

ORPHEUS™



SHADES OF GRAY™

BOOK THREE OF A SIX-BOOK SERIES

SHADES OF GRAY™

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World of Darkness created by Mark Rein·Hagen.

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DEAD WRONG

Despite our best efforts, some oversights and errors have crept into the first few **Orpheus** books. We're here to do our best to fix 'em, though.

In the **Orpheus** rulebook, under "Pigment" on p. 286, the lead scientist involved in pigment research and growth is wrongly identified as Dr. Harold Vermeer. That should actually be Dr. Amours Katilian, as stated in **Crusade of Ashes** and this book.

Also, Wail (p. 101) should include the following text (the material in italic is missing from the rulebook):

If a character spends **two or more Vitality points**, then she may use this Horror to physically wound one or more people directly in front of her, and within ten yards of her. If attacking a group of people, she may not distinguish among them; everyone in the group risks taking damage since they are all within range of her scream of fury. *Victims may roll Stamina to soak damage, the difficulty of which is (number of Vitality expended by attacker + 3). Failing this, a target suffers lethal damage equal to the number of successes scored by the wailing character.*



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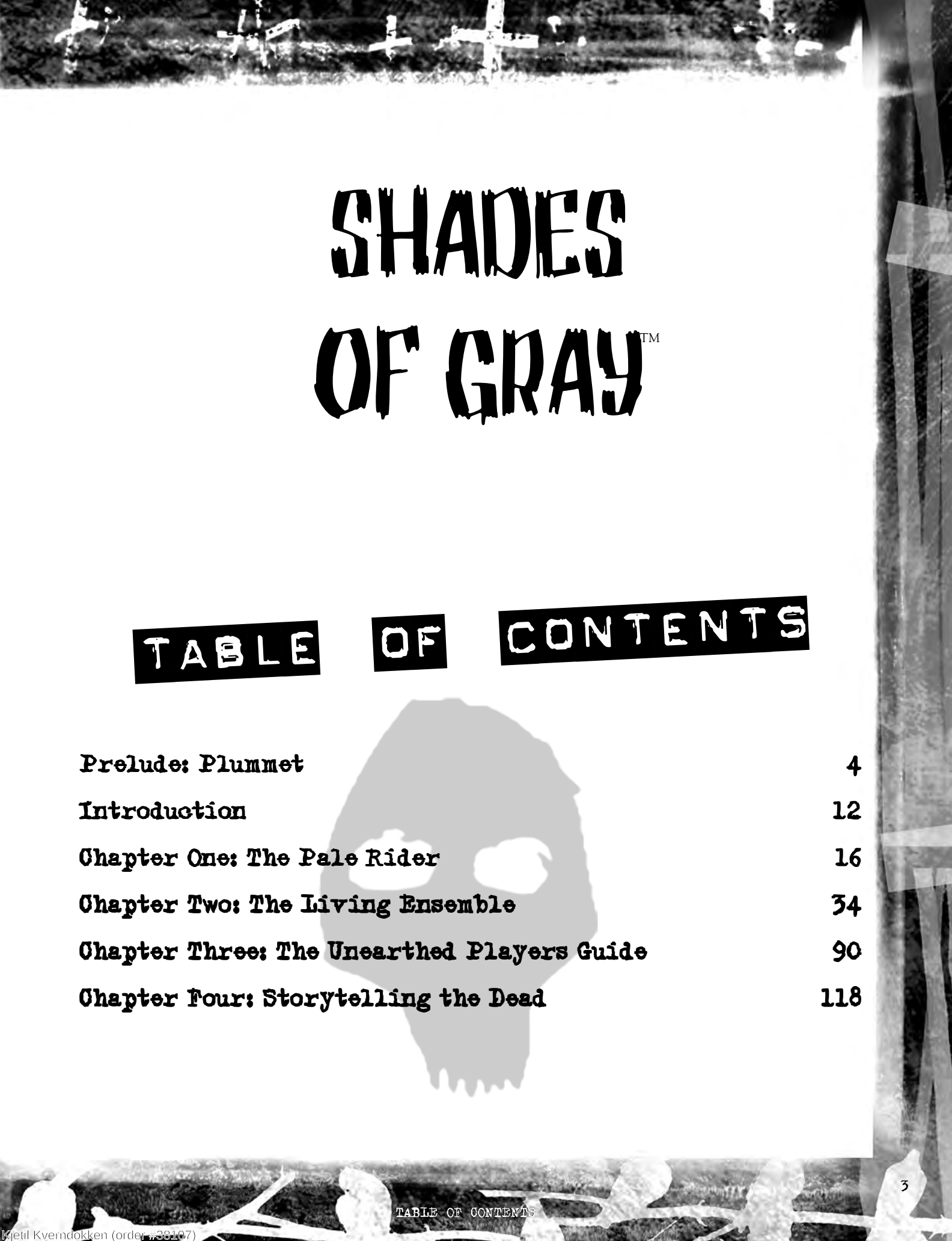
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SHADES OF GRAY™

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prelude: Plummet	4
Introduction	12
Chapter One: The Pale Rider	16
Chapter Two: The Living Ensemble	34
Chapter Three: The Unearthed Players Guide	90
Chapter Four: Storytelling the Dead	118

PRELUDE:
PLUMMET

BY LUCIEN SOULBAN



Now

"I'm sorry," Tom Hayes said. Whatever kindness Kate Dennison knew of Tom was gone. A ring of bright red lined his black pupils, and his dark skin hardened into a hide of cracked mud. From his shoulder blades and down the length of his spine emerged two rows of curved, club-shaped bone fragments, each shattered sharp at the point. The fingertips of his outstretched right hand branched out like a bare tree, impaling Kate through her shoulder and into the wall.

Ghosts weren't supposed to be capable of this... not when manifesting.

Kate groaned against the pain. She felt light-headed... nauseated. "Please Tom... listen to me. We, ah! We can't lose you... not this way."

The red in Tom's eyes dimmed, whatever singular thought driving him to violence fleeing him briefly, but only briefly. "I'm sorry, Kate," Tom said, even though his expression remained inert and dispassionate. His fingertips slipped out of her shoulder and snapped back into his hand. Kate collapsed to her knees, trying to staunch the blood that ran past her fingers.

"I'm not fighting this," Tom said. "I want to do it. It's my fault, and I have to make it right."

"It's not your fault... find another way," Kate said between the stabs of pain. "You're committing suicide."

"Too late. I can hear them coming for me. I'm leaving with them."

Kate tried saying something, but the pain lacerated her thoughts with cold distraction.

"Kate... please leave. If they attack you, I might not stop them. I might join them. I think I'd like that."

Kate rose to her feet, using the wall for leverage. She glanced at Tom one last time, but could see he was fighting just to let her escape. All the kindness she once knew of him was evaporating like dewdrops in Death Valley. Tom was losing himself to the anger... to the hatred. He was becoming one of "them."

Kate stumbled for the door.

"Kate," Tom said.

She stopped, but didn't turn around.

"I have to tell her..." he said, then stopped.

"You can't... save her, Tom," Kate said. "She's one of them." Kate staggered out the door, a sob escaping her trembling jaw.

"I have to tell her... I'm sorry," Tom said to nobody in particular.

Tom stood there, fighting every urge to chase after Kate... to hurt and punish her, to pull strips of her flesh through his gauze fingers. Instead, he focused on the buzz-saw whispers tickling the back of his ears and filling his skull with molasses. He could hear their approach. He welcomed it... but it scared him with freezing water chills. He released his finger-hold on this reality and reincorporated back to his ghost-state.

Black, shadow shapes glided toward Tom, drowning his thoughts beneath the ocean's weight of their nails-on-blackboard song.

"I'm sorry, Sarah. I didn't keep my promise... but I'll make it right this time."

Two Days Ago; 3:45 PM

Let's put it on.

Put what on?

The last suit you'll ever wear.

Tom remembered that line from somewhere, but its origins eluded him. It wasn't germane to his mindset, his situation. It was an odd thought that crept in and left after a moment's consideration. The afterlife was much like that comment. The afterlife was a one-suit occasion.

Unless, of course, you were willing...

...willing to abandon yourself...

...willing to die...

...all over again.

Tom was willing. There was nobody around him to watch his deliberate slip down charity's slope, nobody around to watch him surrender compassion and kindness to become a monster.

The fingertips of
his outstretched
right hand
branched out like a
bare tree, impaling
Kate through her
shoulder and into
the wall.



Except maybe Kate.

Kate was almost always around, somehow sensing Tom's initiatives to drown himself. She was almost always there to offer a kind word or gentle smile — almost always there to help him through his personal tragedy. Almost, almost, almost. And as Tom had taught his children... almost is not good enough. Kate needed to sleep, but Tom didn't. It was in these brief moments of "almost" that Tom focused on the seething seed in his breast, encouraging it to bloom in the abundant soil of his own anger and anguish. Tom's appearance shifted. He called forth the cancers blighting his soul, willing them to manifest upon his gauze, or drew upon his frustration and rage to keep himself infused to the bursting. When he didn't draw upon the tiny thorns in his soul, he seemed absolutely brilliant in cast, not a deathly blemish afflicting his countenance. As every good carpenter knows, however, rot begins from within, and Tom was decaying rapidly. He let the seed grow more powerful and exercise more control over his emotions, drawing upon every nasty and violent memory he could remember feeling to fuel his spiritual atrophy. It was working. The seed bloomed in his chest and sent oily roots to his arms and legs.

Soon, Tom would be devoured completely by his own bitterness and regret.

Soon, Tom would run over the edge.

So, he ran even harder.

Seven Days Ago; 1:10 AM

"She shouldn't be up," Tom whispered, sitting on the still and silent dance floor, cradling the young woman. "It's past her bedtime."

"I'm sorry, Tom," Kate said, a steadying hand on Tom's shoulders. "We have to go. The cops are almost here."

"You go," Tom said. "I... have to find her soul. I—"

"Tom, we looked. She either fled when it happened or..." Kate left the sentence unfinished. She couldn't bring herself to admit the other possibility.

"I don't care," Tom whispered. "I have to find her. I promised. You go... cops can't arrest a ghost."

Kate stood up and walked off the dance floor. She quickly whispered to the petite ghost, Annie Harper, however. "Stay with him. Make sure he makes it back safely."

Tom stroked the young woman's hair and ran his fingers along the smooth curve of her chocolate face,

trying desperately to remember what her warm skin felt like. He searched her eyes for the girl he remembered... for the laughing, happy girl, the one who was always somehow one, and three, and six, and ten, and twelve years old. The one he could always tickle to laughing fits when they played together and hug when tears threatened to burst their dam. Tom could still feel her small arms, thrown round his neck like the world had fallen out from under her feet. Tom waited for her to blink, to smile, to twitch, to suddenly in-

hale and swallow sweet breath in the cradle of his arms... to throw her hands around his neck... to tell him she was okay. To tell him his world hadn't vanished from beneath his feet.

Tom wanted to wake up.

But ghosts don't sleep.

Not in the way that matters anymore.

Tom had to be with her.

No matter the cost.

Seven Days Ago; 12:50 AM

"Nhh!" Tom cried, emotions unfurling so hard and fast that they slammed into his throat, choking off all capacity for speech. He materialized in the center of the dance floor and simply stared at the body at his feet.

Tom was decaying rapidly. He let the seed grow more powerful and exercise more control over his emotions, drawing upon every nasty and violent memory he could remember feeling.



"Tom... Tom!" Kate screamed over the music, but the bombastic bass and drums crushed her words under their hydraulic-pulsing tempo. Kate cursed under her breath. They were too late.

Chet Mason stumbled across the dance floor, his eyes brimming with stinging tears, a rubber ball in his throat expanding, pushing out. "Jesus," he muttered. "Jesus." Chet looked at the dozens upon dozens of dead, young bodies around him, their faces contorted and frozen into agonizing poses and their fingers crippled into arthritic gnarls. Whatever paroxysm snapped their muscles tight left behind grotesque caricatures of corpses, caught in mid-contraction that betrayed some infinite and indescribable torture. Agony was never so inadequate in description as it was now in relating their suffering.

"Some are still alive," Ben Cotton yelled from the other end of the dance floor. At his feet, a raver in silver pants and a glitter shirt contorted with obscene force. His back arched high, threatening to crack his spine, but leaving the crown of his head and points of his shoes alone to touch the ground. The raver cried out a muffled scream, but his jaw remained clenched tight. Two teeth cracked under the pressure.

"Kill the music! And turn those bloody lights off!" Kate yelled back. She stared at Tom who had now fallen to his knees, his shoulders heaving. She wanted to go there... to console him somehow. But Kate knew this moment was somehow his alone, and she saw the ghosts milling around, dazed and confused. They stumbled, and they stared... but they didn't understand. Hell, half of them probably thought they were innocent bystanders, not victims. Kate counted at least a dozen low-ebb spirits, but she knew there were more.

Annie popped her face through a wall. "We've got spooks wandering around all over the place. Many are leaving. I... I can't stop them. Maybe I should flare and attract them back."

"No!" Kate turned to Annie, catching her gaze, "They'll swarm you. Let them go," Kate said after a pause, "There's nothing we can do for them right now. Just stop more from dying."

Chet looked at the dozens upon dozens of dead, young bodies around him, their faces contorted and frozen into agonizing poses and their fingers crippled into arthritic gnarls.

Annie looked outside one last time, then slipped through the wall and joined Kate.

"Some are still alive," Kate said over the music, "but we don't know what the hell's doing this."

Annie materialized and studied the body of a young woman in a tight spandex bodice. Kate watched Tom again, but he was wandering around

now, looking past the ghosts, trying to find something—or someone. "Where is she?" Tom asked to everyone and no one. "She's got to be here?"

Kate was about to go help Tom, when Annie cursed under her breath.

"Turn off the music," Annie said, her voice urgent and panicked "And the lights... keep them low!"

