long legacy of being bad news, and so they respond a bit more... stridently.

But the struggle of “hunter versus witch” isn't so clear-cut. For one, witches aren't exactly easy to identify, are they? They're human, or at least human-seeming. Magic is rarely ostentatious, and besides, what separates a woman who inks her body with the symbols of her pagan faith from a man who carves sigils of his secret faith into the doorframes and floorboards of his house? Does one reap the ben-

efit of magic while the other simply doesn't have whatever strange spark or devotion is necessary to summon spells to her command? If the man's magic serves only to protect his household — maybe even his little girl — from harm, then where's the problem in that? Some hunters will tell you: for now, that's no problem at all. Other hunters will point out that magic is a slippery slope, and as soon as the man realizes his potential for gain, his self-indulgence will rear its nasty head. Better to deal with him now than when he's truly grasped his power.

Ultimately, look at it this way: the battle with witches is a struggle over *souls and secrets*. Regarding secrets, well... sorcerers *know* things. They have access to esoteric lore, ancient blessings, occult weapons. Witches are in many ways the inhabitants of a secret world, and some hunters believe *they* should be the responsible caretakers of such knowledge and magicians need to learn their place. Moreover, the secret world plays host to all manner of resources the hunters can use in their fight against witches and other worse creatures. Hunters, especially those of the ancient conspiracies, are no strangers to esoteric lore and abilities, and thus their conflict with witches becomes more an instance of bloody-minded competition than one of outright war.

And, what about the battle over souls? Some witches have placed themselves as shepherds or demigods above humanity. Hunters don't buy that. No, those carrying the Vigil are quite clear that *they* are the guardians of mankind, thank you very much, and mages are just hubristic aberrations who sometimes convince themselves of altruism when what they're really doing is giving into their basest and most indulgent urges. Maybe they don't mean harm. Maybe they truly believe themselves to be benevolent. But they're like children, and magic is like a loaded gun. Putting the two together is a surefire route to somebody getting hurt, probably killed. Humanity



VIGIL AND AWAKENING

This book is not meant to replace **Mage: The Awakening**. The witches and mages contained within are meant to represent a broad shade of magic-user; while it ostensibly includes the Awakened lot, it also includes a variety of other sorcerers, including occult ritualists, psychics, and so forth. Magic here is meant to be simpler and more flexible, adaptable to all manner of magic-wielder.

If you don't have **Mage: The Awakening**, don't sweat it; you don't need it. Alternately, if you *do* have it, then this book becomes a different resource for you and your troupe. Some of the material contained within may serve to append your already-existent understanding, and in addition, this book can serve either as an antagonist book for **Hunter** wherein the mages play the antagonists, *or* it may serve as an antagonist book for **Awakening** where the hunters and their organizations play foil to your Awakened characters.

This book also doesn't seek to invalidate mages or make them more monstrous than you'd like them to be. Mages can be awful, hubris-driven fiends. However, *so can hunters*. The World of Darkness is one cast in myriad shades of gray — no white hats or black hats, here.

Finally, we don't dig deeply into the ancient orders of Awakened mages — the sorcerers in this book are dangerous because they have magic, because they gather in small covens and cults, and because despite all that they still look like you and me. To the hunters, they are an insidious menace — just as the hunters can be an insidious menace to them.

must be kept safe, and mages violate that safety far too often regardless of their intentions.

Magic Is...

This is how we're portraying magic (and by proxy, those witches that use magic) in this book:

Magic is perilous. Magic is dangerous for both the witch who wields it and the hunter who pursues the witch. Witches find their once-held wisdoms atrophy beneath the promise of magic; hubris takes swift hold. Soon they begin to rely overmuch on magic, and even the tiniest problem seems apt to be solved by a quick touch of enchantment (and while they don't realize it, solving little issues with magic is like hammering in a nail with a loaded shotgun — it might do the trick, but somebody's going to lose a hand). For hunters, magic's danger never shrinks. It only grows.

Magic is unpredictable. Witches can seemingly accomplish anything with magic. One witch raises the dead, another turns

a hunk of dung into a princess-cut diamond. Sorcery might be unseen, with strange coincidences tripping up a hunter (the light turns red awfully fast, he stumbles on a tree root he swore wasn't there before, he *just so happens* to share a name and social security number with a dead man who owes the government for 30 years of back-taxes so now the hunter does, too...). Sorcery might be overt, flashy, bombastic (a screaming strike of lightning, a tide of wailing ghosts stirred by the hands of sorcerer-as-conductor, a witch's flesh becoming that of reptile or raven). The witch the cell encountered two weeks ago could only cast magic by combining weird reagents and offering his own blood in hours of prayer, while the witch they ran into this week seemed able to summon her sorcery with naught but a single uttered word and the wink of an eye. Magic has infinite faces. Magic is madness.

Magic is scary. Scratch that, magic is *fucking terrifying*. Sure, it's not some gory display of a zombie lunching on someone's gut-meat, nor is it a pack of baying lycanthropes chasing a lone hunter through the woods at night. But magic is insidious. It summons power from unknown sources. It is ultimately invisible, and can be made to turn one's mind to mush with but a whispered wish. Worse, witches are basically chameleons. They look like humans. Hell, they look like *hunters*. Even those hunters who have made tenuous alliances with witches know how scary they can be with their secret powers and blasphemous rituals. Any bargain with a witch always comes with the sulfurous whiff of the Faustian, as if at any moment one's soul could be thrown in as ante.

How to Use This Book

Hunter: Witchfinder is about how hunters — and in particular, your characters in your story — might interact with mages. It isn't purely about opposition or confrontation, though conflict between the two sides is an ever-present shadow.

Opening the book and preceding each chapter, you'll find tales of hunters and mages interwoven through Rick Chillot's story, "Following Harriet." You'll see the pursuit of magic and witches from many sides — what happens when those you love are the monsters you hunt?

Chapter One: A History of the Witch details the long struggle between hunters and sorcerers, and how that has shaped the Vigil — and, in return, shaped the magic that sways men's minds. You'll find in-setting artifacts detailing this eternal war as well as story hooks peppered throughout.

Chapter Two: Call and Response is about what hunters do about witches now. How do the compacts and conspiracies

view magic? Do they hope to eradicate it? Pilfer the witches' secrets? Align with the sorcerers to achieve a greater goal? Once more, story seeds are planted throughout the draft to help drive your **Hunter: The Vigil** chronicle. This chapter is also home to three new hunter compacts and one new hunter conspiracy: the Knights of Saint George, the dragon-slaying order that plays host to a few disturbing secrets.

Chapter Three: Magic Tricks is about giving you all the mechanics necessary to run a **Hunter** game in which the struggle versus sorcerers and sorcery is made dominant. You'll find rules to help you bring the magic of the witches to bear

against the hunters, but you'll also find new Tactics, Merits and Endowments to help hunters defend themselves, protect their flocks, and keep magic at bay.

Chapter Four: Spellbound is about putting the themes and moods of this book into play. You'll find practical advice — framed as essays by our writers — on bringing magic and witches to life in your games. In addition, you'll find the **Hunter: The Vigil** setting of Philadelphia given greater shape — magic has long been a part of the bricks and cobblestones of the City of Brotherly Love, and here you'll find all you need to make witches a pervasive presence in any story set here.





Magic has been a preoccupation with the human race. The belief in magic is as old as imagination, as old as dreams. Some think it even older. To do magic is to gain access to higher levels of reality, to effect changes in the world beyond those that could be achieved within the rules of nature as we know it.

One theory of magic says that it's how it's supposed to be, that human evolution depends on the human race discovering how to manipulate dimensions beyond the three we're familiar with. We're supposed to be able to do magic, the theory says, all of us. We just don't know it yet.

Most people who know anything at all about magic think that's bunk. If it were really the case that everyone should be able to do it, why aren't the people who know how to cast spells sharing this grand evolutionary knowledge? No, most of them gather into hidden conspiracies dedicated to amassing more power... and keep it secret. And if magic is something everyone should one day work out how to do, how come we haven't? There have been stories of magicians for thousands of years, after all. You'd have thought people would have gotten magic down by now... if we really were supposed to be doing it.

Sure, pop culture gave us Gandalf and Harry Potter, but it's also given us the Wicked Witch of the West, John Cassavetes' buddies in *Rosemary's Baby* and the antagonists of any number of Disney fairytale movies and Dennis Wheatley novels. So it is in a world where magic really exists. Fact is, for every harmless healer, there's a dozen power-crazed Satanists. They form covens, and then they form conspiracies. They have power; they want more.

And you know what they say about power.

The conspiracies and compacts who hunt monsters in the World of Darkness have their own opinions on what to do with a witch. It isn't pretty. But think about it for a moment: you've got people out there using powers they shouldn't have to oppress and control the human race, from the alienated teenager who plays, alone, with powers he doesn't understand right up to the shadowy puppet masters behind vast international conspiracies. They're all a threat to the future. They have to be stopped.

Not all hunters see it that way, though. The hunter who seeks the arcane document and the ancient relic may find a witch less of a quarry and more a rival. The hunter who wields the fires of Hell, magical organs implanted in his body, or the wrath of a God who may or may not exist might not consider himself to be a user of magic. But other hunters may see things differently. Even the *witches* might see things differently.

Sometimes, witches fight among themselves. A magician may even be on the side of a hunter, pursuing his own private grudges or even fulfilling some supposedly holy purpose. A warlock who performs the rites of Thrice-Great Hermes may himself be a hunter of other magicians, the ones who sacrifice innocents and worship demons. A hunter, even one who considers himself unbending, can sometimes find himself on a magician's side.

If a coven of magicians turns out to be the only thing keeping a horde of demons from breaking through into the material world, should a hunter kill them for being witches? These questions rise again and again. It's never clear. It never has been, not for thousands of years.



Plainly old women do not fly on broomsticks; the devil does not penetrate thick prison walls to make love to unwilling victims.... but many good, honest and sincere people reported these things — and were believed.
Nigel Cawthorne, Witch Hunt: History of a Persecution

Prehistoric Legends

Even thousands of years ago, people spoke in hushed tones about times ancient and forgotten, about primal myths. Many cultures have legends of a primal state where humankind did not know of concepts like "Good" and "Evil." In the Judeo-Christian Bible, it was Eden. In Greco-Roman myth, it was the Golden Age.

Later, societies imagined that the Golden Age was a time of lost civilization, some ancient Ur-civilization from which all others supposedly arose. Names like Atlantis, Thule, Pan, Mu and others are forever bandied about.

It's not all that healthy an idea. Historically, it's been used by thinkers who have wanted to prove that all civilization arose from White people, the assumption being that the peoples of Egypt, Great Zimbabwe, India and Central America weren't smart enough to figure out how to build things and invent writing on their own. Archaeologists point to different

timescales and evidence of entirely parallel development — history reveals no Ur-civilization. The evidence that different people came up with similar things at different times is not evidence of a common source, and a lack of any concrete physical evidence blows the theory out of the water, they say.

The scholar of the occult knows that the truth is somewhere halfway between. There was some civilization that thrived before recorded history. And it destroyed itself, just like in the myths. But its legacy to the future civilizations of the world was not building, or writing, or the secret of the pyramids, or any of that. No, the peoples of the world were quite capable of working that one out for themselves.

No. The Ur-civilization bequeathed only the thing that destroyed it to the world. It gave the world magic, and the world has suffered for millennia as a result.

In a Primal State of Grace

From a private lecture given in the Loyalists' Central Library, Munich, by Stefanie Hoffman, Senior Archivist:

You must realize that magic is not, if our sources to be believed, of human origin. In fact, if our documentary sources are to be believed, its genesis pre-dates the emergence of *Homo Sapiens*.

Those among you familiar with Steiner, Scott-Elliott et al will, of course, know of the Amoahals, allegedly the first Sub-race of the fourth Root, and the last of the races in the Steinerian schema to be definably not human. Nomadic, enormous of stature, blue-skinned, and so on. But authentically not human. This inhumanity extended beyond simple physical characteristics; although the Amoahals have developed what looks like a hunter-gatherer society, the use of quite advanced tools, and language, they had nothing that a present-day human would recognize as individual personalities. Devoid of imagination and true reasoning power, they were, so Steiner tells us, possessed of a perfect memory. All thought for them was past thought, things taught, things learned.

Still, this perfect memory manifested itself in their ability to conceptualize formerly-perceived forms and concepts perfectly. Their language was unique in that all things said were true. Not that they couldn't lie, although it appears they couldn't. No, inasmuch as the words they expressed were true in a cosmic sense as they were being spoken.

Words in Amoahal were more than the basic-level signifiers of our language. They were perfect conceptual representations of the thing signified. Imagine a human word as a photograph or drawing of the thing it represents:

a two-dimensional image in relation to that, a word in Amoahal was like a three-dimensional hologram, a perfect yet ephemeral representation as viewed from every side. Now imagine taking this holographic image and using it to edit the thing it depicts, as, by making changes to the image, you make concomitant changes to the original. This is the way to explain it. This is magic.

This, then, was the magic of language, specifically a language in which every word was a word of power, limited by the Amoahals' own inability to reason or imagine.

The theosophical take is that the Amoahals were our forebears. Some among us posit that they were a parallel, the ends of two separate branches on an evolutionary tree. Either way, the inheritors of the Amoahals were more conventionally human, although with the same intellectual limitations of their Amoahal forebears.

They lived in the primal state of grace of which we often speak and write, unable to imagine and hence unable to grasp good and evil. Unable to abuse the perfect power they had. In some ways, this was the true Eden, or Thule, or Atlantis.

The Amoahals' descendants would eventually leave the Amoahals behind, sacrificing perfect memory (and the natural ability to manipulate the True Language) for the human traits of reason and imagination. Reason and imagination led to ambition.

Here, then, arose the first of those ancient witch-things whose pride led to the ultimate fall of the Primal Age. The Amoahals had continued to exist peacefully alongside the hu-

mans. All it needed was for one of these early humans to re-learn the True Language.

This is conjecture. The shadowy histories are both fragmentary and by no means in agreement. But the point is that the human intellectual characteristics rendered the True Language unnecessary; for a human to learn how to harness it meant potential disaster. The Rmoahals could never use the True Language to effect any lasting change, because they were unable to conceive of ways in which it could be abused.

But the humans who knew it instituted a bizarre conceptual world of fluid history and world-spanning imperial tyranny. In what seemed like moments – in what may have actually been moments – the newly-made witch-kings transformed past, present and future. They created flying machines manipulated by mind alone. They remade, created or destroyed the bodies and minds of the unlucky people who did not share their power at their own whim. They erected vast towers on the borders of the visible universe, great cities that spanned continents. They created Manichaean gods. They spawned monsters and demons. Heaven and Hell, as I shall call them for want of better words, came into being thanks to the meddling of these first witches.

It could not last. The power wasn't stable; the new humans could not control it. Things fell apart. Atlantis fell; Thule retreated to the north and closed its gates; Eden was closed off forever. The great witch-kings apparently ceased to be.

Again, all this is conjecture. It has been drawn from documents liberated from some of the more organized magical groups, and from such dubious sources as channeling transcripts, automatically written texts and simple oral hearsay.

Its factual status is uncertain. As truth, there may be something in it. Perhaps, even by re-telling these myths, I make them a possible history of the human race.

No one has since been able to do magic on the level I have described since the collapse; no doubt the magicians have some explanation for this. Still, we have fairly solid documented proof that magicians exist. Perhaps we can credit the fact they have magical powers after all to the meddling of those ancient witch-kings, who tinkered with the minds of their subjects along with their bodies.

Still, we must be thankful that the True Language does not exist anymore. Were someone to find it, it could mean the end of the world as we understand it.

Story Hooks: An Ancient Lexicon

• The Page

A succession of museums and collections have had custody of a medieval scrapbook. It was kept by a venal bishop somewhere in 13th century France who had no idea what he was collecting. It contains, among many other treasures, a fragment of immeasurably old vellum which holds even older writing. It's the mystic equivalent of the Rosetta Stone; a document which could unlock the secrets of the True Language today. Someone realizes its importance and steals it. Several hunter compacts and conspiracies set their sights on getting it. The Cheiron Group might want to study it (and use it); the Long Night or Malleus Maleficarum might seek simply to destroy it; Task Force: VALKYRIE might be ordered to contain it; the Lucifer might send her followers out to bring it back that she might read it, perhaps seeking to re-unite Heaven and Hell. And that's just the hunters. What of the other conspiracies, the witches and sorcerers? A group of hunters finding it thrust into their hands will definitely find themselves pursued by more than one group of people. But they may also find themselves tempted. If only they can work out how to translate it...

• A Fluid Past

What if someone manages somehow to gain access to the True Language? They'd go mad, of course, perhaps even link-

ing minds with someone from that Primal Era Hoffman mentioned. Or swapping minds altogether; or becoming possessed. The hunters find the past changing around them. Public landmarks — Senate Houses or Parliaments, skyscraper, the Pentagon — become replaced by pyramids of shining black basalt. Baroque, impossible airships patrol the skies, faceless policemen patrol the streets, entire blocks of people get turned into stone and no one apart from the hunters notice anything's wrong. On top of that, the past keeps changing, morphing through any number of alternate histories in the space of days. It's always been like this. Why are the hunters apparently immune? Is something keeping them alive, just to toy with them or torture them? Or are they a blind spot protected by the last remnants of the natural order, reality's antibodies, destined to root out the infection? They might never know. But can they change things back?

• The Survivor

An archaeological dig or a building site survey discovers a huge boulder which, thanks to atmospheric pressures or age, or the rigors of having been dug up, crumbles to dust around its occupant, a perfectly preserved Rmoahal from tens of thousands of years ago. It goes on the run, leaving a trail of panicked destruction behind it. Witches who realize the ancient being's significance seek to track it down and learn the True Language from it. The hunters, probably drawn into the



case because of the anomalous nature of the survivor, work out that more is at stake than the life of a giant. The survivor is essentially harmless, but the language it speaks could reform the world. What to do?

The Secret Epic

From a report circulated among the leadership of the Aegis Kai Doru by Dr. Madeline Ogilvy in June 2008:

The head, as you know, is not that of John the Baptist. Rather, it is that of a woman; she was, when she "died," between 30 and 40 years old. The neck was severed cleanly at its base of the neck, the cut beginning, as far as I can tell, at the suprasternal notch and extending smoothly around the shoulders. The skin at the base of the neck is stitched to what seems to be a pale leather of some kind, the limits of which can just be seen above the edge of the solid gold plate that caps the neck.

She — I cannot use a neuter article, having seen her — has not decayed, or aged, for as long as we Guardians of the Labyrinth have kept her safe. It has been more than 4,000 years since she came into our possession, and she looks exactly as she must have looked when her head was severed.

She is possessed of a beauty that is difficult to quantify, since it conforms to a pattern of beauty — and an ethnic character — that was current in the days of Uruk. Her hair is braided and adorned with still-fresh oil and gold ornaments in styles not known to any contemporary archaeological source I can find. Her nose and ears are pierced with gold rings. Tattooed cuneiform symbols decorate her eyelids and cheekbones. Her eyeballs were at some point removed, replaced with balls of solid gold.

Her head is supported by a stone pedestal of a slightly later era, I think, designed by an earlier generation of keepers, but old enough now to be as much of an artifact as the head itself.

She is currently under the guardianship of three sisters, members of the same female line who have guarded her since we moved the head to Marrakesh in 1476. They are old now, and have no surviving female relatives, leaving some question as to who should guard her when they are gone.

She sings.

She does not sing every night, but – and this is in itself strange, since she is housed in a vault underground – on nights when the moon is clear, at least half-full and not covered by cloud, her eyes open and she sings, until the moon sets.

Since 1995, I have been one of a frequently changing group of linguists and scholars, dedicated to our attempt to transcribe and translate the head's songs. We think she sings in at least three recognizably distinct languages. One of them is some kind of early Sumerian dialect – my own field of expertise.

It's frustrating and difficult work, not least because of the disquieting, hypnotic effect the woman's voice has on the listener. Had I not achieved a breakthrough some two years ago, I fear that my mental health might have failed altogether. I developed, for a time, what could only be described as an unhealthy fixation with the head. I dreamed about her. I convinced myself that her messages and songs were directed towards me alone.

These delusions did not thankfully last. As it is, I think I would prefer to be placed on some other assignment having submitted this report.

I cannot speak for any of the other, as yet untranslated, songs; however, it seems that the head sings an epic poem, an apocryphal tale of the hero Gilgamesh, and his death at the hands of "the nine daughters of Nibiru."

I append the text in full; however, to be brief, the poem is evidently a sequel to a lost version of Gilgamesh's story, told, in part, in the first person. In this version of the mythology, Gilgamesh still gained the blossom of immortality, but did not lose it to the serpent. Also, Enkidu did not die; indeed, in which Enkidu is less a civilized beast-man than a wholly inhuman creature created or summoned by Gilgamesh.

The morality of the tale is, as is the way with ancient epic, ambiguous. The daughters of Nibiru are by no means morally pure, but the presentation of Gilgamesh is negative in the extreme. Gilgamesh molds monsters from the flesh of living newborns; Gilgamesh and Enkidu alone conquer an unnamed city single-handedly and render down the inhabitants into a sea of blood" with what seems to be a vast mortar and pestle; Gilgamesh has congress with demons and begets monstrous progeny; Gilgamesh murders his own human children; Gilgamesh teaches magic – but not his secret of immortality – to ninety-nine eunuchs who serve as his eyes and ears in the kingdom of Uruk; Gilgamesh steals the Sun.

It is the theft of light and the mutilation of the narrator's child by magic that inspires the nine daughters of Nibiru, of which the narrator is one, to take arms.

The nine women embark on a quest to find a means to destroy Gilgamesh. They visit Utnap-Ishtim, whose grand-daughter tells them they must pluck the bloom of immortality from his stomach. They find the corpse of Humbaba and harvest seven of his iron scales; these they grind into powder and dissolve in a bottle of wine bottled in the year that Gilgamesh was born. They take three of the claws from Humbaba's feet, and fix them to handles that they may be daggers. Then they return home, adorn themselves with jewelry, paint and oils, and appear naked at the steps of Gilgamesh's palace.

They offer themselves to him. Gilgamesh takes the three eldest daughters to his bed; they ply him with the poisoned wine, and with an enchanting song; he drinks and becomes blind.

He commands that the three women, one of them the narrator, be cut to pieces. And so they are. Gilgamesh's magic keeps the three alive, however, and he keeps the three heads — their faces marked with their crime, their eyes gouged out and replaced with golden orbs — placed on pedestals. They are to sing to him forever. They can do nothing else. But he is blind.

The three middle daughters come to Gilgamesh the following night, concealing their identity, and he takes them to his bed, and as he does, they use the claws of Humbaba to gouge a hole in his stomach so that anyone can reach in and withdraw the flower that blooms there. But before the eldest of these three daughters of Nibiru can reach her hand into his stomach, Gilgamesh, blind and in fury, transforms her into an earthworm. The second, he transforms into a blackbird, who can do nothing but devour her sister. The third becomes a cat, who devours the blackbird, and whom the mad king strangles.

The heads of the three eldest sisters sing a dirge for them.

The three youngest daughters of Nibiru come to Gilgamesh the following night, and once again, Gilgamesh, blinded and unable to eat (the food falls out), takes them to his bed, and as two of them pleasure him (the epic is quite graphic on this point), the youngest plucks the flower from the witch-king's stomach. The king dies, and his magic fails. The three youngest daughters of Nibiru abscond with the heads of their eldest sister, the narrator. Unlike the others, she does not fall into decay, but continues to sing.

I do not know what other stories the singing heads may have for us, but my own work is done. I cannot believe the tale of the nine daughters of Nibiru in any literal sense, but here is the head. It sings. It tells the story.

Please find enclosed an invoice for my last month's expenses and my official letter of request that I be moved elsewhere.

Story Hooks: Legacy of the Nibiru

• The Many Daughters

History is mostly written by men; is it any wonder so many hunters believe that the original Nibiru were men? But what if the head's song is, to some extent, true, and the Nibiru were a society (or family) of women, dedicated to overthrowing the witches and demons of ancient Sumeria?

They evidently had Endowments of their own, Endowments that aren't too different from those of the Aegis Kai Doru and the Ascending Ones. Perhaps some of the Nibiru's original concoctions, artifacts and powers yet survive in the work of these conspiracies. Or perhaps there are ancient sources of knowledge allowing those who know to access these ancient lost Endowments once more. What powers did they have? Storytellers interested in creating the Endowments of the Nibiru have ample support in the Research and Development rules found in **Hunter: The Vigil**, p. 191-195)

What if they yet survive, a secret passed from daughter to daughter throughout history in the Middle East? Maybe they're a conspiracy within the Aegis Kai Doru or the Ascending Ones. Or maybe they've been absorbed by the enemy and now work for a society of magicians.

Maybe a long search for the Daughters of Nibiru — a chase pursued by a half-dozen conspiracies and compacts, hunters and witches alike, all following clues as to their secrets — ends in the discovery that they really are gone. Maybe the only one of the Nibiru left is some old woman somewhere in Basra who is about to die. Maybe they're completely gone, apart from a crumbling, unintelligible book.

• The Singing Head of the Eldest Daughter of Nibiru

A team of translators sit with the singing head when the conditions are right and attempt to transcribe the head's songs (recording devices are not allowed on pain of death, which is possibly an adventure in itself). Dr. Ogilvy's epic is the first, but not the last. What ancient secrets are the Aegis Kai Doru going to learn? She might tell of more relics; she

might explain the secret of how to destroy a terrible enemy — or awaken it, and then destroy it. The problem with ancient secrets, of course, is that often the specifics change over time. Sometimes people get to the treasure first. Sometimes other things are there, too. Sometimes other forces know when their treasures have been stolen.

The head itself is a fine McGuffin. It's well defended, but that doesn't mean someone using magic can't steal it for its secrets (and use magic to understand it). Getting it back — or stealing it first — could make for a nerve-shredding story.

• The Line of Gilgamesh

Gilgamesh's magic seems impossible now, even among the most powerful witches, thankfully. But he spawned hundreds of illegitimate children in his century-long reign, many of which he didn't know about and didn't manage to destroy. Although the bloodlines have thinned over the millennia, countless descendants of Gilgamesh potentially live all over the world.

And every so often, the bloodlines cross and meet: two people with the genetic heritage have children and strengthen the line. The blood reasserts itself. And one of the children of Gilgamesh awakens one day, after some shock or traumatic experience to power and madness. It could be anyone. A formerly compassionate politician becomes a supernaturally powered megalomaniac. A police officer takes to the streets

and starts killing people he considers to be criminals with magical fire. A schoolteacher becomes the crazed leader of a demon-worshiping coven. A put-upon teenager starts teaching his misfit friends how to get their own back with magi, perhaps planning a Columbine-style massacre using magical power alone. Maybe the characters stumble across it and find out why later; perhaps documents belonging to their compact or conspiracy (the Malleus Maleficarum, Lucifuge, Cheiron Group, and Loyalists of Thule all have documents that could shed light on madness and magic infecting whole bloodlines, even if they don't know it yet, and don't know the source).

People who meet the scions of the ancient witch-king dream of Gilgamesh, of the flood, the blossom of immortality. Visions of winged lions and scaled giants appear over major cities in the world. The descendants of the god-king find themselves drawn, one by one, to the Middle East, to a mountain in Iraq or Iran where the flower of immortality and ultimate power blooms once more. The scion who swallows it becomes a new Gilgamesh... with all that entails. The world as we know it comes to an end; the new world is not one in which most of us would care to live.

Nitocris and the Ant

From Kemal Al-Hamadi, archivist of the Knife of Paradise:

The king-lists of the Sixth Dynasty do not mention Nitocris. Only Herodotus and Manetho tell her story, long after the Egyptians themselves excised her name, and as a result, conventional archaeologists do not consider her to have existed at all.

Herodotus tells of how she was made queen by force at the behest of the Egyptian mob. They had assassinated her brother, the rightful king, and had considered her easy to manipulate, being a woman. She ordered a vast underground hall built, not far from the Nile, and invited several hundred of the richest subjects of Egypt to dine. At the height of the evening, she left the room and commanded that a certain conduit she had ordered built be opened, joining the room to the Nile. The water flooded in, and the murderers of her brother were drowned. To escape retribution, Nitocris cast herself into a "room full of ashes," although what this is, Herodotus does not say, and at any rate, it does not matter, since, as the historians tell us, she did not exist.

It is better for the historians this way. Our own library tells a somewhat different tale. Nitocris' brother had been a witch. He had bartered his soul for power over the dead and the spirits. He ruled over a kingdom of ghouls. Under the Empty Pharaoh, the dead rose and built vast edifices from blood and stone. The army of the dead was joined by an army of mechanical contrivances, powered by the spirits: locusts made of chalcedony and ants of bronze ridden by spirits swarmed through the settlements of Egypt, eating livestock and children and parents alike, at the word of the soulless god-king.

A thousand men of the Cult of Set, not yet compromised by the vampires, dedicated themselves to fighting the locusts, and the ants and the corpse-army of the Empty Pharaoh. A thousand men of the Cult of the Phoenix charged themselves with his destruction, and it was only through the collaboration of his sister Nitocris, who had been initiated into the Cult of the Phoenix as a child, that the thousand men gained access to the palace while the Empty Pharaoh slept. When they overcame him, the thousand men were three hundred. The remains of the Empty Pharaoh's

corpse-army laid down their arms, and turned, and returned to their graves, as did the laboring cadavers who tirelessly built and dug across the length of the Nile Valley.

The ants and the locusts dispersed. The Three Hundred Survivors thought they had gone, too. This was their mistake; they had not.

As Nitocris and the Three Hundred Survivors slept in the ruins of the Empty Pharaoh's palace, the ants returned, and one gnawed its way under Nitocris' skin and burrowed its way to her heart. It ate her heart and with it, her soul. And it excreted the unfortunate soul of Nitocris into the dust of the spirit world. Nitocris became a vessel for the ant.

The Three Hundred Survivors made Nitocris Queen-Pharaoh, and chose to ignore the ways in which she began to re-institute the tyrannies of her brother, more subtly perhaps, without the desecration of the dead. The new Nitocris, her heart a clicking metal insect, preferred the desecration of the living, sending the brass spirit-ants out into Egypt. Every night, the ants would eat another heart; every night, another witch would be born, and the Cult of the Phoenix and the Three Hundred Survivors who led them became beset on all sides; the Cult of Set still fought the locusts, and although they would eventually return them to the spirit world, they became weakened, and their wills faltered, and the seeds of their fall were sown.

It was two years into the reign of Nitocris that the Queen-Pharaoh invited the Three Hundred Survivors to the banquet, and here the story of Nitocris as told by Herodotus and Manetho is true: the Three Hundred Survivors died in the waters.

And then the queen walked into the "chamber of ashes." Or was taken there. And then the ants vanished. This is all we know.

Why this is so, our records cannot say. The archive of the Cult of Set is long gone, and the Cult of the Phoenix lost its eldest and best that day, leaving only untried youths and children to carry on. Perhaps Nitocris, her soul in thrall to the ant, somehow gained enough will to sacrifice herself, taking the ants and their thralls with her. Perhaps the queen had suspected all this would happen before she ever took part in the slaying of her brother, and had taken precautions to ensure that should she lose her soul, someone else would burn her.

Or perhaps the Empty Pharaoh's ants had achieved their goal, and all that remained was for them to hide until the time was ripe for them to re-claim the world.

Who am I to fathom the ways of the spirits?

Story Hooks: Ashes of Empire

• The Ashes of Nitocris

No conventional archaeologist believes Nitocris even existed. So, when one discovers the (empty) tomb, it's a shock to the academic world. Inevitably, many Egyptologists consider the find a hoax. Someone steals the tomb's artifacts. They get smuggled out of Egypt and find their way onto the occult underground. Factions of occultists and magicians start to fight for them. A group of hunters arrives too late at a scene of destruction: two groups of witches have massacred each other. No one seems to have survived, and the prize (perhaps pointed to by a dying, delirious magician, his mind and magic spent), an ancient sealed urn, decorated with hieroglyphics, lies there, ready to be taken: it contains Nitocris' ashes.

In truth, not all of the witches die. Some escape, and they watch the field to see who wins, in the hopes of taking the urn from the winners. The hunters turn up just a little too

early: the witches don't know who the newcomers are, and proceed with caution. But the hunters are marked.

In the meantime, the new holders of the urn, the hunters, begin to experience dreams and visions. They dream of Nitocris, beautiful and cruel, and with a bloody hole in her breast, out of which crawl a swarm of metal ants; they dream of the ants, swarming across a desert landscape; they dream of a future in which Nitocris rules again and the empires of the modern age are thrall to armies of corpses and insects. Cabals of witches harry the hunters, but at the same time, the urn does too: maybe it grants powers to its holder. Maybe it makes things go sometimes right and sometimes wrong, directing fate to the time when the urn can be smashed and the creature in the urn, a melding of flesh and dust and brass and spirit, can walk in the world again...

• The Ants

They still exist. They never went away. There aren't so many of them now, maybe about a hundred, and they haven't had a purpose for thousands of years. Conjured by

the Empty Pharaoh in the Sixth Dynasty, these ants, so tarnished now that they're a greenish-black in color, still burrow into the seat of the victim's soul (in Ancient Egypt it was the heart; nowadays it's the brain — it's not where the soul is that counts as much as where the victim conceives of the soul as being). Having eaten, digested and excreted the victim's soul, the four-inch-long insect has what seems like complete control of the victim's will.

The gestalt being that results possesses quite considerable magical powers and an urge to create chaos. The ant on its own has no real motivations — its creator was destroyed thousands of years ago, after all, and after those millennia it's basically senile — it only exists to find a host, and leaves to find another when its host dies or when the host decides the ant must leave to find a more useful body (at which point, the host dies). The

gestalt entity of ant and host, meanwhile, intends to visit anarchy and destruction on the world. How it does that depends on the host: some might use subtle maneuvering and slow-burning long-term plans to bring about the intended horrors on the world, recruiting minions or setting up witch-cults. Another might seek the other remaining ants in order to combine forces, creating a near-unstoppable network. A less organized or intelligent host might just be compelled to kill.

A host who learns of the finding of the ashes of Nitocris would probably do anything she could to ensure the ashes fall into her hands. Or destroy them, depending on whether the insect's urges were to have purpose or simple freedom to destroy.

Myth and Reality

From Cheiron's Public Relations Training Handbook:

THE CHEIRON-GROUP

You will in the field occasionally find yourself approached by individuals who insist that Cheiron Ltd and the Cheiron Group are in fact the product of a conspiracy that long predates Cheiron Ltd's original foundation. You must be prepared to counter these accusations since, as a member of Cheiron's Field Projects Division (FPD), you will be the public face of the Cheiron Group, and likely the only Cheiron Group employee most people will ever meet.

What follows are the most common accusations leveled against Cheiron Ltd. The Cheiron Group has successfully defended against such accusations with litigation on several occasions, these myths are difficult to dispel. Although litigation is a regrettable course, be advised that it may at times be necessary.

The Cheiron Group is a tool of international freemasonry.

False. Edward Barrett, Cheiron Ltd's founder, was never a freemason. Cheiron Ltd and the Cheiron Group have links with a number of international medical research charities and children's charities, some of which reputedly gain from Masonic organizations, but the Cheiron Group has no direct links with freemasonry or any comparable societies. This has been proven in court.

The Cheiron Group is controlled by a consortium of witches.

False. Ideas such as this appear because Cheiron's Board of Directors value their privacy and prefer to remain anonymous. They have successfully protected their right to privacy in court.

The Cheiron Group was founded by the mythological character Cheiron.

False. The Cheiron Group was incorporated by the directors of Cheiron Ltd, which was founded by Edward Barrett in 1905. Mr. Barrett, a student of the classics, was inspired by stories of the centaur Cheiron, the tutor of Achilles. Cheiron was renowned for his wisdom and skill as a teacher and healer. Mr. Barrett felt Cheiron was an ideal symbol for his company.



There is no other reason why Cheiron Ltd and the Cheiron Group use Cheiron as our trademark apart from a strong sense of tradition and a belief in Mr. Barrett's original vision of a company dedicated to creating affordable, effective medical technology. The Cheiron Group has proven that Cheiron Ltd's origins go no further back through successful litigation. There was in reality no such person or creature as Cheiron. He is a mythological figure, and as such is fictional.

The Cheiron Group uses Cheiron as its trademark because Cheiron is a Satanic symbol.

False. The belief that the mythological figure Cheiron is Satanic comes wholly from the appearance of the character in Dante's Divine Comedy, which is a work of fiction.

The Cheiron Group's trademark symbol appears on Greek temples, Masonic halls and in books on witchcraft.

False. When Edward Barrett designed the Cheiron Group's trademark, he drew on his academic and cultural background. He violated no copyright. It is only reasonable to assume that other well-attested appearances of similar (but by no means identical) symbols come from a similar cultural milieu as Mr. Barrett himself.

Note: Should anyone mention the case of the recently-discovered temple at Santorini, end the conversation and refer the individual in question to Cheiron Ltd's Legal Affairs Department. If the individual persists in questioning or stating these opinions, remove yourself from the situation. Do not take part in any such conversation. Legal action is forthcoming on this issue, and FPD operatives are required to **make no statement whatsoever** concerning any temple at Santorini or any other archaeological projects.

Story Hooks: The Source of the Centaur

• Those Pesky Archaeologists

The Cheiron Group has a lot of money, but can't suppress everything. And those pesky archaeologists keep finding things over there in Greece: hot on the heels of that temple in Santorini, they'll sue you if you talk about news of another temple with the Cheiron logo carved on its pediment — not a similar logo, *the exact logo*, close enough that you could use a graphics program to map the current Cheiron logo onto its outline with no stretching or skewing whatsoever. And then there's the grave of a Greek hoplite with the Cheiron logo on the shield, and the skeleton with the right arm that hasn't decomposed. And which is a very strange shape, even taking into account the 2,500-year time span.

Cheiron bought that site, suppressed all the research, dynamited it for good measure and sued anyone who said anything public about it so fast they forgot where the ground was. Even so, an operative working for Cheiron (or a hunter working in competition with the FPD) might yet receive a desperate, anonymous letter from some academic somewhere with a description of the site, and photos.

FPD operatives who do some digging (and how are they going to find the time to do that? If they're doing it on company time or company equipment, they're in deep trouble) find instances of the Cheiron trademark logo going back 3,000 years; and always on documents and paraphernalia with the stink of witchcraft. And again, not a similar logo (although Cheiron's legal team will swear blind that it's not the same and you can see the obvious differences) — *the same logo*. The company has it all taped. Characters who dig into the origins of the logo might find stories of some cabal of immortal ancient Greek witches; or demons summoned by an ancient sorcerer during some lost imprecation to Hecate; or members of some ancient sect of high esoteric wizards who worship a "throne"; or five men and women who know the True Language; or a cabal of men who have tarnished bronze ants nesting in their brains and no purpose other than the use of money and power to destabilize the world.

An investigator has to get close enough, of course. Curious FPD agents get assigned to deal with packs of ravening werewolves or lung-munching demons on their own; with faulty radios.

Curious and *really lucky* FPD agents might find themselves the target of Cheiron's own hit squads while off duty, thanks to a "bureaucratic error."

The truth has several layers of the onion to peel before an agent even gets close to discovering the ultimate truth about who the members of Cheiron's Board of Directors actually are. And if our overly curious agent does, he may well wish he hadn't.

Or he may find it's all completely innocent. Or, at least, that's what he says when he comes out of his

meeting with the board, smiling, healthy and curiously blank.

• Ancient Evils

It could be the Cheiron Group really is connected with some ancient witch-cult. In the end, it doesn't directly impact what they do — until someone unleashes something that the Board of Directors has an interest in not seeing destroyed or captured.

An ancient Greek exhibit in a metropolitan museum includes an amphora that swarms with spontaneously generated flies when a drop of blood accidentally falls into it; the flies gather into a single gestalt entity and wreak havoc.

A cabal of witches shows every sign of worshiping Hecate, sacrificing at crossroads and murdering their own children in the manner of twisted 21st century Medeas. The cult spreads like a plague; parents turn on their children.

Or perhaps the witches go mad, becoming like the Bacchae of the Greek tragedy, copulating with or tearing apart anyone who gets in their way, doing their magic through crazed sex-rituals or alcohol-fueled orgies of murder.

Or a casket, unopened since the time of Epimetheus, unleashes a virus that grants magical powers, but degenerates the body; people who catch it can do magic... but become chimeras: manticores, cockatrices... or centaurs.

Any FPD hunter going after these things is ordered to cease all attempts to stop the thing, and abandon her non-Cheiron colleagues to their fates. What, then, if she defies the order? Or doesn't get the order in the first place (being too busy fighting to check her text messages) and defeats the thing?

But can she really *not* fight these menaces and keep a clean conscience?

Do Not Suffer a Witch to Live

The birth of Christianity brought with it the eventual end of the ancient world and the rise of the Middle Ages. Its founder, as mysterious then as he is now, performed miracles that at the time were considered by some of his opponents to be acts of necromancy. Still, his followers didn't see things that way and when they gained the upper hand, they drew a sharp distinction between the miracles of the Son of God and the work of magic. Then they did everything they could to destroy the witches who they saw everywhere.

The Mark of Simon (40-60CE)

From an essay by Dom Petur Vuorinen, privately circulated across the Malleus Maleficarum:

Tradition has it that the first Christian heretic was Simon of Gitta in Samaria, known to most as Simon Magus. He appears only once in the canon of Scripture, in Acts 8:9-24, where he is said to be a sorcerer who hears the Gospel and repents, only to beg the Deacon Philip the Evangelist to sell him the power to heal and to perform miracles. The Blessed Saint rebukes him; Simon asks that the Evangelist pray for his soul. That is all.

Simon, we are told elsewhere, did not repent of his error. His not-inconsiderable knowledge of the occult warped his understanding, and he created a Gnostic heresy. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of blessed memory tell us how Simon claimed that the First Thought of God created the angels. The angels rebelled and imprisoned the First Thought in the body of a woman, who in the day of Simon, was incarnated as a prostitute-slave named Helene. God descended in the form of Simon, who bought and freed Helene and made her his lover. He claimed that he was the True Son of God and that he and Helene were destined to join and save the world. He demonstrated the power of flight, first and foremost. He could throw himself from a mountain and rise unhurt. He could free himself from bindings. He had the power to control wind and fire, neither of which can harm him. He could create homunculi from the air.

He claimed he was the pupil and then teacher of Dosithenus, who led those members of the sect of John the Baptist who had not left to follow Christ, and hence claimed he was the true inheritor of John the Baptist.

The tradition of St. Clement of Rome tells us of Simon's struggles against the Apostle Peter. Simon, having turned away from the true faith, challenges the Blessed Saint to a contest of teaching. Simon delivers a homily, and then Peter, and so on until, three days later Peter achieves victory and Simon flees, his intent being to precede Peter at his next destination and incite the mob against him. Simon uses his magic to discredit Peter and his companions; when the authorities turn against him, he smears magic juice in the face of Faustus the father of Clement in the hopes that he will be executed in Simon's place. Peter sees through the illusion, but sends Faustus to Antioch, still wearing Simon's face, his intention to unravel Simon's cult through the same deception Simon sought to practice.

The final confrontation between Simon Magus and Simon Peter happens, according to the apocryphal Acts of Peter, in the Roman forum. Simon flies and preaches at the awed masses from above. Peter sinks to his knees and prays; Simon falls to earth; the mob, enraged, tears him to pieces. The church of Santa Francesca Romana stands on the spot where Simon is reputed to have fallen; the stones supposedly bear the imprint of the Apostle's knees.

Simon's Gnostic sect continued without him for a while. Then they disappeared.

So much for the myths and histories known to all. The Malleus Maleficarum's Black Library, however, holds a single 9th-century text of a cycle of stories and poems presenting Simon Magus as some kind of hero, a man who uses his magic to defeat demonic creatures otherwise unknown to us. On the other hand, some of his opponents (every item in the collection apart from the last deals with some conflict or another) seem to hold for us some familiarity.

One poem, which dates as far as I can tell from just before the fall of the Western Empire, tells of his struggles against "The Name That Must Not Be Written," an inchoate demon of darkness, which

for some reason hides within the Catholic Church. It is presumably an allegory for the corruption Simon's allegedly pure Gnostic descendants saw in Mother Church. In another, he is pursued by the surely more familiar "Seven Daughters of Nibiru," whom he eludes through the use of cunning and magic.

In the segment dealing with his struggles against the Apostles, the story seems almost apologetic. While the Magus falls to the earth in the Roman Forum, it is because "the people ceased to believe," rather than because of the prayer of the Apostle; later in the same document, he defeats both Peter and Paul in debate, and convinces them, perversely, to malign him in public, creating a myth of him as heretic and monster.

In the longest and most bizarre of the poems, other magicians stand against him in a contest of supernatural power, particularly a sect who seem sometimes to be described as Christians, and at other times as pagans. The documents call them as a group "Three Seers of the Throne," which strikes me as rather Gnostic in terminology, perhaps something to do with angels.

Certainly, they exhibit many of the same powers as the Magus, suggesting they come from some common source. The Simon Romance, as the collection has been called on the very few occasions the Shadow Congregation has permitted it to be referenced, is in part very difficult to translate and read thanks to its esoteric terminology, and the fact that it was written in Greek by someone for whom Greek was not a first language.

In The Simon Romance, Simon does not die. He joins Helene in an alchemical magic, with the aid of what can only be a priest of pagan Thoth-Hermes (a "Thrice-Great" magician, as the text has it); they form a perfect Rebis, a creature male and female, at peace with the two halves of its form. The Rebis ascends into "the higher emanations."

It's difficult to know what to make of this secret romance. The text shows signs of having much to teach us about magicians. I am fairly sure it was written by witches, for witches. Frustratingly, the information seems locked within layers of allegory and jargon, and without the key to understanding the work's esoterica, it is nothing more than a romance.

Story Hooks: The Magus

• The Simon Romance

As is the way with a lot of the content in their library, the Malleus Maleficarum don't actually know what they're sitting on. *The Simon Romance* is in fact quite a powerful grimoire; you just have to have "awakened" to the capability for performing high magic to be able to use it. This makes it a really dangerous book. Simon wasn't just a warlock, he was a member of a magical order that was unimaginably ancient in his day. It still exists, and it's still fighting in a secret war against the same enemy it fought against then. Still, times change and over time secrets get lost, which is where *The Simon Romance* comes in. It contains, coded within its moldering pages, the means of performing deadly, forgotten magical incantations. It tells the location of the Head of John the Baptist (the *real* one, which is incidentally not one of the ones possessed by the Aegis Kai Doru).

And it reveals the secret of the ultimate cosmic plan of the Lords of the Aeon, who some call the Archons, or the Exarchs

of the Outer Church. Simon's followers preserved the knowledge for their order, only to die out. So the descendants of Simon's order would literally kill to discover the truth behind what they believe to be the ultimate fate of the fallen world (or what would be that ultimate fate if they don't stop it).

But here's the kicker: the servants of the Lords of the Aeon are not aware of the Archons' plan, either. It's in the nature of their order for their instructions to come from the most obscure, bizarre, elliptical sources. The very possibility of having something direct and obvious — yeah, they'd kill for it, too.

But the Malleus Maleficarum haven't told anyone about it, right?

Well, no, they hadn't, until a Finnish Dominican named Petur Vuorinen wrote a report on it, a copy of which was among the effects of a dead priest found (possibly killed) by one of those warlocks we were talking about. The thing about warring magicians is that they keep tabs on each other. As

soon as one group of esoteric magicians starts frantically looking for something, starts cracking heads and making people spontaneously combust, their opposite numbers will begin to realize that something's up and take steps to find out what it is. Suddenly, two groups of magicians are after *The Simon Romance*. Maybe they find it; someone steals it and manages to get it out of the Vatican and on a plane to wherever the best place to set a story is. Someone else steals it from them. They steal it back, all the while trying to decode its secrets (esoteric magicians these days aren't all necessarily fluent in Neoplatonic Greek) before the other side gets it. And then there's this agent of the *Malleus Maleficarum* who's just been told he has to get it back from whoever it is who's managed to get hold of it today. Mayhem results, of course.

• New Simonians

An alternative: Simon's followers were entirely separate from esoteric magic orders. They were the people who wrote *The Simon Romance*. It does not contain the secret of the Archons' plan; it is just a collection of stories. Simon did not belong to an esoteric order, and the references to "Seers of the Throne" are just a coincidence (and not remotely outside the bounds of possibility, given that Gnosticism is packed full of references to visionaries and thrones and angels and the like).

The Simonians are gone, but the legacy of Simon Magus still exists, and although no orthodox scholar believes it, secret writings of Simon Magus do exist. All it takes is someone to find one of those translations of the *Secret Writings of Simon Magus* knocking about on the Internet and think a bit later-

ally while reading it; and whoops, suddenly someone's figured out how to do magic. And she's told her friends. And now people are flying, walking through flames, changing their appearance and maybe even starting weird religious movements based upon Simon's teachings.

So, a group of hunters stumbles across a whole catalog of weird events that fit the pattern of Simon Magus' *modus operandi*. Members of the Long Night tremble at the thought of Simon's return, it being one of the apocryphal signs of the Coming End of Days. Agents of the Lucifer scratch their heads and think, *hang on, wasn't he one of us?* And the witch-hunters of the *Malleus Maleficarum* remember the recent report and wonder if the old heresy has reared its head once again.

The culprits lead the hunters a merry dance, but when the hunters finally get them face to face, it turns out the culprit isn't really a new Simon. It's a teenage girl (no more than 16 or 17 years old) with some of her school friends, using their newfound powers to settle a fair few scores. They're just kids. What do the hunters do? They have to do something, but it's not a question of simply taking the kids' books away — they *know how to do magic*. There's no simple way out of this one, and tragedy could well result.

Jerusalem Demands (1191)

From the account of Reynard, Count of Derby, Knight of Saint George, concerning the Capture of Acre:



I had been entrusted by the King with overseeing the siege engines. It had been useful in the past to cast decaying carcasses into the city. Cattle were hard to find. I thought it worthwhile to use the tactics used a century before at Nicaea. We cast the heads of dead heathens back over the walls to their fellows. The decay would bring pestilence just as surely, and the faces of brothers in arms would cause distress and lessen their heart for the fight.

It worked well. The King had no objection.

On the second morn after we had begun this practice, my squire discovered four of the men who managed the engines dead, torn asunder as if by some beast yet bloodless, and smeared in some caustic effluent the color of the sky. The baskets in which we had collected the infidels' heads had been emptied.

The men trembled and spoke fearfully of devils — didn't the Saracens sacrifice children? Were they not as terrible as the Jews?

I wanted to laugh at them; I contained myself.

And Lord Captain, I took it upon myself to find the culprit.

This much I knew: among the Saracens, the sects that they call the Batini hold a position of contempt and fear; the Mohometans regard them heretics as we consider the Cathars, or schismatics as we consider the Greeks. In truth, there are many, and none of them can agree, and all are persecuted by their Saracen brethren. Among the many, there are a few of these Batini who hide among the number of the Mohometans, who are not truly to be counted among their number at all. The god they worship is not the Allah of the Saracens, but an older, faceless Angel. They worship the Ones From Outside, and call Their servants to this Earth to do their bidding. They are mad.

I had seen the signs of the Outer Ones' work in times past. We returned to our work. A sortie by the Saracens gave us balls for the catapult, and more to spare. Came the setting Sun, I bade the men retreat to their tents and kept vigil alone. No man or beast came that night, or the second night. Or the third.

On the fourth night, I saw a rent appear in the sky not far from my own tent. A shadow clawed its way through the air and entered my quarters. It found nothing, and when it left, it met my sword. I clove it in two with two blows, before it touched me. It screamed, enough to awaken the King himself and all his retinue, and fell to the earth, where it faded away like the snows in the early days of Spring. It left behind it that same blue effluent.

I wiped the sword, and with the fluid on the rag I used that ritual of knowing I had been taught only a year before. I sought out the place I had seen, and found him there, waiting for me. He knew that I would come, this Batin. And I, I had my sword and my faith to protect me.

The fight frustrated us both. For my part, I could not pass the barriers of wind and fire and smoke he erected. For his, he could not pierce my resolve. My shield of faith did not yield.

The Batin called upon his Other God, one of the lesser gods. It came through another rent in the sky, its black tendrils flooding into the world like blood from a severed limb, its green eye visible as if from a distance not imaginable.

I stood firm and pulled back my collar. I revealed the Sign you inscribed on my chest, and cried out the words you taught me. I spoke the Name That Must Not Be Written. I called on the Unbegotten Source of growth, the Shapeless Walker Across the Planets.

And I said the Words That Must Not Be Written, and I offered the Batin as a sacrifice to his own God. I worshiped, as I had done before and will do again.

The Batin screamed as He Whose Name Must Not Be Written, whom I knew of old and yet could not know, took him. I know he will scream for all eternity as He Whose Name Must Not Be Written devours his living soul, mote by mote. He was a fool. He did not know with whom he dealt, man or God alike.

I had only to show him how a Christian dealt with witchcraft.

Story Hooks: Other Gods

• The *Batini* and their inheritors

Batini is a pejorative term, often used by orthodox Shia and Sunni Muslims to refer to the various mystic sects that exist within Islam, such as the Alevi of Turkey and the Sufis.

But hidden among them during the Crusades were witches who, like the *Batin* Sir Reynard dealt with, consort with gods other than Allah. There's no guarantee that they're gone, and, more importantly, there's no guarantee that these cultists are confined to Islam (although the people who hunt them might make that mistake). Saladin's court was hugely cosmopolitan. The medieval Islamic kingdoms were the nearest thing there was to true multicultural centers, and along with the dissemination of diplomacy science and learning, it only stands to reason that darker things might spread.

The worship of the Gods From Outside (whatever these so-called "faceless angels" are) spread in the late Middle Ages to the Indian subcontinent, then across the Himalayas to Tibet, Nepal and China, and then to the rest of southeast Asia, entering Japan sometime in the 16th century. It spread south, and arrived in Great Zimbabwe by the beginning of the 1400s. And it traveled north and west, infecting isolated communities — sometimes even whole monasteries and convents — in Europe, particularly in northern Italy and the north of Germany. Few cults survived in Spain — the Inquisition might have done terrible things, but the excessive zeal of Torquemada and his brethren did succeed, almost as a byproduct, in eradicating the witch-cults. A few managed to survive in England, under the noses of the Knights of Saint George, who, although they kept faithful watch, were few.

A small cabal of cultists sailed with Columbus; nearly a century later, another would accompany Sir Francis Drake when sailing to Virginia, staying there. In the New World, as in the old, the cultists thrived, secret until in the early 1920s. A writer of pulp fiction learned something of the old cults, purely by chance. He changed a few details, and sold some horror stories to a small number of lurid magazines. Few people took them seriously; the fans who praised them for their apparent authenticity and coherent "mythology" never took them as anything more than simple stories. What the writer was doing is unclear. Was he trying to warn the world in some sort of covert fashion? Was he simply using them as subject matter. It doesn't matter. He died young, of a particularly virulent cancer that had a frighteningly swift onset — the doing of a witch-cultist who tracked him down.

The cults, needless to say, survive today. Some exist, hidden within the Catholic Church. Some have hijacked the more benevolent New Age movements, hiding their philosophies within talk of "self-actualization" and "meditative techniques." Others still exist on their own, hiding within corporate boardrooms and remote Alpine villages alike.

What do they want? Some want the apocalypse to come, and think they will somehow avoid the worst of the eventual devouring of the world by the Other Gods if they sacrifice, worship and do what they consider the gods' bidding. Some want to placate the gods through sacrifice and murder, falsely believing it makes a difference. Some of them want power.

All believe that knowing how to contact or call these unknowable god-beings means that the Ones Outside care what they're doing. It's a misconception. They're still beneath the notice of those faceless angels. The cultists are dangerous. They create vast, entirely made-up justifications as to why they should do what they're doing, and conceive equally labyrinthine plots as a result. A cult might murder 23 people who were born on the same day, or who own a certain copy of a certain edition of a collection of pulp fiction sci-fi stories. They might behead ten male virgins, each in a mall parking lot at midnight on the full moon as some sort of sacrifice (and some of the gods respond to sacrifice, in the same way that something tiny and attractive, like a ladybird or a moth, might briefly gain the attention of a man on his way to somewhere important). They might not have any apparent plot at all, their mad leaders trying to fulfill goals that don't have any purpose at all. The plot peels away like layers of an onion: apparent ritual murders, an apparent purpose, a dagger, a man trying to get the dagger back, a book left behind by fleeing cultists, a central conspiracy that goes all the way to the Pentagon, a plot to unleash a nuclear holocaust across the world as a vast act of sacrifice and summoning... that sort of thing. But there is no heart, no center. It's all empty.

• The Knights of Saint George

The order of Knights to whom Sir Reynard belongs were no ordinary Christians; alone of the knightly orders of the Crusades they still exist. And they still only pretend Christian faith, worshiping the Ones Outside for their own ends, namely the destruction of witches. They play a dangerous game, trying to use what scraps of power they gain from the placation of the same foul entities the witch-cults follow, the better to destroy warlocks. Their work predates their history as a knightly order, however, and for thousands of years, they have waged a vendetta against the magicians who identify themselves with the "Dragons." Why is unclear. Would the entities they worship prefer that the "Dragon wizards" cease to exist? Do the Knights of Saint George uphold some long-forgotten grudge against the magic-workers, much as the Ae-gis Kai Doru do? The only way to find out is to join.

Other hunters who meet the Knights may find them staunch, if obsessive enemies of the witches. But the more they fight alongside them, the more questions our hunters find themselves asking? Why are they so zealous? Why are their not-inconsiderable powers so unlike those one would expect a Christian to wield? The hunters find out more, perhaps uncovering the truth. And then what? Do they live and let live? They might, but the chances are that the Knights may not, preferring to either recruit or kill those who know their secrets.

For more on the Knights of Saint George, their history and their goals, see p. 99.

An Age of Discovery

Time goes on. The Renaissance brought with it a revolt against the Church. The pace of discovery continued. The

birth of Protestantism brought questioning, including the questioning of all religion. In the turmoil of the next few centuries, people began to experiment: with religion, with science, with exploration, and, inevitably, with the occult.

New frontiers were pushed, in the Americas, in the South Seas, in the Far East, and in the minds of humans. The witch remained, shaped by the age, still a danger and still a fear. Witch-hunts destroyed the innocent more than the guilty (the guilty all too often having the power to escape their pursuers). The witch-

hunt extended beyond witches, as a series of great revolutions brought democracy... but also totalitarianism.

The Burning Question (1628)

From an anonymous manual, bound into a signature at the back of one early edition of the Thomas Cranmer Book of Common Prayer, published in Nottingham, England:

The following often excite our suspicions, and should be thought worthy of investigation:

The open questioning of the authority of the Church.

The rumor of unnatural carnal desires, with beasts or with those of the same gender.

A knowledge of herbs and potions. An ability to effect unnatural and marvelous cures.

Speaking of fairies as if one knows their business.

Visions, especially if they are of things seen by the Papists. Those of true faith know that the Virgin Mary does not appear; these things are thus ap- paritions sent by the Deceiver, who even now holds in his grasp the antichrist Bishop of Rome.

The individual having been observed to have spoken with strangers to the parish.

An ability to predict the weather, and more, the reputed ability to whistle for wind or rain.

An aversion to the work of the Church; a failing to attend the Eucharist regularly.

A fascination with plays.

A desire to tell others about one's dreams.

An inadequate respect for God, an irreverence towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

A failure to affect proper reverence on Easter Sunday.

A lack of knowledge of the Holy Days of the year, or the Ten Commandments, or the Beatitudes.

An animal like a black cat, or a black crow, or a hound of unusual size and ferocity, or a rat. The

Devil often grants the witch a familiar demon, bound into animal form.

The loss of one's copy of the Scriptures, with no explanation as to where it has gone. Witches exchange their Scriptures for books of evil work- ings, granted by Satan himself or his demon minions.

Any of the following are true signs of a witch:

Witch marks, which may appear in many forms: as moles or warts, as discolorations of the skin in patterns that have the sign of Satan. Alison Green of Derby was seen to have a mark that resembled the head of the Horned Goat on her neck. Joan Upney of Worksop grew a black wart on her hand. Know a witch-mark in that it does not bleed when prick'd with needle or bodkin.

Curses, whether they come to pass or not. Jane Cony of Bottesford cursed her neighbor's crop of barley to fail; it did. William Bray, a Cunning Man of Melton Mowbray, swore in an argument that the man who cheated him would fall in ill and die of an ailment of the bowel. Not three days later, Tobias Bowen, whom seven good men of Melton Mowbray did swear had cheated William Bray of three acres of land, did die of an ailment of the bowel.

Possession of a document signed in blood, a compact between the witch and the Devil. Know the names that may countersign said pact: Lucifer, Beelzebub, Satan, Elimi, Asteroth, Baal- berith, Asmodeus, and Mephistopheles. The compact signed by three of these dukes of Hell binds a witch to Satan's service forever. William Bray's Contract was pursued by one Jack Lowe,

who told how he stole it from the warlock's house while the warlock slept, at great risk to himself from William Bray's familiar demon, bound in the form of a crow.

Being seen consorting with a Black Man of great height and deep voice. Five witnesses attested to how Jonathan Good of Mansfield sucked from the Black Man's milk by night on the common of said town. Three good men of Newark saw Jenny Hopkin, Elizabeth Francis and Sarah Howe dancing with the Black Man on a hill outside said town; they were heard to declare the names of ten men and ten women they wished to see dead.

To have taken the blood baptism of Satan; to have partaken of the Black Mass. A yeoman of Bassetlaw confessed himself ensorcelled by Susan Martin into partaking of the Devil's Mass. He made due repentance, and the witch was brought to justice.

To have conjured demons to harry the dreams or waking of one's neighbors. Nicholas Grove of Worksop dreamed of carnal intercourse with Joan

Upney on five nights, and yet she would not speak to him by day; he accused her, and she was tried and brought to justice.

To speak to one's familiar demon in intimate terms; and to issue commands and confide desires. Susan Martin of Bassetlaw was heard to speak to her cat as if it were her friend. The aforementioned William Bray spoke to his familiar crow with affection and fed it meat, as attested by nine men of his parish, among them Jack Lowe.

To be immune to drowning. Jane Cony was ducked in the common lake nine times, and yet did not drown, although the three women with her succumbed, and we praised God that their souls were innocent.

To be immune to burning. Alison Green was at the stake and was heard to command that the wood did not burn. It did not. The five women who were said to be of her covey died, innocent and maligned, and we praised God that their souls were in Heaven, not Hell. Know then that the faithful must hang a witch.

Story Hooks: A New Witches' Hammer

• A Guide to Witches

Among many unaffiliated hunters, this sort of thing is really the very best a hunter has to go on. Without the detailed resources and libraries of the Lucifuge and the Malleus Maleficarum, the archives of Task Force: VALKYRIE, or even the online forums of the Union, what else is there? The question everyone who relies on a guide like this is simple: how much is real? That's really up to the Storyteller, but even if some of the information is still current and real (and bear in mind that some of it is *never* correct), the fact is that it won't be real every time. A witch given over to Satan may have a mark that doesn't bleed when pierced... but it might be something else (for example: as a teenager, the author had a blue mole on his arm that didn't bleed when cut. To his regret, the only power it manifested was the power to turn into skin cancer, and he was glad when it was cut out).

The tension between the signs of a witch and the alternative explanations can drive a story, and even a chronicle, as a group of hunters armed with the old manuals of former days tries to track down witches, seeing the signs, and never sure if, this time, they're real.

On the other hand, more knowledgeable hunters might have to deal with a loose-cannon witchfinder, with a copy of

one of these Early Modern Era handbooks and an urge to take it as gospel. Suddenly, he's killing "witches" right, left and center, without any evidence beyond the contents of an old book. Maybe he or she has turned slasher. A potential ally has become a liability (particularly when the *real* witches come for him... and his "friends").

• The Field Projects Division Handbook

Speaking of handbooks, what about the Cheiron Group's own publication? It's mostly inaccurate. Much of it is simply updated from the guide reproduced above, with added pseudo-scientific explanations: for example, according to the FPD Handbook, witch-marks are mutations caused by the "wasteful extrusion of channeled extra-normal energies." Still, the material on witches accounts for quite a sizable portion of the handbook. This is because the Cheiron Group is scared of witches. The FPD particularly dedicates itself to investigating reports of miraculous healings and miracle cures. Benevolent, careless magicians should take care. It's the worst nightmare of the Cheiron Group that magic healing might come into common currency. If everyone's able to heal magically, what place will there be for the manufacturer of pharmaceuticals? Where's the profit? On the other hand, denying them to Cheiron's competitors (no, Cheiron doesn't *have* any direct competition, but that doesn't stop the management being a bit paranoid), taking them in and stripping them of their secrets makes perfect sense.

The Age of Reason (1794)

Told in From Vendémiaire to Thermidor, by Louis Giraud, published London, 1821:

Unaffiliated hunters looking for witches might find themselves targeted by Cheiron employees looking to deny their targets to anyone else. Given that several Cheiron employees manifest unnatural powers themselves, it only stands to reason that conflict can, and will, result.

My mistake had been to suggest to Saint-Just, over wine in his salon on that first day of Thermidor, Year II, that the abolition of history was not entirely necessary. Could it be, I said, that through understanding our past, we would be able to avoid the future repeating its mistakes? Saint-Just had smiled, and had said that the Revolution was perfect, and that it would make no mistakes.

I had pressed the point, excited by wine and the pleasure of debate. The room had gone silent. I changed the subject, and apologized for my gaucherie. Saint-Just had smiled and said, "Citizen Cajean, you are a thinker. The Revolution needs men who think, just as it needs men who act."

The following morning, they came for me with a warrant for my arrest as an enemy of the Revolution, signed by Saint-Just. I was a fool. I should have known.

So it was that I ended up in a cell, awaiting trial alongside the hundreds of others, due to stand in front of that tribunal behind which I had sat myself, tried by my former peers. The window of my cell was high and barred, but I had been here before, and I knew that it faced the courtyard where Madame Guillotine held her court, as much a queen of the masses as Marie-Antoinette had ever been. Sure enough, the heat of the cell was made more unpleasant by the sound of the crowds, from dawn to dusk, as they chattered and gathered and roared barely loud enough to drown out the slice of the blades, the separation of head and body. A brief lull followed; within the hour, another hubbub, another round of executions.

The cell was small and filthy, barely big enough to accommodate the rats, but even so, within two days of my being there I was joined by another man, a small, austere individual who, having picked himself up and brushed off the dust from his clothes, introduced himself only as "Panurge, Chevalier Thélème."

I shrugged at this. It was the fashion among many of the poorer revolutionaries to pretend to wild, fantastic titles, and if he fancied himself a disciple of Rabelais, whose work I admired, then at least we had something about which to converse. What was it to me that he chose to conceal his name?

The days wore on. The jail was over-stocked, and although Madame Guillotine was the most efficient of ladies, the Revolution had seemed to have found itself far too many enemies to behead. We were there for three days. Le Chevalier Thélème, whose real name I would never discover, proved to be a charming and well-mannered cell-mate.

Despite the cramped confines in which we found ourselves, his presence made the sojourn before what I thought would be my inevitable execution somewhat more bearable, although we could not ignore the periodic roar of the crowd as with each execution, our own became nearer. He was a man of ready wit, erudition and manners, who fully understood my humiliation. We talked of literature, of the weather, of politics and philosophy. He both knew and understood Rabelais and Voltaire alike, and could quote both authors more readily than I could. He was no Jacobin, preferring the views of Thomas Paine. I had surmised that this, indeed, was the reason why the good Chevalier had been confined here. It was only on the third day of our joint imprisonment, the sixth of Thermidor, I think, that he was to tell me why he was here.

I had told him the sorry story of my drunken conversation in the salon of Saint-Just, and its inevitable result, and he nodded.

"This is no time for dissent. For my part, I was imprisoned because I hunt witches."

"One could argue that hunting witches is the prime motivation of the Committee of Public Safety, friend Chevalier," I said.

"No, sir, you do not understand. I hunt witches. Magicians."

"You shock me, sir. It has been an endeavor of the Revolution to prove that such things do not exist. Without the priests, are we not freed of the burden of false religion?"

"Without the priests, we are free perhaps. But was this any reason to kill them all?"

"We live in a desperate time, sir. Public safety is paramount for the sake of freedom, and those who would spy on the people for the Church of Rome are surely a danger to the future of the Revolution."

"As, doubtless, are you?" He smiled.

"Ah, sir. You have me there."

We paused, as another man died outside and the crowd drowned out our thoughts.

I began anew. "But surely, Monsieur Chevalier, you do not believe in the existence of magicians and witches? For does not a belief in the witch presuppose a belief in Lucifer, and a belief in Lucifer consequently implies a belief in God?"

"Ah. My certainties end with Lucifer. But I am sure of God's absence."

"But not His non-existence?"

"You are perceptive, sir. Yes, on that subject I have my doubts."

"And Lucifer?"

He shrugged, and said, "It is a matter of family tradition, sir. You could say it was in my blood."

"You strike me as far too intelligent a man to be swayed by simple family tradition."

"Would that it were so simple, friend Cajean. Would that it were so simple."

We spoke some more about the nature of God and Lucifer. I put it to the Chevalier Thélème that demons were no more than creations of human imagination, and as such had no power over us, their creators.

He laughed aloud, and said, "The former statement is certainly true, but even given that, the second statement does not follow. This Revolution which began with such fine talk of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and which has brought us both to such a sorry pass — would you not say it was the product of a human imagining?"

"I would, but come now, surely you cannot equate the idea of a Revolution with some kind of Devil?"

"But did anyone predict the course that this Revolution would take? Did anyone really think it would descend into Terror so quickly?"

As if to punctuate his point, the crowd outside roared once more, as another head rolled.

He put out his hands, palms up. "Who are we to say that the mob has not given life to the idea of the Revolution, that this idea is now aware of what it is, and knows what it is doing? That the mob are, without knowing, witches who have sold their soul to a demon they themselves created? Or, worse, that perhaps the creators of our Terror are knowingly witches?"

"You speak metaphorically."

"I do not, sir."

"If this is true, and I cannot credit for an instant that it is, but if this is true, what can be done about it?"

"One waits for the right time, and one goes out to do battle with it. I mean to do battle with it."

"How can one fight an idea?"

"I do not know. But I will find a way. Perhaps, one first fights its worshipers."

"Your witches?"

"Indeed, sir. What if I were to tell you that among the Committee for Public Safety there sat three men whose participation in the Revolution was but part of some terrible working of magic?"

"Then I would say you were mad, sir."

He laughed, then.

"Still, sir. I will find a way."

"Sir, you cannot fail to see that you are in a prison."

"I do, sir."

And the conversation ended. More Enemies of the Revolution died that day, and while I slept that night, the Chevalier Thélème escaped. I do not know how. The bars on the window were in place, and the door was bolted. Only a smell of brimstone was left behind to show that anything had happened. The guards blamed me, but could find no way to explain how I could have abetted his escape and, since I was doomed to die anyway, could think of no way to punish me further.

I do not know what happened to the Chevalier Thélème, but this I do know: two days later, unexpectedly, the Committee of Public Safety split, Robespierre and Saint-Just were arrested, and, like the King before them, executed on the following morning with only the barest of trials. The Terror ended. I was set free. I would have been one of the next group to go to the guillotine.

I like to imagine the Chevalier Thélème as having somehow defeated the idea of the Revolution. With his erudition, good humor and free spirit, I like to think that in some way he had.

Story Hooks: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

• The Tyranny of Ideas

Sometimes a concept moves beyond the people who originated it, transforming the minds of people and the world. It can be said that it gains a life of its own. But consider: is it too much of a stretch to consider an idea a living being in its own right?

The issue comes when someone begins to treat it as a personality, presumably as a means of gaining magical or temporal power. The French Revolution may or may not have been a sentient idea (it probably wasn't, in the end), but there have certainly been others.

A political movement — perhaps toxic from the beginning, perhaps initially benevolent — develops a life of its own. One day, the flags of freedom are waving. The next, half of the people who supported the revolution are against the wall? What happened? The idea had its own ideas. A multinational brand logo — say, for sports shoes, or discount clothing shops, or even a multi-brand that appears on cola, trains, planes, records, pharmaceuticals and everything else — is everywhere. People spend three times as much for a branded T-shirt as they would for a shirt without a brand.

Like most brands since the 1980s, it's been shedding employees and assets and setting up dirt-cheap sweatshops in developing-world economic protection zones. It's been firing employees and

then re-hiring them as temps through agencies: so no pension plans, health insurance, or sick pay and no tax.

It's an idea, and it's working for a specific ideal: independence. The brand owns nothing, makes nothing. It employs no one directly and amasses vast amounts of money. It is free to grow and free to become sentient. It could be subtle; it could become a kind of monetarist god. It might be able to possess its employees; it might be able to speak for itself through text appearing on the Internet, or text messages, or through the voice of its managing director.

Maybe a cult of witches chooses to use the concept of a brand or political symbol as the conduit through which they do their magic, accidentally awakening the sentience of the concept. They become suborned into doing its bidding. Or maybe the sentient concept finds cultists of its own, granting them with bizarre, psychoactive powers. Defeating a group of magicians is easy; destroying the idea that drives them is harder. When the concept itself is independent and malevolent, it may be nearly impossible.

• Artifacts of the Revolution

Madame Guillotine was a busy lady: towards the end of the Terror, thousands of men and women lost their heads; often for reasons that seem utterly insignificant now (Cajean's drunken suggestion that wiping out history might not be wholly beneficial, and really would have been fatal). Such is

CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF THE WITCH

the way of totalitarianism. Much the same sort of thing happened under Stalin and Pol Pot and a hundred other totalitarian states where rulers are frightened of ideas.

The apparatus of those regimes carries with it terrific conceptual weight; the symbols and the propaganda have a great deal of dark power, which they often somehow hold over those who would otherwise have no connection with such regimes. That the symbol of the French Revolution was, ultimately, not the *Tricolore*, but the guillotine, speaks volumes.

One of those guillotines finds its way into a museum. There, it attracts the working of a group of witches. Perhaps they wish to use it as a focus for a terrible and bloody magical working. Perhaps they've been hired to create some sort of crisis. They steal the guillotine and harness the energy it contains to drive the city into an insane frenzy of mob violence, perhaps because their employer wants to demolish a district of the city and a crisis like this is the excuse he

needs to clean up. Or maybe it's less mundane, and the use of the guillotine is the beginning of a plot to call up a demonic force of god-like power, a Hell-spawned devil, or one of the Ones Outside. Maybe the guillotine itself contains a particularly virulent spirit. Maybe it needs to be rendered down into its component parts (which isn't good from the museum authorities' point of view, because it's worth potentially millions).

Alternatively, perhaps the magicians want it because it's a vital component in a human sacrifice; can the hunters stop it being stolen? If they can't, can they stop the sacrifice? If they can't do that, can they face the consequences?

Kali Yuga (1876)

A transcript, in part, of a talk given by Eustace Farnshaugh to the Ashwood Abbey's London Chapter:



In the final analysis, the thing that convinced me to return to that God-blasted country was the rumor that the Thuggee had re-emerged. As you no doubt know, the East India Company had wiped out the degenerates some forty years ago, but every so often a story would appear among the natives that they had come back.

As Chester is showing you now, our expedition began in Calcutta and traveled East, eventually arriving in Delhi.

Interesting place, Delhi. Consultation with a guide, who, depending on the day, told us his name was Ajay, Anil, Mukhat and John (laughter) led me to visit a Pirzada named, as far as I could tell (I can never get these heathens' names straight) Sadr-Uld-Din.

The Pirzadas. Interesting chaps. A sect of Muslim magicians, part of the group they call the Sufis. The Pirs are, as far as I could tell, thought to have power over the Djinns, demons of the wind. I had half a mind to ask Sadr-Uld-Din to call up one of his Djinns for me to have a crack at it, but it would have been impolitic, since I needed to avoid offending him, partly because he supposedly knew where the new Thuggee were hiding and — having no love for the Hindus or the English and hoping to see us all dead — would point me in the right direction. Also, more pressingly, I had heard that this Pirzada in particular would give me a very good price on a pound of hashish.

As it turned out, the price he gave me on the hashish wasn't tremendously good, although it was of more than passable quality. As for the Thuggee, he sent me in the direction of Moradabad, a city a few days' ride to the north-west of Delhi. You're unlikely to have heard much about Moradabad. Although of quite some size, the inhabitants have nev-

er really caused the East India Company or the Raj much trouble. The place is apparently known in Northern India for its fine brass goods, so I felt that should the expedition prove fruitless, I should at the very least get myself a new hookah.

In Moradabad, we hired ourselves a few new bearers and gained the interest of the local garrison commander, one Colonel Albert Cholmondeley-Warner. He was a capital fellow; and provided me with every hospitality. He didn't initially see the expedition as being of much worth, since he hadn't believed the rumors, but volunteered to join us, since, as he said himself, Moradabad had been deathly boring for the longest time. He was joined by a small platoon of British troops, all of whom were looking for an excuse to shoot some of the natives, led by the doughty Sergeant Arthur Mainwaring, an unimaginative man with a nonetheless healthy contempt for the locals.

After having exhausted my stock of hashish in Colonel Cholmondeley-Warner's company, we set out for the wilds, looking for trouble. Having failed, after a fortnight in the field, to find any sign of the blessed Thuggee, or any other of those heathen cults they had there, I was close to deciding to return to Calcutta, but on the fifteenth day out, Sergeant Mainwaring smelled smoke coming



CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF THE WITCH

from an isle not far from the near bank of the Ramganga. I was more or less prepared to ignore it as some native camp, but I was frankly so bored that any action at all was preferable to thrashing around in the wilds of India without anything to look at other than filthy peasants and even filthier wild cows.

I was glad that I had decided after all to bring a number of two-man canoes, and joined Mainwaring, Cholmondely-Warner and three of the men on the simple crossing.

One of the men, a private soldier whose name escapes me, found it first; the rest of us were alerted by the sounds of the poor chap losing his breakfast. They clearly don't adequately train the British Army these days.

Simply, we found a clearing in which some sort of ceremony had happened. At one end of the clearing was a tremendous image of Kali, the eight-armed devil goddess of the Hindus. It really was quite a capital piece of work. The statue held my attention for some time, it being tremendously well-endowed with every womanly charm. Sometimes several times over.

However, my colleagues seemed for the most part uninterested in the craftsmanship of the statue, preferring to concentrate on the corpses that littered the clearing in various states of decomposition.

I was able to make a number of sketches, one of which now hangs in my bedchamber. I will quite happily show its unique charms to any of the ladies here. Similarly, if anyone is interested, I will, at the same time, offer a demonstration of some of the Tantric skills I later learned from a fakir in Madras. I digress. Having satisfied myself with my artistic depiction, I felt that perhaps I should take account of the corpses. For the most part, they had been butchered from the inside out, and their intestines strewn around the grounds. They were all adults, fairly youthful in age, and all had bloated faces and marks around their throats suggesting that they had been strangled, which, if the large statue of Kali hadn't been a giveaway, left no doubt that we were in the midst of a place sacred to the Thuggee. Which, all things considered, was rather encouraging, I thought.

We decided to bring the rest of the party over to the island, regardless of the inevitable misgivings of the men and the bearers, and wait for them to come back.

At about ten o'clock that night, our lookout reported movement on the edge of the river. Cholmondely-Warner ordered the men into their prearranged hiding places and we awaited the arrival of the Thuggee.

They came in short order. I was disappointed to find that they hadn't bothered with ceremony. There wasn't even any chanting. Most disappointing. They outnumbered us two to one, and had in tow several captives, gagged and bound, presumably for sacrifice. I found myself somewhat unimpressed that they had chosen not to clear up their previous mess.

After some arrangement or other, a masked figure came to the base of the statue and bid the followers come to order. He waved a hand, and I jumped as a dozen or more candles on poles around the edge of the clearing spontaneously lit. It seemed best to me to wait until the height of the ceremony before mounting our ambush, reasoning that the act of strangling their victims would engage the cultists' concentration enough for them to be wholly surprised. Besides, there was no urgency. None of the victims were European.

It was Sergeant Mainwaring who spoilt it. As the villains began to work upon throttling their victims with (I was delighted to note) the trademark red scarves, the Sergeant stepped into the middle of the clearing with his rifle leveled at the head of the high priest, and commanded that the ceremony stop.

This had the expected effect, for me at any rate, as the cult leader raised a hand and Mainwaring found himself holding a cobra, which turned on him and struck, killing him almost instantly.

There seemed nothing for it but to put a bullet in the head of the cult leader, and a second in his heart for good measure, and then to order the troops to bring the ceremony to an end. The melee claimed the lives of all of the Thuggee and two of our men; stray bullets, shock and strangulation did for all but one of the victims, who rather ungratefully was reluctant to aid us, only agreeing to lead us back to Moradabad at gunpoint.

Examination of the cultists' bodies led to an interesting discovery: all of them including the leader had been branded, as Cholmondeley-Warner informed me, with the mark of a British-run prison from the next province, which had experienced tragedy a year ago when the perpetrators of a mass escape had rebelled against its commandant and killed him. These were the men, it seemed. I hadn't realized, I said, that brandings were still performed in British prisons. Cholmondeley-Warner explained that this was not a common practice, and was only used on the natives. They understood little else.

There seems little more to add. I had invited Cholmondeley-Warner to join our number, and he was quite game for it, but unfortunately, he succumbed to malaria fever not long after I left him. A loss, I am sure you'll agree.

I have prepared a small exhibition of the artifacts I obtained on the expedition, on the table at the back. I look forward to answering your questions, ladies and gentlemen...

Motivation and the Consequences of Empire

Eustace Farnshaugh, as a Victorian Englishman, couldn't possibly conceive of the resentment engendered by the British Empire in its holdings. The Sun might not have ever set on the British Empire: the British did what they did in broad

daylight. And they weren't alone. The Belgians, French, Germans and Italians all did terrible things to their colonials.

This is what really happened in the background of Farnshaugh's story: the cultists weren't really Thuggees. The real Thuggee weren't a cult, they were a brotherhood of politically motivated bandits who waylaid European travelers and those they felt were collaborating with the

CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF THE WITCH

British in the first quarter of the 19th century. The East India Company dealt with them, and spread the story round that they were a gang of Kali-worshiping fanatics.

But in 1875, the inmates of a prison grew so sick of the abuses to which they were subjected that they rebelled and killed their guards, led by one man who had discovered that he could do magic. Having used his powers to commit acts of murder and mutilation far beyond anything he would have imagined he would do (he'd been imprisoned for stealing bread), he had a breakdown, and began to hear the voice of Kali. He'd heard the official version of the Thuggee story, and having no reason not to believe it, decided that if it was a Kali-worshiping strangler the British wanted, that was what they were going to get.

A colonial bogeyman was created from a colonial fiction by the actions of the colonists, and, even more tragically, its victims were not the agents of the British Raj, but the cultists' own people.

The point of all this is that these stereotypical bogeymen still exist — and we in the West create them. A century and a half ago, the British made monsters,

and failed to understand why the monsters kept coming. And when some of them learn to make magic, the results can be deadly.

When it's directed at a colonial power, it often manifests as a kind of terrorism. It's tragic, not least because all too often the potential terrorists are only the way they are because of the actions of the power they're opposing. It's tragic because these terrorists' victims are rarely the people directly responsible for the crimes that incited the attack in the first place. And it's tragic because terrorism is fundamentally criminal.

Add to this the magical traditions of a hundred nations. A newly-minted nationalist who knows how to do magic is all too likely to make a point of using the mystic or occult traditions of his own oppressed culture.

Trouble in Salt Lake City (1879)

A private account by Elder Lucas Grey, a Marshal of Salt Lake City:

A man's got his faith in God and his gun, I reckon, and there isn't much else to keep him on the narrow path.

But when John Houghton clawed his way out of his grave and came for me, it was a sore test of a man's resolve. I'd seen him hanged not one month before. He'd killed three men while robbing the State Bank and killed his own brother arguing over the loot. I was glad to see him dead.

And a little less glad to see him get out. It was him, all right, if he weren't a frightful sight, all worm-ridden and full of holes, and eyes like boiled eggs gone rotten and teeth and whispering my name in this gurgling, rattling voice. He came for me in broad daylight, and there weren't a soul on that street who dared even stop him. I put a bullet through his heart. Didn't stop him. Then I put a bullet between the eyes. That stopped him.

There were all these good people watching, and I think I said something like, don't worry, folks, he's a bad man escaped from the county jail and we got him bang to rights, and hoping and praying that no one looked too close at the body or saw my hands a-shaking.

Well, Houghton, he was only the first. Kurt Sterne, he was next to claw his way out. Sterne'd killed his own mother for the money and got his fool self hanged last Fall, and a couple days after I'd shot him down, Henry Gordon the cattle-thief, who I'd drilled through the heart in self defense, shambled off a streetcar and tried to tear my head clean off. He would've nearly had me, too, if I hadn't have shoved him under the streetcar.

Then there was Frank Henry Chase, who'd come to get me after I'd hanged his brother Jack for murder fair and square, and I had to shoot him dead. He'd given me a bullet in the chest for my trouble that laid me up for a good three months, and why, there he was, nothing more than bones and rotten skin and hair, reaching for my throat when I woke up in the morning, and he would've had me if I hadn't been sleeping with my gun under my pillow and managed to put a bullet through the top of his mouth and out the top of his head. It's no way for a man to get out of bed, with a moldering corpse lying atop him.

When Jack Chase came for me screaming out of tonsils you could see from the outside, shambling down the middle of the street as I was leaving Bible Study one night, well, then I started to wonder what was coming next. The Pearl of Great Price tells how Joseph Smith got persecuted as a boy, but he was a prophet and he'd had a vision vouchsafed to him by God, and me, I was just some law man who'd been doing my duty.

I've never been a man of great wit. A smarter man than me would probably have decided that the place to be was the graveyard, but I worked it out eventually. If the Sons of Perdition were so keen to meet me, maybe it was time to come see them at the gates of Perdition.

Midnight seemed a good time to come, and the grave of Jack Chase seemed as good a place as any to wait beside. He wouldn't be coming back.

I don't know what I was expecting, but I sure wasn't expecting who came along. I was leaning against the tree and I heard a sound like someone coming, and here comes a lady, a dowdy, ordinary-looking lady, kind of like my sister Rebecca. I knew her. I'd seen her mopping the floor of the Temple not one week ago. I slid behind the tree. She stopped by the grave of Francis Lee, who I'd seen hanged three years ago. I forgot why. But I reckon that if he was in Perdition like his fellows, then he'd not want to stay there, and he probably had a grudge against the man who put him there, even if it was his own stupid fault for shooting that lady on the train. Still, the lady was kneeling on the grave and whispering like she had something real important to say, and then she rocked back on her heels, and the turf on top of the grave started to rustle and move, like some great big animal was burrowing under there.

Well, I didn't have any desire to be re-acquainted with Francis Lee, so I stepped out from behind the tree, tipped my head and said, "Ma'am. It's an odd time to see you out here tonight."

She started laughing then. It was a scary sound, and it'll stay with me, this good Latter Day Saint in bonnet and pinafore, kneeling on a grave conjuring the dead back from hell, and all of them with a grudge against me, laughing like a mad woman. It unsettled me, surely, and when the bony claw of Francis Lee shot up from the earth in front of her, I hadn't any choice but to shoot her between the eyes.

The hand didn't come out any further. It just stayed there, sticking out of the ground for a moment, and then it retreated back under the ground. I guess the dead'd rather have a rest than pursue a grudge, even if they are in Perdition.

I'd never shot a woman before that, and I haven't ever shot one since. I didn't want to, but like the Holy Bible says, Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live, and if she wasn't a witch, I don't know what was.

Still, I reasoned that perhaps I shouldn't tell, and left her there. The keeper of the yard found her the next morning, and called me. Turned out the keeper knew her. She was kind of a regular at the graveyard. Her name was Leah Houghton. Her nephew, well, I killed him twice.

I took the opportunity to be the first man round Leah Houghton's house. It was all what I'd have expected from some spinster, except that down in the basement, I found all these old papers and books. Well, I only opened one, and saw something about a "Name that Must Not Be Written," which didn't make a deal of sense, and some of the most frightful drawings. Saw something so awful I near dropped the book. I closed that book right back up again, and gathered up all the candles and robes and bottles of herbs and such, and took them home and I had me a bonfire that night in my back yard.

It didn't take long for some friends and neighbors from the Temple to come down for the funeral. There were some other folks, too, who no one seemed to know, and one or two of them

looked at me funny, and I looked funny back at them. But there wasn't anything I could do, and a suspicion isn't any kind of accusation at all.