Kate turned to snap out Anne's request, but the music vanished, seemingly of its own accord. The light show followed, bringing a welcoming darkness to the warehouse. Ben was at the DJ booth, turning off the power. A few groans and pained cries filtered through the room.

"Find the survivors," Annie called out, "but don't move them... loud music and bright lights make it worse."

"What is it?" Kate asked. "What are we dealing with, Annie?"

"I'm not entirely sure. The symptoms match up... with the seizures... but what's more, bright light and loud music intensifies the reaction."

"Reaction to what?"

Annie paused. "Strychnine poisoning."

Seven Days Ago; 12:32 AM

The music played, a chattering selection of drums and bass spinning off the speakers like synthesized machine-gun fire. In tempo, strobes and lasers created a light show that pierced the deepest recesses of the warehouse.

Nobody paid attention to either staple of the rave, however.



Steve Handour was barely dead when the Spectre impaled his gauze with its talons, pulling Steve up and through the ceiling. He vanished, his screams joining the dozens-strong symphony of ghosts beset by clawed and sharp-toothed shadows. The warehouse interior was a swirling mass of gauze — the rave's dance floor a forest of contorted corpses, their limbs stunted, pitiful branches.

Tom and Annie arrived first, through the walls, and nearly cried out in horror. Ravers lay on the floor, caught in spasms of exaggerated suffering, bones snapping from muscle contractions, heart and lungs too exhausted to pump blood or deliver oxygen a second longer. Neither did death provide even its customary respite. All the dying souls emerged from their bodies in a state of shocked confusion, a terribly vulnerable moment that allowed the multitude of Spectres to beset the innocent ghosts. The Spectres tore, impaled and devoured their victims, carrying them off to presumably consume them at their leisure. More horrible still were those souls caught in a tug-of-war between several Spectres, their gauze drawn and quartered by the shadow-blighted mongrels claiming their share of the spoils.

Tom and Annie immediately dove into the fray, their faces knotted by rage, their sensibilities stripped to frenzied vengeance. Tom's hands glowed and melted, becoming twin handguns, which he used to fire upon the closest beasts in a double-fisted hail of bullets. Annie, however, altered her gauze, manifesting clawed paws and a thick hide to deflect incoming punishment. Nobody was sure how Annie could draw upon these thorns and not suffer for them spiritually, but she did and was grateful for such a small blessing. She dove into the fray, tackling a cloven-hooved Spectre head-on. Within moments, she straddled its chest, shredding its decaying horse-head with her talons, her eyes pinpoints of fury, her mouth in a feral curl.

Kate and Chet arrived a moment later, their appearance delayed by the limitations of their flesh.

"Oh, God," Kate said, her voice betraying her martyr's eagerness to save others at cost of her own safety. "We have to help them."

Chet grabbed Kate. "You can't," he shouted over the music. "The minute you project, they grab your body. We're useless here unless we can convince some of these bastards to manifest."

Kate nodded. "Shit! You're right. But Chet," she said. "We have to find her... save her before Tom finds her."

"Then, let's try *real* hard to convince these bastards to manifest."

Kate pulled out her handgun. Its weight was uncomfortable in her grip... but she held it firm nonetheless. Chet also pulled out his pistol and charged the nearest Spectres, a pack of skinned dogs that were trying their best to pull a screaming soul through the wall.

Chet swung his arms through the different Spectres' heads, to gain their attention. He dispersed micro-strands of their gauze through his physical presence, annoying the beasts. None manifested, however. Kate followed suit with a chittering, snail-like creature, then with something that looked like a pack of rats sharing the same large mouth of nail-long teeth. Finally, two creatures, both of them oily, slick and featureless humans, manifested. They ambled toward Kate and Chet, who returned the Spectres' attention and consideration by opening fire with their guns, riddling the two advancing beasts.

The last to join the fray, Ben slipped through the wall, his body stashed elsewhere and safe. A momentary pause was all he needed to unleash his anger in a small trick Kate taught him. He inhaled, a reflex borne of being alive, and unleashed a scream to drown the stereo and cries of terror beneath a wave of his own acoustic rage. Several Spectres in the scream's wake collapsed before the shredding wail, their oil-stained gauze stripped into thin, dissolving tatters.

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Kate and Chet continued firing, trying to draw out those Spectres that could manifest. They couldn't locate their target, however, not in the pandemonium of so many people dying. It really didn't matter anyway. They were too late in almost all respects.

Seven Days Ago; 12:00 AM

This is Radio Free Death, with <static> urgent message for all you list<static>. People are dying <static>night. It's already be<static>. Please... to all those listening <static> save them. It's a rave <static>house district. Somebody poi<static> them.<static>.

"Did anybody get that?" Kate asked, looking around the hotel room.

Tom shook his head, but Annie jumped in. "Some rave in the warehouse district... I think."

"Where in the fucking district, Annie?" Chet said, fuming at the mounting helplessness gnawing at his nerves. "Which fucking warehouse district?"

"Shit, Chet," Annie said, almost spitting gauze in the process. "That's all I heard."

"Shut up," Kate muttered. "All of you. I'll figure it out myself." Kate shifted to the middle of the bed and used the remote to mute the television. She assumed the lotus position, bringing one leg over the other, before slowing her breathing. Her heart rate followed, a lazy descent into the cool and calm waters of her soul. Time dilated around her, everything becoming a blur of accelerated motion. Kate opened her eyes, not really seeing her immediate environment, at least not now. She was elsewhere, a stumble of a few hours into the future... the room was dark, quiet, except for the bluish glow of the television screen. Kate reached for the remote, turning the television volume up again.

A news report played, a warehouse loomed in the screen, and ESU and paramedics ran in and out of the building.

The reporter was talking about a tragedy... at least 200 dead at a rave — Kate recognized the buildings in the background. Similar reports were streaming in from a house party and a high school dance. Many died horribly. The reporter spoke, her voice dragged underwater, warbling. Dozens of ghosts walked behind or in front of her. Shadows moved among them. Finally, the ghost of a young, black woman walked

straight for the camera. She was beautiful, blessed with elegance despite her tender age of 18 years, dressed in 70s chic and infinitely familiar. The young woman walked through the camera and into the room. Kate gasped, but the woman was a reflection of a reflection, a ghost's ghost no more real than smoke in a mirror. The young woman walked up to the bedside, and threw her arms around thin air.

Kate, shook herself awake. The young woman faded from sight, still hugging something. Reality returned into focus again. Tom stood there, watching Kate, but Kate could still see a faded afterimage of the young woman... her arms around Tom's neck.

"What?" Tom asked, suddenly mystified at the expression of horror Kate directed his way. "What is it? What did you see?"

"Oh, God," Kate said. "We have to go..."

"Shouldn't we project first?" Chet asked.

"No. Some of us will need to do First Aid... mouth-to-mouth. Grab the kits."

"Shouldn't we call the cops or paramedics?" Annie asked.

"No, no," Kate said. "I think we have Spectres, and the cops won't let us do our jobs properly either. We have to go!"

"Kate," Tom said, insisting. "What did you see?"

Kate couldn't bring herself to say it. She couldn't tell Tom that she recognized Sarah, his daughter, from the pictures he asked Kate to keep around so he could see her. The dead didn't get to have keepsakes.

"Not now, Tom," Kate said, instead. "Please... we have to go."

Ten Years Ago

"How is she?" Tom asked the doctor, but it was a moot question. Tom knew exactly how his daughter was doing, and the answer set his nerves on bladed edge.

Dr. Bennings smiled at Tom and Jasmine with all the heartfelt sympathy he could muster. He was about to say something, but he caught movement in the shadows, out of the corner of his eye. Six-year-old Thomas, Jr., and three-year-old Nathan were peeking from their bedroom door, their eyes wide with worry and concern. They didn't know enough

The reporter
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200 dead at a rave.



to understand what was really happening, but they sensed the troubled air nonetheless. Jasmine and Tom caught their two boys peeking as well.

"Go to bed," Tom ordered, trying not to raise his voice in the corridor, trying not to direct his fury at them.

"Go on," Jasmine said. "I'll be in in a moment to tuck you in."

The two boys obeyed, reluctantly, and closed their door.

"Adam?" Jasmine asked.

"Sarah's been through a terrible ordeal," Bennings said. "She's confused over what happened to her and why everyone wants to talk to her. She needs time... time and love, but you need to make sure they don't overwhelm her with questions either. I'll leave you the name of a good counselor. He works with abused children."

Tom went rigid at the thought that Sarah was now labeled... she was "abused." There was ugliness to the word, a brutality in its pronouncement that somehow defied the innocent beauty of his daughter... his princess. Tom pulled Jasmine in closer, offering the image of the strong husband there for his family, but he needed her reassuring presence just as desperately as she needed his. They needed one another's touch to validate themselves, to crush the guilt eating at their nerves, the guilt that accused them of failing their daughter in a manner so horrible, so inconceivable. Jasmine rested her head against Tom's chest, but otherwise held strong for her daughter. She wouldn't betray the nausea poisoning the pit of her stomach, not in front of anyone but Tom.

"Did you press charges?" Bennings asked.

Tom nodded, his neck muscles straining to the breaking at the thought of what his own brother did.

"He confessed," Jasmine said.

"I'm sorry," Bennings said again, "but I suspect you'll be hearing a lot of that in the coming weeks." After an uncomfortable pause, Bennings said "I best be going. You have my number if you need anything."

"Thank you, Adam. I'll show you out," Jasmine said, and she escorted the doctor downstairs. Tom waited a moment, then crept silently to his daughter's door. He opened it a notch, throwing a blade of light across Sarah's bed. He watched her, measuring his own breath with the rise and fall of her tiny frame, trying somehow to connect in that simple action.

"Daddy?" a tiny voice asked. It was Sarah.

Tom slipped into the room and was at her bedside with barely a whisper.

"I'm here, pumpkin."

Sarah sat up, and Tom stared into her round, deep brown eyes. She wasn't sleeping. Her eyes still looked haunted. Tom felt instantly ashamed. Guilt supped on his soul and tore away generous morsels of his already tattered self. Sarah seemed so tiny, so frail, and he let her down. He told there were no monsters, but there were. In fact, he brought one into the trust and confidence of his own family. He was guilty of hurting his own daughter, of

shepherding her to the lion's den. He snorted hard and quickly wiped away an errant tear that threatened to spill down his face.

"Are you crying, Daddy?"

"No, pumpkin,"

Tom said, quickly composing himself and fighting the burning in his throat.

"Are you mad with Uncle Eric?"

Tom stared at Sarah, trying to find the right answer to a lie he wouldn't be able to carry convincingly. He despised Eric... for betraying every trust he knew existed between them... but more, for making Tom feel this way. "Don't you worry about that," Tom said, finally breaking the silence.

Sarah looked down at her hands, her fingers jabbing each other softly in her typical telltale display of

Jasmine rested her head against Tom's chest, but otherwise held strong for her daughter. She wouldn't betray the nausea poisoning the pit of her stomach, not in front of anyone but Tom.



nervousness. "Is it because of me?" she asked, her voice a whisper.

Tom's heart wrenched, like a pulled, exhausted muscle broken by the strain. The burning in his throat spread to the back of his mouth. He tried biting back the pain, swallowing to drown it in the pit of his stomach, but he couldn't. The tide broke past his already crumbling veneer, the torrent of guilt and infinite sadness spilling into his soul.

Tom cried, the first tears and sobs bursting out in one wet sound. He pulled Sarah into him and held her hard.

And Sarah, in her own innocent confusion, starting crying as well. She'd never seen her father cry before.

"It's okay, pumpkin" Tom said, his voice shuddering and stumbling over his tongue. "Don't ever... don't ever think it was your fault. Uncle Eric did wrong. Not you... him."

Sarah nodded, her face buried in her father's enveloping embrace. She didn't even mind the hot, wet tears staining her shoulder. She was safe now.

"I swear, Sarah," Tom said, his voice still filled with hiccups. "I promise you... I'll never let anyone harm you again. Not Uncle Eric... nobody. I'll always be there for you... to protect you. I'll make it right."

"I know, Daddy," Sarah said. But just to be sure... she wrapped her thin arms around her father's neck and held tight...

...like the world was no longer beneath her feet...
...but encompassed in his embrace.



INTRODUCTION



It's one thing to die for a cause.
Dying multiple times is something else again.
— Chet Mason

Otis: You see it's all true,
the boogiemani is real and you found him...
— House of 1000 Corpses



Every storm has its swells and its lulls. The characters of your **Orpheus** chronicle dove headfirst into the storm on the day they decided to become projectors for the company (or were employed as post-life entities). They experienced the clamor of that storm during the initial stages of the chronicle, but the most violent lashing of all came in **Crusade of Ashes** (the first supplement) when the Orpheus Group came under savage attack by NextWorld. The chaos and destruction of that blitz faded, but the storm swelled again, this time as the Federal Bureau of Investigation took jurisdiction over the case and began a search for any surviving Orpheus employees.

Since then, the storm has not abated. The characters have had chances to rebuild or retake parts of their old lives, to make contacts and even friends within the intelligence communities and, of course, to hone their own supernatural skills. At the same time, though, agencies such as the DEA and the FBI search for them, NextWorld and Terrel & Squib make their own preparations for the future, and the inhuman Spectres make hiding on the other side of the Shroud a bad idea in the long term.

The storm is about to swell once again. The howls of the dead are about to drown out the storm winds. And, of course, the characters will be right in the middle of it all.

THEN AND NOW: AN OVERVIEW

While we assume that you've read (or played through) **Crusades of Ashes**, a quick recap might be in order. Some of this information is repeated or paraphrased from **Orpheus** and **Crusade of Ashes**. Remember that any dates mention here or elsewhere in this book are suggestions. The Storyteller should feel free to adjust the timeline of **Orpheus** as necessary for her chronicle and is encouraged to ignore established World of Darkness canon with regards to that timeline. **Orpheus** works best on its own.