The strangers left after a while. I never did see them again. I spent that funeral listening to the ladies from the Temple saying, oh how awful it all was, and how lovely a lady she was, even if she had a bad seed in her family.

Me, I couldn't agree. I reckon the family had more than one bad seed, is all.

Down Among the Dead Men

Witches often use the ghosts of the dead as agents; others use their bodies, too, conjuring up revenants and zombies as a means of performing acts they may not be physically capable of doing themselves. Maybe the dead servant is simple muscle; maybe the dead person is someone the witch loved or hated in life. A witch who was bullied as a teenager murders his tormentor and then calls him back as a put-upon henchman. A man whose controlling, smothering “love” drove his wife to suicide returns her to hellish un-life as his lover and slave. Or, as in the case of Lucas Grey, an aunt desiring vengeance on the state Marshal who hanged her nephew calls back the nephew, and when that fails, calls back to life every man the Marshal ever killed. Hunters in the modern day don’t live in the Old West anymore, but given the nature of the game, they do end up killing an awful lot of people. Getting back at their old opponents one by one in slightly decayed form can be a real rave from the grave.

A revenant is a dangerous servant to maintain. Even if the unfulfilled desires of a dead man are in sympathy with the desires of the witch who made him come back, he still resents his re-creation and may well want to kill his creator. Often, witches who use dead men in this way have some sort of object as a focus for their power over the dead: a ring, perhaps, or a necklace. Hunters who aren’t as good a shot as Marshal Grey might yet be able to get rid of the threat by simply getting hold of the focus object and giving it to the revenant. A revenant with the thing that controls him in his clutches may want to get his own back on his creator. He may just want to return to the grave. On the other hand, mindless zombies are just there to get killed. In some ways, having a villain who plays around with corpses in your stories makes things much more clear-cut.

Often, witches don’t really know what they’re doing when they call on ghosts and dead men. There’s no guarantee that the thing they summon is really the ghost of the loved one, or that the body is really inhabited by the person it was when it was living.

A reluctant slave might follow the word of his master’s commands, but not the spirit. Savvy hunters may have the chance to exploit this vital chink in a necromancer’s armor.

But if calling on the dead is so risky, why do it? There are a lot of reasons, many of which go beyond the personal. Some witches do it because, well, death is the one thing they can’t

avoid. Death is the eternal truth, the final answer to all questions. Death is inescapable. Finding what lies beyond that veil is the fervent desire of the necromancer. To know the truth beyond death is, so the necromancer thinks, the first step to conquering it.

The desire to get an answer to that existential question overcomes all shreds of common decency. Messing with corpses violates taboos held by practically every culture that ever existed. Raising them is abominable. A strict materialist might protest that if a body is just meat, surely there’s no moral harm in raising it.

Try getting him to tell you that when the shambling corpse of his mother comes down the street, ready to eat his brains (in fact, the reluctant return of a deceased and beloved family member is a tremendous motivator).

When violating corpses or conventions about talking to the dead becomes second nature, other violations start to happen. You start wondering about other things you can do with corpses.

When a necromancer isn’t alone (and Leah Houghton wasn’t – where did she get the books? Who were the strangers at her funeral?) it only compounds the problem. Whole conspiracies of necromancers exist, and in groups they reinforce each other’s opinions, even as they grow to hate and envy each other.

And they have long memories. Thirty years after shooting Leah Houghton, Lucas Grey, aged 76 and long retired, was strangled by persons unknown. Three days after he was buried in the same churchyard where rested Leah Houghton, Grey’s grave was violated. His body was – apparently – stolen. It had to have been stolen, reasoned the authorities.

It’s not like it could have walked away, now is it?

The Inexorable March of Progress

The 20th century brought with it turmoil and destruction on a scale never seen before. By the end of the century, the human population had risen to six billion, and yet people seemed to be doing their absolute utmost to wipe every last man, woman and child from the face of the planet.

The Great War introduced the concentration camp, the aerial bombing raid, and the use of chemical weapons. In trenches across the Old World, whole generations of young men died, and at home, God died in the hearts of those who mourned them.

The next war brought the systematic and almost complete destruction of a whole race, and the birth of a weapon that could end the world. In the atomic age, fear reigned, and witch-hunts of a different stripe arose on both sides of the Iron Curtain. People feared the metaphorical witches so much that the real ones ceased to be an issue.

Things came full circle as miracles and other Fortean phenomena re-entered the parlance of the Christian church: the century ended with Protestantism rocked by a number of charismatic

figures claiming miraculous powers, and Catholicism accepting the canonicity of more saints in one ten-year period than it had ever done before. It was the century that gave the world Padre Pio and Aleister Crowley, Benny Hinn and Gerald Gardner, all variously called charlatans, heroes, spiritual leaders... and witches.

Operation WALPURGIS (1944)

VALKYRIE STEERING COMMITTEE EYES ONLY

DEPARTMENT OF WAR

Washington, DC

From: GSP

To: DDE

Subject: Operation WALPURGIS

1. Colonel Purchase reports that TFV's maiden operation has proved an unqualified success. In his report, he claims more or less complete certainty the elimination of the Eisler group.

2. The phenomena reported by TFV's survivors may seem difficult to credit, but I'm convinced they're speaking the truth.

Phenomena experienced by TFV members and apparently under the control of the Eisler Group include:

i. Distracting optical effects not dissimilar to the "foo fighters" encountered by our pilots over the last few years. It may be that they're related.

ii. Unusual extremes of heat and cold, often experienced by different members at the same time. Gun barrels froze up and became unable to fire; others found that their weapons became hot enough to burn. Some members of the Eisler Group seemed more proficient than others. One of our men (Fisher, K) appeared to spontaneously combust at the behest of one of the Eisler Group, being incinerated within seconds.

3. To summarize the report, the Eisler Group themselves exhibited several paranormal abilities in their final confrontation with TFV. Some appeared to be able to shrug off the effects of a limited number of bullets. Others showed

speed and strength beyond anything that the survivors recognized as normal human limits (one is reported as being able single-handedly to push a German tank across a street). Others still appeared able to inflict injuries or permanent deformities with a touch. Most damagingly, some appeared able to change their facial appearance. One of the Eisler Group managed to kill a sergeant in the squad (Johnson, D) and picked off three more soldiers while wearing his clothes and mimicking his face before the squad found out their enemy; he was unable to respond in English when addressed.

4. Having taken the Eisler Group's bodies into our possession, the medics found that each one of the Eisler Group, every one of them, is a perfect hermaphrodite. I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen the photographs. Each has both male and female genitalia - and reproductive organs. The doctors performing the autopsies believe that each of the members of the Eisler Group was either male or female, but in no case are they confidently able to tell which. Weirder still, each has a single eye in the back of his head. Whether these third eyes were able to function is a mystery to the lab boys. The photographs will come in a separate dossier.

5. Subsequent to that, our lab boys have already got their hands on a number of objects owned by the members of said group. Contrary to expectations, our scientists believe they can reverse-engineer some of the stranger objects. It may well be possible, so the researchers are saying, to duplicate some of the devices' effects and perhaps even for our agents to make use of them in the field.

6. Finally, Colonel Purchase obviously needs to replace casualties. TFV cannot continue with only three members.

Page 1 of 2 pages

Copy 1 of 1 copies

Story Hooks: Nazis, Hermaphrodites and Secrets

• Bad Guys

Nazis. They're still here, although they don't run any governments right now (at least for the time being). They're the byword for human horror and ruthless evil. This is why, in pop culture, if one turns up, it's all right for the goodies to waste him. Because he's a Nazi.

The thing about twisted ideologies like Nazism is the very fact that they're twisted. As in, they think they're the good guys. They hate the people they hate (Jews, Muslims, Blacks, Asians, Gypsies, asylum seekers, gays, or whatever) because they really believe the world would be better off without them. They believe in using force to achieve their goals because they really think the world is in such a state that any other tactic is pointless. They think they're saving the world. They might be stronger than you; they might be better at killing people (and maybe they've killed more people than they can count). But they still think they're at the wall, a tiny, pure remnant facing off against a vast, faceless conspiracy. The Nazis humiliated and systematically killed off all the Jews they could. Even when they were herding men, women and children into ovens, when they were performing dehumanizing, painful experiments, when they were torturing and killing without any hope of anyone resisting them, they still fantasized about an international conspiracy, led by the Jews, that was going to get them if they didn't do

this stuff. One of the many terrible things about the roots of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem" is that the people who came up with it thought there was a problem in the first place, and that it was a problem that needed to be solved to save the world by killing them all; which included smashing the heads of babies against brick walls.

They thought they were the good guys. The neo-Nazis, neo-fascists, crypto-fascists, and fundamentalists who exist today do too.

Most of those magicians who worked for the SS really did think they were heroes. They imagined themselves as the vanguard of human evolution (which was why they spent so much time altering themselves to make themselves perfect, beyond impurity and gender division).

The evil of Nazism doesn't manifest itself in pointless, random ways. The story doesn't go: "Look! A bunch of Nazis, cackling evilly and rubbing their hands, also in an evil fashion!" Nazis have goals, even if the short-term expression of those goals is a banal, empty violence.

Nazism, of course, had an occult element (though as a party it later rejected it, at least officially). Heinrich Himmler was into a peculiar *Volkisch* brand of neo-paganism in a big way. He tried to get Hitler into it, too, and although Hitler largely wasn't interested, he clearly saw no problem in allowing Himmler to run secret societies, court Savitri Devi and send (absolutely real) expeditions to Tibet to seek Shamballa and the Root of the Master Race. Meanwhile, Aleister Crowley went on the record as saying he wanted the Nazis to win World War II (yes, this was partly because he loved shock-

CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF THE WITCH

ing his countrymen, but also largely because he saw, in Nazi Germany, a potential for his "Thelema" philosophy to reach a wide audience).

Nazi magicians subscribe to Nazi ideals – a desire to purify the world, a belief in a grand evil conspiracy that must be fought – but they also believe the symbols and practices of Nazism have magical power.

Essentially, Nazi magicians would be militant – a belief in the efficacy of violence as a means of praxis is central to fascism and revolutionary communism alike. Several neo-Nazis who begin to dabble in magic suddenly find they can do it. Now, rather than talking about it, they do things, affecting their selves and their families, and eventually deciding to strike. They start bombing places (and by "bomb", we can just as easily mean "use a magic spell" or "activate an artifact"). They start to perform robberies from "impure" institutions, now that they can easily take all the money they want.

But whatever a Nazi cabal does, the important thing is that it's all *for* something. They want to overthrow the government, which is not the US or UK administration, but the ZOG, the Zionist Overlord Government; the vast, evil, utterly fictional conspiracy that they think controls the United States, the United Nations and most of the world. So they convince themselves that the family planning clinic is a center of control for agents of ZOG. They bomb the hardware store, because the (White) owner serves Black people and Jews, and must therefore be in cahoots with them. They want to hurt your children because they think their very existence jeopardizes the future of the human race. It doesn't matter if what they're doing is futile. Part of the nature of these beliefs is that the people who hold them think that they're special and central to the "struggle."

They hate you because they think they're good and right to do so. They direct every effort towards saving the world from you;

because you're one of them, especially if you work for the government. You try to stop them, and you keep them believing they're right. They're evil, utterly evil, dedicated to evil, inured to atrocities (and yes, with very low Morality ratings, probably). But they still think you're worse, and that the things they do are necessary.

• Bad Things

Task Force: VALKYRIE's been about for more than six decades in its current form. They have a warehouse (for that matter, so does the Cheiron Group, and did we mention the Aegis Kai Doru's many storehouses?). And oh, the stuff that's in there. Much of it is useless unless used by the right kind of magician. TFV's top brass would like very much to know what this stuff does. So, they empower an agent or agents of TFV to take some of the magical artifacts in question out of the warehouse and into the "wild." The agent and his friends (who may or may not be agents, or even in the know) have to lure a magician into finding the object and then using it, so they can take note of what it does. Then they subdue (and maybe bring in) the witch, and get the item back. Simple, right?

The problem with the plan is of course the point of the plan. TFV doesn't know what the item does. That tiara that brings ultimate power along with complete madness may not be so easy to get back once you know what it does. The glove that turns out, in the hands of a necromancer, to give a witch the power to kill a man with a touch and resurrect him as a brain-eating zombie will get out of hand very quickly, particularly if it contains a spirit that possesses its magical wearer. And so on. The whole plan is a fundamentally bad idea... but it's an order. Anyone would think the whole mess was deliberate.

The Blessing (1994)

Jack Merrygold's last dispatch, recorded on tape and left in a post box two days before his disappearance:

WILLARDSTON GROVE FULL GOSPEL CHURCH

CHURCH NEWSLETTER

The New Move of the Spirit came to Willardston Grove Full Gospel Church, along with a new pastor.

Andrew Dunn, that's his name.

I don't know where he came from. I wouldn't have been so bothered if it weren't for Kathy Barlow: dumpy little thing, spinster, no social skills, loved Jesus, though. Anyway, Kathy's a member down at Willardston, and she called me and asked me to come down and meet her at some coffee place in a couple of days and talk. It's about the new pastor, she says. She needs advice, she says.

And so I go, and she never shows. Maybe she forgot or something. I buy myself a coffee and go home, and turn on the news, and there she is, being dragged out of the lake in pieces, one by one.

They don't say who it is who's dead. They just say "a woman has been murdered." But I just knew it was Kathy Barlow. Don't ask me how. Some of the people I do the Work with say I'm nuts, and I'm seeing devils and hell-fire everywhere I look, but I'm just sensitive to the Lord's leading, I guess. The Good Lord gave me a word of knowledge. That's it.

So I started looking into where the new pastor down at Willardston Full Gospel came from. Nothing serious. A conversation in Men's Bible Study. A few words with the boys in the opposition at the inter-church basketball league. Dick Garrison said the new pastor was from Tennessee. Bryan Keane at Morris Bible Church said he was from Alabama. Secretary at Byrne Street Baptist said he was from Toronto, or at least that was the last place he'd been, because he wasn't even American. Normally the grapevine gets you more than that. Not weird enough that I could imagine he'd killed Kathy; but a little weird.

It turned out I was right. It was Kathy in the lake. A lot of the folks at church on Sunday knew Kathy. She used to organize the Kids' Summer Bible Camps. So there were a fair few tears from the ladies. No one came from Willardston. No one at all. Not even Kathy's mom.

I got an inkling that the Lord was telling me something. So I visited Mrs Barlow to pay my respects; took some flowers. And she was weird. She wouldn't let me in the house, and wouldn't talk to me. She didn't even admit she had a daughter. And she was scared. She was really scared.

So I started calling round the folks I knew down at Willardston, and they were all friendly and nice, but the moment I mentioned the business with Kathy, they stopped talking to me. Every one. The most I got was from Kathy's friend, Jeannie Newton, who just said, "We don't talk about Kathy. She committed the unforgivable sin. She had to be cast out." And that was it. And she was scared, too.

The unforgivable: All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. Matthew, 12: 31. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost: speaking out against the true work of the Holy Spirit. There's a lot of accusations of the unforgivable sin going around these days, with that New Work of the Holy Spirit that's rising.

The Toronto Blessing got here some few months ago, and I heard from some that it was God leading His Church to Revival. And I heard from some other folks that it was Satan leading the Church astray, and away from the true work of the Kingdom. And some folks said it wasn't Revival, it was just a time of Refreshing to get the Church ready for Revival. But we don't care. God or Satan, it's the one thing to me and mine: it's a sign of the End Times.

So the thought that this church had thrown Kathy out and hadn't let the people go pay their respects was monstrous. If Pastor Dunn had had more of a hand in Kathy's end – and I had a terrible thought he had – that was, well, that was unforgivable.

I decided to go down to Willardston of a Sunday morning and see for myself. I called Sharon, Ben, and Wesley and I told them where I was going, and then I called Lars from the cable access show. He's not a believer, but he has a way with getting things on film. He said, yeah, he'd come along. So it was me and Lars the heathen, meeting in the parking lot. In the auditorium, Lars said he couldn't see anywhere he could use a camera without being seen, so he just turned on his dictaphone.

Weird service. Spent an hour standing singing these songs where Jesus was more of a boyfriend than a Savior and listening to the man in the worship band praying out loud in tongues, and people joining in, and then it all went quiet and Andrew Dunn got up onto the stage. No one sat down. He was like a lizard in a white suit, all silvery quiff and fake tan

and several thousand bucks of dental work. He said something about expecting the Spirit to fall any second, and the moment he said it, ten whole rows of people started falling about in hopeless laughter. And then some other people started crying.

Lars started to say "Holy sh—" but I gave him an elbow in the ribs.

Someone began to crow like a rooster. Someone else joined in. Then there was this scream. Some woman started screaming, and she ran to the front, and Dunn got down from the stage and just touched her lightly on the forehead and she was down, flat on her back on the floor, crying her eyes out. More people began to go to the front, and the Pastor touched them and bang, down they went, caught by the stewards in the black suits.

The sound of a few hundred people speaking in tongues and making animal noises and weeping and screaming and singing nothings began to be too much. I grabbed Lars on the arm, and tried to say, OK, this was enough, time to go, but he was gone too. His eyes closed, face high, tears streaming down his face, speaking in tongues. Over all the hubbub the voice of Andrew Dunn, saying this was the Work of the Spirit and that no one should blaspheme against it or deny its power.

He was talking to me.

And everyone in the place was affected, except for me, and him, and the security guards.

I was shaking when I got out of there. Lars would be OK, I thought. He had his own car.

Lars wasn't OK. Called him at his mom's on Monday, and she was all in tears. He'd been hit by a truck Sunday afternoon, walking on the Interstate. Died straight away. No idea what he was doing on the highway.

Here's a thing. Monday evening, I went out, and there was a weight in the pocket of my overcoat. Lars' dictaphone.

It made me kind of cold. Did Lars put it there before I left? Did he give it to me? Did I take it? I couldn't remember. Course, I played it.

And there was the singing, and then it got drowned out by the people speaking in tongues and such, and then I got Dunn all clear, and then the noises of the crowd, I had to fast forward through that. And then you could hear Lars crying and there was me, saying, "Lars, man, time to get out of here."

And then the tape carried on. Another good ten minutes of service, and then that noise you get when you stop recording and start again. And this time it was all quiet. Voices. A man's voice, talking to Lars. And Lars, telling him who I was, and who my friends were, and that we knew all about what was going on. All calm and everything.

And that was it.

Story Hooks

- When a Witch is Not a Witch

Strange but true: not one single part of Jack Merrygold's experience in 1994 is without a mundane explanation. In fact, if you ignore the inexplicable deaths and the equally inexplicable appearance of Lars' dictaphone in Jack's coat pocket, all of the things that happened to Willardston Grove Full Gospel Church hap-

pened identically in evangelical churches across North America, Britain and Australia (and, in some churches, is still happening). The writer recalls attending about three quarters of a meeting much like Dunn's with an equally skeptical friend, and having to leave his friend lying on the floor, in a state of hypnagogic religious ecstasy, having been touched on the forehead. Unlike Lars, the skeptic was OK the following day (and no less skeptical). Similarly,

the writer recalls a passing acquaintance who swore blind that he'd had his mercury-amalgam tooth fillings miraculously turned into gold at such a meeting. He tried to show the fillings, but to be honest, they just looked like fillings. All this was part of a phenomenon that started in the early 1990s in the Airport Vineyard Church, Toronto, and which, by late 1994, had spread across the English-speaking world. It became known as the "Toronto Blessing" to both its supporters and detractors.

Anyway, all this is to say that in the real world, weird things happen all the time in the real world without any magical explanation at all, and there is no reason to assume that absolutely everything weird has a supernatural explanation behind it. In fact, what better way to wrong-foot the players if it really is just, you know, psychology?

For example, in a situation like the mysterious events at Wilfordston, it may well be that extreme religion has turned into a personality cult. Churches of the kind Pastor Dunn led cut people out for asking questions all the time: question the local Apostle's word, question God, blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

A minister like Dunn could be so blinded by his own cult of personality that he may have ordered the murder of Kathy and Lars without a second thought (they were hindering God's Work!) or may be unaware that members of his church, mistakenly believing themselves to be doing God's work, are dispatching people they believe are enemies of the cult. His demagoguery backfired: he might be able to drive a new BMW bought out of the weekly collection, but what price his soul when he sees that his own people have been murdering people in his name?

• That Old-Time Religion, and that New-Time Religion

All that having been said, what better way for a magician to hide in plain sight than to call his magic "miracles"? With the whole Toronto Blessing phenomenon, and its sequels, charismatic evangelicalism became the source of some of the weirdest beliefs and practices seen in mainstream religion since the Middle Ages. Snake-handling isn't the half of it. More importantly, it made some of its bandwagoneers extremely rich. Big time evangelists Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Reinhard Bonnke, Rodney Howard-Browne and Benny Hinn weren't short of money to begin with, but "signs

and wonders" have made them all millionaires, hundreds of times over. Their belief in "naming it and claiming it" - in telling God you want that drop-top Kompressor (and in blue – quite seriously) and that you want it now – worked for them, but doesn't seem quite so effective for the majority of the TV congregations who send them money for the Lord's Work, with the expectation that it'll come back tenfold. A magician with powers of persuasion and healing (and several other things) could quite easily hide within one of these well-supplied, well-attended and affluent congregations without anyone ever knowing. On the other hand, a lot of people leading these churches are wholly sincere. A charismatic minister may find one day he has gained the power to do the miracles he always dreamed of seeing. Does he see himself as a new Apostle, gifted by God? Does he reject his power with fear and trembling as Satanic? Or does he go crazy and start thinking he's the Second Coming?

• Alpha Rat's Nest

The popularity of the Alpha Course in Christian basics was a direct result of the Toronto Blessing hitting Holy Trinity Brompton in London. Courses run all over the UK, and across much of North America and Australia. This is a big bone of contention for the Knights of Saint George, since Alpha courses, which tend to attract wealthy, educated people, are a prime recruiting ground. But every Alpha Course (really) includes an away weekend where people go to "experience the Holy Spirit." That is, people who take one of these courses go away somewhere quiet to spend a couple of days experiencing the phenomena that characterized the Toronto Blessing.

Which, given the above, is a place for a witch to be, or hide, or become. And yet, the Knights have a blind spot for the Alpha Course. They're too busy arguing about whether it could be a recruiting tool that they haven't seen it could be a hunting ground, or a place where the very thing they fight against could be most fertile. What happens when the two things coincide?

Detention (2008)

A typed document posted anonymously to Detective Inspector Frank Crowe, South Wales Constabulary, three weeks ago:

18TH MAY, CATHAYS YOUNG OFFENDERS' DETENTION CENTRE

CROWE: And this is Simon May. The social worker. He's dealing with the case. Apparently.

LEWIS: Ah. Pleased to meet you.

MAY: Hello.

CROWE: There have been allegations, Mr. Lewis. About the center.

LEWIS: Allegations.

MAY: Allegations of abuse.

LEWIS: And this is a police matter?

CROWE: It's a police matter now.

CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF THE WITCH

MAY: I... DI Crowe felt it necessary to come. To, ah... investigate the allegations.

[PAUSE]

LEWIS: This is about your daughter.

MAY: What?

CROWE: Nothing.

LEWIS: Mr May doesn't know. Somewhat remiss, I would have thought.

CROWE: Lewis...

MAY: What is he talking about?

CROWE: Nothing.

LEWIS: His daughter was here. Bianca. Repeat offender.

MAY: You didn't tell me-

CROWE: Shut it. Lewis, this has nothing to do with the investigation.

LEWIS: You think she's still here.

CROWE: I'm warning you-

LEWIS: You're warning me?

MAY: Calm down. Calm down. Gentlemen. Please, calm down. Whatever the situation with DI Crowe's daughter, there are still allegations which we need to talk to you about.

LEWIS: About this establishment.

MAY: Yes.

LEWIS: You had better sit down then.

[PAUSE]

LEWIS: You can't smoke in here, DI Crowe.

CROWE: Stop me.

[PAUSE]

MAY: The allegations.

LEWIS: The allegations.

MAY: It's alleged by several of the inmates here that there's been systematic abuse.

LEWIS: What kind?

CROWE: Satanic abuse.

MAY: No, not as such. Just with a character-

CROWE: Satanic.

MAY: An occult character.

LEWIS: Where did they-

MAY: We're not at liberty to say.

LEWIS: You don't believe it for one moment.

CROWE: Why not?

MAY: We have a duty to investigate any allegations of abuse.

LEWIS: Of course. So?

MAY: We need to question some of your staff. You can apply for a court order. We've got to give you notice.

LEWIS: The usual?

MAY: The usual.

CROWE: We'd like to go ahead and-

LEWIS: No chance.

MAY: Mr Lewis-

LEWIS: No. Not with him.

CROWE: What's that supposed to-

LEWIS: You know very well, Detective Inspector.

MAY: I'm sorry?

LEWIS: His daughter was here for two years. She escaped somehow. It's still being investigated. DI Crowe has been excluded from the investigation.

CROWE: That's not-

LEWIS: You should not be here.

CROWE: This isn't-

LEWIS: I see what you're trying to do. He wants to find out what happened to his daughter. He's just using the allegations as an excuse.

MAY: Is this-?

CROWE: It isn't. We have these allegations, and I've got no time for arsing about.

MAY: It'll sort things out sooner. Look, I don't believe-

LEWIS: They're young offenders. What, you think they'll go to the counseling staff and tell the truth? They'll open up and reveal to you the sordid details?

MAY: The sooner we clear it up, the less chance it'll get into the press.

LEWIS: No. They're thugs. They won't tell you a thing.

CROWE: Whatever happened to rehabilitation, eh?

LEWIS: Your daughter was just as bad as the rest of them. A cold-eyed thug. No conscience.

CROWE: Lewis...

MAY: DI Crowe, please don't-

LEWIS: Stop.

[PAUSE]

MAY: What did you just do to him?

LEWIS: It doesn't matter. He's just out of the way. Your turn. You're going to forget this. File a report saying it's all false.

CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF THE WITCH

MAY: I am not.

LEWIS: I don't think you have a choice. You're not even going to remember this. All I have to do is-

MAY: I don't think I am.

LEWIS: Wait. Why didn't that - you - ?

MAY. Yeah. You're not alone in hiding things. [UNCLEAR] now.

LEWIS: No. No. I'm sorry. I'm sorry - sorry - I'm sorry - we can make a deal - please, no - no -

[A SCREAM]

[SOUND OF BREAKING GLASS]

MAY: Wake up, Frank.

CROWE: Wait. What? Where - no. I didn't-

MAY: No. It's OK. You didn't.

CROWE: He's -

MAY: He can't have survived. We have to call an ambulance.

CROWE: But I can't have -

MAY: Are you all right? You were here, telling him the allegations. Listing them out. And he broke down. Completely broke down. Threw himself out of the window. I mean, it's shocking.

CROWE: He threw himself -

MAY: Yeah. Threw himself out of the window.

CROWE: I don't -

MAY: I'll go and call an ambulance. You'd better do something about the scene.

CROWE: Don't tell me how to do my job, son.

MAY: Sorry. Of course. Sorry. No.

Story Hooks: Institutionalized

• In Charge

Corrective facilities, hospitals and psychiatric institutions are ideal places for magicians to work their magic. The people trapped there are disenfranchised. No one believes them if they see things or have things done to them. Meanwhile, the arcane rules of the institution hold all sorts of magical power, as rote actions are wont to do. Older buildings may have plans which, intentionally or accidentally, have made them places of power with sacred geometry. Old buildings don't have all that many right angles, and the slightly odd angles, and nooks and crannies that fill a really old institution make the place ideal for summoning things or watching things. A magician with the right kind of abilities knows how to maneuver himself into running a place like this, knows how to bend the wills of the employees, and knows what to do with it.

Maybe he wants to use the inmates and residents as some vast sacrifice, or wishes to make them the guinea pigs in magical experiments? Perhaps he sees them as a magical tool simply because of where and what they are. Perhaps it's not the people, but the building that's where the power lies. Either way, the magician who owns such a place doesn't see the people as being worth a damn thing. He dehumanizes them. They become resources.

• Sometimes They're on Your Side

Frank Crowe had a nose for something weird going on at the Cathays Young Offenders' Institution, but he never realized that the social worker who was with him had a few secrets of his own – at least, not until the transcript came through his door.

Simon May was on Frank's side, to a degree. He was fighting the same battle on a different level. Would Frank understand? Probably not. It just illustrates the problems that a warlock – a mage, if you will – faces when working alongside a hunter. Hunters don't trust witches. Witches don't expect



hunters to trust them. The hunters see that the witches are hiding something, so they don't trust them. The witches see that the hunters don't trust them...

It's not to say that a mage – unlike vampires and werewolves, completely human – can't work with a hunter, either regularly or just once. But he has to be careful. Maybe, like Simon, he hides his powers from his companion. Or maybe he re-casts his powers. The hunter conspiracies include miracle-

workers, drinkers of magic potions, bearers of arcane relics and people who spit hellfire. Why should a mage be any weirder? It should be easy to pose as one of the others.

Perhaps a mage could simply be honest. It's not out of the question.

But he's better not to trust his hunter pals when their friends appear with the hard-core views on what the Bible says about witches.



Following Harriet Part II

PAGE	DTG RELEASED TIME		PRECEDENCE		CLASS	SPECIAL	AMR	C+C	ORG-MSG IDENT
	DATE	TIME	MONTH	YR					
01 OF 03					RR	RR	UUUU		04707302

MESSAGE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

Interview with Harriet Geist

I became obsessed with my sister, I can see that now. Because I couldn't reach her on my own, I went to see Bone. I didn't tell the others, I just went. Bone said Crystal didn't want me to see her, didn't want me to talk to her. She was hiding from me. This didn't make sense. Bone warned me that the dead have their own kind of wisdom, and we need to follow their lead when it comes to asking questions they don't want to answer. And she said I should be patient, let my sister reveal herself when she was ready. It was the wise thing to do, she told me. But of course I didn't listen. I kept trying. And then I came back to Philadelphia, walked into our house, and there was Sunny lying dead on the floor with briars and leaves and thorn bushes growing from her mouth.

Listen, I've been wondering how long I'll have to stay here? I don't want to be uncooperative or anything, but I'm just wondering. I don't know if this was a good idea.

"MY FIRST EFFORTS AT REACHING NETWORK ZERO..."

predictably clumsy. Stupid questions and clueless requests clearly marked me as an amateur. Responses ranged from, "So sorry, can't help" to "Stop taking up space on these boards, asshole." They had better things to do than help one guy work through his grief.

To get anywhere I'd have to put something into it. Pay my dues. Become a credible contributor to their little collective. So I started at the bottom. Found a project needing volunteers. Next thing I know I'm driving three college kids and a ton of gear to a soybean field in the middle of the night. We sat there until dawn. Not a damn thing happened. But then, with the Sun was just coming up, we saw it: this bird, this goddamn bird. It landed in the field, maybe 20 yards away. And it was, I don't know, the size of a small car. Serious. It was black, and huge, and its beak was silver... it couldn't possibly exist. But there

it was. We got it on video — sort of — and it was exhilarating.

And after that I guess you could say I turned into a Network Zero junkie.

I got a day job at a library; the pay was shit, but they let me borrow some recording equipment sometimes. I could store stuff there that I didn't want stolen from my apartment. They had a fast Internet connection. I lived paycheck to paycheck but what did that matter? We called ourselves by the same nicknames we used online. Cryer, Long John, Minnie, Quake. Cryer was an emotional guy, always quick to get choked up or overwrought. LJ would never do nighttime sampling if the temperature was below 50 degrees unless he wore long underwear. Minnie was short for Minnesota, where she came from. Quake's last name was Quaker. Me they called Uncle, because I was a good 15 years older

than any of them. Stupid names, but the names added to the adventure of the whole thing.

I worked like a drone at an unchallenging job: went out at night and hid behind trash cans and trees; climbed into abandoned buildings; shit my pants, literally, at something I barely glimpsed in Fairmont Park (and I wasn't the only one); poured salt across the threshold of my apartment because LJ said it was a good idea; almost fell out of a third-story window, did fall down a flight of stairs; had a glorious month-long fling with Minnie, before we decided to go back to the way things were, and it took two months for us to feel normal around each other. I stopped taking antidepressants. I was able to think about Emily without crying. I put my anger and my lust for payback behind me.

Or so I thought. Then I met Alicia and she proved me wrong by telling me about Harriet Geist.

It was like war.

They tried to get everybody on the same day. Velvet got jumped in an alley; these two guys stabbed her right through her protection. They got scared off by somebody coming, though, and left her bleeding on the ground. She passed out and woke up in a hospital. Chain got pulled over by a cop who tried to shoot him in the head. Archimedes said he was sitting in some crowded coffee shop when he started hallucinating. He tried to fight back but his magic went south and people started panicking. In the chaos somebody grabbed him and tried to pull him into a back room, but he managed to wiggle away and escape. That ass... I'm sorry, excuse my language.

Doctor, would it be all right if I had some extra time to sleep tomorrow? I really feel tired lately. I'm nervous about the surgery and it's keeping me up at night. I know Dr Fromm says not to worry, but I do.

OK. Where was I? Sunny, well, I was the one who found her. She was home alone at the time; obviously somebody got through our defenses somehow. As far as we could figure she was alive when they grew a thorn bush in her stomach.

Velvet was furious, and a lot of her anger was towards me. Nobody knew where I was, she said, and it left the group weak. I should have been there and I wasn't. I'd let everybody down. Chain spoke up for me and that helped a little.

Whoever-it-was left a note next to Sunny's body. Stupid of them, we thought, since we could use it to find them. The note said:

We know who you are.

We know where you are.

We're watching you.

Witches must die.

Witches will die.



EVIDENCE			
Submitting Agency	PHILADELPHIA POLICE DEPARTMENT		
Date Collected	03/19/04	Time	10:30 PM
Item #		Case #	
Collected By	Sergeant VANCE DEAN		
Description of Evidence	BUNNELL'S PHOTO		
Location Where Collected			
Type of Offense			
CHAIN OF CUSTODY			
Rec. From		By	
Date		Time	
Rec. From		By	
Date		Time	
Rec. From		By	
Date		Time	

THE DAILY SUN

IT'S NOT NEWS UNLESS WE SAY IT IS!



PROSTITUTE KILLER BROUGHT
TO JUSTICE THROUGH THE
HELP OF CONCERNED CITIZENS.
STORY ON PAGE 4

LOCAL CITIZENS TARGETTED FOR RANDOM VIOLENCE

Dear Father Anthony,

I haven't spoken to Harriet in about two years, since we were roommates. I only roomed with her that one semester before she dropped out. I remember she was a pretty quiet girl, nice, shy and didn't talk much. But then this one night she didn't come home after dinner. That wasn't like her at all. The next morning she walked in the door smiling, not just politely like normal, but smiling really ear to ear. I asked her what was up and she said she didn't think she could put it in words. Naturally, I thought she'd met some guy! She was kind of bipolar the rest of that week, all jittery and excited one minute and then confused and exhausted the next. She cut most of her classes. Then, on Saturday, these three people showed up... Harriet tells me she's quitting school to go with them to some kind of academy in Philadelphia. I didn't get the name or any forwarding address from her. I'm sorry I can't offer more. Best of luck. Harriet was strange, but I liked her.

DADDED,

To: Anthony H. Geist, S.J.

From: Vernon Malachi, O.S.C.

Tony,

Sorry to hear about your brother, God rest his soul. Horrible thing to happen. You and he will both be in my prayers. Regarding your inquiry, yes, I do still act as chaplain from time to time for Liberty Unit. They're not exactly what you'd call a religious bunch, but that "no atheists in foxholes" phenomenon certainly applies. I passed your request on to the commander; he remembers your help in '89. Your niece's name was not on their watch list, but the search turned up the following persons (below) with similar names and physical descriptions. Unfortunately, they do not keep photographs of these folks on file... or else they do but they're kept in some other system that can't be released... the commander was kind of vague. He also said he'd ask around. If there's anything else I can do for you please don't hesitate to ask.

It may interest you to know that Project: Rebound, which I think you consulted on at some point, has been up and running for a year now, with some positive results. If you want, I could ask the commander to get permission for you to inspect the facilities, I'm sure he wouldn't mind.

This message has been cleared by TFV security protocols, but nevertheless please exercise discretion with the contents.

Pax,

Vern

HELEN GEIST

Subject: Geist, Helen

Class: Yellow

Notes: Self-proclaimed psychic. No observable occult activity.

Directive: Occasional light surveillance. Re-evaluate in six months.

Residence: 447 N. Mervin Street.

Subject: Geist, Harriet

Category: Yellow

Notes: Confirmed Union operative. Believed to be a primary witness of the Broken Chain Event [entry LDOF-13] and the 18th Street Eruption [PNHF-73].

Directive: [REDACTED].

Residence: Apt. 7-C, 234 Bloome Street.

Subject: Geist, Alison

Category: Red

Notes: Possible [REDACTED].

Directive: Avoid contact. Report any sighting immediately. Do not approach.

Residence: Unknown.

Subject: Geist, Crystal

Category: Yellow

Notes: Seen associating with known occultists, including [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

Directive: No direct surveillance; report any incidental sightings. Re-evaluate after six months.

Residence: University City area; possibly 1300 block Andover Street.

Subject: Geist, Rebecca

Category: Orange

Notes: Confirmed category 3 SPENE. Surveillance mission starts [REDACTED].

Residence: Mobile.

It's funny I don't mind talking about this. It really used to hurt me to remember.

Velvet and Archie got into a huge argument. He said we should hit back, and hard, and quick. She said we needed to find out what we were up against first, and line up some help. But Archie wouldn't wait.

The night it all fell apart, I felt so close to those guys. We were in it together. It was a rainy night, we didn't do that but we were glad. Chain was able to scry into their place, a warehouse on the south side. There were six of them in there. And then went out to attack them.

Velvet was the first to go down. They ambushed us when we were still a block away. They'd been watching us the whole time, I guess. Velvet just kind of jerked her head up, and then she fell and then there was blood coming out the back of her neck. Chain faded out and I let loose these three really nasty things I'd called up. I heard someone behind me. By the time I turned around the guy was on the ground quivering as the ghost clawed at him. He was wearing military clothes, like that camouflage stuff. Then there was a loud explosion across the street. Pieces of concrete and glass bounced off my protection.

And then I saw Archie. He pointed something at me. I was just confused enough to let him do it, and suddenly my shields were gone. I was wide open, doctor. I was scared. Real, real scared, but I didn't know why yet.

Archie said to me, "You're the last one left, I should have kept a closer eye on you, dear. You're tougher than you look."

"Archie, what... what are you doing?" I was so confused.

"Don't you get it? I set all of you idiots up." And he told me he pushed Velvet into attacking and then warned the enemy we were coming. "She's dead now, I'm sure," he said, "And I don't think Chain survived that explosion, not with me slowing down his reflexes. Sunny's gone already so that just leaves you."

"What are you talking about? Who's doing this?" I looked all around. "Where's Velvet?" I heard sirens in the distance.

"They were just ordinary people, baby. Just sleepers with guns and bombs, fed up about something some stupid cabal did to their neighborhood. After they attacked us the first time, I figured I could use them to put you all in the ground."

"But..." It just didn't make sense to me. "But they killed Sunny!"

"I killed Sunny, you dumb piece of shit! I left that note, too."

"But... but why?"

"Because I serve the true masters of this world, little Crystal. They're crouched on the threshold, watching everything. And they want you dead, they want your friends dead, they want all of you who think you can wield the power that's rightfully theirs... dead."

I tried to fight him, but he was too well prepared. I could feel myself slowing down, he was slowing me down. There were gunshots, somewhere. My knees buckled and I fell. I hit my head. He was confusing my thoughts, too. Finally I tried one last spell; I couldn't even make the gestures.

"Good bye, babe," he said, and drew back his leg and kicked me in the stomach. "I always thought you were sort of hot, in a geeky kind of way."

I puked. I rolled over and clutched my belly. My body felt like it was tearing itself apart.

And then my mind was clear.

Archie was bent over the hood of a car, on his back. His body shook, and drool and blood dripped out of his mouth. A ghost crouched on his chest, its hands squeezing his head. I watched until Archie was still. I stood up and then I called the ghost by name.

"Crystal," I said. "Come here."

She was a six-year-old girl, still, always would be, and her body looked so much like I remembered it. She walked steadily towards me, her feet bare, her face covered.

I just stared at her. I drank her in. Oh, I felt like a little girl again. But I wanted to see her face. "Take the towel off, Crystal, please." Her hands reached for the cloth and pulled the towel away like a bride taking off her veil.

I have to stop soon, doctor. I'm still sore from what they did to me yesterday. I know I deserved it. I won't be bad again.

I stepped closer to Crystal. I looked at her eyes. Not like living eyes, but I'd seen so many ghosts by that time and it didn't bother me. They were still my sister's eyes, round like marbles, and her face, it was pale, but still seemed fragile and precious to me, like always. And then I looked at her long hair, hanging down around her shoulders, still wet from the river.

And then I first noticed that thing around her neck, pulled tight and digging into her skin, or what would be skin on a living girl. A man's belt, impossibly tight, constricting her as it did in the last moment of her life. I recognized it instantly, I had to cover my mouth with my hands, and I knew that ridiculous buckle and that out-of-style alligator pattern. It was my father's belt.

KEystone PHARMA LLP

A SUBSIDIARY OF THE CHEIRON GROUP

Ye Gods and little fishes. My mother used to say that. No idea where she heard it. Anyway, sometimes I know exactly how she felt; frustrated and excited at the same time.

Haberman, the new R&D director, has a little project going. Sometimes a ghost leaves behind shreds of itself, an insubstantial substance we call "corplasm." Useful in a number of ways, but hard to harvest. Haberman tried feeding some to those worm-things that crawled out of that crack on 18th Street last year. It turns out they eat it like cotton candy. Their appetite is insatiable; they seek out corplasm, gorge on it. Then all one has to do is slice them open and pull out the plasm; the worms shrink and are ready to be used again.

In that haunted attic in Kensington, the worms chewed up a ghost like piranha. We collected more corplasm than we'd found in a year. But ghosts are hard to come by. So then I get a message from Moryken, that government cipher. A priest he's worked with is looking for his niece. He tells me — though he didn't tell the priest, he says — that she matches the profile of a suspected necromancer from the West Side graveyard desecration three years ago. He tells not to endanger my people, should I happen to cross her path. Just pass him the details and he'll handle it. Right. What's Moryken's game? Possibly he wants this witch himself. Possibly he's filling a quota for that "Operation R" he once mentioned. Or maybe he's being truthful. He's hard to read, Moryken. I thought, once of trying to become romantically involved with him. He is attractive, powerful, and intelligent. But he's all business. His loss.

And so, this witch... her name strikes me as familiar. And then I remember. About a year and a half ago, on Network Zero's public message board. Some pathetic wretch looking for information on a doctor killed in Baltimore, same last name as this witch. Coincidence? A little research and I find the doctor had a daughter. Same name!

So now I would like to find this witch. If we had a necromancer, could she not lead us to all the plasm we could harvest? An audacious thought. Perhaps we protect her from Moryken in exchange for favors. Or find some other way to apply pressure. Or I could trade her to Moryken...

But first we must find her. And that's dangerous. Don't want to waste trained personnel. But the person who was asking after the doctor... some Network Zero zero. What if I used him? If it doesn't pan out, R&D always needs warm bodies.

Yes. This is how I will catch this little fish.

Alicia Mangum,
Senior Associate Director of Biotech, Keystone Pharma LLP

"CLEARLY, I'D BEEN FOOLING MYSELF."

Clearly I'd been fooling myself. We all had.

The five of us felt we were documenting a secret world. A hidden world; one "ordinary" people knew nothing about. We'd get some video of a wall that dripped blood, or a rat-thing crawling out of a storm drain. And we'd count ourselves lucky; like we were winning some kind of game.

But it wasn't a game.

Cryer was the first to go. He met this woman at Lucy's Hat Shop (a bar). She got some kind of hold over him. He spent less and less time with us. After a few weeks he confessed he'd been letting her drink blood from his wrists. Before we could decide what to do, the two of them disappeared. Cryer's apartment was empty; like he'd never lived there. We posted all over the Netzo network, but nothing.

And then Long John saw... something. In Pennypack Park. Just a dirty cardboard box lying on the ground, near this tree we'd heard had some kind of dryad in it (we never found any evidence of that). The rest of us ignored the box. But LJ looked inside. Then he was just sitting on the ground and wouldn't

get up. The box was gone. He wouldn't say what he saw in it. For the next two weeks he wouldn't set foot outside his house. His parents came and picked him up. As far as I know he's living in their basement. Quake, she got kind of obsessed with making EVP recordings all over the city; wouldn't take time out to go on other missions; got pissed at us for not helping. And Minnie... she got shot. Killed. Went North Side to help somebody set up some IR cameras. The cops say it was drug dealers and their crews, arguing over territory.

So, I was alone again. I slept a lot. I got fired from the library. I didn't have any money left. I lived on pizza and beer, crackers and bread. Roaches and ants everywhere. I lost 53 pounds in two weeks. Coughed up blood on a semi-regular basis.

Then Alicia Mangum came knocking. She said she saw some of my posts and some other stuff on a Netzo blog. Worked for some Center City pharmaceutical company called Keystone. "We respect the work your people do," she said to me. "I have an offer for you." She says "Some time ago I noticed a posting made regarding the death

of that doctor in Baltimore. That was you, yes?"

I nodded. It seemed so long ago. Another person ago. "You know something about that?" I asked. My voice seemed hoarse and weak. She sat on my disgusting, stained sofa and didn't wince.

"I know the doctor had a daughter," she says. "I know she lived here in Philadelphia, and perhaps still does." She reached into the portfolio she was carrying. "We would very much like to speak with her. But our resources are not much oriented towards finding a single person." She handed me a folder. "This is what we know. She seems well hidden from traditional investigational methods. I think possibly your contacts in the Network Zero may be better at finding out where she is than us. I propose to hire you to find her, since our interests coincide in this matter. I've taken the liberty of bringing your first paycheck with me."

I was having trouble breathing. I felt like I was walking a tightrope, and the only decision to make was which way to fall.

She picked up a scrap of something from the coffee table. She looked at the photograph for a moment and then asked, "Is this your daughter?"





In some religions, you have what's called a "call and response"—the priest or leader makes certain declarations (the *call*) while the listeners in the congregation let fly with certain impromptu or expected expressions (the *response*). The process becomes a kind of conversation between shepherd and flock, between gods and men.

The witches and sorcerers of this world have unknowingly made their call. They have made clear their abilities, revealing their magic and using it to alter reality's mutable laws. Some think their call goes unheard, except perhaps by others like them.

Untrue. The hunters have heard. The witches have solicited a response, and the hunters shall give it. Does that response come at the mean end of an autoloader shotgun? Does it wait in a heavy chair with thick leather straps dangling from the arms? Is the response a plea for mercy, a desperate gambit for secrets, or the stab from a syringe?

In this chapter, you'll find exactly how the compacts and conspiracies of the hunters react specifically to mages and magic. In addition, you'll also find *new* hunter organizations whose missions in this world are geared more uniquely toward dealing with the hidden army of witches that lurk within humankind's populous number.

Compacts

The compacts have some things easier, some things harder. They don't have the resources the conspiracies possess, but alternately, they also don't suffer at the hands of heavy policy, either. They're more local, more rag-tag, and generally "headless" (compared to the top-down leadership of the conspiracies geared toward providing a more *uniform* approach to the "problem" of monsters). As such, they've got some more flexibility — individual cells are likelier to do things with less direction, having the freedom to execute a plan (or execute a witch) as they see fit.

Below, you'll find how some compacts see and handle the perils put forth by the existence of witches and witch magic.

Ashwood Abbey

Have you ever fucked a man who can fly? That was what the invitation said, engraved in fancy calligraphy on bone-colored paper. That was *all* it said. No address, no date or time, no RSVP number. Not even a signature. Just that question and, beneath it, a crest.

Sad to say, the man who could fly wasn't very impressive. Oh, he was pretty enough, but they had him dosed to the gills with something that left him with about as much energy as a landed fish. You were about to write off the whole affair as a dreadful bore when it happened: a hole opened in the air, and the flying man's friends came through, raining fire and destruction on the assembled dilettantes. And now you know the truth: witches are too dangerous to play around with, and *far* too dangerous to roam free. And you're going to be the one that puts them down.

Story Hooks

- You've read *The Most Dangerous Game*. (Read it? Hell, you've *played* it.) Hunting human beings is fun and all, but you've always felt there had to be something more. When you joined the Abbey, you discovered how *much* more. Werewolves, demons, and the like are a true thrill to stalk and catch and kill, but even still, it lacked something. Then you pissed off the



"We teach that every priest shall extinguish heathendom, and forbid wilweort-hunga (fountain worship), and licwigin-lunga (incantations of the dead), and hwata (omens), and galdræ (magic), and man worship, and the abominations that men exercise in various sorts of witchcraft, and in frithspottum (peace-enclosures) with elms and other trees, and with stones, and with many phantoms."

**16th Canon Law under King Edgar
in the 10th century**

CHAPTER TWO: CALL AND RESPONSE

witch somehow and found yourself and a few companions transported to some underground labyrinth full of unholy monstrosities and insidious traps. Now *you're* the prey. And you love every minute of it.

- They say the head of John the Baptist lived on after he was executed, spouting bizarre prophecies in alien tongues. They say it's in a cave, somewhere in Greece, or maybe the south of France. You may not have a baptist on hand, but you have heard of a witch that lives a few miles out from Aspen who claims to be the herald of the coming savior. What might *his* head say if you cut it off?
- There was a party last weekend—a *good* party. While everyone was cleaning up, Rawlins told you a remarkable

story about the trip he took when he ate the mushrooms during the orgy. He found himself stumbling through a vast, primordial wilderness before reaching an enormous tower, inside of which he found an enormous stone book. Now Rawlins has gone missing, and Giselle, the psychic, says his townhouse fairly *reeks* of magic. *Et tu, Rawlins?*

The Enemy

Witches aren't the enemy. Oh yes, that's so *dreadfully* shocking to say aloud, but really, think about it. What is a witch but a man or woman who can do all the things you might dream of? What is a witch but the essence of humanity, unfettered by



tawdry limits of reality? Doesn't that make them, in essence, the mirror image of the Abbey itself? Where members of Ashwood Abbey shatter taboos and refuse to live fettered by laws of morality and decency, a witch shatters the conception of what the universe is and lives unfettered by the laws of physics.

Oh, to be sure, there are dangerous witches, and there are witches who abuse their power, and they deserve to be put down. But really, the same could be said of human beings — some just need to be put down for the good of the group. Ashwood Abbey is more than happy to do what needs doing in those cases. The sheer unpredictability of a witch makes her a positively *exhilarating* hunt.

The Abbey doesn't worry itself much with detailed analyses of witches and what they do. The information Abbey members have is less encyclopedic (e.g. "witches can be divided among those who manipulate chance and happenstance, and those who directly command the forces of reality") and more anecdotal (e.g. "While she was in Budapest, Katrina spent the night with a man whose touch could be felt with *every nerve in her body* at the same time. Isn't it simply too much?"). Stories trickle down from older members to younger members of hunts and parties gone by, and even spread from chapter to chapter as jet-setting members travel the globe.

The net result is that, while the Abbey has a fairly wide range of lore on what witches *might* do, they know fairly little about what witches actually *are*. As far as the Abbey is concerned, if it's not obviously inhuman and not obviously possessed by something else, it's probably a witch. Occasionally, when friendly contact is established with a witch (the less psychotic ones are simply a *blast* at parties), the will-worker tries to explain the philosophies behind her power, and the Sybarites smile politely, nod, and assure her it's all so very *fascinating* and would she care for another hit of Ecstasy?

Response

Witches are quite the fascinating lot, and Ashwood Abbey simply adores the opportunity to interact with one. The Abbey's typical approach to dealing with a witch is, ironically, not all that dissimilar to its approach to a prospective new member. The hunters observe the witch covertly for a time, studying his actions and his attitudes. If he behaves himself and seems like he might be the sporting type, he may well be invited to attend an Abbey function as a guest. At the party, he can expect to be plied for all manner of stories about the things he's seen, done, and is capable of (and since it's the Abbey, most of those questions tend toward the licentious).

At the end of the night, the hunters cast a private vote (the witch is told this is simply routine club business) as to whether or not the witch proved sufficiently entertaining. If the consensus is that the witch was a sufficiently charming guest, that's the end of it. Everybody goes home with one more story of how shocking they are, and the Abbey tries to maintain cordial contact with its guest of honor.

If the vote comes up such that the witch is deemed a dreadful bore, on the other hand, then the evening's secondary entertainment kicks off. The secondary entertainment might be as harmless as dosing the witch's drink with Rohypnol and having some fun, or it might involve declaring a hunt on the by-now liquored up and otherwise impaired magician. All of this is planned well in advance, of course—the Abbey *never* throws a boring party, and contingencies are always in place.

As decadent as the Abbey is, they realize that not all witches are suitable party guests. Some are irredeemably pious, others are so obsessed with secrecy they try to kill anyone who learns their secret. And still others are just completely depraved or devoted to the service of dark, unnatural entities, and one simply doesn't invite such folk to a party. There are *lines*, even for Ashwood Abbey. In the case of such witches, the Abbey generally ignores the less-harmful ones until a par-

ty rolls around and no one has any entertainment prepared. "Witch-hunts" are a popular feature of Abbey soirees in some parts of the world, particularly the northeastern United States and parts of Germany.

In Boston, the Abbey holds an annual Hathorne Ball on February 29, the anniversary of the first arrests in the Salem Witch Trials. Abbey members dress up in period garb for an elaborate costume ball, and at midnight retire to a hedge maze or similar labyrinthine structure, in which a captured witch is hidden. The hunter to strike the killing blow is given the title "Justice Hathorne" for the rest of the year, and is accorded great status and honor until the next year's ball.

The Long Night

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." It's right there, the Book of Exodus, chapter 22, verse 18. It's the word of the Lord in black and white.

And breaking the Lord's commandment makes you feel like... well, like shit.

The other driver was doing over a hundred on the wrong side of the road. You both swerved the same way. You were fine, but little Matthew went for a ride along the blacktop. The paramedic made weird signs with his hands and you saw your son's wounds close. He was just banged up instead of all inside out. You actually *thanked* a witch.

Now every night you wonder what's going to happen. Is Matthew's life — or worse, his soul — going to be tainted by magic? Did you put your son on the fast track straight to Hell with no way back?

Story Hooks

- You've had a great success — you converted a witch after he accidentally summoned something horrific. He's been a silent partner in your Vigil for a while, tackling threats that you would be ill-prepared to face. Just recently though, he's been acting weird. People have gone missing and there's evidence he's been cutting their throats for magical power. He's still just as zealous as before, and that's more than a little confusing — did he magically shield part of his mind when you converted him, or has he developed a second personality who is hungry for magical power?

- Not every Long Night hunter believes witches are worth converting. *If* you're one of those hunters, you're likely a hard-liner. But when a witch saves the life of a loved one — a wife, a brother, a son — it's time to question your convictions. Is it just possible that this witch has done the Lord's work? Or are your desires for your loved ones to be safe nothing more than the petty selfishness that's part of the barrier between you and Jesus? Worse, what if the witch isn't entirely clean-cut — or even an old foe wearing a new face to torment you further. How far will you go to get on the Lord's good side?

- Some days nothing goes right. A small town out in the backwoods has gone Jonestown: people move in, and they don't come out. Nobody's dying, not yet at least, but whoever's in

charge is powerfully charismatic and has no problems *making* people love him when they don't otherwise. He's a witch, but most of the people in his town are just true believers—and if the cell witness one of the "faith affirmation sessions" they may just recognize some of their own methods of converting witches to the ways of righteousness. But a witch can beguile minds without needing to resort to rhetorical tactics, right? Or are his powers far less than he lets on?

The Enemy

It isn't easy being a member of the Long Night. While bestial horrors and blood-drenched serial killers are obviously monsters that need to be shuffled off this mortal coil, witches present a dilemma. On the one hand, they're very human monsters. Serial killers may be wholly human, but they've got the compulsion, the drive, and the thoughts that make them something other, something alien. They don't think like normal people. Witches don't give off any such signals.

On the one hand, a witch is any person who displays paranormal abilities. One of the key words is "person" — witches are still human, not walking corpses or shambling beasts. Doesn't matter if they have some kind of strange mental power or they draw on the dark energies of Hell. A witch is a witch is a witch, and Exodus 22:18 says exactly what any good Christian should do. The Bible doesn't mention anything about how the witch acts. At least werewolves are proof that a man laid with a beast at some point in the past. They carry their sin with their blood.

Witches don't have that excuse. They're not carrying their father's sins, but twisted powers that they asked for. Even the most remorseful psychic doesn't do a damn thing to regain a state of grace. If the curse of seeing the future is so bad, sucking a .38 caliber aspirin is an honest cure. Witches don't just have power, most of them enjoy having that power. They revel in being something ungodly. That's just not right.

The lack of centralized information hurts the Long Night — all too often, a cell only knows that witches have unearthly powers and that they'll go to any lengths to get more. Magic's tainted with all the addictiveness Hell can manage. A cell can be woefully unprepared for actually facing a witch, especially one who wields her twisted powers as coincidences, the better to avoid the world around lashing out. Hunters slip and miss, or connect but leave only a flesh wound. Every time something could go either way, it sides with the witches. Hell, if the worst comes to the worst, a gas main under the place might just blow. It's rare but... these things happen.

Other times, a coven of witches just plain ignores subtlety. The witches come wreathed in armor of fractured space or iron-hard air. They're assisted by ghosts, zombies, and impossible things from worlds that don't exist. The cell tries to run, or to gain a surprise advantage, and a straight line's no longer straight. Lightning and fire fill the air, and the hunters turn on each other under mental compulsion.

The scary part comes when the Long Night realizes what witches are doing: their powers come from the Devil (though a few among the Tribulation Militia believe some gain their miracles from the Lord), and that means the energies of divinity are loose in

the mortal Realm. Witches are the fore-runners and scouts of the End Times, a true manifestation of the Tribulation. With witches running around serving the Devil (or at least the Devil's interests), the Apocalypse cannot come. The Long Night worry that witches are a sign that they're *failing*, that the path for the return of Christ's might cannot be cleared as long as sorcerers walk this Earth. Individual hunters can try all they might, but witches aren't going away. The universe is gearing up for the final fight.

The lengths to which a witch will go for power show her true colors. Some use their power for personal gain and damn everyone else, setting themselves up as local lords and building the faith of their community to benefit one side or the other. Others go all out with magic, sacrificing people and looking for long-forgotten sites to bring yet more divine power into the material world. In a very real way, every witch immanentizes the eschaton simply by using magic.

The Response

Filled with the love of Jesus, these hunters strike out against the hand of magic in the world. Though they don't tend to collect information — save shared anecdotes behind password-protected Christian chat-rooms — they're on much firmer ground as to the sources of magic. The Devil grants occult powers to some men and women who debase themselves to him. Sometimes, ol' Scratch is a tricky one, and appears in the form of an angel, a totem animal, or even the ghost of a loved one. But it's him, all right. It's his energies that course through a witch's blasphemous rituals. Even those rituals that anyone can try have his hallmark — strange runic symbols and chants in dead languages are obvious signs. A few hunters see a more dangerous truth: whether some witches who see angelic visions really receive a visitation from God or not, the Lord does nothing to stem the flow of magic into the world. It's up to the Long Night to do that, by hunting witches and cutting off mystic power at the source.

What gets tricky is when magic appears as miracle. Miracle — in theory, at least — is proof positive of the Holy Ghost infusing the miracle-worker's own soul. But what separates magic from miracle, anyway? Most within the Tribulation Militia claim it's like that old saying about the problem over "What is art?" The response: "I'll know it when I see it." Miracles tend to manifest in a certain way (healing, stigmata, glossolalia) and serve the congregation, not the witch. Still, though, isn't it possible that a witch might lie with his serpent's tongue and play at being a miracle-worker, instead? Without central leadership, Long Night cells are free to respond as they see fit: and they may decide that the holy man with the healing hands needs to have those hands cut off.

Of course, conversion's always an option. Many members of the Long Night try their best to convert witches, rather than going in guns blazing. (Not only is this safer, but they think this is a truer approach that doesn't suffer the stains of sin.) While some — especially those willing to sacrifice people in pursuit of magical knowledge — are beyond redemption, many can still be saved. Magic strengthens the will and clouds a person's vision, meaning that hunters often require extreme methods to convince even divinely-inspired witches. But if they can turn that magic toward the Lord's work... isn't there some value in that?

Some cells have had a lot of success with converting witches using a similar method to cultic programming. Rather than attacking the witch's understanding of how her magic works, they instead attack her personality, alternately breaking down the parts that drive her to selfishness and evil, and building up new traits that will enable her to work her magic in a way that serves the Lord (and, more importantly, His coming). It can take a hell of a lot of time to break a witch's will to that degree, but it can be a valuable approach for those willing to risk it.

Other cells take a more drastic approach. Rather than fighting witches, they instead orchestrate situations where the witch has to use her power to save the hunters from another evil — often something with obvious ties to Hell or the end of the world. In a sudden high-stress situation, the hunters stand more of a chance of convincing the witch that her abilities can work towards the benefit of humanity — and coincidentally, the benefit of the Long Night.

A few go so far as to attempt deathbed conversions. If a hunter is aware of a witch in the area who comes close to death, she can use that as leverage to attempt a conversion. Otherwise, it's up to the rest of the cell to set up the near-death experience. The tremendous shock to the witch's system leaves her in a state where the hunter can convince her of the truth of Jesus' love and the need to hold off the End Times until the world can be cleansed of evil.

Loyalists of Thule

When you carry a secret like yours, it's comforting to know you aren't alone in your complicity. Yes, the Thule Gesellschaft was there at the foundation of the greatest evil of the 20th century, but you weren't there alone. Others were searching for lost Atlantis — witches and magicians searching for a return of their lost glory — and some of those made alliances even more distasteful than those early Loyalists. The difference is, you repented and now work to make amends for the awful truth of your past; the witches didn't. And for that, you're going to make them pay.

Story Hooks

- After World War II, the Soviets seized many of the Nazi's top-secret records and spirited them back to Moscow. With the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, many of those secrets have come to light. Recently, your colleagues in the academic world have been fascinated by the existence of a document recently acknowledged by the Russian government, the so-called Sebottendorf Dialogue. Written by one of the founders of the Thule Gesellschaft, it purports to be a vision of Atlantis granted by the Holy Guardian Angel. The Loyalists of Thule are very keen to recover the Dialogue, but at least three hunters have died mysteriously before it could be acquired. All three deaths appear to be freak accidents, but the Loyalists have dealt with magicians often enough

to know that once might be coincidence, twice might be bad luck, but three times is usually enemy magic.

• The old von Fenstermacher house on the end of the street's been bought after nearly 20 years. Local stories say Erich von Fenstermacher was a Nazi spy during the war. The FBI caught him and he was hanged as a traitor, and that was the end of it. Except that everyone who ever moved into that house for the next 30 years either died unexpectedly or moved out within a year. Eventually, the real estate agents stopped listing the place and the buyers stopped asking. Now, though, it's inhabited again — some weird European guy who claims he's related to old man von Fenstermacher somehow. The locals don't like him much; he's got a weird air about him, and just to look at him you wouldn't know for sure whether he's a man or a woman. Three months after he moved in, local pets started disappearing; then last week it was little Tommy Jones. The police found him hacked to pieces, with weird little cuts all over him. The cops don't know what to make of them, but you've seen them in the compact's records: they're a corrupt, debased form of writing identified as late-period Lemurian.

• Your grandfather never talked much about the war. In fact, until he died, all you really knew about it was that he was there — at Normandy and Bastogne, and a few other places in between. When he passed, he left you his papers and his medals, his trophies and mementos, everything. Among them you found a diary, in which he talked about a resistance group he fought with in Belgium. This group, he said, was dubbed by the Americans the "Five-Leaf Clovers" for their number and their uncanny luck, and claimed to be part of a secret society of scholars that had been exiled from Berlin by Himmler and his SS. Tucked into the back of the diary were obituaries from a Belgian newspaper, four over the last two months of your grandfather's life, each detailing the death of one of the people named in the diary. Scribbled in the margins of the most recent obituary was an address in Oostende, Belgium, along with a telephone number.

The Enemy

The Loyalists don't have a unified outlook on any one thing, but they *do* talk. Whether over e-mail or through an oblique chain of written communications and passed-around journals, the hunters of this compact are keen (sometimes obsessively so) on sharing information. As such, they don't classify witches as "the enemy" in a blanket sense the way they do flesh-eating ghouls or possessing demons. Witches are, if anything, considered a potential source of information. The Loyalists of Thule recognize that as much knowledge as they've accumulated about the hidden world of the night, witches and magicians possess the means to unearth knowledge far beyond what ordinary men and women can ever hope to. A witch can, with a mere glance and a few muttered incantations, dredge up the secrets of the past or divine the precise location of a monster the Loyalists are hunting. The Indebted would be foolish to ignore a source of information like that.

Nevertheless, as a group the Loyalists don't entirely trust mages; the entire concept of certain people being spiritually superior to other men hits uncomfortably close to the memory of the early Thule Society's racial theories. Add to that the compact's records (accurate or not) of occultists and witches deeply embedded in the upper echelons of the Nazi leadership, and you have a recipe for deep suspicion. Even witches who don't claim to be superior by dint of their sorcerous prowess are kept at arm's length, and the Indebted use them as a source of intelligence only at great need. There's no telling how much a witch might learn about *you* during even a brief interaction, so it's best to keep interaction to a minimum.

A fairly common, though usually unspoken, attitude among many Loyalists is to quietly blame the horrors of the Nazi regime on Hitler's personal occultists and witches allied with the Nazi party rather than their antecedents in the Thule Gesellschaft. Certainly, the Thule Society bears *some* of the blame; after all, it was their theories that inspired Nazi ideology and key founding members of the National Socialist Workers' Party, but the real horrors were only devised and executed when the witches moved in. They tell themselves it was the witch-covens and their mad quest to recover the lost kingdoms of antiquity — Mu, Lemuria, Atlantis — that engendered the atrocities of the Holocaust, not the academic hypotheses put forth by the Thule Society. As evidence, they cite the compact's own encounters with magicians who still hold to Aryan supremacy ideals. The fact that numerous historians, both of the mundane and of the occult, have dismissed the idea that the Nazi leadership was significantly influenced in any way by practitioners of the occult seldom gets mentioned. It is, after all, easier to believe a pretty lie than an ugly truth. Senior members of the compact frown on this theory; the burden of responsibility is the Loyalists' to bear, and to shunt that responsibility onto nebulous "Nazi witches" cheapens the debt they owe the world.

Response

The Loyalists of Thule don't typically take an active hand in the elimination of witches who represent a threat to innocent civilians, or to others keeping the Vigil, but they certainly make sure something is done about them. Most Loyalist groups maintain contact with several other hunter groups, whether individual cells or other organizations, with more experience in the proactive arena of the Vigil. Whenever possible, the Loyalists prefer to "hand off" dangerous magicians to other cells, those with a specialty in dealing with magic and its practitioners. If the Loyalists of Thule don't have contacts within such a group, they may take on the task of dealing with the threat directly, but whenever possible they prefer to stand back and direct.

Special ire is reserved for witches with whom the Loyalists of Thule identify with Nazi beliefs and practices. Obviously, witches who espouse Nazi ideals of Aryan supremacy or who invoke their spells through rites and iconography of the Third Reich are hunted down ruthlessly, but the compact is no less vehement in its hatred of mages whose practices echo those of Nazi Germany, regardless of the ideology. A witch who creates bizarre magical creatures by stitching the parts of disparate animals and people may not be motivated

by the same beliefs and goals as Josef Mengele, and may even consider Mengele a repugnant specimen of humanity, but the Loyalists don't care. They see the echoes of the death camps and monstrous experiments performed on "sub-humans," and that will not stand.

A sizable faction of the Loyalists of Thule, as discussed above, believe the Nazi party was heavily influenced by witches who believed their ideals of racial purity were the key to restoring a long-lost "golden age" of magic. A common belief among many of these hunters is that quite a few of those witches survived the fall of the Third Reich and escaped, as did many Nazi leaders, to countries that lacked extradition treaties with the major Allied powers. Further, they believe it very likely that many of those magicians are still alive today — the war was a long time ago, but the Indebted know that witches have many means of extending life at their disposal. In the past, the Loyalists of Thule maintained ties with the so-called "Nazi hunters," men and women (many of them Israeli Jews) who devoted themselves to tracking down escaped Nazi war criminals in the decades after the war. At least one "Mossad assassination" of a death camp commandant in Argentina is rumored to have been the result of a joint operation between the Loyalists of Thule and a local cell of Catholic witch-hunters who may have been aligned with the Malleus Maleficarum. As the years roll on, though, and the vast majority of former Nazis (those without magically-induced longevity) die of old age, the profession of Nazi hunter has declined in prominence, and the Loyalists have lost much of their information network in that arena.

Network 0

The world looks different through a three-inch screen. You're on the Network, the guy who records everything. The good thing is that you're not alone. Sometimes, you wish you were.

She commented on some of your videos, and thanked you for good shots of therianthropes. You started to e-mail each other. Six months of sharing information across an ocean later, you got a phone call. It was her.

Turns out that, with her help, you'd posted a video of a witch who didn't like being recorded. He tracked her down through the comments on your videos. He did things to her. Made her say awful things. And then—

A gunshot heard across the Atlantic has no echo.

And in six hours you're due in the office, and after that there's a coven kidnapping homeless guys and stitching them together all wrong. And all you can hear is her voice saying "Goodbye."

Story Hooks

- You've started receiving mysterious e-mails and phone calls from someone who appreciates your recordings of local witches. He offers good information in trade for more video — all well and good, until his information highlights a Lucifuge cell as a coven of witches. They're hard on the trail of a different coven — one including your mystery in-

formant, who swears blind that he didn't know. It's a Mexican stand-off between two cells of hunters and a coven of witches, but who's *really* pulling the strings?

- Network Zero's videos are one of the main ways that hunter compacts share information, when cells feel like talking. Another cell has got in touch with you: they've got a few secrets for flushing out witches, and they want you to spread the word. That all sounds great, but their methods are a little unorthodox — they've no problem with torturing witches for information on their fellows before dousing the poor bastards in petrol and adding a match.

- The Secret Frequency aren't the only ones who believe the truth will out. You've got your hands on a witch who's more than willing to give an interview, but you're going to have a hard time shutting him up. He bounces between crazy conspiracy theories about psychic FBI agents, monologues on pop-magic sigils, and the truth behind Girl Scout cookies. His words are part of a spell, and if you aren't *very* careful, his spell's going to give him a back-door into controlling half the hunters on the Network.

The Enemy

Unlike more militant compacts, Network 0 cells don't go out aiming to kill witches. They want the truth, and corpses make bad interview subjects. Hunters on the Secret Frequency tend to see themselves as the Vigil's war correspondents — recording interviews with both sides and making sure they preserve what they see for posterity. Witches are important targets for the Network — they're lucid, unlike less human monsters, and several respond well to requests for interview. And when they're being honest, individual hunters have to recognize that witches have a special-effects budget that normally only God can afford.

Network 0 hunters stand divided on dealing with witches. The majority treat a witch as a chance to flex their investigative muscles, working out what she's doing and why. They dig deeper than any other compact, following a chain of occasionally tenuous links until they find what they see as a source, the one event or fact that explains the witch's actions. The hunter then recasts everything he's seen the witch do in light of his findings, hoping to better predict what she will do next. While Null Mysteriis focus on the nuts and bolts of how magic works and the Union concentrates on the impact a witch has on her community, Network 0 hunters in this camp focus on *why* a witch uses magic when she does. Unfortunately, most reporters vastly overestimate the importance of random events, leading them to make false conclusions they don't fully understand.

A smaller group believes that why a witch works magic isn't as important as the fact that she's working magic. Rather than digging through a witch's background, a hunter instead shadows her target, trying to get a handle on her from the people and places with whom she associates. Armed with that information, a hunter can strike very beneficial deals — as long as he doesn't get too greedy. Just occasionally, she'll lead a hunter to a place that shouldn't exist — an underground river of blood running through Chicago, or a house where the

CHAPTER TWO: CALL AND RESPONSE



laws of time and space are mere suggestions. If they make it out alive, these hunters know they can put their videos behind pay-walls and make plenty of money from other hunters.

In Los Angeles, a cell managed to film a 20-minute interview with a witch who works as an EMT, including a segment of him using magic to save people's lives. In New York, another cell videoed a detective with the NYPD's Special Victims Squad using what appeared to be ritual magic at the scene of a crime, though they've yet to approach her for an interview. On the other hand, the administrators behind Network 0's video hosts had to pull a video of a witch's campaign to become state senator after it became clear that the video bewitched people into voting for him.

A few witches try to use interviews with the Network to point hunters towards more deserving targets, whether their victims of choice are working human sacrifices or just opposing the witch's schemes. They generally don't remain that naïve for long. Militant cells may decide to curb-stomp them for any number of reasons, while other cells would rather show up the witch who tried to manipulate them on live video.

Of course, not everyone with a book of spells is a real witch. While the mass-market Necronomicon has less mystical power than a tab of LSD, a few tomes of occult lore draw people in. From teenagers who think that demon-summoning is a cooler way to raise their grades than hacking their school's computers, to backwoods families with a yearly sacrifice to make sure the Sun comes up, people perform strange rituals and things really happen. Without the spontaneous magic of other witches, the Network doesn't consider them "prime-time" material, but the archives have enough video of strange rituals to last any cell a lifetime. Still, the hunters of Network 0 will take what they can get.

The station so far doesn't have much footage of psychic phenomena — powers of the mind are hard to film, and easy to duplicate with special effects. Most hunters who take their time to perform studies in front of a camera don't get useful results. Even when people apparently demonstrate psychic powers, they're easy to fake — just about anyone who's seen an action movie can work out ways of faking everything from psychokinesis to spontaneous fire generation. While an individual psychic may convince a hunter, he's going to have a harder time convincing his audience.

The Response

Hunters in the field have a few tricks they rely on when dealing with witches. They need them — few witches are exactly pleased when people witness her magic, and when that witness is carrying a video camera, she's likely to get down-right violent. More than one cell has raised a whole coven's ire when the video of a ritual goes online — hunters are naïve if they think only other hunters view their video streams. If the footage is high-enough quality, and the audio doesn't suck too bad, another coven can work out what the witches in the video are doing — and come up with a way to counter it.

In some places, the local covens have agreed to work with Network 0 hunters. The hunters can record interviews, and the witches will even help them track down serial killers and

stranger beasts. In return for their help, the hunters don't film any of the witches using magic. Of course, if the cell uncovers a new coven that isn't part of the agreement, all bets are off — as long as the extant witches get to see what their new rivals are up to. Other witches prefer to keep prying eyes — and lenses — the hell out of their affairs, and Network 0 needs to be canny when dealing with them. Telephoto lenses are a good start, as are webcams with built-in cellular modems — the hunters can pick up their video anywhere in the world.

Not all hunters are so forgiving of witches. In Kansas, an alliance of hunter cells calling itself the Red Harvest has restarted the kind of witch hunt that fell out of fashion long ago. They specialize in hunting and killing witches, and some members capture their hunts in still images, video, or audio for Network 0 to disseminate (snuff films, really). The Secret Frequency's administrators still post their material in the interests of freedom of expression, but under serious password protection. Their video clips include torture that would sicken hunters of Ashwood Abbey, with at least one witch burned alive on-camera for the crime of healing terminally-ill children.

Null Mysteriis

You should be handing in your PhD thesis now, but you aren't. And it's all her fault.

You met her at a show before you joined the compact. Once the set ended, you got to talking, had some drinks. She had some interesting ideas on probability fields and you lapped it up. You kept in touch after joining Null Mysteriis. Everything seemed to work out — but she was smarter than you thought.

She showed you her paper: "Consciousness-mediated Disruption of Probability Matrices by the Application of Alternate Continua to Schrödinger-class Quantum Events." You thought she respected you, but she was just showing off.

Next thing you know, all your work, all your research, is gone. You can't recreate it in time. She... did something to ruin it. It's all gibberish, now. A witch destroyed the last seven years of your life because you trusted her.

Story Hooks

- While some hunters condemn witches, you just want a chance to study them. You get your chance when another cell captures a witch who wants to talk. The only problem is that their interview subject thought nothing of making a deal with a demon to "get women." (They seemed willing but... well, a demon was involved, so who can say?) When you finish your research, the other cell will likely kill their captive. How much will the witch let slip in order to stave off his execution? Do you agree with the punishment, or is there a chance the witch can redeem himself? And what truths might you discover that the witch doesn't want you to know?

- A cognitive parapsychologist of your acquaintance has made a breakthrough. He's found what he thinks is the brain structure that links a witch's mind to the theoretical

probability field surrounding the world. It's a strange twist of brain matter, a tiny tumor with twisted structures deep within. So far, he's removed the growth from two witches. There's only one problem — the growths disintegrate on death. And it might be a false trail, anyhow. But if it is, then why are all these witches suddenly trying to kill him? He wants your help. Will you?

- Your research doesn't focus on witches alone. Let the others deal with the psychology of magic; you prefer studying the effects of magic. You get your chance when something chases every living thing out of the steam tunnels beneath your city. It's not anything as simple as a xenobiological specimen — what other hunters call a monster. You've seen the truth, but only briefly. If you walk the tunnels in a certain order, a witch's path, you end up on a barren plain of white dust under a starless sky. Last time, you turned and ran. Not this time.

The Enemy

The infinite variety of witches doesn't dissuade hunters of Null Mysteriis. Indeed, it does quite the opposite. The sheer variety of abilities demonstrated means every scientist can have her own pet theory — the only problem is that they may all be true. In that case, a hunter just needs more information before she can refine her hypotheses. Only after some time on the Vigil does she begin to see that the infinite possibilities mean that everything is equally true — and by reflection, everything is equally false. Such ennui is a sign that the hunter has focused on the mind-bending possibilities of magic for too long. If she's lucky, a colleague will grab her interest with an alien visitation — or she redoubles her efforts to find a unified theory of magic (which among some in the compact is a highly sought-after keystone).

The real problem, of course, is that different witches can do different things. For every one who can call lightning from the skies, another can summon living smoke, a third can raise the dead, and a fourth can link different spaces together. While any one of these abilities would be the subject of a number of groundbreaking theories, a few witches can do all those things and more besides. The best hypotheses concern themselves with the powers that a witch demonstrates, all the possible powers they infer, and how the witch uses magic. A master over fate wouldn't tap into the same energies as a devout priest, even if they both manifested the same effect. Likewise, powers from human sacrifice or scarification probably have a different source again.

Null Mysteriis' investigations have proved that the coincidences surrounding a witch are just functions of her other abilities. That doesn't exactly help with planning. While it's obvious after the fact that a witch who can manipulate space was able to hop into a waiting taxi, no amount of research can prepare a hunter for any coincidence that a witch might use beforehand. It's both infuriating and fascinating for hunters, as they kick themselves for not predicting the coincidence and try to work the latest observations into their theories.

Psychics are an interesting edge-case. Several scientists have dug up research performed in the 60s and 70s by the gov-

ernment and covert private organizations. What they've found is basic at best — it focuses too much on the possible applications of psychic phenomena, rather than identifying a source. Research into powers of the mind attracts a different kind of hunter than the normal "witchfinder." These paranormal researchers can at least content themselves with the understanding that their subjects have a small range of abilities. That allows them to focus on the mechanisms of psychic phenomena, rather than trying to predict a witch's abilities — something most researchers liken to nailing a hurricane to a wall.

Ritual magic might be something else again or an offshoot of larger magic, depending on who you're talking to at any given time. It does allow scientists to study a single defined instance of a supernatural manifestation in controlled circumstances — though often that means being in a specific forest on the night of a full moon and sacrificing an animal with a silver-handled knife. Most scientists who have taken up the Vigil have no problems with trading those circumstances for understanding.

The Response

Investigation coupled with theorizing is the core of Null Mysteriis's response to witches. They spend days performing research and surveillance, shadowing those people they suspect to be witches and building a profile of their behavior. Even in confrontation, a scientist never stops researching. Every trick, every spell, and every strange coincidence is another shred of data to support their theories.

The current front-runner for a unified theory of magic involves localized manipulations of probability fields. Normally, magic involves changing the probability of events — causing a gas main to blow, or ensuring that bullets just miss. The witch somehow hooks into the probability of those events and skews them in her favor. Blatant uses of magic require the mage to create the possibility of it happening, then he increases the probability. Sometimes that happens subconsciously, such as a burst of fire, other times it takes rituals to focus the witch's conscious perceptions to the point that she creates a possibility from nothing. In its present state, the theory's little more than a framework for observed data, but teams of hunters are working on their own hypotheses every day.

Null Mysteriis hunters who focus on witches specialize in testing their theories on the fly, fudging things that they can work out later to hit a conclusion that helps their fellow hunters. Whether their countermeasures work is just as important as the holes in their theories — assuming they survive.

Generalist researchers worry that dedicated witch-finders are mavericks. Magical researchers forget to paper over the glaring holes in their hypotheses once the initial rush of adrenaline leaves them. They're too busy thinking on their feet, coming up with plans that keep their cellmates alive. More academically-minded hunters sometimes refer to these hunters as "Fermats," for their habit of having an answer that's too large for the margin of their paper — or anywhere else for that matter. Worse still, one hunter submitted two papers in swift succession that referred to, and contradicted, each other. The very nature of magic is madness, in its own way.

Scientists who focus on psychic research are the closest Null Mysteriis gets to an old guard — used as they are to quasi-accept-

ability, they prefer repeatable tests. Most don't hunt psychics in the same way as monsters. Instead, a parapsychologist sits in a room with the psychic, with access to Zener cards, etheric resonance meters, and plenty of coffee. She has a conversation with her subject, not a "hunt." While she prides herself on using traditional scientific methodology, her background reading relies on theories that mundane science has long since debunked, from magnetic therapy to orgone energy.

The Union

He was the priest at your church. He never got in your way. Seemed like a stand-up sort, a bit bawdy, a bit of a joker. The one time he was involved in anything weird, he wasn't the cause. He *protected* the folks there. Some people would have given him the bum's rush, but not you. He helped keep people safe, which meant he was on your team.

Then: your cell was tailing a bunch of snake-handler Holy Ghost witches when you realized what was happening. They were after the priest with guns and magic both. You got involved, put a hole straight through one, but it didn't matter. They killed your witch, and torched his church for good measure. So much for leaving well enough alone.

Story Hooks

- Some witches are like parasites, worming their way into the heart of a community and turning it to their own ends. One such example is on your turf, running a battered women's shelter. When young men start vanishing near the shelter, you get word. When those young men turn up dead from old age, you have to get involved. The real problem is the witch's position — the shelter's doing so much good that if the hunters succeed in attacking the witch through the community, they're also damning the women she's helping.

- That gang's got some kind of witch-doctor at its front, some Haitian prick with connections to the Tonton Macoute (i.e. Haitian death squads, a militaristic "bogeyman"). They're selling on your street corners. They're bringing in guns. They're messing with your kids. This used to be such a nice neighborhood. Taking that gang down won't be easy. Most of them are human, but they have guns. And that prick has magic on his side. You might need some help on this, but from whom? Other hunter cells? Or... is it time to ask some of the other local witches for help? Home First, right? You've got to do *something*.

- Fuck. A local politician is a witch. It's all but confirmed. You don't know that he's doing anything wrong yet, but a guy like that in power... think of the things he could do. The uses. The abuses. Of course, a politician's a public figure. He's not the president or anything, but you can't just make some quick threats and run him out on a rail. This won't be easy if you decide to act.

The Enemy

The Union is a reactive organization; its members don't get involved until something's causing a problem. Hence, they've

got a skewed perspective — they're only aware of witches who've caused some kind of trouble. Though members communicate via the web forums, they've got no real organization and the search function is broken more often than not. A few Union hunters spend their free time extracting the accounts that others have posted, hoping to dig up some underlying trends. Other compacts and conspiracies have got them beat when it comes to categorization and quantification, and most members of the Union know it. They don't much care.

No other group of hunters is better placed to witness the real damage done by witches. The Long Night spend their days worrying about the end of the world and where witches fit in, but the Union is concerned more about the small picture than the large one. Sorcerers in the neighborhood? Well, it's time to listen to the word on the street, and the word on the street matters a lot, and is plenty candid. One witch has a fetish for sacred geometry, and sits on the city's planning committee. Nobody can build anything without her making a few alterations, all in the name of her lust for power. Another walks the back-streets and abandoned lots of the city, patching up the destitute and the hopeless. His medicine's too weird for the FDA, and while his patients are under general anesthetic he replaces their hearts with tiny clockwork engines. Any day he likes, he can turn the city's hidden masses against anyone he chooses. A third witch has a lust for material power more than magical, and is running for mayor. Her flyers have hidden writings from a black codex, allowing her to persuade people to vote for her. Once she's spent a term as

mayor, she may go for the senate. A charismatic management guru sweeps into town, bringing with him a large security force — and his own particular style of management. Most office workers will never realize what dark gods listen to their prayers, but the larger community will soon find out.

Surrounded by creatures who meld human ambition with inhuman ability, the Union has to split witches up into two camps: immediate trouble, and postponed trouble. Even witches who try to help out are "postponed trouble." They're up to something, even if it isn't an immediate problem. Some witches consider the hunters as a useful asset, especially if they've had bad experiences with strict magical hierarchies. Most of that help is passive—the witch shares knowledge with the hunters and they watch each other's backs. Very rarely, a witch offers active help, empowering a cell with magic that they can best help their community. Any Union member who thinks she can rely on a deal like that suffers either from curable stupidity or terminal naïveté. Witches are tricky, and at some point they're going to use a hunter cell for their own ends. Immediate trouble or postponed trouble, never "friends."

Every community's got cracks, and witches seem naturally drawn to exploit them. Fortunately, the community can get its own back. The Union hunters often bring normal people into the fight, not as cannon fodder but because their sheer normality is useful — for some reason, the presence of a normal person makes a witch's most outrageous displays of mystic power flicker like a candle-flame in a breeze. Though it doesn't level the playing-field totally, re-



moving an alcoholic treasure-hunter's ability to make the world run on drunk-logic is a powerful asset.

While other compacts bother with splitting psychics from witches, the Union doesn't see much point (and beyond the practicalities of making monsters dead, some hunters in the compact think all monsters are just that, and should be lumped in together). A boy who can control the thoughts of others by concentrating until he gets a nosebleed is just the same as the woman who uses alien languages to do the same thing — hunters care about how and why a witch uses her power, not so much what her powers are. Likewise, a family whose members offer blood sacrifices to help their crops grow or a sorority who kidnap men to drain their life-force through twisted sex magic are problems that the Union need to solve. It doesn't matter whether their power comes from a person or a ritual on a scrap of paper.

The Response

When a witch gets moved into the "immediate trouble" bracket, Union hunters go in to break heads. Most don't bother with in-depth background checks or interviews, and convincing a witch to relinquish her powers is all too often a waste of time (and a matter of "how?"). More pragmatic hunters rely on traditional means of dealing with witches — and making sure that they don't strike again. The consensus on the message boards is simple: the cell has to take the witch out before she can hurt the community more.

Often, that's a problem. Most Union members aren't ex-military, and even those who are can't reliably get their hands on heavy-duty weapons and equipment; better for the cell to disrupt the witch's organization. Most Union hunters have ties to their community, and they can use those ties to fight back. The witch ends up fighting a battle for which she's unprepared, against a foe she can't recognize. If the witch relies on his corporate position, hunters who infiltrate the company can use the system against him. Five independent claims of sexual or racial harassment can turn a whole company against anyone, especially if the allegations become water-cooler talk. Anyone with access to photo-manipulation software and a fertile (some would say "twisted") imagination can wreck a politician's hopes of becoming mayor. A street-doctor's private army will have to face their friends and loved ones as the hunters gather an army of their own. Witches may exploit the cracks in communities, but hunters of the Union mobilize their community to fill the cracks where they can.

Where hunters can't use the community to tackle a witch, either because the witch has too great a power-base or their attempts bear no fruit, the hunters have to draw arms and get rid of the witch the old-fashioned way: with plenty of violence. Because most Union hunters launch their first attacks through social means, most witches don't realize just how far a cell will go. They expect the kind of people who normally use violence as a last resort — people who aren't very good at it. Instead, they find hunters who tried everything they could to remove a witch without killing her, but are more than willing to do that. The witch is a tumor that the Union will excise in any way possible.