THE BEGINNING

In 1994, a firm called JDG Cryogenics became the Orpheus Group in an event that barely sent ripples through the local market. Under normal circumstances, the Orpheus Group would have been seen as a crackpot organization chasing the ravings of cryogenic patients who emerged for treatment and spoke of out-of-body experiences. For some strange reason, however, the Orpheus Group slowly gained prominence and notice for its ability to traffic with the dead. While the doubting Thomases still remained vocal about their dislike for such obvious charlatans as projecting firms, the Orpheus Group slowly won against all attempts to disprove its claims. The world slowly accepted the presence of ghost hunters.

The Orpheus Group remained pioneers in its field, but somehow, more projector firms staked out their market share. NextWorld and Terrel & Squib, in particular, became major competitors, if not publicly, then privately. If you wanted reliability and assured quality, you hired

Orpheus Group. If you wanted a savvy, professional-looking firm, then Terrel & Squib provided that service. If you wanted a no-nonsense operation with few questions asked (and you knew the right people), then NextWorld was there.

Despite the public's acceptance of ghosts and projecting firms, however, the projecting firms still kept their secrets. Few people knew, or wanted to know, about Spectres. Few possessed any inkling of what a ghost was capable of accomplishing. In short, people believed in ghosts and projecting firms, they just didn't know the entire truth. And it seemed that not even these firms' own agents knew everything. Orpheus' history is surprisingly nebulous and inconsistent, and rumors abound of secret assassinations and failed experiments.

Then, there were gaps in what scientists understood about the hereafter. Why were there no ghosts beyond three to five years old, and why didn't spooks depreciate in strength or ability the older they became? Who was broadcasting Radio Free Death? And what were Spectres? These questions, and others besides, remained unanswered. If Orpheus had been able to continue in its research, who knows what might have been uncovered?

Such was not to be, however.

THE STORM BREAKS

In **Crusade of Ashes**, Orpheus Group came under attack by mercenaries armed with automatic weapons and explosives. More specifically, these mercenaries were projectors in the employ of NextWorld, although who hired that company for the job is still a mystery. NextWorld destroyed the Orpheus compound, killing many of its projectors and smashing their sleeper pods.

During the aftermath of the attack, the FBI stepped in and claimed jurisdiction over the investigation, claiming it was domestic terrorism. They immediately began hunting for any surviving members of Orpheus Group... which, of course, includes the characters. The characters must deal with this situation as best they can, probably by going on the run as they avoid the authorities and the Death Merchants still attempting to ambush and kill them.

IN THE BETWEEN

Between the close of **Crusade of Ashes** and the start of **Shades of Gray**, the characters may have endured all manner of hardship (specifically, whatever the Storyteller felt like throwing at them), but the world hasn't stood still. The other projecting firms of the world have come under attack as well, although none has suffered as greatly as Orpheus. Most of the smaller firms have closed in the wake of the attacks. Terrel & Squib, Orpheus' greatest competitor, is undergoing heavy reorganization and is focusing much more on its pharmaceuticals business than its paranormal investigations in the wake of attacks on their facilities. NextWorld, who, of course, has had a hand in most of these acts of violence, should now



be in a position to take over much of the projecting business in the country... but it seems to be pulling out of the business altogether.

Meanwhile, on the streets, the pigment business is booming. The Drug Enforcement Administration is continually frustrated as it tries to track the drug; its agents know that pigment typically originates in Turkey, Myanmar, Colombia and Mexico, but its path once it reaches US soil is a bit more confusing. No matter how complicated the sting operations the DEA puts together, no matter how experienced the agents it sends undercover, the pigment dealers always seem to be able to sniff out the narcs — usually with bloody results. The rave and casual drug-use crowd, of course, knows little of all this. They only want to know when their next score will arrive.

The club kids and college students aren't the only folks using black H, though. Pigment cults continue to pop up, usually with messianic overtones. The Temple of the Mother of Vision is among the most prominent, although the city contains many smaller ones. Loved ones of the characters, even former Orpheus employees who escaped the purge, may well fall into the thrall of such cults, becoming addicted to pigment and seduced by whatever philosophy the cult espouses.

Finally, Spectres have become more visible. Projecting for any length of time reveals Spectres lurking on rooftops, hovering about accident sites and generally present throughout the city. They seem to be waiting for something — a signal, an event... or possibly a leader?

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Shades of Gray covers the current events of the world and the ongoing chronicle in four chapters. These chapters are designed to offer relevant tidbits of information, with a split offered between player-related material and Storyteller-related data. Since the chronicle can unfold in any city, the **Orpheus** series keeps mention of specific locations to a minimum. This also means that, because there is no city-book for the line, each faction example contains a sample supporting character to illustrate the nature of the entry and to provide Storytellers with instant personas. Many of these personas are new to this book; although characters introduced in **Crusade of Ashes** and **Orpheus** are occasionally mentioned, including new characters in each book allows for a great deal of diversity in the Storyteller's supporting cast. It also cuts down on the possibility of a character who died in your game showing up again (although, granted, that's rarely a problem in a game about ghosts).

THE MOVIE MODEL

Following the example begun in **Crusade of Ashes**, consider the movie *Aliens*. After Ripley agrees to return with the marines to the planet where she encountered the

creature, the story is subject to a number of small plot twists. The fact that nearly every colonist now harbors an alien, the little girl hiding in the complex, the battle with the aliens where the marines are almost wiped out and the subsequent revelation that the complex is going to go nuclear in a few short hours are all important wrinkles in the story, all necessary for the climax, but all secondary to the themes and events of the final "act" of the film.

The same is true of **Shades of Gray**. In this supplement, the characters have a chance to peel back more of the layers of the conspiracy against them and to discover who their true enemies are. In **Crusade of Ashes**, we referred to "mysterious antagonists." That kind of mystery is present here as well — even if the characters discover an immediate enemy, they'll still find themselves dealing with a puppet and searching for the being pulling that puppet's strings.

We know that this isn't everyone's idea of the perfect way to present a chronicle. Some Storytellers would like everything laid out at the beginning, a timeline of events and a chapter of supporting characters presented in the first book, so that they can weave things together as they see fit. To that we can only say: Trust us. Present the information and the events to your players as presented in the sourcebooks, and it will all make sense before the final curtain falls. Plus, in the "cracks" between the stories, you'll find more than enough information to run supplemental stories related to the ongoing plot, should you so desire. And, if you'd rather keep **Orpheus** alive and well and run stories within the framework provided in the core book, you'll find additional missions in **Crusade of Ashes** and this book for exactly that purpose.

But if you're one of those folks who can suspend disbelief and trust in the story... keep watching.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Shades of Gray is presented in four chapters (excluding the prelude and this introduction). Some of the information is for players and some for Storytellers, but those sections are clearly marked as such.

A note to players: We can't tell you what to read. If you bought the book, you're entitled to read it. But you'll have a lot more fun with it if you read the players' sections only and leave the real surprises for the game.

Chapter One: The Pale Rider is the next "wrinkle" in the plot, involving the pigment trade and what happens when someone decides to use the drug to create a lot of ghosts very quickly.

Chapter Two: The Living Ensemble includes information on all of the factions likely to plague (or aid) the characters, including the FBI, the DEA, Terrel & Squib and even the media. New information is presented on the Blasphemers and on Spectres, and players will find suggestions on making allies of many of these groups, rather than simply running from or fighting them.



Chapter Three: The Unearthed Players Guide, as in **Crusade of Ashes**, includes new mechanical “toys” for players to purchase for their characters. More specifically, you’ll find third-tier Horrors, enabling your characters to bring an armed response to the forces that hunt them. You’ll also find new roles, 10 new Backgrounds and even a new Shade — the Phantasm.

Chapter Four: Storytelling the Dead is, as the name suggests, for Storytellers only. It provides a detailed look at the pigment trade as well as the cults that use the drug as a sacrament. It also includes advice on running the events of **Shades of Gray** and concludes with new story suggestions, both for troupes following the storyline and those still using the Orpheus Group as the game setting.

SERIES BREAKDOWN

Following the core book, the game’s limited run progresses in much the same manner as would the action of a suspense film, with events building up with each successive revelation (supplement). These metaplot events reach their climax in the final book of the series, with the progression as follows:

Supplement Three — Shadow Games: *<static>headed straight for <static>. Didn’t even know this shit was <static>... it’s like the end of <static>*

Supplement Four — The Orphan-Grinders: *<static>don’t fucking believe <static> saw it with my <static>. He was one of <static> things...*

Final Supplement — End Game: *<static>*

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

Following the cinematic experience, here are several films and television series to provide inspiration for **Orpheus** and **Shades of Gray** stories. Certainly, some are bad or cheesy, but all have some interesting qualities... just not all at the same time:

John Doe. He knows everything... except who he is. That’s a set-up for the same sort of twist as in *Sixth Sense*. Suppose he’s drawing on all that information because he’s dead and he’s tapping into a kind of ghostly unconscious? Just a thought.

Conspiracy Theory. Nothing to do with ghosts, but the imagery in this film is very appropriate to **Shades of Gray**. Notice how *every one* of Mel Gibson’s theories seems to come true.

X-Files. Series or film. Duh.

House on Haunted Hill. The same team that produced *Thirteen Ghosts* and *Ghost Ship* was responsible for this rather loose remake of the Vincent Price classic, which begs the question: What kind of blackmail material do these producers have over such fine actors as Geoffrey Rush and F. Murray Abraham? *House on Haunted Hill* is worth a look simply because Rush’s character is set up

from the beginning as having access to special-effects wizardry and, therefore, could theoretically be faking any of the horrors that happen during the movie, but this film requires a great deal of suspended disbelief.

THEME

Crusade of Ashes was chiefly about the characters’ survival. Survival is, of course, a worthwhile goal, but it doesn’t ask much in the way of character or ethics from the heroes.

Shades of Gray is a little different. The characters have an opportunity here to stymie the best laid plans of the Spectres, to act against someone who intends to kill hundreds in a single night for the express purpose of using their souls. No matter what the characters’ moral outlook is, that sort of thing should be pretty unacceptable. In that respect, a large part of **Shades of Gray** is, if you’ll pardon the expression, fairly black and white.

That doesn’t mean the title is inappropriate, though. The forces that set this plot in motion might be clearly inhumane (or perhaps simply inhuman), but the pawns through which they act aren’t. Drug dealers, drug addicts, mercenaries, Terrel & Squib, confused hues, the DEA, the FBI, the media... all of these forces and more might act with or against the mysterious antagonists behind the events of **Shades of Gray** without even realizing it. Some of the characters’ primary investigative chores are going to be to figure out where other people stand, where they can find (or buy) allies and who, in the end, knows enough to be of any use... or of any danger.

Thematically, then, **Shades of Gray** is about decisions. The characters must decide what avenues of investigation to pursue. They must decide what tactics are acceptable to them, what losses they can incur, and to what degree they want to involve themselves in the events of this story. They must decide who their true enemy is and how they will go about acting against that enemy. Then, they must decide how to deal with the consequences of their own decisions. While the main event of this story — the massacre described in “The Pale Rider” — is fairly obviously a “bad thing,” the rest of the story is a *mélange* of moral and practical choices.

This ties nicely into the overarching theme of telling ghost stories for ghosts. One theme that factors into nearly all ghost stories is that once a person dies, she is in some way accountable for her life. This can manifest subtly (as in *Sixth Sense*, wherein the ghosts must confront their own lives... over and over again) or overtly (as in *Ghost*, where murderers are immediately dragged down to Hell upon death). The characters in **Orpheus** are still making the choices that may damn or save their souls even after death, and which “shade of gray” they choose to paint themselves with might well make all the difference later.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PALE RIDER



Stupid kids. Are you in that much of a hurry to die?
— Kate Dennison

Narrator: I prefer to let you attempt to decide for your-
self the probable consequences of swallowing a soul.
— Kwaidan

This chapter presents a scenario for Storytellers to include in their **Orpheus** chronicle. Take note: *This is all Storyteller material*. Players risk spoiling their own fun — and that of the other players — if they know the plot in advance. If you do read it and end up as a player instead of the Storyteller, please try to resist using what you know.

“The Pale Rider” presumes that characters have already gained some facility with their powers as spooks, as described in the **Orpheus** core book; and that they have seen the destruction of the Orpheus company, as described in **Crusade of Ashes**. Not every Storyteller, however, intends to use the **Orpheus** plotline. The end of the chapter includes suggestions about using “The Pale Rider” in chronicles that ignore the overall storyline that runs through these supplements.

THE BACKGROUND

In the course of their past adventures, the characters learned about Spectres — inhuman spirits who seem to exist to cause suffering. They also saw increasing use of pigment, a drug that enables its users to see ghosts and survive after death as hues. These two mysteries intersect in “The Pale Rider.”

As the story begins, the characters do not know who makes pigment or precisely how it reaches the streets — but then, neither do the police of six continents. Someone, however, has managed to break into the pigment distribution network. In one city, the street dealers receive a batch of pigment tainted with strychnine. The poison kills everyone who takes the drug. Not every dealer receives the tampered pigment, though... just the ones who sell most of their stock at parties, where many people take the drug in a short time.

The Spectres seem to know what’s going on. They gather at the parties destined to receive the poisoned pigment. As hundreds of pigment addicts die in slow agony, the Spectres move in to reap the dying souls.

The Spectres do not claim the spirits of every victim, of course. Victims who die at the smaller parties stand a better chance of avoiding the Spectres, although the odds are still against them. Many of the dying become hues. These new ghosts are dazed and half-maddened from their painful deaths. They lash out in an unprecedented wave of hauntings.

The characters face three challenges in “The Pale Rider.” They can try to stop as many deaths as they can, whether by interrupting the pigment distribution or by discovering the nature of the poison and alerting the medical authorities. They can also try to quell the disturbances caused by the sudden horde of hues. Finally, they can try to find out who poisoned the pigment and why.

Unfortunately, the characters cannot fully succeed at any of these goals. Pigment distribution operates

SIGNIFICANT STORYTELLER CHARACTERS

Gary Burchofsky: Pigment dealer. A petty, sleazy opportunist.

Joe Carwood: Pigment dealer. He believes the drug brings him messages from aliens.

The Ghost Assassin: A powerful ghost who tries to murder all the dealers not slain by their own product.

Ray Latoure: The city’s pigment kingpin. A cunning businessman.

Ike Mortenson: The distributor who poisons the pigment.

Valentino: The Reaper who leads the city’s Spectres during the massacre.

Lauryl Vance: A college student. Sells pigment to support her own habit.

Bobby Wells: Lauryl’s ghost boyfriend.

through too many channels to plug them all. Their enemies also possess powers that the characters lack so far and are ruthlessly thorough at covering their tracks. The characters can find who poisoned the black heroin, but the answer leaves them with another mystery.

LEADS AND WARNINGS

No one commits a massacre on this scale without some preparation and without leaving some trace of his activities. The poisoner takes extraordinary care to act through dupes, but cannot hide his activities completely. If nothing else, so great a death and outflow of ghosts echoes through time itself, warning of the horror to come. If the characters spot the clues and connect the dots, they may prevent at least some of the deaths.

The crucible can receive forewarning and become involved in several ways. Tailor the clues to suit the characters’ interests and activities. For extra-sneaky foreshadowing, slip a clue into some other, completely unrelated story. For instance, a Banshee could receive a symbolic vision about the massacre when she looks into the future about some other problem.

WHISPERS FROM BEYOND

In the days before the massacre, a number of uncanny events can suggest that something big is about to happen.

BANSHEES

The sudden creation of 318 ghosts (and the equally sudden destruction of dozens of them) reverberates

through time to disrupt visions of the future. In the fortnight before the poisonings, the terror of the massacre hijacks at least one attempt to use Forebode. As Storyteller, ignore whatever the player rolls for the Forebode attempt. Instead, provide an enigmatic vision of horror. As usual, you can tailor the vision to grab the characters' interest, but be careful not to give too much away. Something such as this might work:

As the visions of future possibilities swirl before your mind's eye, you hear a scream of agony. The visions vanish. You see only a figure cloaked and cowed all in white, riding a pitch-black horse. The pale rider gallops toward you at full tilt, drawing a sword. You stand among a crowd of people, all screaming, and you scream too as the sword swings back, then falls to sweep through the people, who twitch and flail as they fall in bloody ruin.

Attempts to gain further information about the event should result in similarly frightening and symbolic visions that add no more than one clue about the coming deaths. Suitable subjects for visions include:

- **Skinrider Involvement:** Masks, puppets and mariottes make good images.

- **Poisoning:** An apothecary preparing a powder in a mortar and pestle for a Renaissance nobleman; or children receiving a snack of pudding cups and Kool-Aid (references to the Heaven's Gate and Jonestown suicides).

- **Mass Death:** A child who wears a red, hooded cloak fills a basket with roses, counting "Three hundred sixteen, three hundred seventeen, three hundred eighteen." The thorns on the roses make her hands a bloody mess, but she seems not to notice.

Do not, however, let characters just keep piling up visionary hints and clues until you end up handing them the entire plot. Treat Forebode as a spur to action, not a magic answer machine. If characters do not take the hint and look for answers themselves, let the precognition pipeline dry up.

RADIO FREE DEATH

Radio Free Death, the strange voice that broadcasts to any projectors listening every night at midnight, is, in fact, a Haunter named Terrence Green (see p. 79 for more information). He is aware that something big and bad may happen soon. As with Forebode, treat the mysterious pirate broadcaster as a spur to action rather than a substitute for investigation. Green knows that someone has tampered with a pigment shipment. He also knows that hundreds of people will die, and that this heralds an even greater danger. Very little of his information is reliable or detailed, though. His midnight broadcasts tend to go like this:

The <static> are sharpening their claws, and it looks like Fri<static>is their night to party. Keep your loved ones home, and <static>want to lay low yourself. <static>Free Death,

signing off for the night.

If Terrence Green has come to regard the members of the crucible as trustworthy and effective spooks, he might ask his partner Grace Ishida, a powerful Phantasm (see Chapter Three), to pass on what the two of them know about the pigment network and Terrel & Squib. Grace does this by visiting a character in a dream. Grace knows that T&S is responsible for much of the pigment trade in the world and could certainly help the characters trace the pigment trail back to the company, but she doesn't have any idea why the company would poison a shipment of pigment or what it could possibly have to gain by such an act.

Terrence and Grace can also lead the characters to Ray Latoure, but his limited knowledge of the pigment trail can only distract the characters from what's really happening. The information they gain from him may help the crucible find one of the dealers before the massacre, though. Storytellers are advised to reserve Radio Free Death as a last-ditch source of clues in case the players genuinely don't know what to do.

TIMING

"The Pale Rider" takes place on a Friday night when more than the usual numbers of people attend parties. This gives Storytellers many times when the scenario could take place:

- The start of the school year sees back-to-school and homecoming dances at local high schools and parties at colleges. Fraternities and sororities use the induction of new pledges as an excuse for revelry.

- The end of the school year brings junior and senior proms at the high schools and innumerable finals week parties at the colleges.

- Students also celebrate Spring Break and the end of quarters or semesters. In addition to parties held on campus, many students attend raves or go to nightclubs.

- Any major holiday results in hundreds of private parties as well as raves and a surge of attendance at the nightclubs.

Be careful not to let the characters learn about the poisoning plot too quickly, or they might stop it completely. Give the crucible no more than a few days from its first hint that something might be brewing to the night of the party. Most of the important clues do not appear until Thursday or Friday (again, the party itself takes place on Friday night).

If the characters already hunt pigment dealers, remember that any metropolitan area has lots of drug dealers, who may buy from each other or obtain their stock through third parties. At the street level, the pigment trade is a tangled mess of small-time pushers. The characters can catch a dozen dealers and not find one of the few slated to distribute the tainted pigment. Also, remember that this sort of legwork takes

time. The characters must think to look for dealers who sell many doses of pigment in a short time to find the slated vendors. Any spirit characters can also receive distractions and red herrings from their Spectre twins, who gladly frame a local pigment cult (or anyone else) as enemies of the crucible.

AFTER THE FACT

Quite possibly, the players completely ignore every hint that something big and bad is on the horizon and that it has to do with pigment and Spectres. Don't keep adding warnings. Let the massacre happen on schedule — and kill off someone the characters care about. The crucible then faces the challenge of backtracking to figure out what happened.

PIGMENT INVESTIGATION

Attempts to crack pigment trafficking may also lead a crucible to the poisoning plot. For instance, the patron ghosts of any local pigment cults (such as the Temple of the Mother of Vision, see Chapter Four) pass on the message that the cult should stock up on black heroin so the members don't have to buy any more for a month or so. The cults do not know what's coming down, except that something might soon disrupt the pigment pipeline. The cults face no danger from the poisoning.

Characters who hunt pigment dealers find that their targets now have protection. Each pigment distributor who received the tainted drug now has one or two Spectre guards. The Spectres show no interest in the city's other pigment dealers. After the

dealers distribute the poisoned pigment, they serve no further function, and the Spectres abandon them. See Chapters Two and Four for more information about the pigment trade and suggestions for stories about it. You can start out making "The Pale Rider" look like a story about hunting pigment dealers and then reveal that something far more dangerous is going on.

No plan works perfectly and with no forewarning, of course. One pigment dealer accidentally removes himself from the plan, while another violates his usual *modus operandi* by making an individual sale ahead of schedule. Characters who read the daily paper with an eye for stories about pigment or mysterious deaths cannot fail to notice two news items.

Salvation Is Nigh!

Are you looking for guidance in this dark world and these terrifying times?

Are you lost, lonely or afraid?

Does your life need meaning?

The Church of the Children of the Angelic Host can provide everything you need.

Have no fear. Angels walk among us, guiding the footsteps of the faithful onto the path of righteousness. They pervade our lives, giving comfort and solace and easing the pains of our harsh mortal existence. They whisper words of encouragement in our ears and ward us from the forces of evil that plague the world. Everyone can learn to tap into the strength they provide, learning to see and comprehend the larger world and to merge the spiritual and the physical to ascend to new levels of understanding.

We know that many people have difficulty coming to terms with the spiritual aspects of their lives and understand that you might have questions regarding our church and its goals. Some of the most common we are asked are:

Q: Hang on, aren't churches for the superstitious, a crutch for those too weak-willed to stand up for themselves?

A: There is a distinction between faith and superstition. Faith reflects an individual's convictions, his belief in the Almighty and the power of His agents. Someone with the strength to hold true to his beliefs is not weak-willed. In fact, the exact opposite is true. Holding true to oneself and ones ideals is a difficult proposition in the modern world with all its temptations. We offer support for those seeking to do so, no more.

Q: How do I know you're not a scam or some sort of cult?

A: Our leader is the Reverend Cale O'Reilly who has been preaching in the city for more than 20 years and is well known in the community.

Q: I'm a [insert denomination here]. Will I be welcome?

A: Although we follow the Adventist tradition, our church welcomes all who wish to regain contact with their spiritual lives. Our membership contains Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Mormons and Lutherans.

Q: You talk of angels as if they are real. Are they?

A: Belief in the Angelic Host is a matter for individuals to decide, but most who attend our services do believe in their power and presence. Indeed, many have had first-hand experiences of the angelic form, particularly during the sacrament of the Eucharist when the worshiper's body briefly becomes one with the spiritual world.

Q: Are angels ghosts?

A: Angels are an aspect of the divine, but many have walked upon the Earth in mortal form and, thus, might be considered ghosts, though spirits is a more accurate term.

Q: How do I find out more?

A: Contact Reverend Cale O'Reilly at the church premises or via our e-mail address. Details of both can be found on the reverse of this flyer.

Q: When do you hold services?

A: Services take place daily but our main Communion, attended by the entire congregation, takes place on Saturday mornings.

 The Church of the Children of the Angelic host

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

One pigment dealer samples his own wares on Wednesday and dies in agony. On Thursday, the death of a minor drug dealer merits one column inch in the local newspaper:

Screams Alert Neighbors to Dying Man

Yesterday evening, loud screams drew neighbors to call 911 and ask for medical or police assistance. Fire department paramedics arrived at 8:22 p.m. to discover 28-year-old Mark Soler lying on the floor of his living room. The paramedics attempted to resuscitate Mr. Soler without success. Police arrived shortly thereafter.

The cause of Mr. Soler's death is, as yet, unknown. Several rooms in the house were disordered, with furnishings tipped over or broken as if in a struggle. Police also found large quantities of marijuana, Ecstasy and so-called "black heroin," a popular party drug. Investigating officers are treating the case as a potential homicide.

Soler's drugs are now in the evidence room of the local police precinct. The medical examiner is scheduled to perform an autopsy Soler's body on Friday, including a tox screen, and will analyze a sample of the pigment on Monday. A spook can hover over the examiner's shoulder and learn the results of the autopsy — death by strychnine, with pigment ingredients also found in the body — by late Friday afternoon. If the crucible wants to learn more about the pigment, it must perform its own analysis.

Mark Soler left a blip-class hue when he died, but the Spectre guarding him promptly ate his ghost and moved on. No clue remains at Soler's house, but a character with Forebode might watch the whole sequence of events.

If the crucible actively tracks pigment dealers, the Storyteller might hand the characters a lead to Mark Soler and have them arrive at his house as he expires. In that case, they can try to rescue Soler from his Spectre watchman and attempt to wring his story out of him. Soler knows only that he took a hit of pigment before the pain struck.

DEATH OF A CUSTOMER

Gary Burchofsky plans to deal his pigment at the nightclubs, but he also sells a few hits before then. Friday morning's newspaper includes another brief story about a person screaming and thrashing in agony. College student Irene Folkes was in a public place, however, so she received medical attention sooner. Folkes survives

her poisoning but remains unconscious in a local hospital's intensive care ward. The attending physician recognized the symptoms of strychnine poisoning, and a tox screen confirms the diagnosis by Friday afternoon, as well as finding traces of other drugs. Folkes' chart tells the doctor's diagnosis.

Characters can try to extract the information about how Folkes poisoned herself. Waking Folkes without killing her requires an Intelligence + Medicine roll (difficulty 8). Forebode can trace her actions the previous day. A spook with Sandman (see p. 95) can enter Folkes' dreams to learn about her pigment purchase.

SPECTRE HUNTERS

The crucible might actively hunt Spectres. Such characters certainly notice the new Spectres in town. The Spectres gather in the week before the massacre, which is one clue that something's up. The new arrivals keep a low profile — uncharacteristically so, in the case of savage predators such as the Lost Boys and their Friendly Angel masters.

At first, the Spectres wander aimlessly and avoid encounters with other spooks. Careful surveillance of the Spectres reveals that they often visit a certain warehouse, Greek Row at the local university and the city's nightclubs and that they hang around for a few minutes at each location before moving on. On Friday, the Spectres gather around the party locations, but they do not attack spooks who come near. If anyone attacks a Spectre, it fights back, and a swarm of other Spectres soon arrive to join the fight. They do not leave their location to pursue characters, though.

Most Spectres cannot or will not talk to characters, but the Spectre doubles of spirit characters form a notable exception. Any spirit character finds his "evil twin" hobnobbing with the Spectres. Spectre doubles make a sudden push to run the crucible ragged through distractions. For instance, a Skinrider spirit's twin might possess some innocent person and attack the characters, or a Haunter's twin might set fire to a living character's house.