The Union doesn't maintain specific witch-hunting cells. They're generalists, not specialists. Information about witches

goes back to the online discussion boards. Specific members may profess an expertise against a certain kind of foe, but unless they come up with useful information, nobody believes them. The few specialists who focus their Vigil on witches tend towards a skewed view of the world. Taking out a witch means using anything as a weapon, from the post-production van televising a political debate to the human resource policies of large companies. Everything's a weapon. Occasionally, these experts need to remember that their weapons are human, too.

Conspiracies

The conspiracies have less flexibility when it comes to dealing with the "magical menace." Their orders are usually top-down, so their actions are certainly more strident and directed than those given to compact cells. But, of course, they also have Endowments to help even the odds. Strange, isn't it, that Endowments so often look like magic to those out-of-the-know?

Aegis Kai Doru

Once upon a time, the will-workers had it all. They controlled the world and held the fate of mankind in their hands. Then they fucked it all up. Plus, think about the average assholes you see every day: Movie Theater Cell Phone Guy, "Turn Signal? What Turn Signal?" Lady, Mister Rich And Entitled. Are these the kind of people you want wielding the power of gods? And that's not even considering the real assholes: the rapists and killers and thieves and lunatics. No, the wizards fucked it all up once before, they can't be trusted to do it right the second time around.

Story Hooks

- Life isn't fair for some people. Your sister was a good kid — she hung out with a decent crowd, she didn't smoke or do drugs, and at least as far as you knew she'd never even been with a guy. The car accident was one of those freak things, a one-in-a-million shot. It never should have happened to her. She deserved better out of life. Now your beautiful baby sister is paralyzed from the neck down, trapped in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. She says she doesn't mind, though, because while she was hovering on the edge of death she *saw* something, and it changed everything about the world. She says soon she'll be able to walk again; her new friends are going to teach her how. Goddammit, life *isn't fair*.

- They say the days of the archaeologist-adventurer are long over, if they were ever more than Hollywood's invention. These days it's all permits and painstaking work with camel-hair brushes, not revolvers and head-hunter tribes. That's what the establishment says, anyway. You'd wager the faculty of the College of Archeology at Harvard has never seen a man smashed into a bloody pulp by a living statue beneath the catacombs of Paris. All you got out of that expedition was a necklace that shines with the light of a candle when someone bleeds on it, but the map your con-

tact brought you last week promises to be more lucrative, both for you and the Aegis Kai Doru. The map, written in what appears to be a dialect of Han Chinese, purports to show the way to “the Valley of 10,000 Jade Ghosts,” the treasure trove of an ancient sorcerer-king. Now you just need to find some sucker to finance the expedition.

- The sword speaks to you. Not in the sense that it feels right in your hand, and not in a creepy Son of Sam “voice in your head” way, but actual, spoken words. It never does it when anybody else is around, or when you bring a tape recorder, but it talks to you. It tells you where to find witches, and how to slip past their guardians and their magic wards. So far, it’s been right every time — the only problem is, the sword is an extensively-researched and documented Relic of the Aegis Kai Doru, and it’s not supposed to talk.

The Enemy

There’s no grudge like an old grudge. Nothing breeds more contempt, bitterness, and good-old fashioned hatred like nursing old wounds — and when it comes to witches, the Aegis Kai Doru’s wounds are *very* old indeed. Imagine what the ancient Greeks might have done if they’d gotten hold of Pandora after she opened that box, or how the Hebrews might have reacted to getting a crack at Eve sometime after that incident with the apple and you’ve got a good idea of just how the Shield and Spear reacts to witches.

At the same time, the Aegis Kai Doru holds that not only did the magicians directly cause the destruction of the primordial paradise, they actually exiled the people who would have been wise enough to stop them: the progenitors of the Aegis Kai Doru itself. Thus, mixed in with all the hate is a certain sense of smug superiority, an “I told you so” attitude that comforts the hunters with the knowledge that they are *better* than the people they take vengeance on today. The witches of today bear this belief out time and again. Every time the Aegis Kai Doru stops some lunatic murderer of children from calling forth demonic entities from beyond the dawn of time, every time a wizard’s spell slips from his control and kills an innocent bystander, the Shield and Spear can pat itself on the back, secure in the knowledge that the witches are no wiser today than they were at the dawn of history. There’s no chance that bunch of raving egomaniacs is actually going to restore the paradise of before the Fall, no matter what some of them say.

No chance at all. Really.

And yet, hunters who have reached the highest initiations, who have learned the secret history of their conspiracy, can’t help but feel the occasional twinge of doubt or even — dare it be said — envy. After all, the conspiracy’s oldest records state that the Aegis Kai Doru, or rather its antecedent, was not just an order of Relic-keepers and avenging hunters, but that they wielded glorious sorceries of their own. Doctrine holds that the Guardians of the Labyrinth *would have* stopped the cataclysm had they not been exiled, but if the Guardians were magicians and they were wise enough to foresee and avert the disaster, then must it not follow that there must be *other* magicians wise enough to repair the damage done by their ancient forebears?

The Response

Officially, the Aegis Kai Doru response to witchery is as simple as it is universal: kill the lot of them. They are directly responsible for turning the world into the shit hole that it is today, and while killing every witch on the planet is by no means a guaranteed way to fix things, it will at least keep them from screwing things up *worse*.

That’s the *official* response. Individually, members of the Aegis Kai Doru have a wide range of reactions both to witches in general and to those particular witches they encounter while keeping the Vigil. Many toe the party line and destroy any magician they come across with all the zeal of the Long Night (who’d rather not suffer the bastards to live). Others prefer to evaluate on a more case-by-case basis; *all* witches are suspect and watched closely, and those actively causing harm are put down, but if it’s a choice between tracking down and wiping out a vampire feeding on college kids in the local bars and going after a coven of witches that doesn’t appear to be doing anything but charting the passage of Venus, plenty of Aegis Kai Doru hunters will go after the bloodsucker first.

Then, of course, there are those witches who claim their goal is to restore the world to its glorious, pre-cataclysmic state. These are the most dangerous ones of all, since history has proven (at least to the eyes of the Aegis Kai Doru) that mages aren’t to be trusted with the fate of the world. Imagine what might have happened if the good people of Babel hadn’t taken the divine retribution hint and started over with a second tower — we might all be speaking pure babble. So too with witches. The Aegis Kai Doru does its utmost to stamp out these prideful lunatics wherever it can find them, even as many hunters secretly hope that such a scheme might succeed.

Is it possible to have peaceable relations between the Aegis Kai Doru and a coven of witches? Certainly. Zealots still abound within the conspiracy, but unlike the Long Night or the Malleus Maleficarum, who object to witches on a fundamental, religious level, the Aegis Kai Doru’s grudge is an ancient, historical one. Many rational people find it hard to nurse a blind hatred for someone because of something people like her did (or failed to do) thousands of years ago. Yes, witches are dangerous and powerful and need to be kept in check — but if they aren’t hurting anyone and they aren’t mucking about with the foundations of the universe trying to “fix” things, aren’t they in check by default? This attitude is heavily discouraged by leaders of the conspiracy, but it remains a fairly common sentiment among the ground-level operatives. Actual *alliance* is pushing things a bit, but in extreme cases an Aegis Kai Doru cell *might* consider enlisting an apparently-harmless coven to help take down a seriously dangerous and especially depraved foe. Such arrangements are inevitably short-lived, and often end in violence — whether at the hands of the hunters themselves or another Aegis Kai Doru cell that perhaps takes a dimmer view of peaceable relations with witches.

One thing the Guardians of the Labyrinth generally aren’t interested in is the academic study of witches. Unlike groups like Null Mysteris or the Loyalists of Thule, the Aegis Kai Doru has records and tomes about mages and their sorceries

dating back thousands of years. The Shield and Spear know all they need to know about mages, thank you very much. Individual wizards should, of course, be studied and analyzed before the hunt, but the conspiracy doesn't much care to dig into what makes them tick or how their powers work. They already *know*. (The fact that much of what the conspiracy "knows" is millennia out of date, distorted by the cataclysm that broke the world, or just plain wrong to begin with is somewhat beside the point.) The Aegis Kai Doru response to mages generally falls into the categories of "kill it" or "leave it alone."

Ascending Ones

Sometimes you wonder whether you are truly in the right. You remain a devout Muslim, but many of your compatriots worship the pagan gods of ancient Egypt and practice rites that, to your eyes, are all but indistinguishable from sorcery. You wonder whether you can trust yourself to know the difference between sorcery and a miracle from Allah — and you wonder what might happen if you were to make a mistake. Most of all, though, you hear rumors of warlocks capable of alchemical feats that make your Elixirs look like a high-school chemistry experiment. And you wonder what sort of magic that is.

Story Hooks

- You've run this corner since you were 12, and you've defended your turf against all comers. Most of the time, it was the 57th Street Kings trying to carve a piece out of your territory, but sometimes it's some young punk coming up through the ranks, thinking he's hot shit just because he's got a few Elixirs and knows how to use them. Lately, there's been a rash of disappearances among your customers — no big deal, really, they're just junkies, but eventually it's going to start eating into your profits, and the reagents you need to make your Elixirs aren't cheap. A little digging points you toward a new dealer in the projects, some punk kid selling what he calls "magic dust." Supposedly it shows you "another world" when you use it. Sounds like witchcraft to you — and if it's not, it's still competition. That's business.

- An Ascending One cell has shown up from out of town, claiming they've discovered a new Elixir that makes the imbiber immune to magic. They offer to sell the Elixir to their brethren for a hefty fee, making a tidy profit in addition to aiding the advancement of the war against the occult. The locals aren't too happy about having to pay for something they feel should be freely shared among the Ascending Ones, and there have been some rumblings about taking the formula by force if necessary. Profit isn't the directive, but these tyrants think it is.

- They fished your mentor's body out of the river in pieces — seven pieces, to be precise. The genitals were never found, and the police seem to think they were kept as a souvenir. You know better. Someone's sending you and your brothers a message. Within hours of the body's iden-

tification, the letters started pouring in, each from one of the covens your mentor had battled during his long career, each one swearing they had nothing to do with his death. The witches are obviously desperate to avoid a war, but this level of cover-your-ass action is unusual. The question is, which one is lying? And if none of them are, then who the hell cut your teacher up and dumped him in the river like a modern Osiris?

The Enemy

Witches call down powers beyond any mortal ken. Whether those powers are evidence of wickedness is another matter entirely. The quasi-Egyptian mysticism practiced by the Ascending Ones recognizes a variety of forms of what might be construed as "magic," some of which is considered righteous or at least culturally acceptable, others of which are sins on a level with murder and rape. Discerning which is which at a glance is one of an Ascending One's greatest challenges — no one wants to be responsible for murdering a man so righteous that angels carry his requests directly to God.

Traditionalist Ascending Ones who keep to the practices of the Cult of the Phoenix take a holistic attitude toward the practice of sorcery. Unless a witch is clearly bargaining with demonic entities for his powers, the mystics of the Order of the Southern Temple don't much care where a witch gets his powers, only what he does with it. Such hunters often try to maintain at least coolly professional relations with beneficent mages within their area of influence, and sometimes ally with the will-workers to take down mutual threats.

The more modern, pragmatic arm of the Ascending Ones has less interaction with witches. Some sorcerers in the world are certainly involved in the drug trade, and at all levels of the trade, but their presence is altogether less than that of, for example, vampires. Furthermore, the neighborhoods where the Ascending Ones' drug trade flourishes tend to not be the types of places that attract the attention of witches; the libraries and antiquities dealers that witches so love are usually located in more upscale neighborhoods. Some witches, particularly the depraved and vile practitioners of the black arts, see the inner city as an easy source for sacrificial victims and the like. No one is going to miss a crack whore or a gang banger, after all. Such witches often find themselves unpleasantly surprised when they troll the turf of an Ascending One cell: Even the most mercenary Ascending One dealer is fiercely protective of the people she sees as hers, and she will spare no effort to punish anyone who might harm them.

Of particular interest to the Ascending Ones are witches who practice their art through some form of alchemy. Ascending Ones are keenly interested to study the elixirs and potions brewed by such will-workers, whether followers of the Thrice-Great paths of Hermes Trismegistus or the esoteric alchemy of the Tao. Sometimes that means a truce or a pact of mutual aid; sometimes it means rifling the heretic's lab while the corpse cools. An Ascending One who manages to bring back a formula that can be adapted into one of the conspiracy's Endowment Elixirs (remember, an Elixir is more than just a magic potion, it contains a dangerous poison the Ascending One must mysti-

cally nullify) is sure to gain prestige within the conspiracy. Mechanically, such a coup is a perfect opportunity to spend Practical Experience on conspiracy Status. If the alchemical secrets recovered are exceptionally rare and valuable, the Storyteller might allow the first new dot of Order Status to be purchased for half price (new dots x 1 instead of new dots x 2).

Response

The Ascending Ones judge witches on the merits of their actions, not their nature. They recognize that there are strong similarities between their own beliefs and practices and the occult philosophies of many witches, and they realize the hypocrisy of destroying a witch simply because the witch can externalize her philosophies without relying on Elixirs. Those who act in the interest of their community are left alone, or approached with the aim of conversion. The Ascending Ones prefer to see converts rather than corpses, but should a witch refuse to convert, she is a confirmed heretic and must be eliminated.

Those who use their power for personal gain at the expense of others are gently warned to mend their ways. A popular form of warning (one the medieval *hashshashin* reportedly stole from the Ascending Ones) is to leave a dagger or a poisoned cake on the witch's pillow while she sleeps, along with a warning that she is being watched. This intimidation sometimes has the desired effect, but sometimes the witch is able to follow mystic roads from the dagger or cake right back to the Ascending One who left it. In that case, the hunter's compatriots are honor-bound to destroy the offending witch, preferably in as spectacular a fashion as possible.

All of this assumes that the witch in question is either acting righteously or is merely using magic to his own advantage. Should an Ascending One cell discover a witch engaged in truly blasphemous or wicked behavior, such as trafficking with the infernal or using sorcery to kill or harm innocents, the hunters do not offer any mercy or warning. Such a *saahir* (Arabic for "sorcerer") is an enemy and will always be so, and it is the duty of all Ascending Ones to destroy him. The Order of the Southern Temple performs ancient rites of preparation for war in accordance with the Cult of the Phoenix, and the Knife of Paradise is certainly militant in sending witches to a just afterlife. Even the pragmatic Jagged Crescent mobilizes everything it has to destroy the depraved magician that dares to prey on its people. More than one witch, especially in Latin America or along the US-Mexico border, has gone too far, only to end up a "casualty of the drug war."

The Cheiron Group

Witches are human. What makes them monsters?

You can do something about most witches. There's nothing provably different about them, but you can spark their brains, burning out the areas that know how to work magic. That makes them different. On the other hand, you worry that you're not going to be able to reconcile the hero and the hunter for much longer.

For all you know about the greater good, usually it doesn't involve taking someone off the street, shooting him full of general anesthetic, and running electricity across parts of his brain. Other agents have their weird implants, little skin grafts or extra organs or even creatures snuggled up against their hearts. You don't have any of that. They still look at you funny.

To find the real monster, you need to work out when you stopped caring; when invasive brain surgery on unwilling participants started being normal.

Story Hooks

- A friend approaches you looking for help. A local high-school student, star of the football team, recently dropped out of school and started hanging around with a bunch of occult weirdos. His parents worry that he's joined some cult, but the truth is far worse — their son is a witch, and he's working rituals to make his dreams come true. When the dreamer's a teenage boy, it's only a matter of time before his lack of concern for consequences tears the town apart in a maelstrom of sex and drugs. Is it right to remove his mystic abilities before he causes any real trouble? And why did the friend come to you, knowing what you do?

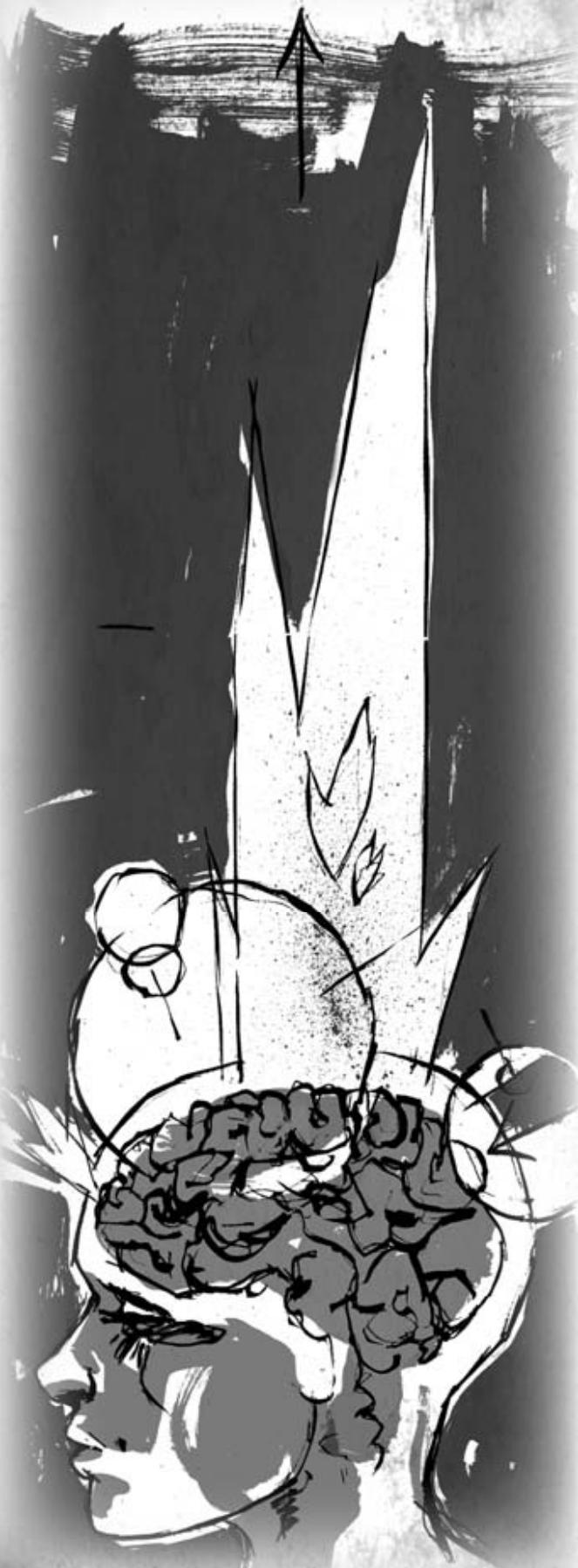
- You've started working with a promising psychic. Mostly, the relationship's beneficial — he can see future instances of the supernatural preying on humanity, and you can put yourself in the best place to do something about that. You can't do something about every vision, though. The psychic has had enough of seeing other people's pain. Rather than bailing out or taking his own life, he asks you if you can help him. Maybe you can "cut it out" of him, he says. Can you bring yourself to help your ally if it means losing such a huge advantage?

- You didn't know children could do magic, but this one can. He's like little Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (not that you believe that junk), too much power for an undeveloped mind. But that's not your problem. No, *your* problem is that your superiors in the FPD think your cell should harvest this kid's brain. "It's a unique chance," they said, a chance to study the physiology of a truly nascent mage. It's a prize find, they say. You do want to get paid, don't you? You don't want your grafts to be taken away from you, *do you?*

The Enemy

Alone of creatures reckoned to be supernatural, witches display no biological changes — unless they change their own bodies with magic. This poses a real problem for the medically-focused researchers of the Cheiron Group. Slashers tend towards abnormal brain structures, and those with a normal structure have a serious hormonal imbalance more often than not. But there's no way to test for witches. Why do they, alone of all monsters, demonstrate no biological changes?

Ah, but Cheiron can't let well enough alone, can they? The scientists and sawbones of the big business conspiracy strive (almost obsessively so) to study mages and their physi-



ology. Some seem to have odd nerve clusters and neuron arrangements in and around the hippocampus, and that seems a good place to start (electrostimulation even works to deprive some witches of their magic for a time), but this isn't universally true, and in fact doesn't even seem to be all that common. Certainly, the organization's hunters come across those witches who have fundamentally re-shaped their bodies (horns, plasticene skin, weird orifices that consume blood or other fluid energies), and these sorcerers make for excellent harvest targets. Of course, such dramatically-altered freaks aren't common, either.

Again, this leads to a rather preoccupying obsession with mages and their ilk. Cheiron scientists have long stopped caring about cracking open the chest cage of every dumbshit vampire who takes the "emo girl" bait or every lycanthrope caught patrolling the edges of his territory like a good little predictable creature, but witches? Oh, witches are all *so unique*, at least on the surface. One can shape water into blood or fire into ice, another can pause time and sing a song that enchants all the birds in the sky. But dig deeper, and they become so damnably similar. Same heart, same kidneys, same bowels. They're *human*; through-and-through. And such mundane configurations are troubling, because magic is anything but mundane.

Ultimately, it's because Cheiron agents don't really buy that magic can be a part of the soul or of the mind. While abstractly they recognize that magic exists, on some level they're very much like the smaller Null Mysteris: everything has a theory, and for Cheiron, those theories go toward exploiting the bodies of the monsters they capture. Magic, to them, *must* have a biological origin, an impetus within the flesh. If it doesn't, then what's the point?

The Response

The Cheiron Group doesn't just send their field agents to stalk witches. They go to places where blasphemous sacrifices have rent the world asunder, or places where magic pulses closer to the living world than normal. Cheiron doesn't care about any hippie "mystical wellbeing" bullshit. Agents go there to look for the weird and horrible traces of magic. Often, they don't find anything. Just occasionally, they'll find something, a living creature that by all rights shouldn't exist. They'll capture it and contain it, when possible. Dissect it if necessary, but if they can... they'll let it breed, first.

Weird creatures slip through the cracks in the world that magic leaves behind. Most witches consider them an aberration, an alien incursion into the world that should never be there. Hunters on surveillance sometimes hear the creatures described as "Abyssal." A number certainly seem to have some connection to magic, hunting witches or feeding on etheric energy. Creatures like that make excellent baselines for R&D to turn into a Thaumatechnological graft for agents to use in the field. Others are just plain inimical to human life, monsters the same as anything else a hunter might face. A doppelgänger made of blood-red crystal is an obvious target, while the only time Cheiron would look twice at a house with newfound — and malevolent — sentience is when people move in and start to change. The closest thing

the Cheiron Group has to witchfinders are hunters who specialize in sweeping areas for such mad manifestations. A few don't wait for magicians to leave an area beforehand, trying to bag both a witch and a strange creature in one. Such glory-hounds are often not long for a body-bag. Experts on witch biology and physiognomy don't have much advice to give in the field — but when they've got a witch captive, it's time to pony up and get the job done. Her superiors will want to see this witch inside and out. (Well, mostly inside.)

When dealing with witches face to face, Cheiron agents try to avoid physical combat. Sure, witches are a paranoid and suspicious lot — that's a given for any monster. But agents don't give off the same vibe as more militant conspiracies; they're neither religious nutcases nor gun-toting government agents. They try to convince a witch to talk. Better a conversation with a suspicious foe than a fight with a room full of animated corpses. Depending on the witch, a hunter may even set up a meeting on his home turf, hoping to set himself up as a friend before turning the conversation to the witch's alien powers. Some of these hunters are more like counselors than monster hunters — they want to understand where magic comes from, and they need the witch's help. Sometimes, she helps out willingly. Others aren't so accommodating. They need to be taken, bagged, tagged, and harvested.

Two cells of Cheiron agents — one in New York, one in Los Angeles — have set themselves up as "parapsychological experts." They investigate and debunk psychic frauds, and do their best to help natural psychics. One of their lines of business is electrostimulation to remove trace evidence of psychic powers. Given the number of people who consider visions of death to be a curse, it's not surprising that they want to turn to a private medical practitioner with a proven track record of both results and discretion. Hunters who focus on psychic phenomena might consider expanding the brand into other locations.

The Lucifuge

The car stinks of cheap cigars and cheaper coffee. You've been watching this guy for a month. He's had a package delivered every Tuesday. Different company every time. The driver doesn't come out. You've been round the back. There's a window into the basement there. He's got four occupied cages, one trough of dog food running past all four. An ornate altar with grooves in the surface, too. Three guesses what he's up to tonight.

Three others will show up tonight to help with the summoning. If you play the hero now, they'll go to ground and you'll never get them all. You can't free those people. There's too much at stake. You can't do anything until the sacrifice starts. You won't be alone when you strike. A summoning usually takes quite a bit of concentration. And if you're lucky, you won't have to look those sacrifices in the eye.

Story Hooks

- A contact clues you in to a witch who knows the truth about her condition: that she stole a part of an angel's

soul. She's used strange rituals and her innate understanding of Creation to destroy other witches, but that's not enough any more. She wants to meet with you for one reason: she wants to give that part of her soul back. Is maintaining the cosmic order a good enough reason to euthanize what could be a powerful ally? Do you treat her like any other witch, or does she warrant special treatment? Is there any truth to the rumors of a ritual in the Lucifuge's library that can fix a witch's soul, and is this witch worth the steep cost of finding out?

- A cell of Long Night hunters operating near the characters has had some success in converting witches and setting them on what they consider the "path of righteousness." You're not sure that's good enough. Will you take the witches on when they start using magic on your turf? If so, do they get treated with kid gloves because they help other hunters, or is that just more reason to smack them down? Then again, how do these Long Night zealots treat hunters who gain their power from Lucifer's DNA?

- You get word from a trusted ally that a bunch of demon-summoning witches are operating out of your turf. Thing is, that ally isn't fully clued in — these aren't witches, they're sons of the Devil who the Lucifuge haven't contacted. They revel in their abilities, burning people with the fires of Hell just to hear the screams and binding demons to do whatever they want. Just when you burst in to confront them, another cell that has obviously never heard of the Lucifuge burst through the door with guns pulled.

The Enemy

Angels and demons: that's what it all boils down to in the end. Angels and demons.

A werewolf's just a person with a bestial demon inside them. Some of the strange creatures from beneath the Earth's crust are a breed of demon manifest on Earth. Everything fits a pattern. Witches are different. They're not possessed by an angel or touched by a demon. They're people, incredibly driven people, who steal their power from its divine source. The Lucifuge libraries contain vast tracts on witches and their powers.

Many witches understand the source of their power, if not the precise mechanism by which they gained it. Those closest to the truth believe they stole their knowledge from the great city of Pandemonium, gaining knowledge and the touch of demons both. Others record a choir of angels as they shape the will of the Lord Above. They're almost right. Some witches don't come close enough to the truth, thinking their powers come from some New Age spiritual woo-woo crap, and others think they're doing the work of the dead. Those witches are so wrong it's almost funny.

The Lucifuge know the truth. A witch is a human who wields powers beyond human comprehension. Her powers aren't human at all; they're divine in origin, the world-breaking power of an angel — or a devil. Neither Heaven nor Hell gives up those world-shaping powers easily, however. The witch in question is willful enough to steal a little spark of the divine,

swapping a fragment of her soul for a small part of an angel or demon. That's why some captured witches go on about the "supernal" — they're referring to Heaven and Hell, the Realms beyond the world. But their understanding is woefully incomplete. The small shard of godstuff that lives in a witch's soul imparts power without knowledge. It's a terrible burden, but one that most witches don't even realize they have.

Hunters of the Lucifuge hate witches for that: they weren't born with Lucifer's blood in their veins, but they go ahead and steal that power anyway — and they end up with more than any child of Lucifer can manage. What's worse is that they seek to increase their spark of divinity, gaining more power over the world as if they have a right to it. The Lucifuge hunt them for that reason, to return their shard of divinity to its appropriate divine sphere. With any luck, they'll balance the books of Heaven and Hell enough that the accountants in the Great Pit and the Shining City will not be any the wiser that shards of their power are wandering around unbidden on Earth.

They also hate witches because of other hunters. A few hunters have encountered rogue sons of Lucifer, those who revel in their condition, and mistaken them for witches. These hunters go on to brand members of the Lucifuge with the same stigma. Only a few have been targeted so far, but the number will only ever increase.

Some abilities don't stem from the Powers-That-Be. No Lucifuge hunter has yet found a way to explain those strange individuals who manifest powers of the mind. Some think it's just random chance, a momentary quirk of evolution. To others it's a sign that something *other* has taken a specific interest in their lives. Though it may be intriguing for lovers of mysteries, at least there's no intervention from the Devil that the cadre in Milan can fathom.

A few books of forgotten lore contain strange rituals. These rituals bind the powers of minor demons, invoking their power through words and actions rather than any inherent condition of the soul. A few cells find evidence of these rituals, and commit them to the agency's libraries, but they can't leave any living witnesses who could remember the rituals.

The Response

Though some witches may seem to draw their powers from Heaven, representatives of the Lucifuge still hunt them. It's still their prerogative to return the power that a witch has stolen to its rightful place. There's only one way that the agency knows of to do that — and the witch doesn't get a chance to be a repeat offender. Some hunters use elaborate rituals to return the stolen shard of divinity back to the Realms beyond once the witch is dead, while others believe that spark will find its own way back. A few believe the witch must die in a specific way — one cell in New England puts out both eyes of a witch, believing her stolen power exits through her empty sockets. Only a few hunters are that barbaric.

Yes, some witches are capable of doing good work. Some Lucifuge hunters let these will-workers do that good work for as long as they can be allowed. Others balk; even if the witch doesn't mean to, there will come a time when demons seek out the witch. Demons, it seems, love magic. It's so easy to tempt a witch, too. Many witches feel like they don't have

as big and strong a grip on their magic as they'd hope, and a demon can whisper it in her ear: *I can give you more*. The sorcerer merely needs to do something for the demon. Steal from someone. Lie. Maybe even, oh, summon one of the demon's friends. Magic is a slippery slope. The best time to catch and kill a witch is before she's sliding down it.

The Lucifuge do take their time when stalking a witch. They dig up information, not just studying how the witch has acted in the past, but who she was and how she acted before becoming a witch. This prior life often holds clues to her life at present, keys to the witch's mindset that allows the hunters to strike at the most advantageous time.

Those people who make use of strange rituals have already proved their intent by using powers that draw upon demons. Hunters might try to re-educate them — or even recruit them to the cause — but their main duty remains collecting any copies of the ritual and making sure nobody remembers how to perform it. The Lucifuge can't leave demon-fueled rites lying around where anyone can scan them in and post them online, after all.

Malleus Maleficarum

The agents of Satan are afoot in the world. This is not a matter of faith — not for you. It's fact. You've seen them call up blasphemous monstrosities from the Pit; seen them beguile men's minds; seen them perform all manner of unholy works. Some say you should hate them. They are, after all, the enemies of all righteousness and the Devil's own brides. You can't bring yourself to hate them, though. Most of them, born into this godless age, just don't know any better. They weren't raised in the bosom of Holy Mother Church, and they were never taught to resist wickedness. You can teach them, though. It will hurt, and they will cry and scream and plead and that will rend at your soul, but you'll teach them anyway; because you love them all as God's children.

In the end, they'll thank you.

Story Hooks

- Your superiors in the Church have been investigating a supposed miracle-worker in a small Colorado town, and the verdict has come back: no miracles, only witchcraft. You've been sent to address the problem. You expected resistance, but the witch came with you quietly. It wasn't until he saw the tools laid out on the table — the needles, the straps, the screws — that he broke down. He swears he's a good Catholic who was granted miracles by an angel with a golden key. He's obviously been deluded by a demon, but how do you convince him of that when he insists his faith is pure?

- When you aren't hunting, you do the Lord's work in a different way, serving as a parish priest. A young woman comes to you in the confessional and tells you she has committed a terrible sin. After a fight with her husband, she went on her computer and found an

PAPISTS VERSUS PENTECOSTALS

What separates the approach of the hunters of the *Malleus Maleficarum* from the hunters of the Long Night when dealing with mages, or, really, any monster? On a philosophical level, the hunters have obvious differences: the Long Night sees a light at the end of the tunnel called the Apocalypse, and is predominantly a sect of "born again" hunters; the hunters of the Hammer of Witches are Catholics both devout and lapsed, are committed to works over faith, and don't believe that whole "Tribulation" stuff. How does this translate over to how they act?

The Long Night vacillates between extremes: different cells aim to end the Tribulation in different ways, having no central leadership to guide them. Conversion is often key to the Long Night approach. This can mean converting in life (whether with honeyed tongue or burning blowtorch) and letting the witch go on as a "born again," or it can mean putting a bullet through her heart and converting her before she tumbles off this mortal coil.

Those of the *Malleus Maleficarum* are effectively old-school inquisitors reborn. They have top-down instructions from the Vatican. Conversion ultimately means little. It's not that they can't be merciful, but to them, one's actions are more important than one's promises (works over faith), and so for the most part, the only restitution a monster can make is to allow its life (or unlife) to end, confessing before turning to char and dust.

on-line "book of spells" that included a recipe for a curse against those who had wronged you. Still angry with her spouse, she performed the curse using a picture of him, and the next morning he was dead. Was it a coincidence, or is someone posting real magic spells on the Internet capable of killing? Or is the spell a red herring, with the real sorcery living in the heart of your parishioner?

- You've worked with the zealots of the Long Night before, and despite their mistrust of "papists," you got on well enough until now. They've come to you for help in striking down a teenage witch, a young man who has been using his occult knowledge to sleep with every good-looking girl at his school, ace all his classes, and generally take what he wants at the expense of others. The Long Night keeps throwing Exodus in your face and sharpening their knives, but you think the boy can be made to see the error of his ways — at the very least, he needs to confess, first. The Long Night seems ready to force the issue — but if push comes to shove, can they call down the righteous wrath of God?

The Enemy

Given that their name translates as "the Hammer of Witches," it's no surprise that the *Malleus Maleficarum* has strong feelings on the matter of witchcraft. Of all the hunter compacts and conspiracies, perhaps only the Aegis Kai Doru and the Long Night have similarly strong opinions on the topic of men who truck with occult powers. Where the Aegis Kai Doru hates witches for their perceived culpability in the destruction of a mythic "golden age" and the Long Night hates witches as the willing servants of Satan, the *Malleus Maleficarum* does not hate witches at all. The priests of the Hammer *love* witches. They love them so much they are willing to torture and brainwash them into recanting their heresy and becoming good Catholics once again. Where the Long Night believes that witchcraft represents a willful defiance of the Lord and is therefore a death sentence, the *Malleus Maleficarum* believes witches are merely misguided and deceived, and can be made to see the light again.

That, at least, is the official party line of the *Malleus Maleficarum*. As with so many zealots, though, the philosophy of "love the sinner, hate the sin" is warped into "hate the sinner, *really hate* the sin." For every priest who professes to do all he does out of love, there are a half-dozen more who make no secret of their hatred of witches and their willingness, even eagerness, to torture a witch to death in search of a "confession." The witches themselves seldom see the distinction between the two philosophies.

From a theological standpoint, the *Malleus Maleficarum* accepts only one explanation for witchcraft: the witch has, whether of her own free will or through the guile of another, entered into a compact with the Devil, promising him her soul in exchange for power. Everything the Hammer knows about witchcraft bears this out, and elaborate studies are made that prove, through Scripture, that the properties of magic are proof of its Satanic origin. One key study, incorporated into the text of the *Malleus Maleficarum* described the fact that, in the words of a self-proclaimed penitent witch, no form of sorcery could be made to last forever when cast upon a human being. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, this was proof that magic came from Satan because only God Himself can create a permanent, lasting change in His creations.

Witchcraft can take many forms, though, from Satanic rites to neo-pagan worship to psychic phenomena, and a troubling thought arises when one considers witchcraft that comes cloaked in the guise of divine miracles. Theologically, the *Malleus Maleficarum* finds itself on shaky ground when it comes to such magic, with some members insisting that it is a sign of God's enduring love for His children, and others reasoning that if the Devil can quote Scripture for his own ends, why can't he

A NOTE ON MISOGYNY

Born out of the witch-hunts of the middle ages, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (both the conspiracy and the book from which it takes its name) is unabashedly misogynistic in its views. According to the founders' worldview, only women were spiritually weak enough to be seduced by the Devil, and therefore become witches. In fact, even the title *Malleus Maleficarum* is specifically feminine, literally translating as "the Hammer of (female) Witches." (For those keeping score, the masculine or gender-inclusive form would be *Malleus Maleficorum*.)

Today, the *Malleus Maleficarum* is somewhat more egalitarian in outlook. The doctrine that only women become witches has been abolished, and the conspiracy hunts male spellcasters every bit as readily – but centuries of tradition do not change overnight, and many hunters are far more ready to accept evidence of witchcraft against women than they might dismiss, or at least investigate more closely, if brought against a man.

also disguise his works as those of God? To date, no clear policy on the matter has emerged from the Hammer's leadership.

Response

Witchcraft is heresy. That's simply its nature: practicing magic is a slight against God. Gambol about in the woods on a demon's holiday? Offer blood to ancient powers to gain the ability to shape-shift, or fly, or sing a song of lust and madness? Couple with an incubus to learn his secrets? All of it, a crass contravention of God's laws. Those who dare perform magic must be convicted of heresy. And such a conviction comes with steep punishment.

Confession is the cornerstone of the Shadow Congregation's response to witches. A witch must be captured and made to confess; it is the proper course. Confession might be private, gained however a hunter of the Hammer of Witches sees fit. A rare few are willing to openly admit to treachery against the Kingdom of Heaven, and if they seem properly penitent about the whole affair, that might work just fine. Mostly, though, confessions must be... solicited with pliers, knives, leather straps, even waterboarding techniques.

Witch-hunts and Inquisitions have a long history of using torture for the good of the soul, and the *Malleus Maleficarum* is no exception. Most chapter houses have at least one antique torture device, commonly an Iron Maiden, prominently displayed. This device isn't intended for use, but rather as a reminder of the extreme measures required to save a soul. While some hunters remain staunch traditionalists, favoring thumbscrews and the rack and the like, most of the conspiracy's specialists have kept up with the times. Waterboarding, electrocution and sonic torture are preferred to hot pokers and the wheel. Modern methods tend to inflict less lasting harm on the penitent, which is to be preferred — torture is not punishment, but incentive.

Most witches are so thoroughly beguiled that they cannot see themselves as the servants of Satan that they are. It takes the shock of pain and the purification of trial by ordeal to open their eyes and make them truly see. Most painful of all for the priests of the Hammer are those deluded souls who believe their magic is a gift from God. Such poor wretches cannot understand why their brothers in Christ would want to hurt them so terribly, and resist the confession as fervently as they may. Once they are broken, though, confession comes like a welcome deluge.

Some confessions are gained publicly: the *auto de fe*, the "act of faith" in which a witch loudly confesses his sins before a gathered congregation (often other hunters, perhaps a whole chapter of the *Malleus Maleficarum*) and, in many cases, reads the sentence levied against him by the hunters.

Not all members of the *Malleus Maleficarum* rely on medieval methodology to coerce witches into repentance. Within the last 50 years, a small but growing faction within the conspiracy has been trying to apply more modern, liberal tactics to the conversion of witches. Some stray farther from the traditional method than others: "liberal" techniques include everything from religious counseling and "inter-faith discussion" to tactics gleaned from cult deprogrammers.

Once confession is offered, then what? Hunters usually beseech their leadership within the Vatican for some judgment upon the heretic. If their sins are truly minor, they may be allowed to convert to the Catholic faith; but in these dangerous times, that isn't frequently an option. Some are forced to walk a pilgrimage, and shadowed the entire way (a path that may comprise many years to travel) by a cell of hunters. Some are captured and kept imprisoned for a set numbers of years, and the Shadow Congregation keeps a number of hidden prisons all over Europe (with a few in North American cities like Boston and Philadelphia). If the crimes of the heretic are severe enough, the heresy merits death. Burning is, of course, the old-fashioned way, and certainly some cells cleave to "tradition," but most do it with some level of modern mercy: a noose, a bullet, a forced overdose.

While confession is the outright policy of the Shadow Congregation, cells ultimately operate alone and sometimes go for months or years without communication from above, and are as such free to pursue a witch as they see fit. If they simply don't believe the witch to be harmful, she may be left to her own devices until the time comes when she proves a danger. In other cases, the *Malleus Maleficarum* forgoes any attempt at conversion and simply seeks to destroy a witch outright. The sort of crime necessary to merit this sanction is extreme; usually only the selling of the immortal soul of an innocent to a demon is grounds for summary execution. A recanted witch who returns to her infernal ways is likewise seldom given a second chance, and in practice, if a witch inflicts particularly grievous casualties on a cell during her apprehension, it isn't unheard of for that witch to "tragically succumb" before she can be taken. Vengeance may not be terribly Christian, but there's always confession.

Task Force: VALKYRIE

The lady behind the desk turns to you: "Why did you kill your teammates?"

It all comes back: a coven of witches bought a luxury office, and you're in a van parked out front. Command gave you authorization for extreme prejudice when you showed them photos. Minsky's checking his screamer pistol. He'll pull one for questioning. The air's tense in the back of the van.

Time. You burst into the building. Security thinks you're with Homeland Security, and they don't fuck with the Patriot Act. They don't get in your way. The elevator takes a week for 23 floors. The doors open. You see this girl; she looks like your own daughter. You hesitate for a second.

That's all she needs.

Now: You hate the other guys; can't stand the sight of them. They're pointing their guns at your daughter. You pull the trigger without thinking. Four trained agents fall dead. Minsky's already got a witch. He tags you with the screamer. You repay his kindness in 7.62mm.

Story Hooks

- They work in cells, just like you do. They're faceless. That guy at the ATM machine might be a witch. That girl going into the Maggie Moo's ice cream place might be, too. You're starting to get paranoid, and that's made all the worse by the intel that just came in over your wiretaps: there's a coven out there, some hateful Manichaean lunatics who think they're going to bring the United States government crashing down around your ears. You don't know shit about them, but you know you're working on a clock: you've got two weeks. Then, something big happens. Something *bad*. Good luck, agents.

- Agents who go through EOCHAI training (an acronym for Etheric-Occult Containment, Harvesting, And Investigation) don't just have to take down a whole bunch of witches; they have to lead a team of agents against a coven of witches. You've been tapped to assist in another hunter's training. You're at the mercy of his command against a coven of witches. According to your intel, they're not experienced enough to present a threat. When you go in against the coven, you find out first-hand just how wrong intel can get. It's up to you to get yourself — and your pet trainee — out alive.

- A cell of witches has taken over a survivalist compound. They've tried to secede from the United States, and have got all the media attention anyone could want. ATF and FBI agents have got their compound surrounded, but with news helicopters buzzing and reporters at the gates nobody wants another Waco. Command's authorized you to go in and take out the witches before they work sanity-blasting magic live on CNN.

The Enemy

Task Force: VALKYRIE responds to suspected witches in the same way that other government departments respond to suspected terrorists. They're under a lot of pressure from the very top to snuff out the threat to good American lives, and can get clearance for military operations and hardware just by saying the word "witch." On the other hand, VALKYRIE's analysts need information. That means sending sleeper agents to infiltrate covens, setting up elaborate surveillance — everything from phone taps to bouncing a laser beam off a window — and tracking down every link that a witch has to other people. The Task Force has no mid-level sanctions, no mechanism to deal with suspects that they're not sure of — there's no mystical equivalent of a no-fly list, and ID checks mean jack shit to someone who can cloud the minds of men.

The comparison to terrorists doesn't stop there. Witches, like terrorists, have a nasty habit of looking like normal people. Unlike terrorists, there's a hell of a lot of witches on American soil. And these terrorists (or, as some call them, Reality Deviants) can do a lot more than blow up the 7-Eleven.

VALKYRIE has a lot of theories on where witches come from, all of which are backed up by some semblance of "proof." (Sometimes, VALKYRIE even steals documents and theses from Null Mysteris and casually inserts them into case files or records — whiting out any names, of course.) Are witches actually possessed by or servants of the ghosts of the First People, of pissed-off Native Americans who are now working to get back at America? Could they be genetically-modified insurgents or terrorists, their brains and souls tinkered with by a supernaturally-ascendant Middle Eastern nation (or by the once-again-burgeoning Soviet Union)? Maybe it's the result of a contagion like anthrax or smallpox. Maybe it's all of the above. Pet theories live within VALKYRIE, and often do more harm than good given the fractured command structure. False information falls too easily into the hands of a cell, especially when a commanding officer's pride is on the line.

While it doesn't know much about witches, VALKYRIE's got a whole load of information about psychic phenomena from every government program that studied mental powers. Though the researchers hired by the CIA for the MK-ULTRA program vanished when the project was disbanded, VALKYRIE holds full copies of the program's research and findings. They've also got reports acquired from KGB remote sensing experiments. Some agents died to get the result of a single experiment, but with the fall of the Iron Curtain the trickle of information became a torrent. Rumor has it that some of the MK-ULTRA researchers remained active after the program ended, possibly even within the United States government, and the Task Force's commanders would happily kill to get their hands on that research.

In the end, the point is that witches and psychics damage the cultural currency of democracy. A sorcerer can screw with the vote. He can mind-rape a politician or, worse, become one himself. He can wage a war against the American people by conjuring some awful new infectious bacteria just by *willing it to be so*. If the American people knew just how often they needed to be protected from witches — and, more importantly, how often it's TF:V doing the dirty work — they'd be shitting their britches.

The Response

Shock tactics are the mainstay of Task Force: VALKYRIE's response to witches and psychics. It's not always enough, but often bursting through the door with flash grenades and guns blazing is a damn good start. The agency's trademark big guns are actually less useful against witches — unlike shapeshifters or undead serial killers, a witch dies the same as a normal human. Anything bigger than a bullet is probably a waste of ammo, though sometimes you get those sorcerers who can turn a bullet into a rose or a firefly just by snapping her fingers.

When the element of surprise fails, hunters are on their own. Their equipment reflects this: screamer pistols and witch-busters have a nice line in regaining the element of surprise, either by knocking a witch's concentration for a few seconds or just giving her another target to fix upon. When they're not effective, it's up to agents to use their own secret weapon: everyone.

When it comes to dealing with witches, Task Force: VALKYRIE has a two-stage strategy. First, they find out who they're dealing with. Claiming to operate under the aegis of the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, or even the NSA, the agents can legally put anyone under surveillance. Enough bad movies have lead most people to believe that the government run black helicopters and monitor alien abductions, giving VALKYRIE agents far more leeway than any other group. The agents know that witches are terrorists with the equivalent destructive power of a dirty bomb. They've got hundreds, maybe

thousands of witches under surveillance. It used to be hard — trying to secure a warrant for stuff like this can be tricky to describe on the formal documents. But these days, it gets all the easier. The Patriot Act has done wonders for VALKYRIE's surveillance capabilities: wire-taps and hidden cameras, ahoy.

Task Force: VALKYRIE maintains a number of specialized witch-hunter units. Normally, they're based in major urban areas. That's not because of any specialist concentration of witches; rather, if an occult weapon of mass destruction were detonated they'd want to protect the main population centers. In addition to these cells, the agency has a large number of agents who've gone through EOCHAI training under the auspices of Project TWILIGHT. Most agents who go through the training but don't join a witch-hunter squad get assigned to VALKYRIE cells as mission experts. The remainder work as specialists in cells drawn from wider fields. Unlike graduates of other training programs, EOCHAI agents tend to be prized for their tactical knowledge rather than their access to advanced weapons.

Alone in the Dark: Hunter Cells

Not all hunters have the advantage of a compact or conspiracy backing them up. Those who keep the Vigil alone, or



with a small group of trusted allies, face the horrible powers of witches and rely on their own wits, trusted friends, and a sturdy shotgun. Lacking the resources and lore of more organized hunters, these cells must make do with the knowledge they accumulate in the field to understand the threat their quarry poses. In the case of witches, wily and unpredictable as they are, that field knowledge can be confusing, contradictory, and downright dangerous.

Story Hooks

- You don't usually follow up on things like animal sacrifices. Usually there's nothing to it — teenagers in black clothes trying to be "edgy" or just some weird religious thing. It's a big city, after all, lots of people from all over the place. This time, though, something's different. Every time you check out one of these dead animals (just you, not the cops or Animal Control or the ASPCA folks), exactly 24 hours later, someone dies in a spectacular, gruesome fashion at that same location. So far it hasn't been anyone connected to you, so who's benefiting? And why did they pick *you* as the catalyst for this thing?

- Your wife always said you were too lenient about who you let your daughter date, but the way you saw it, you raised her to be able to take care of herself, and really, if you try to say no she'll just sneak out to see the guy anyway. So when she brought home Brad, with his piercings and his weird "tribal" tattoos, you weren't too worried. He was a nice kid, always asking about your work and how things were, and you thought you might actually like this one. Then you remembered where else you'd seen those tattoos. You're pretty sure there were no wit-

nesses when you and your friends took out those demon-worshippers at the rail yard, so how'd one of them find you? And what's he *really* want with your little girl? She's out with him *right now*.

- You've known Lindsay for a while now. She contacted you when you were dealing with that bloodsucker out in Reno, gave you some good advice. You kept up correspondence, and eventually it came out that she was a witch. You're pretty okay with that, that whole "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" thing seemed pretty intolerant. Besides, Lindsay's good people. She's a pediatrics nurse, and sometimes she gives a little "extra help" to the kids that are really bad off. Only thing is, now the kids who get Lindsay's "extra help" are keeling over a few days after they leave the hospital. Does Lindsay have an enemy she never told you about, or has your friend gone off the deep end?

The Enemy

In many ways, a witch is the most frightening foe an isolated cell of hunters can expect to face. Consider: to all outward appearances, a witch looks like an ordinary person. Oh, there are old wives' tales about how you can recognize a witch — weird birthmarks, strange eye color, and so on — but any cell that's encountered more than one of them can tell you that's crap. Until a witch starts hurling lightning at you, you'll never even know she's anything but a civilian. Even worse, if she's one of the subtle ones, you might not know she's a witch *even while she's destroying your life*.

A vampire may be powerful, but that whole "pale as a corpse, no vital signs" thing is a dead giveaway. A werewolf

SATANIC RITUAL ABUSE

Stories abound of witches who gain power through human sacrifice to dark powers, but the likelihood of that being a particularly common breed of witch seems small. If such were the case, there would have to be a much higher incidence of occult, ritual-style murders, and the vast majority of reports of such killings have been debunked.

Nevertheless, the first-tier cell's general lack of access to large-scale resources causes many to believe that there is a vast Satanic conspiracy of ritual abuse and human sacrifice underlying society, whereas most of the larger organizations, not to mention law enforcement, have dismissed the entire theory as nonsense. Isolated cases of occult practice and human sacrifice do not indicate a systemic, nationwide network of Satanic cults.

And yet... the stories persist. Even among hunters, and sometimes the witches themselves, just about every cell or coven has at least one story about the vast cult that lurks in the shadows of society. One could even argue that the Lucifer, by their very nature, constitute a "global Satanic conspiracy." Conspiracy theorists point out that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, to which skeptics reply that neither is absence of evidence of a vast conspiracy concealing its own existence — but in the World of Darkness, sometimes that's exactly what it means.

is a terrifying opponent, but unless you're really new to the Vigil, it can be tough to miss the gang of tough, scary, feral-looking motherfuckers coming at you. Slashers and cultists can blend into society pretty well, but they're usually (mostly) normal people when the fists start flying. Most of the other creatures lurking in the shadows are savage brutes or lunatics incapable of blending in with human society, and while they might be hard to find, they usually aren't that good at vanishing into a crowd and fuck you up eventually.

How, then, does a cell of hunters, bereft of the research and assistance of a larger compact or conspiracy, track down and deal with a magician on its turf? The short answer is, many times they don't; unless its membership includes at least one dedicated scholar of the occult who knows what to look for, it's all too easy for a small cell to completely miss the presence of a witch right in its own backyard. Unless the magician starts doing something to draw attention to herself, like sacrificing homeless children and leaving their bodies where the police can find them, it's very likely that the cell won't even know she's there. Even those rare hunters with a kind of sixth sense for the occult (as represented by the Unseen Sense Merit) can easily miss a witch's presence, since such a sense only registers the presence of actual magic, not merely one capable of performing magic.

All this isn't to say that witches are running amok throughout the world, doing as they like with no hunters to

keep them in check. Witches are difficult to identify, but they don't exist in a vacuum. Most hunter cells aren't privy to the details, but there does appear to be at least some semblance of a larger society in which the magicians operate, a sort of occult underground in which the so called "heirs of Atlantis" are at the top of the pecking order, while witches who cannot claim descent from that ancient kingdom serve them as vassals (or, alternately, hate the bastards for their power). This means that witches, like members of any other select subset of the population, tend to congregate — and while one witch may be extremely difficult to find, a group of witches becomes much more noticeable. Witch-hunters learn to stake out occult bookshops and keep an eye on regular customers (the good ones even learn to tell the trippy-hippy New Age fluff shops from those that sell actual occult tomes). Witches tend to be a little off-kilter: yes, they look like "normal humans" in theory, but a lot of them are kind of weird. That eccentric guy who keeps building onto his mansion so it grows into some kind of tangled labyrinth? That emo-girl who has a pack of hollow-eyed boys following her, all of them grinning and drooling a little? The homeless guy drawing weird sigils on the ground — sigils upon which passersby always stop and deposit a little change? Witches, probably.

Response

So your cell's caught itself a witch. What now? It can be difficult to clearly guess any single cell's reaction to a witch, since first-tier cells have such disparate motivations. A cell formed by the father of a little girl who's in a persistent vegetative state because a warlock stole her soul and fed it to some crawling *thing* from some nightmare Realm is going to have quite a different reaction to encountering another witch than a group of college professors and grad students with an intense fascination with the hidden world who occasionally avert the rising of ancient demonic god-kings.

Whatever a cell's motivation or reaction, it's often a better tactic to observe the witch for a time before taking any final action. A dead witch is a dead witch, and while that may well be a good thing, it also limits you in the future. In much the same way that the police often let small-time drug dealers walk in order to catch their distributors, it's sometimes advisable to let an identified witch roam free for a while. She might lead you to others of her kind, or to magical "hotspots" in your territory that serve as focal points for unnatural activity. In Phoenix in the 1980s, a group that called itself the Desert Rats identified a witch as the culprit in several local murders, but rather than kill him straightaway, they shadowed him for the better part of a year, investigating everyone he had regular contact with in that time and monitoring the places he frequented. In the end, the witch killed three more people during that time, but by the end of their investigation

the Rats were able to kill the witch's entire coven and three more allied witches before themselves being killed while going after a man their notes identified as the "chief warlock of Arizona."

The story of the Desert Rats circulates regularly throughout the hunter community in the southwest, with opinion sharply divided on the whole affair. Some hunters point out that, while the Rats were sitting around *watching*, their quarry murdered even more innocents. Those were deaths the Rats could have prevented. On the other side of the argument, many of the witches identified by the cell's investigations were exceedingly low-profile individuals who might never have been identified otherwise. The counterargument to that typically goes that the Desert Rats never really found any evidence that those other witches were involved in the killings, and in fact some of their findings can be interpreted to suggest that even the killer's own coven was initially unaware of the murders and, once they learned of them, attempted to bring the man to justice.

Peaceable relations between first-tier cells and witches are somewhat more rare, but not unheard of. In fact, if a cell is likely to have peaceful contact with any sort of supernatural being, a witch is the most likely candidate. When you get down to it, a witch is just a human being who can perform remarkable feats (though strongly religiously-motivated hunters may disagree with that sentiment). Whereas a vampire is a walking, talking corpse that *must* prey on humanity to survive, and a skinchanger is usually a feral savage prone to violent bouts of murderous fury if thwarted in their ambitions, there is usually nothing about a witch that makes him inherently antagonistic to the human race at large.

Witches themselves are sometimes more reluctant to engage hunters in peaceful interaction than hunters are with witches. Magicians as a rule tend to be a secretive, paranoid lot, and some of them seem to have an almost religious devotion to the idea that magic should be hidden from the common rabble. A hunter cell that approaches a witch with an offer of peaceful coexistence may well find itself the target of death squads or a string of freak accidents in order to "protect the Mysteries." Some witches are less stringent about their secrecy, but are understandably leery at the thought of associating with a group of people who describe it as their *duty* to destroy the supernatural. On the rare occasion when a witch and a hunter cell do come together without violence, the hunters all too often find themselves as pawns in the witch's schemes, quietly directed against other warlocks and monstrosities that their "friend" will benefit from seeing dead.

Once a witch has been identified and the decision has been made to go for the kill, an entirely new suite of problems presents itself. Witches are among the most unpredictable denizens of the hidden world, and a hunter could research

for years and not find two accounts that definitively agree on what a witch can and cannot do. How do you develop a tactic to deal with someone who might be able to simply disappear and reappear somewhere else, or make you forget you were ever hunting him in the first place?

Once again, planning and observation becomes the key to success. It's nearly impossible to predict what a witch can do, but it can be feasible to *observe* a witch and gauge his powers. Some cells engage in a tactic they refer to as "wizard-baiting." Using contacts within criminal organizations, law enforcement, or similar groups, they arrange confrontations with the witch in question to see what his strategy entails. Does he immediately resort to magic, or play it subtle? Does he have any particular spell he uses frequently, or does he seem to have difficulty controlling his magic under stress? Of course, unlike Hollywood productions, real magic isn't always accompanied by flashy special effects, and it can be difficult to gauge a witch's magical tactics by observation. A magician might appear to be relying entirely on his mundane abilities to win a fight or get out of a confrontation when, unbeknownst to the hunters, he is using magic to render himself preternaturally durable or hard to hit and manipulating the minds of his attackers. Those rare individuals with a sixth sense regarding magic are highly prized by groups employing this tactic.

For some cells, subtlety isn't a strong suit: if a witch is basically a human being, they reason, she should die like a human being. The only thing the hunters have to worry about is her magic — and if you kill her quickly enough, that's not an issue. The truth is: blitzkrieg tactics *do* work pretty well, especially against inexperienced witches who haven't yet developed that finely-honed paranoia their elders possess. A group of dedicated hunters, if they catch a magician unawares, can very likely surround her and pummel her into unconsciousness before she can muster the will to cast a spell, at which point a bullet in the head settles things admirably. The tactic meets with considerably less success against old, cagey witches who have had long years of dodging assassination attempts by their rivals. Such witches often don't even get out of bed in the morning without wrapping themselves in protective spells. Some, if apocryphal accounts are to be believed, even know how to prepare a spell hours or days in advance, keyed to trigger at some stimulus. A cell in Rhode Island tried to blitz an old man they had identified as a witch. According to the sole survivor of the attempt, the instant the magician's front door caved in, his entire cell was struck dumb and rendered immobile, the whole place burst into flames like it had been doused in gasoline, and the old man simply vanished from the recliner he was sitting in. In the words of that lone survivor: "Before he disappeared, the sonofabitch actually looked *surprised*. Like he had no idea all that was going to happen."

DIVISION SIX

THE CONSENSUS

Every rational, scientifically-minded person knows there's a way the world is *supposed* to work. We may not fully understand it yet, but there are undeniable laws that should not — *cannot* — be broken. What goes up must come down. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. You can't measure a subatomic particle's position without changing its speed, and vice versa. The universe is, fundamentally, a rational place; except when it isn't. Some people out there push the bounds of reality, and sometimes they shatter them beyond all repair. Humans don the skins of wolves and become ravening beasts, or enact bizarre rites entreating alien gods to break through into this world, or snap their fingers and cause typhoons in Tokyo. When that happens, when reality bends to the breaking point, Division Six moves in to clean up the mess.

Division Six claims to be a government agency; but it's not. They claim to operate in a worldwide theater. They don't. They claim their history reaches back to the Revolutionary War, to George Washington's Culper Ring spies. It doesn't. Division Six, in fact, can only be traced reliably back to 1976 and the American Bicentennial. Thomas Major, a hunter who worked in the office of a prominent New England Congressman, and a group of like-minded DC power players had become aware of an ongoing shadow war between various occult societies on the eve of America's 200th birthday.

Major's cell was never clear on the details of this war, but based on interrogation of three witches they captured trying to exert magical influence over key members of the federal government, the best theory they could assemble was that the witches believed the Bicentennial to be an event of huge occult significance. They thought if they could influence policy during that mystically potent period, the changes would carry for the next two hundred years in a kind of cosmic ripple effect.

Major and his cell weren't the tiniest bit comfortable with that idea, and so they dedicated themselves to taking out any and all witches they could find within the capital. Whether the Bicentennial War would have had any real, lasting effect on America's future can't be determined; not long after Major's group began its hunts in earnest, most witches in the city scattered or went to ground, and the Bicentennial passed without the warlocks pushing things toward their own agenda.

That might have been the end of the story, but Major's cell wasn't the only group watching the struggle. In early January of 1977, Major was contacted by a man who identified himself merely as Mister Jones. Jones claimed to belong to a secret, top-level government bureau called the Panopticon, which monitored so-called "reality deviants" and attempted to minimize their impact on world government and the collective zeitgeist.

The Panopticon had monitoring and information-sifting capabilities that made the NSA look like a kid with a pair

of binoculars and a notebook, but it lacked any sort of force-projection capability of its own. In order to minimize interdepartmental "red tape", Jones had been authorized to establish a pilot program to test the feasibility of employing a small group of extra-governmental operatives to directly deal with the reality deviants the Panopticon located. Major and his allies consented, and Division Six was born.

By the early 80s, Division Six had proven itself an unqualified success. Major and most of his original cell were dead, but later members expanded the program to include cells in several major cities across the country, including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Las Vegas. It was around this time that the compact's false history began to take root, claiming that the group stretches back to the American Revolution and has been involved in key events throughout the nation's history. A few of the "old-timers," those who have been around since the days of Thomas Major, know the truth, but they assume the story is just a fanciful tale to overawe the new recruits. Agents are paid via direct deposits of cash into numbered bank accounts, non-specific but vaguely federal-looking ID (which doesn't actually carry any weight, but nevertheless seems to elicit cooperation) are delivered via anonymous post office boxes. The whole thing looks so much like what you'd expect from a top-secret government agency that few hunters ever think to question why there's no clear chain of command, performance reviews, or even due process for reality deviants.

Division Six still operates today as it has for the last 30 years. Each cell's leader is contacted anywhere from once a week to once a month by someone he believes to be a Panoptican intelligence agent, and is provided with a list of names of known reality deviants. Sometimes the list is a single name, sometimes it's a dozen or more. None of them come from a central Panopticon clearing house; the lists are entirely composed of Jones' enemies, rivals, and those he considers potential threats. Division Six eliminates these reality deviants, ensuring that the laws of the cosmos remain intact. Or so they think.

Someday, Jones is going to die, or his connection to the curiously effective cabal of witch-hunters is going to become known to his enemies. It remains to be seen whether such an event will mean the destruction of Division Six, or whether it will survive its founder's end and become a force in its own right.

The Enemy

According to the "facts" laid down by Jones, the laws of reality are meant to be static. Some "flex room" is built in, to allow for the odd one-in-a-million coincidence or strange

occurrence, but a set framework exists within which the universe operates. Unfortunately, thanks to the principle of entropy, this framework is no longer as rigid as it should be. Flaws are allowed to creep in at the edges, and careless or power-hungry individuals can exploit those flaws to gain powers that appear, to the outside observer, to be magical.

Division Six focuses the majority of its efforts on human witches as opposed to monstrosities like werewolves or demons. According to their theories, supernatural creatures are a symptom of the breakdown of reality, but humans deliberately forcing their minds into the cracks and pushing them open even wider are the root cause. Eliminating genuine monsters might ease the world's symptoms, but it does nothing to slow the onset of the proverbial disease.

In hunting reality deviants, Division Six finds that its most useful asset is its members themselves. For reasons not fully understood by Division researchers, the human mind seems to have the ability to not only pull the framework of the universe apart, but also to hold it together, at least temporarily. When Division Six agents are present during the manifestation of a reality deviance, many times the witch in question finds that her spell becomes difficult to control or even fails outright. The superstructure of reality is reinforced by the application of the same power that pulls it apart. This protection is by no means absolute, and determined reality deviants can overcome the presence of several Division Six operatives and still invoke powerful extranormal effects. Still others seem to have transcended this difficulty altogether, invoking powerful psychic phenomena without any apparent difficulty.

Division Six operatives are rigorously conditioned to expect any form of unexpected occurrence in the presence of reality deviants. Often, a reality deviant's effects are subtle and easily overlooked, and the mental reinforcement agents rely on becomes noticeably less effective if a witch manages to cause a deviance without agents directly noticing. At times, this conditioning can take *too* well, and an agent's mind becomes inured to reality deviance. He is no longer capable of separating deviance from proper reality, and he ceases to be able to disrupt the practice of magic. Such agents are usually retired to teaching positions, or else they are "promoted" to the intelligence-gathering department of the Panopticon. Promoted agents are rarely seen again, but at least three have been confirmed as ending up on Division Six hit lists.

Hunters

You were a young hotshot in the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, a real up-and-comer. Going places, they said. Then you worked that case with all the copycats — only they weren't just copycats. The *exact* same MO in crimes committed hundreds of miles but only minutes apart. It seemed like a highly-disciplined cult, but the profile had nothing to suggest a group-oriented killer. You couldn't explain it — then you met someone who could. Now you profile people far more fascinating, not to mention dangerous, than serial killers.

Division Six recruited you right out of MIT on the basis of your work theorizing an underlying mathematical superstructure of the entire universe. You thought you'd be working on proving your theories out on the quantum level, not trying to design a device that could cancel out the manipulation of that structure by goddamn *wizards*. The device hasn't worked at all so far, and now your superiors are starting to lose patience.

You hunt witches — but what's the point, really? You took physics in college, you know the way entropy works.



ME AND MISTER JONES

Jones has become something of an enigmatic figure over the years. He's still alive, and to this day looks to be only in his mid-40s. He's the only person Division Six has ever had any contact with from "the Home Office." Most agents put that down to intense secrecy and institutional paranoia, but the truth is something far more sinister.

There is a Panopticon, and Jones is a part of it, but to say that he represents it is an outright lie. The Panopticon is a labyrinthine conspiracy cult which claims to be in direct contact with, and service to, the so-called "Lords of the Supernal" or "gods of this world." This compact, along with others, are embroiled in a constant state of cold war, in which assassination and betrayal are the orders of the day. Division Six is not a "pilot program to test the feasibility of employing a small group of extra-governmental operatives," it is, in fact, Jones' personal assassination squad that has, quite independent of its creator, become far more successful than he could have ever hoped.

To date, no operatives of Division Six have discovered this truth, nor have Jones' colleagues linked him to the organization. Any Panopticon member that gets close to the truth ends up on Division Six's list of confirmed reality deviants shortly thereafter.

Even without the reality deviants out there, the structure of reality is breaking down. Maybe it goes a little slower every time you eliminate one of the deviants, but if your calculations are correct, the world has maybe 50 to 100 years, tops, before everything melts into quantum foam.

You were in the Army way back when, and you fought in one of those messy little jungle wars that never officially happened. You saw some weird shit out in the bush, too, and when you got back a buddy hooked you up with Division Six. Joining up was the worst mistake of your life. You never did take to the conditioning quite right, and reality deviants seem to have no problem raping the universe right under your nose. Lately, you've been having blackouts, experiencing lost time.

Your shrink says it's post-traumatic stress disorder, but every few weeks you lose anywhere from an hour to a day and wake up someplace you've never been before. Sometimes there's blood on your hands. Usually it's not yours.

Departments

Division Six is organized on a cell-based structure, but each member is further assigned to a specific department with particular duties. All agents are expected to engage in at least some cross-training so that, in the event of a casualty in the field, operational readiness remains intact.

The members of **Department Alpha** are the planning and logistics specialists. Nominal cell leaders, their job is to marshal and organize the resources provided by other team members and turn that into a viable strategy for the elimination of reality deviants. Alpha agents are also responsible for receiving the "hit lists" from their mysterious Panopticon sponsors.

Department Charlie is responsible for surveillance and intelligence gathering; dangerous work when you shadow people as paranoid as most reality deviants. Charlie agents, thanks to their skill in infiltration, are often called upon to place booby traps. Car bombs and the like are a popular means of taking out reality deviants, and many Charlie department agents have at least some skills with explosives.

Nobody really trusts **Department Whiskey**. These agents are the ones tasked with making the actual hit, whether it's at long range with a high-powered rifle or up close and personal with a length of piano wire. It takes a special kind of crazy to kill ordinary human beings just because they use magic wands to cast spells on people, but Department Whiskey doesn't seem to mind all that much.

Status

Division Six agents gain Status by participating in the elimination of reality deviants and by performing their duties at a superlative level. More academically-inclined hunters gain Status by publishing new theories regarding the nature of reality deviance, psychological studies and profiling techniques, and the like.

Reality has been pushed

beyond accepted norms.

We're here to fix that.

STEREOTYPES

Aegis Kai Doru: These are some spooky sonsabitches, my friend. I'm not sure if an object can be called a "reality deviant," but that stuff they carry around isn't quite right.

Network O: Way to go, jackass. Show the whole world what crazy fucks can do if they put their minds to it. Christ, do you *want* the structure of reality to come crashing down around your ears?

Null Mysteris: I've worked with these guys before. They've got some sound theories, and they were very interested to hear about the reality superstructure and how deviants are tearing it apart. I hope all that shit I told them wasn't classified.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: In Boston I saw one of these guys take on some kind of water demon. The lucky bastard had an actual, honest-to-God *ray gun*. Why the hell don't they supply us with that crap?

- You've been recruited by Division Six, but you don't know much at all about the compact's real history. You probably buy the Culper Ring story, and you probably think you really are working for the highest echelons of the federal government. Whenever you risk Willpower on a roll to intimidate someone based on your (alleged) governmental status, such as threatening an uncooperative witness with jail time, you gain one additional Willpower point as a result – even if this pushes beyond what your normal Willpower pool will allow.

- You've undergone the extensive conditioning Division Six uses to reinforce the superstructure of reality,

and you've been involved in the elimination of several reality deviants. Whenever you witness a Vulgar spell, the witch casting that spell suffers an additional -1 Paradox penalty (see Gutter Magic, p. 135).

- You're a hotshot agent, the cream of the crop and an idol to the new recruits. They tell stories about your exploits, and when you go out for beers with your team, you never have to buy. You're looked on as a mentor, and can take a young agent under your wing as a personal protégé. This character is the equivalent of three dots in the Retainer Merit, except that you don't have to pay her, just teach her the ropes.



keepers of the SOURCE the dowsers

Magic is the bloodstream of the universe. So say the Keepers of the Source, at any rate. Magic flows through the Earth in invisible, immeasurably complex patterns, following natural features of the terrain and the unseen contours of the spirit world alike. In some places, it pools, forming sacred places rich in natural power. The ignorant — witches, shamans, and magicians — assume these pools are merely natural collection points that fill up with energy the way a crater fills with water after a rain. They assume the energy is there for the taking, another resource for mankind to take from the Earth. The Keepers of the Source know better. The Earth itself is a vast, living organism, and those places where the Source pools are her organs. Draining away the energy from those holy places is like stealing the blood from a human being's heart. Every time a witch siphons power from a holy place, the Earth Mother screams in pain. The Keepers of the Source have felt that pain, and they'll see it cease, no matter the cost.

The Dowsers can trace their history back to the Summer of Love and a woman named Meredith Lehane. Meredith, who preferred to call herself Starflower, was deeply involved in the New Age movement in San Francisco. By all accounts, she was possessed of a minor psychic gift which allowed her to perceive the ebb and flow of the mystical forces that course through the world. Along with several associates, Starflower adapted the practice of *dowsing*, the art of divining the location of subterranean water, precious stones, or metals through psychic vibrations, to map the flow of this energy in and around the San Francisco area. Starflower believed that if a complete map of the ley lines in the area could be drawn, it would be the key to achieving a higher plane of consciousness.

As her technique grew more precise and her maps more elaborate, Starflower became a local celebrity among the New Agers. Many occultists, including at least one actual witch, followed her work with great interest, and her Dowsing Society attracted new members, some of whom apparently possessed the same psychic gift that Starflower did. One of these members was an idealistic young man named Duncan Redgrove, a prodigy who quickly became a protégé of Starflower.

In 1970, Starflower and several of her group attended a Samhain festival in Balboa Park. Starflower's ley line charts had been key in the choice of location, having noted a confluence of seven ley lines at the site. By this time, the Dowsing Society had already become familiar with the concept of the "Source pools" and had begun to develop the theory that these sites were the living organs of the Earth Mother, but had no conception the energy could actually be harvested. That night at midnight, as the sliver of the moon reached its zenith, one of the celebrants performing the ritual, a witch named Cassandra, siphoned the Source from the nexus — and to Starflower and all of her psychic Dowsers, it seemed as though the Earth itself screamed in pain.

It wasn't until the next week that the Dowsers were able to piece together what happened. Starflower went to Cassandra and begged her to return what she had taken, but the witch just replied with a convoluted explanation about Mana and something called a Supernatural Hallow and insisted her harvesting of the energy was perfectly natural. Starflower tried to explain what she had felt, but Cassandra was convinced she was in the right. After all, her mentor had told her the harvesting of magical energy was not only natural but vital, and surely an Adept of the Mysteries was greater in wisdom than a New Age psychic girl. Starflower left, disheartened, and returned to her group.

When he heard what had happened, Redgrove was outraged. He had felt the Earth scream that night, and anyone who would willingly do that to their Mother was a monster of the worst sort. He advocated using force to make the witch return the Mother's blood, but Starflower would have none of it. Deeply entrenched in her pacifistic ideals, Starflower felt that if they descended to violence they would be no better than those who raped Mother Earth of her life force. Redgrove wasn't convinced, but Starflower was still the popular leader of the group.

For the next five years, the Dowsing Society was something of a joke among San Francisco's occult society. Whenever a witch drew Source from a sacred place, within a week members of the Dowsing Society would stop him in the street or come to his house and try to convince him of the harm he

You took something from Mother Earth.
Now you're going to have to give it back.

was doing to the Earth Mother. Most just smiled and nodded politely, then promptly ignored the group, but several Dowsers endured verbal abuse, assault, and even magic curses. At least three members died in mysterious accidents which some members, notably Redgrove, muttered were the work of secrecy-obsessed witches afraid of the "sleepers" who knew the truth of their power source. Discontent grew, led by Starflower's old student, now leader of a growing faction that favored more drastic action.

The conflict came to a head in the summer of 1975, when the Dowsing Society interrupted a ritual being held in Golden Gate Park. The Dowsers had been monitoring the site for months, and when four people came together around the sacred stone outcropping, fourteen members of the Dowsing Society, including Starflower herself, physically interposed themselves between the stone and the werewolf pack that claimed it as their territory. Twelve of the Dowsers died, one was maimed for life, and Starflower was in the hospital for three months recuperating.

With the leader of the Dowsers incapacitated, Redgrove moved to take over the group. He and his supporters abandoned Starflower's peaceful, and ultimately ineffective, methods in favor of direct action. The next time the Dowsers caught a witch stealing from the Earth Mother, they jumped him in the middle of his ritual and beat him into a coma. As time went on, the group became both more militant and more innovative. The witches retaliated, often spectacularly, against the most direct assaults, so booby traps and stealthy ambushes became the order of the day. Redgrove himself developed the Corruption tactic (see p. 117) the group used to "herd" witches to specific sites that were left active and rigged with traps. A fire at one such Source pool in late 1977 killed at least five witches and a dozen innocents when the apartment building next door caught fire. In 1979, the werewolf pack that maimed Starflower was killed by a homemade fertilizer bomb planted at the very same sacred site.

Starflower herself tried to rein Redgrove in, but by the time she recovered from her injuries he had far too much of a hold on the group. Over the following years, the founder of the Dowsing Society was slowly but surely marginalized and pushed aside, until in 1985 Redgrove officially asked her to leave the group and changed its name to the Keepers of the Source. With no other option, Starflower left the group and left San Francisco altogether.

Today, the Keepers of the Source continue to operate in much the same way as they have since Redgrove took over more than 20 years ago. Redgrove himself died in 1996, victim of a freak lightning strike that no one even pretends was an accident. Today the group is led by Karen Redgrove, Duncan's daughter. Karen is more moderate than her father; she at least urges her followers to try to convince witches to see the error of their ways before beating them to death, but she doesn't shrink from violence if it's necessary to protect Mother Earth.

As for Starflower, she's still alive today. She lives in Philadelphia now, and she's back to calling herself Meredith Lehane. She works as an advertising executive at a prestigious firm, and she's completely shed her old hippy image. Sometimes, she even manages to convince herself she can't hear the Earth Mother screaming any more.

Since 9/11, the group has moved to less attention-grabbing tactics; in the old days, a car bomb suggested a mob hit or some other criminal turf war. These days, a car bomb on domestic soil invites the specter of terrorism and the heavy boot of the Department of Homeland Security. The Keepers today favor traps that look like accidents: ruptured gas mains, electrical fires, and the like.

The Keepers of the Source are still mostly found in San Francisco, especially in neighborhoods like Haight-Ashbury with a strong connection to the hippy



STARFLOWER'S PSYCHIC ABILITY

Starflower, along with several of her followers, possesses a form of the Unseen Sense Merit that allows her to sense the presence and the flow of Source. She experiences this sensation through pain: the ordinary, natural flow of Source through the world is a dull, not altogether unpleasant ache akin to the feeling one gets after a good workout. When a witch or other supernatural creature siphons Source into itself, or when she encounters a creature with a pool of Source within itself, she experiences a sharp, searing agony that female Dowsers have likened to the pain of childbirth. It is this sensation that forms the foundation of the Keepers' theory that harvesting Source is grievously injurious to the Earth Mother.

For the complete rules for the Unseen Sense Merit, see p. 109 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

movement. In recent years, some of the more gifted Dowsers have struck out on their own, mapping ley lines across the country and in other cities throughout North America.

Joining the Keepers is a simple prospect: the group regularly proselytizes on college campuses and street corners, where they are usually dismissed as kooks. (Most of their public literature focuses on how corporations destroying the environment are responsible for the Earth Mother's bleeding; the Keepers have learned that witches strike back violently if their existence is openly discussed.) New recruits are encouraged to protest and demonstrate with other members; if the leaders of the group think a new member is amenable to extreme methods of protecting the Earth, she is told about witches and how their vanity and lust for power harms the Mother, and is invited to strike back against those who would defile the Earth.

The Enemy

The Keepers of the Source have no objection to witches, or indeed to nearly any sort of supernatural being. The group draws its membership from fringe culture, after all, and more than a few Keepers of the Source practice "magic" as part of their religion and identify as witches, vampires, or even more outlandish creatures. The Keepers don't even mind witches who perform actual, real magic: it's people or entities that draw upon the Source that flows through the Earth who earn their ire. Most of those people happen to be witches of some stripe, but cultists, werewolves, and even demons anchored to the world of flesh incur their wrath. The Keepers of the Source are far less equipped to deal with such monsters than they are with witches, and so hunts against more exotic Source-feeders are often brought to more militant hunter groups like the Union or the Lucifuge.

Despite their long history, the Keepers of the Source have a very narrow awareness of the supernatural world. They look for creatures inflicting pain on the Earth Mother, and are almost en-

tirely unconcerned with anything outside that scope. They are almost entirely unaware that vampires even exist, although some Keepers have reported encounters with pale men and women who seemed intensely interested in Source pools. Werewolves, on the other hand, they are familiar with, as the skinchangers seem to draw upon Source energy in much the same way as witches do. The Keepers avoid the territory claimed by werewolf packs as a general rule, as nearly every encounter between the two groups has ended in a massacre of the humans. Demons, ghosts, and other incorporeal entities that anchor themselves to places strong in Source cross their radar from time to time, but the Keepers often lack the mystical acumen to detect or deal with such creatures.

The Keepers of the Source are equally active against mundane threats to the Earth Mother. Since the mid-80s, when the compact learned that urban development, logging, and similar environmental changes could actually destroy Source pools, they have been active environmental campaigners and self-styled eco-warriors. From protesting the destruction of historic neighborhoods to spiking trees in timber country, the Keepers of the Source devote almost as much energy to combating human enemies as they do supernatural. A trio of deaths in the late 1990s after a cell of Keepers sabotaged equipment at a construction site nearly made the compact a national name, but a confluence of factors ensured that the story never quite made the big time.

Hunters

You're one of the last of the old guard — you joined the group when it was still Starflower's Dowsing Society, and you've stuck with it all these years because you *believe* in what you're doing. Duncan's methods weren't the answer, and that was a bad time — but somebody has to stick around to be the voice of reason. These days, you run with a bunch of angry kids who just want to hurt others the way they see the Mother hurt. You try to keep them reined in, but sometimes you wonder — what if they're right?

You only went to the lecture as a joke. You and your frat buddies saw the flier on the campus notice board, "save the Earth Mother" or some shit, and you figured it might be fun to go and have a laugh at their expense. Plus, you heard those hippy girls are *total* sluts. Then you got there, and the guy speaking gave you a magic mushroom, and you *saw*. You could feel the Earth Mother's pain, and it tore you up inside. Now you know the truth — and you'll do anything to stop that pain.

You're an Angry Young Person fighting the good fight with Daddy's credit card. You've done the Greenpeace thing, and ELF and all the radical environmental groups, but it always felt sort of hollow. Then you found the Keepers of the Source. You're not sure you buy the whole "psychics feel the Earth Mother's Pain" thing, but these guys are hardcore, and that's something you can get behind. (It pisses off the parents, too, which is a nice bonus.)

STEREOTYPES

Ashwood Abbey: Free love is a beautiful thing, but this... this is just degenerate.

The Cheiron Group: These soulless corporate bastards are everything that's wrong with the world today. I've never actually seen them steal the Mother's sacred blood, but I wouldn't put it past them if they realized how.

Lucifuge: They seem to *really* hate witches, even though I can't see much of a difference. I'm not going to tell them that, though.

Null Mysteriis: Hey man, when are you going to stop *watching* and *do something*? Your scientific hoodoo really don't cover it, and once you get your hands dirty you'll figure it out.

You've always been able to feel it — the Flow, you called it, and you never knew any other name for it. Most of the time it was just *there*, but sometimes it spiked into such agony you couldn't even bear it. You had no idea what it was or why you felt it until that old hippy came to town. He said you were feeling the Earth Mother's pain as she was violated, and he told you how you could help. You don't have any backup, and you're 2,000 miles from San Francisco, but you've got a baseball bat and you've got a picture of the guy you always see hanging around that big rock in the forest right before your pain hits.

Philosophies

Three primary philosophies govern the Keepers of the Source, offshoots of the beliefs of the group's three different leaders.

The **Children of Gaia** are a small but rapidly-growing bunch, inspired by a resurgent interest in the pacifistic teachings of Starflower from the group's early days.

On the other end of the spectrum, the **Hand of the Mother** remains a large and influential philosophy even after the death of their patron, Duncan Redgrove. They preach a doctrine of no mercy: anyone who defiles the Mother must pay.

Finally, Karen Redgrove's **Dynasts** vacillate between the two extremes, never quite settling on a solid direction. Both of the other philosophies constantly try to pull Karen, and thus the compact, toward their view.

Status

Keepers of the Source gain Status by protecting the Earth Mother's sacred Source pools from depredation, and also by expounding upon new philosophies regarding the nature of the world and the Source.

• You've been to a few meetings and participated in some non-occult environmental protests. Maybe you've even had a few scrapes with the police. Choose one of the following Specialties: Weaponry (Improvised Weapons), Expression (Protests), or Science (Environmentalism). You receive that Specialty free.

•• You've proven yourself willing to go to extreme lengths to protect Mother Earth, from mundane and supernatural predation alike. The rest of the Keepers trust you and look up to you, and you never lack for a place to crash or someone to post bail in San Francisco. You gain the Merit: Allies (Keepers of the Source) at two dots, or if you have it already, two more dots, to maximum of five dots.

••• You've attracted the attention of the leadership of the Keepers, particularly one influential long-time member. Through the use of entheogenic drugs and transcendental meditation, you have opened yourself to the pain of the Earth Mother so that you can better protect her. You gain the Unseen Sense (Source) Merit. If you already have this Merit, you instead receive a three-dot Mentor in the form of a senior Keeper of the Source. If you already have a Mentor in the compact, that Merit increases by three dots, to a maximum of five dots.



THE PROMETHEAN BROTHERHOOD

THE FIRE-STEALERS

Any hunter who has ever faced down a witch knows how powerful they can be. By word and deed, they call down the forces of Heaven, shake the foundations of the Earth, and bind unholy things to their will. They are nearly invisible save when calling forth their most powerful magic, and they suffer none of the taboos or frailties that hobble other types of demons. Many hunters, from time to time, have wished he might possess that power for himself, if only to make the world safer from the rapacious creatures of the night.

The Promethean Brotherhood does more than wish. Thanks to an ancient ritual unearthed from a forgotten tomb in Greece, the so-called Fire-Stealers believe they have learned a way to sacrifice a witch to the gods in order to steal power and Gnosis for themselves. Sometimes the ritual works; sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes the supplicant dies in unspeakable agony. But the Promethean Brotherhood keeps trying. One day, they'll perfect their art, and then the power and the glory will be theirs.

The Promethean Brotherhood traces its origins to the middle of the 19th century and a man named Jacob Hite. Hite, a junior professor of archaeology at Oxford University, was also apprentice to a high-ranking magician of the Order of the Silvered Thorn, one of London's most exclusive occult societies. Hite assisted his master, who called himself Maecenas, in the preparation and execution of various ritual workings, but never developed the spark of mystic enlightenment for himself. Though his jealousy grew by leaps and bounds with each failed attempt to achieve a Gnostic enlightenment, Hite maintained his relationship with Maecenas because of the status it gave him in London society.

In 1868, Hite oversaw the excavation of a newly-discovered temple of the Orphic Mysteries in Macedonia. Among the sacred icons and the remnants of sacrifices long past, his team discovered a papyrus written in a form of a language that would later be identified as Linear B. None of the Greek linguists Hite showed the papyrus to could make any kind of sense of it, and most suggested that it was mere nonsense — a gibberish language made up to impress the cult's worshipers with "ancient writing from the gods" or the like. Hite disagreed; something in the writing seemed to speak to his soul, impressing upon him its grave importance. Forsaking his dig and his academic responsibilities alike, Hite holed up in the tiny village of Derveni to work on his translation of the papyrus.

Months passed; letters from the Oxford faculty went unanswered, visiting friends and relatives were turned away, and even threats of legal action from the dig's sponsors were not heeded. Finally, in January 1867, Hite had a mostly-complete translation of the papyrus. The language was patchy, and sec-

tions of the text were missing outright, apparently expunged by burning, but what Hite possessed was a ritual of sacrifice to Hecate which, if performed correctly and at the proper phase of the moon, allowed a person to murder a witch and steal her power for his own. A rational man would have dismissed this as mere pagan superstition, but Hite had witnessed the things Maecenas could do. He knew there were powers in the world beyond what he could hope to comprehend, and Jacob Hite coveted those powers.

Hite returned to London with a story of having come down with a grievous illness while in Greece, and resumed his lecturing. He likewise continued to assist Maecenas, waiting patiently until the moon reached its crescent phase once more and the Rite could be performed. When at last the time came, he served his master tea heavily laced with laudanum and, while the great magician lay insensate, Hite murdered him with a ritual dagger and dedicated the death to the goddess Hecate. Power flooded through his limbs, and the scales of blindness were torn from his eyes to reveal the glorious truths of enlightenment. Jacob Hite reveled in his power — but it was not to last.

Not even a week after he performed the Rite, Jacob's powers began to wane. Within a day, he could barely conjure the simplest of spells, and the enlightened wisdom he had gained began to slip from his mind. Not long after, the power and the wisdom faded completely, leaving Hite as he was before, a weak, blind, mortal heedless of the glories that surrounded him. Clearly, something had gone wrong, but what?

A month later, Hite tried the ritual again, this time on a lesser magician who had been acquainted with Maecenas. This time, the magic lasted only two days. Desperate to determine what he was doing wrong, Hite enlisted the aid of half a dozen of his fellow servant apprentices whom he knew to feel similar resentment toward their enlightened masters. Though initially horrified by Hite's actions, the lure of power proved too great and all six men agreed to seek the secret of the papyrus together. They moved in secret, circulating throughout the country, fearful that too many deaths in one location would draw the attention of their former masters.

Over the next six years, the Promethean Brotherhood murdered at least twenty-five witches across Great Britain and Europe, constantly refining their approach to the Rite of Hecate based on what they could decipher. The ritual's efficacy varied wildly: sometimes its effects lasted for months and the Fire-Stealers were convinced they had solved the riddle at last, only to taste the bitterness of defeat once more. Other times it didn't work at all, and in one attempt in Paris during the summer of 1884, one of the original members of the compact died horribly, rent apart by invisible talons as he tried to complete

the Rite. A rare few times, the Rite appeared to work perfectly, and a member demonstrated full proficiency in the magical arts for over a year — most of these successes were themselves killed by their cohorts in hopes of discovering “what went right.”