The evil twins are in on the poisoning plot, however, and can provide hints if the crucible can capture one. A character's Spectre double may offer the crucible something else it wants — such as, say, information about pigment trafficking, Radio Free Death or some enemy left over from the **Crusade of Ashes** story arc — if the characters will merely stay out of town for the weekend.

PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS

Storytellers can also find personal reasons for characters to get involved and care about what happens.

- A projector might have a "day job" that leads him into contact with the pigment trade, Spectres or the location of a party. For instance, a projector who managed to find employment as a cop could work for the narcotics



squad or, if attached to homicide instead, might be assigned to one of the early deaths from tainted pigment. A bodyguard could accompany his client to a fashionable nightclub and see Spectres hanging around. A reporter could find herself sent anywhere the Storyteller wants.

- Friends and family make good “hooks” to draw in the crucible. Having a sister addicted to pigment gives a character special reason to trace the drug network and stop it. A ghostly acquaintance who likes to haunt nightclubs might notice the Spectres. Loved ones who die in the massacre and become prey for Spectres turn the story into a revenge epic.

- Of course, characters might already hunt Spectres to avenge past friends, relatives or partners destroyed by the malign ghosts.

- Allies, contacts, mentors or patrons might somehow become involved in the lead-up to the massacre and draw in the crucible. For instance, an ally on the police force might ask a projector to help investigate Mark Soler's death, or a businessman patron could ask a character to pull his daughter out of the pigment scene.

ARRANGING A MASSACRE

While the characters chase Spectres, pigment dealers and psychic visions, the poisoner's pawns receive

their consignments of pigment, while young people throughout the city prepare for party night.

THE DEALERS AND ONE OTHER

Terrel & Squib distributes pigment through a complex smuggling network with the help of spooks. Skinriders possess innocent people to use as drug couriers. Haunters possess vehicles and use them to carry drugs under conditions no mundane vehicle could survive. Wisps mesmerize border guards to help drug couriers pass, while the company's few Phantasms may hide drug shipments through illusion. Banshees, meanwhile, forecast which routes are most likely to avoid law enforcement. The system is highly compartmentalized, so few people know more than one or two steps in the chain — and since some of the critical links are run by spooks, mortal law-enforcement efforts quickly reach (forgive the expression) a dead end.

Once a shipment of pigment reaches a city, the drug spreads through mundane channels. One or two local kingpins receive the pigment and sell it to distributors, who sell it, in turn, to small-time street dealers. The police have no trouble nabbing these small fries. Whenever the police take one dealer off the streets, though, a new pusher takes his place in less than a week.

TRACING THE PIGMENT

Ike Mortenson didn't just have large quantities of strychnine sitting around, nor did he have the medical expertise necessary to poison the pigment so flawlessly. That alone should clue the characters in that something larger is going on, but providing a clear path to Terrel & Squib might be a little more difficult. Here are a few suggestions toward making that leap in logic. You can provided hints to prod the players down any of these avenues if they succeed in Intelligence + Investigation or Streetwise rolls for their characters. Contacts or Influence in the medical or investigative communities might also help.

- **Tracing the drug:** T&S is careful to cover its tracks, but with help from Grace Ishida and Radio Free Death, or simply by careful and painstaking legwork (perhaps capturing and interrogating some of the spooks involved in the distribution network) the characters can discover that Terrel & Squib is responsible for producing the pigment that wound up at the massacres. They will discover, however, that it wasn't poisoned when it left its facilities.

- **Other dealers:** Not every drug dealer is an uneducated scumbag. Pigment sees a lot of use among college students, and characters willing to follow a chain of information ("I don't know much about this, but I've got a buddy who's a Pharm major") might find students or even professors who have interned or even been employed by T&S's pharmaceuticals division. While T&S takes pains to hide its role in pigment traffic from the large body of its work force, gossip always occurs, and some folk know enough to lead the characters to the company.

- **The poison:** The strychnine used to poison the pigment is probably the best possible clue. It's shipped in opaque, frosted plastic bottles with a manufacturer's logo on the bottom. While the manufacturer isn't T&S (it's a drug manufacturer whose business practices are completely aboveboard), the characters discover that only a few large companies buy poison from the company — and one of them is T&S. If any of the characters analyzes (or arranges to have analyzed) a sample of the strychnine, they discover that it's been professionally modified to mix with pigment. This information provides proof that someone very knowledgeable was behind the poisoning, someone with knowledge of ghosts and pigment and with enough resources to engineer it. The list of such culprits should be fairly short, and Terrel and Squib should be at the top.

Different dealers work with different types of clientele. Many pigment dealers sell small quantities of the drug to anyone who asks, vending their supply to several people over the course of a few days. Other dealers sell

exclusively at nightclubs, raves or other venues where they have connections.

In the city where "The Pale Rider" takes place, a Frightener (one of the few able to possess people) takes control of one local pigment jobber, Ike Mortenson. When this Spectre breaks the black heroin into separate doses, he poisons several batches. The Frightener and other Spectres see to it that the poisoned batches go to dealers who sell their wares at parties and other group events. These dealers typically sell all their stock in one night, to people who use the drug on the spot. The dealers know nothing and, indeed, many of them die the same night from using their own product.

We provide descriptions for some of the crucial people who distribute the tainted pigment. Storytellers can create more such characters as needed. We assign Traits to the dealers who might become ghosts. The others do not require Traits because they are normal humans with no special abilities — at least, nothing special compared to spooks.

RAY LATOURE

The city's chief pigment importer has a degree in Business Administration and an office downtown. He trades commodities in the Third World. Ray did his first drug deal to tide him over during a short cash-flow problem and found that narcotics made an excellent source of venture capital. Terrel & Squib chose him as their jobber for the city. Most distributors, such as Ike Mortenson, buy their pigment from Ray. Ray himself knows only that pigment comes from Terrel & Squib labs. He knows nothing about how the pigment reaches him, since a different person delivers it each time.



Ray communicates with his distributors and his own suppliers through anonymous e-mail and encrypted, digital cell phones. He owns several properties in the city, such as a small market, a motel and a used bookstore. Ray rotates the pigment deliveries between properties, to be less predictable, and insists that his customers receive their pigment at a different place each time. His distributors pay in cash, which Ray launders through offshore accounts and business ventures. Terrel & Squib receives its payment in the form of electronic fund transfers through third-world banks.

Ray doesn't feel entirely comfortable with his source of extra income but has grown accustomed enough to importing the drug that the moral implications don't nag at him too much. He is also fairly naïve with regards to the effects of pigment on those who use it — he is under the impression that the occasional hit of pigment does no real harm.

After the poisonings, the Ghost Assassin murders Ray, but he endures as a drone. The challenge is not to defeat him, but to wring useful information out of him.

Image: Ray Latoure is a Caucasian man of middle height. He is in his late 30s, just starting to spread around the waist and with a touch of gray in his short, wavy brown hair. He wears silk suits in a variety of dark colors, with gold buttons, cufflinks and a tie tack, a class ring and a large gold wristwatch.

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

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 2, Bureaucracy 3, Empathy 1, Etiquette 3, Expression 2, Finance 3, Firearms 1, Intrigue 3, Investigation 2, Law 3, Linguistics (Native: English; Spanish) 1, Politics 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Rogue

Willpower: 6

Vitality: 2

Spite: 5

Equipment/Offensive Abilities: .38 automatic pistol (as mortal); none yet (as drone)

IKE MORTENSON

Ray Latoure sells boxes of pigment capsules to several jobbers, such as Ike Mortenson. Ike was thrown out of high school for selling pot to other students. He didn't much care, since he had already learned everything he needed to know. Fifteen years later, Ike is a professional dealer in marijuana, heroin, meth, Ecstasy and any other drug that's currently popular — now including pigment. Ike left the streets years ago. He now sells to street dealers such as Joe Carwood and Gary



Burchofsky and never meets the end users. He does not sample his own stock, either. Back in high school, Ike paid attention to the messages he heard about the dangers of drugs. He just drew somewhat different conclusions than his teachers intended. Ike has no idea that he poisoned the pigment.

Ike Mortenson is a black man of medium height, in his early 30s, with a narrow, bony face and close-cropped hair. He wears conservative gray or brown business suits with no jewelry. He does not need any Traits. He dies before the crucible finds him and does not leave a ghost.

GARY BURCHOFSKY

Gary Burchofsky has held a few jobs that he thought were beneath him, such as flipping burgers and running



a cash register, but he is now a full-time drug dealer. Gary sells at nightclubs. While he's tried pigment, his addiction of choice is cocaine, which he thinks makes him smarter and sharper. He does not himself sell cocaine — the competition in that market is too cutthroat for his tastes. Gary thinks he's a real lady's man and stays at nightclubs after he sells his stock in hopes that he'll get lucky. If a woman's short on cash, he's always ready to trade a hit of pigment or cocaine for sex. He survives the massacre and flees the city.

Gary Burchofsky is a Caucasian man in his late 20s. He wears his straight, black hair slicked back, which unfortunately emphasizes the slightly rodent-like appearance created by his prominent nose and weak chin. He typically wears a black denim jacket and jeans, with a white T-shirt, polished black shoes, a gold pinkie ring and black shades.

JOE CARWOOD

Joe Carwood lost his job as a sales clerk because of his pigment addiction. He makes more money now, selling pigment to other addicts. For Joe, however, selling black heroin is more than a business. It comes near to a religious calling. Joe believes that pigment opens his mind to cosmic consciousness and contact with higher intelligences from other worlds. He doesn't believe any talk of ghosts. Joe thinks that the strange figures who talk to him during his pigment high are extraterrestrial space brothers who've come to guide humanity to its next stage of spiritual evolution. A number of local ghosts take tremendous amusement from jerking Joe this way and that, seeing how many ways they can make Joe embarrass himself at the behest of his "space brothers."

Joe deals at raves and other semi-public parties. He also supplies a few small-time dealers and bulk buyers on

college campuses, such as Lauryl Vance. Many of Joe's customers enjoy yanking his chain about the "space brothers" as much as the ghosts do. He is one of the local drug scene's leading eccentrics. During his last high, he met a new space brother, who told him to buy all the pigment he could and sell it at an upcoming rave. In fact, he should distribute the drug any way he can at the rave, whether people ask for it or not.

Joe Carwood is a short, chunky Caucasian man in his early 30s, with unkempt blond hair, a round, soft face and a vague expression. He usually wears brown slacks, a T-shirt with flying saucer imagery and a windbreaker with a book by Timothy Leary, John Lilly or Robert Anton Wilson stuffed in the pocket.

Joe does not require any Traits. He cannot fight the characters in any meaningful way. If the crucible cannot find him before the rave, he dies, and the Spectres reap his ghost.

LAURL VANCE

So far, Lauryl Vance's pigment addiction has not interfered too much with her undergraduate studies (Theater Arts) at the city's university. Lauryl tried many drugs once or twice before she settled on pigment as her high of choice. She has interested several of her sorority sisters in black heroin as well. They consider it a safe, cheap and uniquely intense high. Lauryl does the buying for all them and sometimes buys extra to sell to other people on Greek Row. She usually buys from Joe Carwood.

Lauryl also has a ghost boyfriend. During a pigment high, she met a student who died in a drunken accident a few years before and accidentally resolved one of his tethers, raising him from a drone to a fully conscious ghost. Lauryl still thinks that her boyfriend Bobby is a hallucination, even though they are lovers. She has accidentally projected while high on pigment but does not know how to project deliberately and without the drug. Her ability to see spirits flickers on and off: At any given minute, she has a chance of seeing a ghost. At the beginning of any scene in which she is present, roll her Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8). If she succeeds, she sees a faint outline of any spook present. Characters with very high Vitality (8 or more) are more clearly visible — she can make out their features and some details.

Image: Lauryl Vance is a Caucasian woman in her early 20s, with straight brown hair framing a classic heart-shaped face. She's taller than average, and dresses in "hemp chic," with earth-tone blouses and slacks, Birkenstock sandals and cross-shaped earrings.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 1

Abilities: Academics 1, Awareness 2, Computer 1, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Expression 1, Linguistics 1,





Medicine 1, Meditation 1, Performance 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Shade: Haunter

Lament: Skimmer (later Hue)

Nature: Socialite

Willpower: 6

Vitality: 7

Spite: 2

Offensive Abilities: Inhabit

BOBBY WELLS

It happens once every few years at every major university. A frat party gets out of hand, one of the frat brothers drinks and pops and tokes a little too much, and... he dies. Bobby Wells almost died twice before he shuffled off the mortal coil. He wasn't even a real member of the fraternity — just a new pledge going through the early hazing. Being stoned helped him avoid realizing he was dead for three years. He just kept partying, unseen and unheard by the living.

This year, Bobby's old fraternity moved out, and a sorority moved in. Bobby vaguely noticed that there were girls around, but what's a party without chicks? Things changed when Lauryl Vance took pigment at a party and started dancing with a cute guy whom no one else could see. Bobby ended up in Lauryl's bed, and she said he was the nicest frat boy she'd ever met. Lauryl didn't know it, but anxiety over whether he'd made it into the fraternity was one of Bobby's tethers, while the pigment and some imaginary sex enabled Lauryl to infuse him with Vitality. It was a fluke, but it raised Bobby from blip to echo.

Although his mind remains clouded, Bobby has started to realize that something is very wrong. Lauryl lives in the house, and the fraternity doesn't. Lauryl occasionally calls him a flashback to a pigment trip, which confuses him. Other times, she doesn't see or hear him for hours at a time, which frightens him. Bobby does not yet know how to materialize, but he is nevertheless a Phantasm. He subconsciously uses Bedlam to give himself and Lauryl the physical sensations of making love. Bobby is quite devoted to his girlfriend, since she's the only person who talks to him. He has not yet met his Spectre twin, who also recently awakened and participates in the massacre.

In life, Bobby was a Business Administration undergraduate, but his passions were tennis and guitar. He still needs one or two tethers resolved before he achieves the full Vitality possible for his Shade and Nature.

Image: Bobby is a pleasant-looking, light-skinned young black man. He has an athletic build and dresses in the memory of conservative, "preppy" clothes.

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

Abilities: Academics 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Expression 1, Finance 1, Intuition 1, Law 1, Performance 1, Subterfuge 2

Shade: Phantasm

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Dreamer

Willpower: 4

Vitality: 5

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Bedlam



THE PARTIES

Every weekend sees many parties, but most of them are small, private affairs where most people consume nothing stronger than alcohol. Some of them see a little pot or harder drugs, but seldom in quantity. Although some of the tainted pigment reaches these smaller gatherings, the poisoner targeted larger and more public gatherings. Numerous people buy drugs at the city's nightclubs, and most of these people consume what they buy on the spot. Greek Row at the local university also sees hard-core partying on a large scale. Most importantly, from the poisoner's point of view, a rave is scheduled for the weekend. Pigment has become a popular rave drug, used almost as much as Ecstasy. The poisoner — and the Spectres — counts on the rave to produce at least 100 hues.

THE RAVE

The rave takes place at a vacant warehouse. The organizers of the rave legally rented the warehouse for a week. The company knew it was for a rave instead of for temporary bulk storage, no matter what the contract said, but the money was good and the lawyers said no one could prove any liability.

The warehouse is a huge, empty space two stories high. The organizers removed the grid of tube-steel scaffolding that usually holds crates and pallets. They also hung strobes, lasers, colored spotlights and speakers among the ranks of fluorescent tubes on the ceiling. One wall holds loading docks with huge, sheet-metal doors that slide up and down when someone pulls on a chain. These are all locked for the rave: The customers enter through a smaller side door, where they pay the entrance fee and a bouncer inks a mark on their hand. One end of the warehouse holds a small block of offices, including a glass-fronted office that looks down on the cargo area. A narrow stair leads from the warehouse floor up to this office. The rave's organizers monitor the rave from this control booth, but the rest of the office space is locked so the partiers cannot steal or vandalize equipment and paperwork. The DJ sets up his stage directly below the glass-walled office, flanked by massive speakers. A concessionaire sells bottled water from a table against the rear wall. If people want other refreshments, they must bring them themselves.

Most people learn about the rave through word of mouth or a website. The rave opens its doors at 9 PM but does not really get going until 11. It is meant to break up around dawn.

At the rave, a DJ plays techno dance music at a brain-melting volume. Strobe lights and lasers flicker over the crowd, which writhes and shakes in time to the beat. Young men and women with white armbands circulate through the crowd, ready to spray water on

overheated dancers or pull aside anyone who seems ready to pass out. A sound-deadening partition screens off part of the warehouse as the "chill-out room," where people can sit down or dance to slower and softer music from another DJ and recuperate from the crash after a drug high. Many people bring their own drugs (mostly ketamine and Ecstasy), but several dealers also circulate through the crowd. Four paramedics from a private service wait outside with an ambulance in case of overdoses or injuries.

Joe Carwood dances with the rest of the crowd in between pigment deals. He loves raves for their energy as well as the business he receives.

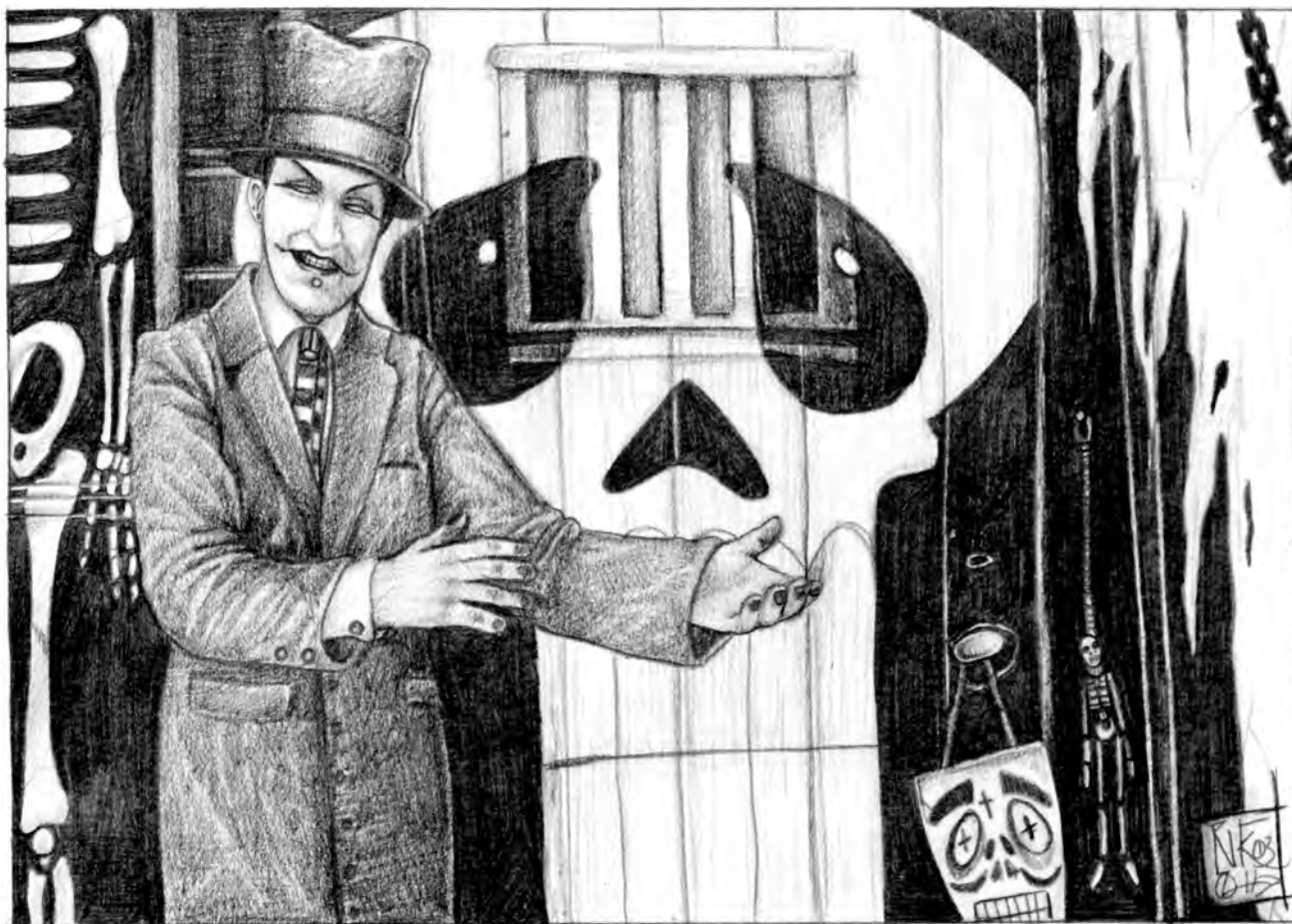
THE NIGHTCLUBS

Dealers working at least half a dozen clubs sell poisoned pigment on the fateful night. Gary Burchofsky is one of them. He sells the bulk of his stock at a new club called the Haunted Palace. Between pigment and the Orpheus Group, ghosts have become a fad. The Haunted Palace promises its customers the "pigment experience" without the need for drugs... but some people want the drugs anyway.

The Haunted Palace is part of a block of storefronts in one of the older parts of town. Plywood turrets and gables rise above a storefront painted black with white ghosts and skeletons. Customers pay in a small vestibule just inside the door, then proceed to the dance floor. The two-story interior is decorated in classic Addams Family faux-Victorian, with plaster scrollwork on the walls, electric candles in sconces and imitation cobwebs sprayed around the edge of the ceiling. The furniture features lots of black velvet and carved wood-grain plastic. The male staff wears undertaker suits and top hats. Even with the air conditioning on full blast, they sweat like pigs from the heat generated by so many active bodies. The female staff dresses in slinky black dresses split low down the front and high up the sides, with black lipstick and pale makeup for a Mistress-of-the-Dark look. A small stage provides a venue for live music, while a bar topped with imitation black marble dispenses drinks and snacks.

Cameras project images of ghosts on the walls. Up on the second story, niches hold the angled glass pane and lights for a more sophisticated illusion called Pepper's Ghost. The glass panes reflect a transparent image of dancers out of sight behind the walls, for a truly spectral effect. Some of the dancers are shapely young women dressed in veils of white gauze and not much else, while others wear skeleton costumes or old-fashioned suits with skull-face masks and plastic chains. For all the kitsch, the Haunted Palace has become the leading place for the city's glitterati and wannabes to see and be seen. On Friday, the nightclub is packed.

The few local ghosts who naturally possess enough Vitality for self-awareness know about the Haunted



Palace. Opinion is divided over whether the club is a tasteless mockery of the bodily challenged or a hilarious place to watch the living and practice manifestation.

The other nightclubs are rather more ordinary. They simply provide a dance floor, a bar, a space for a DJ and some flashing lights.

GREEK ROW PARTIES

At the university, not a weekend passes without at least one fraternity or sorority throwing a party. Several dozen people usually crowd into the hosting house. The Greeks crank up the stereo, tap a keg or three of beer and dance and whoop and socialize until the wee hours of the morning, when everyone has either found a one-night stand, passed out or gone home. Furniture often ends up on the lawn or the sidewalk, along with a great many bottles.

Naturally, a certain amount of drug use also takes place, though alcohol is always the principal intoxicant, and some of the collegians enjoy pigment. Lauryl Vance and her friends are among them. On the night of the fateful party, Lauryl brings pigment for herself and her five friends and another 10 hits that she sells at the party for \$20 each. She has already delivered about a dozen other doses of pigment to students who plan to attend other parties.

The college dormitories also see many parties on Friday night, but these are much smaller affairs. Any pigment-users at these parties buy their drugs individually, with no plans to resell or distribute them to many other people. Any poisoned pigment at these parties got there by accident — not that that means anything to the people who die.

OTHER PARTIES

Greek Row, the rave and the nightclubs do not exhaust the range of parties that receive the tainted pigment, but those three venues present the greatest concentration of victims. A group of four pigment users regularly meet for a group high every Friday — their buyer receives the poisoned drug, and they die together. An addict prefers to buy in bulk and stretch out his stash for months: He looks like a possible dealer, and so, he receives a deadlier dose than he expects. A young executive receives a promotion and decides to celebrate by throwing a party for all his friends, with pigment as a party favor. That adds another dozen victims. A dance at the local high school includes a dozen or so pigment users daring enough to indulge under the noses of their parent and faculty proctors — it's the last party they ever attend. The Storyteller can create as many of these smaller parties and smaller massacres as she wants,

since the characters probably do not learn about them until after the fact.

THE SPECTRES

Dozens of Spectres come to the city to collect the maddened souls of the pigment victims. Most of these are minor spirits, such as Lost Boys, Fetches and a new breed, the Clappers. The characters also encounter a few more powerful Spectres, such as a Frightener or two. A clowder of cats or a pack of dogs under the control of a Chupacabra might also be present — after the poison takes effect, the animals run among the partiers, tripping up paramedics, biting at the dying and generally heightening the horror of the experience. The larger the party, the more Spectres gather to reap the dying.

Two or three minor Spectres lurk at each of the lesser parties where only a few people die.

At the nightclubs and Greek Row, place one Spectre for every character in the crucible.

The rave receives at least two Spectres for every character. Adjust the number of Spectres to match the power and tactical skill of the crucible — this is meant to be a tough fight. The Reaper called Valentino oversees the slaughter at the rave.

If a particular Spectre emerged as a repeated enemy of the crucible, that spirit should certainly join the roster so the characters get a chance for a rematch. Spectre “twins” of spirit characters may fall in this category, if they are available.

Giving the crucible an “arch-nemesis” may seem hokey, but such a repeated enemy helps tie a chronicle together. Characters eagerly follow up any hint of a former foe’s activities, which gives you another hook to draw the crucible into the plot. Few victories bring a greater sense of achievement than the final defeat of a persistent foe, too. The arch-nemesis does not even need to be the crucible’s most powerful foe to become the enemy the players love to hate. (Note that “The Pale Rider” begins a story arc in which the ghosts of Project Flatline serve as the crucible’s ongoing enemy. See Chapter Four for more about Project Flatline.)

THE TAIN OF DEATH

The poison in the pigment is a form of strychnine chemically modified to take effect more slowly than the toxin normally does. The altered poison is just as deadly as its original form, though. The black heroin becomes a Trojan horse carrying the white strychnine, a true pale rider, into the bodies of the users.

The strychnine takes effect 40 to 60 minutes after ingestion. Strychnine attacks the central nervous system. Along with agonizing pain, all the victim’s muscles contract and spasm at once, leaving the victim arching

and convulsing wildly. Loud noises and sudden lights make the convulsions worse — a real problem at a rave or any other loud party. The victims can dislocate or break their own limbs from the force of the spasms. They eventually die from asphyxiation or sheer exhaustion.

Intravenous injections of Valium can save a victim’s life. The symptoms of strychnine poisoning resemble those of tetanus, however, which may confuse paramedics.

Three hundred and eighteen people die if the characters do nothing to reduce the pigment distribution or save lives once the poison takes effect.

THE DANCES OF DEATH

As Friday evening approaches, people arrive for work at the nightclubs. The rave organizers set up the sound system, light show and refreshments. On Greek Row, Lauryl and her friends primp before they set out for a neighboring fraternity house, and she distributes her pigment capsules. Gary Burchofsky and Joe Carwood eat dinner and dress for the night’s business. The Spectres gather at every location and watch.