Members died, in botched attempts at invoking Hecate or at the hands of witches who didn’t go quite as quietly as the group might have hoped. Likewise, new members were initiated, almost always academic men with a background in ancient Greek linguistics and religion. Jacob Hite settled in Vienna, establishing a central clearing house for the Brotherhood’s research and lore. The loosely-organized cells scattered throughout Europe regularly sent reports of their newest hypotheses regarding the Rite of Hecate and what the compact was still missing from it.

Jacob Hite died on New Year’s Day, 1900, the apparent victim of suicide. He had, just the day before, performed the Rite of Hecate successfully and stolen the power of a renowned Austrian prophet known as the “Nostradamus of Vienna.” To this day, the Promethean Brotherhood debates whether Hite saw something with his stolen prophetic powers that made him choose to end his life or if he was merely overcome by more than two decades of failure to achieve his dream. Leadership passed to Heinrich Klopf, a scholar who steered the compact toward more academic study of the text of the Rite of Hecate rather than field experimentation. Klopf found the needless waste of human life that came with an unreliable translation of the Rite shameful and unscientific, and he preferred the idea of perfecting the Promethean Brotherhood’s ritual first and foremost to the sloppy guesswork of ages past.

In 1953, Linear B was fully deciphered by the academic community, and many members of the Promethean Brotherhood were certain that at last their work would be complete. Alas, it was not to be. The writing on the original papyrus (which by now had been faithfully and laboriously hand-copied many times to preserve the subtle details of the characters) appeared to be based on a form of Linear B, but the letterforms carried additional flourishes and subtle variations hinting at a deeper layer of meaning. Fire-Stealers who successfully performed the Rite often claimed that, while their stolen power persisted, they were able to instinctively understand the nuances of the papyrus, and most of the great strides toward the full understanding of the Rite of Hecate have been made by researchers who successfully performed the Rite.

The last 60 years have proved an exciting time for the Promethean Brotherhood. While the decipherment of Linear B proved not to be the panacea the compact had hoped for, advances in computer technology and cryptography have provided more major breakthroughs in the past 50 years than the nearly 100 years before. With the ascension of a young, vital new leader in the form of Dr Alexander Hite, a descendant of the compact’s founder and an expert in early Greek religious practices, the Promethean Brotherhood has never been as organized as it is today. The Vienna headquarters has had to be moved and expanded three times in the last ten years, and membership is growing across Europe and even in the prominent academic cities of North America. While actual performances of the Rite of Hecate occur less frequently (a relic of Heinrich Knopf’s leadership in the early 20th century), those performances that do occur succeed far more often than they have in the past. The compact’s leading analysts predict that the Rite of Hecate will be fully deciphered and understood within the next five years — at which point the Brotherhood’s work can begin in earnest.



It's nothing personal.

You've just got something I want.

The Enemy

Witches have power, and the Promethean Brotherhood wants that power. The compact isn't much concerned with the enemy beyond that — certainly taking out a marauding spell-slinging lunatic is a good thing for society, and many members take comfort in the idea of eliminating dangerous beings that pose a threat to their communities, but really, it's about power. Many Fire-Stealers come from the same background as the compact's founder, Jacob Hite: they were acolytes and assistants to witches, but never quite managed to reach the level of their masters. Bitter and frustrated, many of these failed apprentices resent witches and don't much care whether a witch is a "good" person or a "bad" one.

Others, particularly those drawn into the group for their academic background, try to justify their actions by practicing their Rite only on the most heinous witches they can find. It's not *really* murder if the victim is sacrificing his neighbors in the name of magical power or ripping out human souls to fuel vile, sorcerous machinery, after all, or so the hunters tell themselves. In a way, it's like using the corpses of executed criminals for scientific research; to the scientifically-minded Fire-Stealer, if the witch needs to be taken out anyway, why not do so in a way that promotes a greater understanding of the Rite of Hecate?

The Brotherhood focuses its attention on witches almost exclusively; the Rite of Hecate is, after all, specifically designed to steal the gifts of magicians. As such, they have little knowledge, or even awareness, of other threats that haunt the night. Occasionally, reports come in at the central Vienna headquarters of attempts to perform the Rite of Hecate on vampires, cryptids, or other exotic creatures, but such attempts are always unsuccessful. Still, in the World of Darkness, it's not always easy to tell exactly *what* sort of monster a potential threat is, and over the years the Promethean Brotherhood has clashed with werewolves, the possessed, and countless other, stranger creatures. Sometimes it leads to a greater understanding of the Rite of Hecate, other times it leads to an unprepared cell's complete annihilation.

On occasion, the Promethean Brotherhood has even clashed with members of other hunter groups, particularly the Lucifuge and the Malleus Maleficarum. The Castigation and Benediction Endowments look a lot like witchcraft to the Fire-Stealers, and there have been numerous recorded incidents in both the literature of the Promethean Brotherhood and other conspiracies of hunters ending up as victims of the Rite of Hecate. In a similar vein, the Aegis Kai Doru has serious reservations about the Promethean Brotherhood. That conspiracy doesn't even trust actual witches, who (presumably) had to put in significant effort and study into gaining their power. The Shield and Spear sees the theft of magic by the Promethean Brotherhood as something akin to a man who suddenly and spontaneously gains the knowledge of a

black belt without any vestige of the training and self-discipline that teaches him when to use that knowledge.

Hunters

You and your twin brother were always close. You were inseparable growing up, you completed each others' sentences and spoke your own private language. Even your parents sometimes couldn't tell you apart. Then your brother had that accident, and he woke up... different. He said he understood things now, but when he tried to explain it to you, your brain went all fuzzy and you couldn't comprehend it. You began to drift apart, and you hated him a little for that — and then you met a man who said he could show you how to be like your brother, if you're willing to pay the right price.

High school was hell for you. You were scrawny, no good at sports, and not funny enough to be the class clown. Everybody picked on you, even the other nerds. You used to dream about going in to school one day and just shooting them all, but you didn't know where to get a gun. You immersed yourself in a fantasy world of the occult to escape, until you found out it wasn't much of a fantasy at all. You first heard about the Promethean Brotherhood on an Internet forum, and with a lot of cyber-research you tracked down the chapter in your city. They were impressed by your zeal, if not your academic credentials, and they accepted you as a member. The Rite of Hecate hasn't actually worked for you yet, but someday soon it will. And that will be so much cooler than using a gun.

You're a vastly overqualified professor of antiquities at a small, reasonably-respected university. You could do a lot better, but the area's nice and you have pretty much free rein since the school knows how lucky they are to have you. Six months ago, you were offered some moonlighting work, translating a scrap of Linear B off of an ancient parchment. Much to your surprise, you couldn't nail it down. That intrigued you enough to investigate further and led you to the Promethean Brotherhood. By the time you realized they practiced actual human sacrifice, you were in far too deep to leave.

The Sun King first spoke to you when you were 17. He told you that your sister was a whore for bringing a boy home before she was married, and that your parents were blasphemers against His name. The only way to save their souls was to purify them with fire. When the police took you away, you thought the Sun King had abandoned you, until he sent you your friend Tobias. Tobias recognized the spark of greatness in you and told you that he could show you a way to serve the Sun King again. Now you're out of prison, and helping your friends in the Promethean Brotherhood destroy the enemies of the Sun King, just like Tobias said you would. Lately, though, you've begun to suspect that your friends don't *really* know the Sun King. You might have to do something about that.

Colleges

As the Promethean Brotherhood has expanded across the globe, several different philosophies have taken root among the compact.

THE RITE OF HECATE AS AN ENDOWMENT

The Promethean Brotherhood is a compact on the verge of becoming a full-blown conspiracy. It has the global membership, and under Alexander Hite the group becomes more organized every day; it even has an Endowment of sorts, although it remains unreliable at this point. Sooner or later, though, they're going to crack the code and figure out what they're doing wrong, and the Rite of Hecate will work as reliably as any other Endowment. If you want to explore this evolution in your game, here is a suggestion for how the mechanics of such an Endowment might work:

Rite of Hecate (.....)

You have been trained in the performance of the Rite of Hecate, an ancient human sacrifice that allows you to steal the Gnosis and magic powers of a witch.

Action: Extended (3 successes per point of victim's Gnosis Merit required, each roll represents 10 minutes of chanting, prayer, and ritual preparation)

Dice Pool: Academics + Rite of Hecate

Roll Result:

Dramatic Failure: The Rite of Hecate fails immediately, you suffer one point of lethal damage per point of Gnosis your intended victim possesses, *plus* one point of lethal damage per roll you had made prior to the dramatic failure. For example, if you suffer a dramatic failure on your third roll during the sacrifice of a witch with a Gnosis of 3, you suffer six points of lethal damage.

Failure: You fail to make progress toward completion of the rite. If you fail to acquire the requisite number of successes in a number of rolls equal to your dice pool, the Rite fails and you suffer one point of bashing damage per point of Gnosis the victim possesses.

Success: Progress is made toward the successful completion of the Rite of Hecate. Once you have completed the Rite, you must fill your victim's rightmost Health box with a lethal wound in a single blow (the weapon used does not matter). If you fail to do so, the Rite fails and you suffer damage as described under the effects of failure. The witch must be physically present for the entirety of the Rite; most Fire-Stealers sedate and securely bind witches before beginning the Rite. Whether the victim is drugged or not, human sacrifice for the purposes of gaining occult power is a Morality 2 sin, akin to serial murder.

If you successfully perform the sacrifice, you temporarily gain the Gnosis Merit at the same rating as your victim, up to a maximum of your dots in the Rite of Hecate. You gain access to *half* of the Mysteries a witch with an equivalent Gnosis would possess, and all of them must be chosen from those the sacrificial victim possessed. If you acquire a Gnosis of 5, you gain the Unseen Sense Merit for free and are afflicted by the bane of Paradox. For more information, see Gutter Magic, p. 135.

The effects of the Rite of Hecate last for one day per point of Gnosis the victim possessed (*not* the Gnosis rating you actually acquire from the Rite). Multiple invocations of the Rite of Hecate do not stack; if you perform the Rite again while still under its effect, the Rite is treated as a dramatic failure as soon as you either earn enough successes to complete it *or* fail to complete the rite in a number of rolls equal to your dice pool.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the Rite's effects persist for one week per point of the victim's Gnosis.

The preceding rules represent the Rite of Hecate in a hypothetical, fully-understood state. If you wish to use these mechanics to represent the Rite in its current, flawed state, assume that the imperfect knowledge possessed by the Promethean Brotherhood imposes a flat penalty of -2 to all rolls. (To illustrate the advances made in deciphering the Rite, during Jacob Hite's time the penalty was -5). The Storyteller may wish to roll the dice for the Rite in secret, so players do not know whether they have succeeded or failed until they strike the killing blow.

STEREOTYPES

Ascending Ones: Some of what they do looks like witchcraft, but their potions and oils don't provide enlightenment along with power.

The Cheiron Group: How very interesting. I wonder if what they do is all that dissimilar to what we do, just from a different angle? I'd love to compare notes sometime.

The Long Night: Avoid these fanatics. They hate witches, but they hate any sign of idolatry or "devil-worship" equally. Do you want to explain to a fundamentalist with a gun why you're setting up an Orphic altar and sharpening a brass dagger?

Lucifuge: So far, no one who has performed the Rite of Hecate on one of these gentlemen has succeeded. I'd dearly love to try for myself, though.

The **Orphic Temple** believes the Rite of Hecate is unreliable not because of an imperfect understanding, but because of imperfect belief. In order to perform the Rite, one must both practice and *believe* in the Orphic Mysteries. They reconstruct the Rites of the mystery religions of old and serve as priests and supplicants alike.

The **Cautionaries** believe the Promethean Brotherhood should draw away from the practice of witch-hunting until perfection of the Rite of Hecate is achieved. In this day and age, serial, ritual murder carries far too many risks for far too uncertain a reward. Only a minimal number of sacrifices should be performed per year, and ideally under carefully-controlled conditions.

The **Experimentalists** take the Rite of Hecate in bizarre new directions, extrapolating wild new theories in places where the text is incomplete or not fully translated. Some skin their victims and make garments out of their hide, some eat the witch's heart or drink her blood, others kill their victims slowly and painfully rather than use the swift, clean kill. Many are insane, and members of the other factions view them with utter disgust.

Status

Members of the Promethean Brotherhood gain status by identifying witches to the group, performing the Rite of Hecate (especially performing it successfully), or by

providing new insight into the proper translation of the Rite of Hecate.

- You've been initiated into the Promethean Brotherhood and have been told of its true purpose. You've begun your own studies into the Rite of Hecate, and may have participated as an observer in a performance of it. You gain the Language (Ancient Greek) Merit for free, and you also gain one of the following Academics Specialties: Ancient Religions, Greek Mythology, or Linguistics.

- You've advanced significantly in your understanding of the Rite of Hecate, and have successfully performed it at least once. Human sacrifice has led you to develop a support network to help you cover your tracks, and you have several friends who will help you destroy evidence and hide the bodies. You gain two dots of the Allies (Promethean Brotherhood) Merit, up to a maximum of five dots.

- Your understanding of the Rite of Hecate is as close to perfect as it can be based on the limited translation available to you. You have stolen power from several witches, and you've managed to provide new insights into the linguistics of the Rite. When you perform the Rite of Hecate, you only need to accumulate a number of successes equal to the victim's Gnosis, instead of three times the victim's Gnosis.



Knights of Saint george

the dragonslayers

The Knights of Saint George turn up in all manner of places: a name in the small print of a parish newsletter; a glyph on a plaque over a hostel door; the subject of a modern conspiracy novel. They never take the spotlight, but people who look find them in the oddest places. When conspiracy theorists get sick of the Catholic Church and Opus Dei, they look to the Church of England and the Sacred Order of the Knights of Saint George.

Some people say the Knights of Saint George were originally a place for renegade Knights Templar to hide, divorced from their original order. Others claim to have incontrovertible evidence that the Knights Templar are patsies, a smokescreen set up by the Knights of Saint George to divert attention away from the real conspirators. Authoritative sources claim the knightly order didn't come about until after the Reformation, while other experts can prove a direct lineage back to the time of Saint George himself. Whoever compiles the records, there's always some doubt as to their authenticity as part of the Anglican Church.

Whatever the truth behind their history, the Knights are a devoted part of the Church. While almost all members are not actual knights — only three members have received a title in the last two hundred years — they still refer to each other as such. Some wield power and influence, whether they help ailing churches or fund shelters and hostels for homeless people. Others work directly with people, going out and doing their bit to make things better without discussing their faith. Most keep their beliefs personal — rather than making their faith overt, they don't mention God unless asked. A cornerstone of the Knights' doctrine is that the love of God is spread through deeds rather than words.

The rise of grass-roots evangelism within the Anglican Church divided the Knights. Some believe the new breed of Christians are good potential recruits, while others — currently in the majority — worry that anyone weak-minded enough to be duped into belief by a propaganda course won't be ready for the truth. The Alpha course exemplifies the current evangelical trend, being a series of guided discussions on the nature of Christianity that rely more on peer-pressure and social conditioning than actual faith. Its popularity with mid-30s professionals is a powerful argument in the course's favor,

but most Knights would rather not lower Christianity to the same level as many fringe religions. Or so they claim.

See, the Knights of Saint George are damn good at lying. They've been doing it for a very long time.

Saint George slew the dragon, the king of magical creatures. His Knights hunt witches and users of magic. They've done this since long before the birth of Christ, because they know the truth: the only gods are faceless angels from beyond the barriers of space and time, terrible powerful things that are drawn to magic like planet-sized moths to a flame. The Knights don't worship them — no, they appease their gods, giving them magic so that the gods don't come looking. The last time the Knights failed was on June 30, 1908 in Tunguska, Siberia. The mere focused interest of one of these distant gods hit with a thousand times the force of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, devastating 830 square miles. Needless to say, nobody wants that to happen again. The Knights have divined some secrets from their dark masters, enough to gain a measure of temporal power and some ability to counter the arts of witches. Their power comes from the faceless angels' dreams, and if those gods were to wake, the Knights of Saint George would stand powerless alongside the rest of humanity.

Though witches are their primary concern, the Knights concern themselves with the products of magic that walk the world. The walking dead are the half-living creations of alchemical demiurges, given a semblance of life and in thrall to the sins of their creators. Some such monsters convert the blood of the living into the magical essence of unlife, while others run on stranger fuel. It matters not — by existing, the reanimated dead convert the stuff of life into magical power, and thus cannot be allowed to exist. Werewolves are aberrations, their shifting shape the heritage of witches who fell from grace and forgot their true shape. The beasts stand guard over sites of mystic power — sites that magicians and the Knights both work hard to claim. Other, stranger things haunt the night. Tales tell of mysterious doppelgangers appearing from a witch's fevered dreams, and of alien beasts created by twisted sorcerers that feast on a community's sense of hope. The Knights know their duties are to face all forms of magic, and so they fight the monsters of the world without wavering.

We have a sacred duty.
Hope nobody gets in our way.

The Knights don't tell anyone about their origins or true beliefs. Members must pass the First Revelation, a test of their faith and duty, before the order tells them of witches and other products of magic. Many members don't know anything more, even though they hunt magicians. Only those who devote themselves to the Knights' mission undergo further Revelations, testing their faith to its limit to find the truth behind the order — and the world. Once they know it, there's no going back. Nobody leaves the Knights of Saint George. A few people try, the pressure of too many secrets proving too much for them, but they don't succeed. Errants who are careless in their truth-telling may find a nice padded cell waiting... in an asylum that coincidentally is funded by the order.

History

Before their incorporation as a knightly order, the dragonslayers were just a collection of disparate individuals, sans organization. These individuals didn't communicate much with one another, each inventing their own myths and methods of shaping the dreams of the faceless angels. Dragonslayers stood apart from human settlements before the time of Ur, the first city of Sumer and the dawn of human civilization. Their lot was the death of witches, and nothing more.

During the time of Christ and after, the dragonslayers carried out their duty. Their position as heathens didn't help, placing them on the outside of communities that harbored magic. All that changed when Henry the Young King invaded Aquitane. Henry had a witch for an advisor, a man who placed a terrible curse on Richard the Lionheart. Richard could not concentrate, his men followed the letter of his orders rather than their spirit, and nightmarish visions of his fated death in battle plagued his sleep. For three weeks leading up to the battle of Aquitane, Richard the Lionheart suffered.

On the night before the battle, one of Richard's advisers sought out a group of local men said to know the ways of magic and to be no friend to the Young King. The men, dragonslayers all, dissolved the curse. Freed from his fated death and with his men once more attending his orders, the battle was a resounding victory for Richard. Afterwards, Richard found the men who had aided him. They told him what they knew of the truths of magic and the gods, and brought him into their ways. In return, Richard founded the Knights of Saint George.

Richard's influence continues to this day. He was the last King of England to truly embody the spirit of Saint George, the dragon-slaying patron saint of England. After Richard's initiation, the spirit of Saint George found its vocation. It primed the royal line to slay the dragons of magic. Every king has part of the intangible spirit within him, no matter if he's born and raised a pauper, female (and thus a queen), or even French. Later kings ignored the strange and horrible dreams, squandering their hereditary position as the leader of the Knights of

Saint George, the Dragon-Slaying King. Luckily, Richard had an illegitimate son in Aquitane. The new Knights stole him away. They kept him and his children under observation. The blood of Richard the Lionheart runs true, and the spirit of Saint George refuses to leave them.

This has led the Knight Commander to both victory and defeat. In the late 16th century, the Knights of Saint George first took their mission to the New World. They found more than just magic to hunt on those foreign shores — the Knights found natives of the land who practiced the ways of the dragonslayers. Under the cover of "converting the heathens," the Knights discovered many secrets of native witches and uncovered precious verses of the Goetic Gospels.

In 1892, a secret arm of the Pinkerton detective agency burned down the Pittsburgh library of the Knights of Saint George under the cover of the Homestead Riots. The fire destroyed a number of documents and reports that the archivists hadn't copied to the other libraries, and killed five Knights. Nobody caught the Pinkerton agents who burned down the church, though most Knights accept that they were in the pay of witches.

Where possible, the Knights of Saint George induct Richard's illegitimate descendants. The commanders of the order have so far all come from the bloodline of the Lionheart, and they have the final say on members who undergo the First Revelation — without the blessing of the Lionheart, the Spirit of Saint George won't watch over a Knight. The current Knight Commander is an old man, and two potential challengers present problems for the order. One is a staunch

THE GOSPEL OF ELIGOS

Modern translation from recovered fragments by Dr Anthony Webber, 2008

The Devil who is called Eligos rules 60 legions of demons, and holds the rank of Great Duke of Hell, yet the pious and the penitent may bind Him into service. Do not take the task lightly. Eligos has the appearance of a goodly knight, bearing a lance, an ensign, and a serpent, but his motives are those of a demon.

The penitent man must make himself unto a beacon of the sin of Pride, recalling those times when the man has put himself before God. A truly devout man may scar his face, branding the face that once stood above the Lord in his mind. Shaping that Pride that is within him into the shape of Eligos' serpent, the man gives freely of himself and prostrates himself before his Sin, trusting only in the Lord. If he shows true penitence, the serpent must obey the man, but would that the man be sure of his faith lest the serpent bite his own heart, poisoning him with sin.

traditionalist who would reform the dragonslayers around an elite core and cast out those who wouldn't accept the Revelations. She's female, though, and most of the old guard would never accept a woman as Knight Commander. The other potential commander wants to meld the Gnostic and Goetic teachings of the Knights with the more accessible forms of Anglicanism.

Many established Knights fear that such a program would work against their hard-fought history of lies and misdirection.

Confessions

The Knights have kidnapped many witches and wizards, warlocks and wise-women in their days, and have gathered information by torture and interrogation. Several mystics claim their magic comes from dragons. Others claim they are agents of another world. Though the testimonies of wizards are hardly reliable, enough have agreed on one of those two points, even under terrible persuasions, for the order to take them as a truth. The true gods are matters for Scripture and the Revelations, and no Knight would believe a witch who claimed to know otherwise.

Even so, scholars argue their own positions. Some hold that the dragons are the natural adversary of their gods. Just as the One True God has His Satan, so the faceless angels have the dragons. Another faction holds to the idea that the dragons are the gods of another world, another reality that mages tap into when they use magic. The faceless angels police the boundary between the worlds of spirit and flesh.

A few Knights, enamored with the work of modern occultists, have stranger theories: the dragons are alien beasts. Their "gods" are a defense system seeded by future humanity. The other world, the source of magic, is a whole different dimension, and faceless angels slumber in the void between realities. Knights who hold to such theories don't spread their ideas around. They're not just quiet, they're heretics. If "mainstream" Knights found out what they believed, the order would give them the same treatment as the witches they hunt.

The Revelations

Knights of Saint George go through three Revelations, three stages of initiation into the order. The Revelations are a progression from their public face as a religious order affiliated with the Church of England, to their true nature as heretics with a divinely-charged mission.

There's no schedule to the Revelations. Some Knights are in their 20s when they undergo the Third Revelation, while others labor into their end days without ever knowing of the First. Those who have not undergone the First Revelation are members of the order, but as Squires, rather than Knights. It is up to the Squires to look after the order's front. Some run soup kitchens



or hostels. Others mind the order's finances, attend society dinners, or maintain those churches sponsored by the Knights of Saint George. A Squire isn't expected to know of the supernatural world; those who do soon undergo the First Revelation, or face excommunication if they fall in with another compact or conspiracy.

Each cell of Knights has a place where they perform the Revelations. Many groups are lucky enough to work close to one of the churches in which the Knights maintain a cloister — just about any place on Earth with a strong Anglican presence has such a church. A lucky few have access to churches wholly owned by the Knights of Saint George, with access to their libraries and other members of the order. Those churches only really exist in the UK and major urban areas of the US. In rural areas, each cell has to come up with its own solution. The Knights of Saint George benefit from their front as a good Christian organization, and can sweet-talk the keys to most small-town Anglican churches for a night to "hold a midnight vigil." Other cells don't have that luxury. Instead, they sanctify their current headquarters to bring others through a Revelation. Lone Knights often keep in contact with others throughout their state. They share information and tactics as well as their own brand of worship. Often, they only have tenth-generation photocopies or shoddy scanned versions of important texts, including the *Key of Solomon*, the *Ars Goetia*, and the *Gnostic Gospels*: the original illuminated manuscripts rarely leave the Knights' libraries in Seattle, New York, and England.

After the First Revelation the initiate knows secrets that most men never will: witches and stranger things walk the world, hidden in the form of humans. Some Knights undergo the Revelation after showing promise in their studies; others have the or-

der's teachings thrust upon them after seeing a facet of the hidden world. However it happens, the hunter becomes a Knight.

The First Revelation teaches that wizards and their ilk exist. They access strange and bizarre powers from outside creation, drawing down the energies of another Realm. The Knights encourage her to study their own form of Christianity, including some apocryphal tomes that other churches don't know of. The Goetic Gospels especially concern wizards and their abilities, as well as ways for the warriors of Heaven to face their foes — by embodying their sins and facing them down, a Knight can inflict her sin upon a witch.

Though she has access to the full range of information that the Knights have collected on wizards and other supernatural phenomena, a hunter who undergoes the First Revelation can't see everything. Some people and books are off-limits. Some passages and exercises for the faithful detailed in the Goetic Gospels contain the keys to powers that can turn witches against themselves, but don't speak of dragons or faceless angels. These secrets leave tantalizing holes in the records that spur some Knights to investigate. They must tread carefully, lest the order decide to take back its investment.

After the First Revelation, the Knights gently guide an initiate's worship away from traditional Christianity. Her contacts within the order encourage her to read scriptures from the Knights' records, and discourage contemplation of God in favor of Goetic disciplines designed to harden the hunter's devotion to the Knights. Thus do they prepare her for the Second Revelation. When she's made privy to that information, she's ready. The truth no longer scares her — she craves it.

The Second Revelation teaches not just more secret truths about the world, but secrets about the Knights themselves. As with the first, a few hunters have the information thrust upon them. Most show their readiness in other ways, poking holes in the Knights' doctrines, or questioning a witch's source of power if God has truly forsaken them. The order doesn't induct those who aren't ready for the truth.

A Knight must reaffirm his faith before undergoing the Second Revelation — but his faith in the order, not in God. He spends a week in guided meditation with Knights who have passed through the Second Revelation, demonstrating time and again his dedication to his duty in the face of situations that would leave lesser men in moral quandaries. In return, he's shown one side of the truth: that the Knights appease strange old gods that have little to do with the Christian creator, destroying magic so that the faceless angels don't turn their attention to the world. The Knight also learns that the Gospels have a further truth — they shape the dreams of the faceless angels, using their power to even the ground with witches. Finally, he's told of the dragons, immensely powerful creatures that bless mages with their power, and of the order's heritage as dragonslayers.

The reaffirmation of faith that precedes this Revelation serves a second purpose — it breaks

THE GOETIC ARTS

The *Ars Goetia* is a set of practices shrouded in myth. The basic conceit of Goetia states that a man of sufficient will can invoke angels and evoke demons. If that man has sufficient faith, or access to mystic symbols ("seals"), he can command the evoked demons to learn their secrets and gain their powers.

The form practiced by the Knights of Saint George is a particular form of Christian Goetia. The practitioner meditates, focusing upon his experiences with one of the Seven Deadly Sins. In his mind, the sin manifests through one of the Goetic demons. The practitioner manifests his Virtues within himself, and fights the demon that is his own sin. If he wins, the grip of that sin lessens for a while. If he loses, the sin influences his life for a time.

An individual who can combat his own sins is better placed to combat the sin in the world, and the best way to do that is repeated training. Losing to sin is just one step on the road, and a truly faithful Christian perseveres in the name of the Lord.

down the Knight's resistance. Under the cover of guided meditation and focused worship, the Knights twist the hunter's faith until it will accept their truths. Their methods are very similar to brainwashing techniques employed by cults and fringe religions, though they subvert the Knight's existing faith rather than trying to destroy it. When all is told, the Knight gets a feeling of things falling into place. The new teachings tear away the ragged edges of the First Revelation to reveal the truth beneath. After the Revelation, he attends services dedicated to appeasing the faceless angels, offering prayers and worship that they will accept offerings of magic. These services take place in the same churches and sacred places that the Knights use for all their worship.

A few Knights remain too strong-willed for the reaffirmation to have its desired effect. Normally, the Knights who guide the aspirant know when they fail, and cut him loose without letting him get too close to the truth. Nobody's infallible, and a few Christian Knights have kept their faith even against such facts as the faceless angels and the dragons. Though it's rare for the Knights to fuck up quite so spectacularly, the aspiring hunters are never seen again.

Many Knights never move past the Second Revelation. They know the truth about both their order and their enemy. Though a hunter faces many monsters — some beasts of myth and magic, others all too human — the Knights of Saint George hold to their faith, and their faith strengthens them. A Knight removes magic from the world, dedicating it through prayers to her outer gods, and performs Goetic meditations to gain the power to fight on. She knows all that she needs to know.

For a few hunters, that's not enough. They have to know more — not just what they fight, but why they fight it. That knowledge comes at a price — Knights who undergo the Third Revelation learn the secrets of the universe, but knowing why they fight makes them a target for witches the world over. As such, only a few members of the order ever get so close to the truth. Though the secrets lack utility in the field, they still can shock a Knight to the core. As such, the aspirant once more goes through a period of guided worship and meditation during which Knights of the Third Revelation again guide his thoughts and his faith, molding his mind to the point that he can accept the truth.

The Treatise of Saint George is a patchwork document that outlines the secret history of the world according to the order. It ties together the disparate threads of the Knight's theology and beliefs into a coherent history. The world was once paradise, but such a state could not last. Alone of the beings in the cosmos, humanity has a world to themselves. Angry creatures from beyond the Realm of humans — the dragons — sought to take over this paradise and shape it to their liking. They brought twisted magic with them, but

MYSTERY CULTS

The Knights of Saint George are perhaps the one agency closest to a cult. While other compacts and conspiracies practice extreme secrecy, they generally don't appease alien gods or hide behind a religious front featured in many conspiracy theories. So what's the difference? How can the Knights of Saint George hunt cultists, and why don't other conspiracies hunt them?

The simple answer is that there is no difference.

The Knights of Saint George are a cult. The faceless angels are the kind of gods that would excite Lovecraft. But, importantly, the Knights worship in the name of the Vigil, and they worship to keep the attentions of their gods away from the world. They hunt supernatural creatures, and they hunt to keep people safe. The Knights filter all supernatural creatures through their understanding of the world, and so some cells go after witches and magical power exclusively. Only a few take a holistic view, ignoring the witch who works as a doctor in order to pursue a serial killer with strange ritual undertones.

Other conspiracies don't count the Knights of Saint George as enemies. Most don't know that the order exists. A few know of the Sacred Order of the Knights of Saint George but believe them to be Christian hunters with a fixation on witches. Were any agency to hear the truths imparted in the Second or Third Revelations, they'd turn on the Knights as soon as look at them.

away from their natural realm the dragons had not the power to use their knowledge. The dragons found a source of power in humanity — they provided certain people with forbidden knowledge that could corrupt the world. Those people, the first witches, didn't realize that every time they used their powers they made the world more suitable for the dragons. All they understood was the power they had, over the world and over their fellow humans. Under the rule of the dragons, most people lived in fear of witches noticing them and destroying their lives with cruel magic.

At that time, 72 statues stood upon the Earth. The head of each was almost a mile above the ground, and each looked like a man, but for the great bird's wings that erupted from his back and the lack of any facial details. Nobody knew what the statutes were for until the dragons came in greater numbers. The statutes moved then, each faceless angel an engine of destruction who forced the dragons beyond the boundaries of the world. Witches remained, but their powers were lessened without their draconic tutors. But when enough magic gathered, the dragons could return. The faceless angels could prevent that, but the destruction they wreaked threatened to tear the world asunder. The dragonslayers stood up then, kill-

KNIGHTS OF SAINT GEORGE (CONSPIRACY)



ing witches and magical beasts and dedicating the power in mystical items and places to the faceless angels who keep the dragons from returning.

Since that time, the Knights have fought magic in the world for fear that the faceless angels will pay attention to the world, or worse, that the dragons would overcome their masters.

The Third Revelation is the final barrier for a Knight of Saint George. Everyone who goes through the Revelation learns the secrets of the Treatise of Saint George from the current Lionheart, a man who masquerades as a collector of religious books in the English city of York. He impresses upon

the Knight the need for secrecy - only those who need to understand the truth in order to lead the order can know the secret history of the world. If it were otherwise, agents of the dragons would have killed the Knights long before now.

The Knights of Saint George take their religion very seriously. In addition to the functions organized by Squires, Knights hold weekly services of prayer and thanksgiving. As with Revelations, most cells use churches, so that they can worship in appropriate surroundings. Their services are a reminder to members that no matter how deep they get into the occult underworld they still represent the Sacred Order of the Knights of Saint



George, and the Knights are a Christian organization. No matter what she does when maintaining her Vigil, a member of the order must conduct herself as a virtuous Christian when there's a chance she'll end up in the public eye. Without their veil of secrecy, the Knights couldn't exist.

Knights who have passed the Second Revelation attend extra services, away from the prying eyes of others. Often, they use the same church but on a different night. Their gatherings are more private affairs, as each individual Knight makes her peace with the faceless angels and dedicates herself to both her mission and the secrecy of the Revelations. Gathered to-

gether at these times, hunters can trade tactics and tales of victory and defeat, as well as cataloguing new secrets to be added to the Knights' libraries. Other Knights work on embodying and battling their inner demons, assisting each other in study of the Goetic Gospels.

Around the World

The Knights of Saint George have a presence around the world. Because their public face is a part of the Church of England, though a secretive one, the order holds their main library and the upper echelons of command in England. Copies of all manuscripts in the library — some scanned and printed, others photocopied or mimeographed and a few still hand-transcribed — reside in their secondary libraries in upstate New York and downtown Seattle. A Knight can find a safe house anywhere that the Anglican Church has a presence, though stores of magical knowledge are rarer — outside of Europe and large urban areas in the United States, they're hard to find.

Cells in most of the US can feel cut off from the higher echelons. Though they can communicate with each other in coded messages sent via parish newsletters and Christian mailing lists, they've no way to get a message to ranking members with any particular speed. To counter this, cells and individual hunters across the rural US join together into larger groups called chapters, providing the support that the Knights Commanders cannot.

In Europe, the situation's subtly different. Ease of travel within the European Union and the lesser focus on religion gives Knights on the continent an easier time communicating with the Knights Commanders. The many variations of national churches — each with specific and occasionally minute doctrinal differences — can make it harder for hunters to maintain their face as a philanthropic Christian organization that's part of the Anglican Church. While some countries welcome them, in others, especially those with a strong divide between Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches, the Knights must tread very carefully.

Countries that used to be part of the British Empire still maintain well-stocked safe houses for chapters of the Knights of Saint George. Often the Church has outlasted British rule, and through it, the Knights have easy access to parts of the world usually off-limits to agencies of a national government. Africa and India are both home to a range of strange magicians who work blasphemous magic alien to their Western counterparts, and the Knights have a head-start in understanding them.

A War of Secrets

The Knights of Saint George don't just hunt witches. They hunt magic, however it presents itself. Knights of the First Revelation believe they must stop mages accessing such wonders, while those inducted into further mysteries fear the attention of the faceless angels. Simple denial tactics are often enough to limit the use of powerful magical areas, though in the case of large installations the Knights have to use surveillance technology and booby-traps — a single cell can't deny access to a sacred grove and a haunted house at the same time. Knights who have undergone the Second Revelation

A STRANGER WORLD

The Knights hunt all kinds of magic. Sometimes that puts them in conflict with the Aegis Kai Doru, as both may be on the tracks of a powerful Relic. Other times, they encounter stranger things entirely. At first glance, a lot of these things are more surreal than horrific, but every single one has an undercurrent of terror. The Knights of Saint George aren't mages and don't have the faintest clues what to expect.

While a mage from **Mage: The Awakening** who hears of a sentient corporation may wonder if it's a spirit or the strange creation of a Master of the Mind Arcanum, a hunter doesn't have the luxury of speculation. They don't know about Mysteries or Arcana or the ways of magic, just that it's out there, consuming people into a hive-mind and literally working them to death. Instead of wondering where it came from, the hunter has real-life concerns: what happens when a hunter's wife gets a job for a subsidiary of the brand and slowly loses her sense of self? Or when the Knights work their way up the chain to the board, and each chairman willingly donates his soul to the company in a twisted ritual?

The surreal aspects of a world of magic are scary because of what they imply — the basic laws of reality don't always apply. Every new situation, place, or creature is a chance to break whatever seasoned hunters like the Knights of Saint George think they know about the world. Storytellers should play up the implications of whatever strangeness they introduce, and players should revel in the sanity-blasting consequences.

can dedicate places of magic to their gods (using the Corruption Tactic, p. 117). Doing so removes the magic from reality, making the world a safer place.

Some items slip through the cracks of history. The flaming sword of the angel who guarded Eden appears in a secret auction of mysterious items in the northwestern United States. A kid uses the real pistol that shot Lincoln in a school shooting — it never needs reloading and always kills whoever it hits. An antique typewriter writes mystery stories of murders that haven't happened yet, one chapter per night — though the murder always occurs before the chapter naming the culprit. One of the first televisions has no aerial, only strange designs in old blood on its casing. The screen shows a flickering vision of Hell, and every so often one of that Realm's myriad of demons stares back at the viewer.

There are places mundane eyes never set light on. An old plantation house is larger inside than out, and only people conversant with non-Euclidian geometry stand a chance of escaping its nightmarish halls. In Italy, the hidden gardens of a manor hold the secrets of powerful spells and enchantments in its careful arrangements. The penthouse level of a skyscraper in Hong Kong's

financial district doesn't have a single right-angle, all to keep a powerful entity bound within. One hundred feet below the valley of Valchiusella, in northern Italy, one man excavated a series of underground temples describing the journey of humans from Eden towards their apotheosis. People who spend more than a week there without seeing daylight have terrifying visions of worlds beyond our own.

Where the walls between worlds are thin, strange things occur. Wellsprings of magical power color the world around them according to their power. The bleachers at a baseball field where a homeless man died exude sloth, encouraging people to rest for a while — and stealing their urge to ever leave. A street-corner in Japan radiates treachery and malice, and five honest cops have died there in the past two years. Unknowable creatures cross into the world in a certain building in Basra, indulging in a feast of human flesh before crossing back to a world of magic.

Magical experimentation has left weirder things abroad in the world. A startup in Silicon Valley absorbs the companies it takes over, growing and adapting with every buyout. The board members are just figureheads, mouthpieces for a corporation with a mind of its own. Political philosophers in Russia spread their vision of a perfect society via enchantment, but the spell won't end — anyone who comes into contact with a carrier soon joins the community, their free will subverted by magic. In the ruins of Sarajevo, a young girl carries with her a necklace that belonged to her mother — a necklace that contains a fetal world, waiting to be born.

It's a very strange world out there. The Knights of Saint George do everything they can to save us from it.

The Enemy

For all their effort to focus on witches, the Knights of Saint George know quite a bit about the other creatures that stalk the night. They have to — tales of a shapeshifter may lead them to a witch who dons a sacred animal skin to run with the wolves or to a pack of bloodthirsty werewolves. It's impossible to tell. Blood sacrifice could be a sign of a cult of wizards or a serial killer. Cryptozoologic artifacts could be a witch's twisted pets or freakish creatures from the bowels of the Earth. Whether by accident or design, no Knight can remain totally ignorant for long.

Witches

The libraries of the Knights of Saint George hold numerous tomes on witches and magic. If they didn't contradict each other, they'd be even more useful. Some books maintain that witches can only affect the world after long rituals, while many Knights have personal experience that this is not the case. Other cells have encountered wizards whose magic was the result of occult ceremony. Likewise, some books de-

clare that “magic” is show and nonsense around powers commonly thought to be psychic in origin. While some hunters can back up these claims, there’s plenty more documented evidence that that isn’t the case.

Scholars among the Knights piece together knowledge that they pass on to their fellows in the field. Witches gather together in groups — covens, really — much like hunter cells. Not only does safety come in numbers, but individual witches have different magical capabilities and working together broadens the group’s magical repertoire. This variety makes them dangerous. The Knights therefore take on witches who are alone. Shock tactics work best when the witch is removed from her group and moved to a new, unfamiliar location. That way, those witches who can twist time and space don’t know where their comrade has been taken. Most cells try to keep a captured witch in a semi-public location. That way, their coven-mates have a hard time working truly world-shattering magic; collateral damage isn’t an issue when the faceless angels stand a chance of noticing the world.

The Knights know that with witches, those of like mind band together. Scholars have found traces of a large organization of witches that pursue the same kind of strange artifacts as the Knights. A team investigating an item or location must be on the look-out for these “mystery archaeologists.” On the other hand, a sleeper Knight who can infiltrate such a witch’s cult of personality might find herself wandering the world, letting the wizard find the relics and then destroying them in secret. Some wizards belong to a more militant group that infiltrates mundane conspiracies to distract from their real goal. These wizards are also well-trained in the arts of combat, defending their secrets in every way. Again, if a Knight can follow such a mage and play the waiting game, he could follow her to other mystics. Doubtless other magical organizations exist, but there’s not enough evidence in the libraries for research-minded Knights to uncover their traces.

The Knights have identified three different kinds of mages: *Animists*, *Necromancers*, and *Theists*. Each shares magical

THE INSIDE TRACK

For Storytellers familiar with *Mage: The Awakening*, it’s worth pinning down what the Knights of Saint George know, what they suspect, and what they get wrong. Where the Knights are ignorant of a fact, it’s a reasonable assumption that individual cells would have their own erroneous assumptions.

- The Knights know about the difference between Atlantean magic and other kinds (ritual magic such as that detailed in **Second Sight** or Castigation rituals).
- While no organization knows of specific spells, the Knights have recorded a range of magical effects that witches tend to use, and know what can be used against them — holding prayer vigils to fortify their minds against a prying witch, or uncovering the secret clauses in a fate-twister’s curses.
- The Knights also know of psychic powers, and that they are different again (whether those powers are natural in source, as in **Second Sight**, or stranger yet). For safety and sanity’s sake, better to lump it all in with “magic” — why risk inviting the faceless angels to turn their attentions once more to this world?
- Mages join together in covens, and belong to larger organizations. The Knights know about the *Mysterium*, and conflate the *Adamantine Arrow* and the *Guardians of the Veil*. They don’t know about the *Free Council*, seeing rebellious or “uncategorized” mages as disparate from the rest.
- Some individual Knights are experts in unearthing magical artifacts and locations, though they have no way to tell which are related to Awakened magic and which have stranger origins.
- The magical styles the Knights have identified are akin to the Paths of mages. *Animists* are either *Acanthus* or *Thrysus*, *Necromancers* are *Magistos* or *Moros*, and *Theists* are *Magistos* or *Obrimos*.
- Atlantis is a closed book — though the Knights know that mages get their powers from dragons, they know nothing of the Awakened view of history and often don’t care.
- The Knights believe any creature near a witch is likely in league with that witch — including Abyssal creatures summoned from a Manifestation paradox effect.
- Though the Knights use the Corruption Tactic to warp magical places, they’ve no idea of how to find them — a cell might make a futile attempt at the Tactic at a haunting, or the coffee shop where the mages meet, and never check otherwise mundane locations where Mana trickles into the world.

The faceless angels that the Knights of Saint George worship bear some mention as well. Are they strange and terrible beings lurking in the Supernal Realms? Do they distract the Knights from the depths of the *Tenebros*? Or worse, are they destroying magic to pave the way for powerful and alien creatures lurking in the bottom of the Abyss? That’s up to you as Storyteller to decide.

style and common abilities granted to them by the dragons. Animists make deals with spirits. They can invite possession and twist their own bodies. Their magic extends even to cursing enemies, fating them to fall before the witch. Necromancers commune with the dead, bending ghosts to their will or foretelling the doom of their foes. They can extend the touch of death to physical items, strengthening them with the stuff of souls or rusting them away to nothing. Theists take their powers from angels and demons. Angels give them power over the fundamental forces of nature and the very firmament of reality, and they wrest control of people's minds and the fabric of space from demons. Knights of the Third Revelation know that the differences between individual witches are no more than figments of their own imaginations, though the majority of the order believes that the dragons link different witches to different aspects of the otherworlds.

As to what they actually *do* with and to witches... well, the facts are, to them, simple. The faceless angels will once more turn their attention to the world if magic is allowed to exist unbidden. Hence, magic is the enemy. Magic must be stopped. It'd be great if magic could be somehow "extricated" from the mage, and some Knights have tried: brain damage does the trick for some, disconnecting their conscious mind from the magic they perform. Honestly, though? Ending the witch's life is easier than trying to damage the frontal lobe in just such a precise way. Yes, some try deprogramming and conversion, and it works for a while. But inevitably, the allure of magic calls once more to the witch. Magic's call is a siren song. Better to cut that song short. And so they watch the witches and wait for the moment.

Watching a coven of witches takes time, often a luxury that the cell doesn't have. While going in under-prepared against a werewolf or serial killer usually leads to terrible violence, at least the Knights have an idea of the endgame and can plan accordingly. Hunters who willingly go up against a coven without doing all their homework could be blasted with mystic flames, have their memories shattered like spun sugar, or have their body collapse like a puppet with cut strings. That's where the Knights shine. Every member of the order studies witches extensively, and the order's archives store reports from surviving hunters; the First Revelation covers the basics, such as spells requiring a couple of seconds' concentration from the witch. Whenever the Knights move against a coven, they go in hard and fast. In addition to preparing themselves with the Goetic Gospels, cells with a big enough budget make extensive use of flash-bang grenades, tear gas, and other distractions — some even go as far as to use less experienced hunters as human shields. It's a hideous way to think about others who uphold the Vigil, but sometimes they are the distraction that a Knight needs to take out the witches.

Other Monsters

More things walk the night than exist in the Knights' libraries. Their records identify several kinds of supernatural threat, from vampires to ghostly beasts, and record how in every case the threat led back to a witch in some way. Even on those rare occasions that a witch is not apparent, supernatural

beasts have some link to magic — something that means the Knights must keep a Vigil against them. It's a losing battle, but a battle that the Knights of Saint George must fight.

When fighting the creatures of the night, a Knight would do well to read up on his foes. That way, he's not going to try warding off a vampire with a cross or a bunch of garlic. But while they know what doesn't work, few enough Knights have gone up against enough monsters that they know what does with any certainty.

Vampires are paranoid creatures, so a whole cell of hunters must work together in tracing the creature to its lair. Some of the walking dead collect ancient lore, including rare books or items with mystical power. Others are the companions of necromancers, and observing a vampire will lead to the witch. Whatever the case, all are the creations of alchemical demigods, able to react human blood within the vampiric crucible to attain a semblance of life. Once the Knights know what links a vampire to the world of magic, they strike. Thanks to the cleansing effects of sunlight, Knights try to fight undead opponents during the day, when the vampire is resident in its lair. Many of the undead aren't dumb enough to leave themselves vulnerable when they cannot be around, and take home security to a ludicrous degree. Knights who don't get to attack on their home turf — during the daylight hours — often die, as the living dead bolster their physical and mental prowess with enhancing magic. Some cells survive night-time hunts, but not enough to derive any workable strategies.

Against werewolves, the Knights know enough to carry silver bullets, but that's about it. On the other hand, werewolves would tend the sites of mystic importance that witches crave. Letting them do so intrinsically limits the amount of magic in the world — though they may be cursed men, werewolves are no agents of the dragons. A few Knights use this to their advantage, striking alliances of convenience and wielding a pack of savage beasts like a weapon against a coven of witches. It doesn't always work — sometimes, the werewolves don't see the witches as a threat, and sometimes they would rather eat the man who wastes their time with talk — but enough Knights try bargaining with them that it's worth it. Other hunters have seen one too many witch dressed in an enchanted animal skin to trust any shape-changer. Though they aren't in league with the dragons, werewolves still have magical power within them. Against a physically superior foe, all these Knights can do is load up with silver bullets and hope they pull the trigger in time.

Apart from vampires, some necromancers raise golems from the sewn-together parts of dead golems. Their experiments leak the magic used to animate them in a way that even normal people can register. That makes it easier for the Knights to raise others to help them exterminate the corpse, but runs the risk of deaths amongst the mob — or a few members discovering scraps of the truth that they should never know and working against the Knights of Saint George.

As a Christian agency, at least to the public, the Knights are very interested in demons. After the Second Revelation, that interest increases — the demons who lend humans their power are likely relatives of the dragons that the Knights seek

to slay, or rogue dreams of the faceless angels. The Knights' libraries have a range of information on demons, more than they have on any creature except witches. Unfortunately, demons have few defining traits. While banishing rituals work on some, others come and go as they please — and a hunter needs to know which banishing ritual to use. The Knights' standard tactic of observation and information gathering means they often know what they're getting into beforehand.

Only Human

The Knights Commanders of the Sacred Order of the Knights of Saint George remain unflinching on one thing: their mission is to destroy magic in the world. They don't have a moral remit to hunt humans who have no connection to magic. Knights who investigate the human targets of other hunters find that the majority have something linking them to witches or magic. The few who do not have such a link become targets simply because the Knights are human beings, sick of people who abuse, degrade, and destroy other human beings for their own sick enjoyment.

Every Knight has had some exposure to the mind-bending effects of magic, which in turn means that she's more likely to keep herself together when a slasher stalks her neighborhood. While normal serial killers are a threat that many hunters face, most Knights know that slashers have a supernatural edge. They're living avatars of sacrificial magic, existing only to end human lives. Every single person a slasher kills dies in a sacrificial manner, her death increasing the amount of magic in the world. The Knights are thus duty-bound to stop a slasher by any means possible. They turn their normal means of operating onto the killer, observing and learning as much as they can about him and use what they find to identify weak spots that they can exploit.

What most Knights will never know is that slashers aren't anything to do with magic. Knights of the Third Revelation work a campaign of propaganda and misinformation to convince them that every possible threat leads back to a magical genesis. The Third Revelation knows they're spreading a lie, but they do it with the best of motives — if people knew about the monsters in the world, they would look to witches to save them. Destroying magic means destroying every trace of the supernatural, even if that means the Knights Commanders lie to their own order. Humans do stupid things for money and power. A few join cults, believing that committing blood sacrifices to a demon first named in the mass-market paperback *Necronomicon* will somehow give them eternal power. They're so obsessed with their own impotence that the cult will kidnap and kill people for no real reason. Many witches sponsor these cults. Some use them directly, seeing the cultists as little more than human pawns for when the witch doesn't want to get too close to a subject. Often, the witch is one of the leaders of such a cult. Others are no more than a blind set up by witches to distract witch-hunters from the real magic. In either case, the Knights know that taking a cult down hard is the best way to find the witch behind the curtain.

The Vigil takes its toll on hunters, too. Some end up going too far, killing too many people to ever be normal. More

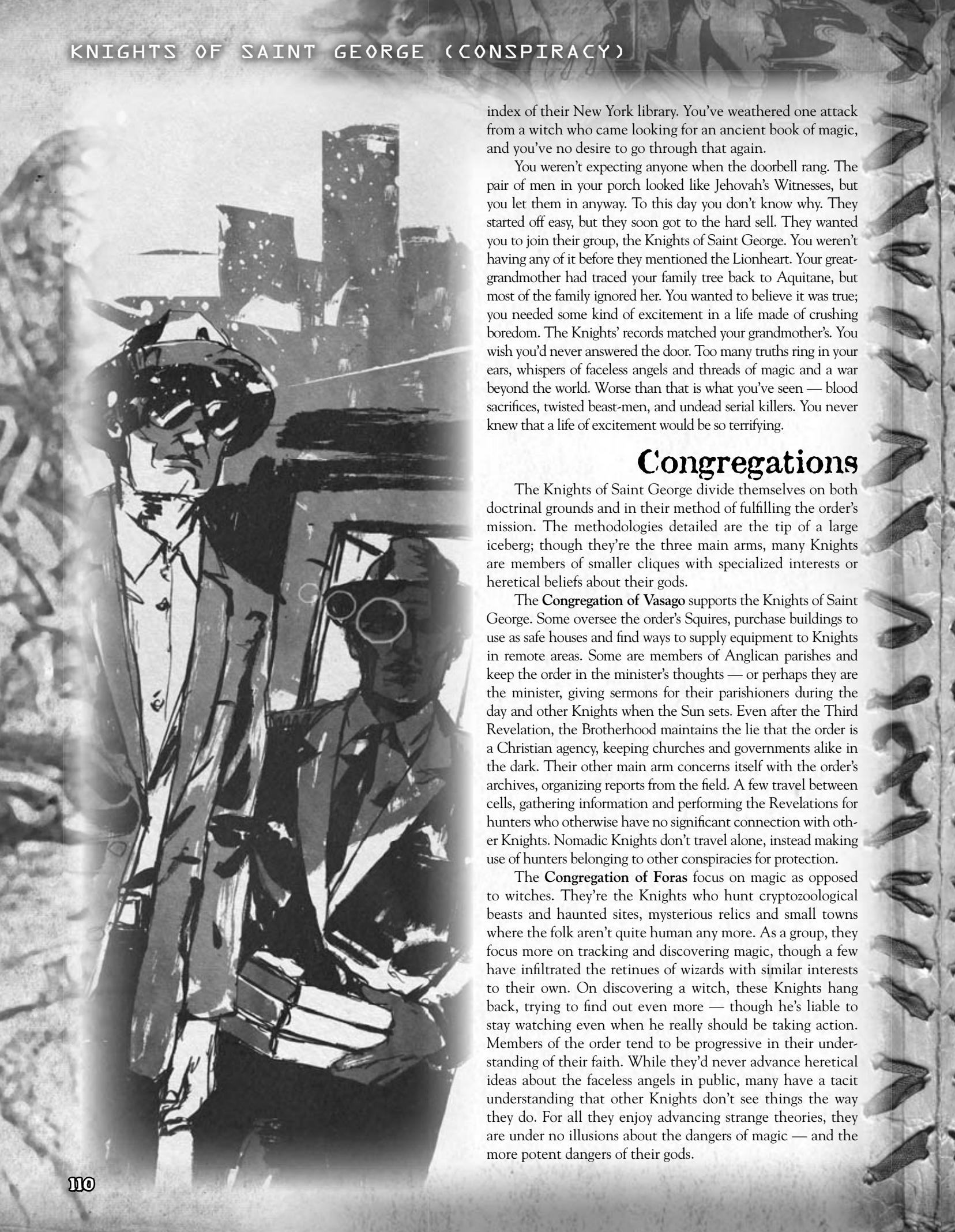
than a few of those were once Knights of Saint George. Maybe he's spent too long among the libraries and thinks he's found the ultimate Gothic Gospel, but needs the blood of five innocents to truly manifest his wrath. Maybe he realizes that Judgment Day is upon the world, and that the dragons are going to win — their influence remains on the world, when the faceless angels have gone quiet. Ex-Knights who suffer a crisis of faith may strike at their old order for being in bed with blasphemous powers — especially if the Knight cracks during his initiation into the Second Revelation. Others lash out because the Knights aren't doing enough. The dragons are coming back, and the only way to be safe is to wake the faceless angels — destroying the world in the process. The Knights take their rogues very seriously, and hunt them the same as any witch.

Hunters

Nobody was surprised when you got your Divinity degree. They just wondered why you wanted to be a part of a small, local church rather than something much grander. You wanted to give something back — years in school had sapped your faith, and you had an easier time believing in the small community you joined than in God. You spent your time helping people out and studying some old texts, and it was enough. Then they came. Five people who you just *knew* were wrong. They started hanging around in the graveyard, right at the spot where old folks and crystal-wavers claimed the ghosts lived. You saw them once when they didn't think you were looking. You heard their blasphemous ritual. You asked for help. The Knights of Saint George answered.

You were on a fast-track to the top of the finance world. Late nights in the office, either finalizing a deal or screwing your secretary, later nights in bars celebrating your victories. Then you hit the last barrier on your way to the top. You were too much of a "wild child," too young and impetuous. You had to do something, and you remembered your grandfather was a member of the Knights of Saint George. You asked about membership, and they asked you to help out with their finances. You got your promotion, but had to calm down — the Knights have an image to maintain. Only years later did you learn the truth, when a gang of lunatics started shooting up the whole building. They moved like they were in an action movie, and you were lucky to survive. The Knights paid for your hospital bills and got in touch when you'd recovered. They had a more active role in mind.

You agreed to help out your boss with some library software for his church group. After all, it was over the odds and cash in hand, you'd have been an idiot to say no. When they had trouble with the OCR software, you offered to take a look. It didn't look like the usual church stuff, so you took a copy, if only to snoop around and cure some insomnia. It was weird. Some of the stuff was old manuscripts, while others were electronic reports of field operations. You asked your boss about it over lunch, and he agreed to tell you more. After your Revelation, you understand what's going on. The Knights of Saint George employ you full time now to maintain the electronic



index of their New York library. You've weathered one attack from a witch who came looking for an ancient book of magic, and you've no desire to go through that again.

You weren't expecting anyone when the doorbell rang. The pair of men in your porch looked like Jehovah's Witnesses, but you let them in anyway. To this day you don't know why. They started off easy, but they soon got to the hard sell. They wanted you to join their group, the Knights of Saint George. You weren't having any of it before they mentioned the Lionheart. Your great-grandmother had traced your family tree back to Aquitane, but most of the family ignored her. You wanted to believe it was true; you needed some kind of excitement in a life made of crushing boredom. The Knights' records matched your grandmother's. You wish you'd never answered the door. Too many truths ring in your ears, whispers of faceless angels and threads of magic and a war beyond the world. Worse than that is what you've seen — blood sacrifices, twisted beast-men, and undead serial killers. You never knew that a life of excitement would be so terrifying.

Congregations

The Knights of Saint George divide themselves on both doctrinal grounds and in their method of fulfilling the order's mission. The methodologies detailed are the tip of a large iceberg; though they're the three main arms, many Knights are members of smaller cliques with specialized interests or heretical beliefs about their gods.

The **Congregation of Vasago** supports the Knights of Saint George. Some oversee the order's Squires, purchase buildings to use as safe houses and find ways to supply equipment to Knights in remote areas. Some are members of Anglican parishes and keep the order in the minister's thoughts — or perhaps they are the minister, giving sermons for their parishioners during the day and other Knights when the Sun sets. Even after the Third Revelation, the Brotherhood maintains the lie that the order is a Christian agency, keeping churches and governments alike in the dark. Their other main arm concerns itself with the order's archives, organizing reports from the field. A few travel between cells, gathering information and performing the Revelations for hunters who otherwise have no significant connection with other Knights. Nomadic Knights don't travel alone, instead making use of hunters belonging to other conspiracies for protection.

The **Congregation of Foras** focus on magic as opposed to witches. They're the Knights who hunt cryptozoological beasts and haunted sites, mysterious relics and small towns where the folk aren't quite human any more. As a group, they focus more on tracking and discovering magic, though a few have infiltrated the retinues of wizards with similar interests to their own. On discovering a witch, these Knights hang back, trying to find out even more — though he's liable to stay watching even when he really should be taking action. Members of the order tend to be progressive in their understanding of their faith. While they'd never advance heretical ideas about the faceless angels in public, many have a tacit understanding that other Knights don't see things the way they do. For all they enjoy advancing strange theories, they are under no illusions about the dangers of magic — and the more potent dangers of their gods.

STEREOTYPES

The Long Night: I worked with a young man for a short time who showed a certain fanatical devotion to his cause. I saw fear in his eyes, and heard it in his voice, even after we'd chloroformed our target. Only later did I realize what scared him: that his God would find him wanting even after all he had done. He fought like the Devil, though. I don't know if the Revelations would come as a great comfort to him, or make me his next target.

The Loyalists of Thule: I was investigating the gardens of a villa outside Turin when they appeared. There I was, trying to find a way to bleed off the magic without attracting too much attention, and a cell appeared, offering their services. All I had to do was make sure that they got "their cut" of information. They made one mistake: they didn't tell me anything about them. I've encountered too many witches who hunt for the same secrets as I do to trust anyone appearing on my site.

The Lucifuge: Children of the Devil? Hardly. Most likely they're a bunch of mutations, quirks in the world caused by magic bleeding in from the background. That'd make them a problem if they went the same way as most witches, but in their madness they're out to stop the strange and the weird from taking over the world. They're useful allies, but if they learned the truth I fear they'd tie their devil in to our angels.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: We have to be careful when rededicating mystical energy. It's all too easy for the big guns to notice, and when they notice, they send their Men in Black. We have a hell of a time convincing them that we're on the same side. If you do convince them, they're a big help. If there's no chance you can get useful information out of a bunch of witches, drop these guys on them then grab whatever's left and count yourself lucky.

Most Knights of Saint George belong to the **Congregation of Malthus**, and are witch-finders first and foremost. They're the hunters in the field, the people out taking photographs of known or suspected wizards, working out who their main targets are. They're also the Knights who perform smash-and-grab raids on witches who they have a chance of bringing to the light, or who go in with guns blazing when that's not an option, hoping to kill the witches before their targets know what's going on. These hunters are the most proactive, tracking serial killers, murderous cults, and stranger creatures in the hopes of a clue that will lead them to a coven of witches. Because they often work with other hunters, the Congregation's members are the most paranoid about the order's security. Nobody but the Knights of Saint George can know the order's true secrets: the information hunters learn in the Second and Third Revelations.

Status

Status in the Knights of Saint George is a combination of initiation into the Revelations, and capturing magical knowledge. A lot of the upper echelons of the Knights are old men who have been fighting the good fight for a very long time, and it takes documented achievement to gain their respect. Likewise, it's hard for a Knight who has only gone through

the First Revelation to grasp the direction and decisions that the order must make.

- You've undergone the First Revelation and know that magic exists in the world. You've been shown the secret Goetic practices that allow you to deny wizards their abilities, but you don't know the truth and often the order's goals seem to conflict with their Christian stance. Still, you get the option of purchasing Goetic Gospels with Merit dots.

- You've undergone the Second Revelation and know there's no turning back now. You have destroyed magical items and tried to rehabilitate witches in the name of the faceless angels, because you know the price of failure. You've got access to the order's libraries and have spent time in the stacks, absorbing enough information to give you 9-again on Occult rolls relating to witches and magical phenomena.

- You know the secret truth of the world. The Third Revelation opened your eyes, and you know that you're fighting for the world — past, present, and future. On the other hand, you can pick other Knights and Squires to help you, giving you the equivalent of a three dot Retainer who must assist you in the Vigil in some way.

Subject: Following Harriet pt 3

Date: 7/24/06

From: Anthony Geist (ageist@padre.net)

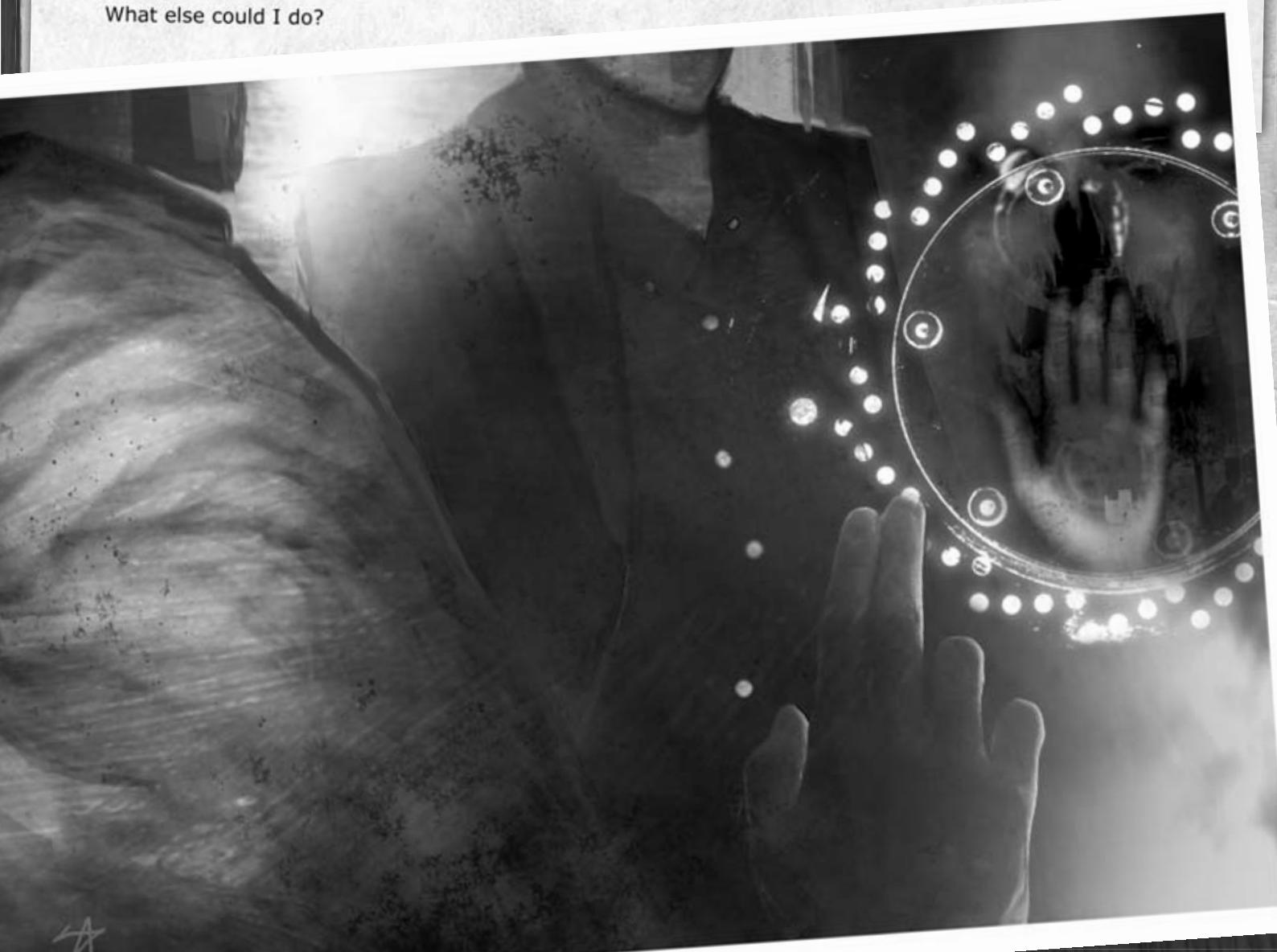
To: Cardinal Samuel Gilmore (sgilmore@padre.net)

Conversation: Following Harriet pt 3

In folk traditions, your Eminence, there are many signs that indicate a witch: the Devil's mark; inability to say the Lord's Prayer; inability to shed tears. But in modern times, as I've tried so often to impress upon my colleagues, there are psychological patterns that indicate a soul lost to witchcraft. A troubled young person comes into contact with an occult group. Friends or relatives describe a transformation, a change in personality, a sort of reinvention of the person's identity. They change the way they dress, the way they talk. They may take on a new name. Then, they disappear. They cut off contact with friends, family, and lovers. They move across the country, across the world, to start a new life. We're taught that a witch's infernal patrons don't want their thralls reminded of their previous lives. But I think there's more to it. I once interviewed a man who left three children and two grandchildren behind when he turned to sorcery. When we spoke, he told me he hadn't seen or spoken to them for 20 years. "It's for their own good," he said to me. "For their protection." To me, that says that a witch can still harbor a spark of humanity.

Observation and instinct convinced me Harriet had been corrupted by some coven, had probably become one of them. My mistake was in informing my superiors about the situation. But what could I do? My vow of obedience required it. You'll recall, Eminence, the letter I sent you then. I reminded you how I'd been pushing for a more progressive approach to the treatment of witches in our custody. I hoped to convince you to let me start a pilot program. I didn't want Harriet put into the hands of someone like Father Kramer, who would bring back the days of trial by hot iron if he could, or Father Sprenger, who should have been put out to pasture long ago for the things he does when he's alone with a prisoner. But you turned me down again.

What else could I do?



"I MOVED INTO A NEW APARTMENT IN THE CITY CENTER"

Used the stipend they gave me to buy new clothes and eat three square meals a day. Had a physical at the Keystone Pharma complex. The doctors treated the fungus I had on my left foot, gave me medicine for the headaches. They made me run on a treadmill and breathe into a tube. They took a urine sample, a blood sample. They injected me with some vitamins. And something else. Something that itched, at first, where the needle went in. A few hours later, the itch moved up my arm. The next day it

was in my neck. The day after that, I felt a weird pressure behind my breastbone.

A day later it was gone, and I forgot about it.

Harriet Geist was out there. Harriet Geist was the doctor's daughter. She had to know something about his death.

But Harriet Geist was also a witch. Minnie used to say she'd kill for a five-minute interview with an actual witch. To find out what it was like to make anything you wanted to happen, happen. To make actual magic.

I put the word out to Philly's Netzo cells. Posted the picture of Harriet they gave me: a young girl, awkward, gawky, and turning shyly away from the camera. I put the word out. I waited. But time gnawed at me. A nagging thought in the back of my head. Harriet's a witch. The doctor was killed by black magic.

What if Harriet is the killer? Harriet, killer. Harriet, killer. Like that, the words echoed in my head. Harriet. Killer. Harriet. Killer. Harriet. Kill her.

The day I saw my daddy for the first time in six years was the last time I saw him ever. I went there ready for anything. I was ready to push my way through his office, shove aside any secretary or anybody who got in my way. If I wanted I could rot away the door to his office and send set a screaming shade to terrify the whole building.

But instead the lady at the desk was excited when I told her who I was. She must have thought there would be a happy reunion.

I walked into his office. He looked at me. His eyes were filmy like a fish. I sat in a chair.

"Well? Do you need money?" he asked me first. He said it like an insult.

"If I did, I wouldn't need to ask you for it."

"If I did, He'd lost a lot of weight. His hair was a little grayer. He was a handsome man.

He nodded. He'd lost a lot of weight.

"Are you still in school?"

"No." I shook the bangs away from my face so he could really see me. "You have quite a setup here."

He nodded again.

"I've been thinking a lot about..." for a moment I couldn't say her name. "I've been thinking a lot about Crystal."

For the first time, he looked upset, just for a moment. "Crystal's gone," he said. "She's been gone a long time now."

"Not to me she's not!" I shouted. I meant to shout, but not as loud as I did. It took a lot of energy out of me.

He snapped at me: "What is it you want here, Harriet? Some kind of closure? I don't get the impression you're trying to heal old wounds. You already told me you don't want me in your life. What else is there left to say?"

"I can see Crystal," I said to him. "I can talk to her, in a way you can't understand."

"When's the last time you slept? Do you want me to put you in a hotel? I'm willing to do that."

"I can see Crystal the way she looked when she drowned," I went on. "Do you remember what she looked like that day? Can you tell me what she was wearing? The color of her bathing suit? Do you remember the color of the belt you strangled her with?"

He was reaching for the phone. I made it fly to pieces. His hand jerked back. He was afraid now.

"Don't you tell me you didn't," I whispered. "Don't even try. I swear to fucking God—" and now my voice was loud again. "I swear to God I'll make you sorry! You have no idea what I can do to you!"

"What is it you want from me?" he shouted. Now he was sweating and his face was red.

"Crystal is in this room with us," I told him. "She didn't want to come here."

"Harriet. Stop this." Now his eyes were so, so wide.

"I wanted to tell you that Crystal loved you and I hated you. Even back then I hated you. Mom wanted to leave you, and she would have, if she hadn't gotten sick. You killed the one who loved you, the only one who loved you. The one who loved you right up until you choked the life out of her."

My hands were shaking. I pushed myself out the chair. "I don't want to know why you did it," I told him. "I just want you to know that I know." I didn't look back as I walked towards the door.

I found a cemetery that night and walked into the very middle. I sat down and I thought about Velvet, dead; and Chain, dead; and Sunny, dead. And I opened my eyes to see Crystal. I stared at her for a long time. I tried to take the belt from around her neck, but it was part of her.

"Go," I told her. "Go show yourself and do it."

She shook her head, slowly, from one side to the other.

"Go and do it!" I said, and my voice had power and she had to obey so she did it and daddy was dead.

Can I go watch a movie now?

Subject: Confronting the enemy

Date: 7/29/06

From: Anthony Geist (ageist@padre.net)

To: Cardinal Samuel Gilmore (sgilmore@padre.net)

Conversation: Confronting the enemy

They made me bring Brother Amos and Brother Ethan to Philadelphia with me. I'd never worked with them before, but they were experienced. Amos had helped rout the Warlock of Shaker Heights a year ago; I'd heard about that. And Ethan was the only survivor of the Burlington Blood Harvest. He bore a pale scar across his neck where the crows had tried to scratch open his jugular. I tested them on the drive into the city. They were both resolute in their faith and by-the-book in their approach. They seemed prepared to defer to me as their superior for this mission, but only to a point.

I had Vern Malachi's list in my pocket. The name "Crystal Geist" leapt out at me at once, of course, and it was hard not to think that this was some sign from my poor niece who we lost so long ago. And it didn't seem unreasonable to me that Harriet might take her sister's name as she embarked on a new life. It was still a long shot, but I know no Benediction to help one find a missing person, which left me to rely on prayers to St. Anthony and my own instincts. I had located Andover Street on a map, and contacted the pastor of St Matthew's, an unassuming neighborhood church located a few blocks from our destination. The Brothers and I went there first. I said a quick Mass for the three of us, and before we set out Brother Ethan performed the St Abel ritual. And then we walked.

It was six months to the day since my brother's murder.

It was a cloudy, damp afternoon. The Brothers were grim and silent, and I nervously fingered my rosary as we walked past rows of homes, duplexes, and an occasional single house. We had reached the end of the 1300 block without incident, when Brother Ethan turned his gaze down the cross-street, raised his hand to point and said. "There."

He indicated a shabby-looking single house pressed tight between two brownstones. "That one," Ethan told us, "I can see the taint of sorcery on it."

"You're certain?" Brother Amos questioned.

"It's clear to the sight of St Abel," he answered, "without doubt."

"How would you like us to proceed, Father?" I could tell from his tone that if I had said, 'Burn the structure to the ground' Brother Amos would volunteer the first match.

"Let's proceed," I told them, "by knocking on the door."

The mailbox next to the doorway was stuffed with envelopes, and there were more lying on the porch. I pressed the bell, but didn't hear any ring, so I knocked hard on the glass. After a moment, Brother Amos volunteered to force open the door. I was going to tell him to wait while I took a look at some of the mail scattered at our feet. But before I could say anything, we heard some noise from inside. And then the door opened.

A young man stood in the door frame, blond and freckled, eyeing us with a cocky and amused expression. He had opened the door all the way, and I could see the house was dark inside. There were some cardboard boxes stacked on a stairway.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," the young man said. "But I'm not interested in any religious literature." At my direction, we were all wearing our jackets open, with our collars plainly visible.

"Oh no," I said to him. "We're not here for that. I'm Father Anthony; my associates and I are visiting at St Matthew's down the street there. My niece lives in this neighborhood but it's been awhile and I'm not sure I remember which house is hers. Does Crystal happen to live here? Crystal Geist?"

He tilted his head. "Crystal? You're looking for Crystal?" He stared at me, and then glanced at Brother Ethan. "Well, you look harmless enough. Why don't you come on in."

"So she does live here?" I asked. The house smelled of sandalwood and citrus. "It's been so long since I saw her. Is she home?"

Brother Ethan leaned close to me as he entered the hallways. "Exodus 22:18," he muttered. It was an informal code used by some among the Order; he was telling me that the man was a witch. That was sloppy thinking; if the eyes of St Abel had revealed a taint of magic on this boy, it was not an absolute indication that he was guilty of witchcraft. Ethan's rush to judgment reinforced my conviction that I'd need to keep a tight rein on him and his cohort. At that moment I realized Brother Amos was nowhere to be seen.

"She's not here right now," the man said, leading us into a small parlor and gesturing for us to sit. We remained standing. "This may sound strange," I said to him, "But I just want to be sure we're talking about the same person, Mr. ..." I reached into my jacket pocket for Harriet's photo.

"Call me Archie," the man said. He was leaning against the mantle of a fireplace that had been bricked up. There were several objects on it; most of them were polished stones.

"This is an old picture," I said, handing it towards him. "This is my niece, do you recognize her?"

He took the photo. He squinted at it. He looked up at me. "She looks..."

And then Brother Amos, standing behind him, clubbed Archie with the side of his hand, just below the left ear.

"Brother!" I shouted, rushing forward. "What are you—?"

"Look in his hand!" Amos cried. "I saw him take that stone from the mantle. It has blasphemous writing on it!"

The young man was on his knees, moaning. "He's not out," said Ethan. "Some force blunted my blow," Amos replied. "I could feel it."

The boy was gesturing with his left hand, or perhaps just shaking it as he pitched back and forth and tried to regain his balance. Ethan grabbed the hand in a joint lock and began to apply pressure to the wrist.

"For God's sake," I blurted. "Stop this!"

Archie slipped out of Ethan's grip. Amos threw a punch towards his midsection, but the young man slid out of reach at the last possible moment. He was still somewhat shaken by Amos' attack. "Fucking... bastards," he huffed. "You'll pay for that." Brother Ethan suddenly collapsed, clutching his stomach. I heard Amos begin to chant a Benediction, but before he completed it his whole body began to shake, and he too fell to the floor, twitching.

And then Archie was pointing a gun at me.

"Please, son," I said to him. "I'm sorry they attacked you. They were out of line. They overreacted. But let's not take this any further. Let's talk. We really are just looking for my niece."

"Your 'niece,'" he said — I could hear the quotes of disbelief around the word — "is dead. If I had more time, I'd find out who you people are before shooting you. But I have places to go, so, bang. You're dead too."

He pulled the trigger. Nothing happened, not even a click. He pulled it again, looking puzzled. Then he spun around, looking all around the room. "Who is it?" he called. "Who's doing this?" He trained the pistol on me again. "Who's backing you, priest?" Then the gun fell from his hand, dissolving into fragments even before it hit the floor.

He backed away. Then he smirked. "Okay, truce. You're lucky I'm not at my best these days. You want the house? Fine, take it. But good luck holding it." He took two steps backwards, into the hall, and then ran for the door.

I looked at the Brothers. They both lay unconscious; Amos had stopped twitching; Ethan seemed to no longer be in pain. I prepared to call on the healing power of St Luke when I heard a voice behind me.

"Uncle Tony? Is that you?"

As I turned, Harriet walked towards me, and then she collapsed into my arms.





New Tactics

A cell of hunters who train together can learn Tactics that will help them against one or several magicians. Whether they prefer to strike at the witch directly, gather information on her, prevent her from thinking straight, or disrupt her rituals, a cell always has options. Often, the Tactics a cell chooses will depend on what they know of witches, and as they accumulate more practical experience, their preferred means of attack changes. This is a natural progression — but often hunters must remind themselves that the old ways remain just as viable when faced with a new threat.

Compression

Several Tactics in this section and in the *Hunter: The Vigil* Core Book cover activities that can span a long period of time. Shadowing a target or performing extensive background research can take several days, yet the Tactics involved reduce these activities to a single instant or contested action. Some players may feel wronged that their investigative superstar is reduced to the primary or secondary actor in a Tactic while another player shines during a longer slice of play simply due to investing in combat Skills. Likewise, some Storytellers may prefer to expand the tasks of a secondary actor due to the occurrence of something dramatic.

Tactics that represent extended actions do so to speed up role-playing. Say a cell attempts to infiltrate a biotechnology laboratory to discover the source of mysterious crab-like creatures flooding the city's sewers. They could use an “Infiltration” Tactic, which covers taking part-time jobs, meeting managers, and working their way in the slow way. From the group's point of view, playing through that in real-time would be a drag, and the Tactic mechanics are a useful way to shortcut right to the point where the characters are in position and something dramatic happens.

On the other hand, Tactics aren't always the right way to go about things. When a cell tries to shadow a target, the Shadowing Tactic (see below) is often the best way to go. Just occasionally — say if one of the hunters rolls a dramatic failure, or if the target is especially paranoid — the Storyteller might decide that the situation has become too dramatic for just the Tactic roll. In that case, the situation shifts to place more detail on the actions of the hunters and their tactics. It's a good idea if a shift back to dramatic action happens when the hunters are all together, or when there's a good chance for them to get together quickly. That way, one or two players don't get the lion's share of the spotlight.

Corruption

Prerequisites: All: Manipulation 2, Occult 1. Partial (1): Expression 3 (primary actor). Partial (1): Empathy 2 (secondary actor). Partial (1): Occult 3

Requires: 2; more than 2 bestows a +1 to the primary actor for every extra hunter

Dice Pool: Primary: Manipulation + Expression. Secondary: Wits + Empathy or Investigation

Action: Instant

Description: Witches aren't the only source of magic in the world. Houses with internal dimensions that are distinctly non-Euclidian, ancient standing stones, and places where the spirit world is just plain closer

“Witch is one who worketh by the Devil or by some curious art either healing or revealing things secret, or foretelling things to come which the Devil hath devised to ensnare men's souls withal unto damnation.”

—George Gifford,
A Discourse Concerning the Subtle Practices of Devils by Witches and Sorcerers

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

than it damn well should be. Magical energy — what some hunters know as Source — leaks into the world in these places. Some witches seek out forbidden cities and underground gardens, while others guard even the smallest incursion of Source energy into the world. Corruption is the hunter's answer to these places.

Magical places typically generate from one to five points of Source each day, though mysterious places hidden from the mundane eye may be higher. The secondary actors spend time in and around the site, trying to get a feel for the place. Each secondary actor can make one roll per day, for a number of days up to her Investigation dots. She can only "keep" one of these rolls to bolster the primary actor, but can choose which one to use — normally the one with the most successes. Once the secondary actors have made their rolls, one must roll Intelligence + Occult to work out the best way to twist the area's feel (if the primary actor has Occult 3 or more, skip this part of the Tactic as he can work out the right patterns himself). The primary actor then enacts a ritual designed to alter the resonance of the area.

Each cell has its own rituals, though often they're flavored by the hunters' affiliation. The slight twists to counter a given area's feel are often worked into standard rituals. The Malleus Maleficarum has several forms of exorcism rites that apply to places rather than people, while the hunters of Ashwood Abbey typically enact depraved sexual rites at the location. Less religious groups have their own rituals: the Cheiron Group seed the area with tailored forms of viruses descended from the common cold, while Null Mysteriis perform experiments designed to disprove the etheric resonance of the site.

Organizations: The Aegis Kai Doru has a good understanding of sacred geography and the places where the walls between worlds may be thin. They use this Tactic to lock down such places, denying their energies to the conspiracy's foes. Members of the Long Night don't always realize what they're doing when they do it, but their fevered prayers have chased eldritch forces from the world many a time.

Potential Modifiers: Target area has a very obvious resonance (+3 to secondary actors); target area generates more than four points of Source a day (+2 to secondary actors); hunters spend more than one week observing the site (+2 to all applicable secondary actors); Wits + Occult roll is an exceptional success (+2 to primary actor); area is a nexus for spirits, ghosts, or other obvious supernatural phenomena (+2 to all participants) secondary actor has Unseen Sense Merit that applies to mysterious places (+1 to appropriate hunter); area is frequented by monsters (-1 to secondary actors); target area has a particularly subtle resonance (-2 to secondary actors); target area is hard for normal people to access (-2 to primary actor); Intelligence + Occult roll is a failure (-2 to primary actor); target area is a known "supernatural" area — Stonehenge, Easter Island, etc. (-5 to all participants); Intelligence + Occult roll is a dramatic failure (-5 to primary actor).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The cellmates get their plans wrong — dead wrong. The area generates twice as much Source over the next week, and the cell may have got the attention of a powerful spirit or ancient ghost.

Failure: The ritual doesn't properly mesh with the feel of the area. For all they try, the hunters don't accomplish anything.

Success: The hunters come up with a ritual that alters the feel of the area and enact it correctly. Subtract the number of successes rolled from the amount of Source that an area generates each day to get the new amount generated for the next seven days. Successes over and above that number become additional days that the site doesn't generate Source — if the area normally generates three points of Source and the primary actor rolls four successes, the site now generates no Source for the next eight days.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the effects of a success — giving the hunters a chance to nullify even the strangest of places — smaller sites are disabled for longer. Each success over the amount needed to depower a site keeps it powerless for another three days, not one. If the area normally generates three points of Source and the primary actor rolls six successes, the site generates no Source for sixteen days: seven initially, then three more for every success over the three needed initially.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience, 10 for the Long Night, 8 for the Aegis Kai Doru.

Distraction

Prerequisites: All: Composure 2, Brawl 1. Partial(1): Expression 2 (secondary actor). Partial(1): Brawl 2 or Weaponry 2, Stealth 1 (primary actor)

Requires: 2; more than 2 bestows a +2 to primary actors; more than 4 gives a -2 to all actors

Dice Pool: Primary: Dexterity + Stealth. Secondary: Presence + Expression

Action: Instant and contested; opponent rolls Wits + Composure (resistance is reflexive)

Description: Witches wield great powers, but for all that hunters can tell they can't do so instantly. They need at least a few seconds to marshal whatever eldritch energies they wield and focus on a target. The more powerful the magic, the more time it takes. That's what this Tactic is for, to give a witch one target when the rest of the cell uses that delay to their advantage.

Note that like the Disappear Tactic (**Hunter: The Vigil**, p. 221), one secondary actor supports several primary actors.

One hunter has to bite the bullet. He makes himself a nice target — the more powerful and dangerous the better. It's a terrible risk. If his teammates aren't good enough, he's fucked. If he's lucky, it's a quick death. While he makes himself a target, the other hunters fade out of the witch's sight. Taking advantage of the distraction, they can strike from where the witch least expects. The Storyteller's roll for the witch (Wits + Composure) is then compared to each of the primary actors' rolls.

Example: A cell of hunters is fighting a witch who's more powerful than they first thought. They decide that a Distraction is their best bet. There are four hunters: Alexis, Barry, Cassandra, and Dan. Dan's toting the latest in Task Force: VALKYRIE's monster-killing arsenal, and is volunteered to be the secondary actor. He makes a big show of cocking his gun and drawing a bead

on the witch, and his player rolls three successes on his Presence + Expression roll. The other players roll Dexterity + Stealth + 2 (from the number of hunters) +3 (from Dan's successes). Alexis rolls four successes, Barry two, and Cassandra five. The Storyteller rolls the witch's Wits + Composure and gets three successes. The witch is aware of Barry and Dan, but Alexis and Cassandra are free to strike from the shadows.

Organizations: The Knights of Saint George know a lot about witches. They capitalize on the weak spots in their opponent's powers to take witches down. Members of the Union have an implicit trust that allows one member to feel better about putting himself in danger to give his colleagues a shot at a target with a hefty wrench.

Potential Modifiers: Target is engaged in ritual magic (+2 to all participants); secondary actor is obviously a threatening target, such as being the only hunter brandishing a weapon (+1 to secondary actor); secondary actor has wounded the target (+1 to secondary actor); nearby area has places to hide — deep shadows from candlelight, or easily available cover (+1 to +3 to primary actors); nearby area is open and brightly lit (-2 to primary actors); target is using powers that don't require concentration (-2 to all actors); secondary actor is obviously less armed than primary actors (-3 to secondary actor).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The witch sees through the obvious deception. She knows where all the hunters are, and can direct her magic at any of them.

Failure: The Storyteller rolls more successes for the witch than a player does for a primary actor. The witch knows where the hunter is, and can target her normally.

Success: The primary actor's player rolls more successes than the Storyteller. The witch loses track of the hunter, and cannot target him until he acts against her. If the hunter attacks her next turn, the witch does not apply her Defense to the roll.

Exceptional Success: The primary actor's player rolls more successes than the Storyteller and rolls an exceptional success. The monster has no idea what the hell is going on. The witch loses all her Defense against all participants — not just those who were successful. If the hunter who gains an exceptional success would normally act on a lower Initiative than the witch, he instead acts as though his Initiative is one higher.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience, 10 for the Union, 8 for the Knights of Saint George.

Excision

Prerequisites: All: Wits 2, Medicine 2. Partial (1): Intelligence 3, Medicine 5 or Medicine 4 with Specialty in Brain Surgery (secondary actor). Partial (1): Dexterity 3, Medicine 4 (primary actor).

Requires: 3 or more; more than 3 adds +2 to the primary actor's roll, more than 6 imposes a -2 modifier instead.