VALENTINO

The Spectre dubbed Valentino seems to be a variation on the Reaper breed. Unlike the more infamous Grimm, Valentino is a dapper figure. He wears his hooded black cloak over a Saville Row suit. Valentino also constantly radiates an aura of blue flame, like that of a propane torch. The Reaper’s name comes from his tendency to grab his victims and sweep them back into exaggerated kisses straight out of old romantic movies while he burns them to death and beyond. Although Valentino never speaks, he expertly mimes the social graces with a mocking sense of humor. He never *acts* like he means to frighten someone.

VALENTINO

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Etiquette 5, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Melee 5, Occult 2, Performance 5 (Dance, Mime), Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Gallant

Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Carapace (+5B/5L soak), Flit, Hive-Mind, Immolate, Manifest, Rend

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense
Reaper Scythe	-2	+1	9A	+0

CLAPPERS

The Orpheus Group encountered the Clappers only twice and did not learn much on either occasion. These Spectres do not possess a human form. A Clapper looks like two huge, clawed hands joined at the wrists, flying on bat-like wings. (These wings are just a bit of visual color for using Flit.) Clappers swoop down to grab victims and carry them away. A Clapper can squeeze and gouge at a victim even while it gains altitude. If a victim seems too tough or too formidable, the Clapper simply drops him. Clappers are not very powerful, though. Both times Orpheus encountered Clappers, the creatures served as minions and transportation for more powerful Spectres.

Several Clappers come to the crucible's city to participate in the massacre. They stay in town afterward. They cannot speak, but may clap their hands to show impatience or excitement.

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

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Stealth 4, Survival 2

Nature: Competitor

Willpower: 4

Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flit, Hive-Mind

The parties don't really get started until 9 or 10 PM. The self-consciously cool try to arrive two hours late, just to keep everyone else waiting... a strategy that would work better if they weren't at least half the clientele. Joe goes to the rave early, around nine. He sells several hits, but his customers wait until the party is hotter before they take the drug. Valentino dances with the crowd — strictly ballroom, though, using his scythe as an ersatz partner in a macabre parody of Fred Astaire. Lauryl and her friends take their pigment together around 9:30. By 10, Joe is selling busily and Gary arrives at his first nightclub. Around the city, several people at smaller parties have already taken their pigment.

About 10:30, the first few victims feel the poison strike. A boy at a high-school dance collapses, screaming. A young woman at the rave spasms and falls. The first paramedics to respond don't realize they have a mass poisoning. Joe Carwood doesn't make the connection either. He and another dozen people take pigment to soothe their nerves after the disruption. Meanwhile, Gary Burchofsky decides that business is too slow and drives to another nightclub.

By 11:00, the Spectral feast is in full swing. Ten people lie dying at Burchofsky's first nightclub.



He has already sold much of his stock at the Haunted Palace and is heading for a third club. At the rave, the paramedics scramble to treat dozens of screaming, twitching victims. They have already called every hospital and emergency service in the city. The rave is over. Hundreds of terrified young people huddle together, silent and shaking or sobbing in terror that they might be next. The media have heard and TV news cameras catch the human drama. The local stations break into regular programming for a special report on the mass death. Unseen by mortal eyes, the Spectres stalk amongst the dying, snatching at the departing souls. They harvest Carwood, and he learns that the space brothers are not friendly.

At 11:30, Lauryl and her friends lie dead. Bobby flees when he sees a Clapper carry off Lauryl's ghost. Bobby runs through the streets, screaming in the faces of passers-by as he tries to make someone see and hear him. If any characters are near Greek Row, their high Vitality attracts his notice, and he begs them to rescue his girlfriend.

By midnight, hundreds have died. Genuine ghostly horror has struck the Haunted Palace. Gary has finally seen customers die. He realizes that his pigment killed them, jumps in his car and races home to start packing. The Spectres have fed well and dragged dozens of hues to the building they've chosen as the site of their hive. In the hiss of the TV static, Radio Free Death says:

*<static>reporting at least 100 dead... and they're all
<static>Oh, God! <static>happening again. <static>Radio-Free Death, signing out.*

At 1:15 AM, the Spectres destroy their captive souls all at once and expend massive amounts of Spite. The Stormwall rips, and a ghost-quake sweeps across the city. Ectoplasm fountains out from beyond the Shroud and coalesces into a huge, festering boil of jelly that completely envelops Mayfair Greens (see p. 133), unfelt and unknown by mortals. The Spectres now have a hive. Later hives do not require such extraordinary measures — just the first, the one that begins the invasion from beyond the Stormwall.

WHAT THE CRUCIBLE CAN DO

Ask the players to state where their characters are as Friday night falls and what they are doing. Track their actions by half-hour increments, and compare them to the timeline of the parties. The characters cannot stop the massacre entirely, but they can reduce the death toll.

Gary and Joe are each responsible for about 40 deaths. Neither one is the only dealer working the rave and the nightclubs. Other dealers rack up similar body counts. Around the city, small-time distributors such as Lauryl kill

two to ten people each. Unfortunately, the characters do not have time from first understanding the threat to the massacre itself to find every pigment dealer. Still, catching even a few dealers before the parties start saves many lives.

The crucible can also try to intercept the tainted pigment at the parties. The rave presents the largest target and the largest number of lives to save. Unless the characters arrive early and catch each dealer as he enters, however, they cannot save everyone. At best, preventing the deaths at the rave saves 100 lives.

Crashing a party and telling people not to take the pigment because it's poisoned works in the smaller settings. At the rave or a nightclub, simply getting people's attention without using ghostly powers can be difficult, and bouncers stand ready to eject anyone who screams about poisoned drugs. Such warnings can cut the final death toll by a third.

Helping the paramedics can be just as useful. Just telling the paramedics what poison the victims took helps a bit: The paramedics know what to do as soon as the symptoms hit. There aren't enough paramedics in the city, however, to treat every case as it happens. Once again, the rave presents the greatest opportunity to save lives.

Whatever the crucible tries to do, however, the Spectres try to interfere. They attack any spooks that intrude on the dances of death. The Spectres who can materialize do so to attack characters who stay in their bodies. They may even attack the paramedics or the terrified bystanders — anything to keep the crucible from saving the victims of the tainted pigment.

After midnight, however, the Spectres retreat with the last of their victims. Nothing matters to them except gathering to evoke the hive. The crucible cannot hope to fight more than three dozen Spectres at once, but a swift raid can rescue a few captive hues.

THE AFTERMATH

The hive's eruption does not end the terror of "The Pale Rider." Indeed, characters may realize that the terror has just begun.

A HORDE OF HUES

Dozens of hues fan out across the city. They are dazed, terrified and angry from the memory of their agonizing deaths. Most of them are blip-class entities, who quickly head to their mortal homes or families and wreak havoc as they try to find a way to end their pain. Some are echoes, more aware but no less dangerous in their pain-fueled anger. The crucible's city becomes the most haunted municipal area on Earth, with manifold consequences.

Angry hues may attack other ghosts. The characters are probably the most high-profile spooks in town to the post-death community. Quite possibly, they raised several of the city's ghosts to full consciousness. The crucible

“THIS SUCKS”

Running a story such as “The Pale Rider,” in which a certain amount of tragedy and death is not only inevitable but essential for the ongoing plotline, is a tricky proposition for any Storyteller. You must give the players enough information that they can make a difference, but not enough that they can stop the massacre entirely. You must give them opportunities for victory on some level, but the hive must still appear. This is a balancing act, and letting the players in on too much of the plot too early in the game means that they may well have time to stop the whole thing... and if they realize that, they will be justifiably annoyed if you stonewall their clever plans in the name of “metaplot.”

The way around this is to be extremely stingy with the information you let them discover. Make Forebode rolls yourself, behind a screen or otherwise out of sight. If a character attempts to intimidate a dealer, make the player roll Manipulation + Intimidation (or whatever seems appropriate) and give the dealer a Willpower roll to oppose it (and of course, you can fudge these rolls all you like). If the players feel as though they’ve worked for whatever information they’ve acquired, the perception is “Wow, this is a pretty tough story,” not “Wow, the Storyteller is totally railroading us.”

Also, give the players opportunities for victory on some scale. They should be able to save individuals such as Lauryl Vance (for which they gain two new ghostly allies: her and Bobby Wells). If they have loved ones involved in the massacre, they should be able to save those people, as well. And, of course, defeating Valentino or any other powerful Spectre (or spirit characters’ Spectral twins) makes for a good achievement.

You could also adjust the power level of the hive at Mayfair Greens (see Chapter Four) based on how many lives (or souls) the characters manage to save during “The Pale Rider.” All in all, the players should feel like active participants in a story, not spectators.

receives a delegation of ghosts who demand that the characters do something to curb and calm the new arrivals.

MASS HYSTERIA

Society suffers consequences from the upsurge of ghosts, too.

- Parents panic. Hundreds of parents in the city, and thousands across the nation, keep their children home from school in the days after the massacre. Less than a dozen high school kids died at the rave and the high school dance. Many parents, however, keep their chil-

dren home as a reflexive, panicked response to a terror they cannot understand.

- The media has a field day. There’s nothing like mass death to sell papers or boost ratings. TV stations and cable news channels show footage of the victims over and over again.

- The media wants talking heads to venture sage opinions, so any person who’s read a book or two about ghosts — or simply has seen a lot of movies — can get on TV as a “ghost expert.” Some of these instant experts get swelled heads and try their hand at amateur ghostbusting. Most of the “hauntings” they investigate are just anxious people who heard mice in the walls or felt a cold draft, but a few of them manage to find (and annoy) one of the new hues... or a Spectre. The crucible may find a chance to rescue one of these feckless ghost-hunters (if they think he’s worth saving). Two or three others meet messy deaths or at least serious humiliation, increasing the public’s hysteria.

- Once the news gets out that all the dead took pigment, outraged citizens across the nation call for tougher penalties against the drug. National and state or provincial legislatures quickly accede. Black heroin replaces real heroin, crack and crystal meth as the media’s favorite pharmaceutical menace.

- Pigment cults come under attack whenever they are found. In the crucible’s own city, the police try to round up the local branch of the Temple of the Mother of Vision. (If you want to substitute a cult of your own invention or one of the others in this book, go ahead.) The cops already know where the cult meets — the Temple is a public church, after all — but hitherto did not see the cult as dangerous the way, say, junkies robbing convenience stores are dangerous. The pigment users in the Temple seemed like *quiet* drug-addled lunatics. Once someone points out the degree to which the Temple’s theology centers on pigment, the public immediately blames the cult for the massacre. If the cops don’t arrest the local group quickly, angry citizens form a lynch mob and attack one of the Temple’s services. Most of the cultists die... and become more hues to feed waiting Spectres.

- Pigment distribution in the city almost ends for the next two months. Almost everyone who had any pigment flushed it down the toilet, out of fear that it was poisoned too. In time, however, addicts demand their fixes, and enterprising individuals arise to meet the demand — only now, the price is double what it was before the massacre. Terrel & Squib does very well indeed.

NOTORIOUS AGAIN

Perhaps the most frightening possibility comes if the crucible acted visibly and openly to save lives... especially if they used their ghostly powers in front of witnesses. The media descends on the characters like starving

hyenas on the carcass of a gazelle. Reporters from around the world converge on them, demanding interviews and investigating every detail of their past. Forget about a private life — the characters become instant celebrities. Corporate flacks arrive in a second wave, hustling for product endorsements, appearances on “reality” TV shows, *anything* that can exploit their sudden fame. Crazy women tell tabloids that they had a photogenic spook’s love child.

About two weeks later, the backlash begins. Any new identities created in the aftermath of **Crusade of Ashes** crumble under the investigative onslaught. The crucible’s past with the Orpheus Group comes to light and is widely reported. So is every lie their enemies told while they were hunted, and fame-hungry fraudsters make up a few new ones. Before long, some psychologist or criminal profiler suggests that the characters themselves committed the poisoning, so they could look like heroes and get media attention by saving people. They toss around scholarly sounding jargon such as “hypervigilance complex” and “Münchausen syndrome by proxy.” Other media-appointed experts accuse the characters of being frauds who merely fake having uncanny powers. If the characters embrace the spotlight and try to use their new fame, they are called grandstanders. If they shun the media, they are accused of having something to hide.

After a month or so, the media feeding frenzy dies down. The characters know they are about to slip off the front page when the talking heads start arguing about the controversy itself and whether the characters have received too much exposure. The media shifts to discussing its favorite subject — itself — and the whole issue disappears a week or two later.

Naturally, the characters come under pressure to deal with any hint of ghostly troublemaking. This can happen while one section of the media lionizes them, another section reviles them as villains and a third section calls them fakes. Even after the feeding frenzy ends, the characters remain notorious.

CLEANUP

The crucible has little time to discover who poisoned the pigment, how and why. The day after the massacre, someone starts killing the people who distributed the tainted pigment — someone who can appear and disappear, who can reach into locked rooms and strike his victim dead with bolts of fire or lightning. Someone wants to tie up loose ends.

The crucible has one day to find Ike Mortenson before the assassin kills him in his home. Mortenson pulls a gun and fires two shots before his assassin fries him with a bolt of lightning, leaving two scorched patches on the polished hardwood floor. If a person had stood on

those two patches, both bullets would have gone squarely through his chest before shattering the TV set.

Mortenson does not know that he poisoned the pigment because someone else was using his body at the time, but an investigative spook could look into his past or his mind to find the period of possession. The vial that held the modified strychnine powder is also still in Mortenson’s garbage can, until the next garbage pickup.

As soon as he learns about the pigment massacre, Ray Latoure makes his own cleanup efforts. He tries to destroy all the drugs at his various properties and burn any paperwork about his lucrative second business. He also moves all his money offshore and holes up in his penthouse apartment. He is apparently struck by lightning two days after the massacre, while working in his office. Only the continuing furor over the pigment massacre keeps his death away from the public’s attention. Latoure leaves a drone that endlessly repeats a cycle of purge the computer, shred the documents, clutch his chest and fall, purge the computer, shred the documents, clutch his chest and fall....