Dice Pool: Primary: Dexterity + Medicine. Secondary: Wits + Medicine or Intelligence + Medicine (secondary actor with Medicine 5)

Action: Extended

Description: What hunters know as witches aren't always strange practitioners of magic. Many more are blessed — or cursed — with a gift that stems from within. Some of these psychics can cast their perceptions out of their bodies, or see the past and future. Others can have more tangible effects, setting fires or hurling objects. A few can dominate the wills of others, using their mind to steer otherwise innocent people. While nobody's sure what causes these psychic phenomena — autopsy results, even full-brain dissection, are as unique as the psychics involved — it's possible to short out the area of a psychic's brain that knows how to access her powers. Saying it's not easy is an understatement. The hunters attempting this Tactic are attempting highly experimental brain surgery. If they fail, they'll leave their subject a vegetable. If they succeed, on the other hand, they give psychics the chance to live a normal life — whether they want to or not. After the first experimental surgeries, a cell attempted the same Tactic on a witch with a significant degree of success. Some cells specialize in using this Tactic against even powerful witches, believing they can live a better life without access to their powers.

The secondary actors prepare the subject and monitor him during the procedure. Unlike most brain surgery, this procedure involves a general anesthetic. Though this increases the risk to the patient, it also means her powers won't trigger during the surgery. One of the secondary actors points out the precise locations that require electrostimulation (rolling Intelligence + Medicine). Unlike other such Tactics, there's no way for the primary actor to shortcut this roll — this is a very complex and dangerous tactic. The primary actor stimulates specific areas of the brain with an electronic probe, shorting out the reflexive memories that allow a subject to access her powers.

The primary actor needs to gain five successes for every dot the patient possesses in the Gifted or Gnosis Merits, and each roll represents one hour of surgery. Note that if this tactic is used on a subject other than a witch or psychic, it will not have normal results. A human, shape-shifter, or other living creature is treated as if the surgeon rolled a dramatic failure. Vampires, zombies, and other things made more of dead flesh than living suffer no effects but are probably awake and aware throughout the surgery.

Organizations: Only a few cells of hunters even know this Tactic is possible. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of them contain employees of the Cheiron Group. They use the Group's medical know-how to rehabilitate witches, allowing them to live a life free of pain — and extracting anomalous growths from the subject's brain for further study. Members of Ashwood Abbey have no such moral reason. The thrill of experimental brain surgery is hard to beat, and even when it doesn't work they can find something useful to do with the result.

Potential modifiers: Primary actor has Medicine as an Asset Skill (+2 to primary actor); hunters are working in a state-of-the-art operating theatre (+1 to all participants); hunters have administered an MRI scan while the witch uses her powers (+1 to primary actor); subject is a willing participant (+1 to all participants); hunters are working in a standard operating theatre (-1 to all participants); hunters are working in a poor-quality operating theatre, such as a county hospital



or a high-quality improvised theatre (-2 to all participants); patient's powers can affect the physical world: psychokinesis, pyrokinesis, elemental magic, etc. (-2 to secondary actors); hunters are working in an improvised area, such as a warehouse kitted out with stolen gear (-5 to all participants).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The doctor makes a terrible mistake. The subject may lose all long-term memories while retaining basic functions (so would be able to speak, walk, and read but would not remember friends or loved ones), or may lose mental or motor function (losing points in Intelligence, Wits, and Dexterity). The Storyteller is the final arbiter of the disaster. All participants have committed

a sin with a Morality Threshold of 3, and must make a Degeneration roll immediately.

Failure: No successes are accumulated toward the total.

Success: Successes are accumulated toward the total. If the doctor's player rolls enough successes to hit the target described above, he successfully shorts out the psychic's control centers. The patient suffers six points of lethal damage as part of the surgery which must heal normally, and loses access to the Gifted and Gnosis Merits and all associated powers.

Exceptional Success: Many successes are accumulated toward the total. If the doctor's player rolls five or more successes over the total required, then the surgery went exceptionally well. The subject loses the Gifted and Gnosis Merits

VICTIMS OF EXCISION

The Excision Tactic uses the rules for witches as presented later in this chapter (see Gutter Magic, pp. 135-142). Storytellers who use the rules in **World of Darkness: Second Sight** or **Mage: The Awakening** to detail their foes, or who include hunters as foes in their games should use the following rules.

When using this Tactic against psychic characters, total up the number of dots of Psychic Merits that the subject possesses, and double it to find the total. If the hunters only want to remove one Psychic Merit, the primary actor suffers a -4 modifier on his roll, but only has to gain a number of successes equal to (dots in that Merit x 2).

Against mages, the number of successes required is twice the mage's total Arcanum dots, plus her Gnosis dots. For example, a witch with Gnosis 3, Fate 2, Forces 3, Mind 1, and Prime 2 would require 19 successes in total.

Hunters who use this Tactic don't have to use it against unwilling targets. A character who sees her gift as more a curse than a blessing might contact a sympathetic group engaged in psychic medical research. Some characters might even bribe the hunter cell to investigate ways of increasing their abilities — or removing the powers of a foe.

Also, don't think that great story hooks can't come out of this: what happens to the mage when he decides to pursue surgery or demonic favor to regain his magic? Once his magic is regained, couldn't he become an even deadlier and more fiendish foe to the cell?

Dice Pool: Primary: Dexterity + Brawl - target's Stamina. The primary actor suffers no called shot penalties as the witch is thoroughly subdued at the time of attack. Secondary: Strength + Brawl; Wits + Medicine (secondary actor with Medicine 2).

Action: Instant

Description: Many hunter cells want to capture witches without killing them. Some cells hope they can redeem the witch, either convincing her to give up her powers or using them to help her community. Other cells see the witch as a source of information, using intensive questioning and torture to get the location and capabilities of her coven. Still others just want a quiet chat about all this "magic" stuff that the witch claims to use, but wants home-turf advantage. Whatever their reasoning, they all have a need to take witches alive. This Tactic is designed to do just that, by striking at pressure

and all powers, but only suffers four points of lethal damage which must heal normally. All hunters who participated in this Tactic regain a point of Willpower.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Ashwood Abbey, 9 for The Cheiron Group.

Headshot

Prerequisites: All: Strength 2, Brawl 2. Partial (1): Dexterity 2 (primary actor). Partial (1): Medicine 2 (secondary actor).

Requires: 2; up to 4 adds one die to secondary actors for each extra hunter. A maximum of 4 hunters can use this Tactic.

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

points on the head. That way, the witch can't concentrate — and can't use her magic against the cell. All it takes is someone who knows enough anatomy to work out precisely where to strike.

The secondary actor(s) first grapple the target. See pp. 156-158 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for information on Grappling (note especially the section on multiple people grappling a single target). This roll to grapple the creature is not part of the Tactic, rather it's just the set-up — in other words, the initial roll to grapple does not add dice to the primary actor's roll. Once the creature is grappled and one secondary actor overpowers the creature successfully, all of the secondary actors' players make their rolls (Strength + Brawl). This roll is to stop the monster thrashing around, giving the primary actor a chance at hitting the right spot on the monster's head. One of the secondary actors then rolls Wits + Medicine to point out where to strike, which is usually the temples (if the primary actor has Medicine 3 or more, skip this part of the Tactic as he can work out where to hit by himself). The primary actor then strikes the pressure points, dazing the target.

Organizations: Null Mysteriis often use this Tactic to their advantage. They have a burning need to know how this so-called magic works, but most witches aren't willing to talk. Stunning them and removing them to a more appropriate location can make a witch more talkative. Task Force: VALKYRIE officially doesn't capture witches, and it especially doesn't put them through extreme interrogation techniques to find the names and addresses of their fellow supernatural terrorists. That'd be un-American. But desperate times call for desperate measures.

Potential Modifiers: Secondary actor's Size rating is greater than that of the target (+1 to applicable secondary actor); primary actor has trained in a martial art that focuses on hitting pressure points (+1 to primary actor); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants); Wits + Medicine roll fails (-3 to primary actor); target has reinforced skull, via magic or other powers (-2 to primary actor).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor strikes one of the other hunters. The primary actor's player rolls a new attack against that hunter, without the bonus dice from the secondary actors. This attack subtracts armor, but ignores Defense. Damage is applied normally for an unarmed attack. Worse, the target automatically escapes the grapple.

Failure: The hunter misses the mark, his blows not precise enough to strike the pressure points and daze the target. He doesn't do any appreciable damage, and the creature can immediately try to escape the grapple (see p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Success: The hunter strikes true. The creature does not take any damage, but suffers a -1 die penalty for every success that the primary actor's player rolled. This penalty reduces by 1 each hour until it hits zero. The creature cannot use any supernatural powers that require concentration (such as magic) until the penalty inflicted is reduced to zero. The first time a witch

uses her magic after the penalty returns to 0 automatically suffers a Paradox (see p. 138), even if she doesn't have Gnosis 5.

Exceptional Success: The target is knocked unconscious for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. This trauma to the target's brain causes any ongoing effects of her supernatural abilities — including those that no longer require concentration — to immediately cease. This only applies to effects of the target's supernatural powers: if another witch had cast a spell granting the target armor then that spell would remain, but if the target had granted luck to a companion, that spell would end immediately.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Null Mysteriis, 9 for Task Force: VALKYRIE

Interrogation

Prerequisites: All: Manipulation 2, Subterfuge 1, Intimidation 1. Partial (1): Academics 2 or Computer 2 (secondary actor). Partial (1): Intimidation 2 (secondary actor). Partial (1): Subterfuge 2 (primary actor).

Requires: 3 or more.

Dice Pool: Primary: Manipulation + Intimidation. Secondary: Presence + Intimidation, Intelligence + Academics or Computer

Action: Extended and contested

Description: Witches traffic in secrets. Some are purely magical: ancient spells or the location of fountainheads of magical power. Others are more mundane. The principles of sympathy and contagion are real for many witches. Knowing the name on a witch's birth certificate, holding a copy of the high-school yearbook that voted her "Most Likely to Go Nowhere," or a set of photographs of her mundane family all hold sway over a witch. Many fear that other witches could get that information and use it to turn deadly powers against them. Others have a quite legitimate fear of law enforcement getting hold of that information and linking today's supernatural insurgent with last year's nebbishy college student activist.

A hunter cell using this Tactic has to gather some information on the witch, usually by digging through public records. This is a roll by one or more of the secondary actors of either Intelligence + Academics or Intelligence + Computer, depending on whether he looks on-line or through public archives. A total number of secondary actors can support the primary actor in the next step equal to the number of successes gained on this roll. If the cell has previously completed a Profiling Tactic against the same target, this step can be skipped and the number of secondary actors equals the number of successes rolled for that Tactic.

The primary actor questions the target, pumping for information. In amongst the usual questions designed to make the target more likely to answer, there are a few the cell really wants answered. Throughout the questioning, the secondary actors mention what they've found. One might mention the target's bank balance and account number, another might remark on the color of his wife's eyes, while a third drops his mother's address into conversation and the fourth mentions his son's school. Having all his secrets laid bare like this is incredibly unsettling for anyone, making the target all the more likely to answer the important questions.

The primary actor rolls once per hour. The subject resists with Composure + Subterfuge. The primary actor must gain a number of successes equal to the target's Resolve + Composure, while the subject must score more successes than the primary actor's Composure + Empathy. If the subject reaches her target before the primary actor, she can derail the whole interrogation.

Organizations: While they've come a long way from the Inquisition, the Malleus Maleficarum still know a hell of a lot about putting their targets under duress. They're careful never to threaten, only imply that they know. The Loyalists of Thule, on the other hand, see no harm in threatening the secrets of others — especially if those others know or even just suspect the Loyalists' true history. It's a dirty job, but without it there'd be no chance of finding the truth.

Potential Modifiers: Hunters have previously completed a Shadowing Tactic on their target (+3 to secondary actors); hunters have previously completed an Identification Tactic on their target (+2 to all participants); primary actor is a Cop, Detective, or other profession with experience interviewing people (+1 to primary actor); hunters uncovered old information — an ex-girlfriend rather than the target's current wife (-1 to primary actor); questions revolve around things that the target would rather die than give away (-2 to all participants); hunters attempted a Shadowing or Identification Tactic against the same target but failed (-2 to all participants); hunters attempted a Profiling tactic against the same target but failed (-4 to all participants); target honestly has no idea about any questions asked (-4 to all participants).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If the subject suffers a dramatic failure at any point in the proceedings, he believes he has deflected the hunters' questioning but has actually told them the answer to another question. If the primary actor rolls a dramatic failure, he believes the target has answered all his questions when in fact all he has are lies.

Failure: No successes are gained toward the total.

Success: If the interviewer's player rolls more successes than the target's Resolve + Composure, then the interviewer can ask a number of questions equal to his Investigation dots which the subject will answer truthfully. If the Storyteller rolls more successes for the subject than the interviewer's Composure + Empathy, the Tactic fails and cannot be used on the subject again.

Exceptional Success: If the target achieves an exceptional success, she's destroyed the interrogator's confidence. The primary actor suffers a -2 modifier to all Social rolls for a day. If the interviewer achieves an exceptional success, the subject loses a point of Willpower in the face of extreme questioning.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience, 10 for the Loyalists of Thule, 8 for the Malleus Maleficarum.

Shadowing

Prerequisites: All: Wits 2, Stealth 1, Investigation 1. Partial(1): Investigation 3 (primary actor). Partial(2): Stealth 2 (secondary actors)

Requires: 3; more than 3 bestows a +1 to secondary actors rolling Stealth for each extra hunter.

Dice Pool: Primary: Intelligence + Investigation. Secondary: Wits + Investigation or Stealth

Action: Instant

Description: Similar to the Identification and Profiling Tactics, a cell uses this Tactic to gather information about their foe. The cell follows her for several days to find out where she goes and what she does with her time, and build a pattern of her life. Each secondary actor follows the target for a set period, before handing her off to another, doing her best to ensure that the target doesn't realize she's being followed. Some cells prefer to make their handoffs in person, using eye contact and hand signals, while more technologically advanced groups favor having one man in overall control from a separate location and using cell phones — especially text messaging — to co-ordinate the secondary actors. Though the hunters on the street don't know if the handover went well, this method gives off less signs that the witch is being followed.

A cell can shadow their target for a number of days. Each secondary actor can make one roll per day, for a number of days up to her Stealth dots. She can only "keep" one of these rolls to report to the primary actor, but can choose which one to use — normally the one with the most successes, though if the witch had got to one secondary actor beforehand, he might prefer to keep a dramatic failure. The primary actor may join his cell on the street, but only makes the Intelligence + Investigation roll.

Organizations: The Knights of Saint George are masters of this technique, using what they know of witches to identify which parts of a target's daily routine are the best places to strike. Task Force: VALKYRIE likewise excels in recon operations, with one man coordinating an army of Men in Black to build a comprehensive picture of a target and identify other threats. Though these groups are the best of the best, cells of all three tiers and all organizations make use of this Tactic. Those who don't often don't survive.

Potential Modifiers: Target's routine doesn't vary day-to-day, making repeated observations easier (+3 to secondary actors); target has a distinctive look — blue hair in an otherwise businesslike area of a city, or an Armani suit in the middle of an artist's community (+2 to secondary actors); a member of the cell has Contacts: Police and the target moves through an area with security cameras (+2 to primary actor); primary actor took part in the shadowing (+2 to primary actor); a member of the cell has Contacts who are likely to notice the target (+1 to secondary actors); a member of the cell has Stealth 4 or higher (+1 to secondary actors); the cell members are all on the street, communicating by eye contact and hand signals (-1 to secondary actors); the target is naturally wary or paranoid (-1 to secondary actors); secondary actors are not local to the area (-1 to secondary actors); the target's movements change dramatically from day to day (-2 to primary actor); no secondary actors roll Wits + Stealth (-1 to all secondary actors); the target's Wits + Composure is higher than the highest Dexterity + Stealth in the cell (-2 to secondary actors); the target becomes invisible or otherwise unable to follow (-4 to all participants).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor builds what he thinks is a routine for the witch, but gets it dead wrong — the

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

cell could attempt a break-in while the witch is home, or misidentify an alt-culture coffee shop as a haven for witches.

Failure: The primary actor can't build a workable routine for the target, or builds one that is obviously wrong compared with observations from the ground. The cell can attempt to shadow the target again, but all secondary actors start with a -2 modifier.

Success: The primary actor assembles a working model of the target's daily routine, and identifies potential weak spots. If the cell plans and carries out an assault or raid against the target using their routine, they gain a pool of extra dice equal to the number of successes on the primary actor's roll (to a maximum of +5). These extra dice can be added to "preparatory" rolls, including Empathy, Investigation, Larceny, Stealth, and Subterfuge rolls, as the Storyteller deems appropriate. Once the witch realizes the hunters are on to her (either because they try to kidnap her, fail a Subterfuge roll, or otherwise draw attention to themselves) the extra dice in this pool are lost. On the first action of an assault, the witch's Initiative is set to one less than the lowest Initiative in the cell.

Exceptional Success: The hunters not only assemble a model of their target's daily routine (as for a success), they identify a number of the target's companions as also being of interest. If the cell attempts the Identification or Profiling Tactic (see **Hunter: The Vigil** page 224 and 227) on one of those companions, the primary actor in that Tactic receives a +1 bonus.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Task Force: VALKYRIE, 9 for the Knights of Saint George.

System Shock

Prerequisites: All: Dexterity 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1. Partial (1): Dexterity 3, Firearms 2 (primary actor).

Requires: 2; more than 5 levies a -2 penalty to the primary actor

Dice Pool: Primary: Dexterity + Firearms. Secondary: Presence + Athletics.

Action: Instant

Description: The counterpart to Distraction, this Tactic is for more organized hunters who want to implement surgical strikes. Commonly used as a first strike, this Tactic capitalizes on the fact that most witches need a moment's concentration to use their power. Whether they burst through the door with SWAT gear, flash-bang grenades, and tear gas, or offer a more civilized distraction by taunting the witch without making the first move, the majority of the cell gives the witch something to focus on. One hunter hangs back. Traditional witch-hunters prefer shotguns, high-powered rifles, or any handgun chambered for .44 magnum shells for their relatively certain chance of putting a witch in the ground permanently. Those who prefer being able to talk to their targets afterwards use rubber bullets, tranquilizer rounds, or Tazers to stop witches in a less lethal way.

Unlike Distraction, System Shock focuses on overloading the target's senses. The secondary actors make a lot of noise and catch the witch's attention, presenting possible targets. Before he can do anything, the primary

actor pulls the trigger. Though this target is mostly useful against witches, some cells have put it to good use against werewolves — though sacrificing lots of hunters just to put a silver bullet through the beast's heart is seen by many as grandstanding.

The primary actor needs to score enough damage to stun the subject of this Tactic. Normally, this calls for a head-shot, giving the primary actor a penalty of -3 (see p. 165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for called shot rules). Note that if a secondary actor fails, he's proved himself too good a target, and the witch can target him with a spell before going down. Otherwise, if the Tactic is successful, there's not enough time for the witch to bring any mystical effects to bear.

Organizations: When the Lucifuge strike against witches, they know to go in hard and fast. Their Castigation rituals can provide additional benefits when distracting a witch, and once they've subdued their target they can tell if it's demon-touched, or a stranger kind of witch. Null Mysteris much prefer interviewing witches on their own terms. They strike to subdue; better to question the witch at their own leisure than wait for his friends to break down the door and fill the room with primal fire.

Potential Modifiers: Target is unaware of the cell before they use this Tactic (+3 to all participants); secondary actors use weapons that target the subject's senses, such as flash-bangs or smoke grenades (+2 to secondary actors); the primary target is using a long-arm, and has time to draw a bead while the secondary actors move (+1 to primary actor); monster is Size 6 or greater (+1 to primary actor); monster is Size 4 or smaller (-1 to primary actor); primary actor is firing one-handed (-1 to primary actor); witch knows hunters are coming on turn before hunters use this tactic (-2 to all participants); secondary actor(s) have lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants); subject does not require concentration to use supernatural powers (-3 to primary actor).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor misses the monster, and instead hits another hunter. The primary actor's player immediately rolls an attack against a randomly determined secondary actor, without adding the dice from the secondary actors. Subtract the targeted hunter's armor, but ignore Defense. Damage is applied normally.

Failure: The primary actor's shot goes wild in the chaos around the subject. The target is unharmed.

Success: The attack deals damage as normal. In addition, the shock to her system and general chaos leaves the witch unable to use her supernatural powers for two turns per success, or two minutes per success if the combat ends sooner than that.

Exceptional Success: In addition to a greater amount of damage and nullification, the subject cannot concentrate well enough to focus on the hunters. She cannot apply her Defense against any attacks for the next turn.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for Null Mysteris, 10 for the Lucifuge.

New Endowments

Each conspiracy has its own response to the threat of witches. The Endowments detailed in *Hunter: The Vigil* are general tools for hunters who belong to specific conspiracies. These are slightly different, targeted as they are towards witches specifically. Witches don't require any special means to kill or incapacitate — compared to a werewolf or a serial killer, they hurt easy. If a cell can catch a witch unawares, they're golden. If not, these Endowments may just save their skin.

Advanced Armory

While etheric technology allows a hunter to perceive witches and strange creatures, the technicians of Task Force: VALKYRIE are still a fair way from making a truly anti-witchcraft device. Instead, they focus on weapons that disrupt the target's ability to concentrate.

Screamer Pistol (•••)

A witch who can't concentrate can't work magic. Quantifying and diverting etheric energy is hard, and fucking with someone's head is much easier. The screamer pistol generates a beam of ultra-low frequency sound. At a distance, the low-frequency sound leads to hallucinations and altered states of consciousness as the vibrations interfere with the target's inner ear. Up close the effects are more impressive, wrecking the target's ability to concentrate. In some extreme cases, the vibrations hit the resonant frequency of the human bowel, causing it to empty — sometimes called the "brown note." No mage can keep the mental image of a spell ready through that.

The pistol doesn't just work on mages. (While it affects higher brain functions, it's still pretty useless against werewolves — something in the sounds causes them to go frothing mad, like dogs hearing a certain pitch.) Anything with a sense of balance and coherent thought processes gets the full blast at range, but only living creatures with human bodies suffer the most extreme effects.

Function: A Screamer Pistol is a ranged weapon, subject to all normal rules for ranged combat. Attacking with the Screamer Pistol is a Dexterity + Firearms roll with a +3 modifier to represent the weapon's equipment bonus. As a focused beam of sound, the pistol doesn't deal damage.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Screamer Pistol unleashes a burst of low-frequency sound without any focus. Anyone within five feet, including the wielder, suffers the effects of a success. Fixing the focusing apparatus needs five successes on an extended Intelligence + Crafts roll, with each roll representing one minute of work.

Failure: The beam misses the intended target, causing no ill effects.

Success: The target suffers strange hallucinations, and cannot concentrate for at least one turn. Compare the number of successes rolled to the target's Composure. Each success above the victim's Composure is one turn above the first in which the target cannot focus enough to use any supernatural powers. (If the successes are equal to or less than the target's Composure, the victim still suffers that requisite one turn without powers.)

Exceptional Success: In addition to any other effects, the target voids his bowels. The target suffers a -3 penalty to all Social rolls for the remainder of the scene.

Special: A Screamer Pistol has no effect on creatures that don't have higher cognitive functions. Werewolves fly into a frenzy against the wielder when targeted due to their enhanced hearing.

Benediction

The Benedictions of the Malleus Maleficarum summon the powers of saints and angels. While some witches claim to have the same power source, they are heretics. The specific blessings that the Shadow Congregation use against witches make their foes well aware of their place.

Revelationes Coelestes

The Malleus Maleficarum puts forth that magic, like tainted blood, is a "pollution." Historically (and bound to the misogyny of the early order), the menstrual blood of a woman was seen as corrupt in this way, tainted with vile energies. St Birgitta of Sweden would not let her nuns ever touch altar cloths with their bare hands for this reason. It was through her "celestial revelations" (which gives the name of this Benediction) that the conspiracy conjured this prayer, which attempts to highlight the "pollution" of witches through an expression of unwilling blood-letting.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Resolve + Benediction

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter suffers intense sinus pain and a nose or mouth bleed. The sinus pain incurs no wounds, but for the remainder of the scene he suffers -3 dice to all rolls.

Failure: The prayer falls on deaf ears.

Success: Any witches within a radius equal to five times the hunter's Benediction score in yards suddenly bleed — one may bleed from the nose, another from the mouth or eyes, while a female witch might have her menses early. This causes them no wounds, but any witch affected suffers -2 dice to all rolls for the remainder of the scene.

Exceptional Success: As with success, but the penalty to the witches is now -4 dice.

Suggested Modifiers

+5 The Benediction is performed on July 23, St Birgitta's feast day

-2 The hunter performing the Benediction is already bleeding



Castigation

One of the few areas of Hell known by the Lucifuge is the well of souls, sometimes called the Formless Land. It is a place that hates everything that is, and can warp even a concept with a touch. Some of Castigation's dark blessings can turn the power of the Pit against witches.

Abyssal Bondage

Hell is a place of fire and brimstone, but it contains multitudes. Part of it is the Great Pit, the well that scours souls from existence. Some ancient tomes equate this Pit with the metaphysical Abyss, the Formless Land, or the Void. Nobody knows the truth, but they do know that witches are scared shitless of anything summoned forth from this Abyss. The witch's shadow intensifies into a pool of inky blackness, and tendrils of Abyssal energies snake into her soul, consuming the magical energy within.

The hunter cannot contain the energy of the Void within her — if she tried, she'd be lucky to end up in Hell. Instead she uses herself as a conduit, pouring the energy into a handful of her own blood. The blood must be freshly drawn at the time of the ritual. The touch of the Formless Land still chills her to the bone, reminding her of what awaits if the First of the Fallen finds her wanting. When the hunter splashes her Abyssal blood over a witch, the energies react with the arcane power that a witch calls forth, warping it beyond her control. The entities that wait in the Void lust after the life-force of pure arterial blood. It's more costly for the hunter to draw it out, but the effects can be nothing short of astounding.

Cost: 1 Willpower and one point of lethal or aggravated damage (see below)

Action: Extended (15 successes required, each roll represents 10 minutes)

Dice Pool: Stamina + Resolve

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Lucifuge is wracked by the energies of the Void as they feast upon her soul and devour her. She suffers one point of lethal damage over and above whatever injury she took for the rite to work, and loses two points of Willpower in addition to the cost of this rite.

Failure: The hunter fails to make contact with the Formless Land. Perhaps that's for the best.

Success: The hunter infuses an amount of her blood with the energy of the Abyss, using herself as a channel. She must still strike the witch in question with her blood, which is a Dexterity + Athletics roll minus the target's Defense. Each use of this ritual empowers enough blood for one attempt only, and the blood remains empowered until the next sunrise.

If the hunter took lethal damage when preparing this rite, the witch's next spell has strange effects. The spell affects a random target chosen from all possible viable targets in range — if the spell targets the witch's human ally, then all humans in the range of the spell are possible targets, including the hunters and the witch. If the casting roll succeeds, the new target takes the effects of the spell as normal. If the casting roll fails, the new target suffers the opposite effects: a

fireball cleanses its target of wounds; a sensory spell strikes the target blind.

If the hunter powered this rite with aggravated damage, then not only are the specifics of the magic altered, but the form itself twists out of control. The Storyteller should come up with a new spell from the same Mystery as the intended one, though not constrained by the witch's rating in that Mystery. The new spell affects everyone in a radius of 20 yards per dot of the witch's Gnosis.

Exceptional Success: The dark powers of the Abyss smile upon the hunter, refunding the point of Willpower and making sure they know of the hunter's existence.

Elixir

Some witches claim to be alchemists, though they lie every time. They just wish away base matter and replace it with whatever they want. The Ascending Ones know the true secrets of combining rare substances into powerful substances, and use that power to hunt the liars.

The Tallyman's Eyes (•••)

The Ascending Ones hunt many creatures. Some are obvious nightmares, with twisted flesh around their damned souls. Others wear the cloak of human form and never breach it. Slashers, witches, and stranger things look entirely human to an autopsy, never mind human sight. The Tallyman's Eyes shows that lie for what it is, unveiling the hidden essence of a witch and laying it plain in the hunter's sight. She can see the alien marks on a monster's soul that others can't. It won't highlight a serial killer, but it will bring light to people who traffic in eldritch powers. Her eyes are the eyes of Ma'at when weighing her target's heart against a feather, and she knows how the scales will fall.

The Tallyman's Eyes is a complex combination of dimethyl triptamine (DMT), alchemical reagents, and the vitreous humor from a human eye. The ingredients must be blended into a thin liquid that appears to glow softly with a green light. Most Ascending Ones place three drops into each eye to see the true weight of a human soul, but a small number inject the Elixir into their own pupils. Though this is a scary prospect the first few times a hunter tries it, the effects of the drug last far longer. The injected form doesn't wash out, though, and can lead to problems with the hunter's sight when she's not affected by the Elixir.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter is affected by a Toxicity 4 bashing poison. If injected into the eye, this is instead a Toxicity 4 lethal poison. He may resist this poison by rolling Stamina + Resolve as a contested action versus the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter receives no benefit from the Elixir, and is affected as though he had taken a mild (-1 to all dice pools and traits) dose of a hallucinogen.

Success: The Ascending One can identify the traces of otherworldly energies around a human soul. He can make a reflexive Wits + Occult roll to identify any magic-user (any character who possesses the Gnosis or Gifted Merit) in sight. He must be able to see the witch normally, but the cloud of magic around her is unmistakable. In addition, the character receives

a three-dice bonus to resist mind-altering effects from someone he knows to be a mage. The effects normally last for a number of minutes equal to the character's Resolve. If he injected the Elixir into his eye (which necessitates success on a Resolve + Medicine roll), the effects instead last for a full scene.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the effects of a success, the hunter can identify places imbued with magical energy. This is a Wits + Occult roll at a -2 modifier.

Relic

While witches are a common source of the Aegis Kai Doru's strange Relics, a few seem tailored to witch-hunters. A pocket-watch with cogs of human bone can disrupt a witch's thoughts with its ticking, while more powerful Relics can unweave all manner of enchantments.

Centurion's Gladius (••••)

Some of the Relics held in the hidden vaults of the Aegis Kai Doru were originally enchanted by witches. Others are religious in purpose, and some are stranger still. The Centurion's Gladius is one of these latter things. Only four have been found so far. Each is an old Roman sword, buried in an unmarked grave along with its owner. While buried in the ground, strange patterns formed on the corroded blades, runes that seem to writhe and twist under the gaze of anyone who inspects it. While no two swords have the same markings, they have the same properties.

A Centurion's Gladius is the weapon of a leader, the king of items. That's more than a hollow boast — an enchanted item struck with the blade is reduced to its mundane form. Though its power isn't permanent, it gives the wielder a fighting chance against witches that prefer to work their magic through tools — or to hunt down a member of the Aegis Kai Doru gone rogue.

Cost: 1 Willpower or 1 point of lethal damage

Benefit: Despite its apparent fragility, a Centurion's Gladius is surprisingly hardy. Nobody has ever managed to shatter one, and magic directed against it simply fails. It's something else, something alien to the arcane energies wielded by mages. A hunter can use that power to his advantage when confronted with a magical item. His player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Dexterity + Weaponry (if the item is wielded by a person, subtract the wielder's Defense and assume the targeted attack incurs another -2 dice). If he succeeds, any magical properties of the item simply stop functioning for the rest of the scene. The item struck is rendered entirely inert and mundane in all ways until its magic returns. If the hunter rolls an exceptional success, the item is mundane for a whole day. This ability can only be used once per day.

Each Centurion's Gladius is a corroded, weak example of a Roman sword, with a blade around two-and-a-half feet long. Though it cannot be broken, it's of little use in combat — treat it as a 1(B) weapon. When the wielder wipes fresh blood across the runes on the blade (incurring one point of lethal damage), it becomes as sharp and well-balanced as it was in life, making it a potent weapon. After activation, treat it as a 2(L) melee weapon for one scene. The wielder of the Centurion's Gladius can only use one of its powers each day.

Thaumatechnology

Witches are unique amongst monsters for not having anything biological that Cheiron can harvest. While a few enchant items or even people, a surprising amount of Thaumatechnological enhancements come from mysterious creatures that seem to eat magic.

Agonizer (••••)

Witches power their magic with energies from worlds beyond our own, and warlocks marshal powers that no sane man can fully comprehend. They're not the only ones in tune with otherworldly power. Sometimes, magic isn't the only thing to cross between worlds. Impressive magical acts occasionally bring unearthly creatures into being. While the range of creatures that crawl between the cracks of the world is vast, Cheiron agents recovered a number of unearthly creatures that feast on magical power. They've found enough that R&D believe they have to come from somewhere, but nobody's quite sure where. Some appear very similar, suggesting that they're not created *ex nihlio* but are instead fauna of some alien Realm. One such beast turns humans into thaumovores — magic-eaters. On its own the creature is no bigger than a cockroach, but it soon chooses a human host and burrows in through the base of the throat. Working through the host's body, it soon attaches itself to its target's brain. Once it's there, the bug spins new nerve fibers out through the host's body. These fibers act as an antenna, picking up on ambient magical fields and sucking them dry. The host starts acting odd, researching weird places and occult sites at the bug's insistence. Even then, parasites that Cheiron don't recover die out. There isn't much magical energy just lying around.

The Cheiron Group aren't monsters. They don't expect their field operatives to give up any part of their brain in the name of killing witches. That would be wrong. The biotech guys came up with a better idea. They trim the nerve-antennas and attach them to four half-inch metal spikes, then implant the bug on the outside of the hunter's right arm. Each spike lies flat just under the hunter's right palm. Flexing her wrist just so makes the spikes spring out. When they do, the area of palm between them turns the color of old blood.

A hunter has to keep her Agonizer happy. She can walk through an area suffused with magical energy, and the residual nerve-antenna might pick up enough magic to sate the bug. More often, she has to stick the spikes into a witch's skin. The Agonizer then eats the magic out of her victim's soul, crippling the victim with pain as it does so. If she doesn't keep her Agonizer happy, the hunter knows just how her victims feel.

Benefit: The Agonizer *eats* magic. There's no other way to put it. It can either draw magic out of areas steeped in magic, which usually keeps it happy for a week, or it must feed on the Source stored within a witch. Attacking with the Agonizer requires the hunter to touch her target: Dexterity + Brawl - target's Defense. The bug doesn't deal damage normally. Instead, every success on the attack roll drains one point of Source. If the target doesn't have enough Source, extra successes are lost. For every point of Source consumed,



the target suffers a -1 penalty due to crippling pain (to a maximum of -5). This penalty lasts until the end of the scene. If used on a target that does not have any reserves of Source, the Agonizer has no effect.

Special: The Agonizer must consume one point of Source per week, either from a witch or from a magical area. The hunter suffers a cumulative -1 penalty on all rolls per day once the week is over (to a maximum of -5). Feeding the Agonizer instantly removes this penalty.

Example: Oscar's had a bad week. His Agonizer ran dry on Monday, and by Wednesday night he's in intense pain. Fortunately, his cell has got a lead on a witch. The others distract her while Jack plunges his barbed palm into her back. He gets lucky, rolling two successes even with his -3 modifier. The witch loses her two points of Source, and suffers a -2 modifier on all rolls until the end of the scene. Oscar stops suffering the -3 modifier immediately.

Goetic Gospels (•-••••; Special)

Couched in Christian iconography to ease new recruits into the bizarre faith of the order, the Goetic Gospels of the Knights of Saint George are nevertheless a key text in the dragonslayers' religion. To those who have attained the First Revelation, it is a forgotten teaching of Jesus Christ, in which he gives his Apostles the power not only to cast devils out of others, but also to "cast out the devils from thine own soul, and turn them to the vexation of thy enemies." To those Knights who attain the higher Revelations, the Goetic Gospels are a many-layered mystery, containing increasingly complex ciphers that provide secret knowledge on the ancient gods of the Knights of Saint George. All recognize it as a powerful tool in a witch-hunter's arsenal, and every active member of the order is expected to study the disciplines found within.

Unlike most Endowment Merits, but similar to the Safehouse Merit, the Goetic Gospels Endowment is broken up into distinct categories, each of which must have individual dots assigned to it. The three categories of Goetic Gospels represent the three Goetic Gospels themselves and the hidden secrets of witch-hunting to be found within: the Gospel of Agares, which teaches the Knight the ways of disrupting and destroying magical effects (such as destroying a warding barrier, countering a witch's spell or unraveling the spell that creates a mystical abomination); the Gospel of Amon, which teaches the hunter to vex witches directly by tormenting them with demons and magnifying the witches' own flaws; and the Gospel of Beleth, which teaches the dragonslayer to poison the magical energy from which witches draw their power. The Gospels themselves are holy texts, named for de-

MEDITATIVE STATE

To use many of the powers of the Goetic Gospels, the hunter must be in a meditative state. The Meditation action is described on p. 51 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**; to be in a "meditative state" means the character has achieved four successes on the meditation action within the current scene. If a hunter suffers a wound in one of his last three Health boxes, fails a degeneration roll, or expends all of his Willpower, he loses the meditative state and must regain it by earning four successes on a new meditation action.

With the exception of total Willpower expenditure, the conditions that cause a hunter to lose his meditative state don't prohibit him from re-attaining it. A Knight of Saint George can meditate, for example, even with a wound in his third-rightmost Health box; if he suffers another wound in one of the next two rightmost Health boxes, he again loses his meditative state. A hunter cannot attain a meditative state for the purposes of Goetic Gospels if he has no Willpower remaining. A meditative state lasts until the end of the scene.

A Goetic Gospel "meditative state" is not precisely the same sort of meditation commonly practiced by New Age enthusiasts or mystics seeking union with divinity. A Knight's meditative state is one of synchronicity with the darkness both within and without, a feeling of perfect emptiness which clings to the hunter like a shroud. He feels no pain or joy while in this state, only a complete and utter absence. It takes a significant stimulus, such as grievous bodily harm or the crushing guilt of degeneration, to shatter the emptiness of the meditative state.

mons because each tells how Christ can allow a man to vanquish that demon's hold on his soul.

Each of the three Gospels is rated from one to five dots, each with a different power associated with it. A Knight of Saint George may never have more than five total dots in Goetic Gospels without going mad. If a player buys his character more than five dots, each dot above the fifth incurs a severe derangement (of the Storyteller's choosing). Thus, some choose to focus on a single Gospel, mastering its tenets completely, while others prefer to spread out and learn the basics of all three. Some go for broke and accept the madness that comes with power.

Whenever a Goetic Gospel's power calls for a character's "Goetic Gospels" dots, use the total dot rating he possesses, not the dots assigned to the specific Gospel. Likewise, experience point costs for Goetic Gospels are based on the total number of Merit dots the hunter possesses. Buying the fourth dot of Goetic Gospels costs eight experience points, whether that dot is the fourth dot of a single Gospel or the first dot of a new one.

Example: Sir Thomas has four dots in Goetic Gospels, with two assigned to the Gospel of Agares and one each to the Gospel of Amon and the Gospel of Beleth. When he uses the one-dot power of the Gospel of Beleth, *What's Mine Is Mine*, the activation roll calls for his Presence + Goetic Gospels. He adds four dice to his dice pool for his Goetic Gospels rating, even though he only has one dot assigned to the Gospel of Beleth.

Later, he decides to buy the fifth dot of Goetic Gospels and advance his knowledge of the Gospel of Beleth to two dots. This still costs 10 experience points, since he already has four total dots in the Merit.

A Knight may reassign his dots through a period of meditation, prayer, and mortification of the flesh at any time. To do this, the Knight must spend one full night (from dusk till dawn) in seclusion, preferably in one of the order's cloisters or at least an Anglican church, meditating on the Revelations and scouring his flesh with a "discipline." The hunter must accept one point of lethal damage per dot of Goetic Gospels he wishes to reassign to another category.

The Gospel of Agares

Many witch-hunters consider this Gospel to be the most "important" to their work from a practical standpoint, as it deals directly with the witch's most potent weapon: her Dragon-gifted sorcery.

• The Lie of the Heart

Witches are cunning creatures, and they often booby-trap their lairs with defensive spells and magic alarms to warn them of intruders. A hunter must be able to avoid those pitfalls, and by focusing on his own sins of dishonesty, he can invoke a demon of falsehood from his own soul, whose lies shield him from a witch's active spells.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Wits + Goetic Gospels

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter actually begins to believe the whispered falsehoods of the demon, which befuddles his mind. For the rest of the scene, he gains a single minor Derangement of the Storyteller's choice.

Failure: The hunter is unable to manifest the Lie of the Heart and thus cloak himself from magic.

Success: The demon of deceit manifests from the hunter's soul and whispers its lies to the world. The demon "tricks" active spells into not recognizing the hunter's presence; any time the Knight would be affected by a spell that affects anyone in a given area (for example, trying to step through a warded door or into the area of a spell that curses any within its effect), compare that spell's dot rating to the Knight's Goetic Gospels rating. If the hunter's Endowment rating is higher, the hunter does not suffer the effect.

Exceptional Success: As above, but treat the hunter's Goetic Gospels rating as one dot higher when comparing it to spell levels.

This power does not actually counter or dispel the magic, it merely causes the hunter not to register to the spell. It like-

wise has no effect on spells cast directly on the Knight; only spells that would affect anyone in the spell's area of effect.

To use the Lie of the Heart, the Knight must be in a meditative state. The effect lasts until the end of the scene.

• Crocodile Armor

According to the Goetic Gospels, the god-king Agares appears as an old man riding on a crocodile, carrying a goshawk on his fist. By meditating upon the crocodile as a symbol of his own sloth, the Knight calls forth a minor demon which can deflect the magic a witch hurls at him.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Stamina + Goetic Gospels

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Knight actually renders it easier for a witch to target him with magic. For the rest of the scene, any spell that directly targets the hunter gains the 9-again rule.

Failure: The dragonslayer is unable to summon the crocodile-demon to protect him.

Success: The crocodile demon manifests itself to protect the hunter; for the duration of the scene, he gains a number of points of Armor equal to his dots in the Goetic Gospels Endowment. This armor only functions against spells or attacks made with enchanted weapons.

Exceptional Success: The Knight's power is so strong and sure that the armor persists until the end of the scene even if he loses his meditative state.

•• Agares' Goshawk

By meditating upon his own wrath, the Knight conjures forth an ephemeral demon in the form of a goshawk that picks away at the threads of an existing spell, such as a mystic ward that prevents entry or a spell that imbues a weapon with preternatural strength, slowly but surely unraveling it.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Extended and contested; each roll represents five minutes of meditation on one's Goetic techniques. The hunter must score more successes than the witch scored on the initial casting of the spell.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Goetic Gospels versus the spellcasting dice pool that cast the target spell

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter's Goetic knowledge is insufficient to overcome the power of the witch's dragon-gifted magic. The unraveling attempt fails, and the goshawk-demon is banished back to the hunter's psyche, ending the duration of the power. Any successes accumulated are lost.

Failure: No successes are accumulated toward unraveling the spell.

Success: The hunter makes progress toward the destruction of the magic. When his total successes exceed those scored on the initial casting roll, the spell is destroyed and its effects end immediately. The witch who cast the spell knows the spell is no longer active, but does not gain any knowledge of how or why.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the witch who cast the spell remains unaware of the spell's destruction.

To use this power, the hunter must be in a meditative state (see the sidebar on p. 129 and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51).

•••• Envy's Barb

Though most would never admit it, many Knights of Saint George secretly envy the power witches possess. By channeling that envy into the manifestation of a Goetic demon, a vicious, barbed little creature that hates everything its creator doesn't have, the hunter can undermine a witch's power, countering a spell as it is cast. The demonic spirit recognizes the impending spell as the source of the hunter's envy and latches onto it, feeding on the energy of that emotion like a hungry tick.

Cost: 1 or Willpower, optionally 1+ points of bashing damage and 1 point of lethal damage

Action: Instant and contested; successes are compared to the successes of the spellcasting witch.

Dice Pool: Presence + Goetic Gospels, but for each point of bashing damage taken at the time of activation, the Knight gains +2 to this roll

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter's envy latches onto his own heart instead of the spell. The hunter suffers one point of lethal damage.

Failure: More successes are rolled for the witch than for the hunter. The spell takes effect, though any successes on the hunter's roll are subtracted from the total number of successes earned on the spellcasting roll.

Success: The hunter's player rolls more successes to activate this power than the witch's player rolled to cast her spell. The spell is countered, completely nullified. Any side effects of casting the spell, such as Paradox, still occur.

If the hunter so desires, he may augment this power by engaging in the practice of mortification of the flesh. Traditionally this is done with a small scourge called a "discipline," but in the field any means of inflicting harm upon oneself will do. This enhancement costs the hunter one point of lethal damage (automatically inflicted as part of the activation), but the witch also suffers one point of lethal damage per success on the hunter's activation roll beyond what was needed to counter the spell. (Mortification is also how the hunter incurs bashing damage to his own body at the time of activation to give him bonus dice to the Gospel's roll.)

Exceptional Success: No additional effect beyond countering an extremely powerful spell.

To use this power, the hunter must be in a meditative state (see the sidebar on p. 129 and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51). If the optional point of lethal damage would be sufficient to break the Knight's meditative state, this power still takes effect before the meditative state is broken.

A Knight of Saint George may use this power even when it is not his turn in the Initiative count. He may not, however, use it if he has already acted this turn, and preemptively using the power costs him his action for the turn. He must know that a spell is being cast on him and must be able to see the caster, but he need not know the nature of the spell.

••••• Flagellant's Denial

Mortification of the flesh is a powerful ritual to the Knights of Saint George. It provides them with a source of pride in their own righteousness, reminding them that their devotion is so much more than other men's. By channeling that pride through the act of mortification, the hunter conjures up a mighty demon of pride, an avatar of the demon-king Agares himself which is greater than the pride of any mere witch. By breaking the magician's hubris, the hunter denies her most potent weapons: her spells.

Cost: 1 Willpower per turn and 1-5 points of lethal damage (see below)

Action: Extended. Each roll represents one turn of self-flagellation

Dice Pool: Resolve + Goetic Gospels

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter suffers a moment of crippling self-doubt as his Goetic demon masters him. The effects of this power end immediately, and the hunter loses all unspent Willpower points.

Failure: The hunter fails to bolster his own pride sufficiently to deny more potent magic, but he may try again next turn.

Success: The hunter is able to channel his own pride into a tangible force that denies magic within his presence.

Exceptional Success: The hunter increases the maximum dot rating of a hindered spell by one, without paying an additional cost in lethal damage (see below).

Flagellant's Denial works differently than most other extended actions, in that you aren't aiming for a specified number of successes to complete the action. In effect, it's more like a series of instant actions strung together to accomplish an effect.

To use Flagellant's Denial, the hunter's player must inflict one point of lethal damage on himself (this is an automatic part of the activation action) and roll the power's dice pool. If he succeeds, any one-dot spell simply ceases to function near the hunter. Spells cannot be cast, the effects of active spells are suppressed, and so on. This effect persists within a radius of 5 yards around the hunter. The spells are not actually countered or dispelled; they simply refuse to function in the Knight's presence. Once the Knight leaves the area, any suppressed spell effect is restored.

The Knight may attempt to increase the level of spell he can suppress once per turn. To do so, he inflicts one further point of lethal damage on himself and rolls Resolve + Goetic Gospels. If he succeeds, spells of one or two dots are suppressed. He may only inflict one point of damage and increase the suppressed spell's dot rating once per turn. The Knight may stop mortifying his flesh at any time, but once he does so, he must spend another Willpower point if he wishes to resume.

Flagellant's Denial lasts for one scene.

Example: Sir Thomas and his cell face a coven of witches in an old mansion on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Thomas possesses five dots of Goetic Gospels now, all focused on the Gospel of Agares. During his first turn, he invokes the Gospel and begins to



strike himself with a cat-o'-nine-tails, inflicting one point of lethal damage on himself. His player rolls two successes on the activation roll; any witch with a Gnosis of 4 or less cannot cast one-dot spells, and any one-dot spells already cast are suppressed.

As his cell-mates distract the witches, Thomas attempts to increase the potency of the effect on his second turn. His player rolls two successes on the activation roll and scourges himself for another point of lethal damage; now any spell of two dots or less is suppressed.

During the third turn, one of the witches goes after Thomas with a fire axe. Knowing he's likely to take significant damage, Thomas elects to Dodge the attack rather than continue flagellating himself. Since Thomas has stopped actively invoking the Gospel, when his fourth turn comes around his player will have to spend another Willpower point to resume the process of the Flagellant's Denial.

The Gospel of Amon

Witches are vile, debased creatures, beset by demons of their own. This makes them easy prey for the mysteries of the Goetic Gospels, and Amon, Marquis of Hell, teaches the Knight to exploit the foibles of his foes to gain an advantage in battle.

While the Gospel itself, and the doctrine of the order, state that the following powers are used to weaken and vex witches, they actually (with the exception of the five dot power, Demon Prince of Nothing) work equally well against anyone, supernatural or mortal.

• Stolen Vice

The most basic knowledge of the Gospel of Amon allows a Knight to call forth a tiny demon of one of his own sins and send it forth to bedevil the mind of a witch, robbing her of the guilty pleasure she receives from her own wickedness.

Cost: 1 Willpower, 2 points of bashing damage (optional)

Action: Contested

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Goetic Gospels versus Resolve + Gnosis

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The demon turns on its creator; the next time the hunter regains Willpower from fulfilling his Vice, he recovers no Willpower.

Failure: The demon is unable to take hold upon the witch.

Success: The demon latches onto the witch's soul and waits until she attempts to indulge her Vice. The demon steals the energy of that emotional rush, denying the witch the Will-

power she would have gained. If the Knight chooses to augment the power by mortifying his own flesh and accepting two points of bashing damage, he receives the Willpower point instead. This cannot raise him above his normal maximum.

Exceptional Success: When the witch attempts to fulfill her Vice, not only does she fail to regain a point of Willpower, she loses one Willpower as well.

This power lasts for 24 hours.

•• Madding Whispers

From sin comes madness, says the Gospel of Amon. By calling forth a demon from the depths of his own wickedness and setting it upon his enemy, a Knight of Saint George can send madness into the mind of a witch, cursing her with strange compulsions and irrational thoughts.

Cost: 1 Willpower, 1 point of lethal damage (optional)

Action: Extended (number of successes equals target's Morality, each roll represents 10 minutes of meditation)

Dice Pool: Composure + Goetic Gospels

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter fails to master his demon and is afflicted by the very derangement he sought to inflict upon his victim.

Failure: The Knight makes no progress toward conjuring forth his demon.

Success: The Knight manifests a demon composed of his own wickedness and base urges. Once he has accumulated a number of successes equal to the target's Morality or equivalent trait (Humanity, Harmony, Wisdom, etc.), the demon goes forth and attaches itself to the witch like a psychic parasite, whispering maddening thoughts into her mind.

The witch's player rolls her current Morality rating; if she fails, she gains one mild derangement of the Knight's choice. If she succeeds, she resists the derangement. This works exactly like the potential derangement that accompanies Morality loss.

If the Knight chooses to augment the power by mortifying his own flesh and accepting one point of lethal damage, the derangement inflicted is a severe one instead. The derangement (mild or severe) lasts for 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: The derangement lasts for a full week.

The Knight need not be able to see his target to invoke this power, but he must have a photograph, video, or other accurate likeness of the victim to work with.

The Knight chooses both the derangement itself and the specific form it takes. For example, a hunter who curses a victim with a phobia might choose to give her a phobia of spiders or of heights.

To use this power, the hunter must be in a meditative state (see the sidebar on p.129 and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51).

••• Magpie Mysteries

According to folklore, the magpie is a covetous, greedy bird that snatches up anything that might catch its eye. By channeling his own greed into the creation of a Goetic demon, the Knight is able to send forth a spiritual servitor to steal a witch's power from her.

Cost: 1 Willpower, 1 point of lethal damage (optional)

Action: Contested

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Goetic Gospels versus Composure + Gnosis

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Knight loses his struggle with the demon-thief, and loses a point of Willpower to the struggle.

Failure: The mage resists the hunter's attempt to steal her magic and the power has no effect.

Success: The hunter's Goetic servitor overcomes the witch's defenses. For the rest of the scene, the witch loses the ability to cast any spell from one Mystery to which she has access (excepting the Mystery of Lore). The Knight may choose which Mystery to steal, but he must know in advance that the witch is capable of invoking that Mystery to use this power. Any spells from that Mystery the witch has already cast remain active, but she cannot modify or release the spells. If the Knight chooses to augment the power by mortifying his own flesh and accepting one point of lethal damage, the witch loses access to two Mysteries.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the Mystery remains "stolen" for a full day.

•••• Vicious Cycle

Sin calls to sin, and guilt can have a long and powerful memory. This application of the Gospel of Amon allows the Knight to call forth a demonic representation of his own sin and set it upon a witch, forcing her to relive her most shameful deeds.

Cost: 1 Willpower, 1 point of lethal damage (optional)

Action: Extended (number of successes equals target's Morality, each roll represents 10 minutes of meditation)

Dice Pool: Presence + Goetic Gospels

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Goetic demon conjured by this power turns on its creator. The hunter must immediately make a degeneration check at the same level as the most severe sin he has ever committed.

Failure: The Knight of Saint George fails to make any progress.

Success: The Knight creates a demonic being of pure wickedness and sets it on his target. The victim must make a degeneration roll at the same level as the most severe sin she has committed in her life. If she fails, she suffers a -3 penalty on all rolls and cannot regain Willpower by fulfilling her Virtue for the rest of the scene.

If the Knight chooses to augment the power by mortifying his own flesh and accepting one point of lethal damage, the degeneration roll is made as though for a sin one level worse than the target's actual worst sin.

Exceptional Success: The power lasts for 24 hours.

The Knight need not be able to see his target to invoke this power, but he must have a photograph, video, or other accurate likeness of the victim to work with.

To use this power, the hunter must be in a meditative state (see the sidebar on p. 129 and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51).

•••• Demon King of Nothing

The most potent and esoteric teaching of the Gospel of Amon, this power requires the Knight to mortify his flesh while meditating upon a kernel of pure nothingness deep within his soul. The Knight draws this nothingness out, and from it conjures a being the Gospel calls the “Demon King of Nothing.” This demon attaches itself to the target witch, infecting her soul and corrupting her magic.

Cost: 1 Willpower and 1 point of lethal damage, 1 additional point of lethal damage (optional)

Action: Contested

Dice Pool: Stamina + Goetic Gospels versus Resolve + Gnosis

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Knight is unable to maintain his focus, and the invocation collapses around him. The mental effort of the calling drains him of all his remaining Willpower.

Failure: The hunter fails to overcome the witch’s defenses, and the power fails to take effect.

Success: The hunter earns more successes than the witch, and the Demon King of Nothing takes root in the witch’s soul. For the duration of the scene, *any* spell she casts invokes Paradox, not just vulgar spells and spells that suffer a dramatic failure. Even if the witch’s Gnosis is less than 5, she suffers Paradox on all her spells (see “Paradox,” p. 138). Should the hunter choose to augment the power by further mortifying his own flesh and accepting one *additional* point of lethal damage, all spells additionally suffer a -1 Vulgarity Modifier.

Exceptional Success: The effect lasts for 24 hours.

The hunter must be able to see his target to use this power; a photograph or video will not do.

To use this power, the hunter must be in a meditative state (see the sidebar on p. 129 and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51).

The Gospel of Beleth

The Gospel of Beleth was discovered by the Knights of Saint George 45 years ago beneath a forgotten wing of an ancient temple in the Middle East. Its teachings are not yet fully understood by the order, but the Knights have deciphered three of the hidden Goetic teachings within its text, and scholarly dragonslayers suspect there are yet more to be uncovered.

• Gluttonous Devourer

Gluttony is often an underrated sin in this day and age, but the Knights of Saint George understand its demonic influence and how it may be turned to righteous use. By meditating on the concept of gluttony and invoking the principles of the Goetic Gospels, the Knight conjures forth a ravenous imp that lives only to consume, and its food of choice is Source.

Cost: 1 Willpower, 1 point of lethal damage (optional)

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Wits + Goetic Gospels; subtract target’s Resolve

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The imp gluts itself on its creator, consuming one point of Willpower.

Failure: The Gluttonous Devourer fails to take form.

Success: The spirit coalesces and battens itself onto the target witch, where it remains for up to 24 hours. As long as it remains attached to its victim, the spirit prevents the witch from generating or receiving Source. The Devourer consumes one point of Source per success rolled on the activation of this power, at which point it vanishes.

Should the hunter choose to augment this power by mortifying his own flesh and accepting one point of lethal damage, the witch finds even the act of attempting to generate Source physically and mentally exhausting; she loses one point of Willpower each time she attempts to generate Source.

Exceptional Success: In addition to being able to consume a prodigious amount of Source, the imp remains attached to its victim for one day per dot the Knight has in the Goetic Gospels Merit.

The hunter must be able to see his target to use this power; a photograph or video will not do.

•• Servitor of Sloth

Sloth, like Gluttony, is often an overlooked Vice. It lacks the sexiness of Lust or Wrath, or the glamorous connotations of Envy, but in the hands of a Knight of Saint George, it remains a potent weapon. By channeling a demon of Sloth and setting it upon a witch, a Knight can force her to exert tremendous effort just to expend her energies and cast a spell.

Cost: 1 Willpower, 1 point of lethal damage (optional)

Action: Contested

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Goetic Gospels versus Resolve + Gnosis

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter is overcome by his own sloth; for the rest of the scene he must spend an additional point of Willpower to activate any Endowment. If he cannot spend this Willpower in the same turn as the Endowment or Tactic (for example, if the ability itself costs Willpower), he must spend it in the turn immediately prior.

Failure: The Servitor of Sloth dissipates and has no effect.

Success: The Servitor of Sloth burrows into the witch’s soul, infecting the source of her power with a supernatural lethargy and general malaise. For the rest of the scene, whenever the witch spends a point of Source, she must also spend a point of Willpower. If she cannot spend this Willpower in the same turn as the Source (for example, if the spell she casts also costs Willpower), she must spend it in the turn immediately prior.

Should the hunter choose to augment this power by mortifying his own flesh and accepting one point of lethal damage, the witch must succeed on a roll of Resolve + Composure as a reflexive action to be able to spend Source. This roll comes before the Willpower expenditure.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the effect lasts 24 hours.

The hunter must be able to see his target to use this power; a photograph or video will not do.

To use this power, the hunter must be in a meditative state (see the sidebar on p. 129 and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51).

••• Poison Baubles

Most witches aren't content to merely gather Source when they require it; they harvest it and store it diffused throughout their flesh and blood. Most describe it as a pleasantly warm sensation — like having just drunk a glass of fine brandy. Through an intense period of mortification designed to foster a white-hot wrath, the Knights of Saint George can send forth a demon from the depths of their mind to poison the Source a witch stores within herself, inflicting savage pain upon the victim.

Cost: 1 Willpower and 1 point of lethal damage

Action: Contested

Dice Pool: Presence + Goetic Gospels versus Stamina + Gnosis

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter's wrath backfires and turns on him. He suffers one point of lethal damage per point of remaining Willpower.

Failure: The witch receives more successes than the hunter, and the power fails to take effect.

Success: The hunter receives more successes, and the demon of wrath seizes the Source that circulates through the witch's body, turning it to a deadly poison. The witch suffers one point of lethal damage per point of Source she is currently storing, to a maximum amount of damage equal to the hunter's dots in Goetic Gospels.

Exceptional Success: In addition to suffering damage, the witch loses one point of Source per dot the Knight possesses in the Goetic Gospels Merit.

This power may only be used on a given target once per scene. The hunter must be able to see his target.

To use this power, the hunter must be in a meditative state (see the sidebar on p. 129 and the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 51).

Gutter Magic

Magic is both a blessing and a curse to the individuals that follow its call. By opening herself up to a broader worldview, the witch inevitably attracts the attention of the lurkers in the shadows. Learning new spells and improving magical knowledge is often as much about survival as it is any desire to probe deeper in the mystical arts. Most witches fly below the radar of hunter groups that might seek to destroy them, but those are the kind of witches that seldom cause problems anyway. No, it is the witch that seeks power for the sake of power or the witch that turns his spells on his neighbors and rivals that merit the attention of witchfinders.

This section provides an overview of the abilities of the witchfinders' prey. Along with lists of spells and general information about how magic works; this section includes some

GOETIC SPIRITS

The Goetic Gospels Endowment allows the hunter to conjure up demonic spirits from the depths of his own psyche to affect the world. Most of the time, that's just flavor text; mechanically, the powers function like those of any other Endowment.

Sometimes, though, the actual existence of these spirits matters. Some witches, werewolves, and even other hunters have the supernatural ability to detect, destroy, or even command spirits. When such a being interacts with a demon created by Goetic Gospels, use the following rules as guidelines:

- Goetic demons are completely mindless, they have no will or abilities other than to inflict the effect of a Goetic Gospels power on their designated target.
- Goetic demons may be controlled, damaged, or destroyed by any power or effect that affects demons or spirits. Assume that, for game purposes, the demon's Attributes are all equal to its creator's dots in Goetic Gospels.
- A Goetic demon lasts only as long as the power's duration. Powers that detect spirits can reveal the creature hovering around the power's target.
- A Goetic demon exorcised, abjured, or otherwise forced to abandon its target dissipates into nothingness immediately. It cannot survive without its target to give it purpose.

new Merits, commentary on the Morality of magic, and instructions on how to build witch antagonists.

Gnosis

Gnosis is the measure of a witch's magical knowledge and natural aptitude. Much of the magical power of a witch is tied to his Gnosis, with more powerful witches having greater ability due to their potency. A witch's Gnosis is also tied directly to their ability to cast spells and to affect the magic and spells of others. No one aspect of a witch is so defining as their Gnosis.

Merit: Gnosis (• to ••••)

Effect: The character has an understanding of magic and an ability to wield it. Only characters with dots in the Gnosis Merit have access to the spells of the Mysteries. The Gnosis rating of the character is an indicator of how much magical knowledge a witch can absorb as well as granting the witch access to higher tiers of Mysteries. Gnosis rating is also added to any contested dice pool to resist magical effects.

- Access to Tier One Mysteries. The witch may draw spells from one Mystery of his choice and the Mystery of Lore.

•• The witch may draw spells from up to two Mysteries of his choice.

••• Access to Tier Two Mysteries. The witch may draw spells from up to three Mysteries of his choice.

•••• The witch may draw spells from up to four Mysteries of his choice.

••••• Access to Tier Three Mysteries. The witch may draw spells from up to five Mysteries of his choice. He also gains the Unseen Sense Merit for free and now suffers from the bane of Paradox.

The Mysteries

Witches refer to the collective knowledge of magic as Mysteries. The classic definition of the word “mystery” can be summed up as a secret that cannot be revealed, only learned through experience. So it is with magic. Though a witch might have a mentor to teach her the basics of her craft, much of the knowledge she gains will be the result of trial and error.

The Mysteries a sorcerer studies flavor her spells with hints of accumulated knowledge. Even spells that have no visual component leave a feeling behind associated with the Mystery that spawned it. Spells of Fortune, for example, leave their targets with the feeling that either the odds are stacked against them or everything is going their way. Spells of Elemental fire leave the faintest hint of the heat of flames, and spells from the Mystery of Twilight inspire feelings of being watched by someone perpetually just out of sight. (Some call this an “aura” or “resonance.” Hunters can endeavor to sense this, but at some cost: success is necessary on a Wits + Occult roll, but with a -5 penalty.)

Mysteries are divided into three tiers. The first tier includes the Mysteries that are easily obtainable by people with no extraordinary ability, sometimes described as hedge magic. Second tier Mysteries require a greater dedication to magical education and some degree of natural aptitude for the craft. Finally, tier three Mysteries are the province of truly powerful witches that were born with a spark of magic in their souls. These witches describe their entry into the world of magic as an Awakening that opened their minds to mystical might.

Each Mystery, with the exception of Lore, is tied to an Attribute that most closely defines it. These Attributes, along with Gnosis, form the base of the casting dice pool.

In addition to the Mysteries listed below, all witches have access to the Mystery of Lore, which is the collected wisdom of the craft as a whole.

Tier One Mysteries

Disease: The study of and power over all kinds of diseases complete with an understanding of how to inflict and spread disease. The Attribute associated with Disease is Stamina.

Foretelling: The power to look into the future, of prophecy and knowledge of scrying. The Attribute associated with Foretelling is Composure.

Fortune: Power over random chance and luck applied to the witch and those he targets. The Attribute associated with Fortune is Wits.

Hearth: Spells of warding and enhancement that enchant the home of the witch or the witch’s friends. The Attribute associated with Hearth is Resolve.

Passion: Understanding and influence of human instincts and desires. The Attribute associated with Passion is Manipulation.

Tier Two Mysteries:

Health: The magic of healing and purity of body. The Attribute associated with Health is Resolve.

Mind: The study of mental health and discipline, including abilities often labeled as psychic. The Attribute associated with Mind is Intelligence.

Nature: The power of control over all life, eventually extending to control over the witch’s form. The Attribute associated with Nature is Presence.

Shadow: Communication with and control over darkness, shadows and the creatures hidden in the shadows. The Attribute associated with Shadow is Composure.

Twilight: Dominion over the shades of the departed and access to the Twilight. The Attribute associated with Twilight is Composure.

Tier Three Mysteries:

Elements: Control over the building blocks of the world. Most witches master only one of the elements, be it earth, air, fire or water. The Attribute associated with Elements is Dexterity.

Space: The understanding that distance is a myth, requiring only a shift in perception to overcome. The Attribute associated with Space is Wits.

Supernal: The study of magic itself and of Source, a magical resource. The Attribute associated with Supernal is Intelligence.

Time: Spells that allow the witch to alter the flow of time, twisting it to his own ends. The Attribute associated with Time is Intelligence.

Transmutation: Power over matter, sometimes thought of as alchemy. The Attribute associated with Transmutation is Resolve.

Source

The power that fuels the spells of witches is known simply as Source. This is a reference to the fact that, regardless of where a witch draws his mystical energy from, the final result is the same. Each Mystery has its own distinct method of gathering Source and most of the introductory spells of a Mystery have ways of generating additional Source.

Claiming and Spending Source

Witches gain Source as a result of demonstrating their understanding of a Mystery. Acts of obeisance, demonstrations of control, and influencing others with the power of the Mystery are all actions that demonstrate the witch’s comprehension of the magic behind that Mystery. As a reward for acting in the character of a Mystery, the witch gains Source.

MAGE: THE AWAKENING AND SECOND SIGHT

The magic system used by witchfinders is intended to represent the mystical abilities of mages and witches of all stripes, from the lonely, middle-aged woman performing love spells in her bathrobe to the Awakened mage altering the rules of reality.

Magic, as described in this section, is intended for ease of use for **Hunter** Storytellers unfamiliar with or without access to **Mage** or **Second Sight**. Storytellers with access to those books are welcome to use those systems in place of the rules presented here, or perhaps even in combination.

Listed under the heading of each Mystery is an example of how a witch might generate Source from acting in a manner sympathetic to that Mystery. As an example, one method for generating Source from the Mystery of Time is to synchronize all the clocks in a stranger's home with GMT. By performing this action the witch demonstrates obeisance to Time by ensuring all time keeping devices in the house are accurate. Lower ranking spells from a given Mystery also provide options for generating Source dependant on successful spell casting and alteration of that spell to show respect for the Mystery.

Any time a spell or activity states the witch gains Source, the witch adds one Source to his pool.

A witch can store a pool of Source equal to the total of his Stamina + Resolve ratings. Storytellers can keep track of stored Source by placing a dice on the witch's sheet, showing the amount of Source the witch has available to him and jotting down the pool of stored Source in the margins of the character sheet between games.

Whenever a spell lists the cost of casting as Source, the witch must subtract one Source from their pool. If the witch is unable to pay Source, he may not cast the spell. Not every spell requires Source to be cast. Lower ranking spells generally have no cost or require Willpower expenditure as an alternate cost.

Spells

The only reason to gain knowledge of magic is to express that knowledge in the form of a spell. A spell is the will of the witch made real, a wish given shape and substance. Study of a Mystery grants access to the spells that fall under the purview of that Mystery.

Each spell represents not only a mystical ability, but also a step on the path to mastery of the Mystery studied. Spells must, therefore, be purchased in the order they appear in the Mystery. To learn a three dot spell, the witch must have learned the first two spells in the list.

Witches may not bypass a lower ranking spell to learn a higher ranking spell.

Below is a detailed breakdown of spell listings, explaining how a spell is cast, what the requirements for casting involve, and so forth.

Action

The action required to cast the spell is either instant or extended. Spells listed with instant as their action require an action to cast. Spells described as extended require an extended action to cast, the details of which can be found in the spell description.

Occasionally the words "resisted" or "contested" appear beside the required action. Spells that are resisted subtract a Resistance Attribute of the target from their casting pool. Specifically which Attribute is used to resist the spell is described in the Dice Pool section of the spell listing. Contested spells require a roll for the target to oppose the magic of the witch. Details of which Attributes or Skills make up the contested dice pool, along with the results of a contested spell, can be found under the dice pool listing or the spell description.

Duration

The duration of a spell is either Turn, Scene or Lasting. The effects of spells with a duration of Turn and Scene are basically self-explanatory, lasting for a single turn or the remainder of the scene, respectively.

A spell with a duration of Lasting is any spell that has a permanent effect. Spells without permanent effects that last beyond a scene are also considered Lasting and the exact duration of the spell will be stated in the spell description. Even though spells that deal damage are listed as having Lasting durations, this doesn't mean wounds caused by that spell never heal! In this case, the descriptive Lasting refers to damage without a transitory effect.

Range

The range of a spell casting is described as either Self, Touch, Sensory or Sympathetic.

IDENTIFYING SPELLS

Witches and other people familiar with magic may attempt to identify a spell as it is being cast based on the feelings provoked by the spell and any chanting or arcane gestures that accompany the casting. To correctly identify a spell, the witness rolls Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis as a reflexive action. If the roll gains a number of successes greater than the dot rating of the spell, the spell has been correctly identified. Obviously, magically-inclined individuals have an advantage in identifying spells, but characters of more mundane backgrounds can still attempt the feat.

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

Spells with a range of Self only affect the caster of the spell. Spells with Sensory listed as their range may be cast anywhere within line-of-sight of the caster and if the caster is blindfolded or otherwise impaired the casting will suffer a -2 penalty.

Spells listed with a range of Touch require the witch to touch his target before he may cast the spell. Against unwilling targets or in combat situations this requires a successful Strength + Brawl roll (subtracting a target's Defense where appropriate). Once the witch has achieved physical contact he may cast the spell as an instant action in the following turn.

Spells with a range of Sympathetic require some sort of physical connection between the witch and the target of his spell. In the case of a living target, a sympathetic connection can be formed by possession of an item commonly worn or carried by the target, or by acquiring hair, fingernail clippings, blood or other leavings of the target's body. To form a sympathetic connection to a place the witch must have visited that place at least once or form a sympathetic connection with that place by holding an object (a handful of dirt, a branch, a brick and so on) taken from that place, during the casting. A sympathetic connection to an object can only be formed by holding a fragment of the object.

Cost

The cost required to cast a spell is described as either Source, Willpower or None. When either Source or Willpower is listed as the cost, the witch must pay one of the required resource to cast that spell. Remember, any time Source is listed as a cost or a gain the witch always spends or stores exactly one Source. Spells listed as having None as the cost require, of course, no expenditure.

Dice Pool

Two of the three elements that make up a casting dice pool are determined by the Attribute associated with the Mystery of the spell and the Gnosis of the caster. The third element is always a Skill.

The casting pool can be modified by such factors as Paradox, resisted spells or wound penalties, just like every other roll. When the casting pool is modified by a Resistance Attribute, that Attribute will be identified in the dice pool description.

Spell Description

Directly below the dice pool listing is the spell description. The spell description will describe the effects of a successfully cast spell as well as other details pertinent to the casting of the spell.

Paradox

Reality operates under a specific set of rules that allow the universe to function in a consistent and predictable manner. Magic defies these rules to impose the will of the witch over reality. For most witches, the magic they perform rarely upsets the balance of reality enough to cause a reaction. The magic of truly powerful witches (Gnosis 5) can build up in an area with repeated castings until reality responds by negating the spell of the witch.

Not every spell cast by a witch with Gnosis 5 results in Paradox. Only spells with obvious effects, described as Vulgar spells, have a chance to cause Paradox. Any spell that results in effects with visual components of an unexplainable nature is considered a Vulgar spell. Mundane witnesses to Vulgar spells increase the likeliness of Paradox by alerting reality that something is amiss. Witches can attempt to disguise Vulgar spells by timing them to coincide with mundane events, thus avoiding Paradox. Storytellers are the final judge of which spells are considered Vulgar and whether attempts to conceal the spell are successful. Vulgar spells are subject to the following modifiers.

Vulgarity Modifiers (penalties are cumulative)

-1 for each Vulgar spell cast in the scene

-1 for casting Vulgar spells in the presence of mundane witnesses

Vulgarity Modifiers are subtracted from the casting pool. Failed casting rolls that have been modified by Vulgarity cause Paradox and the caster suffers one point of bashing damage. Casting rolls that result in a dramatic failure that have been modified by Vulgarity also cause Paradox. The caster takes bashing damage as described above and suffers additional narrative effects that stun the caster for one turn. The narrative effects of a dramatic failure that results in Paradox can include such elements as the witch bleeding from the eyes, causing a rain of frogs, summoning a lesser demon, or whatever else might seem most interesting for the story.

Example: The Storyteller wants a witch to use "Casting the Towers" (see p. 161) to throw a fireball at the hunter chasing her. "Casting the Towers" is a spell with an obvious Vulgar effect, which subtracts one dice from her pool (Vulgarity) and it is being cast in the presence of a mundane witness, which subtracts another dice from his pool (Vulgarity) for a total of -2 dice. If the Storyteller fails the casting roll, the spell will cause Paradox and Rory will suffer one point of bashing damage.

Arcane Experience

Basic character creation of a witch results in a character of middling power and experience. Tailoring witches more appropriate to the power level of the chronicle can easily be accomplished by adding extra spells to the character. Examples of the appropriate number of bonus spells to add are shown below.

Initiate	+2 spells
Apprentice	+3 spells
Disciple	+4 spells
Adept	+5 spells
Master	+6 spells

Psychics and Mutations

Not every character in the World of Darkness with paranormal abilities can be properly classified as a witch. Some people are born with powers that defy logic, some pick up a trick or two from their experiences and some are enhanced (sometimes

GIIFTED HUNTERS?

Hunters may select the Gifted Merit with Storyteller approval. A Gifted hunter is something of a dichotomy: a witch-hunter with the power of witches. A hunter so empowered, especially a hunter that intentionally learned his Gifts, might begin to ponder the real difference between himself and the people he persecutes. This can lead to some interesting moral dilemmas, inspire character development, and provide fuel for continuing themes and storylines in the chronicle.

intentionally, sometimes not) with unusual abilities by their encounters with unnatural forces. Otherwise ordinary humans with such powers are called the Gifted by witches.

New Merit: Gifted (• to ••••)

Prerequisite: Five-dot Gifts are available at character creation only. A character may not have both the Gifted and Gnosis Merits.

Effect: The character has either an inborn or learned paranormal ability. Each time this Merit is purchased the character may select one spell with a dot rating equal to the Gifted Merit rating from the Mysteries section as a Gift. Gifts function exactly like the original spell except that any Source cost is paid instead with Willpower and the Gifted character never gains Source. Substitute the dot rating of the Gifted Merit for Gnosis rating to determine casting dice pool or for any spell effect based on Gnosis. The powers of the Gifted never cause Paradox and characters may purchase multiple Gifts.

Drawback: Channeling magic through the body in this unconventional fashion can have unpleasant side effects, especially in the case of the more powerful Gifts. Tier-two spells selected as Gifts cause one point of bashing damage (headaches, strange patterns of bruises) to the Gifted the first time they are activated in a scene, and tier-three spells selected as Gifts cause one point of lethal damage (nose bleeds, heart palpitations) to the Gifted the first time one is activated for the scene.

The Morality of Magic

Astute readers will notice no mention of Morality in the spell descriptions later in this chapter. The moral effect of the use of a spell is left for Storytellers to determine, based on the same rules for Morality (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 91) used for mortals. Magic itself is just a tool and is intrinsically amoral (regardless of what the hunters think); it is how that magic is used that defines Morality. Any time the end result of a spell breaks the Morality threshold of the witch, the character should roll for degeneration.

Designing Mysteries and Spells

Though the Mysteries and Spells presented in this chapter are intended to cover a broad spectrum of magic, Storytellers will inevitably desire to design their own.



Designing a Mystery

Step 1: Theme

Every Mystery has a unifying theme with the spells in that Mystery defining different aspects of that theme. Select a theme that is narrow enough in focus to unify the Mystery as a whole yet broad enough to allow some leeway for the spells contained. A Mystery based on smoke has a broad enough theme to allow interpretation for a variety of spells, while a Mystery based on cigarettes is too specific to allow for much variety.

Step 2: Source

Each Mystery should have some method of generating Source, other than the one and two dot spells. This method can be based on activities relevant to the Mystery, Virtues and Vices or Merits, and shouldn't require magic to perform.

Step 3: Tier

The last step is to decide the power level of the Mystery and assign it a tier. As a rule of thumb, Mysteries of narrow focus belong in higher tiers than Mysteries with a broad focus. This might seem somewhat backwards, but the narrower the focus of the Mystery, the more authority the witch gains over the focus of that Mystery — and the more potent it can be.

Designing a Spell

The spells of a Mystery should all follow the theme of that Mystery and build on each other, where possible. A one-dot spell that allows the witch to recognize elements of the Mystery should lead to a two-dot spell that gives the witch power over the element recognized. The basic framework for designing spells, by dot, is shown below.

One-Dot Spells

- rarely require expenditure
- are of limited or restricted use
- have effects limited to self
- affect others with a Willpower cost, or at a penalty to the caster
- are of short duration
- provide Source for later spells

Two-Dot Spells

- rarely require expenditure
- have an effect that is limited to self or single target
- affect others with a Willpower cost, or at a penalty to the caster
- are duration of scene length or less
- may cause bashing damage
- when cast with a target become Resisted or Contested actions
- allow the caster to control base life forms (plants, insects)
- provide Source for later spells

Three-Dot Spells

- require an expenditure, usually Source
- may affect multiple targets or have a small area of effect
- allow for durations past scene length with additional expenditure
- give personal stat boosts or enhancements
- may cause lethal damage
- allow the caster to control animals

Four-Dot Spells

- require an expenditure, usually Source
- allow more powerful multiple target spells and larger area effect spells
- allow for durations past scene length without expenditure
- may cause aggravated damage
- allow the caster to control humans

Five-Dot Spells

- require an expenditure, usually Source
- cause truly powerful and unique effects
- may include large, scene length, stat boosts or enhancements
- allow major modifications to dice pool of self or others

The minimum rank of the spell is determined by the most powerful effect in the spell. For example, a spell with a single target that causes lethal damage should be a minimum of a three-dot spell. The action required to cast a spell should be based on common sense. If the task of casting the spell seems particularly difficult, requires concentration, or if the spell targets objects larger than Size 4, the spell should require an extended action. Spells that are easily cast on the fly or require little effort should be cast as an instant action.

Ritual Magic

Magic is usually the result of the will of a single practitioner triumphing over the rules of reality to create spell effects. For individuals without the knowledge or ability to manage these effects alone there exists the option of cooperative magic, in the form of rituals. Ritual magic is a far slower and more tedious form of the art than that practiced by most witches, but it does work. In ritual magic, the will of the group (coven or cabal) allows the witches to cast spells that they wouldn't be capable of individually. The practice of ritual magic gave birth to such concepts as spell components, day-long chanting and specific numbers of witches required to cast a spell.

It is important to note that anyone with a solid understanding of the occult (Occult Skill at two dots or more) can contribute to a ritual; possession of the Gnosis Merit isn't required.



Casting a Ritual Spell

Any spell from the Mysteries may be cast via ritual magic. The dot rating and tier level of the spell chosen contribute to the complexity of the ritual to be performed, with lower tier and dot spells being fairly simple to perform and higher tier and dot spells being more difficult. Shown below are the number of witches required to cast each dot rating of spell, the total success needed to complete the spell, and the number of unique ingredients that need to be collected for the spell. Spells that require more than five hours to cast needn't be cast at one go, but can be cast in several convenes as long as at least one witch (the cabal can alternate) concentrates on and maintains the ritual until completion.

Dot Rating	# of Witches	Successes	# of Ingredients
1	3	10	3
2	5	15	4
3	7	30	6
4	9	50	7
5	13	75	9

The tier of the spell affects the quality and rarity of the exotic ingredients that must be gathered in preparation of, and for use during, the ritual.

Tier one ingredient examples: toadstools, incense, pure water, various herbs, ritual tools (athame, wand, chalice, sword), sympathetic representations of the target (pictures, voodoo dolls) and candles.

Tier two ingredient examples: eye of newt, blood from an unborn child, tears from a virgin, ashes from the combined burning of the sacred woods, continual recitation of the name(s) of the target, use of glyphs and sigils and animal sacrifice.

Tier three ingredients examples: fresh hemlock flowers gathered during the dark of the moon, a physical representation of the target carved from the wood of Yggdrasil, an apology from the unrepentant, the horn from a demon, bodily fluids of a saint, a vial of water taken from the Sea of Tranquility and human sacrifice.

Ingredients are handled differently for different spells — one ritual might demand that they each be turned to ash and inhaled, while another might simple require them to be laid out, end-to-end, during the chanting or whatever ceremony is necessary.

Once the cabal has collected ingredients and the proper number of witches, the spell is cast by the leader of the cabal, called the hierarch. The hierarch creates his dice pool as described in the spell listing, ignoring Gnosis, with each additional participant adding +1 dice to his pool. This is an extended action with each roll representing a half hour.

REAGENTS AND INGREDIENTS

Even if the witch isn't performing ritual hedge magic, she can still make use of ingredients to allow her Source to "flow more easily" into the magic she commands.

The witch can add up to three ingredients — ones apropos to the tier of the spell she hopes to cast — to gain a bonus to the casting roll. Each ingredient offers a +1 bonus to the roll. How the ingredient is applied is up to the Storyteller — maybe the witch consumes a newt's eye like an aspirin or must crush a scarab with a mortar and pestle to release its spirit. Alternately, some "ingredients" might actually be tools meant to focus the magic: a diviner's rod, a lucky coin with an 'x' carved into the metal, a demon's paw on a chain.

Example: The cabal wants to cast "Guardian's Wrath" (see p. 161) to rain fire down on the safehouse of the local hunter cell. This is a tier-three spell with a dot rating of five that requires the cabal to gather 13 witches for the ritual as well as at least nine unique ingredients. The hierarch rolls Dexterity + Occult (as described in the spell listing) +12 dice (+1 dice for each additional participant) with each roll representing a half hour. The ritual takes a total of 14 hours to complete over the span of four days. Assuming the cell doesn't uncover the plot, at the end of the fourth day, fire rains from the heavens onto the safehouse.

Spells learned as rituals are often plucked from various mystical or blasphemous sources: occult or demonological tomes, friezes or tombs of old buried temples, or inscribed upon strange relics. (Though, let's be frank: sometimes, if a wannabe witch knows where to look, she might be able to find lower-dot spells on the Internet.)

Demonic Investment

Ritualists and witches alike foolish or brave enough can find help in learning magic by bringing demons into the equation. Greater demons (**Hunter: The Vigil**, p. 284) can offer to teach spells. For each dot in the spell the witch wishes the demon to teach, the demon will ask for the completion of one task. These tasks likely are beneath the sorcerer's current Morality level, or alternately might involve summoning another demon to this world.

It's not always necessary for a witch or ritualist to seek the demon, either. Demons *will* seek those out who wish to do magic but don't know how to achieve what they desire. A band of troubled boys who find themselves endlessly bullied may be paid a visit from a greater demon that will gladly show them a ritual (i.e. a spell) that allows them to slake their vengeance without getting caught. (Note that this can serve as an inciting incident for a new hunter, too — either one of the abused boys denies the demon and takes up the Vigil, or one of the bullies survives the onslaught with the knowledge in mind that something isn't right.)

Mysteries

Mysteries are the meat and potatoes of a witch's spell casting. Each Mystery is dedicated to a single idea and the study of that idea begins with a simple expression of the complexities of the Mystery in the form of a spell. As the witch begins to gain a greater understanding about the idea that forms the core of the Mystery, she gains greater mystical power and can express that understanding in the form of more powerful spells. Some witches feel the word "mystery" is too old-fashioned and somewhat over-dramatic for common use and may replace Mystery with words like Study or Path instead.

Lore

Varies

Source: Lore spells generate no Source, nor does the Mystery of Lore grant Source from any particular activity. Lore spells instead draw on Source generated by other Mysteries.

The Mystery of Lore represents common magical knowledge known to witches regardless of their ability or particular areas of knowledge. The form and usage of Lore spells will vary from witch to witch, but the end result is the same. A witch with aptitude in the Mysteries of Foretelling and Fortune surrounds herself with the power of fate to protect her from harm, while a witch that studies the Mysteries of Disease and Shadow relies on disrupting the concentration of an assailant with wracking coughs or visions of half-formed imagery to diminish the potency of an attack.

Like other spells, the Mysteries a witch knows will flavor Lore spells with distinct elements of the mystical powers possessed by that witch. A Lore spell cast by a witch following the Mystery of Passion might cause pulse rates to soar or evoke memories of the first time the target had sex, while the same spell cast by a witch who favors the Mystery of Twilight might bring on cold shivers and goose bumps. Storytellers should emphasize these differences during play to highlight the feel of the Mysteries favored by a witch.

All witches have access to the Mystery of Lore regardless of their Gnosis rating. Lore has no governing Attribute.

Gaze of the Wise (•)

The most basic power shared by all witches is the ability to see through illusion and pretense. This spell also allows the witch to note the traces of power left by spells and magical effects. The piercing gaze of a witch sees all and is unimpressed by obfuscations.

Cost: None

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Scene

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Gnosis; subtract target's Resolve if unwilling subject

With success on the casting roll, the witch gains a +2 bonus on any roll to pierce illusions or notice obvious attempts at subterfuge (hiding an object in plain sight, lies, and intentional oversights). The witch can also see the mystical presence of spells or magical effects on a person, place or thing as well as sense if Source has been expended in a particular place within the last 24 hours.

The witch may attempt to identify the type of magic present by studying the phenomenon, then rolling Intelligence + Occult. This is an extended action requiring a number of successes equal to the Gnosis + 5 of the caster of the spell the witch is studying. Each roll of the extended action represents one minute. If the witch succeeds on the extended action she can correctly identify the Mystery used. Magical type effects that are not the result of a Mystery (powers used by a werewolf, for example) register as *unknown*, though it is possible a witch could grow to recognize the signature of other magical effects as belonging to a specific type of entity.

The effects of the spell are basically the same if cast on someone (the target gains the +2 bonus to pierce illusions) other than the witch, except the witch must spend Willpower to affect others and mundane individuals may not attempt to identify magical spells and effects.

Mystic Shield (••)

The World of Darkness is a dangerous place to live, even for witches. Overzealous hunters, ambitious underlings, and the random horrors of the night all pose serious threats to the health and well-being of a witch. By deflecting physical threats with mystical misdirection, this spell helps mitigate those dangers.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Self

NEW MERIT: TALISMAN (•, •• OR ••••)

Witches often find it necessary to protect friends or loved ones from physical threats. The solution to this problem is the creation of a Talisman to protect their mundane acquaintances. A Talisman is attuned to one owner and if it is sold, traded, or stolen, it loses its power. The owner of a Talisman must spend a point of Willpower to activate its power for one scene. For whatever reason, the magic that goes into the creation of a Talisman causes the magic to malfunction when worn by a witch or other paranormal being. Consequently, only normal humans can benefit from wearing a Talisman. Some Talismans are more potent than others: one dot grants an Armor rating of 1, three dots grants Armor with a rating of 2, and five dots provides an Armor rating of 3. Armor protects against both bashing and lethal.

Dice Pool: Stamina + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll, the witch gains an Armor rating (proof against all physical attacks) equal to her Gnosis rating for the scene. If the witch wishes to extend the duration of the spell to 24 hours, she must spend a point of Willpower during the casting.

Evil Eye (•••)

For centuries, the average man has rightfully feared to draw the wrathful gaze of a witch. An angry glare enhanced with magical might can stop hearts, rupture veins, and collapse lungs. When the time comes for aggressive action, witches turn to this spell.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Gnosis; subtract target's Stamina

Each success garnered on the casting roll deals one point of bashing damage to the target. Magical damage generated by this spell ignores the Defense and/or Armor rating of the target.

This spell may be purchased multiple times. If purchased at four dots, the spell deals lethal damage and if purchased at five dots, deals aggravated damage. Casting the five-dot variant of the spell requires the witch to spend a point of Willpower as well as Source.

Resolute Spirit (••••)

The Bible claims there is no rest for the wicked and, wicked or no, many witches force themselves to persevere beyond the boundaries of conventional wisdom.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Stamina + Occult + Gnosis

For every two successes accrued on the casting roll, the witch regains one point of Willpower (minimum of one). Use of this spell is no substitute for actual rest, however, and witches that push themselves for too long without a full night's sleep still suffer from the effects of fatigue (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 179).

Unravel (•••••)

Spells can be likened to a woven tapestry. For those with the knowledge, pulling the right string can unravel the whole thing.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Gnosis

Before the witch can begin unraveling a spell she must first successfully identify that spell with, "Gaze of the Wise" (see above). Once the type of

spell has been determined, Unraveling the spell is an extended action with a target number of successes equal to the Gnosis + 10 of the caster of the spell to be unraveled. Each roll of the extended action represents 15 minutes. If the unraveling is successful, the target spell or magical effect is dispelled.

Possible modifiers for the roll: -2 dice if the magic is non-human in nature (vampire, fae, promethean); -1 dice if the magic stems from a Mystery not studied by the witch; +1 dice if the magic stems from a Mystery studied by the witch.

Tier One Mysteries

Tier one Mysteries are the most basic of magic a witch can study, but, as any witch-hunter will tell you, “basic” shouldn’t be misconstrued to mean “weak.” All magic, with its ability to alter the fundamental rules of reality, is powerful when applied creatively to a problem. Witches don’t speak in terms of tiers when they discuss magic; instead they refer to this grouping of magic as *initiate* Mysteries. Tier one Mysteries include power over Disease, Foretelling, Fortune, Hearth and Passion.

Disease

Stamina

Source: The witch gains Source each day she is afflicted by any kind of disease.

Few things have the power to cause terror like the looming specter of disease. Otherwise brave men have been known to tremble in fear at the prospect of a wasting illness. Historically, outbreaks of the plague are met with excessive force and are followed by periods of deep civic unrest. Whole families and towns have been put to the torch by rioting crowds of anxious citizens; their fear of disease overcoming their compassion.

Witches that follow the teachings of the Mystery of Disease seek to gain power from fear. No healers of innocents, these witches, who seek instead to plant disease and spread panic, reaping for themselves a gruesome harvest.

General rules for disease may be found in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 176.

Blight (•)

For centuries, blame for the loss of crops or domesticated animals from disease or blight has been laid at the feet of witches. More often than not this was simply a case of superstitious paranoia. Sometimes, though, paranoia is justified.



Cost: None
Action: Instant
Duration: Lasting
Range: Sensory
Dice Pool: Stamina + Survival + Gnosis

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch can affect a 30' by 30' area. Plants or animals inside the area affected begin to sicken and waste away; they develop disgusting weeping lesions or a flesh-colored creeping mold, at a rate of two points of bashing damage (or Structure) each day. By spending a point of Willpower during the casting, the witch can draw power from the decay she has created. If this option is selected, the spell only inflicts one point of bashing damage each day, but the witch can claim Source from the blight.

For purposes of this spell, healthy crops are considered to possess three to six points of Structure.

Fever (••)

After mastering the ability to spread disease among the lower life forms, the next step for witches' studying this Mystery is to successfully infect humans.

Cost: None
Action: Instant and Resisted
Duration: Scene
Range: Touch
Dice Pool: Stamina + Medicine + Gnosis; subtract target's Stamina

Diseases inflicted by this spell are more inconvenient than life-threatening, with cold or flu-like symptoms. The victims suffer from a variety of normal symptoms such as pounding headaches and double vision to more bizarre maladies like phlegm the color of bread mold or spontaneous painful cysts that form on the tongue and genitals. All these symptoms fade when the spell expires.

With success on the casting roll, the target suffers a -2 penalty on all actions for the remainder of the scene. By expending one Willpower during the casting, the witch may extend the duration of the spell to 24 hours. In this case, the penalty is reduced to -1 dice and the witch gains Source.

Corruption (•••)

Once a witch has developed a taste for inflicting suffering on other humans, most witches yearn for power over diseases that can kill. Witches must be cautious with such pestilences lest they become victim to their own power.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant and Resisted
Duration: Lasting
Range: Touch
Dice Pool: Stamina + Medicine + Gnosis; subtract target's Stamina

Diseases caused by this spell are much more dangerous and can be contagious. The diseases caused are supernatural in origin and have no names, unless given a name by the afflicted. Lack of a proper medical descriptive certainly doesn't diminish the virulence of the disease. The exact symptoms of the disease vary from witch to witch and directly relate to other Mysteries studied. The diseases of witches that have

only studied Disease and Lore will produce relatively mundane symptoms, such as a dangerously high fever or pneumonia-like infections in the lungs. The Mystery of Passion might influence the disease by wracking the victim with paroxysms of intense pleasure, Twilight could cause a calamitous drop in body temperature or Transmutation might transform a portion of the victim's blood into a fluid inimical to the body.

For each success on the casting roll, the witch inflicts a set number of disease stages on their target (see below). With an exceptional success on the casting roll, the witch has infected her target with a communicable disease. Anyone (including the witch) who spends more than five minutes in close proximity to the target (or comes in direct contact with body fluids of the target), without protective equipment, must succeed on a Stamina + Resolve - disease stage roll, or contract the disease themselves at that stage.

Each stage of the disease causes either bashing or lethal damage and requires a certain number of successes on Stamina + Resolve rolls to overcome. Checks to overcome disease are rolled once daily and any damage caused by the sickness is dealt after the check. Once the victim has overcome a stage, he moves down to the next stage of the disease until he overcomes the sickness completely. Proper medical attention can also assist in overcoming the disease in the form of bonus dice to the Resolve + Stamina roll. A victim tended by a nurse or physician (or a successful Intelligence + Medicine roll) adds +1 dice and hospital care adds +2 dice.

Stage to Overcome	# of Successes	Damage
1	1	2 bashing
2	1	3 bashing
3	2	1 lethal
4	2	1 lethal
5	3	2 lethal

Plague Rat (••••)

Some of the worst plagues in human history have been spread primarily by rats and fleas. This spell uses animals as disease carriers when a witch values subtlety over direct confrontation.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Lasting
Range: Touch
Dice Pool: Stamina + Animal Ken + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch prepares an animal for use as a disease carrier. Once the animal is prepared, the witch then embeds a casting of "Corruption" (see above) into the animal. This particular casting of "Corruption" is contagious regardless of successes rolled and will spread as described in the "Corruption" listing. The "Corruption" spell becomes active within 24 hours at a time set by the witch during the casting. Until the spell becomes active, the animal seems completely healthy and shows no signs of illness.

Ravage (.....)

Although it can be rewarding to watch an enemy slowly waste away to disease, sometimes a witch requires expediency. This spell speeds up the ravages of a disease crafted by the witch, forcing the victim to suffer all the symptoms of the disease in the span of a few seconds, rather than days.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Contested

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Stamina + Occult + Gnosis; target rolls Stamina + Resolve reflexively

The target of this spell must already suffer from the effects of the "Corruption" spell. For each success gained on the casting roll the witch forces her target to roll per turn to overcome the "Corruption" disease. Each failed roll deals the damage listed for the disease Stage currently suffered by the target. It is possible for a victim to completely burn through the disease by succeeding on every check they are required to make as a result of this spell.

Foretelling

Composure

Source: Destruction of sympathetic items grant Source when using spells on others. Meditating over divination tools (Tarot, runes, bones, bird guts) grants Source.

Parting the mists of the future is a time honored tradition for witches. The image of a wizened crone staring into the depths of a glowing crystal ball is iconic. Witches don't limit themselves to a hunk of mineral for their divinations, however. Tarot cards, runes, bones, pendulums and a variety of mind altering substances all assist the witches in their work. These props aren't strictly necessary for a witch with true power, but many use them regardless out of a respect for tradition or because they know it's what their customers expect.

Glimpse (•)

Looking into the future is a chancy thing. Events are always in motion, possibilities are always changing. Looking into the near future is more reliable and can be incredibly helpful in the right situations.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Turn

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch gains a split-second glimpse into the near future. During combat this gives the witch a +5 bonus to her Initiative for the rest of the combat. In non-combat situations this foreknowledge can provide a witch with a second's warning in case of attack or point her attention at important details, granting her a +2 bonus on a Wits + Composure roll made in the next few seconds. Repeated castings of the spell do not stack.

Alternately, by spending a point of Willpower, the witch may cast the spell on an ally. The target gains +3 to

Initiative or a +1 bonus for a Wits + Composure roll and the witch gains Source.

In The Cards (••)

With this spell the witch gains the ability to gaze farther into her own future, as well as the future of others. On a practical level, conjuring food is problematic and even a witch needs to eat. Casting the future for customers is an accepted way of earning money.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch may ask three questions about her future. These questions need to be specific in nature to receive a reply and the answers received are of the yes or no variety. "Will I die tonight?" is fine, while "Will I like my dinner?" is too subjective (too many variables).

Alternately, by spending a point of Willpower, the witch may perform this spell for someone else. That person receives their three questions and if the witch is paid for her work, she gains Source.

This spell may only be cast once each chapter for an individual.

Obviously, only the Storyteller knows (he hopes!) what is going to happen in the future, still, taking notes of fortunes told is a good idea.

Crystal Ball (•••)

Divination isn't restricted to future events. Frequently, knowledge of current events or the location of someone or something is also important. The iconic witch discussed earlier is just as likely to be spying on the neighbors as she is to be looking into the future.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Scene

Range: Sympathetic

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action requiring a total of five successes. Each roll is equal to five minutes. When successful, the witch may attempt to locate an object, person or place to which she has a sympathetic connection. The distance a witch's mystic gaze can travel is based on her Gnosis.

Gnosis	Distance
1	50 Miles
2	100 Miles
3	500 Miles
4	Continent
5	Earth

The spell creates a shimmering magical window that the witch alone can see and hear through. If used to spy a person, the target may roll Wits + Occult - the Gnosis rating of the witch to notice the attention. With success, the target gets

the feeling that someone is watching them. Those with the power to do so can attempt to counter the spell by using "Unravel" (see p. 143) or "Nix" (see p. 163). Targets that successfully counter the spell may not be spied upon for 24 hours.

The witch can only locate the object, person or place by the general surroundings. Exacting directions to the target of this spell are outside the scope of the divination.

Prophecy (•••)

Through the centuries, warriors, kings, priests and the wealthy have sought out oracles for prophetic insight. Just like in the stories, the subject of the prophecy doesn't always receive good news. The power of the prophecy isn't absolute, however, and tales abound of heroic individuals who have defied their fate.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Scene

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action that requires a total of 10 successes. Each roll is equal to 15 minutes. A witch that uses hallucinogenic substances, deprivation or other mind-altering techniques gains a +2 bonus to her rolls. The casting of the spell and the prophecy itself comprise a single scene, during which the witch is considered helpless (prophetic trance) and is a legitimate target for a killing blow (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168). When the witch speaks a prophecy she does so out loud, describing to the best of her ability what she sees. This process can be somewhat unnerving for the uninitiated as the witch thrashes about, foams from the mouth and either shrieks or whispers her prophecy in a voice (or voices) not her own.

Traditionally, prophetic visions are filled with symbolism, allegory and cryptic insights. If a hunter benefits from a casting of this spell, Storytellers should describe information gained rather than just answer questions outright. If the seeker is looking for information regarding the outcome of a fight, rather than just saying, "You win!" the Storyteller should, via the witch, describe a scene of thrilling combat in which the combatants take on animal aspects of their personalities and weapons used, or wounds delivered are described as archetypes or just imagery.

A witch may prophesy a number of times equal to her Stamina each story. To determine the number of clues imparted by a vision, roll the witch's Wits + Composure. The results are:

Dramatic Failure: The witch speaks only of the horrors she sees in the seeker's future. No useful information is gained and the witch reduces the number of times she may cast this spell during the story by one.

Failure: Meaningless gibberish. The witch rants and raves, speaking in monosyllabic sentences that mean nothing. No useful information is gained.

Success: The witch describes a vision about the seeker in which a number of pertinent clues equal to the witch's Gnosis rating are hidden.

Exceptional Success: As with success. Additionally, when the witch recovers from her trance she can aid, if she so chooses, in interpreting the prophecy (the Storyteller should drop broad hints to the meaning of the visions).

Omen (••••)

The witch can read the flow of fate in the everyday world, picking up on signs of importance that go unnoticed by others. These signs draw the witch to important happenings, warn of possible dangers, or lead the witch to places, people or things they seek to locate.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll, the witch opens her mind and senses to the signs of fate around her. For the duration of the spell the witch gains the 8-again quality to any roll involving Investigation or any Wits + Composure roll, as well as the Merits, Danger Sense and Unseen Sense (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 108 and p. 109, respectively). This spell may only be cast once each chapter.

The witch can cast this spell with either a firm objective in mind or just to see where it takes her. The signs and symbols she follows should form a sort of extended action that leads the witch to her destination. A flock of birds suddenly taking flight could warn of impending danger or that the target of her search has left town. If the birds took wing to the north, the object of the witch's search might lie in that direction or the sign could be an indicator of the direction from which an attack will come.

Fortune

Wits

Source: Any exceptional success or dramatic failure rolled by the witch grants her Source.

Fate and fortune are intertwined strands in the great fabric of reality. Witches that choose to study the Mystery of Fortune instead of Foretelling seek to influence fate rather than witness it. While it may be true that no one can control fate, this Mystery lets witches nudge it a bit, to stack the odds in their favor. Regardless of the meddling of a witch, fate has a way of balancing itself out at the end of the day, thus reminding witches no fate is ever truly set.

Destiny (•)

Witches following the Mystery of Fortune first learn how to influence their own fate. They learn how conscious choice can alter what might be to what will be. Students also learn that fate can only be bent so far and only in so many ways.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll, the witch gains a Destiny pool equal to successes gained for the chapter. The witch may

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

either remove dice from the Destiny pool to add bonus dice to her rolls or remove dice from the Destiny pool (1:1 ratio) to generate Source. Any failed roll that included one or more dice from the Destiny pool is considered a dramatic failure.

When the Destiny pool is exhausted, the witch must wait until the next chapter before she may refill the Destiny pool with a new casting.

Hand of Fate (••)

Using magic to alter the fortune of others is the next step in the Mystery. This spell also presents new choices to the witch. Will she use her power to influence fate for better or for worse? Either choice has equal power; fate can be cruel as well as kind.

Cost: None

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Turn

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Gnosis; subtract Resolve for unwilling targets

With success on the casting roll the witch can influence the fate of her target. The next roll by the target either gains a +3 bonus or suffers a -3 penalty. If the witch chooses to invest a point of Willpower into the casting, the bonus or penalty is reduced to -1 dice or +1 dice, but the duration is increased to scene and the witch gains Source. Such minor nudging of fate will go unnoticed by the majority of the witch's targets. A shooter nudged favorably by the witch who is seeking a better angle on his target might suddenly find the target has stepped into the open. The same shooter, cursed with poor luck, might find his target suddenly surrounded by a crowd of people exiting a building.

Fickle (•••)

The power of the witch over fate now extends to all aspects of her target's life, but no fate is ever certain. This spell results in either utter failure or success against all odds. Sometimes fate can't be denied, even through the meddling of a witch.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Gnosis; subtract target's Resolve

With success on the casting roll, the witch bends fate around her target to make success in any venture less likely. The victim's new target number for success is 9 (instead of 8), but all rolls gain the 9-again quality.

Oath Crafting (••••)

The pledging of oaths is a serious matter, tying the destinies of two or more people together for a time. In bygone days the label of oath-breaker was an insult and a curse. Fate deals harshly with those who unceremoniously sever the ties forged by word and vow.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Gnosis

Before the pact of an oath is sealed, all parties involved must agree to the terms of the oath. Oaths are generally pledged for a specific amount of time or for a specific purpose, but oaths without duration aren't unknown. Once agreement is met, the witch ties a piece of silk ribbon around the wrist of each oath taker; partly as ceremony, partly to remind each person of their pledge. The witch then casts the spell and with success on the casting roll, the oath is sealed.

While under the aegis of an oath, any action taken that has direct bearing on the oath gains a +2 bonus. If any party breaks the terms of the oath, the oath is broken for all. The foresworn is labeled oath-breaker and the silk ribbon begins to rot on their wrist. For a number of months equal to the Gnosis rating of the witch that sealed the oath, the oath-breaker suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls. Fortune favors the faithful.

Karma (•••••)

At this level of power in the Mystery, the witch can use her magic to confound her foes by stealing their luck and bestowing it on her allies and herself. At the end of the day the ledgers of fate will be balanced.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Contested

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Wits + Larceny + Gnosis; target rolls Resolve + Composure reflexively

With success on the casting roll the witch can impose a -3 penalty on all actions taken by her target for the remainder of the scene. Each time the target fails a roll, the witch and her allies gain a +3 bonus to their next action. Conversely, each time the target succeeds on a roll, the balance of fate is restored and the target regains a point of Willpower.

By investing a point of Willpower into the casting, the witch may simultaneously affect a number of targets equal to her Gnosis rating with a single spell. In this case, subtract the highest Resolve present from the casting roll.

Hearth

Resolve

Source: Whenever the witch successfully defends against an attack made on her home or on her person while she is at home, she gains Source.

Remember when you were a kid and you dared your friends to go knock on the door of that house where the weird old lady lived? Nobody ever saw that old lady do anything, but you got the idea — in your gut — that trespassing on her domain was a bad idea. No one ever egged the old lady's house or threw trash in her yard because everyone felt a bit uneasy even approaching the place.

Targets of persecution and paranoia for decades, witches fully expect they will need to defend themselves and their homes against invasion and attack at some point during their lives. Using magic to fortify the places where they live is only common sense. Spells that ward, enhance, and claim a home as a place belonging to a witch add to the aura of magic that surrounds such dwellings.



The magic of a witch who studies this Mystery is directed toward the places they live. The only places in the world that a witch can relax her guard and rest in security are the places she claims as her own. Witches that pour their energies into homes and apartments understand this idea and their spells reflect that understanding.

Innocuous (•)

When a witch claims a house as her own, she places a mystical mark on the property that acts as a ward against unwanted attention. This mark helps the home of a witch blend into the background, frustrating attempts to locate or spy on the witch by means mundane or magical. In effect, the house becomes so completely unremarkable that the gaze of onlookers slide directly over the house without really considering it.

Cost: None

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Resolve + Stealth + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action that requires a total of 10 successes. Each roll is equal to 15 minutes. With success, any attempt to locate the witch while she is inside her home or any action taken that might single out the home

as belonging to a witch suffers a penalty equal to the Gnosis of the witch. Once any character has overcome the magic of the spell, they are no longer affected by the spell for that particular location.

When a witch specifically invites someone in or to her home, the magic of the spell is broken for that individual. If the witch then rescinds her invitation, the magic becomes active again and affects that person as usual (unless they find the house on their own) and the witch gains Source from the act of exerting dominance over the place where she lives. Although this type of behavior does generate Source, wise witches don't engage in games of invitation and denial. People become suspicious or curious about a place they can't remember (especially if it was a recent visit) and tend to spread tales about the witch and her home.

Dreamcatcher (••)

A restful night's sleep contributes to the overall sense of physical and mental well being. Unfortunately, creatures in the World of Darkness prey on the dreams of sleepers and rob them of this peace of mind. Witches employ this spell to discourage nighttime predators and encourage restful sleeping.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Crafts + Gnosis

Although the casting of the spell itself is an instant action, the witch must first create the dreamcatcher with her own two hands. Creation of a dreamcatcher is an extended Dexterity + Crafts roll that requires a total of 5 successes. Each roll is equal to 15 minutes. Once the dreamcatcher has been assembled, the witch need only succeed on the casting roll to imbue the dreamcatcher with her magic.

Sleeping under the dreamcatcher encourages peaceful rest and the witch regains two Willpower, rather than one, for a full night's sleep. If the witch invests a point of Willpower into the casting, the dreamcatcher also imposes a -3 penalty on any attempt to influence the dreams of the sleeper protected by it.

Dreamcatchers are usually personal items of protection, but witches can also give them to others. The dreamcatcher works for others in the same way as it does for the witch, but it also absorbs the energy of dreams forming a bond between the witch and the dreamer. After a dreamcatcher has been hung in one place and slept under for a week, the witch forms a sympathetic connection to the place where it is hung and to the person who accepted it, granting the witch a +1 bonus on any attempt to influence that place or person. Each time the witch succeeds at influencing either a person or a place as the result of a dreamcatcher "gift", the witch gains Source.

Clean Sweep (•••)

One popular tradition of modern witches is the sweeping of a new dwelling, the old fashioned way, with a broom. The physical action of sweeping the house clean of dust also enhances the claim of the witch to the home, helping her to drive out unwanted energy as well as unwelcome apparitions.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action that requires a total number of successes equal to the total dot and/or Numina ratings of persistent and unwelcome spells and ghosts in the home. Each roll is equal to 10 minutes. As an example, a home haunted by a Numina 2 ghost and under the influence of a permanent 2 dot spell would require a total of four successes to cleanse. Witches may freely exempt any ghost or spell from this casting.

A great deal of the success of this casting relies on the inherent magical prowess of the witch casting it. Ghosts or spells with a Numina or dot rating higher than the Gnosis rating of the witch are immune to her attempts to push them out of the home.

Information about ghosts can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208.

House Rules (••••)

When trouble does finally find the home of a witch, the best way of protecting her home is to ban the presence of dangerous people or entities from the place altogether. This spell places wards around a home that discourages unwelcome guests.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action that requires a total of 10 successes. Each roll is equal to 15 minutes. A single warding is enough to cover the entirety of a modest sized home. The ward imposes a -5 penalty on attempts to influence or damage that place, or the people in that place. A home warded by this spell also gains the benefit of increased security. Anyone, or thing, not specifically invited into the home suffers a penalty equal to the Gnosis of the witch who cast the spell on any attempt to break into the home. Normal duration of the spell is one month, but by spending a dot of Willpower, the witch can make the ward permanent.

Homes may have up to five different wards placed on them at any one time. Wards must have specific targets, but may be somewhat broad in nature. Some examples of proper wards include vampires, fire, fae, and hunters. Each ward placed on a dwelling must be cast and paid for separately. The power of the wards comes from the Mystery of Hearth, but the nature of the wards is influenced by the other Mysteries known to the witch. Shadow might cause difficulties for intruders by reducing light sources, Nature might bring rampant plant growth to the area around the home making it more difficult to approach, or Supernal could cause spells to go awry and mundane equipment to malfunction.

Hallowed (•••••)

After a witch has spent enough time in the same place, her claim over that place becomes dominant and anyone entering the home can feel it. Invited guests feel the presence of the witch in every corner of the house, almost as if they were being watched, which can be unnerving. Intruders also get the sense of being watched and they feel the wrath of the witch as a tangible presence.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action that requires a total of 10 successes. Each roll is equal to 15 minutes. A witch may only cast this spell on a place she has lived for at least one month.

The witch has completed her claim over her home. Any one who enters such (un)holy ground with ill intent will suffer for it. Creatures not wholly human need an invitation to enter the home. Those without an invitation suffer one point of bashing damage each turn while inside from unseen forces that punch, slap and otherwise harass them. Normal humans that enter the home uninvited feel a sense of unease and suffer a -5 penalty to their Initiative score from jumping at shadows. For the purposes of this spell, hunters with the Endowment (or Gifted) Merit constitute an unnatural threat.

This spell also acts like a silent alarm against intruders. Whenever an uninvited person or entity enters the house the

witch immediately knows. The alarm is potent enough to wake witches from deep sleep, meditation, or drug induced stupor. When the alarm is sounded the witch may make a Wits + Composure roll. For each success on the roll the witch learns one fact about the intruders that could be learned from simple observation. Possibilities include number of intruders, unconcealed armament of the intruders, location (or locations) of the intruders, or obvious physical indicators of an intruder's identity (such as name tags, protruding fangs or black ops type military garb).

Passion

Manipulation

Source: When a witch regains Willpower from exploiting her Vice, she may instead gain Source.

It's easy to confuse lust for love. Both emotions stimulate certain portions of the brain through the creation of chemicals that reward people with feelings of excitement and pleasure. The high rates of divorce and the fairly commonplace scenario of a bitter breakup serve to illustrate exactly how difficult many people find it to differentiate between lust and love.

Adding to all this confusion of emotion is the Mystery of Passion. Witches draw on the power of sexual fantasy, hidden desire, and physical pleasure to work their magic. The might of Passion is subtle in its workings, seldom betraying the core of magic that is responsible for the erratic behavior of an affected individual. It's also important to remember that Passion isn't restricted simply to sex. Football fans claim to be passionate about their sport, but you are unlikely to find many of them that would attempt to make sweet love to a ball. Passion is an extreme of emotion or desire. It is a Vice that people happily indulge in, even with full knowledge of future consequences.

Lust (•)

Make no mistake, there is a vast difference between making love and just plain fucking. The act of love is one of passion, but a tempered passion that exists between two people in a meaningful way. Unadulterated sex, on the other hand, is about the desires of now: witches that study the Mystery of Passion can draw power from that desire.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch gains the 8-again quality on any Seduction roll (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 39). Successful "conquests" may be claimed as Source.

Temptation (••)

In each of us there lurks a little voice that encourages us to give in to our lesser values. It's the voice that whispers, "Go ahead, eat another donut" or "It's just a blowjob, the wife will never find out." The magic of this spell turns that whisper into a shout.

Cost: None

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Scene

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Gnosis; subtract target's Resolve

With success on the casting roll the target of the spell has his basest instincts brought to the fore. A target that indulges in his Vice during the scene gains an additional Willpower point on top of what he would normally gain. If the witch invests a point of Willpower into the casting, the target must indulge in his Vice during the scene or lose a point of Willpower. The first time the target indulges in his Vice during the scene the witch gains Source.

The Storyteller should attempt to point out opportunities to give in to their Vice to characters affected by this spell.

Aphrodisiac (•••)

Every person has certain preferences that trigger their lustful impulses. For some the trigger might be large breasts or a shapely bottom, while for others it might be certain scents or behaviors. Forcefully struck, the urgings of lust that result from these triggers can cloud the rational mind.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Scene

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Gnosis; subtract target's Composure

With success on the casting roll the target is bombarded with visions of the target's wildest sexual dreams and fantasies. The target finds that concentrating on anything other than fulfilling his immediate sexual needs nearly impossible and suffers a -2 penalty to any action that doesn't directly relate to getting laid. Additionally, the target may not regain Willpower from indulging in his Virtue as any actions taken while under the influence of the spell can't be considered wholly altruistic.

Compulsion (••••)

Pleasure is powerful and addictive. People who give themselves over to their favorite pleasure tend to be annoyed when they are interrupted while enjoying themselves. By using her magic to focus the target's attention solely on his own pleasure, the witch can force inattention to more pressing problems.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Contested

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Gnosis; target rolls Resolve + Composure reflexively

Any character that has received Willpower from indulging in their Vice during the current scene is a legitimate target for this spell. With success on the casting roll, the witch forces her target to indulge in the activity that spurred their Vice, regardless of what is going on around them. The target will defend themselves if attacked, but otherwise will take no action other than indulging in their Vice.

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

After each turn past the first, the target may attempt to break free of this compulsion by succeeding on a Resolve + Composure roll, with a penalty equal to the witch's Gnosis. A target may only be affected by this spell once a scene; repeated castings have no effect.

Obsession (••••)

Some relationships are healthy, interdependent relationships while others are slavish and codependent. Magic can't create true emotional depth to form lasting attachment, but it can create an almost physical need for an object of desire.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended and Contested

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Gnosis; target rolls Wits + Composure reflexively.

Casting this spell is an extended and contested action with 20 successes necessary. Each roll represents one turn in which the witch tries to impose her will over the target with honeyed words and sensual caresses, while the target attempts to maintain his composure long enough to cotton on to the witch's scheme. If the target wins the contested action by reaching 20 successes first, he is unaffected by the spell and comes to some realization of what nearly happened to him. A target that has proven resistant to this spell may never be the target of the spell again.

With the witch as the victor, the target of the spell becomes her love slave, ensnared by the witch in a net of passion and lust. While under control of the spell, the target will gladly perform any task set before them by the witch to the best of their ability. The nature of the task doesn't matter to the target. They will happily betray their friends, families and own moral code of ethics, even to the point of self-destructive behavior.

The usual duration for this spell is one week per dot of Gnosis rating of the witch, but the witch may double the duration of the spell by spending one point of Willpower per additional week during the casting.

Any time during the duration of the spell, the witch may renew the enchantment with a new casting. Cast under these conditions, the spell is no longer considered a contested roll and the witch needs only to succeed on the casting roll to renew the spell. If the duration of the spell ever lapses or the target somehow manages to break free (through long absence or death of the witch), the target feels a deep sense of shame for their behavior and views their captor with violent animosity. The target may never know they were magically enchanted by this spell, but they gain immunity to future castings just as if they had won the initial contested roll.

A target can end this enchantment prematurely by expending a Willpower dot. Once this is done, the witch cannot reattempt this spell on that victim.

Tier-Two Mysteries

Tier-two Mysteries offer a witch her first glimpse at gaining *real* magical power. Witches that progress to this level of aptitude are more than mere hedge witches and were like-

ly born with no small amount of inherent magical talent. Witches often refer the set of mystical traditions that comprise tier two Mysteries as devotee or dedicated Mysteries. Witches with the power and knowledge necessary to learn tier two Mysteries can choose to study from the Mysteries of Health, Mind, Nature, Shadow and Twilight.

Health

Resolve

Source: Exercising for one hour uninterrupted grants Source. Eating healthy for one full week grants Source.

It's tempting to think of witches that study the Mystery of Health as "good" witches. Just like any other generalization, though, this is neither a true nor a safe idea. Simply possessing the ability to perform an act of great good or kindness isn't necessarily an indicator of the morality of a witch. Witches come to study this Mystery for a variety of reasons, not all of which are virtuous. Some follow the Mystery as the result of a last, desperate, attempt to save a loved one. Others see the Mystery as the road to riches; sick people are desperate enough to pay for and try just about anything.

With that being said, some witches do study the Mystery to help their fellow man. These are likely to be the same witches that will point out that magic itself isn't good or evil, anymore than a gun is. The intent of those who use any tool is what creates acts of good and evil.

Dull the Pain (•)

This spell is a small magic to repair small hurts that would heal on their own, given time and care. The magic of healing causes the wounds being repaired to tingle slightly and itch like mad. The more healing that is required, the worse the itching becomes.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Gnosis

For each success gained on the casting roll, the witch can heal herself for one point of bashing damage. By spending a point of Willpower during the casting, the witch may heal the wounds of a single target. Each time the witch receives payment (of any kind) for casting this spell to heal another person, she gains Source.

Remedy (••)

One benefit to studying the Mystery of Health is near invulnerability to minor illnesses and toxins. Unfortunately, this kind of magic does follow something resembling the law of conservation...

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch is able to purge herself of any normally occurring, non-fatal disease as well as

any poison with toxicity 4 or less. The disease or toxins must go someplace, however, which requires that the witch touch a living creature to transfer the disease or poison into. By spending a point of Willpower during the casting the witch may likewise cleanse a single target. In this case, the witch takes the disease or poison from her target into her own body (which means she will suffer the ill-effects) and the witch gains Source.

Mend (••)

Injuries that aren't immediately fatal to the wounded can be mended by witches that have gained a deeper knowledge in this Mystery. The marks left by gunshots, bites, stab wounds or slashing claws can all be erased.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Lasting
Range: Touch
Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Gnosis

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch may heal herself or one of her companions for one point of lethal damage. Magical healing of serious wounds causes the wounds to burn as though they've been set on fire and the patient must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll or howl in agony during the process. Wounds healed by magic leave no scarring.

Purge (•••)

Possessed of knowledge undreamed of by mundane physicians, the witch can purge herself of any corrupting influence

in her body. This spell follows the same general rules as the spell "Remedy," that requires the witch to have a living vessel into which to transfer the impurity.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Lasting
Range: Touch
Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can cleanse her body of any disease, toxin, poison or contamination regardless of source. The witch must have a living creature ready to receive the pollution corrupting her body and, further, that creature must have been personally cared for by the witch for at least a week before it becomes a suitable vessel for this spell. By spending a point of Willpower during the casting the witch can perform the same magic upon another. Unlike "Remedy" this spell doesn't require the witch to take the contamination into her own body. The patient must provide a living creature that they have personally taken care of for at least one month. This is necessary to create a strong enough bond with the creature for use as a suitable vessel.

Miracle (••••)

Rumors that Jesus was just an exceptionally powerful witch may be based on the power of this spell. Short of raising the dead, a witch that has mastered the Mystery of Health can duplicate many of the feats of healing attributed to the son of God.

Cost: Source

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Gnosis

This spell may be performed to produce a number of different results. The first use is that of healing aggravated wounds. This is an extended action that requires the witch to gain three successes for each point of aggravated damage healed. Each roll is equal to 10 minutes.

The other usage is the regeneration of missing or damaged organs and limbs. The blind may see, the deaf hear and the legless walk after receiving the touch of a witch. This is an extended action that requires the witch to gain the number of successes indicated below. Each roll equals 10 minutes. The pain caused by this procedure is so extreme that the patient must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll each roll of the extended action or pass out. No effort has been made to cover every possible injury or handicap and Storytellers should use the table below as a reference.

Injury/Handicap	# of Successes
Missing Finger	1
Missing Arm	5
Missing Leg	10
Blind/Deaf	15
Partial Paralysis	20
Full Paralysis	25

A witch can use this spell to raise the dead, but doing so necessitates 30 successes and one Willpower dot expended. Those raised in such a way suffer a loss of one dot from every Attribute.

Mind

Intelligence

Source: Calming the mind through an hour of Meditation (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 51), grants Source once per day.

Those witches that choose to study the Mystery of Mind turn their thoughts inward to find the power that exists within. This is old magic that has been known by different names over the centuries. Italian peasants knew the witch could steal their thoughts and made the *mana cornuto* (the horned fist) to ward away the evil eye. Modern parapsychologists call the phenomenon telepathy or ESP. A well-trained and disciplined mind can be more dangerous by far than a gun or knife. The power to drive men mad, to hurl boulders with a thought, or to cause bystanders to forget they ever saw you all can be found within this Mystery.

Static (•)

The power to cloud the minds of men is one often laid at the feet of witches. There is truth in these claims, but what is less understood is the power to cloud one's own mind from the interference of others.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch imposes a -3 penalty on any attempt to influence her thoughts or emotions. This spell also completely shields the witch from mental snooping, though she may choose to allow people to access to her thoughts.

Alternately, by spending a point of Willpower during the casting, the witch can use her magic to influence weaker minds. Used in this manner, range is Sensory and the witch subtracts the target's Resolve from their casting dice pool. With success on the casting roll the target suffers a -2 penalty on any Intelligence or Mental Skill roll from the mental clouding for the remainder of the scene and the witch gains Source.

Psychosis (••)

The mind of an average human is easily tweaked and muddled by a witch. Some witches treat insanity like a game and infect whole crowds with derangements to watch the fun. More responsible witches put forth the effort to use their magic to help their allies overcome mental shortcomings.

Cost: None

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Scene

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy + Gnosis; subtract target's Composure

With success on the casting roll the witch inflicts a mild derangement of her choice on the target (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 96). The target is considered to have failed their check to resist the derangement and suffers any penalties associated with the derangement.

Alternatively, by spending a point of Willpower during the casting, the witch can reach into the mind of an ally and soothe their internal disquiet. Cast in this manner, with a simple success the target can ignore a single derangement for the rest of the scene and the witch gains Source.

Telepathy (•••)

It isn't always good to know what other people are thinking. The smiling face that you call friend can hide a mind seething with hatred and jealousy. On the other hand, knowing the mind of your enemy is useful tool.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy + Gnosis; subtract target's Resolve

With success on the casting roll the witch penetrates the mind of her target and gains access to surface thoughts. This includes what the target is currently thinking about and short-term memory, but not personal secrets or long-term memories. The intrusion of the witch is registered by her target as a strange, low buzzing sound (like a fly) which the target can't immediately find the source of. The witch may also initiate a two-way link to mentally communicate with the target, each whispering in the mind of the other. The witch suffers no penalty from Resolve when this spell is used on a willing target.

Telekinesis (****)

The popular image of a psychic bending a spoon with their mind is mocked by witches studying this Mystery. Of course, they *can* bend spoons, but why bend a spoon when you can throw a car?

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Turn

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

This spell can be used in a variety of ways.

When targeting inanimate objects, the witch may lift an object equal to her Gnosis in Size + successes gained on the casting roll. That object can then be reflexively hurled at a target by succeeding on an Intelligence + Athletics roll. Hurled items cause damage as though they fell on the target (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 138).

Alternately, by spending a point of Willpower during the casting, the witch can lift and mentally control an object no larger than half her Gnosis (round up) in Size. Cast in this manner the spell duration is increased to scene. Attacks with controlled items are resolved in the normal manner for that weapon, substituting Intelligence for the usual Attribute (firing a gun would be Intelligence + Firearms, for example).

Used against a living target, the witch delivers a psychic blow to their victim. Attacks of this nature ignore any Defense or Armor ratings of the target and deal an amount of bashing damage equal to successes on the casting roll.

Erase (*****)

Ever since the Burning Times, witches have been cautious about whom they allow to witness their magic. Unfortunately, people seem to have a way of turning up when least expected, or welcome, and of remembering things they later whisper to those who hunt witches. Magic can remove these memories, albeit imperfectly, leaving a blank space behind.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended and Contested

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis; target rolls Resolve + Composure reflexively

Casting this spell is a contested, extended action with a target number of 20. Each roll is equal to 5 minutes. If the witch is the victor she may reach into the mind of her target and remove a number of memories equal to her Gnosis rating. If the target is the victor he has successfully driven the witch from his mind and gains immunity to this spell for 24 hours. Additionally, any future attempts to remove memories from that target suffer a -3 penalty.

Witches cannot replace memories removed by magic with new memories. A target that has his memories erased finds he has an empty space in his recollections.



Nature

Presence

Source: Tending to a garden or a number of plants of personal significance to the witch for an hour grants Source once per day.

The study of the Mystery of Nature is nothing less than claiming dominion over life itself. Every living thing is subject to the whims of the witch. Just like with all magic, this power can be used for both good and ill. Crops can be saved or infested by swarms of locusts; animals can be tamed or enraged. Even the most complex mammal, man, can be influenced by Nature to follow the dictates of the witch.

Gaia's Breath (•)

In older times the wise were called upon to bless the crops to bring a healthy harvest. This tradition continues today in different forms. Many rural seasonal festivals are thinly disguised rituals that emphasize life and fertility and some even mimic (in ignorance) the ancient rites of human sacrifice to bring life to the crops.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Gnosis

The witch calls to the plants she looks upon to explode into rampant growth even outside their season. For each success on the casting roll the witch can simulate a season's growth in the plants. This spell can affect a 10' x 10' area for each dot of the witch's Gnosis. Anyone caught inside the affected area must succeed at a Dexterity + Athletics roll or have their Speed halved until they escape the area.

Witches may use this to grow reagents for spells or to grow narcotic herbs.

Flesh and blood work as marvelous fertilizer for healthy plant growth. If an individual caught up by plants suffers lethal damage while in the radius of this spell, the witch gains Source.

Whisper on the Wind (••)

Insects vastly outnumber the other creatures of the world. Most of the time, insects fill their niche in the cycle of life quietly, but they have the numbers to make their presence known. When a witch casts this spell she exudes pheromones that are barely discernable to human senses (she may smell faintly cloying or sickly sweet) that give her control over the insects.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Presence + Animal Ken + Gnosis

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch can summon (and command) two yards' worth of a swarm. Though the spell is cast as an instant action it takes time for swarms to form. A swarm will gather at a rate of one yard per

turn until the entire swarm is present. Witches may command the swarm while it is forming, but it will do less damage and will be more easily dispersed. (See the "Swarms" sidebar in **Hunter: The Vigil**, p. 188 for complete rules on swarms.)

Alternately, the witch can command an existing swarm. Cast in this way, successes gained on the casting roll indicate the Size of a swarm that can be commanded. Exerting dominance over a naturally occurring, insect infestation grants Source.

Primal Tongue (•••)

Animals communicate with other members of their species through body language and wagging tails as well as bellowing roars and throaty grunts. Witches believe there exists a primal form of communication known to all animals, learned at the dawn of time and passed down over the millennia. This language is one of naming and command, but its power has been diluted over so long a time.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Presence + Animal Ken + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can communicate with and command any type of animal within line of sight, through body language and sounds appropriate to that species. Animals will follow the commands of the witch as long as they don't contradict the natural instincts of that animal or force the animal to attack members of its own pack (or loved ones in the case of pet owners). Asking a cow to attack a farmer will probably be met with confusion, while asking a dog to attack an unknown human will probably succeed. Animals will not commit to openly self-destructive acts (commanding a cat to jump into a wood chipper, for instance).

Biological Imperative (••••)

Humans are animals. Despite all of our grandiose accomplishments, at the core of our being we are just higher functioning animals. Witches understand this and can tap into the core of human instinct to command us in the same way she commands other creatures. The target of this spell may not understand why he is following the instructions of the witch, only that he must.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Contested

Duration: Scene

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy + Gnosis; target rolls Resolve + Composure reflexively

To overcome the ego of the target and command that person at an instinctual level, the witch must gain a number of successes on the casting roll equal to or greater than the target's Composure rating. While under the control of the witch, the target will follow any commands given by the witch, even those that lead to self-destructive or morally reprehensible actions. The victim of this spell may spend a point of Willpower to do nothing for a turn.

Shapeshifter (••••)

With the full might of Nature to command the witch turns at last to commanding modifications of her own body. Calling forth the possibilities of evolutional roads not taken, the witch can change her form to those of beasts.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Scene
Range: Self
Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Gnosis

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch gains the power to shift into one possible form. The witch can shift into any naturally occurring animal form and she may shift reflexively from one form to the next. When the witch exceeds the number of successes rolled she reverts to her human form.

While in the shape of a beast, the witch retains her human intellect and gains the abilities of the animal she has shifted into. A witch-become-falcon can fly and a witch-become-hound can track by scent. Animal forms are of a Size appropriate for the creature chosen. The Health of a transformed witch varies as the Size of the animal she shifts into changes and, if wounded, she retains the same amount of damage taken regardless of form (which could be a hazard when shifting from a large animal to a small one).

Shadow

Composure

Source: Casting no spells during daylight for one week grants Source. Meditating in total darkness for one hour grants Source.

Humans have an instinctual fear of the dark that is probably carried over from our primitive ancestors. Humankind has no natural aptitude for seeing in the dark, which puts us at a severe disadvantage if pitted against a nocturnal predator. Early humans would gather together before nightfall for mutual protection, huddled against the darkness and shivering in fear at any sound that might portend danger. It is little wonder that the ability to create and control fire is what finally allowed man to begin to claim the Earth as his own.

A witch that chooses to study the Mystery of Shadow is claiming the darkness for her own. Instead of fearing the dark, the witch revels in it, wrapping it around her like an attentive lover. Shadows bend and gather at her command and the witch can also commune with the strange creatures that dwell in shadow, called shades by witches and spirits or demons by others.

The spells of this Mystery require shadows or darkness to function properly. Storytellers may penalize the casting roll by up to -3 for spells cast in less than gloomy conditions.

Commune (•)

With this spell the witch gazes into the shadows and they gaze back at her. The creatures that exist only in shadow communicate in hollow whispers to the witch that looks upon them, imparting secrets hidden from mundane view.

Cost: None
Action: Instant
Duration: Scene
Range: Sensory
Dice Pool: Composure + Expression + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can peer into the shadows and spy out the shades that hide there. Shades form indistinct images and are only partially visible even to the gaze of a witch. Staring at one is like staring through a fogged window. The witch may ask the shades three questions about the secrets kept by someone the witch knows by name. Shades quickly become bored with this kind of mundane trivia, however, and the witch may only cast this spell once per chapter.

Once per casting of this spell, the witch gains Source if she uncovers a secret held by another.

Darkling Grasp (••)

Shadows have memories, you know. They remember every object, every creature, every-thing that ever created them. As the witch grows more capable in her dealings with shadows, she finds she can physically reach into them and retrieve those memories.

Cost: Willpower
Action: Instant
Duration: Scene
Range: Touch
Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch may pull objects constructed of pure darkness out of the shadows and into the material Realm. The witch can pull almost any simple object she can think of (anything that has ever cast a shadow), with a Size no greater than her Gnosis rating from the shadows. These objects are solid, yet fragile and will always have a Structure and Durability of one. Objects retrieved from the shadows remain in the material Realm for 24 hours or until destroyed, at which time they revert to shadow. If sunlight ever fully falls on a shadow object, it is immediately destroyed. Shadow objects intentionally destroyed by the witch grant her Source. Objects cannot involve complex machinery: a shadow-knife is appropriate, but a shadow-pistol isn't.

Darkened Countenance (•••)

At this stage in her training the shadows seem to stretch and lengthen, to reach out to the witch of their own accord. The witch accepts the embrace of the shadows gratefully and can weave them into mask and cloak to hide her from prying eyes.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Scene
Range: Sensory
Dice Pool: Composure + Stealth + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch gathers the shadows around her like a finely-woven garment. The witch becomes nearly invisible to the eye and no recording device of any kind will register her presence. Not only do the shadows hide the witch from view, they also muffle any sounds she might make with a downy blanket of darkness. For the remain-



der of the scene the witch gains a +3 bonus to all Stealth rolls and any effort made by onlookers to spot the witch (by means mundane or magical) suffers a penalty equal to the witch's Gnosis. The spell will only break early if the witch engages in violent action of some kind (like attacking someone).

Banish/Summon Demon (••••)

Not all witches truck with demons, but some sure as hell do. Demons *know* things. They have powers and can offer favors. Of course, they're also insidious and can damage a witch's sanity and ethical sensibilities, but that's the cost of playing with Faustian fire.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action whose successes are variable based on the type of demon one wishes to banish or summon: a lesser demon necessitates five successes, a greater demon needs 10 successes, while an elder demon demands a full 20 successes. The witch must know one of the demon's names (true or false) to banish or summon it.

Banishing necessitates that the witch spend a Willpower point, while summoning requires no such expenditure (demons are more than willing to come when called). Binding a summoned demon is a whole different affair. While certainly ritual abilities exist to bind a demon, magically it's a tough sell — the witch *must* know the demon's true name and, in addition, must expend a Willpower dot. By doing so, the demon is rooted to that spot until the witch dies.

Demons summoned aren't necessarily friendly. A hissing imp may attack. A potent elder demon may see fit to try to possess the witch. Alternately, demons are cunning, and may see the witch as a potential ally or bargaining buddy. Demons love to make deals, and let's be honest, that's probably why the witch summoned the damned thing to begin with.

Unseen Stride (•••••)

With mastery of Shadow the witch can open doors into and out of the shadows, traveling instantaneously from one shadow to the next. The shades whisk the witch through their strange world releasing her from the shadows upon her command.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can step into any shadow or darkened place and reappear instantly in another patch of darkness within her line of sight. Moving from one shadow to the next requires no action, instead exhausting all the witch's allotted movement for that turn. By spending a point of Willpower during the casting the witch can take a single passenger along with her through the shadows. If the target is unwilling, the witch must first succeed at a Strength + Brawl attack to grapple the target and physically pull them into the shadows with her.

Twilight

Composure

Source: Sleeping for a night in a haunted place grants Source.

No one, not even witches, is exactly sure what happens after death. Theories abound in the magical community about where souls go to rest, with different groups each proclaiming their own theory as absolute. Whatever happens, it is known that not all souls leave the mortal Realm after death. Whether bound here by magic, fate or unfinished business, some souls are stuck in an in-between state known as Twilight.

Twilight is an intangible state, populated mainly by the non-corporeal shades of the restless dead and shadowy ephemeral objects mirrored therein. Witches that choose to study the Mystery of Twilight can influence and communicate with its inhabitants. Few ghosts are coherent enough to see beyond the suffering of their own state, but those who are can provide valuable information and insight to a witch that can deal with them directly.

With their unrivaled understanding of Twilight, there exists no more qualified individual than a witch to perform an exorcism. Witches that follow the Mystery of Twilight may add their Gnosis rating to any attempt to exorcise a ghost.

Ouija (•)

Communicating with the living isn't easy for ghosts. They make their presence known in often subtle ways like a chill breeze on the back of your neck or flicking a light switch on and off. Witches can learn to see and communicate with ghosts by peering into Twilight.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can see and communicate with ghosts in Twilight. Generally, the witch speaks aloud questions to which she receives replies that go unheard by most people. When performing a séance some witches will play up the experience for the crowd and speak in hollow, macabre tones to impress the gulls. Ghosts aren't forced to answer questions posed to them by the witch, though most are inclined to do so simply because of the rarity of mortals that can talk to them. If the witch is paid to perform a séance for others, she gains Source. (Note that naïve witches may instead be unwittingly communicating with an unmanifested demon instead of a ghost. Demons, after all, are gifted liars.)

Ephemeral Chain (••)

Most ghosts are harmless, pitiable entities lost in confusion over their condition. These lost souls bother no one and cause few problems for the living. The shades of people that died violent deaths or are angered in some way are a different matter. Angry ghosts can become a serious problem for the living and are best dealt with by destroying the anchor that binds them to Twilight.

Cost: Willpower

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch becomes attuned to the touch of Twilight and can recognize anchors for what they are on sight. Attunement doesn't equate to omniscience, however, and the witch must still physically search out a ghost's anchor. Searching for the anchor is an extended Intelligence + Investigation action with a target number of 10. Each roll equals 5 minutes of searching.

Possible modifiers for the extended roll include: Size 5 or greater anchor +3 dice; Size 2 or smaller anchor -2 dice; hurried search -2 dice; knowledge of personal details from the life of the ghost +2 dice; exceptional success on the casting roll +5 dice.

Angry ghosts are unlikely to idly watch as a witch searches for its anchor. The witch should expect the ghost to attempt to block and interfere with her search at every opportunity. Destruction of an anchor grants the witch Source.

Necromantic Slave (•••)

The word zombie conjures instant images in the minds of people everywhere. Movies have portrayed zombies as shambling, moaning corpses that eat the flesh of the living. The reality of is, of course, quite different.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Composure + Intimidation + Gnosis; subtract ghost's Resistance

To create a zombie the witch must first acquire a corpse. The corpse must be fresh enough, or well-preserved enough, that it retains the majority of its flesh and bones. The witch must then locate a ghost and attempt to intimidate the ghost into animating the corpse. With success on the casting roll the ghost is forced and bound into the decaying flesh of the corpse and animates it as a zombie.

Zombies retain the characteristics of the corpse they were made from with the following modifications:

Strength, Dexterity and Stamina ratings are all reduced by one dot, to a minimum of one. All other Attributes are reduced to a single dot.

Zombies possess only very basic problem-solving skills and can only communicate through moans and rasps. All Mental or Social skill rolls are considered unskilled attempts and zombies may not have more than one dot in any skill from either of those skill sets.

Physical Skills remain unchanged. The exception is any Physical Skill dice pool that includes an Attribute other than Strength, Dexterity or Stamina is considered unskilled.

Fire deals aggravated damage to zombies; all other weapons deal bashing. Zombies don't suffer wound penalties and can only be defeated by filling their Health tracks with aggravated damage. The bodies of the dead are also immune to any sort of poison or disease.

Zombies don't heal and may not be repaired.

A witch may only create a number of zombies equal to her Gnosis at any one time. Zombies follow the commands of the witch and attempt to work on her behalf even when she is incapacitated or out of range of communication. Zombies possess an intense hatred for the living and will attack them on sight unless ordered otherwise by the witch. The binding of a ghost in a corpse is permanent until the zombie is destroyed or the witch dismisses the ghost. Once a ghost is released from the dead flesh it returns to Twilight.

Command Appearance (••••)

Rather than destroying an identified anchor, sometimes witches use that anchor to summon and control a ghost, which materializes upon command howling and screaming in rage.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can force the manifestation of a ghost whose anchor she holds or touches. The ghost manifests under full command of the witch and may not harm the witch in any way while the witch maintains physical contact with its anchor. Ghosts commanded to appear by the witch need not roll to manifest.

Aspect of the Banshee (•••••)

With complete understanding of the Mystery of Twilight the witch can release her soul from her body and take on the form of a ghost for a short time.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch releases her soul from her body and exists in Twilight as a ghost. The body of the witch acts as the anchor for her shade while in this form and the witch may not travel more than 50 yards per dot of Gnosis away from her anchor. The ghostly form of a witch resembles her physical body, only withered and decayed as though she were long dead. Any disturbance to the witch's body will end the spell.

While transformed, the witch takes on all the traits of a ghost. In this form the witch loses access to the Mysteries and gains a number of Numen equal to her Gnosis rating. Numina possessed by the witch should be selected the first time this spell is cast and remain consistent thereafter, adding new Numen only if the witch raises her Gnosis rating. The Essence pool of the ghost form is equal to twice the current amount of Source stored by the witch, to a maximum of 10. The Power, Finesse and Resistance of a witch in ghostly form are based on the highest corresponding Attribute tied to that trait +1 (Intelligence, Strength or Presence for Power; Wits, Dexterity or Manipulation for Finesse; Resolve, Stamina or Composure for Resistance). Witches may manifest at will and can communicate with the living without use of Numina.

Tier-Three Mysteries

Nearly every witch that ascends to the heights of power afforded to her by the tier-three Mysteries is strongly magical at birth. The rare witch exists that can, by struggle and perseverance, elevate her magical ability to this level, but those are rare individuals, even among witches. For most witches the mystical might required to shape the magic of what they call the ascendant Mysteries slumbers within them until it is Awakened by trauma, stress or personal enlightenment. Witches that learn to harness this raw power may choose to study from the Mysteries of Elements, Space, Supernal, Time and Transmutation.

Elements

Dexterity

Source: Full or partial submersion in mundane, pure forms of the witch's favored element grants Source.

From the point of view of a mystic, elements form the building blocks for all of creation. Earth, air, fire and water are combined in a myriad of ways to build all life and matter. Possibly as a result of such raw power, ascendant elemental magic is not a subtle thing. The ability to command and control the strength of the elements results in magic with obvious displays of power.

Most witches favor one specific element during their studies into the Mystery of Elements. Witches that choose fire delight in the destructive energy of the flame, while those who choose air prefer the chill embrace of the winds. The element of water calls to witches that appreciate the relentless nature of waves pounding against a rock and the element of earth appeals to witches that desire to draw their power from the very bones of the world.

Unlike other Mysteries, the Mystery of Elements may be chosen multiple times; once for each element studied. Understanding of control over one element doesn't impart any particular advantage to witches that choose to study additional elements. Witches frequently rename this Mystery to reflect the particulars of their studies. A witch that has chosen to study water will refer to this Mystery as the Mystery of Water, while a witch that prefers fire will refer to it as the Mystery of Fire.

Apotheosis (•)

Witches begin their study of this Mystery by learning to pull particles of their chosen element together to form a cohesive mass. To the uninitiated it appears the witch has simply summoned the element from nowhere.

Cost: None

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Crafts + Gnosis

The action description of "extended" is somewhat misleading in conjunction with this spell. For each turn the witch

continues to pull together motes of their chosen element she makes a separate casting roll. In effect, the continual casting of this spell creates a flow of the element, the genesis of which is chosen by the witch (not a living creature) with a touch. The witch may cease repeated castings of this spell whenever she chooses. The amount of raw element woven from reality varies from turn to turn dependant on the number of success garnered on the casting roll, equaling 1cu.ft. of element per success.

Common sense may be applied to the fate of the element brought forth. Unless poured into a repository of some sort, water will spread; without a source of fuel, fire will burn out and so forth.

If the witch brings the element into an area where that element is scarce (such as water in the desert) the witch gains Source.

Elemental Harmony (••)

Part of the study of the elements involves understanding how to interact with them. Although some elements are more dangerous than others, all of them have the potential to cause harm to the unwary.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Expression + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch gains immunity to damage from her chosen element. For all intents and purposes, use of this magic means a witch cannot be harmed in any way by her chosen element. Tornadoes will alter course to avoid a witch of the winds, landslides will shift and flow around the earth witch, fire witches might seem to dance around the flames and water witches appear to step between raindrops or navigate the roughest waves with ease. By spending a point of Willpower during the casting, the witch may cast this spell on another. A witch that protects allies from the deleterious effects of the elements gains Source.

Immersion (•••)

Mainly used as an offensive magic, this spell can also be put to passive uses. The witch weaves her favored element together just long enough to fully engulf her target in it. This, obviously, can have a negative impact on living creatures, but it can also provide just enough flame to start a small fire or just enough water to put out that same fire.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Turn

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Science + Gnosis; subtract target's Stamina

For each success on the casting roll, the spell causes one point of bashing Health damage to the target. The element called forth exists only for a moment and in a large enough quantity to fully cover the target, regardless of target Size. After the element has dealt its damage, it returns to the nebulous state of dispersion in which it existed before the casting.

Casting the Towers (••••)

At this point in her training, the witch can pull together handfuls of her chosen element with little difficulty. The element lies quiescent in her hand until released, at which time it explodes into full life.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch calls forth a handful of her favored element. The element may then be reflexively thrown at her target, hitting the target with a successful Dexterity + Athletics (the usual throwing modifiers apply) roll. Each type of element has a different effect on the target.

Fire causes aggravated damage to the target equal to the total number of successes gained on the roll to hit.

Water hinders the target reducing their Speed by half, extinguishes any flame they might be carrying and forces the target to succeed on a reflexive Dexterity + Resolve roll or lose their grip on any items they are holding.

Earth solidifies during the throw into stone. The target takes points of bashing damage equal to the total number of successes gained on the roll to hit. If the target takes more bashing damage in one turn from this effect than their Stamina rating, a Stamina roll is made for the target. With a success, the target is only dazed and loses their next action, if the roll fails, the target is considered to have been struck by a knockout blow (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168).

Air diffuses slightly and becomes a howling gale. The target is subject to a knockdown effect (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168) and suffers a loss of breath that imposes a -3 penalty on any roll made before the witch's next turn.

Guardian's Wrath (•••••)

This spell calls on the unbound fury of the elements to rain from the sky. Stones, golf ball sized hail, freezing winds or fiery ashes descend on anyone, friend or foe, unfortunate enough to be caught in the magic.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Turn

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Occult + Gnosis

The witch's favored element falls from the sky causing one point of lethal damage per dot of the witch's Gnosis to anyone within 50 yards of the witch. Victims caught in the storm (that have not yet acted this turn) may roll Dexterity + Athletics to negate one point of damage for each success gained on the roll. This is considered a Dodge.

If the witch spends a point of Willpower during the casting, the duration of this spell is increased to scene. The witch automatically pays Source for each turn the spell continues, but needn't use an action to do so and may voluntarily end the spell as a reflexive action at the beginning of any turn.

Space

Wits

Source: Experiencing sensory deprivation for at least an hour grants Source.

All points are one. This is the basic premise behind the Mystery of Space. It sounds like mystic claptrap, but witches that study this Mystery are able to see past the illusion of distance. Magic allows them to overcome their mundane perceptions and transverse space as easily as you might walk into the next room.

Hermes Stride (•)

The path to magical knowledge always starts with a single step and in the case of Space, the first step is mighty.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Turn

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Wits + Science + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch triples her Speed for a turn. During that turn the witch may move as a reflexive action. Alternately, the witch may choose to quintuple her Speed for one turn. If the second option is chosen, the witch may take no actions on the following turn as she must concentrate on her footing and she gains Source. To onlookers, a witch using this spell is moving so quickly she almost seems to flicker in and out of vision.

Dimensional Push (••)

By shifting her perception of where an object or person is in space, the witch can literally shove her target to a different location.

Cost: None

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Wits + Athletics + Gnosis; subtract target's Resolve

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch can move the person or object she is touching 5 yards in any direction. The target of the spell simply vanishes then reappears in the direction nominated by the witch. Objects and people may not be moved into the ground or solid structures. The first time in a scene that the witch successfully casts this spell to move a dangerous target (an axe-wielding madman, a ticking bomb) to a safe distance she gains Source.

Omniscience (•••)

Without the illusion of distance to blind them, witches that study this Mystery can locate missing (or misplaced) people and items with relative ease.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sympathetic

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch knows the exact direction and distance to her target (north, 10 miles, for example),

as though she received perfect GPS coordinates. If the target is moved after the witch has located it, the witch retains knowledge only of where the item was, not where it is. A single target can be located as many times as needed by repeated castings of this spell.

Spatial Window (•••)

Along with their understanding of space comes a superb memory for places the witch has visited. By casting their perceptions down the lane of those memories, the witch can witness events transpiring in those locations and even reach through space to grab useful items.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Sympathetic

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch opens a window in space, rather like how the curtains on a stage are pulled back to reveal a new scene. This window is roughly 3' x 3' in size, is visible by anyone who happens to notice it (roll Wits + Composure with a -2 penalty) and allows both sight and sound to travel through it. The witch (and only the witch) may also reach through the window to grab any objects of Size 3 or less within arm's reach and pull them to her.

Translocation (••••)

Through her experiments and studies the witch has gained a full understanding of the Mystery of Space. By concentrating on a single point, the witch brings all points together and opens a portal that leads to any place of her choosing.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Scene

Range: Sympathetic

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Gnosis

Casting this spell is an extended action with the target number determined by the distance to be traveled. Each roll is equal to five minutes. When enough successes have been accumulated, a portal in space opens that allows anyone who walks through it to travel to the target location. Opening a portal isn't a subtle act: the space where the portal will open blazes momentarily with light and the sudden air displacement causes a loud popping noise. The portal is large enough to allow anyone or anything Size 6 or less to pass through.

Distance Traveled	Required Successes
50 Miles	5
100 Miles	10
500 Miles	15
Continent	20
Earth	25

Supernal

Intelligence

Source: When the witch gains Source from a different Mystery she may roll Intelligence + Occult the following turn as an instant action. With success she gains Source.



Named by some witches as the Mystery of Prime, the study of the Mystery of Supernal is the study of Source and of magic itself. By manipulating the structure of magic, witches gain power over magical rivals and learn how to strip Source from living vessels. Witches that favor the study of this Mystery seek a greater understanding of the magic they wield. Other Mysteries might have flashier effects, but only by mastering the Mystery of Supernal can a witch truly claim to be a master of magic.

Awaken the Power Within (•)

Most witches realize they aren't alone in the night. Over the centuries witches have learned, sometimes to their sorrow, that the world holds other supernatural forces. Most of these creatures that hide in the darkness utilize magic in some way and frequently imbue worldly objects with their powers. With this spell a witch can identify and control these items.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch gains a basic understanding of function of an item she touches. By spending a point of Willpower, the witch can activate and use the item, regardless of usual costs or restrictions, for the remain-

der of the scene. Over the years, witches have used this spell to activate a plethora of strange magical items that have come their way. Not every item recovered is useful for a witch. A set of magical teeth that drain blood from their target and add that blood to the witch's system doesn't really have many uses. Instead of simply discarding these magical objects, the witch can use this spell to completely drain the item of power to claim Source. A drained object loses all magical power and becomes inert for one week — or, she can spend a Willpower dot to remove its supernatural power permanently.

Nix (••)

Mystical battles between witches aren't an unusual occurrence. A fight may start between rival covens over perceived insult, as a result of competition for resources or simply because the witches involved can't stand each other. In these battles, witches that study the Mystery of Supernal have a trump card over their foes.

Cost: Willpower

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

The witch may use this spell to counter the spell or supernatural ability of her target. To successfully counter her opponent, the witch must gain more successes on her casting roll

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

than the target gains on theirs. Suggested modifiers for the casting include: +2 dice if the spell is from a Mystery studied by the witch; +1 dice if the witch has successfully identified the spell (see p. 150); 3 dice if the magic comes from a non-human source (vampire, fae, etc.).

This spell may be cast at any time during a turn, ignoring the usual rules of Initiative, provided the witch hasn't yet acted in the turn. Once she casts it, however, she may not take any other actions for the remainder of the turn. If the witch successfully counters the spell of an opponent, she gains Source. This does not work on any hunter Endowments.

Siphon (••)

Left with no other option for survival, a witch with "Siphon" can resort to cannibalizing her own body for magical power or the will to live.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Self

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can draw upon her own health for Source or Willpower. For each self-inflicted point of lethal damage suffered as a result of this spell, the witch gains either Source or two Willpower. The magic of this spell pulls and tears at the flesh of the witch, causing spontaneous ruptures in her skin. These wounds are incredibly painful and the witch must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll or shriek in agony.

Superiority (•••)

All witches can dispel magic with the proper training, but witches with knowledge of this Mystery can perform the feat with greater alacrity than their peers.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the magic of this spell becomes active and provides a pair of effects that are resolved as reflexive actions, though each action may only be attempted once per casting.

Identify: The witch attempts to identify the type of magic confronting her by rolling Intelligence + Occult. With success, the witch can correctly identify the Mystery and duration of the magic. Magical type effects that are not the result of a Mystery register as magic: unknown, though it is possible a witch could grow to recognize the signature of other magical effects as belonging to a specific type of entity.

Dispel: Once the witch has successfully identified the magic she can attempt to dispel it. This can be accomplished in one of two ways. If the total of the Gnosis of the caster + dot rating of the targeted spell is lower than the Gnosis of the dispelling witch, the witch can dispel the magic automatically; no roll is required. If the total is higher than the Gnosis of the dispelling witch, the witch must roll Intelligence + Resolve and add the number of successes rolled to her Gnosis

rating. If successes rolled + the dispelling witch's Gnosis is equal to or higher than the total, the target spell is dispelled.

Example: Raven is confronted with a "House Rules" (see p. 137) spell that is interfering with her plans. The dot rating of "House Rules" is 4 and the Gnosis of the witch who cast the spell is 3, bringing the total of the spell to 7. Raven's Gnosis is 5 so the Storyteller must gain 2 successes on an Intelligence + Resolve roll to dispel the magic.

Alternately, this spell may be cast as an extended action, in which case it functions exactly like the spell, "Unravel" (see p. 143) without the requirement of first casting "Gaze of the Wise" (see p. 142).

Superiority can only affect spells with duration of scene length or more.

Blood Potency (••••)

With full command of the magic of the Mystery of Supernatural, the witch can flay the skin of her enemies, drawing power from agony inflicted and blood drawn.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant and Resisted

Duration: Lasting

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis; subtract target's Stamina

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch inflicts one point of lethal damage to her target and gains Willpower. This spell has no effect on targets that are incapable of feeling pain or bleeding. Wounds caused by this spell appear on the body of the target as though they had been slashed by an invisible knife. Such wounds bleed copiously, leaving a trail of spatter in the victim's wake.

Time

Intelligence

Source: Synchronizing all the clocks in a stranger's home with GMT grants Source.

Time is a continuous chain of events marching forward towards a final goal. Mankind attempts to control time by breaking it down into manageable portions, lacking the capacity to view time as a whole. The magic of the witch grants them a broader view.

Witches that study this Mystery view time like a river. Moving upstream in the river pits the strength of the individual against that of the water. The individual must eventually tire and be swept back downstream. It is also possible to dam the river's flow, but dams created in the river of eternity never last for long. Moving with the current, even speeding one's journey in the same direction is the easiest feat to manage. Nothing the witch does can affect the river as a whole. At most the witch causes a few ripples, which quickly vanish into the flow.

Opportunity (•)

Events form brief eddies in the flow of time. A witch with the power to do so can study those eddies and determine her place in them.

Cost: None
Action: Instant
Duration: Scene
Range: Self
Dice Pool: Intelligence + Athletics + Gnosis

With success on the casting the witch may change her position in the Initiative order during any turn as a reflexive action, even interrupting the actions of others, so long as the witch hasn't already acted that turn. The witch remains at the same Initiative for the remainder of the scene unless she decides to change position again.

Alternately, the witch may spend a point of Willpower during the casting to target an opponent with this spell. Cast in this manner the spell becomes Resisted (subtract target's Resolve), the witch forces her target to the bottom of the order and she gains Source. Targets on the receiving end of this effect suddenly feel sluggish or confused for just long enough to lose their momentum.

Backflow (••)

When a witch resists the flow of time, people and events slow around her. To the perceptions of others, the witch moves with superhuman speed.

Cost: None
Action: Instant
Duration: Scene
Range: Self
Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch slows her perception of time. Events around her seem to unfold in slow motion and the witch gains a +2 bonus to any Physical skill roll and +1 to her Defense. By spending a point of Willpower during the casting, the witch may instead slow an opponent. Cast in this way the spell becomes resisted (subtract target's Resolve), the target suffers a -1 penalty to any attack type rolls and to their Defense, and the witch gains Source.

Postcognition (•••)

The waters of time touch everything as they flow, imprinting a legacy of history onto people, places and things. A witch can touch that history to witness past events.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Scene
Range: Touch
Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch activates this spell and can peer into the history of her target. Normally, the witch scans the past of her target looking for specific information; alternately, if she casts the spell with no specific information in mind, she instead sees the most significant event in the target's past.

Temporal Reprieve (••••)

Every choice has a consequence, every action a result. When a series of events results in misfortune, most people have to live with those results and attempt to roll with the punches. Witches are not bound by such limitations. Those

with power over time can form false currents and trick time to turn back the clock.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Lasting
Range: Sensory
Dice Pool: Intelligence + Subterfuge + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can rewind time for 3 seconds (i.e. one turn). Every action that occurred between the witch's last turn and the casting of the spell is negated. This includes Health loss, expenditures of any kind and even death itself. Only the witch remembers the events of the old timeline and even her memories will slowly begin to fade. Time is not so easily fooled twice, however. The witch may only use this magic once per scene.

Stasis Field (••••)

No one, not even a witch, can claim full control over time. Time is an inexorable force with tireless determination. Witches that claim mastery in the Mystery of Time find ways to elude that force and divert it back upon itself.

Cost: Source
Action: Instant
Duration: Special
Range: Self
Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Gnosis

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch removes herself from the flow of time for one turn. During this stoppage, the witch can cast any number of spells she likes that can be completed within the duration of the stoppage. Spells cast during the duration have no immediate effect, instead waiting for time to resume. Once regular time resumes all the spells cast during the extended moment are resolved at the same time.

From the perspective of the witch, everything around her is frozen in time. She can travel up to her normal Speed each turn, carrying the effect of stopped time with her. The witch can interact with people and objects during the stoppage, but she cannot manipulate them in any way. Doors that are closed are impervious to damage and refuse to open, people become immobile statues and rainfall forms an impenetrable barrier to movement.

From the perspective of onlookers the witch vanishes from sight for a split second, reappearing at the end of the spell's duration. In practical terms, the witch retains her place in Initiative, the entirety of her actions during the effect of the spell taking place during a single turn.

Time resents being manipulated for even short periods and refuses to be tampered with again until the witch has moved further downstream. This spell may only be cast once per scene.

Transmutation

Resolve

Source: Mundanely changing the state of a material grants Source.

The Mystery of Transmutation is partially the science of alchemy. The dreams of mundane dabblers in alchemy during the Middle Ages revolved around transmuting base ma-

CHAPTER THREE: MAGIC TRICKS

terials into gold. Witches find little use in this application of the Mystery. Yes, they can make lead into gold, but what do you do with your newfound riches? Modern business practices track the sales of valuable minerals and, even by going outside the system, the witch can quickly dilute the value of her work.

The other applications of the Mystery can be just as valuable to a witch. Altering the integrity of matter, shaping its form and density, or combining the best attributes of two separate items can produce far useful items than a pile of gold.

Lead (•)

Lead was the mineral most often used in the experiments of the mad alchemists of days gone by and it represents the foundation of the witch's education in the Mystery of Transmutation. Lead is also among the softest of metals and can be easily broken.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Science + Gnosis

With success on the casting roll the witch can determine the molecular composition of any item she touches. By spending a point of Willpower after determining the structure, the witch can pinpoint weaknesses in the item, gaining a +3 to any roll made to break or destroy her target. When a witch breaks an item she has successfully examined with this spell, she gains Source.

Copper (••)

Possibly the single most utilized metal in human history, copper can be fashioned into a multitude of forms and can be easily combined into alloys with other metals to improve its durability. At this stage in her training the witch learns to be equally adaptable with her magic to alter liquids and gases.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Duration: Scene

Range: Sensory

Dice Pool: Resolve + Science + Gnosis

This spell allows witches to solidify gaseous vapors and liquids into solid forms. The witch can affect a 5' x 5' area of her target, creating a solid with a Durability equal to the number of successes gained on the casting roll (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 135 for more information about Durability). Liquids affected by this spell take on the feel and consistency of plastic, while gases feel spongy and pliant like the foam used in couches or car seats. At the end of the scene, the liquid or gas reverts to its usual state. By spending a Willpower during the casting, the witch may form the new material into a simple desired shape with a successful Dexterity + Crafts roll. Clever use of shaped objects grants the witch Source.

Iron (•••)

The ability of humans to work and shape iron was the dawn of scientific and industrial achievement. With the un-

derstanding of how to smelt iron into steel, humans arose as the dominant species on the planet. In a similar way, this spell teaches witches how to bring together disparate materials to form a new object from both.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Gnosis

This spell can be used in one of two ways.

The first use of this spell is to fuse two objects together to form an unbreakable bond. To achieve this effect the spell is cast as an extended action with the target number equal to the total Size of the two objects to be joined. Each roll is equal to one minute. The bond formed as a result of this spell can only be broken through extreme measures, such as use of explosives or the touch of a cutting torch. Any attempt to separate the two objects suffers a -5 penalty.

The second use of this spell is to combine two different objects into one with aspects of both. To achieve this effect the spell is cast as an extended action with the target number equal to the total Structure of the two objects. Each roll is equal to 10 minutes. The new Size and Durability of the object are determined by adding together the Size and Durability of both objects used and dividing the total by half (round up). Witches generally have a fair idea of the result of this spell, but sometimes the new object doesn't function exactly as they had intended. Storytellers should be creative in assisting players to design the new item, handing out flaws for objects that seem overpowered. Objects created with this spell should also have fantastic appearances that include elements of both items used in its creation.

Example: Rory the witch aims to combine a pistol and a can of gasoline to create a weapon that fires flaming bullets, without the need for ammunition. The pistol is Size 1, Durability 4 and the can of gasoline is Size 2, Durability 2. The resulting object is a Size 2, Durability 3, Structure 5 weapon that resembles a heavy revolver with the nozzle of a gas can as the barrel and a lingering smell of petrol. The Storyteller decides a gun that shoots endless fiery shells should have a flaw and decides that the gun requires refueling after firing 20 shots.

Silver (••••)

Valued for its luster and by some for its mythical ability to harm creatures of the night, silver has been mined and traded for centuries. No matter how many times silver is melted down and remolded it still retains the same value, similar to how objects altered by this spell remain intrinsically the same even after being changed by magic.

Cost: Source

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Science + Gnosis

For each success gained on the casting roll the witch can alter the Size or Durability of the object touched by 1. Objects may not be reduced below Size 1 and objects reduced below

Durability 1 become exceedingly fragile and easily broken. Increasing the Size of an object has no effect on the Durability of the object and vice versa. Altering the Durability of an object does have the effect on the weight of the object, effectively increasing or decreasing its weight by 10% for each degree of alteration.

Gold (••••)

The final product of their studies in the Mystery of Transmutation is the fantasy of medieval alchemists come true. With mastery of this Mystery the witch gains ultimate power over matter and can turn lead into gold, oxygen into poisonous gases, or rock into cheese.

Cost: Source

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Range: Touch

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Gnosis

This spell allows the witch to rearrange the molecular composition of an object to form an entirely new object from

the materials. The Durability and Size of the object remain constant, but may be changed with other spells. Objects created through use of this spell may not have complex designs or moving parts. Turning a plastic chair into a wooden door is fine; turning the same chair into a car is not.

The magic of this spell may also be used to break objects down into their component materials. Used on a computer, for example, the witch would dissolve the bonds holding the machine together and end up with hunks of plastic, metal and a variety of chemical pools.

Objects undergoing changes as a result of this spell slowly shift from the old item to the new one, taking on aspects of both objects halfway through the procedure while giving off clouds of reeking (but harmless) gas. If the spell is being used to break down an object, the item seems to simply melt down into its component materials (with the same reeking clouds of gas).

Casting this spell is an extended action with the target number equal to Structure of the object to be changed. Each roll is equal to one minute.



"THE STUFF ALICIA'S PEOPLE INJECTED ME WITH WAS MORE THAN VITAMINS"

The stuff Alicia's people injected me with was more than vitamins. It was... worms. Don't know how else to describe them. A mass of worms that traveled to somewhere in my chest and settled in there.

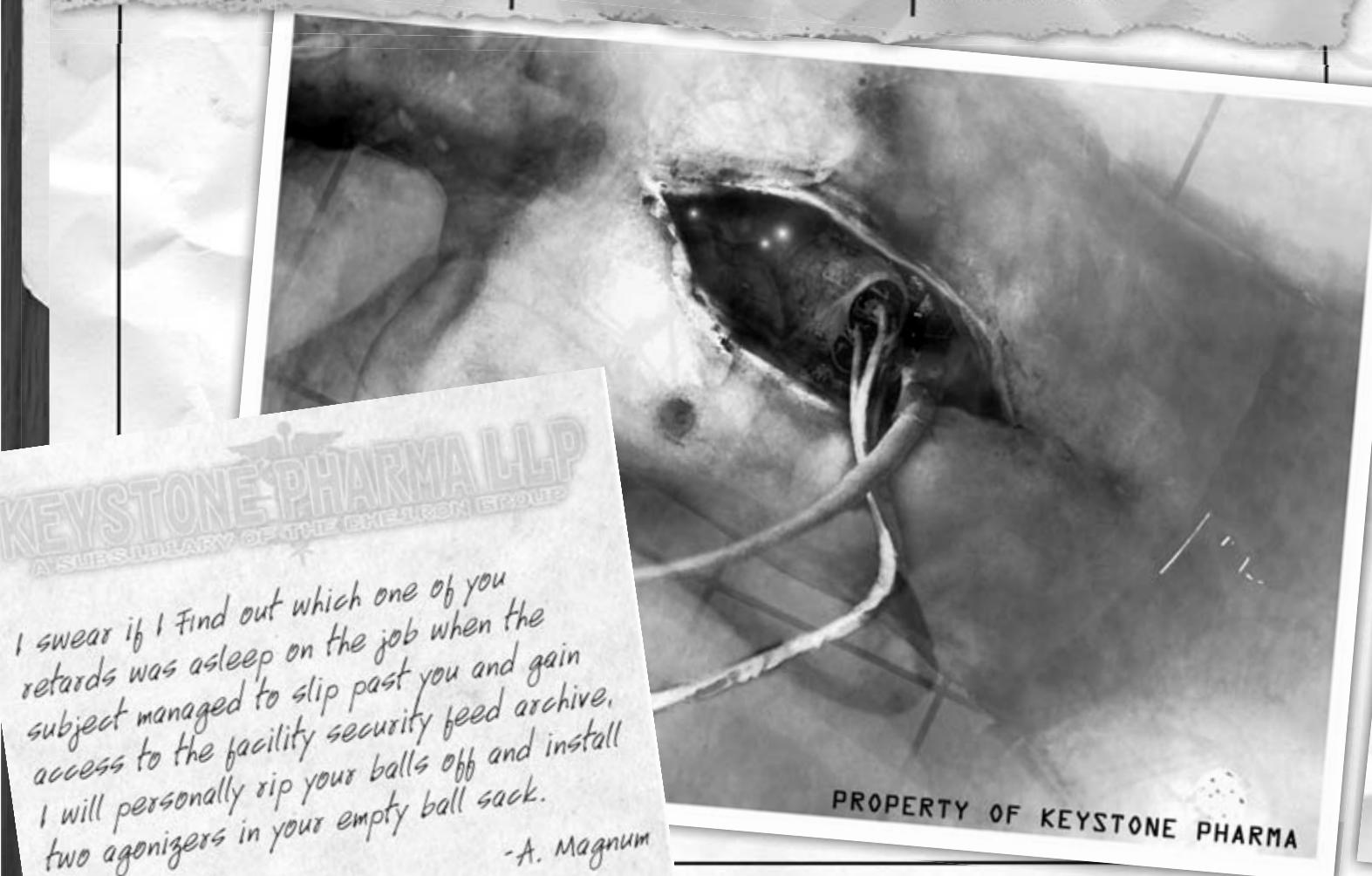
These worms, they eat ghosts. The Cheiron people have another way of saying it, but that's basically what they do. The first time it happened, in a cemetery in south Philly, it felt like someone was pulling my guts out. I thought I was just there to be an extra pair of hands. The "extraction team" was wandering around and I was just standing next to some boxes of equipment. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder and I turned around and there was this thing, this ragged, skull-faced cloud of fog with eyes like tunnels...

I couldn't move. And the worms came whipping out of my chest, right through my muscles, my skin, my shirt, my jacket; these glowing, wriggling, ugly ghost-worms. They flung themselves at the apparition and it howled. The worms burrowed into it, chewed it up into nothing. Then, fat and warm, they flew back at me, slithered around my legs and arms and into my mouth and eyes and back down into their nest behind my breastbone. They were gorged on ghost-flesh, and it made me feel heavy and nauseous. Back at HQ they drained whatever it was out of me, but left the worms inside me to do it again.

Alicia kept sending me out; I spent evenings in graveyards, afternoons

in sewers, whole days and nights in crumbling, abandoned houses, attics, basements. Waiting for another dead soul to turn up and feed the worms. Praying that none would. She said it was part of the job, in exchange for the money they were paying me. I told myself it was just one more price to pay to find my daughter's killer. It had to be, or why would I put myself through this? It had to be one more way the witch Harriet Geist, wherever she was, had destroyed my life.

And then I got an e-mail from a Netzo affiliate who'd just been on a road trip. She swore she'd seen Harriet Geist in a small town called Evansville.



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I swear if I find out which one of you
retards was asleep on the job when the
subject managed to slip past you and gain
access to the facility security feed archive,
I will personally rip your balls off and install
two agonizers in your empty ball sack.
-A. Magnum

... start doing your fucking job.

Subject: the bitter conclusion

Date: 8/15/06

From: Anthony Geist (ageist@padre.net)

To: Cardinal Samuel Gilmore (sgilmore@padre.net)

Conversation: the bitter conclusion

She was hungry, so we stopped at a diner. "We don't have a lot of time, Harriet," I told her. I tried not to sound nervous. It was hard to estimate how much time we had. I'd taken the car, but the Brothers wouldn't realize that until they got back to St. Matthew's. They wouldn't know if I'd left of my own free will or not; they might assume the latter. They had no contacts in Philadelphia that I knew of, which would delay their ability to mount a search. The Brothers clearly put a lot of time into their Benedictions and fighting skills, but how were they at detective work? We might have minutes, hours, all day, all week.

She wolfed down a turkey sandwich. We hadn't talked much yet. She looked so different from the last time I'd seen her. Her 17th birthday, I think it was. Then she was charming, but shy. She'd look at her feet when she talked to you. Now she moved boldly, talked loudly, walked with long strides, met your eyes with her own fierce stare. Intricate tattoos covered both her forearms; her hair was cut with a punk style and I could tell she'd had some piercings, though she wore none at the moment. She also looked tired, haggard. Her clothes were worn, and not just by fashion. She had the look of someone who'd slept on the street. I knew that look. "Harriet," I told her. "We need to talk about a few things."

She drained a glass of water, put it down. She looked up at me, her chin pointed at me like an accusation. "What were you doing in that house, Uncle Tony? You don't know how dangerous that asshole Archie is."

"Why would you live with someone so dangerous?"

"I don't live there anymore. This is the first time I've been back in six months. I didn't even know he was alive. I just wanted some of my stuff from the basement." She turned away.

"He's a—" I couldn't say the word. "He was using sorcery, wasn't he, Harriet? You can be honest with me. I know such things exist. I know more about it than most people do."

She looked at me again, and her eyes were tearing. "I had to stop him, didn't I? He really would have hurt you. I didn't want to use the Art. I've been trying not to do anything — that way. But it's hard. What if someone told you to stop using your left arm? Not that it was injured or anything, it was perfectly normal, but you had to keep it still all the time and never use it? How hard do you think it would be?"

"Harriet—"

"You don't know what it's been like. You can't imagine. There are two dead little girls following me around. One is Crystal, the other, some girl in green pajamas, I don't know her. And I don't want to see them. I don't want to look at them. So I try not to do any magic at all. But it's been so hard..."

"Shh," I said. "Don't worry. Don't worry." I reached to take her hand but she pulled away, leaned back in the booth with her hands to her face. When she put them down her expression was more composed.

"Harriet," I said. "I want to help you. I've known other people in your situation, other people who've traded their humanity for the lure of infernal power. Honey, you're my family and I'll always love you. Let me help you."

She started to say something, her voice cracked. Then she whispered, "You don't know what I did."

"I know more than you think. I won't judge you for anything you've done, honey. Not me."

"But..." She leaned forward, rested her head in her hands and stared down at the table. Then she looked up and said, "What am I supposed to do, Uncle Tony? What am I supposed to do?"

I found it hard to speak also. "I can't tell you what to do, Harriet, you have to make your own choice. If you decide to walk out of here now, I won't stop you. I can't stop you. But you're not safe on your own, honey, I can tell you that."

"I don't give a shit about being safe anymore," she mumbled. "I just want them to stop following me. I don't want to look at them, I don't want to feel them...but sooner or later I will; I won't be able to stop myself..."

"I know of a... a place," I said to her, whispering now. "For people in your situation who want out of it; it's a Government-sponsored treatment program. It's new, and I don't know all the details. But they say they

can make people normal again, people who've gone down the path you're on. I have some contacts and they can get you in, I'm sure of it."

"I'm not crazy, Uncle Tony. I don't need to be in some psych ward..."

"I know you're not crazy. I'm not denying the reality of your experiences. And they won't either. They'll just help you turn back to your humanity, to who you really are, and leave the nightmare behind."

"You think they can make me a normal person again?"

"I think it's worth finding out, if you're willing. And I'll keep in touch, come to visit, make sure it's working and take you out if it's not." And, I thought but didn't say, you'll be out of reach of Kramer and Sprenger, and their ilk. "I'm sorry, but there's not a lot of time to make a decision. The people I'm with are looking for us right now."

We sat in silence for a minute. The waitress came and took the check, returned and left my change. And then I realized something: my cell phone. It had a locator chip in it. A security precaution. Jesus, Mary elbow caught the edge of the sugar jar, flipped it; sugar spilled everywhere. I fumbled to open the phone. I'd have to turn it on to deactivate the tracking signal...

"Uncle Tony." Harriet's voice was urgent. I looked up. She pointed at the spilled sugar, in which these words had been traced:

HARRIET UNCLE TONY THEYRE CLOSE THEYRE COMING FOR YOU

"It's Crystal," she said, and we found our way to the back door.

You know how the rest of it turned out, Eminence. I gave my niece over to the Government rather than to the ministrations of Malleus Maleficarum. And damned if I didn't let my fear of one autocratic authority blind me to the dangers of another. Within a week, the Government people started breaking their promises to me: wouldn't let me see her, wouldn't tell me where they took her, wouldn't tell me what their "Re-bound Protocol" would do to her. To save her from one Hell, I sent her to another.

Have me excommunicated if you wish. I know they've already replaced me at St. Andrew's, and I'm sure there's a crop of new, young witchfinders ready to step up and take my place in the Order. After this letter, you won't hear from me again. I'll need to travel far to avoid your reach. But I'm not without resources, allies. I'll find some way to get Harriet out of the prison I placed her in. I won't betray the secrets of the Hammer — that vow remains intact. As for the chrism of Holy Orders, that may be eternal, but I no longer consider myself a priest. My last priestly act occurred the last day I saw my niece. Before we parted, Harriet allowed me to administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation. She confessed her sins and I absolved her of them. The Lord will count her no sinner. And I no longer believe witchcraft a sin. But you, your Eminence, and I, and all our brethren...we have sin on our souls, stains so dark I weep to think of it. May God have mercy on us all.

"THERE'S A DINER OUTSIDE OF EVANSTVILLE THAT SERVES COFFEE SO STRONG IT COULD WAKE THE DEAD"

There's a diner outside of Evansville that serves coffee so strong it could wake the dead. Took me five hours to drive there. Wouldn't have thought they're be an all-night joint like that, way out there in the sticks. I guess they got enough truck traffic from the interstate to make it worthwhile.

At about 2 AM I sat down in a

booth by a window. Didn't recognize Harriet when she poured me that first cup of coffee. She was different than the picture. Not just older. Her hair was long now, pulled back in a pony tail. She'd gained weight. It was her arm that caught my attention first; there was the trace of a tattoo visible just past the sleeve of her uniform. It

seemed out of character for this place. I looked up. Saw her face; that crooked nose, that sharp chin. Harriet Geist.

"You want a menu?" she asked. She sounded half-asleep. Eyes half closed.

"Tough to work the late shift, huh?" I asked.

She just stared at me. No, not stared... just looked. Not seeing me. Waiting for an answer. Not impatient, just waiting. Like she would stand there all night if she had to.

"Hey, have we met or something? Because you look really familiar." I tried to sound casual, relaxed.

She tilted her head back a bit. Said nothing. It wasn't boredom. My question just didn't register. "Sure," I said then. "I'll take a menu. Thanks."

Another waitress passed by as Harriet walked away, put a salt-and-pepper set on my table and said "She's kinda slow," nodding towards Harriet. "Not much for chit-chat, but she'll take good care a'you, don't worry."

I waited in the parking lot with a gun in my pocket. Finally, I saw Harriet walk out. By the time she climbed onto her bicycle — an old ten-speed with a basket in front — I was blocking the front wheel.

"Harriet."

She didn't look surprised. She didn't look like anything. Finally, she said, "What do you want." Flat, no inflection.

"You're Harriet Geist."

"Yes."

"You killed my daughter."

She didn't flinch. It was as if I'd told her she'd dropped a penny. "I don't remember killing anybody's daughter," she said.

My mouth was dry. I had to swallow before I could speak. "Did you kill your father?"

She didn't hesitate. She didn't so much as blink. "Yes."

"You're a witch."

"Not no more."

I lowered my voice. "I have a gun. I want you to get off that bike and walk over to that car with me."

"I don't want to."

"Do it or I'll shoot you."

She climbed off the bike, let it fall to the ground. Started walking, not looking to see if I was following. I walked behind her, hand on my pistol.

We got to my car, stood there, looking at each other.

"Don't you want to know who I am?" I demanded.

"It doesn't matter."

"I'll shoot you! I will!"

She shrugged.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I'm a little slow," she said. "I'm just a little slow. Can I go home now, mister? I've been on my feet all day."

I drove her home. I put her to bed. I waited for my conviction to return. That was four months ago. We're living together now. It's not sexual, though that's what people around here think.

I'm left with no Harriet Geist to kill, and nowhere else to go. Harriet has been emptied of herself. That's the best way I can describe it. She has a surgical scar across the top of her forehead, just below her hairline. Others on her left arm. She takes medicine that comes in the mail, no return address. I told her to stop taking it. A day later she started having seizures. I gave her the pills back.

Most nights she likes — as much as she can "like" anything — to walk along the riverbank. Sometimes she says she sees two little girls in the water. "The dead girls," she calls them. One is her sister Crystal. The other... I have an idea who that is.

If the dead girls were to appear, the worms would devour them. They're still in me. Hungry.

Warm nights, Harriet wades into the river. Walks out a little farther each time. She's gone in up to her shoulders so far. One night soon, I'm sure, she'll just keep walking. Don't know if I'll go in after her.





Storytelling Witchfinders

Below you'll find a handful of essays that operate as advice to both Storytellers and players when it comes to a game where hunters must hunt and confront the mad magic and dangerous whims of sorcerers.

The Emotional Perils of Hunting Witches

Few beings raise as many deep and intricate challenges to hunters as witches. As if interacting with a being that possesses nigh-unlimited power was not enough for a hunter to deal with, witches also challenge those who would interact with them on many other levels. From their very appearance as "almost normal" humans to their treacherous skill with manipulating the world around them, hunters who interact with witches quickly find themselves dealing with threats not only to their body and mind, but also to the very core of their being. Not every witch-hunter game will focus on these challenges, but for players and Storytellers who are willing to delve into them, a plethora of interesting moral conundrums can be encountered and explored through encounters between hunters and witches.

Manipulation, Magic and Moral High Ground

Witches are capable of challenging hunters not only physically and intellectually, but also on a uniquely moral level. They may possess powers that force their foes into certain actions, controlling an opponent's mind or body like a puppet. These wholesale manipulations may be obvious and immediate, as a sorcerer takes control of an opponent who is forced to mindlessly obey the witch's command to shoot a fellow cell-member or himself. Or, perhaps more terrifyingly, the control may be subtle and subconscious, activating only when a certain word is spoken or a specific situation comes into being. A witch-hunter who has run afoul of a talented wielder of the Passion Lore may well find herself acting against her will to sabotage, sell out or even slay her closest companions and allies. And, if the witch is also adept with mind magic, he can erase all memory of the hunter's traitorous actions from his own mind. Coming to terms with having been used as a tool or weapon against innocents, friends, family or fellow hunters is a reality many witchfinders may eventually have to face.

Even those witches who are not entirely antagonistic towards hunters (or vice versa) are capable of challenging a hunter's moral code and ethics in ways other monsters rarely do. Witches defy the laws of reality, manipulating it to their own whim. And, because of this, they come to see the world and those in it as not finite or implacable, but mutable and easily influenced by those, like themselves, who have the skill and inclination to do so. Even among their friends and allies, they are capable of subtle intellectual and emotional manipulations that may well influence a hunter into thoughts and actions he would have never previously considered. Inch by inch, action by action, witches are capable of providing seemingly-logical justifications for their own misdeeds and the tres-



If a man has put a spell upon another man and it is not justified, he upon whom the spell is laid shall go to the holy river; into the holy river shall he plunge. If the holy river overcome him and he is drowned, the man who put the spell upon him shall take possession of his house. If the holy river declares him innocent and he remains unharmed, the man who laid the spell shall be put to death. He that plunged into the river shall take possession of the house of him who laid the spell upon him.

-Hammurabi



passes of others, until a hunter may find himself engaging in debauchery or degradation of unthinkable depths and depravity. Such is, unfortunately for those who ally themselves with magic-wielders, standard fare in the world of the witch.

Camouflage and Paranoia

Not only are witches known to be subtle, sly and manipulative, they look like normal human beings. They might be the Volvo driver with the power tie, the pot-smoking hippy, the corner-store owner or the cookie-baking grandmother next-door. College students, bus drivers, politicians, priests or professional athletes; witches are capable of being anyone, anywhere. And, unless a witch-hunter actually witnesses one using his blasphemous abilities or uses some sort of equipment or skill capable of discerning his sorcerous nature, it's often impossible to tell a warlock who has sold his soul to the Devil or an unholy high priest capable of summoning zombies or earthquakes apart from your average Joe on the street.

Because witches are, generally speaking, human beings (regardless of their inhuman powers), they are also capable of moving among human society in ways the average monster cannot. They are not, as a group, hampered by supernatural bans in the ways other monsters are. They go out in sunlight

and eat normal food. They can cross running water, enter holy ground and are unaffected by holy symbols, garlic, cold iron or wolfsbane. They (most often) live in houses or apartments, drive or take public transportation, and carry valid human identification. They frequently have jobs, families, friends, and other anchors of human interaction that aid in their masquerade as "normal" and add to their ability to remain below the radar of all but the most wary hunter.

Nothing heightens one's sense of awareness more than realizing that your greatest enemy, a creature potentially capable of apocalyptic-level devastation and reality bending upon a whim, could be standing next to you at any given moment: buying groceries; cutting your hair; eating dinner in a restaurant; repairing your leaky pipes; taking the uptown commuter; or babysitting your children. In some cases, these actions are just the witch going about her daily business. Many hold jobs, or live at least partially "normal" lives. But a hunter can never be certain when a sorceress is just trying to make money to pay her rent, or when she's working in a barber shop to cut short her customer's lives along with their fallen hair, or babysitting to get the chance to steal sweat, spit, tears and blood for use in her profane spells.

The realization that witches could be literally anywhere drastically increases the general paranoia of your average witchfinder. Heightened paranoia, unfortunately, means mistakes are more likely to happen. Horrible, painful, often deadly mistakes. Trigger-happy witch-hunters might take out a “coven” of witches, only to discover it was a women’s study group unknowingly led by a single high-priestess/witch – or that no one in the group has supernatural powers at all (even if they believe they do) and they’ve slaughtered a group of New-Agers whose only connection with magic was buying books with that word in the title. An all-night stakeout could leave a cell weary (and jumpy) enough to strategically take out someone who just looks like their intended target (a concern that’s doubled if the witch is capable of wearing a normal human’s face.) Or worse, they might begin to see indications and hints that lead them to believe their friends, family or co-workers are actually manifesting magical abilities or possess them and are hiding them from the hunter’s perception. When you know your enemy could be anywhere around you, the temptation to see anyone around you as the enemy is catastrophically high.

Signs, Signs, Signs

If a witch-hunter can’t sort witches from normal humanity by their looks or weaknesses, he may try to do so by their abilities. Witches, however, rarely advertise their powers, and humanity is full of those with subtle abilities (or the belief that they have abilities) that might easily be mistaken as signs of magic-using. Having hunches, “good feelings” about things, *déjà vu* or seemingly prophetic dreams might easily be seen as potential signs that a person has latent or purposefully concealed supernatural powers to see the future. A genius’ ability to break a long-secret code, a master diplomat’s knack for bringing warring nations to common ground, or a greasy mechanic in some backwater town’s reputation of being able to fix “anything.” Are these simply the upper extremes of human abilities and skills, or is there something else, something sinister and supernatural behind these individuals’ talents? Someone picks the winning lottery numbers, or walks away from an accident that should have killed them, someone else is saved from robbery or theft when their attacker has a heart attack, is struck by lightning or just gains the attention of the police mid-attack. Coincidence? Luck? Miracle? Or Magic?

As tightly as society tries to wrap up the happenings of the world into cause and effect, predictable outcome and logical explanations, a great deal happens in the world for which even the most scientific of minds have no explanation. The potential for a paranoid hunter to mistake an anomaly for subtly-wielded supernatural power is high, especially if (as discussed earlier) he suffers from the paranoia that plagues many witchfinders. In such a situation, it is easy to cross the line between attention to detail and jumping to false conclusions. The same instinct that allows him to notice a certain individual always mumbles to herself and twitches her fingers before purchasing a winning lottery ticket may detect an OCD sufferer or habitual gambler on a lucky streak just as easily as a fate-twisting witch. And, even if his intentions are not lethal, these mistakes may lead to complicated moral issues.

If he’s convinced she has the ability, but not the willingness, to show him which tickets will allow him to win enough to pay his rent or get his rifle out of hock, or if he believes she can turn the tides of an upcoming battle in his favor, he may not think twice about asserting a Morality-straining level of pressure upon her to try to influence her “powers.”

Pot, Kettle, Black

To further complicate things, many of the most effective methods witch-hunters use to discern their subtle prey are actually supernatural items or powers themselves. Whether it’s a prayer (holy or otherwise) for insight as to the identity of their intended target, an ancient relic or recipe that is capable of reacting in the presence of sorcerers or magical activity, or a pseudo-scientific device that uses exo-biological samples to fuel a high-tech “witch-sniffer,” the line between hunter and hunted is, in many cases, not only blurred or crossed, but simply does not exist except in the mind of the hunter. Even if a hunter character is not self-aware enough to recognize the hypocrisy inherent in using one supernatural power or item to hunt down a person whose only crime may be using a similar power, the Storyteller should feel free to question the player about the moral implications of such actions. Introducing other non-witch-hunter characters to raise such challenges can be an effective way to encourage a character to explore (if not come to grips with) the moral hypocrisy of his actions.

The Many Faces of Magic

From reading minds to summoning lightning from a clear sky, the gamut of “magic” displayed by apparent witches is strikingly broad and diverse, for those who are aware of it. And, just as the powers they wield range wildly in power, source, and effect, so do witches themselves vary greatly. So greatly, in fact, that there is little clear concession on what exactly a witch is, even among those who hunt them.

To some witchfinders, any seemingly human being with abilities beyond those of normal humans may be classified as a witch. Some of these witch-hunters reserve the title for those supernaturally powered individuals who are antagonistic (or at least have goals that are in contrast to the hunters’ own.) Others use the term for all humans with magical abilities, but may designate some as “good” witches, and others as evil, using titles like “warlock” or “sorcerer.” As with all judgments of this type, however, a “good” witch may quickly be labeled “evil” if she refuses to cooperate with a hunter or if her motives or actions come to be seen as interfering with those of the hunter or his cell. (This can lead to complex emotional complications, a subject more fully explored in the previous essay.)

Other hunters quantify witches as only those who are inherently capable of supernatural effect, weeding out those whose powers are the result of other beings or items. They may even see those who are so influenced as victims rather



than perpetrators. Some witch-hunters may specialize in “liberating” such victims by confiscating the item or breaking ties between the victim and the influencing party (see both “Shamans and Priests” and “Owners and the Owned” below.)

Still other hunters classify witches by their relative power levels, seeing those who are only capable of slight or subtle acts as being less inhuman as those who wield magic on a grand scale. Where exactly this line is drawn, however, is subject to interpretation. Is a witch that possesses a single very powerful ability more or less human than one with a whole gamut of less-effective supernatural skills? Is someone who uses their magic subtly but constantly more or less of an offense to a hunter’s sensibilities than someone who rarely uses their power but when they do, the effects are cataclysmic? Is potential, power-level, action or effect more important when judging who is a witch and who is not?

Finally, there are those who judge whether an individual is a witch not by their abilities but by their motivations, beliefs and actions. They may look the other way, labeling certain individuals (those whose motives they understand and agree with) as psychics, gifted or simply “special,” while those with magical powers whose goals are contrary to those of the hunter are labeled witches (and treated accordingly.) Like judging a witch by the strength of her magic, this is a mutable scale, and one hunter’s “ally with a knack for being

in the right place at the right time” may be another’s enemy. Similarly, the psychic a cell befriends and works beside in one situation may turn out to be their nemesis in another.

Confusion about who and what exactly qualifies a person as a witch is certainly understandable, given this wide variety of definitions. Although the categories into which hunters divide witches often overlap or contradict each other, certain designations exist which individual hunters or cells may recognize. Some are offered here, along with suggestions and story hooks that may be used to spawn plotlines, Storyteller characters, or even act as inspiration for designing a player’s witch-hunter character’s background.

Putting the Magic In

When Storytelling magic in the World of Darkness, several simple style techniques can be used to enhance the atmosphere of the game and reinforce the themes of a “hunter versus witch” story.

Ambiguity – One of the greatest challenges facing witchfinders is the fact that witches are human. They’re humans with powerful abilities (just as many hunters themselves are) but their very nature as humans means the line between hunter and monster is much finer than in most other Vigils. Playing up this ambiguity by referring to an antagonist in uncertain terms can help build the player’s paranoia about the nature of the individual they’re interacting with to the

same degree that their character should be experiencing. Using non-specific descriptors (the woman, the boy, the voice on the other end of the line) or specific descriptions that do not focus on whether they are a witch or not (the red-haired man, the nurse, the girl in the rainbow jumper) can help a Storyteller portray the uncertainty a hunter often feels when pursuing witches. On the other hand describing an antagonist (or ally) as “the witch” may reassure the player (and character) that his or her assumptions about the target’s nature are correct, removing the inherent doubt and second-thoughts.

Diversity – Not all magic “feels” the same. The ritual used by a cannibalistic coven may smell of blood, even when none is physically present, while a witch whose powers come from her worship of nature may smell of rich earth, wet leaves or fresh grass. Those who gain their powers from demonic pacts may show a bit of their infernal patronage when casting spells, an unholy light gleaming from their eyes, or the shadows in the area writhing sinuously. Choosing a few specific sensory details that are appropriate for any given witch and then using them to describe situations where he is doing or has done magic helps add to the atmosphere of a witch-hunter game, and having those details be very different from those of other witches reinforces to hunter players and characters that the world of magic is a very diverse and complex one.

Show, Don’t Tell – All of the previous techniques contribute to the overall admonition to show your players what is happening in a given scene, rather than telling them what is happening. Saying “he throws a lightning bolt” isn’t really descriptive. Describing to a player how their characters hair begins to twitch and stand on end, how they can smell the electric scent of ozone in the air, and hear the hum and crackle as the woman standing before them holds her hands in supplication to the gathering clouds overhead gives a much richer experience. While not every situation necessarily needs a full five-senses description, using a “show, don’t tell” approach can bring a sense of reality to describing magical effects.

By combining these techniques to flesh out the challenges and intricacies of interacting with a witch, Storytellers can provide a more satisfying and complete experience to their players, and thus enhance the witchfinder portion of any **Hunter: the Vigil** game. All of these style affectations can also be used in other types of **Hunter** games, to enhance the atmosphere for players and increase the “reality” factor for characters.

Shamans and Priests

Hunters facing witches who receive their powers from external entities such as gods, demons or spirits may have to worry about inciting the wrath of these greater beings (if they, in fact, exist). This type of witch also frequently attracts followers (who either worship the witch as a representative of the greater being or who worship the god/demon/spirit along side the witch and see him as a part of their religious community.) Even if the witchfinder’s intentions towards the shaman-witch are not malevolent, he may find that the witch’s faith bleeds over to his allies in uncomfortable ways. He may require certain spiritually significant sacrifices or ac-

tions from the hunter before lending aid or cooperation, and he may challenge the hunter’s own faith (or lack thereof). It is difficult to argue an atheistic or agnostic philosophy with an individual who can prove in no uncertain terms that his god is not only present, but powerful. For more ideas about this kind of witch, see *Holy Callings*, below.

Owners and the Owned

Just because an individual can change the weather, levitate or sprout wings doesn’t mean she has any inherent supernatural ability herself. Some witches manifest their magic not because of who they are, but rather because of what they own. Blessed, cursed or simply supernatural items are not just the purview of the Aegis Kai Doru. Other individuals (or organizations) also may acquire (or be acquired by) relics, amulets, or idols that are capable of granting them certain supernatural abilities – usually with a significant cost to the owner. The price may be as straightforward as gaining the witch the attention of a hunter cell or causing him physical harm whenever the item is used. Or, the item’s cost may be more subtle and insidious, warping the witch’s thoughts, actions or even their soul to better suit the item’s vile goals.

In most cases, once separated from these items, the witch is powerless, possessing no inherent magic herself. Of course, a witch who knows this will do anything within her power to retain said item. Even if she is being forced or manipulated into doing horrible things to “feed” the item, those who attain superhuman abilities are often hard pressed to walk away from them. This desperation can fuel inhuman resistance to the hunter assigned to separate witch from item, even if the removal is for the witch’s own health, sanity, or well-being.

Hunters may refer to those witches who rely upon supernaturally-powered items as “packing” or “hot” when carrying the items, and “unloaded” or “offline” when separated from them. However, paranoid witches who know that a particular item is the key to their power are likely to hide the item (and its existence) from all but their most intimate associates, out of fear that someone will try to steal it from them. This reduces the likelihood that a hunter cell will recognize this type of witch as being under the influence or in the possession of said item, and cuts down on the probability of seeing the simplest solution to dealing with her (i.e. removing the item from her custody).

Certain hunter organizations (the Aegis Kai Doru, especially, but to a lesser extent the Cheiron Group, and various lower-level groups and cells) take a particular interest in acquiring any item that grants supernatural power to its owner. Some profess to merely wanting to keep such dangerous objects safely away from those who could either use them to harm others or be unknowingly seduced into using them. Others make no secret of their desires to use said relic’s powers in their own crusades, leading to a moral conundrum not unlike that faced by prayer or curse wielding hunters who challenge spirituality or religion-based witches.

Some witches even believe their power lies within a particular item, and that they are unable to work magic without it, a circumstance that only further blurs that line. These

CHRISTIAN WITCHES

Some witch-hunters classify those who believe they receive their supernatural powers from the Christian God in the same category as those who worship pre-Christian deities, totemic spirits, or demons and devils. Others, especially those who possess Christian beliefs themselves, may not. Whether a certain religious individual's supernatural powers are witchcraft or miracles is entirely a matter of interpretation by the hunter, and this schism can lead to conflict — both internally and between hunters. A Task Force: VALKYRIE cell that is ordered to capture, interrogate or "neutralize" a cult leader target may run into problems when one devout cellmate refuses to take action against the scripture-quoting witch who uses the hunter's own beliefs against him. Likewise, Malleus Maleficarum hunters or those of the Lucifuge or Long Night may well find themselves faced with a conundrum when they are ordered to act against witches who claim to receive their "power" from the same sources that the hunter's own Endowments originate.

witches can prove a particularly dangerous threat to hunters attempting to apprehend or destroy them. While some believe so strongly in their power's connection to the item that they will become effectively powerless when separated from it, others will discover that in a life-or-death situation they do not need to rely upon their item, and will unleash their fury upon their would-be-assailants. And, especially if a hunter cell does not know that a particular witch actually has powers of her own, they may not be prepared for dealing with the witch as a still potent enemy after she has been separated from her purported power source.

Dowsers, Sparks and Stormseers

While some witches seem to have a broad spectrum of magical abilities and powers at their fingertips, others have a single "knack" or "quirk." Sometimes this is a helpful, or even powerful skill. Witches who were able to sense the presence of water, oil or valuable minerals underground were used extensively in previous centuries to determine where wells or mines should be dug (and in some areas, those with these skills are still valuable experts consulted before construction begins.) Other witches might be able to accurately predict the sex of an unborn child, detect (and often thwart) the evil eye or other curses upon their clients, or bring rain or good weather to a particular location. Such witches might be seen (at least for a time) as a positive influence on a community (by those who are aware of their ability).

Some knacks, however, are more difficult to justify as being used for the common good. Those who can, themselves, cast curses or inflict disease, injury or pain upon others, for example, are unlikely to make any friends by virtue of their powers, unless they also possess the ability to undo such hardships. They may, however, earn the respect (and fear) of those who know of their ability, and may attract minions, worshipers or at least cowed-community members by virtue of their potential to do harm.

Like most tools, however, even the narrowest knack can usually be used (and perceived) as either good or evil. One witch might use telekinesis to assassinate those who stand between herself and her goals. Another might use the same power to aid in her work as a firefighter, allowing her to enter into areas others cannot without fear of the building collapsing on her. A witch with the power to heal might use her gift to cure terminal illness, saving the lives of hundreds or thousands of deserving individuals. Or, she might covertly sell her services to the highest bidder, becoming a well-paid, walking life-support system for the rich, powerful and, inevitably, corrupt.

In earlier times, humans with a knack frequently had no need to hide it from the rest of society. Such abilities were often seen as a gift from whatever benevolent spirit the community worshiped or as simply a family or individual trait, and were respected as such. Although they still exist, individuals who speak publicly about such knacks are more often seen and treated as (at best) simple-minded, superstitious folk lacking in modern sophistication or intellect. At worst, claiming to have such ability might well earn a modern person a label as eccentric, crazy, or potentially as a shyster or con-man.

Some hunter groups may not classify humans with a single knack as witches, while others (especially if the ability is exceedingly useful or harmful) may focus on either attaining the witch as an ally or "neutralizing" her to avoid her power being used against themselves or the rest of humanity.

Some examples of knacks which hunters might encounter include:

TOOLS VERSUS RELICS

Some witches, while possessing magical abilities on their own, rely heavily upon certain ingredients and tools to amplify, focus, or direct their power. Tarot cards might be used to divine the future, a particular wand to focus curses or offensive attacks, or a piece of jewelry to hold a protection spell. This designation muddies the lines between those who are inherently witches and those who have become witches by virtue of possessing a supernaturally powerful item.

Compass: Someone with an innate sense of direction. Historically, many cultures have relied upon these individuals to lead or accompany expeditions or journeys, especially before the advent of reliable navigation equipment.

Danger Sense: Some folks just have a knack for knowing when trouble is heading their direction.

Doodlebug: An individual with the ability to sense significant sources of oil beneath the ground. Doodlebug is also used to refer to a dowsing rod, especially if it is used for sensing oil rather than water.

Dowser: An individual with the ability to use dowsing rods to sense significant sources of water beneath the ground. Also sometimes known as a diviner (although the term diviner can also be used for someone who sees the future).

Eidetic Memory: The knack for being able to recall information after seeing it only once. Some people with this ability describe it as their mind taking a snap-shot of the information which they can later peruse at will.

Fakir: Someone with the ability to endure normally devastating damage through sheer force of will. Examples might include fire-walking, laying on a bed of nails, or eating glass. This is a Sufi term, but can be generally applied to any individual with these abilities. This knack can be related to the Iron Stamina or Iron Stomach Merit.

Filch: A person who can relocate small objects, usually into their own pockets.

Forecasters: Those with the ability to tell when significant weather changes are going to happen. Some feel the impending change physically (an ache in a particular location) while others simply “sense” that the change is coming. This knack is related to Stormseers, although more general.

Healers: Some healers have the ability to speed along others’ healing, while others simply recover from wounds or illness very quickly themselves. This knack can be associated with either the Holistic Awareness Merit or that of Quick Healer and/or Natural Immunity and/or Toxin Resistance.

Medium: An individual who can communicate with ghosts.

Precog: Someone who has visions of things that will happen in the future. Related knacks include “postcog” (seeing what happened in the past that one did not directly witness), “precog-psychometry” (seeing what will happen in the future when touching an item that will be important to the situation), “déjà vu” (a sense of having already heard, felt or seen a particular situation, often in a dream), or divination (using tools of some sort to predict the future).

Psychometry: The ability to sense something about an item by touching it. Psychometrics can sometimes sense the emotional state of the last person who handled an object, or get a vision of the owner’s current location, state or situation.

Spark: Someone with the ability to create a small spark of fire from thin air. Sparks often, but not always, have pyromania tendencies and strong tempers.

Stormseers: Individuals who can predict an impending storm well before any physical signs manifest. This knack is especially helpful for sailors and other sea-related professions, or for those who are traveling in harsh environs. Many stormseers can

KNACKS AND MERITS

Many knacks are similar or identical to Merits found in the World of Darkness, a circumstance which only serves to additionally complicate the already difficult definition of “witch.” It may also provide some interesting conflict if an eager hunter, cell, agency or organization turns its focus on an otherwise-normal mortal with a Merit-related knack, especially if one or more of the hunters in question (or a member of their family or friends) also possess the related Merit.

predict not only the arrival of, but also the intensity and approximate duration of a coming storm.

Psychics, Seers and Clairvoyants

Not all witches manipulate reality through magical powers. Some just have access to knowledge that normal humans do not. Whether by seeing into the future, reading thoughts or emotions, dream-hopping, astral projection or distance-viewing, these types of witches have no real powers, other than the ability to gain knowledge to which others do not have access. But, as anyone whose privacy has been invaded will attest, knowledge is power and even without the ability to supernaturally manipulate the world around them, those with access to supposedly secret information can use it in a plethora of ways.

Some witches with the ability to glean private or hidden information do so only at will, and have the ability to turn off their power to allow others privacy. Others simply cannot help knowing what they do. They can no more turn off their ability to read others’ thoughts or sense their emotions than anyone else can stop their sense of smell or touch.

When hunters are willing to take allies from among the ranks of witches, it is often this type of ability that is most strongly coveted: covert reconnaissance, in-depth interrogation, anticipation of mission success or failure and the like are talents which can only enhance the effectiveness of a hunter cell. Unfortunately for the witches, more than one cell befriended such an individual and then made the decision to end the relationship (and often the witch’s life) when their boon companion was deemed to know “too much” about the cell’s actions, operations, or weaknesses.

In general, psychics come to the attention of hunters only when they are obvious about their abilities. Otherwise, a close-lipped witch might easily work, play, and live in close proximity to a hunter or cell without the hunter ever knowing it.

Born or Made

Some witches are born with their abilities. Others develop them “naturally” as they grow. Still others have their supernatural powers thrust upon them, or steal them, or spend their lives researching to attain them, or sacrifice at unholy altars to gain them. Few witchfinders actually categorize witches by whether they inherited their magic from their family, were born with it as some sort of supernatural birth defect, or were

granted (or cursed with) their ability later in life. But some hunters see witches who gained their powers against their will as victims, similar to those who are possessed by some sort of otherworldly entity or influenced by the supernatural manipulations of a magical item. Few hunters have sympathy for those witches who actively sought out their magic, through ritual, investigation, supplication, or sacrifice. But for those who, as some claim, were taken from their beds, stolen from the safety of their homes, or kidnapped against their will and somehow "changed" against their will, it is difficult for any but the most stone-hearted hunter not to empathize.

Still, some witch-hunters care nothing for the whys and wherefores of a witch's origins. Regardless of how they came into being, some see any witch as, at best, a tool, and at worst, a threat, and treat them accordingly.

Holy Callings

The woman lies in the dirt, a crimson tear in her breast, her face a mass of glass, bone and blood. The horn from her crumpled car bleats continuously, as if the car too were suffering. Warm hands cradle her, warm breath whispers words of prayer in her ear. She feels a tightness and slowly the pain fades. She blinks the blood from her eyes and stares up at the man holding her. He smiles and she sees an angel.

Or

Drums beat frantic rhythms into the night. The mambo chugs rum directly from the bottle and calls on the Loa to mount her. She spasms, the bottle turns a slow rotation as it drops and she falls to the ground flailing. She rises, jerkily, and speaks with a different voice that predicts the future and grants blessings or bestows curses.

Or

The priest whispers a psalm of blasphemy while his congregation revels in an orgy of pain and lust. He draws power from their frenzied couplings as well as the blood spilt from biting teeth and scratching nails to sanctify the temple to their bloated god. He can sense it lurking in the shadows, can smell the sickly sweet stench of putrefaction that comes from its limbs and he silently mouths its name. But only silently.

Are the actors in these scenes witches or priests? When does magic become miracle? The first magicians venerated for their powers were called shaman, or witch doctors, or holy men. Before Christ was even a whisper on the wind, the people went to priests and priestesses to communicate and intervene with the unseen on their behalf. The priests dealt with spirits, ghosts and demons on a daily basis, using their powers to keep their people safe. Were these powers divinely inspired or just early manifestations of the Mysteries? The line between holy man and magician is a thin one, with no real distinction made between the two in some societies. The magic of Voudoun is considered a religion, yet Western mages recognize elements of spell casting in the rituals.

Not all witches dwell in swamps, turning water to blood, and jinxing their nosy neighbors with boils or small pox. When a witch claims her power is a gift from the gods it somehow becomes more acceptable to the public at large. The witch gathers disciples and preaches the word of her god,

offering magic as proof of divine favor. Cults form and grow, eventually becoming religions and the witch is transformed, *abracadabra!*, from spawn of Satan to servant of God. At this point the main difference between a witch and a priest seems to be public relations. No one seems to mind a healer that says she channels her magic from God, but one that works in strange smelling elixirs is cast out. How, then, to tell a witch from a priest and a cult from a religion?

The question of cults is a problem that witchfinders must grapple with frequently. Each time a cult is uncovered, a hunter is faced with a choice. They can either burn out the cult completely or wait and watch how the cultists behave. Neither choice is an easy one. Hunters with a religious bent realize their forefathers were persecuted for their beliefs by individuals and organizations that judged their religion as heresy or condemned it as black magic. With these thoughts in mind it is difficult to justify the wholesale slaughter of a so-called witch and her congregation just because they subscribe to a different belief. Not every hunter is this self-aware, however. Hunters are only human and are subject to the same weaknesses of character that have led to violence and bloodshed in the name of the One True God. These are the types of hunters that don't often last long on the Vigil. They see everyone and everything that believes differently from them as the enemy, including other hunters. The righteous hunter burns out quickly or has her beliefs challenged by her experiences. To stand the Vigil is to take the long view. Wasting energy and resources on a non-existent threat is liable to open a hunter to attack from real enemies, of which they have plenty. So, rather than attack blindly, the patient hunter waits and watches. Such patience can also backfire. On the very night the hunter decides not to attack she might be allowing the cult to carry out to completion a magical ritual that will devastate the city. For all the hunter knows, the high priest of the cult is a witch that keeps his congregation in line through magic. All the same, the hunters have a responsibility to be sure.

The most delicious alternative is also the most frightening. Simply put, some witches *really do* receive their power through rituals, devotion, or prayers to another, more powerful being. From pagan priestesses to demon-worshiping cultists, these individuals believe (and for good reason) their powers are a direct result of the influence or action of their god (be it a totem spirit, deity, demon or even an animistic entity such as "the Earth"). Circumstantial data held within some organizations' evidence lockers suggests that in certain circumstances witches of this type who have been convinced (through deprogramming, logical or emotional persuasion, or physical force) to deny or reject their god are sometimes left bereft of powers as they lose their status as a chosen representative of whatever entity apparently once bestowed them. (In other circumstances, attempts to deprogram said individuals sometimes trigger what one case report referred to as "cataclysmic resistance" as the witch or its patron expressed a rather undeniable rejection of the hunters' efforts.)

All kinds of entities exist in the World of Darkness with the ability to answer prayers and grant miracles. High-ranking

spirits are near godlike in their power and could grant some of their strength to a mortal that caught their attention, changelings make contracts and pledges with mortals that rarely turn out in the mortal's best interest, and there are yet darker things that gnaw at the edges of the universe that seek mortal accomplices to open a door for them. Most of these entities are not really interested in benefiting mankind in any way. They seek worshipers in the mortal Realm to extend their influence, or cultivate a crop of cultists to cause chaos and mayhem on a greater scale. Hunters may refer to these types of witches as "witchdoctors" or "skins" (in condescending reference to the stereotypical "barbarian" in animal skins). There can be significant crossover (or ambiguity) between these types of witches and those who are possessed by spirits, demons or ghosts. The witch as priest offers an abundance of ideas for a chronicle.

Religious cults and the priests that form the center of a cult are formidable enigmas for hunters, which require more than a shotgun and a willingness to use it to solve. Certainly the information that led a hunter to the cult might give some indication of their predilections, but hard evidence is difficult to find. Early rumors about Christians suggested they were cannibals that ate the flesh of their prophet. Similar tales about a cult told to hunters would probably lead to violence. Far too often a witchfinder only sees what he expects to see. A cell hears rumors about a cult that kidnaps runaways. The leader of the cult is a witch that the hunters have investigated in the past that claims to hear the voice of God. With some investigation, the cell learns that none of the runaways are ever seen again after the cult takes them off the street. Surely evil is afoot! The cell charges into the converted warehouse that serves as the headquarters of the cult in search of the children, killing cultists that attempt to stop them. Only then do the hunters notice the cultists are very young, no more than teenagers. They have succeeded in attacking a privately-funded halfway home, which just happens to be run by a witch with religious convictions.

It is easy to see how the cell could have gone wrong in the above example. A gathering of people in an unmarked building with a known witch as their leader certainly looks suspicious. Even if the cell had discovered that the "cult" was a charity organization, they still have every reason to be suspicious. Evil frequently presents itself as good to more easily trap its prey. Storytellers can use situations like the above to remind gun-happy troupes that the solution to every problem can't be solved with direct force, sometimes subtlety is required.

A Helping Hand

Witchfinders have a dirty little secret that most don't like to acknowledge. Not all mages, witches or sorcerers are bad. Some of them actively work to fight evil in the same way as hunters. It is tempting to tar all witches with the same broad strokes and it certainly makes the task of killing them much easier. Instead of wasting time trying to determine whether or not a witch is up to no good, witchfinders can simply off them and continue on their way. This is a very short-sighted

strategy which only the most narrow minded of hunters subscribe to and that kind of approach can also be rough on a hunter's Morality and sanity. The fact is no one is better at finding a witch than another witch. Magic leaves traces of mystical energy that are beyond the capabilities of most hunters to sense. A witchfinder could walk by the same house day after day and never realize he has been ignoring the place because the wards placed around the house encourage him to do so. Witches are not so easily fooled. When the hunter has exhausted every other means available to him, he is often forced into an alliance with a witch.

An alliance between a hunter and a witch is never an easy one and trust is in short supply. The hunter expects to be betrayed at any moment and the witch expects to find a knife in her back. Calling such an alliance tame is something of an understatement. Still, when they come together, both hunter and witch realize they can accomplish feats that would be beyond either of them individually. The witch brings magical experience and training, and the hunter brings the will to end a threat by any means necessary. Not all such alliances end well, however. Sometimes the tension and stress that comes with working with someone that would normally be a mortal enemy spills over into violence. Insults, real and imagined, slowly eat away at the alliance until it breaks. The only winner in these skirmishes is the shared enemy.

Very rarely a hunter and a witch come to value each other as comrades in the same struggle. They form an attachment based on pain and shared experience, similar to the one shared by soldiers in the trenches. The two may still not like each other, but they recognize each other's value and come to a grudging respect. A hunter that forms a solid working relationship with a witch has gained a powerful ally in his struggles against the terrors of the world and he knows it. Storytellers are encouraged to introduce characters that force players to rethink their assumptions. Reoccurring characters should be a part of any story because they bring a sense of continuity to the chronicle. In a game of **Hunter: The Vigil**, a reoccurring witch character gives a face to the enemy and makes the consequences of the Vigil seem more real. If the players interact with one witch that shows a sense of compassion and strives towards noble goals, it makes all witches seem that much more human. Characters of this type can also make enemies seem more threatening by comparison and may allow hunters to let their guard down, which is a nice conflict in a game.

Another possibility for witches to provide some assistance to hunters is anonymous tips. Witches often know far more than they have any right to know about what is going on in the area they live in. This comes as a result of both magical prowess and their habit of indulging their incredibly active curiosity. If a hunter cell has been active in a witch's neighborhood, odds are good she'll have some idea that something unusual is going on and will probably dig deeper to find out what it is. What happens next depends on the personality and motivations of the witch involved. One possibility is the witch will actively work against the cell and become another impediment for them to deal with. The witch might also try and limit the ac-

tivities of the cell by restricting the amount of information they receive from contacts and other outside sources. The most interesting possibility is that the witch can choose to use the hunter cell to further her own goals. This is, of course, a risky sort of enterprise for the witch to undertake, but the benefits can outweigh the risks. If the witch is interested in promoting the welfare of the city she lives in, providing a few small tips to a hunter cell can make her job easier by reducing the amount of work she needs to do herself. Similarly, if the witch is more interested in her own welfare than that of others, pointing a hunter cell towards enemies and rivals provides a convenient method of disposing of her opponents without tipping her hand to other interested parties. Witches that choose to aid hunters from the shadows must take every precaution imaginable if they wish to remain anonymous. No other mortal is possessed of the tenacity of a human who takes up the Vigil.

The cell first met Sasha at the scene of a ritual slaying. She pointed out clues and small details that would have eluded them and when the time came to fight the witch responsible, Sasha stood shoulder to shoulder with the cell. 'Course, they hadn't figured on Sasha being a witch herself until she warded them with her magic. Some of the cell had problems with that and, after the fight, the cell and Sasha parted ways. Since then the cell has received packages in the mail, all addressed in Sasha's distinctive handwriting. Inside the packages are items of interest to the cell, always with an attached note explaining what they hold. Thanks to Sasha, the success rate of the cell has doubled in the last year.

Michael was the first witch they ever caught and the only one they ever let go. It was only natural they were suspicious of him, even Michael agreed to that. When you see a man absently juggling fire after a string of unsolved arsons, people tend to make assumptions. Only the fact that he had an airtight alibi made them even consider letting him go. In return for their mercy, Michael contacted something or someone called a Consilium and, shortly afterward, the fires stopped. Now the cell goes to Michael first when they have questions but no answers, but he still freaks them out a bit with the fire thing.

The cell had named itself Morton's Mortuary as a sort of morbid joke. The joke suddenly seemed less funny when bodies began to appear outside their safehouse. Everybody showed signs of a less-than-natural demise. Some had twin puncture wounds in the neck, one had been disemboweled by what looked to be a set of razor sharp claws and the latest had shown no outward COD, but was oddly deflated. When they did an autopsy they found it had been hollowed out, probably from something inserting itself through the anus, and there were spider webs inside. Each body came with a token of some sort, indicating where it had come from: a bar matchbook; a hotel business card; or a subway ticket. The security cameras around the safehouse never showed anyone bringing in the bodies, they just kind of... appeared.

Intelligent Adversaries

Bringing a witch into a hunter chronicle as an antagonist means thinking about the motivations and methodology of

that witch. Witches don't just stir cauldrons and cackle madly into the night waiting for victims to stumble by. They plan, scheme and strive towards completion of their goals. These plans might make no sense to mortal bystanders or to hunters trying to fathom the connection behind a series of, apparently, unrelated paranormal attacks, but it always makes sense to the witch. Remember that for a witch to work her magic, she must find a Source to fuel that magic. The easiest way to generate Source may not have anything to do with the witch's current agenda, though it still should give some insight into the character of the witch. A witch with knowledge in the Mysteries of Disease, Lore and Foretelling might be expending massive amounts of Source in her attempts to scry out a grimoire she believes is in the area. Although her main goal is finding the grimoire, she can't rely on Foretelling alone to generate the Source required for her undertaking and since Lore generates no Source, she spreads disease to power her search. That fact that the witch spreads disease on a daily basis tells the hunters something important about the witch (namely that she isn't concerned with collateral damage) and it gives them a way to hunt for her, but it doesn't really give them any information about the primary goal of the witch. Even more confusion could be caused by a number of witches descending on the same place searching for the grimoire, all using different methods to both search for it and generate Source.

Regardless of their goals, most witches aren't interested in having a stand-up fight with a group of mortals that are dedicated to her destruction. Unlike other unnatural forces, even when tracked down to their sanctums, most witches will fight to flee rather than fight to kill. This attitude doesn't necessarily stem from any sense of morality, rather it is based on both common sense and survival instinct. Unless the witch is part of a coven, standing up to a hunter cell is the next thing to suicide. Even with magic as an ally, the numbers involved aren't favorable for victory. The better choice is to escape and seek revenge from a safe distance, even if it means losing in the short term. Magic is a powerful force, but its workings are often more subtle than the sharp end of a knife or a 9mm bullet. Witches have a well-deserved reputation for sneakiness and underhanded dealings. Whether witches have always behaved like this (as hunters claim) or whether they have been forced into such clandestine activities (as witches claim) as a result of persecution is something of a chicken and the egg argument. Regardless of the why, the fact is that witches prosper most when they are seen the least. When the cell can't tell what the witch is doing, let alone the why or how, is when the witch is at her most dangerous.

Just because a witch would rather beat a hasty retreat than participate in a slugfest doesn't mean that witches aren't capable of putting up a fight when backed into a corner. Even the meekest animal will try to bite if given no other option and when the gloves come off, most witches are still wily opponents. When fighting is the only option there are several things to keep in mind to make a witch a credible opponent. First off, how well does the witch know the cell? If the two sides have crossed paths before the odds are good the witch

has done some background digging into the cell. She is likely to know each member of the cell by name, occupation and possibly even by position in the cell. The witch should be able to size up her opposition and make tactical decisions about how to fight the cell based on her knowledge. Is one character obviously a key part of a Tactic? That character is now the first target on the list. The witch might have found out one of the hunters spent time in an asylum and why. She will absolutely use that knowledge to try and trigger the derangement of the character, thereby reducing the numbers facing her almost immediately. She will use gathered intelligence on the cell to attack the weakest parts of the cell first.

The next thing to remember (and somewhat related to the first) is witches tend to fight dirty and think outside the box as a side effect of their magical training. If a witch can make threats against a hunter's family that might give that hunter pause, she will certainly do so, even if the witch has no real intention to harm the family at all. If a hunter is standing near a window and the witch can figure out some way to push him out that window, that hunter will likely learn the meaning of the word "defenestration." Attacks that blind, deafen or otherwise physically hinder the cell are all viable tactics that could give the witch an edge. Not every attack has to be aimed to kill or injure to be effective. Messing with the heads of the cell is always a viable tactic. Has the witch found some information that could lead to the cell members fighting amongst themselves? Gold! Any sort of tactic that could lead to the survival of the witch is fair game. Remember, it is the job of the Storyteller to adjudicate a fight fairly, not to ensure a fair fight.

Another possibility to bring a fight more in balance is to provide the witch with allies. Witches will band together for mutual protection and support in the exact same way hunters do. A coven provides a serious challenge to a hunter cell, given that the cell is now faced with a group of witches that all fight as down and dirty as a single witch. Covens may even feel secure enough in their numbers not to back down from a fight, which may surprise witchfinders that are used to their quarry fleeing at the first opportunity. Assuming the coven has been working together for any length of time it is reasonable to assume the witches know each other's strengths and weaknesses and will fight in ways to promote those strengths. One witch might be very good at casting personal warding spells, another might be exceptional in offensive spell casting, while yet another might hide behind her friends and heal them. Tricks don't even have to be magical in nature to be effective, misdirection is a type of magic all its own.

The cell bursts into the house of a trio of witches in the middle of the night, hoping to surprise them and finish the fight quickly. Earlier surveillance had revealed the witches were all asleep in their beds. The hunters divide into three teams, each forcing their way into the bedroom of a witch and lighting up the bed with gunfire. After the opening volley the hunters realize something is wrong: the bodies in the beds aren't bleeding. No sooner has this sunk in than the doors to each of the rooms slam shut and the bodies begin to rise from the beds. Zombies. The cell is now divided, trapped and faced with the undead.

Plenty of witches also bring mortal or extra-human henchman to a fight. The mortals may even be spellbound, increasing the problem of how to deal with them for a cell. These allies of the witch can be enhanced with magic (or their own abilities) that make the battle just that much more difficult for the cell. As an example, the witch may have used magic to save the life of an injured gang leader and then provided him with a personal ward against bullets. To repay his debt, the ganger makes sure to keep an eye on the witch's home. The witch always casts spells like "Mystic Shield" (see p. 143) on the thugs that come to protect her as a kind of thanks for their help. Now, instead of dealing with a single witch, alone in the house, the cell is faced with multiple thugs all enchanted to resist damage. Even worse, if the cell succeeds in killing the witch and the thugs, they have to watch their backs for retaliation from the gang. Potential allies don't even have to know the witch personally to act as an effective deterrent. If the witch is well-known and popular in the neighborhood, any disturbance at her home could result in calls to the police or the witch could have a mundane security system that notifies authorities in the event of a break-in. As a result of their dabbling in the supernatural, witches often make allies of the non-human variety. Perhaps the witch has befriended the local werewolf pack or an influential vampire. Because hunters tend to gear up to deal with a specific type of threat, suddenly producing an additional threat of an entirely different nature can throw a serious wrench in their plans. Even if all else fails, the allies of a witch can run interference long enough for her to revert to plan A, which is escaping to fight another day.

Familiars

No story about witches is complete without the inclusion of familiars. Not every witch has a familiar, but for those who do the choice, whether it is a black cat, bound spirit, summoned imp or flying monkey, indicates something about the drives and personality of that witch. Some witches choose their familiar on purely aesthetic ideals or perceived qualities, while for other witches the choice is a further expression of their dedication to a Mystery. A witch that follows the Mystery of Passion might choose a cat as her familiar because she seeks to emulate the languid qualities of the animal or she might seek out and bind a spirit of lust to whisper fantasies in the ear of her targets. For a witch that studies Disease, a rat seems an obvious choice, but she could just as easily choose the ghost of a plague victim. Environment can also affect the choice. A witch devoted to Life that lives in a swamp might choose a snake because the serpent is best suited for her location. If the same witch lived in the frozen wastes of northern Russia, she might choose a wolf for similar reasons.

Merit: Familiar (•)

Prerequisites: Gnosis •, Occult ••

Effect: The ritual to summon and bind a familiar is easily learned by any witch with adequate mystical knowl-



edge. The witch prepares for the ritual by gathering items sympathetic to both herself and the familiar with which she seeks to bind. For naturally occurring animals sympathetic items could include the usual blood, hair or claw clippings, while for ghosts, the anchor of the specter is always necessary. Spirits require a physical representation of their nature as a sympathetic device and speaking aloud or transcribing the name the entity, along with some sort of sacrifice, serves as a sympathetic connection for demonic creatures. When the witch has gathered the necessary components, she binds her own sympathetic items to those of her desired familiar and burns them while chanting the name of the familiar. The caster then rolls Resolve + Occult + Gnosis. With a single success on the roll, the witch has successfully summoned and bound the familiar to her and spends a dot of Willpower to seal the union. If the bound familiar of a witch is ever killed, destroyed or permanently banished, the witch loses a dot of Willpower, representing the loss of the bit of herself she bound into her familiar. Witches may only have one familiar at any time.

The four main types of familiars available to witches are animal, demonic, and ghostly. Below are instructions for the creation of each type of familiar and the benefits enjoyed by the witch and her familiar as a result of their bonding. Regardless of type, all familiars share an empathic connection with their master; each can automatically feel the emotions of the other. (Magical effects that damage or manipulate the familiar through an emotional attack don't damage or manipulate the master.) The familiar can always understand its master, no matter what language the master speaks, and vice versa. Additionally, the connection shared between the witch and her familiar allows the master to see through the eyes of her familiar as described below.

Through the Eyes: By spending a point of Willpower, the master of an embodied familiar can shift his perceptions to the familiar. He sees what the familiar sees, hears what it hears, and so on. He is oblivious to his own surroundings while viewing through his familiar, but still possesses tactile sensation (thus he is aware of any damage or physical sensation to his own body). Ending this viewing is a reflexive action and requires no roll.

Animal Familiars

Animals are the most common type of familiar owned by witches. Cats, snakes, birds and even some fantastic hybrids all serve as companion and helpmate to witches. Animals bound to witches as familiars are always more intelligent and hearty than other members of their species, as a result of the binding ritual. Examples of mundane animals to provide a basic guideline for what is appropriate in mechanical statistics for an animal familiar can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 202.

Familiar Traits: Attributes should be equivalent to the familiar's mundane cousins, with a bonus of an additional dot in both Intelligence and Stamina. Willpower, Initiative and Defense are all generated in the usual fashion, keeping in mind that animals choose the greater of their Dexterity or Wits as their Defense. Speed, Size and Weapons/Attacks remain con-

sistent with that of other animals of the same type and Health is increased by one level as a result of the familiar's superior Stamina. Animals have no Virtue, Vice or Morality traits.

Skills: Assign 10 dots in pertinent Skills. Animal familiars gain a free Stealth specialty.

Preternatural: Animal familiars enjoy enhanced protection against magical and mundane threats as a result of the bond with their master. Familiars gain an armor rating equal to the Gnosis of their master against any physical attacks and may add the Gnosis rating of their master to any roll to resist or contest magical effects. Additionally, no spell or effect of any kind can turn a familiar against its master.

Magical Companion: Witches frequently include their familiars in their magical workings. Any spell cast while in physical contact with their familiar gains +2 dice bonus to the casting pool.

Dread Powers: Assign three dots among Dread Powers (see *Hunter: The Vigil*, p. 276). Any Dread Power can work with creative application (a cat may cause "Ecstasy" simply by rubbing up against a target, for instance).

Demonic Familiars

Demonic familiars are imps, lesser demons and minor infernal entities that are summoned up from the darkness to serve a witch. See the familiar entry under the Lucifuge

Endowment, "Calling Forth the Pit" for descriptions of these creatures (*Hunter: The Vigil*, p. 164) and the Familiar Traits sidebar for complete rules. The spell for summoning or banishing a demon is found on p. 158 of this book.

Ghostly Familiars

Ghostly familiars are often ancestors or friends of the witch that have shuffled off their mortal coil yet still remain tied to this world because of their love for the witch. These ghosts are usually less powerful than the other poor souls trapped in Twilight, but suffer less confusion about their state of being. Ghostly familiars are created using the rules found for ghosts in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 208. Regardless of actual age, ghosts bound to serve a witch are allowed a maximum of two Numina. When a witch destroys the anchor of a ghost during the binding ritual she is actually offering up herself as a replacement. The physical body of the witch is the new anchor for the ghost, though the ghost may have additional anchors that allow it to travel away from its master. Ghostly familiars may *always* manifest at the command of their master, without needing to roll and can always communicate directly with their master through speech, though most other people won't be able to hear the ghost and may assume the witch is talking to herself.

Philadelphia: Witchcraft in the Cradle of Liberty

Deep in the basement of the country's oldest public library, a curious student cracks open a book that has not been read in centuries. Within its yellowed vellum pages, he finds secrets so impossible and profane that his mind is shattered. He slips into a hallucination-filled fugue, and wakes to discover he has the ability to mold reality to his will.

Philadelphia police explore a series of disturbances in the city's cemeteries. Some of the area's oldest graves are unearthed and certain parts removed from the bodies within. Skeptics are quick to label it senseless vandalism, but those in the know in Philly's occult community fear the end results of the spell fueled by such potent components.

In a tiny church in South Philadelphia, an elderly priest passes the Communal wine and wafers through burning incense, carrying out the same secret ritual he has every full moon since he took leadership of the church more than 50 years ago. It has protected his flock from the attentions of a centuries-old witch that hunts for virgins and innocent souls in the neighborhood, but the priest fears for his congregation's fate once his fading health fails entirely.

Magic has lurked in the Philadelphia area for as long as it has been populated (and perhaps even before humanity settled there). Magical beliefs and practices flourished among the indigenous people of the area, and as immigrants, missionaries, and colonists were attracted to the area, each brought their own unique magic with them. As in other areas, the "definition" of what exactly qualified as magic and what was miracle, skill or innate ability blurred extensively in the often fractured and schizophrenic city. Whether any particular ritual or ability was defined as "witchcraft" or not was often more of a judgment call on the part of those outside the neighborhood, culture, or religion within which it had spawned, than any cut-and-dried fact.

Along with the varied folkloric, spiritual, and religious beliefs and practices brought by immigrants to the city, magic has also been introduced to the area as the supernatural was drawn to Philadelphia. Many entities became attracted by the same qualities that pulled human inhabitants to the area: wealth, industry, and the relative protection associated with the city's clique-ish reputation coupled with the anonymity of one of North Amer-

ica's largest cities. For those whose intentions were predatory, playing one neighborhood's insular nature against another virtually assured a steady stream of victims, while those who merely wanted a place where their quirks and idiosyncrasies would not be noticed (or at least persecuted) had high hopes of finding that in Philadelphia as well.

Like politics and religion, witchcraft and magic in Philadelphia has for the most part been a compartmentalized issue. When witches or witchcraft were suspected, they were generally accepted, rejected, or stamped out by those who dwelled within the given sub-sector of the city in which they arose, with little to draw the attention of outside areas. In those cases where, through indiscretion or sheer scale of effect, handling a problem was not possible on a neighborhood or family basis, Philly's inherent no-nonsense nature often meant its inhabitants dealt with the issue and went on, allowing the city's reputation as a potential haven for magic creatures and wielders to go on relatively untarnished.

The Lenape

Magic has been a part of Philly's history since well before the first European settlers arrived in the early 1600s. The Lenape tribes who populated the area for hundreds, if not thousands, of years before the Europeans arrived viewed magic (or what the Europeans would label as magic) as an integral part of daily life. It was simply how the world worked and was recognized and treated as such by members of the various Lenape tribes. While many of the specifics have been lost over the four centuries of European intercession in the area, some basic information was preserved through a variety of sources.

Ancient Beliefs

Traditional Lenape philosophy recognizes "Kishelamàkâñ" the Creator, a powerful spirit who in turn made four other spirits, called Manítowàk or Spirit Beings, to aid him in creating the rest of the world. Kishelamàkâñ, also sometimes called "Getanittowit," "Manito" or "Allowat Sakima" (meaning "The Great Chief"), is not overly involved in the day-to-day workings of the world, but instead relies upon these other spirits and their own spirit creations (also called manítowàk) for intercession in worldly affairs when necessary. The Four Great Manítowàk live in the four corners of the world and are related to the various elements, while their namesakes, the manítowàk, became the spirits of everything in the world: mountains, valleys, rocks, the soil, rivers, lakes and ocean, and, of course, plants and animals.

Along with these four great Spirit Beings and their spirit-spawn, the Lenape also hold sacred a spirit creature known as Mesinkhálikàñ (the keeper of the forest and game animals). Mesinkhálikàñ (sometimes shortened to Mesink or Mesingw) is a tall hairy bestial spirit-creature with a frightening face that is half-red and half-black. Because of his physical form, Mesink

SPIRITS AND MANITOWAK

For Storytellers who would like to include beneficial manitowak (or their malevolent counterpart, *machtapequonitto*) as a complement or counterfoil to Metinuwak characters, a plethora of possibilities exist for representing the local native spirits of the Lenape.

The rules for ghosts are offered on pp. 208-216 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, and while Manitowak are unlikely to have anchors, Storytellers can use the Power/Finesse and Numina offered there to create nature-focused manitowak for their storylines. For those who have access to other World of Darkness books that detail mechanics for spirits or spirit creatures, those same mechanics can be applied to manitowak as well.

And, finally, the Dread Powers and rules for demons from **Hunter: The Vigil** can be applied to manitowak. Simply strip out any portions of the demonic mechanics that do not seem thematic for the individual manitowak and proceed from there.

is often associated with Sasquatch, or Yeti, in modern folklore. Mesinkhálikàñ not only aided the Lenape people in hunting when game was scarce, but also served as a reminder, teacher and enforcer of the import of respecting the Earth and the spirits, and walking in balance with both. Mesinkhálikàñ is purported to have first visited the Lenape people in this capacity long before the European settlers arrived in the area. The Lenape had grown lazy and begun to neglect the appropriate religious rituals. The longhouse they'd used for ceremonies had fallen into disrepair and the tribe was growing weak because of their imbalance and disrespect for the spiritual world. The game animals stayed away, crops were poor, and the tribe was in danger of dying out entirely. Mesinkhálikàñ appeared to the village and warned them of the cause of their ill fortune. He told them to return to their formerly faithful ways and to put masks resembling his face, half-red and half-black, on each of the 12 lodge poles of the longhouse to frighten away evil spirits (the *machtapequonitto*) who had been taking advantage of the tribe's lack of diligence. Fortunately for the Lenape, they followed the forest-spirit's suggestions and quickly found that their hunting and farming once again were bountiful and the tribe prospered (at least until the Europeans arrived). Because of his fierce appearance and role as an enforcer of rightful balance and behavior, Mesinkhálikàñ also served as a "boogeyman" figure for Lenape children.

Witches, Priests and Healers

Traditionally, within the Lenape tribes, some individuals were seen as being destined for spiritual and religious service to the Earth and to the people. Often these individuals, called



Metinuwak, were recognized for this destiny in early childhood and would be trained rigorously by other Metinuwak for the role they would take within their tribe.

As the Lenape saw spiritual and physical health as being interwoven to the point of being inseparable, Metinuwak were responsible for “medicine” in Lenape terms – social and spiritual ceremonies and rituals, intercession with the spirits (both good and evil), prophecy, and counsel to the rest of the tribe. They were also in charge of medicine in conventional terms, such as herbs, potions, first-aid, and the like. While the use of rituals, ceremonies, charms, icons, prayers for spiritual intervention, and sacrifices might easily be broadly labeled as witchcraft and sorcery by modern standards, for the Lenape culture they were ingrained and core to the culture. Metinuwak were a vital part of the tribal structure and heavily relied upon for preserving the strength and health of the Lenape culture.

Also among the duties of the Metinuwak was the carving and blessing of “ohtas.” Lenape legend says that long ago a lonely child fashioned a doll out of discarded cornhusks and, having no other partner, danced with the makeshift toy. Upon doing so, he discovered the doll granted him health, luck and prosperity, which he used to hone himself into a powerful hunter-shaman for the tribe. When the child grew to be a powerful

Metinuwak, he carved ohtas, hand-sized human figurines, from wood and the entire tribe would gather to dance in the ohtas’ honor, ensuring that the Lenape would be blessed with good fortune and protected from evil in the coming year.

New Relic: Ohtas (•••)

Ohtas are occasionally found in archeological digs in the Philadelphia area and many natural history museums in the area have at least one ohtas in their collection. Few, however, realize the relics are still potentially powerful.

While the details of ohtas appearances vary depending on the exact period, tribe and creator, most are between six and 10 inches tall, carved of local wood (predominantly oak, beech, birch or sugar maple) and depicting a simple human figure clothed in Lenape traditional wear. Most are faceless; some actually look like faceless angels (which may give hunters of the Knights of Saint George pause).

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Drawback: Any action taken against a member or descendant of the Lenape tribe while in possession of an ohtas (either literally carrying one or owning it – even if the doll is not carried on their person) is made at a -4 dice penalty.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The individual attempting to activate the ohtas instead angers the Relic and incurs a reversal of the intended effect. All actions attempted in the next scene are rolled at a -2 dice penalty.

Failure: There is no effect, and the expended Willpower is lost.

Success: The activating individual is blessed with the ohtas' favor. Any action related to the Vigil that is attempted in the next scene is rolled at a +1 die bonus. As well, if the action directly benefits a member(s) or descendant(s) of the Lenape tribe, the roll is made at an additional +2 die bonus (for a cumulative +3 bonus). Further activations cannot increase these bonuses.

Exceptional Success: The ohtas' favor is strong. Bonuses remain with the activating individual for the next 12 hours.

Suggested Modifiers**Modifier Situation**

+2	Activator is a member or descendent of the Lenape tribe
+2	Activator speaks a prayer of genuine respect and honor to the ohtas immediately before activating it.
+2	Activator spends at least one turn dancing with the doll before activating it
-4	Activator currently has ill intentions towards the Lenape in general, or a member or descendent of the tribe in specific.
-1	Activation is being attempted outside the Delaware Valley region
-1	The ohtas has been successfully activated within the last lunar month (cumulative with each successful activation within the month).

Modern Metinuwak

During the late 1700s, the European inhabitants of the Delaware River Valley, which had long been home to the Lenape tribes, forced the tribes westward. Many Lenape tribal groups ended up as far west as Oklahoma and Ontario, and those few who remained in the Philadelphia area lost a great deal of their cultural heritage (and their magic) as they struggled to hide their indigenous roots and make a place for themselves in the European-centric culture of the city. For several centuries, the supernatural presence of Lenape Metinuwak was suppressed (externally and from within) to the point of being non-existent.

In the latter half of the 20th century, however, interest in the beliefs and practices of the indigenous people of the United States rose again. Descendants of the original Lenape tribes (and curious outsiders) began researching their ancestor's ancient beliefs and practices, using modern technology to dig up

bits and pieces of a magic system that had lay fallow for the better part of 200 years. For some, enough of the traditional ways and abilities had been lost to make the bits they did uncover essentially powerless. But in others, the potential for magic had merely been lying dormant through many generations, and what little information they were able to discover about the ancient rituals and ceremonies was enough to spark this latent potential to life. Unfortunately, as these first members of a new generation of Metinuwak were created, so were the first of the modern Nutschihhowe, their ancient enemies.

Nutschihhowe and Malliku

Not all magic workers among the Lenape were benevolent. Even among the tribes of the region whose culture was rife with magic, the terms "malliku," (witchcraft) and "Nutschihhowe," meaning nightwalker or witch, were enough to bring fear into the hearts of the bravest Lenape warrior. Another of the Metinuwak's roles among the Lenape was to protect the rest of the tribe from the malevolent actions, both physical and spiritual, of the Nutschihhowe. A Metinuwak might use charms, rites, specially blessed weapons, seasonal ceremonies or direct intercession with the spirits (especially in the form of nianque, the manitowak associated with various wild animals who served as guides and familiars to the Lenape people) to weaken a marauding Nutschihhowe.

Nutschihhowe are purported to possess any number of magical abilities, including, but not limited to cursing, inducing illness or injury, haunting others' dreams, fostering evil spirits, raising ghosts and undead zombies, controlling animals, causing droughts or storms, and extreme longevity. According to Lenape legend, a Nutschihhowe could potentially live forever by sucking the life force out of others (in the form of their breath) while their victims were sleeping. Modern Lenape are divided on whether this legend is true or merely the local version of a "boogey-man" story. Periodically, however, mysterious happenings arise in the Delaware Valley that those who believe the legends blame on the Nutschihhowe. Perhaps another explanation exists for the bizarre weather, unexplained epidemics of baffling diseases, increased incidents of mental illness, and uncharacteristic behavior in the area's animal populations. Or perhaps one of the fallen shamans has simply found a way to return to torment the area once more.

In an irony not lost on modern witch-hunters, most Nutschihhowe among the Lenape were believed to have originally been Metinuwak. Through some inherent flaw (greed, jealousy, wrath, envy or the like) or by circumstances outside their control, such as being possessed by machtapequonitto (evil spirits) or ensorcelled by other Nutschihhowe, these ill-fated hunter-mages were corrupted into nightwalkers. Nor that the duty for policing these fallen former-comrades fell upon those same medicine people from whom they came. While any Metinuwak might have been called upon to protect his community from the Nutschihhowe, some few took on the duties exclusively. Naming themselves Elauwit Medsits – Those Who Hunt Evil – these proto-hunters made it their business to protect the rest of the Lenape community from the Nutschihhowe who were too powerful, devious or subtle

for the local Metinuwak. Some specialized in investigating nightwalkers, and ferreting out their secret rituals and pacts with evil spirits that made them powerful. Others excelled in defense, shoring up the physical and spiritual protections of the community against the witches who sought them harm. Yet others were renowned for investigation, tracking, interrogation, or killing Nutschihhowe, and driving out the spirits that possessed them or breaking the spells that turned them evil. Elauwit Medsit were also called upon when high-ranking members of the local Metinuwak force went bad, and their communities had no defenses against the now-evil medicine workers who they had formerly relied upon so heavily.

Recently, a cell of hunters calling themselves the Elauwit Medsit have crossed paths with other hunter groups in the Philadelphia area. Those who have encountered the Medsit report that the cell appears to be made up entirely of hunters of indigenous origins, and that they seem utterly devoted to the Vigil, demonstrating a well-choreographed repertoire of Tactics that would indicate the cell has worked together for an extensive period of time. While they are standoffish and aloof, they have, on occasion, cooperated with another cell if it appears their target cannot be dealt with by the Medsit alone.

Early Immigrants

In many ways, Philadelphia fostered both the retention of native forms of witchcraft and immigrant witches who practiced it. Like the Lenape before them, many of the immigrant cultures who came to Philadelphia had their own rituals, superstitions, charms and spells which, although their practitioners were also Christian (Quaker, Mennonite, Anglican, etc.), were ingrained into their own cultures. These practices may well have been seen as "sorcery" by those of other cultures. In a less insular setting, these native forms of witchcraft would have been subjected to more intense scrutiny by the outsiders with whom their practitioners were forced to live, work, and worship alongside. The tendency of Philadelphia's citizens to remain virtually segregated from one another by culture, however, meant supernatural practices that might have died out (or been persecuted away) by those with other beliefs, instead continued from generation to generation as immigrants from similar regions in Europe continued to filter into the same areas of the growing city as their ancestors and kinsmen had for decades and centuries. This same territoriality virtually ensured that, so long as a witch curtailed her public "magic" to those

WARDS AND WITCH BOTTLES

Humans can't always rely on hunters to be present to protect them from the evils of witchcraft and sorcery. From prayers, chants and rhymes to superstitious behavior or magical creations, settlers in the Philadelphia area historically used a plethora of methods to ward themselves from magic-wielders with ill intent. One of the means historically used to protect against witches, ghosts and other supernatural creatures was a witch bottle: a glass bottle filled with pins, twine, herbs and wine or sea water, corked and sealed with wax, and then buried or hidden somewhere in the home.

When an evil spell cast by a witch meets the protective presence of the witch bottle, the pins snag it and the twine binds it tight. The spell is then drowned by the water or wine and cleansed by the herbs, leaving nothing that can harm the bottle's household. Some legends state that witch bottles are also capable of capturing ghosts, spirits, fairies and elves who might wish harm or mischief upon a household. Because of this, it was considered vital for any existing witch bottles to be removed from a home where someone was in danger of dying to stop their souls from being captured in the bottle instead of going on to their just rewards.

As a folk charm, witch bottles can be made by anyone who has access to information on how to create them. No supernatural power is required to successfully create one, and as long as they stay sealed, they remain effective. Once the seal is broken, however, and the cork unstoppable, any power they had to stop evil magic is lost.

Storytellers may elect to levy a -2 penalty on any spells or magical effects cast in or on a building where a witch bottle exists. Alternately, witches, mages or other users of magical arts may find it is impossible to enter into a home protected by a witch bottle. Another possibility is to have the bottle act as a spirit trap. Any ghost, spirit or intangible being entering a home where a witch bottle is might need to make a test (Resolve + Composure or Resistance, whichever is appropriate for the creature type) to avoid being trapped in the bottle. Opening a bottle that contains one or more entities releases them, which may create its own challenges.

accepted by her culture, there was very little chance of investigation or persecution for these or more private rituals, spells or ceremonies. In many cases, those within a given area were well aware of who among their kind was purported to be able to create love charms, cure curses, bestow fertility, or other useful magic. And those witches without such benevolent intentions could, for the most part, remain hidden as well, so long as they



abided by the mores of their particular culture and remained within the appropriate area of the city.

Cultural witchcraft from the colonial period included a broad variety of knacks and abilities. Some were beneficial to the community, and were not seen from within as witchcraft, but instead as an important talent, just like blacksmithing, animal husbandry or weaving. From being able to sense things that others could not (the outcome of a particular event, the coming weather, the sex of an unborn child, or the presence of valuable resources) to magical defenses against natural, manmade or supernatural dangers (wards, witch bottles, protective charms and magical medicines and cures) each new group of immigrants and settlers brought their own version of witchcraft with them to help in the often hostile environments of the New World. However, magic is a dangerous tool, and the same abilities that could protect a community could often be used against it or another group. When a witch was believed to be using his powers in a harmful fashion, members from within that community (or from a neighboring area, if the witch was believed to be targeting them rather than his own people) often would rise up together and, in an exhibition of cooperation and teamwork that would make modern hunters proud, ensure the witch knew the error of his ways. Often this was a lethal lesson.

Swedish and Northern Germanic

While the use of runes as an alphabet for general written communication ended well before the colonization and settlement of the US by Europeans, in the Swedish and some Northern German neighborhoods of town, use of runes as a magical tool for religious worship as well as blessing and curses was not unheard of in the 17th and 18th centuries. The practice saw serious decline throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries as the symbols blended and merged with other local beliefs and practices, including Pow-wow and the Pennsylvania Dutch hex signs (see below). The use of runes and other traditional forms of Scandinavian magic, however, underwent a modern resurgence in the late 20th century. During the last 25 to 30 years, runic magic (for both benevolent and malevolent purposes) has reappeared among not only traditional Swedish families, but also neo-pagans of the Norse and Germanic faiths that have made Philadelphia their home.

Similarly, Pennsylvania Dutch Pow-wow and hex signs have not only remained present in the Philadelphia area for centuries, but have carved a niche for themselves in mainstream culture (which sees them as quaint folklore) that allows devout practitioners to remain predominantly under the radar of those who might take umbrage at the use of magic. While the continued presence of these and other "traditional" beliefs is a boon to the witches who make their home in Philly, it can prove challenging for those witch-hunters who must separate the wheat from the chaff and determine which individuals to focus on (whether for supernatural aid, or when protecting their city from an imminent magical threat) and which are harmless and likely unknowledgeable.

Pennsylvania Dutch

While immigrants from the Netherlands did make their homes in Philadelphia, the term Pennsylvania Dutch actually refers to immigrants from the Rhine region in Germany (the name being a corruption of the word “Deutsch” or “Deitsch.”) These peoples fled religious persecution at home and settled in and around Philadelphia in the late 17th and early 18th century. The moniker has expanded in modern times to include a broader variety of immigrants from the Germanic region in Europe, especially those who cling tightly to their traditional religious perspectives.

While modern Pennsylvania Dutch most often profess little to no belief or practice of the culture’s ancient magic, the traditions have not been entirely lost, and it is still possible to find devotees of the traditional ways in the city to this day.

Pow-wow

Although the name was taken from the Algonquian word for a shaman or medicine man, the magic system of Pow-wow relates directly to the Germanic European cultures from which the Pennsylvania Dutch immigrants came. It combines Catholic prayers, intonations or inscriptions of magical words, folk rituals, and recipes to create cures for various ailments and illnesses.

Modern patients and practitioners of Pow-wow are often very close-lipped about their activities and beliefs. This is, in part, because of a tightening against the “ancient ways” (including anything that might be construed as magic) by modern churches of most denominations since the Industrial Revolution. Many fear they will be seen as simple-minded, superstitious or even insane if they admit to their beliefs, or fear retribution from more conservative members of their religious community (or outsiders, such as hunters) who may believe such works to be “of Satan” or just plain evil.

Many Pow-wow magic is based on or taken from Bible passages. Others originate in a text called “The Long Lost Friend,” which was originally written by John George Hohman in German in the early 19th century. One of Hohman’s primary resources was a book long familiar to The Ascending Ones: Albertus Magnus’ *Egyptian Secrets*. Compiled in the 13th century by a Dominican monk, the book details all manner of holistic, religious and ritualistic cures that were adopted into the Pow-wow repertoire.

Letters from God

High among the magical items valued by hexmeisters (practitioners of Pow-wow) and their devotees was a magical letter called a Himmelsbrief (heaven’s letter) that purportedly fell from the sky, written by God or an angel. Those who carried a Himmelsbrief (either an original or a copy) were protected from death, injury and other bad luck. These letters (and their malevolent counterparts, Teufelsbriefs, which were used to bestow curses) are thought to be the earliest precursors of the modern chain letter.

Today, hexmeisters with sufficient skill in the Fortune Mystery can, through use of a Himmelsbrief or Teufelsbrief, bestow

good or ill fortune upon whoever bears the bespelled letter. To create either form, the hexmeister must spend double the normal Source as for normally casting Bless or Curse, as well as a point of Willpower while inscribing the letter’s effects upon a piece of paper. Either form of letter must be created for (and addressed to) one individual person, and its benefits only work for that person. The addressed recipient of a Himmelsbrief gains a +1 dice bonus (-1 for a Teufelsbrief) for the week after they receive the letter, regardless of what happens to the letter afterwards. All effects of either form of letter last for only a week.

Hex Signs

Among the folkloric magic the Pennsylvania Dutch brought with them were hex signs. Originally painted on homes, barns and other outbuildings, these simple geometric and folk art signs utilize primary color schemes and basic symbolism dating back to early Germanic culture, to bless a particular location with certain (normally protective) attributes.

Like many originally magical symbols, hex signs have been adopted as a rustic decoration or folk tradition by mainstream society. Portable versions of hex signs are mass marketed for use in homes all across the world, and of course, most have no supernatural power whatsoever. Occasionally, however, a hex sign painted by someone with “the touch” will be unearthed and in these rare cases it is often possible to activate the sign for its original purpose. As well, rumors have cropped up over the past few centuries of those who have inherited the knack for creating supernaturally potent hex signs. Without fail, these individuals can trace their bloodlines back to the original Pennsylvania Dutch immigrants who brought this form of magic to America.

New Relic: Hex Sign (• to

A hex sign’s cost is equal to one dot per symbol (and associated power) it includes, to a maximum of 5. Where noted as permissible, if more than one symbol of a particular kind is included, its effects are cumulative, but so is the cost. Thus a hex sign with a heart, a star, and three tulips would be 5 dots and (when activated) bestow +1 dice bonus to all Presence rolls, +1 to resist disease, toxins and supernaturally accelerated aging and +3 bonus dice to resist supernatural attacks (making a cumulative +4 against supernatural aging, which counts as both itself and a supernatural attack.)

Regardless of their supernatural potential, hex signs have no power while mobile. They must be affixed in place on a horizontal or vertical surface before being activated. Their power will automatically end if the relic is moved, although it can be reactivated once the sign is once again placed in an affixed location. The hex sign’s power is an area of effect that is of inverse proportion to the power of the hex. All individuals within the given area receive the benefit of an activated hex sign’s effects.

- - 100 square yard area, including all buildings within that area
- - 50 square yard area, including all buildings within that area

CHAPTER FOUR: SPELLBOUND

••• - 100 square foot area, including all buildings within that area

•••• - The building within which the hex sign is affixed (or a maximum of 2000 square feet, whichever is smaller).

••••• - Only the room within which the hex sign is affixed (or a maximum of 400 square feet, whichever is smaller).

Note: Permanently-affixed hex signs operate with a 100 square yard area, regardless of their potency. This only applies to signs where the hex has been directly painted upon a structure, wall or upon the ground.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Roll: Resolve + Occult

Dramatic Failure: Activation does not occur and the hex sign cannot be activated until an entire lunar month has passed.

Failure: Activation does not occur and the hex sign cannot be activated for the remainder of the scene. (Further attempts result in automatic dramatic failure.)

Success: The hex sign is activated and remains so for the remainder of the scene, bestowing whatever benefits are appropriate for the symbols shown on it.

Exceptional Success: The hex sign is activated and remains so for the next 24 hours.

Some of the symbols utilized (and the benefits to those in the area of an activated hex sign that features them) include:

Distelfink – A mythological bird akin to a meadowlark, said to bring happiness. (+2 bonus dice in all Morality, Degeneration and Derangement rolls.) Limit: 2

Double Headed Eagle – This two-headed bird represents strength and courage. (Spending Willpower grants 4 bonus dice, rather than 3, to permissible challenges, or 3 to Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense to resist mental or social/emotional pressures or to make concentrated effort to avoid being harmed per p. 95 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.) Limit: 1

Hearts – To attract and maintain love. (+1 bonus to all Presence rolls.) Limit: 3

Oak Leaf – Oak represents strength of body, mind and character. (+1 bonus to all Strength, Intelligence and Presence rolls.) Limit: 1

Tulips – Hex sign tulips are normally shown with a stylized arrangement of three petals representing the three-fold aspect of God. As such, tulips are used to maintain faith and protect against witches. (+1 bonus dice to any attempt to resist supernatural attack, whether physical, mental or social.) Limit: 3

Outer Ring – Black – A solid black ring around the exterior of a hex sign represents unity. (+1 cumulative dice bonus for any rolls involving teamwork; see p. 134 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for teamwork rules.)

Outer Ring – Brown – A solid brown ring around the exterior of a hex sign represents the cycle of life and can be used to bring longevity or avert disease. (+3 die bonus to all attempts to resist disease, toxins, or supernaturally-accelerated aging.) Limit: 1

Outer Ring – Waves – A border of waves or scallops around the outside of a hex sign represents smooth sailing. (+1 to Manipulation rolls.) Limit: 1

Rosette – 6 petal – A simple six-petal flower represents good fortune during particularly challenging times. (Dramatic failures reduce to failure while within area of influence of this activated hex sign.) Limit: 1

Rosette – 12 petal – A 12-petal rosette (also called a Daddy Hex) represents an entire year of good fortune. (1 reroll of any dramatic failure or failure. Second roll must be used.) Limit: 1

Stars – Eight-pointed stars represent skill and knowledge. (+2 dice bonus on rolls in any one of the following focus areas: Academics, Crafts, Investigation, Medicine, Occult, Survival, Animal Ken, Empathy or Expression (ST chooses focus for hex, which then does not change) Limit: 4 (must all be different focus areas.)

Wheat – Stalks or sheaves of wheat represent an abundance or material prosperity. (For the next lunar month, a character's Resources act as if they are one dot higher than they actually are.) Limit: 2

Revolution and Aftermath

Like many forward-thinking individuals of the Revolutionary era, Benjamin Franklin was fascinated with the burgeoning pseudo-science of the period. As the scientific process was still far from perfect, many technological discoveries of that era were generally held to cross the line between magic and technology.

Modern historians would refer to some of these devices and inventions as frauds or hoaxes, especially when they were unable to replicate their miraculous effects. Others would later be categorized and defined as purely scientific, even if it required altering the recorded histories of the items to get them to conform to modern technological laws.

Among the latter items was a device known as a Leyden Jar, a glass jar partially filled with water, stoppered with a cork through which a metal wire passes. When the jar is charged with electricity (static or otherwise), it serves as a battery, storing the charge until it is released. Franklin experimented with this device extensively, both in formal scientific experiments and in the form of demonstrations and parlor tricks, and later scientists would credit him, not for inventing the device, but for being the first to truly understand how it worked. They define the Leyden Jar as the first capacitor and later scientific theories were based on explaining how and why the device does what it does, taking the mystery and any possible supernatural explanations out of the Leyden Jar equation.

Modern scientists, however, would be wrong. Or at least their own comprehension of the capability of the Leyden Jar falls far short of the device's true potential. More than a simple electronic device, a properly created Leyden Jar can harness and store other energy just as easily as it does electrical power.

Leyden Jar

To hold supernatural potential, a Leyden Jar must be created by an inventor with a minimum of four dots in both Science and Occult. The physical components require Resources **•••** to acquire. The jar itself must be pre-Industrial era, hand-blown glass (the impurities are vital to the process). The cork must be hand-cut from the Cork Oak (native to southwest Europe and northwest Africa), and the all metal parts of the jar must be created by hand – the wire hand-pulled and foil rolled by non-automated machines from hand-smelted tin ore. As well, the jar must contain water from a natural source, not tampered with through technology – river- or well-water works best. It should be collected from an area a minimum of 100 miles from the nearest city. The use of tap or purified water will negate the Jar's supernatural potential.

After being properly created, a Leyden Jar can be used to store not only electric charges, but also the "spark" of human will, although the transfer is not perfect. Once per day, someone with access to one of these specially made jars can spend two points of Willpower while touching the jar – one point is stored within the jar, and the other lost through imperfect conduction. At any point in the future, any individual who touches the jar and attempts to spend Willpower will find that the Willpower is spent from the jar's reserve rather than their own.

Rumors exist of Leyden Jars that have been supernaturally created to allow witches to store their own innate power (Source) rather than willpower, but as yet no public information has been made available to the hunter community about such a development.

Leyden Jars are delicate objects. Treat them as having 0 Durability and 1 Size, for a total Structure of only 1. Any damage done to a Leyden Jar (accidentally or otherwise) destroys the item and its components. Leyden Jars cannot be repaired.

19th Century

Like much of the "civilized" world, Philadelphia of the 19th century was typified by an abrupt paradox. On one hand, the city was feeling both the boon and bane of being one of the largest and most technologically advanced in the nation. An Age of Reason was upon the city. The advent of technological advances, from electric lights, gas lines and running water becoming common in public and private buildings to the advent of railroad within and to the city. Between 1800 and 1899, the city established the first Fine Arts Academy in America, saw the first practical railroad, war orphanage, zoological garden and pneumatic mailing tube, and was home to America's first World's Fair. Philadelphia during this century was home to the first penny newspaper, regularly printed comic paper and successful women's magazine, the first building and loan association, and saw the first American women receive medical degrees. The city was among America's largest, richest and most technologically advanced. And yet, it was also rife with crime, disease, disastrous fires and race battles as the city's newly freed African American population surged in the latter half of the century while still struggling for basic human rights.

But, along with all the technological advantages and socio-political challenges the new century brought with it, Philadelphia was also experiencing a surge of interest in the supernatural world. From séances where mediums actively sought contact with the spirits of the dead (and occasionally got far more than they bargained for), to stage magic shows where audiences paid good money to suspend their beliefs about how reality worked, to more clandestine conmen and women who made profit from marketing magical charms and trinkets, the mysteries of the supernatural were high in the minds of Philadelphian citizens, from the penniless orphan in the street to the rich and influential.

Séanciers, Stage Magicians and other Shysters

Mediums and stage magicians experienced their Philadelphian glory days during the 1800s. Perhaps because much of the city's new technology was as foreign to most of its citizens as magic was, a surge in public and private performances of "showmanship" style magic typified 19th century Philly. From elegant (and expensive) performances that were populated by Philadelphia's elite upper crust to back-alley shows that even the common man could afford, magic was everywhere in the city. Most of it, however, was fraudulent. Mediums frequently held their séances in darkened rooms where early versions of special effects – objects "floating" on fishing line, balloons filled with hot gasses bobbing about in the air, carefully altered props, trap doors, sliding panels, or assistants wearing costume and makeup – could be used to emulate contacting the souls of the dead. These fake mediums were of little interest to hunters, although some cells took great delight in publicly defaming those whom their investigations determined were frauds. Others, however, were of greater concern to the city's hunters. Some were actually able to conjure forth the spirits of the dead; Miss Helen Hale was one of the city's mediums. She was never proven to be fraudulent and, after investigation by several hunter groups, was sometimes used as a resource by the more open-minded of their numbers. Her ability to communicate with those who were murdered or feared dead was the key to solving the mystery surrounding several hunter deaths in the late 1800s.

On the other end of the spectrum, Priscilla Anderson, another witch-medium, became the focus of a city-wide Vigil in 1893 when an investigation proved she had killed more than 40 men, women and children in northwest Philadelphia by using her magic to rip out their souls and trap them in specially charmed bottles. The victims, who appeared to have died of natural causes, ranged in age from five to 74, and Anderson, using the pseudonym "Lady Rosemary," used her control over the trapped souls to fuel her reputation for knowing the unknowable and being in touch with "the other side." After her ability and actions came to the attention of Philly's hunters, she quickly became the target of one of the city's only full-scale mass hunt, which ended in her death, the bottles' destruction, and the release of her victims' ghosts. Or,

so the rumors say. Certain hunters have, however, reported discovering antique glass bottles in various locations around the city. When the sealed bottles were opened, they released powerful and hostile ghosts that then attacked whoever opened the bottle before disappearing. Whether these bottles are remnants of Anderson's work or possibly activated witch bottles remains uncertain.

Although the Spiritualism craze was rampant during this time period, not all of this era's witch/hunter conflicts revolved around mediums and séances. The investigation of stage magicians also occupied a great deal of hunter attention, although the vast majority of these individuals relied on mechanical engineering and showmanship than actual magical ability. One exception, however, was a European mage named John Steele, who billed himself as "the human target." For a small sum, audiences flocked to watch Steele's assistant fire various weapons at the magician, who remained unharmed although the bullets destroyed his clothing. For an additional fee, audience members could climb onto the stage along with Steele and fire one of their own weapons at the magician, again with no effect to his body. Hunters eventually discovered that Steele's ability was not due to his own magic, but was rather the effect of an amulet he wore around his neck and granted his person invulnerability to any sort of projectile. Steele's downfall came when the amulet came to the attention of the Aegis Kai Doru, who sent a team to appropriate the item. While a female member of the team "distracted" Steele, other members of the cell switched the authentic amulet for a copy. Steele's next performance was his last.

Also of interest to Philadelphia witchfinders of this era were those who, as Franklin had in the previous century, blurred the line between science and magic, often with unexpected results. Demonstrations of magic might include what modern hunters would accept as simple technological advances; in their early stages electric lights, Tesla coils, X-rays, the telegraph and telephone, even the alternate current motor were all displayed as magic or near-magic before they became commonly accepted as science. Also frequently displayed (and investigated by hunters) were more complex creations, like the Turk, a famous chess-playing mechanism, which might have been technological, magical, or simply a hoax. One of the most famous of these to be displayed in Philadelphia was a machine that its creator claimed had solved the nigh-timeless challenge of a self-perpetuating energy source.

Redheffer's Perpetual Motion Machine

Early in the 19th century, inventor Charles Redheffer claimed to have invented a machine long-dreamed of by early scientists and philosophers – a perpetual motion device. Redheffer claimed his contraption utilized the Earth's own gravity to drive a pendulum which, in turn turned a gear that drove a shaft which could be used to power any one of a number of different machines from industrial looms, mills or lathes to household devices such as rug-beaters or butter churns.

Redheffer charged admission to those who wanted to see his miraculous machine, which he located in a shop in the

outskirts of the city. In time, bolstered by the steady stream of gawkers who were willing to lay out money to stare at his device, he petitioned the city of Philadelphia to provide funds to build a larger version for the benefit of the city. Numerous articles were written in the local papers about the machine, with proponents of Redheffer claiming it was legitimate and other, more skeptical voices, claiming it was an out and out fraud.

Before long, the hubbub about Redheffer's machine reached the ears of the High Street Market Boys, a cell of hunters in the city, who decided to investigate this potential "miracle." What they found was disturbing – Redheffer's machine, while it appeared to be doing what he said it would, was being powered not by gravity, but by magic. Interrogation of Redheffer revealed he had no idea the machine was tapping into a supernatural power source and he truly believed himself to be a scientific genius for having invented it.

The Market Boys, understanding that it was not the invention but the location that was important in this equation, realized that such a powerful site was inevitably going to attract the attention of those who would harness its power for selfish purposes (as Redheffer had) or worse, to use its apparently unlimited supernatural energy to fuel plans to harm the growing human population of the city. They pressured Philadelphia's city leaders to give Redheffer the chance to petition for their support – by setting up the machine in a public place and allowing the commissioners and the public a chance to examine it.

As the hunters had bet it would, removing the machine from its location severed the supernatural power link between the two and Redheffer quickly discovered his miraculous machine was now no more than a compilation of quickly-unwinding pendulum clockworks. Desperate to buy himself time while he investigated the cause of the sudden breakdown, Redheffer rigged a manual source of power at the demonstration site. Unfortunately for the inventor, the already-skeptical city commissioners quickly noticed his makeshift modifications and revealed Redheffer as a fraud. Confused and ashamed, Redheffer slunk out of Philadelphia, never to return.

Meanwhile, the High Street Market Boys set fire to Redheffer's shop and then made arrangements to purchase the "worthless" plot of land from the city. While various hunter groups have squabbled about "rights" to the land for more than a hundred years, it has remained in hunter hands since Redheffer's disappearance.

Location: Redheffer's Ruins

For more than a century, the hunters of Philadelphia have carefully guarded the site of Redheffer's former shop on the banks of the Schuylkill River. The land currently is held in trust by a charitable organization dedicated to preserving areas of wild land in the ever-growing sprawl of Philadelphia and is one of the few non-developed areas remaining in the now-massive city. Over the years since Redheffer's "unfortunate" shop fire, the location's supernatural potential has been discovered by a variety of individuals capable of tapping into it. Witches, either individually or in covens, as well as lycanthropes, ghosts, creatures from outside of this mortal

existence, vampires and other power-hungry entities have all, at one time or another, attempted to insinuate themselves into ownership of the property. This inevitably unites the local hunters who are aware of the locale's supernatural potential to fight against the possibility of the land being removed from their care.

Redheffer's Ruins are a natural wellspring of supernatural power, a conjunction of multiple unrelated magical energy flows into a very intense location of latent magic. This wellspring manifests in a variety of ways, some (such as powering Redheffer's device) are only strange, although they could be dangerous in the wrong hands. Some, however, are a very real threat to the area and its inhabitants. Not only are supernatural creatures attracted to the area because of its power, but also the energy collected there can serve as a thoroughfare for creatures or entities seeking to enter into the "real" world from other places. Ghosts, demons, spirits and other nasty individuals may well seek out the Ruins in hopes of using them as a passage-way to or from the mortal world.

A witch (or other creature capable of tapping into Source) can conjure forth up to four points of Source from Redheffer's Ruins during any 24-hour period. Untapped Source is bled back into the area and is unrecoverable, although decades of untapped Source have also infused the area, acting as a beacon to those who hunger for Source or other supernatural power.

Hunting in the Age of Reason

While many hunters were lulled into a sense of false-safe-ty by the increased "civilization" of 19th century Philadelphia, a few notable witch-hunter cells refused to relax in their Vigil. Despite the Age of Enlightenment, these dedicated (or some might say obsessed) witchfinders continued to ferret out the witches and magicians who plied their trade on an unsuspecting public in the guise of stage magic, séances and "hoodoo."

The Curtain Gang, a Philadelphia hunter group whose public personas were as skeptics and debunkers, claimed to have "unveiled" more than a hundred fraudulent mediums and spiritualists during the mid-1800s. Behind the scenes, they frequently were the "first response" team when unwary humans managed to actually tap into the supernatural world and call forth powers they were wholly unprepared to deal with. In 1858 alone, the cell reportedly closed three portals to the "abyssal realms," saved an entire orphanage of children who were being encouraged to study "the darke artes," cleansed two of Philadelphia's largest cemeteries which had been serving as a source for a particularly nasty necromancer, and captured a small army of homunculi that had been released when an aspiring alchemist's experiments turned sour. They are credited with having "held down the fort" in Philly during a time when few hunter groups remained.

SOURCE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Like many places of supernatural power, Redheffer's Ruins serve as a font that might be used by a variety of creatures and individuals who can tap into such a thing. While it works perfectly well serving as a spring of Source in a witchfinder game, it can also be expanded and adapted, should a Storyteller wish to incorporate other games' rules into the Hunter chronicle.

For Storytellers with access to *Mage: the Awakening*, Redheffer's Ruins can be treated as a four-dot Hallow (pp. 83-84 of that book.) Alternately (or in conjunction), the Ruins might be represented as a Wyrm's Nest in a game that features vampires, or the rules from *Werewolf: The Forsaken* for Loci can be used, with the Ruins serving as a four-dot locus.

In 1883, one hunter cell gained acclaim within those in the know in Philadelphia, not by conflict with the city's magic-wielding population, but by cooperation with them. Early 1883 saw the inception of Philadelphia's Antiquarian Society, a group that professed to be dedicated to the preservation and research of the city's historic past. While the majority of the group was focused on this work, a small subset of their number had a more specific goal – to collect and catalog the wealth of supernatural material that 200 years of immigrants had brought to the city. This sub-set of group presented themselves as skeptics who sought such information so that future Philadelphia generations could learn from the follies of their forefathers. In truth, however, the group (which originally consisted of a talented psychic, a woman whose matrilineal line had been herbalists and "wise women" for multiple generations, and a collector of occult manuscripts and paraphernalia) hoped that by gathering as much of the city's occult knowledge as possible in one location, they would both ensure it was not lost and reduce the chances of it falling into the hands of those who might use its potential power for evil.

The Antiquarian Society came to the attention of a cell of hunters when both were following up on rumors of a malevolent ghost tied to an artifact on display at Memorial Hall (now the Philadelphia Museum of Art). Each group suspected that the other was another of its own kind, resulting in discussion and eventually cooperation rather than conflict. When the truth eventually became apparent, the two had established the roots of what would go on to be a long-lasting team effort between the hunters of the Jakob's Pike cell and the Antiquarian Society. Although neither group revealed its secrets entirely to the other, the two worked together to investigate, catalog and contain magical threats to the city for more than a decade, until the partnership was dissolved by the unfortunate demise of the entirety of Jakob's Pike in a confrontation with what turned out to be a pack of lycanthropes. The Antiquarian Society, however, remains in place to this day, as does their supernatural special interest group.

Hoodoo Queens

As Philadelphia's fascination with the supernatural grew, a religious/spiritual form of magic took root in the city. Brought to Philadelphia by African American residents, especially those from Louisiana and other formerly slave-holding states, as well as the Caribbean, Hoodoo (like Pow-wow) incorporates Bible scripture and Catholic symbolism with the native religious practices of its followers, in this case the spiritual beliefs of West Africa.

While New Orleans was the undisputed Mecca of American Hoodoo, Philadelphia's religious tolerance, wealth and accessibility did much to ensure the City of Brotherly Love was also a safe haven for those who practiced Hoodoo. Small shops could be found in many areas of town, where a lovesick gent could purchase a love-charm guaranteed to gain the attention of the object of his affection, or a worried wife could buy a spell to keep her husband's roving eyes from straying.

While many of these self-professed "hoodoo queens" were blatant frauds and shysters, some possessed sufficient supernatural skill (or access to potent magical texts or items) to attract the attention of Philadelphia's few active 19th century hunter cells.

Among these was "Sister Serafina," a freed slave who came to Philly in the early 1800s and collected a following of rich

upper-class women who relied on her for magic powders, potions and charms of all sorts. Unfortunately for her clients, Sister Sera (as she was sometimes called) was an adept at manipulative magic and each of her "treatments" only acted to solidify her customer's dependence upon (and loyalty to) the hoodoo queen herself. It was not until one of her clients bankrupted her well-connected family through generous "donations" to Sister Sera that the situation came to the attention of hunters. Word of the bankruptcy spread along the East Coast and a cell of the Malleus Maleficarum from New York was assigned to investigate the incident. By the time they arrived in Philly, the witch had virtually enslaved an entire swath of the city's socialites. When the hunters brought the hammer down on Sister Sera, almost every one of the late-witch's former clients was struck with acute wasting as their bodies were denied the magical sustenance they had come to rely on. Although the deaths would be attributed to a "consumption" (tuberculosis) epidemic among the upper class, the Malleus Maleficarum counts them among the number of Sister Sera's victims.

Similar epidemics have been investigated in modern Philadelphia. In the mid 1970s, a fraternal brotherhood organization held a convention in Philly. Members from around the world gathered in Philadelphia for a weekend-long party that (according to later investigation) involved numerous



drunken "incidents" including the alleged "assault" of one of the convention hall's young female employees. The brotherhood, having powerful members in city government, quickly covered up the situation, using well-paid character witnesses to cast doubts on the moral integrity of the victims.

Several months later, the convention-goers having returned to their own corners of the globe, a strange occurrence began to be noticed. Many of the attendees began seeking medical attention for strikingly similar symptoms: fatigue, hair loss, weight gain, non-specific pain, nausea, dizziness. An entire gamut of physical complaints struck more than a quarter of the men who attended the conference, more than 200 in all. In time, the situation again came to the attention of the Mal-leus Maleficarum, who, detecting supernatural influence in the victim's situation, traced the victims back to their gathering in Philadelphia, and eventually to the assault "victim." Through her, they discovered (and they believe rooted out) a clandestine underground industry of black-art "cursing" which the woman had accessed (and paid dearly for) to exact her revenge.

Recent History

Despite small victories on the part of various groups and sub-groups of Philly's supernatural population, no one supernatural group has remained far ahead in the power struggle for long. The coming of the 20th century, followed quickly by the Great Depression and a pair of World Wars drastically undercut the powerbase that various and sundry magical groups had built in Philly during the superstitious 19th century. Cults which thrived in the gaslights of the Civil War died a slow and wasting death as their members had to focus more and more attention on necessities like feeding themselves and their family, and even the most talented witches found themselves short on resources with which to maintain their followers' loyalty. Other supernatural creatures, less reliant on mundane necessities like food, clothing and shelter, quickly seized the opportunity to undo any advantage the witches of Philly might have built, individually or as organized groups, in the earlier decades, and once again leveled the city's playing field.

Also putting Philadelphian witches at a disadvantage for the first time since the city's inception was the increasing disbelief and disinterest both in magic and the supernatural and in individual culture's traditional beliefs and practices. While, even to modern day, Philly has retained more neighborhood- and culture-specific practices than almost any other American city, even The City of Neighborhoods felt the effects of America's modernization. As the Industrial Revolution faded far enough into the past that new generations couldn't remember a time without electric lights, radio, automobiles and eventually television, mass transit, airplanes and other scientific marvels-turned-mundanities, fewer and fewer individuals held onto the previous century's fascination with (and tolerance of) supernatural phenomena.

While a witch's power does not stem from the belief of others (at least not for most), disinterest in the supernatural made it more difficult for witches to thrive in Philadelphia.

After many generations of prosperity, former hoodoo queens or neighborhood wise women struggled to make a living plying their trade in such fields. With a reduced potential clientele base, those who sought to support themselves through their skill with witchcraft (regardless of the name they put upon it) had to be much more obvious than in previous centuries. Those who did so using supernatural abilities (rather than as pure con artists) were much more likely than at any time previously to come to the attention of the Philadelphia hunter cells who had begun to coordinate their efforts.

As well, witches faced stronger opponents in the form of hunter groups who were quick to turn this century's newly developed technology against their former enemies. The Cheiron Group and Task Force: VALKYRIE both thrived in the new century, profiting and gaining strength not only from advances in science, weaponry and technology, but also from the influx of confusion and tension brought about by the city's race riots, drug epidemic, organized crime and heightened murder rates. Both organizations were able to requisition stronger funding and support to their Philadelphia cells than at any time in the past, and quickly turned those new resources on the city's supernatural population.

The Philadelphia Experiment

Arthur C. Clarke said any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. The truth is, however, that at a certain point science and technology's ability to achieve something far outreaches their ability to explain how and why they achieved it. In truth, sufficiently advanced technology is not indistinguishable from magic – it is magic.

In the fall of 1943, a small experimental team working for the Government turned a US Navy destroyer invisible and teleported it from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Norfolk, Virginia, in an incident known as the Philadelphia Experiment. According to official records, this experiment not only never happened, but no branch of the Government has ever sanctioned or funded experiments that could be even tangentially related to such an outcome. The destroyer purportedly experimented upon, the USS *Eldridge*, was not stationed in Philadelphia at the time, and those who claim to have knowledge of the experiment have been, over time, consistently exposed as crackpots, mentally and emotionally unbalanced, or out-and-out liars. Washington has always insisted the Philadelphia Experiment is, at best, utter fiction created by conspiracy theorists to attempt to discredit the Navy's war efforts during World War II.

The truth, however, lies just behind and two steps to the left of the reported story. In late 1943, a small team of technology-minded individuals with strong occult backgrounds approached the Government with a clandestine plan. Worried by heavy Allied losses in the Atlantic, this group (a coven known as Bona Dea) wrapped their magical ability in the façade of super-science and offered the Navy the ability to cloak and transport their warships in a way that the Axis fleets could not detect or intercept.

Under the coven's supervision, a skeleton crew of Navy personnel volunteers was sworn to secrecy and then ordered to wrap a decommissioned battleship (dubbed the *USS Eldritch*, which contributed to the later rumors that the ship in question was the *Eldridge*) in more than 20 thousand yards of high-voltage electrical wiring while it sat in a sequestered portion of the Philadelphia shipyards. Once the ship was thoroughly encased in the wiring (and onlookers completely convinced this was a scientific experiment rather than a supernatural one), the coven began the ritual they planned to use to turn the ship and its crew invisible and instantly transport them more than 400 miles north, to a similarly sequestered dock in Norfolk, Virginia. Midway through the ritual, under the guise of a fortuitously foggy night provided by the weather-controlling skill of one of the coven members, the electrical voltage was activated sending tens of thousands of volts in an elaborate pattern around the ship.

Unfortunately for the coven (which had perfected its ability to shift large items from one place to another by combined effort and copious use of the Space Mystery) the same trappings they used to convince the Government that their efforts were technological rather than magical worked against them. The introduction of the high-voltage wires amplified and altered their spell in ways they had not anticipated. Witnesses in Philadelphia claim to have seen the ship flicker out of sight in the shipyards and those in Virginia claim the ship (or something like it) appeared briefly in the heavy fog outside of Norfolk for a few seconds. Photos and video of the experiment, however, are largely inconclusive. Some show only a shadowy outline where the ship should have been, others' time stamps seem to indicate the ship was actually in both places at the same time, or that there were periods where it was present in neither. The coven claimed they had been successful, but their victory was bittersweet at best.

The structural integrity of the ship was damaged beyond repair by the ritual. Much of the core skeleton and siding, capable of withstanding all but the strongest artillery blows, was degraded as if it had spent a century underwater. Perhaps more importantly, the crew of volunteers was also put out of commission by the teleportation. Many died immediately; some showed signs of advanced aging as if a century had passed during the ceremony, while others appeared to have been torn apart by the spell, their bodies and limbs scattered like flotsam across the battleship's decks. Others, strangely, appeared unscathed physically, but were entirely insane after their experience and never recovered their mental capacities thereafter.

Despite all this, the Government was anxious to continue experimentation, labeling the project a "conditional success with losses within the acceptable range for a project of this magnitude." When word reached Philadelphia's hunter population, they quickly recognized the project for the witchery it was and set out on one of the city's first multi-agency task force projects to ensure it never happened again. Cells from around the city were brought in on the job. Some were assigned to research and information extraction, ensuring that the Government files were gradually lost, misdirected and

destroyed while the hunters themselves kept copies for their own archives. Other cells, those with political might, brought those involved in the project into scandalous limelight and ensured they were so busy covering their own trails they had no time or attention to devote to further experiments. And finally, a cell of Watchmen from the Knights of Saint George were assigned to eradicate the Bona Dea coven, ensuring that, even if efforts to erase the Philadelphia Experiment were not entirely successful, there would be no way for the Government to duplicate its initial effort. The hunter's efforts were successful. The coven was exterminated to a man, and every shred of reference to their ritual taken into hunter custody. Governmental archives relating to the experiment were scoured clean and those originally involved with it found themselves retired or deceased before the Allied-Axis conflict came to its conclusion in 1945.

Modern Philly

Philadelphia is a city of potential in the 21st century. Just as the town has started to reinvent itself in a variety of ways, so are its supernatural and hunter populations experiencing a resurgence. Witches, both in groups and alone, seem to have flocked to the city in the past decade, drawn by its centuries of history and the wealth of potential power to be found there, as well as the "not my neighborhood, not my problem" attitude found throughout the city. Hunter populations are also at an all-time high, in part because of a seemingly new influx of supernatural activity.

At a Glance: Philly Witch-Hunt

Ascending Ones: *Peaceable.* Right now, a number of Ascending Ones have managed tenuous alliances with local witches — some share alchemical interests.

Ashwood Abbey: *Predatory.* Witches represent an elusive prize for the Abbey in Philly. An Abbey member who captures a witch for "play-time" or interrogation may earn the transitive title of "Witchfinder General," a slightly tongue-in-cheek title.

Aegis Kai Doru: *Aggressive.* Tired of always being two steps behind witches and other hunters, the Aegis Kai Doru has stepped up its assault on witches, sometimes growing reckless in their attempts. They'll do whatever it takes to get Relics back into their hands and to end the depredations of magic.

The Cheiron Group: *Experimenting.* Local pharmaceutical companies that operate under the auspices of TCG have been curious about the uses sorcerers can "offer" them. One report claims they're working on a skin graft similar to the Anger Patch (**Hunter: The Vigil**, p. 185) that will help detect magic and even weaken it.

Knights of Saint George: *Crusading.* The Knights have grown in power over the last several years, and have begun to steal the thunder from other hunter organizations and cells — none of whom know who the hell these "upstarts" (ironic given that the Knights are anything but) are. Their approach to destroying witches is highly-focused and, frankly, violent.

The Long Night: *Steady.* They don't focus on witches here, not really — but the disparate cells of the Long Night recognize that the Devil has his hands in the minds of sorcerers. If they can convert those lost heathens, then that only helps pave the way for Jesus. Those who are beyond redemption must be watched, then destroyed.

Loyalists of Thule: *Scattered.* No one Thule cell approaches the witch-hunt like any other. Some are amping up their research on magical resources by actually interviewing and allying with witches (which doesn't sit well with other hunters).

The Lucifuge: *Steady.* The Lucifuge in Philly only concerns itself with those witches who seem to have embraced the demonic. If they truck with demons, then that's a problem. If they don't... well, it becomes a "watch-and-wait" situation. They especially keep an eye for those descendants of Lucifer who possess the ability to perform Castigations, but don't have the mandate to hunt evil.

Malleus Maleficarum: *Waiting.* Right now, they're waiting for reinforcements. They have commands from on-high (Vatican) that tell them to gather information and do nothing else. It's making the Hammer of Witches real itchy; soon, one or two cells might opt to buck the papal directive.

Network 0: *Eager.* They want magic on camera. They want it captured on MySpace and shown to the world, but so far? Hasn't happened. Some have gone "undercover" amongst a few witch cults to try to get some evidence.

Null Mysteriis: *Academic.* The Null Mysteriis in Philadelphia may have a greater crossover with witches than with any other single supernatural group. While not all who perform magic study to do so, some witches dedicate a great deal of time, energy and resources into research, often in the same public and private libraries, universities and colleges that the NM are most at home within. Conflicts between the Null Mysteriis and witches are generally non-violent territorial scuffles or squabbles over access to or control of prized information.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: *Duplicitous.* On the one hand, they make lots of noise about bringing the fight to the witches; lots of bluster and balls-out attitude. On the other hand... well, TF:V has local witches on the bankroll. Not officially, of course. But it helps to have a few diviners and soothsayers in your pocket, right? No different than hiring insurgents on the streets of Baghdad.

The Union: *Steady.* Witches are bad for the community, plain and simple. Where witches exist, social norms go out the window. Drugs sometimes come into play. Laws bend. That can't happen. The Union has always maintained a strong witch-hunting front. They don't strike to kill whenever possible. Exile is the preferred option.

Covens, Cults and Cabals

Multiple groups of witches are known to exist within Philadelphia, although most tend to (understandably) attempt to remain hidden from the eyes of those cells specializing in witch-finding. Some have forged a tenuous peace with certain cells, but no coven has carte blanche with *all* of the city's hunters.

The Daughters of Diana, an all-female coven, are known by many of the city's hunters, as they claim responsibility for having destroyed the Fairmont Fiend, a quasi-demonic rapist who marked the city's largest park as his territory. This victory (which many of the city's cells had proven incapable of achieving), as well as their ceaseless efforts to reduce predatory crime in the city's parks, has led some of the city's witchfinders to turn a blind eye to the DoD's activities. Other cells, perhaps chafing at being shown up by their sworn enemy, see them as supernatural vigilantes, and seek to end the Daughters' "unholy control" of Philadelphia's green spaces.

Although few hunters realize how extensive the network is, a handful of cells have at least one contact among the Oracle, an organization of witches all gifted with various divinatory powers. For those who know of their existence, information gleaned from Oracle contacts is generally held to be reliable, although subject to misinterpretation. Adamantly anti-witch hunters (especially the *Malleus Maleficarum*) may well refuse to act upon Oracle prophecies, regardless of the price their stubbornness costs their cells.

Few covens can claim tolerance from even some of the city's hunters, however. Witch groups that utilize their magical abilities to collect human power and wealth or to gather followers are often actively hunted by witchfinders. Philadelphia has its share of witch-spawned cults, like the Brotherhood of the Comet who have convinced a number of Philadelphia's rich to suicide with the promise that they will be resurrected and "blossom" with their own magical powers. In truth, the only thing that has bloomed under the Comet's care is the cult's bank account (which is craftily made the recipient of their victim's estates), but there are always those who are greedy enough for power that they will do almost anything — including kill themselves — in hopes of attaining it.

Similarly, groups, like the Shadow-Touched, a small cabal of witches that worship an alien force in exchange for their magical powers, are rarely considered as potential hunter allies. In fact, the Shadow-Touched are thought to be Philadelphia's Public Enemy Number One by many cells.

The Shadow-Touched

Led by Spider Kincaide, the coven known as the Shadow-Touched seems a haphazard collection of individuals to those not privy to their master's grand plan. Their actions as a group often also appear to be bizarrely random. The group may murder a single member of a sleeping family in their home, leaving the rest to waken safely amid blood-splattered horror, or destroy the political career of a seemingly unimportant politician, while allowing both those who are far more corrupt and those who are more virtuous to continue their careers. It is rumored that not even the group's leader understands exactly why her masters order her to recruit certain individuals or turn the coven's attention towards a particular task. Kincaide, however, feels certain the Shadows are merely biding their time and will reveal their entire plan to her when she proves worthy of their complete trust.

Antagonist: Spider Kincaide

Background: The daughter of two preachers, Spider started on her own spiritual quest at an early age. At first she sought only to rebel against the "truth" offered by her parents, a path that led

SPIDER KINCAIDE

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Investigation 3, Occult 4, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Brawl 1, Drive 2, Firearms (Shotgun) 3, Larceny (Shoplifting) 3, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Prayer) 3, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Familiar (Animal; Black Rat) 3, Gnosis 3

Mysteries: Fortune 3, Nature 3, Passion 3

Willpower: 4

Morality: 3

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 11

Health: 7

her to experimentation first with mainstream religions other than their own, and then with more exotic beliefs and practices. At some point, her prayers to find "her own path" were answered, but not in a way she could have ever imagined. Whatever it was that heard her plea answered by taking Spider for their own. They manifest to her, speak to her in visions and dreams, and grant her powers far beyond those of mere mortals. All they ask in return is her obedience, her servitude and her soul.

Description: Spider's a plucky girl, looks more innocent than she really is. She dresses in whatever clothes suit her mood that day: all-black to denote an internal bitterness, a latex dress of orange and red to reveal that day's mad furor, or a wedding dress to intimate (falsely) her virginal demeanor.

Storytelling Hints: Challenging, challenging, challenging. That's what she does, always. She challenges statements almost needlessly — getting up in someone's face is her most comfortable zone of action. The only ones she doesn't challenge: the voices that speak to her.

Solitaries

Not all Philadelphia witches are organized into covens or cults. Individuals dwell within the city as well and



are just as capable of having positive or negative relationships with hunters as larger collections of witches are. Some solitary witches are seen as allies or resources by some hunters while being actively persecuted by others. A case in point is Black Maria, an elderly woman who possesses the ability to cause disease, but also to cure the same. In her younger days, several hunter cells relied heavily on Maria when exposed to supernatural illnesses (or when natural maladies threatened to prevent them from fulfilling the duties of the Vigil.) While her husband and children were alive, Maria was generally held to be "one of the good ones" by most who knew of her abilities. After losing her spouse and children to a drunk driver, however, things changed drastically for the witch. Maria began to drink heavily and in her angry stupors, often lost control of her abilities, inflicting harm throughout the city. Perhaps worse for the hunters who had come to rely upon her, Black Maria (as she quickly became known) was rarely capable of performing the healings she formerly could. Knowing this, and fearing retribution from those who had once been her allies, Maria retreated, shunning all but the closest of her former contacts. In time, some of those who had been closest to Maria and her family began to focus

OTHER SHADOW-TOUCHED

Fera — Other than Kincaide, Fera is the most senior member of the Shadow-Touched. Only Kincaide (who recruited him) knows if he has always been as brutal and animalistic as he now is, or whether that is a change wrought by the Shadows. Fera's magic use seems to be more instinctive than intellect based, as are most of his actions. He is the brute force of the coven, and only Kincaide's words (assumedly speaking on behalf of their masters) can control him in the slightest.

Recommended Mysteries: Passion, Nature, Elements

Persephone — Recruited straight out of Philadelphia's Goth community, Persephone was nearly unique among her black-clad club-hopping peers in that she really *could* see and hear the ghosts, spirits and other ethereal creatures that many claimed to be haunted by. Since joining the coven, her connection with the Shadows has only strengthened her abilities, giving her the power to summon and control a veritable army of non-corporeal servants. **Recommended Mysteries:** Shadow, Twilight, Foretelling

The Doctor — Perhaps the most grounded member of the coven, The Doctor was a renowned surgeon until Kincaide was ordered to remove his memory of an intricate procedure immediately before he entered the surgical theater. His patient died, and The Doctor was bullied into joining the coven upon threat of similar attacks against every patient he worked on. Under the Shadows' protection, he has been given the ability to heal at will (usually theirs). His supernatural skills can also be used to harm, however. **Recommended Mysteries:** Disease, Health, Supernal

their efforts on helping the witch recover from her losses, even though they did not realize how dangerous she had become. With their help, she gradually began the road to recovery. Today, most of the time Maria is (if not her old self exactly) not a walking disease vector: there's always a chance, however, that hunters will call on her and find her in her cups... and contagious.

Other solitaries have earned the animosity of the vast majority of Philadelphia's hunters. John Digger has been hunted in Philly for decades. His crimes include assault, murder and grave robbing, although that's not what has earned him the hatred of Philadelphia's hunters. His greatest offense is what he does with the spoils of his late-night forays into the city's cemeteries. Digger is a necromancer, using purloined corpses and body parts to create untiring servants and a plethora of potions, relics and spells of both a defensive and offensive nature.

Philadelphia: Spellbound

The following is a collection of reports, journal entries, interviews and other data sources accumulated over the past few years detailing just a small amount of the city's burgeoning magical activity.

Cult Leader

From the notebook of Henrik Jager, part of "The Order," a Loyalists of Thule cell recently assigned to Philadelphia from Boise, Idaho.

June 14 – 2:38pm – Location: Malcolm X Memorial Park

"He's at it again. More than an hour now, going from one group to the next. His approach is always the same. Friendly, smiling, talking about someone's dog or child. Then he hands them the flyer. Some read it, some only pretend to. Many end up in the trash when he turns away, but some are taken and read. I appropriated one of the discs and found it to be an open invitation to a "Rally for Freedom" (see attached evidence). The rally is scheduled for 6pm next Saturday. We must strike before then, before he spreads this propaganda further."

Antagonist: Matthew Williams, Codename "Forten"

Description: Elegant, regardless of the casual clothing he wears, Forten's slight Parisian accent only highlights his exotic looks. His skin is *café au lait*, his features fine and his eyes ice-blue. He carries himself with a fluid grace that puts others at ease, even when the topics he raises are disturbing.

Background: Forten's family emigrated from the slums outside of Paris in the early 1990s in hopes of giving their then-10 year old son a chance at success in America. They opened a small restaurant and worked day and night to make certain their child had all he needed to succeed in his new home. Their hopes were dashed, however, when Matthew began acting out in high school, running with a group of activists and extremists who staged political rallies and protests against

Storytelling Hints: Matthew is a rebel with a clue, a political mover and shaker who believes that by empowering those within Philadelphia's community who previously felt neglected, he can incite a virtual army of dedicated followers to his cause. He prefers to use his charm, quick wit and supernatural powers to recruit others to his side, rather than utilizing force. Should situations escalate to combat, Williams will attempt to withdraw and retreat back to a safe haven where more physically adept members of his "cult of personality" can help protect their spokesman.

MATTHEW WILLIAMS AKA "FORTEN"

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Occult 3, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 2, Survival (Urban) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 4, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 5, Socialize 1, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Gnosis 5, Contacts (University Students, Street Kids, Homeless, Welfare Recipients), Allies (Cult Members), Inspiring

Mysteries: Lore 5, Fortune 4, Mind 3, Nature 5, Supernatural 2, Space 2

Willpower: 5

Morality: 5

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7



Eventually, Matthew's intentions will become clear. He genuinely believes witches have not only the right, but also the duty to rule over humanity. Those in his army he can force into manifesting supernatural power will eventually rule beside him. Those who, through what he sees as inherently flaws, are unable to do so will join the rest of humanity under the "benevolent" control of the new witch-ruling class. And, of course, Williams sees himself as the head of this new mageocracy, when it comes about.

Hunters may not know whether Williams intends to begin his own cult-army, or is simply using his powers to create and stabilize a platform of power within the city. Whatever his intentions, once they realize he's using magic to manipulate the minds and emotions of Philly's underprivileged citizens, he's unlikely to be allowed to continue his work for long.

Relic Keeper

Excerpt from an oral interview with Morris Goldstein, long-time ally of the Aegis Kai Doru and owner/proprietor of "Goldstein's Quality Merchandise."

"...So, I says to the guy, I says... 'Yeah, that's a nice flower pot, but five hundred bucks, you gotta be kiddin' me. I'll give you twenty bucks, cuz it's the holidays and I'm feeling generous.'" The subject laughed before continuing. "That ticked him off. I mean, here was this vase, big as my head, obviously an antique, and I'd just told him I was gonna plant geraniums in it. He musta turned five shades of purple, and I thought he was gonna go apoplectic right there, so I stops him... 'Fifty bucks,' I says. He counters with three hundred, and he's watching the door like he thinks someone's going to come stormin' in after him at any minute. I hem and haw a bit. There's no way I'm payin' 3 big ones, even though I was pretty sure this was what you was lookin' for. I mean, what, you made of money? We go back and forth a bit, and I swear, if I hadn't had it in my hands – checking for that mark you told me about on the bottom – I think he woulda bolted. Finally, we shake on 175 and he's out of there before the cash register's even closed. That's when I called you, ya know?" The subject paused for almost a minute. "So, what is this thing anyway?" Interviewer declined to answer. Interviewee recovered target object, exchanging it for three hundred US dollars and departed. Target object remains in custody.

**MORRIS
GOLDSTEIN**

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 3, Investigation (Artifacts) 4, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Firearms 2, Larceny (Security Systems) 2, Stealth 1, Survival (Urban) 1

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Intimidation 2, Persuasion (Bargaining) 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Bluffing) 3

Merits: Encyclopedic Knowledge, Allies (Police), Contacts (Hunters, Police, Underworld, Witches) (Note: Morris has no Gnosis, and is not capable of inherently casting any spells of his own volition. He can only use such magical items as are fueled by Willpower, or other human-based means.)

Willpower: 8

Morality: 7

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Shotgun	4(L)	20/40/80	8 + 1	9 again

Antagonist: Morris Goldstein, Merchant and Magician

Background: For over 100 years, Goldstein's Quality Merchandise has been a cornerstone of the local Jewish community, and a haven for those seeking artifacts, ancient tomes and other interesting items. Morris Goldstein, the current proprietor, inherited the shop from his father, who inherited it from his father, who inherited it from his father, who established the shop just after arriving in the US in 1904. Since then, the Goldsteins (all four generations) have earned a reputation among those who traffic in exotic (and potentially illegal) merchandise (although Morris steadfastly avoids any deal involving obviously stolen or unlawful items).

Several years ago, Morris discovered certain items that passed through his inventory were more than they seemed. It began with a crude iron Amulet he found under the lin-



ing of a small jewelry box he purchased as part of an estate sale. While trying to read the inscription on the hand-shaped charm, his store was broken into by an armed robber. To Morris' surprise, when he yelled "Stop" at the would-be thief, not only did his assailant freeze, time itself stopped in its tracks. The effect didn't last long, but it was enough for Morris to hit the "panic button" that would summon the police and lock himself safely in the back room. Since then, Morris has tinkered with the charm's powers, while keeping his eye out for other "treasures" that might cross his store's counters. He hasn't told anyone about the Amulet, including the customers who normally buy "special" items from him, but he's anxious to add more items to his collection.

Description: At 55, Goldstein's glory days (if he ever had them) are far in the past. He's a skinny Jewish man with a bald head and glasses. He is not, however, slow-witted or inobser-

AMULET OF ACANTHUS

The Amulet of Acanthus is a small iron charm in the shape of a close-fingered hand and palm. On one face, crude inscriptions in Greek have been mostly rubbed away, leaving only random letters here and there. On the other, an open eye stares ceaselessly. A small loop at the wrist-end of the hand allows the amulet to be worn as a pendant.

The Amulet attunes itself to someone by being held while they are in danger. Upon being attuned, the Amulet allows them to "freeze" time in a 20 foot radius around them for 30 seconds. The initial use of this item **must** be while the wielder is in imminent danger. Later uses do not have to be. After being activated, the Amulet is incapable of being used again for 12 hours. The Amulet can only be attuned to one person at any given time. Attuning it to a new person automatically breaks any previous attunements.

vant. He knows a little bit about everything and has an innate knack for bargaining.

Goldstein dresses conservatively, wearing well-maintained clothing that is (at least in style, if not actual items) the same as he's worn for decades. He keeps his shop the same way, exerting incredible levels of organization and cleanliness in an environment that might, under anyone else's care, quickly devolve into chaos.

Storytelling Hints: The unofficial Goldstein family motto since arriving in the States has been "keep your eyes down and your mouth shut; but never miss an opportunity." This idea served his great-grandfather, grandfather and father's generations well, allowing them to build a reputation as the "go to" dealers in the kind of merchandise not found on most modern store shelves. Morris, however, has learned a thing or two in his 40+ years in the business. He's begun to suspect there's probably a lot more to some of the items he's been buying and selling than meets the eye, and is just curious enough to want to know more about them. His curiosity has served him well. While he still provides items to various buyers (including hunters and witches) he gives everything a good once-over first, hoping to find another magical item like the mysterious Amulet.

Storytellers can utilize Goldstein in a variety of ways. He can be an information resource, using his contacts with the shady side of Philadelphia to keep an ear out for tidbits that may be of use to hunter player characters. Alternately, he can be an ally to their enemies, providing a means of obtaining supernatural items to bolster the city's witch population against the hunter's onslaught. Another possibility is for Goldstein to play one side against the other, providing information or resources to both sides, depending on who's offering the highest bid at any given time. And, of course, there are his own supernatural abilities

(granted by items such as the Amulet of Acanthus below) that qualify him, at least in some eyes, as a witch himself. Storytellers should feel free to "stock" Goldstein with whatever supernatural items seem appropriate to their game. Relics can be used (and the requirement to belong to the Aegis Kai Doru is waived), as can any of the supernatural items from *World of Darkness: Reliquary* or any other of the *World of Darkness* books. For items that normally require characters to be of a certain supernatural type to use them, Storytellers may deem this requirement to be waived, or may substitute Willpower in place of the normal activation cost (Gnosis, Mana, etc.)

Witchfinder Extraordinaire

Ascending One member, Yousef Shinwari, in a recorded verbal report of a recent situation in SW Philadelphia

"I arrived at the Golden Carp in search of supplies that I routinely purchase there. Upon entering, I was struck with an Awareness. I knew, without any shadow of a doubt, the other customer in the store was... wrong. Bad. Evil, if you must. But that he was unnatural, an abomination, and that if left unfettered he would do great harm. Although the instinct was very strong to strike him at that moment, I wished not to endanger the store's proprietor who had served me well over the past years, nor did I wish to expose myself as anything but that which she knew me as – a simple practitioner of the herbal arts. And so I waited as this... abomination... went about his ordering, taking careful note of the substances he called for. I stepped outside while the store owner was measuring his goods, then called Sara, who made for the store in all haste to follow this newly-discovered target and perhaps discern his base of operations. I re-entered and found him preparing to leave. To delay his departure, I feigned clumsiness and knocked the package from his arms, scattering Madame Li's carefully wrapped packets in all directions. I apologized and rushed to "help" him gather them up again, and as I was handing him the last of them, noted Sara's stealthy presence outside the shop window. After he departed (followed by my cellmate) I made my own order, including an item I knew from past experience would require Madame Li to visit the storeroom in the back of her shop. I took the opportunity of her absence to open the register and remove the credit card receipt from the earlier customer's transaction. Upon her return, I took advantage of our previous acquaintanceship to inquire about the gentleman and learned he had begun to frequent Madame Li's shop only the week before, purchasing the same items as he had today. After paying for my own purchases, I received a call from Sara, who had followed the target to a brownstone, where we have kept him under surveillance as I make this report. From the combination of the items "Mister Caleb Michaels" was purchasing, I can only assume he is experimenting in necromantic fields, which, of course, cannot be allowed to continue."

Profession: Detective**Agency:** The Ascending Ones**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 4**Mental Skills:** Academics 3, Crafts (Brewing) 2, Investigation 5, Medicine (Herbalism) 4, Occult (Herbalism) 3, Science (Botany) 3**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Larceny 4, Stealth 3, Weaponry (Dagger) 3**Social Skills:** Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 5**Merits:** Eidetic Memory, Unseen Sense, Toxin Resistance, Contacts (Apothecaries), Professional Training 4, Endowments (Elixirs) 4**Willpower:** 7**Morality:** 5**Virtue:** Temperance**Vice:** Pride**Initiative:** 7**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 10**Health:** 8

Yousef Shinwari, Investigation Specialist, The Ascending Ones

Background: Born Joseph Shin, a native San Franciscan of Chinese descent, Shinwari converted to Islam and changed his name while going to college in Philadelphia in the early 1990s. His skill with traditional Chinese medicines, quick wit and almost infallible perception led an Ascending Ones cell run by one of his former college professors to snap him up after the cell suffered losses at the hand of a cabal of potent soul-stealing witches. His family is very disappointed in him, first for his religious conversion and secondly, for not returning to California to follow in the footsteps of his father, who is an accountant. Shinwari allows them to continue in their concerns that he is "wasting his life," as he worries that if he bridges the distance between them, his parents may become a target of those he and his cell pursue.

Description: A slim, soft-spoken gentleman of obvious Chinese heritage, Shinwari dresses more casually than his very rigid manners and strong sense of propriety would suggest. Somehow, however, on this straight-laced and solemn young man, even a college sweatshirt, sneakers and jeans are worn like a uniform.

Storytelling Hints: Shinwari is almost unfailingly alert, a trait that has saved his cell from disaster on multiple accounts since he joined them a handful of years ago. He is quick-witted but not quick to anger and although he is not the leader of his cell, he is one of the strongest members. He has been single-handedly responsible for ferreting out more than 70 witches, having a knack for sensing their presence. He might well be assigned to help a cell investigate a potential witch infestation, or, depending on the cell's intentions, come to conflict with them in a race to track down a targeted sorcerer.

Witch Safehouse

From the September 14 entry of the journal of Marcella Eylan, former member of Elfreth's Runners.

Specialization: Surveillance. **Status:** Deceased – 9/15/07

"It finally happened. I think we've got them. Last night, we saw them moving what could only be the statue into a building up on the third block of Mascher Street. They arrived just before 1 AM, in a cargo truck marked "Jameson

Produce" (license number archived for additional investigation). I'd been watching for long enough that my eyes ached, but once they arrived I managed to get it all on tape. Three men and a woman (descriptions archived for add. invest.) They unloaded the crate (6ft x 3x3) with a dolly and wheeled it into what appeared to be a boarded up entryway. At their approach, however, the boarded-doorway rolled up into the building, revealing its role as a façade. I got a few pictures of the interior of the room they entered through, although it appeared to be empty and essentially featureless from my vantage point. They left the crate, returning the dolly to the back of the truck before driving away. After they'd departed the building but before they had re-entered the truck, the façade/door closed once more, indicating that there may well have been someone else in the building. Continued surveillance, however, provided no additional movement once the truck departed. Marko's watching now, so I can jot down details for our official report, but I have a feeling this is the place – the location we've been looking for. Now if we can just figure out why it looks like no one is there, before the rest strike tomorrow afternoon."

Location: Mascher Street Archives

In any city with a strong witch population, unions and alliances may form. Just as hunters may operate as individuals, cells or larger agencies and organizations, witches can potentially form groups to pool resources, share information and protect one another. And, just as hunters may have safehouses from which to base their operations, these witch-groups sometimes pool their efforts and create locations to sequester information, individuals or items too powerful, useful, or dangerous to be housed in any one witch's home.

The Mascher Street Archives serve as such a location in Philadelphia. While not all witches in the city know of its location, certain of those who have banded together due to similar philosophies and abilities use the building as a storehouse for items, manuscripts, and information they deem too dangerous to trust to any other location. Although it looks like an abandoned building from the outside, the security (both supernatural and mundane) is actually very intense, and the Archives are always guarded by a formidable force of at least three powerful witch protectors, with back-up only a phone call (or telepathic scream) away.

The Archives are protected with multiple permanent layers of Ward Place spells, protecting the site from fire, hunters, vampires, werewolves and blunt-damage (such as battering rams or wrecking balls). Additionally, the interior of the five-story building is divided into multiple rooms, most of which have physical locks, surveillance and other technological security in place to warn the witches of intrusion.

As for the Archives' contents, the sky is the literal limit. They could serve as a repository for this particular group of Philadelphia's witches' acquisitions: ancient relics, antique manuscripts, magical tools and the like. Alternately, they

SANCTUM

Mage: The Awakening players may recognize the Archives as a potential shared Sanctum and Storytellers are welcome to apply the Sanctum rules as provided in **Mage: The Awakening** in place of those offered here if it suits their needs. Additionally, for Storytellers with access to the Magic supplement, **The Mysterium**, the additional rules for an Athenaeum (pp. 66-73, **The Mysterium**) can be added to those for a Sanctum, further broadening the locale's mystery and potential.

could be the home of a coven, and contain not only their residence but also their ritual chambers and guardian familiars (and potentially some non-magical loved ones and family members, increasing the risk of civilian casualties should the hunters chose to make an armed assault on the building.) The Archives could also be a meeting place where witches from all over the area (or even outside of Philadelphia) come together, either to perform group rituals and sacrifices, to share news and jostle for political power among their community, or to escape persecution and provide a safe haven to those who have run afoul of their adversaries (such as the hunters.) It could also be located over a site of inherent supernatural power, akin to Redheffer's Ruins (see pp. 194-195) and be held as a tightly-guarded resource for the witches, who must protect it from all outsiders who would seek to take it from them.

William Corybell, Hidden Knight

Background: Corybell is one of the Knights of Saint George, and has been for nearly two decades. For most of that time he has operated out of several New Jersey cities (Camden, Trenton, Atlantic City), working with a tight and growing network of Knights who monitor the coastline both for the witches that lurk there and the faceless angels that have at times threatened to rise out of the wind-chopped sea. But Corybell received instructions from on-high; threats were mounting in Philadelphia. Witches. Dragon's magic. This swollen core of power must be punctured, must be crusaded against and destroyed. Yes, the city had its Knights, and they were doing what they needed to be doing: cutting out the cancer where it was found.

But Philadelphia is a city with an unusual hunter population: its hunters are many, and in greater communication than those carrying the Vigil in other cities. William's job is to infiltrate a hunter cell or, even better, another compact or conspiracy. He's not to be antagonistic to such a group unless they eventually oppose him. No, he's to join them. He's to give them aid. And when he's learned enough about them and the witches within the city, he can return to Atlantic City and help form a more cogent plan of attack.

At present, Corybell has not joined any one group, though he's certainly formed some connections.

WILLIAM CORYBELL, HIDDEN KNIGHT

† WILLIAM CORYBELL, HIDDEN KNIGHT †

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Religion) 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Brawl 3, Drive 2, Survival 3, Weaponry (Sword) 3

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2, Socialize (Drunken) 4, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Barfly, Giant, Goetic Gospels (Agares 2, Amon 1, Beleth 3), Inspiring, Status (Knights of St. George) 3

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Health: 10 (with Giant Merit)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Broadsword	3(L)	na	11	na

TOM SWAN

This is an old story about a character who once wandered the streets of Fishtown/Kensington, a man named Tom Swan.

Tom walked the streets for 60 years, always wearing the same outfit that was fashionable when he was young, but not when he was old (a frilly *Beau Brummel* getup).

He only spoke to those who spoke to him. He returned courtesy with courtesy. If someone insulted him, he returned the insult. If someone threatened him, he beat them senseless with alarming skill and swiftness.

Tom sold "elixirs," or more specifically, a *single* elixir. He had a small case full of little blue bottles, and these blue bottles contained a measure of liquid that he claimed was a "draught of vigor."

Tom did this for 60 years, then disappeared. Nobody ever knew where he lived. No family to speak of, no house, no job other than to offer his potent elixirs.

Well, Tom's back. He's been seen in his dapper outfit, peddling the same elixirs he sold over 100 years ago. These elixirs, when consumed, gift men with a +5 to Strength, and women a +5 to their Presence. They also gain the Striking Looks Merit at four dots. This lasts for one full day.

Of course, the elixirs come with a cost. Those who consume such a draught suffer from a debilitating severe derangement once the effects wear off, a derangement that can be assuaged by psychotherapy, but is otherwise quite persistent and damaging. Moreover, the cost is that it's not good to have people running around feeling abnormally empowered with gifts of brawn or beauty. It goes to their head quite quickly, it seems.

So, who—or what—is Tom Swan? Sounds like a good story lies within finding out...

Description: Corybell is a big, big man. He's easily seven feet tall and is built like an oil tanker. He's balding up top, has a warm face and beard, and often wears heavy clothing (flannel, denim) even in summer's heat.

Storytelling Hints: William's a loud, boasting, boisterous guy. He squints a lot, laughs a lot, and loves to drink and eat. He's easy to get along with, and this helps his mission intimately; people seem to glom onto him very easily due to his intense charisma.

The Fishtown Shadders

The neighborhood of Fishtown has a legend that has largely been proven untrue, but remains part of popular belief, regardless: Charles Dickens came to Philadelphia and named the neighborhood Fishtown (probably because of all the fish markets and fisheries). Probably not true, given that the name Fishtown seems to predate Dickens' visit, but don't tell the local residents that.

It is, to some degree, the local residents that form the backbone of Fishtown, but it is a small subset of those residents who present a clannish danger to the other citizens and, most certainly, to hunters. The Fishtown Shadders—a small, incestuous band of witches—have long watched over the Delaware River and reaped its bounty.

Shad: Poor Man's Salmon

Fishtown's most prominent bounty was the *shad*, a once-abundant river fish whose most prominent breeding ground was the Delaware River and its estuaries. Fishtown, an unofficial neighborhood, has always bordered the River and the Cohocksink Creek, and was originally settled by bands of Leni-Lenape. The Lenape moved into the region in the summer, and fished the area when the waters churned and grew turbid—time for the shad to come home and spawn. It was a sacred area, truly bountiful.

The people of Philadelphia found and eventually exploited the potential bounty. Dock after dock, boat after boat. Fisheries and fish markets lined the area. Taverns sold smoked shad, “cattiehead soup,” steamed snapper and herring—all meals born of the many fishes pulled from the river waters. Wheelbarrows would be overflowing with fish. You could walk into any home and take a meal gifted by the river. The air reeked of smoked fish, pickled fish, fish blood.

Of course, it didn't last. They overfished. The river's bounty became scarce. That's when the drownings began. And the floods. And the boats lost to the current.

The Shadders

Those who fished the area and who belonged to the neighborhood were a clannish sort: they intermarried, sometimes incestuously. The same names popped up on every

street: Bakeovens, Collars, Cramps, Tees, and Tuttles. Some say a few of them even had Lenape blood, though certainly the Fishtown families disputed such a notion.

They grew fat, happy and wealthy with the abundance of fish pulled from the Delaware. And when the fishing got bad, the Shadders grew thin and poor, which naturally lead to a large measure of lost happiness.

Surely that's where the story ends, is it not? A fitting lesson: nature only has so many gifts to give, and to spurn her is to lose her gifts. Exploitation leads to obliteration and all that. Ah, but that is not where this tale ends. Some might say it is where it begins.

The Murder of Red Song

The Shadders would not accept blame for what had happened. No, the river had taken back its gifts for a reason, but it was not a reason that they could fathom. The term “Indian-giver” applies here, a term that comes from the European settlers’ lack of understanding that the Native Americans did not own land or have borders, as such: when the settlers bought land, sometimes the natives simply reclaimed it, not keen on the ways of permanent land ownership. Here, the Shadders saw a similar thing: the Lenape had once fished the river and had since ceded it to the Dutch and Swedish settlers in the region. Now, they had taken it back. It further explained why, when they went to try to find more fish, many of their boats sank, or why many of their sons drowned even when standing in shallow waters.

They found an old man amongst the Lenape, *Màkke Naxkohoman*, or “Red Song.” The story was, Red Song was a powerful old magician amongst their people, and clearly his magic could help to restore the beautiful bounty to the river, right? They captured him, told him as such. He refused, said it was not in his power to control nature in such a way; they had stolen all the fish, they had ruined the balance, and that was that.

A gang of Shadders carried him to the docks. They punched him and kicked him. Stuck him with gaff hooks. Demanded that he “give them” his magic. He smiled through bloody teeth, and said they could have his magic. Then, with blood running down his arm he whipped his hand at them, flecking them all with his blood. They snapped. They beat him further, then dumped him in the river—he was too weak to swim, and the muddy waters carried his body away, a swirl of red blooming around him. Red Song was dead.

And then the Shadders had magic.

The Shadders, Tonight

The Shadders have had magic since 1899. And yet, Fishtown has long since lost its fishing legacy, and the only local shad fishery that remains is up the river in Lambertville, New Jersey. The easy conclusion is that the magic didn't help the Shadders, but that's not true, not true at

OF WITCHES AND WEREWOLVES

The witches and werewolves have a lot of reason to be friendly in this city, and the Shadders' grasp of Fishtown is one of them. The Delaware River needs her sacrifices, and the werewolves know that. If they don't have to be the ones who do it, all the better. The Shadders do that dirty work, and so the werewolves grant the clannish witches some measure of protection from outsiders.

all. It helped *them*. It just didn't help the rest of the neighborhood. If one didn't belong to one of the families whose tangled, already-incestuous bloodlines were touched with the Lenape magic, then that person and that family didn't gain anything.

Over the last century and then some, the Shadders have benefited from the river and from their magic, yes. But they've changed. They've grown all the more insular. They've become more than a little mad (both from the magic and from the inter-breeding). They serve the river, now, "making amends" for what they did so many years ago. Making amends means giving the river its sacrifices. Pets, sometimes. Adults other times. Children once a year.

And how is it that they gain? For one, they're allowed to keep their magic. But they also always have fish from the river, they can always feed their own children, and they always have enough money to get by. It's not an opulent lifestyle, but it's consistent, and it's easy, and it is a life without worry.

Antagonist: Silas Bakeoven, Shadder

Background: Silas Bakeoven is head of the local Shadder clan, head of the Bakeovens and Tuttles and Cramps. The man his in his mid-60s now, and has taken a long time to clamber to the top of the family food chain, a wretched journey that began nearly 35 years before when he brained his father with a boat oar and dumped the man's body into the Delaware River.

See, Silas' father, Hiram Bakeoven, had the magic just like the others. But he hated it. He saw what the city was becoming, saw how modernity had taken hold and what possibility existed out there in the big broad world. But he was shackled by his duty, bound to his family and fettered to the magic of Fishtown and to the river itself. Then came the night the man could not take it anymore. He gathered his things. He woke his wife during the night and gathered the children. They were going to leave Fishtown behind. No more Shadders. No more magic.

Silas, at this point, was the oldest of seven brothers, ranging from age 25 (Silas) down to the youngest at seven years of age (Willem). Silas could not abide such treachery. He would not let his father take them away from all this, from their lives and from their blessed magic. Hence, the oar to the skull and the body in the river. With that, Silas became the head of his family, which meant he got a vote amongst the other families. And with that, Silas

Bakeoven began his long crawl to become the head of all the Shadder families, sitting at the top of the clan.

Description: Silas is not pleasant to behold. His grizzled face seems to droop on one side as if besieged by a stroke. This gives the eye on that side of the face a stretched look as the lids seem tugged down by fleshy jowls. He's got cracked yellow teeth and always gives off an aroma of brine, salt, and seaweed.

Storytelling Hints: The man is rarely friendly, and even when he is, it's tempered by foul humor or a jibing insult. Otherwise, he's incredibly bitter, a soul rubbed raw by ceaseless years at the head of a clan of crazy fishermen. He's got a voice so rough it sounds like he's got a throat-load of broken glass and river mud.

Antagonist: Rosalie Tuttle, Shadder Daughter

Background: Rosalie is a young girl, 16 years old. She's home-schooled by other Shadders. She's not allowed to cavort with outsiders. Her job is to do her chores. To clean the fish. To never say a bad word about her mother or the other Shadders.

She has no father: her mother will not tell the girl what happened to him. Rosalie believes that the man is like Silas' own father, that he escaped into the world and is now free and will one day come back for them all. But lately she's grown to accept that this probably isn't entirely true—rather, she believes he's still out there, but that he cannot come home for fear of being killed and chopped up for bait. Instead, Rosalie now believes that it is her job to leave the Shadder community and find her father—he must be waiting for her nearby, just out of sight, just out of danger.

Rosalie has taken those first steps by befriending a local boy, a black teenager by the name of Rowdy Lee. She meets with Rowdy once or twice a week when her mother is at the Bakeoven's row home cooking stew or mending nets. Rosalie is in love with Rowdy, and she hopes that he will help her escape.

Description: Rosalie is frightfully plain. Gray smock. Black hair. Pale lips. Beautiful, in a way, but something about her looks too much like a drowned girl, a corpse washed up on the river-banks. Her limbs are long, her eyes too big. Some of this serves to enhance her off-putting grace, yes. She smells faintly of rosewater, the scent of her mother.

SILAS BAKEOVEN

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts 3, Investigation 3, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Weaponry (Gaff Hook) 4

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Expression 1, Intimidation (Blackmail) 5, Persuasion 3, Streetwise (Fishtown) 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies (Shadders) 5, Ambidextrous, Common Sense, Direction Sense, Fighting Style: Boxing 1, Gnosis 4, Retainer (Bodyguard) 3, Strong Back, Strong Lungs, Unseen Sense (Ghosts)

Mysteries: Lore 5, Disease 3, Hearth 2, Nature 3, Twilight 5

Willpower: 9

Morality: 3

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 9

Derangements: Fixation (mild), Paranoia (severe)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Gaff Hook	1(L)	na	8	na

CHARLES DICKENS: PHOBIA OF STATUES

Here's something strange: Charles Dickens was reportedly very disturbed by the very idea of statues. He refers to statues as "existing abominations" and they fill his soul with "grief and despair." He wrote to a friend regarding a statue of Shakespeare: "I dread the vision of a statue... I shiver and tremble at the thought of another graven image in some public place." He even had it in his will that England was never, ever to put up a statue of him. Anywhere. Did we say "ever?" Ever.

Oh, but Philadelphia is not a part of England. In Clark Park (in Spruce Hill section of West Philly), the city erected the world's only full-size statue of Charles Dickens. Certainly, Dickens had nothing to be concerned about. It's just a statue. Quite a nice one, in fact.

Of course, he'd still believe something sinister was going on. He'd probably even believe all those crazy rumors that have the statue getting up at night, the metal creaking and groaning. He might even believe the wildest rumor of them all: that the statue is haunted, perhaps by his own ghost, perhaps by the ghosts of those the statue has killed. But that seems silly, doesn't it?

ROSALIE TUTTLE

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Larceny 2, Stealth 2, Survival 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Empathy (Grief) 4, Expression (Song) 4, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Gnosis 2, Meditative Mind, Mentor (Mother) 3, Natural Immunity, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Derangement: Vocalization (mild)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Nail File	-1(B)	na	1	-1 due to improvised

Storytelling Hints: Rosalie is quiet, subdued, but occasionally given over to fits of giggling or, rarer, sobbing jags. She is kind, for the most part, but is not afraid to use her magic to harm those who frighten her. Sadly, she is easily frightened.

The Infernal Siege

This is the truth about demons and witches: foolish witches think demons make great pets. Familiars, they think of them, but really, what they mean is *pets*. They expect, what's better? Binding a seemingly eternal, ultimately knowledgeable creature to their service? Never mind the fact that it falls into a certain expectation—a demon taking the form of a black cat or a jackdaw bird on the shoulder is a proper path.

It's crap, of course, and it's *dangerous* crap, to boot. Yes, it works sometimes. Truly gifted witches can conjure, summon, and bind demons with the best of the hunters of the Lucifuge. Unfortunately, magic and witchcraft lends itself to a certain profile, a hubristic inner sense where witches think themselves stronger in the occulted arts than they truly are. Hence,

they occasionally bite off more than they can chew, and when you're dealing with the deadly, chaotic ramifications of unbridled magic, a single second's worth of lapsed judgment can bring a witch's very life—or very soul—in danger.

And it's the soul that's in danger, here. Except, for one such witch, it isn't just a single soul, but many. One foolish witch has opened the doors to Hell in Philadelphia, and now the demons are crawling free from the cracks and crevices of some infernal realm. These creatures are glad to bring their diabolical whims to bear against both witch and hunter alike.

Antagonist: Danny Millsack, Amateur Summoner

Background: Danny Millsack, guidance counselor at a local West Chester school, was always a good guy. Sure, he wasn't cool. He pretended to be, slinging around some slang and slapping the kids five when they came through his door. The kids knew him for what he was: a bit of a doofus, but a loose ally in their fight against an oppressive high school administration.

Of course, Danny Millsack is a witch. By most standards, a pretty new one, at that. About a year ago, he started having these dreams. Something about a ghostly tower in the deep dark black of space—a book made of asbestos, a pen made of fire, ink made of blood. His name, scribed within. That

CHAPTER FOUR: SPELLBOUND



creepy nightmare is what started it all for him, but when he awoke, he found the shadows cast across his floor by the sun cooking through the venetian blinds were his to control—the sun glared in his eyes as it always did, and as usual he cursed the sun and wished it away. Shadows moved to block the light from his eyes with nary a thought. Danny was not frightened; the horrors of the nightmare faded swiftly as he swelled with power and promise.

That was about a year ago. Recently, he started having a persistent visitor in the guidance office: a lanky teen boy named Victor Park. Young Mister Park was a quiet, seemingly harmless kid, and Millsack liked him. Nobody else did, though. Park was picked on routinely for no good reason, but bullies need only a moment's weakness—at which point, anything from an acne breakout to a “fag tag” poking out the back of one's shirt becomes fodder for abuse. The administration, in its usual backwards way, decided that *Park* was the problem, not the bullies. Park, to them, was the herald of the next Columbine, the next Virginia Tech, and so they wanted him watched. Millsack was the man to do the guidance... and the surveillance during school hours.

So, not long after one of their meetings, Millsack decided to follow Park during the kid's lunch hour. Victor Park left school grounds. He went to the woods behind the school. He entered those woods, wandered into a crudely-designed circle of twigs and stones, and then began to read something from a ratty notebook, something that sounded like Latin but was no Latin Millsack had ever heard.

Millsack watched in rapt fascination as *something* started to come through in the middle of that circle: a long-limbed shadow with wailing mouth. The buzzing of flies became almost too much to bear. Leaves facing the circle on trees curled, blackened, drifted to earth. But Danny interrupted—leaning against a tree, the bark slid away and Millsack toppled into the brush, startling Victor's reading. The lithe shadow vanished; the flies were gone.

Thus was Danny Millsack brought into Victor Park's world. Danny knew this was his destiny. He felt like he was once more at the ghostly tower with the fiery pen in his hand, and he begged Park to teach him everything the boy knew.

Park taught him. And he even hung around long enough for Millsack to try his first summoning, weeks later. Millsack read what Victor had written. He found the long-limbed thing again, wailing. But then everything spun out of control. The circle of stones and sticks crumbled into dust with a pulse of frigid air. The demon laughed. It turned into a thin trail of oily vapor and forced its way into Millsack's mouth. As Millsack lay on the ground, rolling about, his face bloated as he tried to force the thing back out of his throat, Victor calmly walked up, patted the guidance counselor on the knee, and winked.

Then, Victor was gone, and Millsack now had a new friend: the demon Semiazas, a powerful elder demon that now resided comfortably within Danny Millsack's body.

Description: Most times, Millsack's a curly-haired dude with thick black glasses, a head full of curly hair, and a bit of a paunch. When the demon Semiazas takes hold, though, Danny grows pale, his eyes widen, and his teeth shine bright

**DANNY MILLSACK
(SUMMONER)****Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4**Mental Skills:** Academics (Psychology) 3, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Medicine (Psychiatry) 1, Occult 2**Physical Skills:** Brawl (Restrain) 1, Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 2**Social Skills:** Empathy 3, Expression 3, Persuasion 1, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 2**Merits:** Allies (Teachers) 3, Allies (School Administration) 1, Allies (Police) 1, Contacts (Hospital, Child Services) 2, Fresh Start, Gnosis 3, Language (Latin), Resources 1**Mysteries:** Lore 1, Health 1, Mind 4**Willpower:** 6**Morality:** 5**Virtue:** Faith**Vice:** Greed**Initiative:** 6**Defense:** 2**Speed:** 9**Health:** 8**SEMIAZAS
(ELDER DEMON)****True Name:** Semiazas (right now, it "goes by" Danny Millsack)**Fiendish Flaw:** The Disruption**Attributes:** Power 10, Finesse 5, Resistance 10**Willpower:** 20**Essence:** 25**Initiative:** 15**Defense:** 10**Speed:** 0 when not manifested, 20 when made manifest**Virtue:** Charity**Vice:** Pride**Morality:** None**Size:** 8 when manifested**Corpus:** 18**Bans:** Cannot hear children laughing (Ban of Torment), must gaze into a mirror for at least 10 seconds (Ban of Task), Cannot go outside on the dark of a new moon (Ban of Torment)**Dread Powers:** Ecstasy 3, Fury 3, Hypnotism 5, Impress 5



white. He seems... *bigger*. More impressive, even though his appearance hasn't technically changed much at all.

Storytelling Hints: Danny really just wants to be liked. He wants to be cool. He wants to be somebody's mentor, because he never had a mentor and he feels like that's a big part of who he is, what his *destiny* is. Of course, he also felt that his destiny was to go summoning an elder demon in the middle of the woods with one of his students, and hey, maybe it was. His need to be liked is very much represented in how he treats the demon within him: like someone he wants to impress. When the demon is active and fully in-control, Danny is full of power, he walks with broad strokes, he laughs and says things that guidance counselor Millsack would never say. He is keen to cause both awe and fear, and that often means in students—he hasn't done it at *his* school yet (you don't shit where you eat, says the story), but he will, soon. And once he and the demon grow bored with simply frightening children with his stunning array of power, what happens next?

Antagonist: Semiazas (Elder Demon)

Background: Who really knows the truth? But this is what Semiazas believes: he is an archduke of Hell. A big-wig in some infernal hierarchy, some grand master only a few

rungs down the blood-slick ladder from Lucifer himself. Semiazas, in many ways, has a great admiration for the head of Hell's legions, but in that way the elder demon is very much in the mold of Lucifer himself: a pride-driven entity whose chief-most goal is to overthrow he who sits at the top of the ladder so that Semiazas can be the one in control. As a being overwhelmed by pride, Semiazas does whatever it can to assert its diabolical will over everything and everybody.

Taking over Danny Millsack's body is, in a way, a case of a bully abusing a lesser creature, but it's also about having the desire to turn such a weak, sniveling thing into a powerful, undeniable force. Millsack's always wanted to be something special, and so the elder demon is happy to oblige.

Here's the thing, though. Semiazas really is a potent entity. It was never meant to come through this world, and clearly Victor Park (see below) had something far bigger in mind than simply the demonic possession of his guidance counselor. When Semiazas came through, it tore a hole in whatever spiritual wall separates This World from Hell (or the Abyss or the Thousand Hells or whatever it is you want to call it). Demons now have a far easier time entering this world, and hunters and witches alike have both noticed an alarming uptick in such wretched presences plaguing the city. And the fact that witches first and foremost seem to be the targets of these demons is troubling

POSSESSION OF THE WITCH

When elder demons (**Hunter: The Vigil**, p. 287) possess a person, it's generally temporary. The human flesh cannot generally uphold the raw, bloated power of the demon—and, over time, it breaks down.

Witches are different. It's not the body, that's for sure—generally, sorcerers have human bodies with human frailties.

It's the mind. Or the will. Or maybe even the soul. The demons don't know, and such philosophical questions can be answered but never proven, so the truth isn't significant.

What *is* significant is that an elder demon possessing a witch doesn't have to worry about the breakdown of the body. The two can forge a kind of mad symbiosis (provided the witch is willing; the more hubristic the sorcerer, the better), and the elder demon can remain in the witch's flesh for as long as that symbiosis will be upheld by both sides.

Certainly, the witch can endeavor to seek out exorcism, but the demon won't like that. The elder demon at any point can attempt to force the witch to do something different with a Power + Finesse roll versus the witch's Resolve + Composure + Gnosis. In addition, if the demon has chosen to simply give up, it can choose to begin the standard physical breakdown of the body as if the possessed individual were only human, and not a witch.

VICTOR PARK (ETERNAL YOUTH)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 5, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 3, Investigation 4, Occult (Infernal) 4, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 4, Stealth 4, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (New Identity) 5

Merits: Allies (Witches) 3, Allies (Demonologists) 2, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Language (Aramaic, Chinese, Greek, Latin), Gifted (Banish/Summon Demon) 4, Resources 4, Striking Looks 4, Unseen Sense (Demons)

Willpower: 7

Morality: 2

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 12

Health: 7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Athame Dagger 1(L)	na	6		Used in some demonic rituals

to... well, everybody. (More information on possessing a witch can be found on the sidebar above.)

Storytelling Hints: It's not brute, thug power, this pride. No, it manifests more as a kind of preening narcissism, a giddy exploitation of power. When Semiazas is in control, Millsack seems truly happy—wild-eyed, surely manic, but happy. He'll pause to stare into mirrors. He'll flirt. He'll put a little swagger in his step. And when absolutely necessary, he'll go full-bore with Millsack's magic or the demon's Dread Powers, showing off or frightening those who are weaker than him (i.e. *everybody*). It is pride, and it is blind.

Antagonist: Victor Park, Eternal Youth

Background: Victor Park has the beast in his blood. His family has long been the carrier of the infernal bloodlines of the hierarchies of Hell, the same bloodlines that infuse many members of the Lucifuge. He has no interest in redeeming Lucifer or using Hell's own evil to fight evil. No, Victor Park has—oh, for about 200 years, now—been an expert manipulator, operating in this world on behalf of the demons on the other side of the veil. Victor's *modus operandi* is ultimately straightforward: he enters a city. He lies to get close to whomever will help him accomplish his goals. He sets in motion a series of events that lead to infernal energies flowing freely into

this world (read: he opens the door and lets the demons in). He monitors the progress. Then, he leaves. Victor is content knowing that yes, eventually this occulted uprising will be put down. Demons are not permanent fixtures in this world, at least not that this point. But every instance weakens the fundament. Every surge in the infernal winnows the membrane between this world and that of the demonic, and that's fine. The work may be long; ten more years? Fifty? Another two hundred? But he's willing. He's patient.

Description: Victor is mostly plain. He's got a dark mess of hair. Innocent eyes set back in his face. Dark freckles. A sweet smile, even. The only thing, really, that marks him as unusual is the strange configuration of moles on the back of his neck—dark carcinomas forming a strange, hand-shaped pattern. It's important to note that Victor “came of age” within the bloodline not at age 23, as do many of the Children of the Seventh Generation (sometimes, those who do not join the Lucifuge to fight temptation and evil refer to themselves as *L'enfant Diabolique*). No, Victor reached his diabolical nature at the young age of 17—the onset of puberty. He's eternally young, though why that is remains unclear. Some suspect it must have to do with the identity of the demon that once fucked its way into the Park family bloodline. Either way, Victor's appearance is one of youthful purity (a crass lie).



Storytelling Hints: Victor is a cipher. He's whatever he needs to be to get the job done. Average teen. Wounded doe. Bully. Victim. Friend. Enemy. (Or even, frenemy.) At his core, Victor is a cold but somewhat mischievous character who is, oddly enough, occasionally still given to fits of youth. He likes teen girls (a potential downfall). He thinks technology is shiny and keen, often absorbed in such "cool stuff." Yes, his body is eternal but his mind still sometimes shows the symptoms of teenaged imprudence and impudence.

Antagonist: The Undesirables (Cabal)

The saying goes: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." That's true, really, but amongst witches (and some hunters), that saying's taken on a few extra words: "A little knowledge *and a lot of power* is a dangerous thing."

The Undesirables is a relatively young cabal of witches that counts its territory in and around the eclectic South Street portion of the city. They represent a relatively new faction of magicians within the city, and as of a few years ago could best be described as young, dumb and full of fun. They possessed little to no wisdom. They saw magic as a means to an end—they wanted to have fun, wanted to get all creeped out messing with ghosts and secret spirits and kooky rituals. Their so-called "bettters" were not better at all, just more boring. Stodgy, cruel, strange.

It was fun, for a while. They were a flake of pepper in a sea of milk, the way they saw it. A much-needed infusion of chaos into a system that was overly-ordered. They didn't really recognize the ramifications of magic gone awry, though. Magic is fickle. Like fire, it's almost alive. You can't really control it—and like with most physical experiments, it always seems to have an equal and opposite reaction somewhere, somehow.

The fun ended just shy of a year ago. They summoned a demon—what they hoped would be a little imp, some fiendish, self-hating shadow. They didn't know what had happened with Victor Park, Danny Millsack and the elder demon, Semiazas. What they summoned was far greater than they expected, and they could not bind it. It fled; realizing they had done something really, really wrong, they tracked it through the crowds of South Street, catching glimpses of the demon (a greater demon; see "Nussbaum," below) in its summoned form: a dark-skinned man, mostly non-descript, with a sharp-lined beard. The demon ran. They used magic to track it.

By the time they found it, though, it was too late. When they finally caught up with the creature, it was kneeling over the corpse of one of the city's presiding occult masters, a sorcerer known as John Foxglove. The demon plucked something from the man's gutted stomach—a glowing orb that, to this day, the Undesirables think was Foxglove's soul—before disappearing into thin air.

YOUR HUNTER CELL, HERE

The Undesirables are actually a good way to get the hunter characters into this "infernal siege" story.

First, it's possible that the cell has already had dealings with the Undesirables when they were full of chaotic vim and vigor—meaning, any run-ins at that point have established a history between the two groups, likely an antagonistic one.

Second, evidence of the Undesirables actions (true or falsified) ends up in the cell's laps. Do they uncover that the cabal is arguably working toward positive aims and have, for now, discarded their chaotic brand of magic-dealing? Or is it that a witch is a witch is a witch, and the only good witch is a jolly fucking dead one?

Of course, they were blamed. They were blacklisted. No one was to sell to them. No witches were to speak to them or teach them a single blessed thing. The fun times had ended. Each of the Undesirables felt a terrible need to make amends, but how?

By investigating the heavy presence of the infernal within the city, that's how. The Undesirables have recently taken it on themselves to do what the other witches of the city seem largely unwilling to do: tackle this mess, puzzle it out, and if possible, turn it off.

Complications have arisen, though. Some of the sorcerers within the city have decided that the Undesirables are so aptly-named that it is best for the young, dumb cabal to... disappear. Oh, but they don't want to get their own hands dirty, so they've seeded several local hunter cells with tips leading to the Undesirables' various homes and jobs. Sure, most of the "proof" of their work is false, but some of it is real—they are still witches, after all, and have left their own little legacy.

Still, this group of pariahs—almost a half-dozen witches, now—recognizes that it faces an uphill climb. Its members are trying desperately to grow-up and make things right.

Clover Honey, Miss Undesirable Herself

Background: For a long time, *fun* was always the name of the game with Clover Honey (real name: Chloe Herschel). She endured an unpleasant childhood: her mother was a pill-popping raw nerve tumbling through life buoyed by a series of cascading nervous breakdowns while her father was angry and abusive—not physically, but verbally and emotionally. Her mother died from an overdose when she was fifteen. Her father died from a brain aneurysm when she was eighteen. She found magic—or, more specifically, it found *her*—only a few hours after her father's ill-attended funeral.

From that point forward, it's been all about how life is short, take the bull by the horns, *carpe diem* and all that. Magic was an open door, an excuse to act like an asshole and cause (mostly)

CHAPTER FOUR: SPELLBOUND

harmless mayhem and live more than a little selfishly. It brought her into conflict with her peers, with her magically-ignorant friends, with just about everybody. And that was fine by her, because she had her core group of people who felt the same way about life that she did: it was meant to be lived, so shut up.

Up until this point, though, all her antics resulted in very little *actual* consequence. All the consequence up until this point was light, easy, able to be dismissed with a careless wave of the hand. No longer. Foxglove's dead. The demon is still free, and now they've seen evidence of other demons. Worse, it seems a bunch of witches are either in-league with the demons or are perhaps possessed outright. Clover's decided that something must be done. It's time to hit the books. Maybe learn some real magic. And if they can't fix everything, well, maybe they'll die trying. Life is still meant for living, after all.

Description: Clover's ethnic origins are unidentifiable by sight alone: her skin is the color of caramelized honey, her eyes slightly almandine, her hair the color of flax—meaning, every part of her has a kind of golden hue. Good thing then that she makes up for it all by wearing wild colors, lots of bright hues and motley displays of self-sewn fabrics. Very rarely does Clover Honey dress in a subdued manner; usually, you can see her coming from about two miles away.

Storytelling Hints: Clover still maintains that giddy, “every day is like jumping out of a plane” edge, but it’s way more forced, these days. Her laugh feels strained, like there’s something lurking behind it... and there is. Fear. Regret. An acknowledgement of consequence. Her actions perhaps speak louder than words, though, and Clover’s been running herself ragged, losing sleep over trying to figure out just what she and her rag-tag group of young and untested witches can do about any of this demonic claptrap.

Possum, Hoarder Extraordinaire

Background: Possum’s life sucks. It didn’t used to. Once upon a time, things were pretty much fan-fucking-tastic. His mother was a witch, had enough temporal and mystical power to pull rank over the rest of the assholes in this fugly town, and his father was basically a cowed little puppy, always afraid of getting hit across the nose with a rolled-up copy of *Vanity Fair*. They were a wealthy family. Had a mini-mansion near Villanova. And he had a seemingly endless array of credit cards, which Possum used to purchase... well, anything and everything under the sun. Possum’s a collector, or more to the point, a *hoarder*. Anything he deems collectible, he buys it. Comic books, posters, weird antiques, mugs, toys, knives—you name it, he probably collects it. That was fine when he had lots of money. But then they let out a demon. And that demon killed that prick, Foxglove, and then it all went to shit.

Possum’s mother didn’t resist the blacklist. In fact, rumor has it that she helped spear the effort, for some bizarre political pressure (who knew witches had politics?) suggested that her lackadaisical, *laissez-faire* approach to her son gave the Undesirables far too much leash for their own good. To compensate, she brought the hammer down. Possum no longer had a home. He no longer had a family. And he no longer had access to credit cards or his myriad collectibles.

As a result, he’s become a little... obsessed. Some people find clarity in loss. Not Possum. He’s twitchy, nowadays. He still collects, but now he hoards things both truly esoteric and downright useless—an odd bundle of string, a dead bird, a stolen diary. He claims that there exists a purpose behind all this, but his fellow Undesirables are becoming concerned for him. Once a spoiled rich kid, his paradigm has been kicked square in the nuts, and he doesn’t seem any better for it. What happens if he goes off the reservation, really, truly crazy? He has magic. Isn’t that dangerous? Clover hopes that getting him to help figure out this whole “demonic” thing might provide him with some focus. If not that, maybe they can prove their way back into their old lives.

Description: It’s sad, but Possum looks like, well, a possum. He’s pale. A bit rodent-like. Long nose, beady eyes, unclipped fingernails. Part of it, too, is his posture: he stoops, his spine clearly suffering from self-made scoliosis, his shoulders curving forward with his chin nearly on his chest. His clothing doesn’t help this image, either: he’s usually in all gray, gray slacks (once nice, now tattered and stained), gray v-neck tee, a pewter sigil dangling from his neck.

Storytelling Hints: Possum’s on edge. He’s nervous, shaky. He grows a little more distant by the day. He chews his lip, his cheek, his fingernails. His mood vacillates from apathetic to surly, and he often devolves into passive-aggressive behaviors. The only one who gets a pass from his weird behaviors is Clover. Somehow, she is a calming presence (even though one wouldn’t normally think of her as “calming”), and when he’s around her, Possum is on his best behavior. Does he have romantic inclinations toward her? It’s possible, but if he does, he’s keeping that information very close to the vest.

Philo Inamorato, City Boy

Background: Phil’s been homeless for much of his life. He doesn’t remember his parents outside of a few cryptic dreams regarding weird people in red robes, and after being bounced from foster home to foster home for the first 14 years of his life, he decided that enough was enough. One day, he walked away from his fifth foster family, leaving their home on Chestnut Hill and just... becoming one with the city. He wasn’t crazy. He wasn’t addicted to anything. He simply decided to become homeless.

It wasn’t easy, obviously. But he learned the art of panhandling well. He learned to fight a little (because all too often he got his ass kicked by thugs, drunken frat lads, other homeless, even abusive cops). And in the meantime, he learned magic.

Philo didn’t learn magic the way that Clover and Possum and the others within the Undesirables picked it up—he did not “awaken” to the sudden possibility of turning blood into gold or using the reflection on a parking meter to glance backward or forward in time. No, Philo learned magic the hard way: through ritual study at a local second-hand bookstore. The shopkeeper let him browse, and when he scraped together enough coin, Philo bought some books.

One of those books was something called *Happenings in Ye Olde Philadelphia* by Rudolph J. Walther. Inside was a small handwritten note: “To E. B. Fortmann, compliments of Rudolph J. Walther—speak to the Northern Liberties.”

**CLOVER
HONEY****Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 2**Mental Skills:** Computer (Internet) 2, Investigation 2, Occult 3**Physical Skills:** Athletics (Run) 2, Brawl (Cat Fight) 3, Larceny 3, Stealth 3**Social Skills:** Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1**Merits:** Danger Sense, Fleet of Foot 3, Gnosis 3, Meditative Mind**Mysteries:** Foretelling 3, Mind 1, Shadow 3**Willpower:** 4**Morality:** 6**Virtue:** Hope**Vice:** Envy**Initiative:** 5**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 13 (with Fleet of Foot)**Health:** 7**POSSUM
HOARDER EXTRAORDINAIRE****Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3**Mental Skills:** Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation (Objects) 3, Occult (Artifacts) 2**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Drive 3, Firearms 2, Larceny (Shoplift) 4**Social Skills:** Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Socialize 3, Streetwise 2**Merits:** Gnosis 2**Mysteries:** Fortune 3, Passion 1**Willpower:** 5**Morality:** 5**Virtue:** Prudence**Vice:** Greed**Initiative:** 6**Defense:** 2**Speed:** 11**Health:** 8**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
9mm Luger	2(L)	20/40/80	7	na

PHILO INAMORATO

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 1, Computer 2, Investigation (Landmarks) 4, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Stealth 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Strays) 2, Empathy 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise 4

Merits: Allies (Homeless) 3, Direction Sense, Eidetic Memory, Gnosis 1

Mysteries: Lore 3, Hearth 3

Willpower: 6

Morality: 7

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Baseball Bat (Metal)	2(B)	7	na	

The book itself was alarmingly mundane: about 200-some pages of the goings-on in Philadelphia from about 1859 to 1899. Except, tucked away in the middle of the book (p. 181), near a section on taverns, was another handwritten note in the margins. This note, written by the same hand that penned the earlier one (likely the hand of the author, Walther), said the following: "Thirteenth street. Above Locust. McDermott's Inn—find the sign that reads, *I, William McDermott, lives here; I sells good porter, ale and beer; I've made my sign a little bit wider; To let you know that I'll sell you good cider. Bring a brick, a shad, a small bell and a handful of nails. Leave them there and ask to speak with the ladies. Walk away. Come back two days later, same hour of the night.*"

So, Philo thought, fuck it. Why not try it? Took him a while to find the exact location (the tavern's been gone now for quite some time), but asking around got him what he needed. He left the items, asked to speak with the "ladies," then left.

He returned two days later, and blacked out.

Philo awoke when the sun was rising. He remembered some of what had happened once he was tossed into unconsciousness: he remembers meeting three ladies who called themselves the 'Northern Liberties,' and who claimed to be the 'spirits' of the city of Philadelphia, the 'city sisters.' He could not remember what they looked like, only that they were beautiful but stank of fish and river water. They told him

that he could speak to them any time, but he'd need to leave them gifts at special places. They told him that others were out there, others like him, and that it was his job to find them. Upon awakening, Philo saw something written on his inner arm in blood and what was plainly fish guts. It was Clover Honey's name and phone number.

Description: Philo's a gangly, awkward sort, like someone poorly cobbled him together. He's not really homeless anymore (he crashes at Clover's place most nights), but even when he was, he remained alarmingly clean, if slightly unkempt. He's got a tangled mop of dust-colored hair and a large, hawkish nose over thin lips. He's not attractive, not really, but there exists a kind of innocence about him that girls seem to find awkwardly appealing.

Storytelling Hints: Very plain-spoken, even quiet, Philo's not given over to bouts of rhetoric or exaggeration. He's not sad, really; but he's not happy, either. Out of all the Undesirables, he's probably least represents the "grab life by the balls" attitude found within the faction, and ultimately belongs to the group because he just doesn't belong anywhere else. But these people are his family, and though he may not speak of them in just such a way, his actions are always favorable and altruistic toward the other Undesirables, even at cost to himself. Philo is trustworthy to a fault. He'll do nothing different than what he promises.

PHILO'S RITUAL

One of Philo's rituals involves speaking to the three ladies known as the Northern Liberties. While technically, this ritual is "magic," it isn't magic in a way that necessitates a witch's presence—no, this magic is defined purely by a kind of equation. Balance the equation by performing the rite, and boom, the magic happens regardless of whose hands and will performed it. Could be a hunter. Could be a vampire.

The ritual is a little bit different every time, though. Philo assumes that the ritual changes and that only he knows the ingredients that go into it, but that's not precisely true: actually, the ritual simply needs three disparate reagents tied to the city of Philadelphia. These reagents must be left at a prominent Philadelphia location, but "prominent" doesn't precisely mean "popular." Leaving the reagents at the Liberty Bell or Independence Hall will not do the trick. But depositing them at the site of the South Street gum tree (literally, a tree stuck with thousands of pieces of chewing gum) or at the Masonic Temple on Broad Street might be just what's needed.

A character must leave the objects, then beseech the three ladies to come visit him. This necessitates more than just a simple request, and should take the form of an homage, poem, or entreaty. The player or Storyteller rolls Presence + Persuasion, with bonus dice (up to +3) given if the entreaty was worthy, or a penalty (to -3) given if it was droll and unworthy.

Come back two days later, see what happens. Most stories suggest that the character simply... disappears. Nobody sees what happens to her. Just... poof, thin air, gone. The character meets with the three Northern Liberties (though what they look like can never be recalled), and may ask of them a single pertinent question about Philadelphia. Not its residents now, but its history, its layout, down to the very cobblestones. Upon receiving an answer, the character awakens somewhere else hours after disappearing.

The final question is, what reagents are appropriate for this ritual? Anything that has to do with old or new Philadelphia: bits of cobblestone, bits of old brick, a bell, a candle, a quill, a Mercer tile, a Phillies hat, a SEPTA transportation pass, a shad fish, a ticket to any of the local museums, a turnpike EZ Pass, etc.

fools with the power and will of children. Meaningless. He left them behind to find true power, power that he could tempt, or power that he could take.

Nussbaum—that's his name, at least, that's what he calls himself and does not understand why this would be so—has the vaguest sense of purpose, a purpose that reveals itself to him in his dreams. What he dreams of are chains: oiled with ichor and blood, pulled taut, binding *something* in the deepest shadow. A very powerful entity remains bound. Nussbaum feels tied to this entity in some way. Hell has its hierarchies; does he belong to one of them? Is this grave beast his father, his forebear, his king?

What he knows is that he is to claim power in this place, because power here directed to serve the infernal helps his dreams evolve. Every time he tracks down a sorcerer and either convinces that sorcerer to devote power in service to Hell or simply steals that sorcerer's soul (a glowing mote that lurks past the guts, near the spine), one of those chains breaks. Metal links—shrapnel, flecked with rust and pain—tumble into darkness and the fettered *thing* makes a hideous, contented sound. Nussbaum finds that contented noise very, very comforting, and yet, paradoxically frightening. He only knows he serves that shape, that sound. He expects his time here during this go-round is limited; eventually, the witches or these blessedly corruptible hunters will come for him and cut off his head or banish him back to the pale lands or pits of fire from whence he (thinks) he came. Until then? He pushes forth, undeterred.

Description: Nussbaum's a small man, a dark man, a man of shadows. It's not just the dark hair, dark skin, dark beard. It's the way his shadow seems longer, or how the contours of his clothes and skin seem deeper and dimmer. His face is forever passive; it shows little emotion.

Storytelling Hints: Nussbaum thinks of himself as a "reasonable man," though he also finds it odd that he considers himself a "man" at all. But, the shoe fits, at least in this corporeal place, so he goes with it. He likes to make deals (pacts, like those found under "Greater Demon," **Hunter: The Vigil**, p. 284), but he's no salesman. He lays out the pros, lays out the cons, and plainly states the advantages of sealing the deal, and he's also quite clear about the consequences of turning him down. Logic, to him, dictates an easy win, but so many of these people think themselves above him, able to pull one over on

him. So far, they haven't. And that's their fault; he told them, they didn't listen, what happened after had to happen. He was reasonable. They were not. End of story.

Antagonist: Nussbaum, Greater Demon

Background: He does not know precisely how he got here. Children summoned him; not actual children, but

NUSSBAUM
(GREATER DEMON)

True Name: Uphir-Thamuz

Fiendish Flaw: The Pall

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Investigation 5, Medicine (Surgery) 2, Occult 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Brawl 4, Larceny 1, Stealth 4, Weaponry (Knives) 2

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Quick Healer

Willpower: 10

Morality: 1

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 10 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 3

Speed: 14 (with Fleet of Foot)

Health: 8

Bans: Must always stop to watch an act of Wrath (Ban of Task), Cannot be in the presence of acts of Charity (Ban of Torment)

Dread Powers: Dread Attack (Sharpened Nails) 3, Judgment of Guilt 3, Tendrils 1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Sharpened Fingernails	3(L)	na	10	Costs 1 WP; part of Dread Attack



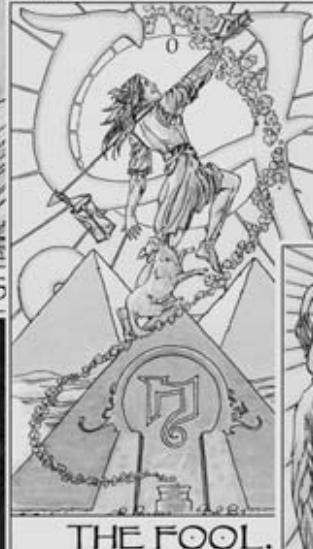
KEYS TO THE SUPERNAL TAROT™



THE HIGH PRIESTESS



THE LOVERS



THE FOOL.



STRENGTH



NOVEMBER 2008

EACH OF THESE
TELLS A STORY,
CONTAINS A CLUE.
THEY'RE PIECES
OF A MAP,
MARKING OUT A
JOURNEY THAT
CAN TAKE YOU
ALL THE WAY TO
APOTHEOSIS,
REALLY.

BUT BE CAREFUL.
THOSE OLD
POWERS THAT THE
CARDS REVEAL,
THEY'RE STRONG
AND HEEDLESS.
STUDY THE
CLUES, AND YOU
HAVE A CHANCE
AT RECOGNIZING
THEM WHEN THEY
TAKE ON A NEW
FORM. THAT
FOREWARNING MAY
BE ALL THE
DIFFERENCE.



They kill
because
they can

World of Darkness

SLASHER

OCTOBER 2008