Ray Latoure is the most important character the crucible can save — whether before his death or after. He knows more about Terrel & Squib’s pigment network than anyone else in town, including Radio Free Death. Ray is a clever man with lots of money to spend on detectives and bribes. He doesn’t like doing business with cutouts. Ray knows that Terrel & Squib manufacture pigment and knows a few links in the chain from production to him. Before the massacre, he does not willingly share what he knows because he does not want to incriminate himself. After the massacre, the crucible might persuade him that talking is the less dangerous course: Better to risk conviction as a drug dealer than as an accessory to mass murder. After his death, if the characters can resolve enough of Ray’s tethers to raise him to full awareness, he gladly cooperates. He presumes (erroneously) that Terrel & Squib sent the assassin and wants revenge.

Gary escapes because he was first to run and he keeps a low profile. Finding one man with a suitcase of money in his trunk, driving across country, is left as an exercise for the ingenuity of the crucible. The assassin isn’t up to the challenge.

The crucible can gain information about the pigment distribution network from dealers they capture or rescue (before death or after) — and possibly from a surprise informant from the Temple of the Mother of Vision. The cultists are terrified, and some are ready to talk. Their mystical beliefs might not make much sense, but they tell what they know about pigment distribution. The cultists usually obtain their sacramental pigment from the central temple — a completely different pipeline than the other dealers — but sometimes, the cult

runs short. On such occasions, the cult buys "the holy sacrament" from Ike Mortenson or other dealers. In return for their information about pigment jobbers, they want the crucible's help in avoiding legal trouble as well as assassins.

The characters may encounter the assassin, but only for a short time. If the Storyteller wants one of the pigment dealers or distributors to escape the cleanup, just have the assassin arrive at the same time the characters find their quarry. The characters get a brief look at the assassin — a being once human, but now made monstrous by Adder's Scales, a Hawk's Beak and a Dagger Tongue. With a successful Perception + Streetwise roll (difficulty 7), however, a character can also spot the assassin's prison tattoos before the spook turns into a crackling mass of electricity that jumps into a power outlet and vanishes. He is one of the Project Flatline ghosts (see Chapter Four for information about Project Flatline's role in pigment distribution).

NEW HORRORS, NEW FRIENDS

The characters already know that some ghosts have special powers. "The Pale Rider" gives them a chance to see these powers in action and maybe learn them.

The assassin employs Broadband Ghost. Simply being in the presence of the Horror's use and feeling how the assassin manipulates his Vitality may give a Haunter the clue he needs to develop this power on his own.

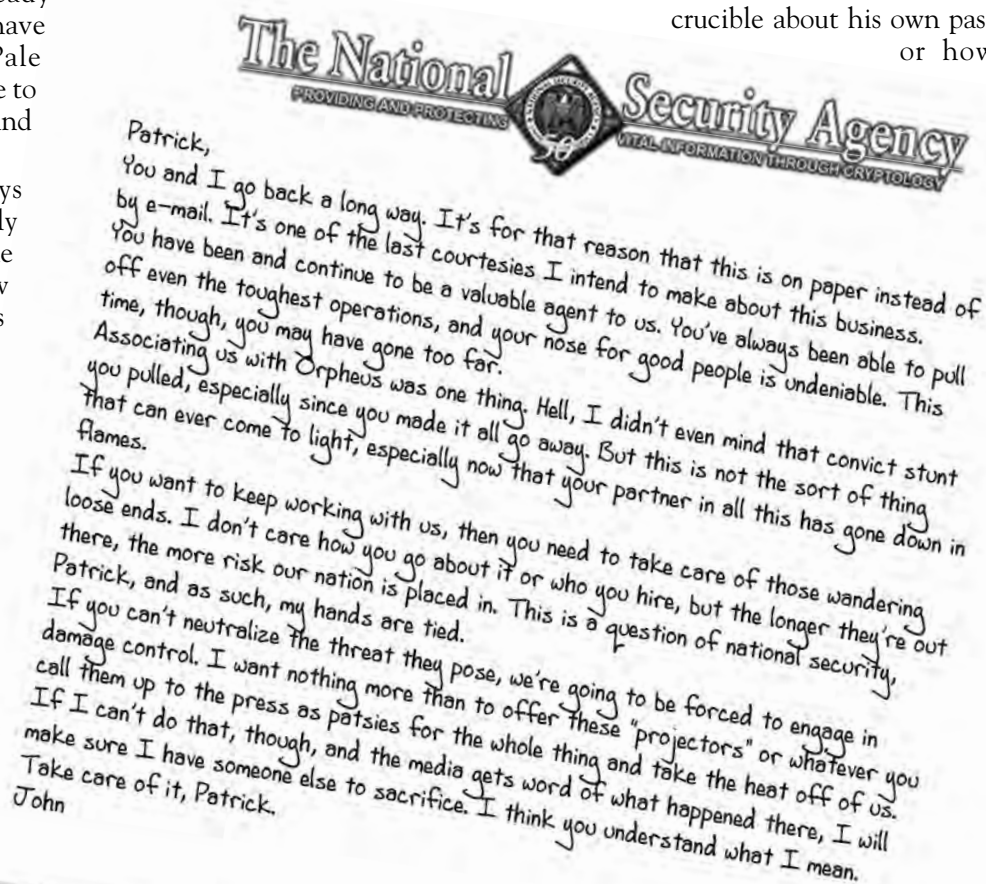
Bobby Wells and Grace Ishida may be the first Phantasms the characters meet. Neither of them knows how unusual they are. Bobby may seek out the crucible for help in finding Lauryl. If the crucible manages to reunite Bobby and Lauryl, the

young couple feels considerable gratitude to the characters. The two ghosts are not adventurous sorts, but contacts among other ghosts never hurt. Bobby can also impart the Phantasm's trademark Horror of Bedlam, if characters want to learn it.

Radio Free Death may also seek a closer cooperation if the crucible performed well. Terrence Green does not want to meet face to face just yet, but he may contact the crucible through personal cell-phone calls or by leaving messages on their computers.

Grace Ishida sometimes acts as a go-between by planting messages in dreams. The characters most likely meet Grace only if they start to wonder who's feeding them information in their dreams and set some sort of ambush. If they do not threaten her, she might explain some more about herself, Radio Free Death and their pursuit of Terrel & Squib.

Perhaps most importantly, Radio Free Death can tell the characters directly about third-tier Horrors. Of course, if a character develops Broadband Ghost on his own, he can backtrack Radio Free Death's transmissions straight to Terrence Green. Terrence does not tell the crucible about his own past or how



The National Security Agency
PROVIDING AND PROTECTING
VITAL INFORMATION THROUGH CRYPTOLOGY

Patrick,
You and I go back a long way. It's for that reason that this is on paper instead of by e-mail. It's one of the last courtesies I intend to make about this business. You have been and continue to be a valuable agent to us. You've always been able to pull off even the toughest operations, and your nose for good people is undeniable. This time, though, you may have gone too far. Associating us with Orpheus was one thing. Hell, I didn't even mind that convict stunt you pulled, especially since you made it all go away. But this is not the sort of thing that can ever come to light, especially now that your partner in all this has gone down in flames.

If you want to keep working with us, then you need to take care of those wandering loose ends. I don't care how you go about it or who you hire, but the longer they're out there, the more risk our nation is placed in. This is a question of national security, Patrick, and as such, my hands are tied.

If you can't neutralize the threat they pose, we're going to be forced to engage in damage control. I want nothing more than to offer these "projectors" or whatever you call them up to the press as patsies for the whole thing and take the heat off of us. If I can't do that, though, and the media gets word of what happened there, I will make sure I have someone else to sacrifice. I think you understand what I mean. Take care of it, Patrick.

John

he became a projector with third-tier Horrors.

CHAPTER TWO: THE LIVING ENSEMBLE



You watch, you misdirect, you lie. Intelligence work is all
smoke and mirrors. I think I missed my calling.

— John "Blink" Carruthers

Mrs. Mills: Sometimes, the world of the living gets mixed
up with the world of the dead.

— The Others



This chapter is devoted to the forces that the characters are likely to encounter in **Orpheus**, both those they know from prior supplements and some new groups they'll be meeting for the first time. The information is divided up into players and Storytellers sections. The "Players Section" covers the background of the groups to this point, explains how the groups may be swayed to the crucible's side and offers suggestions for how to deal with the threat they may pose to the characters. The "Storytellers Section" presents an overview of the organizations to date and strategies for reacting to the characters' actions toward each group, whether they choose to ally themselves or to strike first.

PLAYERS SECTION

In every screenplay or script, one ever-present element is the cast of characters — a short list of the *dramatis personae* along with a brief description of their personality or function in the story. **Shades of Gray** is no different in this respect. Against the ever-changing landscape of **Orpheus**, it's useful for the actors (or players) in this drama to have a scorecard of sorts to let them keep track of what they know and how best to use it.

This method of presenting information has been used throughout the **Orpheus** series, with sections of in-character information for the players and out-of-character information for the Storyteller on the major forces behind the events of each book. **Shades of Gray** changes the formula slightly, however, giving players the same out-of-character format in the hopes that this information can be used in a conscious effort to guide their characters.

The information in this section is primarily designed for the players. Storytellers are invited to read over the sections as well, of course, keeping in mind the potential adventures or plot-hooks provided. The players, however, are the main audience for this information. This information is intended to empower the players, giving them the tools they need to seek out their own fate.

The organizations presented here should all be familiar faces to the characters by now. The DEA, the FBI, the Blasphemers, the media and Terrel & Squib are all discussed herein from a player's perspective. Each section is divided into a number of headings, designed to help the players make the most use of the given information:

Overview: As the name implies, a simple explanation of what the group is and what it wants.

Allies and Not Enemies: Some small possibility might yet exist for peaceful coexistence or even mutually beneficial action. If so, it is discussed in this section.

Dealing with the Group: Of course, if the crucible would rather take an antagonistic approach to its deal-

ings with the group in question, that's a viable option for the chronicle, and we address that eventuality as well.

THE BLASPHEMERS

Overview: Spirits and hues occur in a wide variety of forms outside of the auspices of **Orpheus** and its ilk. Many ghosts are drones and blips, largely ignorant of the world around them, but others are self-aware and wield powers comparable to any crucible. Given the conditions that prevail when ghosts are "born," it is little surprise that some of these independent spirits have a gangland background, but the group known as the Blasphemers stands out for the sheer number and organization of the spirits and hues it contains. Members of the crucible may already have encountered members of the gang in **Crusade of Ashes**, which may color any future relationship between the crucible and the gang, or the characters may be aware of the spook gang through rumors of strange power brokers or contract killers on the street.

Members of the Blasphemers do exactly what they did in life — run with their gang and fight wars with their rivals. However, being dead (and the only "spook gang" in the area), the Blasphemers' involvement in such clashes is somewhat different from normal gang wars. Instead, they work with one or other of the mortal gangs, making alliances as the spook leaders see fit with the living and working through the agencies of two living (and spirit-sensitive thanks to pigment) agents. The Blasphemers number 18 members, most of whom are ghosts. The four leaders are Mirage-class ghosts, while the remaining gangbanger ghosts are Echo-class and serve as the Blasphemer's grunts. A handful of the Blasphemers are mortal and frequently serve as the public face of the gang, negotiating deals with other gangs and prospective employers, relying on their spirit brothers for protection and the intimidation of recalcitrant mortal associates. Indeed, to those not aware of the spirits' existence — the Blasphemers frequently build alliances through their agents, who promise their clients that "friends" will deal with the matter — these mortals appear immensely powerful and appear to wield strange powers, which may itself draw the attention of the crucible.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

Because of their origins, the Blasphemers are wary of outsiders, particularly groups whom the gang members — spook and mortal alike — regard as threats, either because of their potency or simply because of their attitude. This does not, however, mean that the gang spooks are out of reach, rather that they have to be approached carefully. Once the crucible has won their



trust, the gang members can be staunch allies and the source of considerable resources and information.

The first, and arguably most important, step in establishing a relationship with the Blasphemers is the initial approach. Despite being dead, the Blasphemers are extremely territorial. Learning the boundaries of their turf — which shifts on an irregular basis, depending on their current alliances and employment — is vital. Encroaching onto this territory without appropriate care is likely to get the crucible into trouble, either with the Blasphemers themselves or their mortal associates and allies. If the crucible take care to respect the gang's turf and approaches them with at least a modicum of respect, the Blasphemer's agents listen to any proposals put to them. Nonetheless, the crucible has to approach the right people within the gang. A spook character could hail one of the spirit gang, but attempts to approach one of the leaders directly would threaten them and provoke an appropriate response. Similarly, mortal characters must approach one of the Blasphemers' mortal agents or a manifested spook gang member (this is an unlikely occurrence; the spooks in the gang rarely manifest). In either case, the Blasphemers acknowledge power, and so, an approach to them must balance strength and respect. Too much strength, and the gang may feel threatened. Too little, and the gang might not feel the need to honor its end of a bargain.

Once the crucible gets in touch with the Blasphemers, how does it win them over? While the Blasphemers might be willing to talk, that is no guarantee that their leaders are willing to deal, not on the first encounter, at least. The crucible needs to produced some demonstration of faith. The simplest way to do this is with money up front, either in electronic form, in ready cash or in high-value goods that the gang can fence. While money is a welcome means of recompense and the gang respects substantial, regular and timely payment, it does little to create a true bond to the group. If the crucible wants nothing more than a business relationship with the Blasphemers, then it suffices. If the characters want more, they need to give more. Providing a service that the gang cannot get elsewhere is one option (for example, intervening with the cops or media to keep them away from the Blasphemer's territory), as is taking action against a problem that has been plaguing the gang — a rival gang, a Terrel & Squib operation on its turf or even a Spectre pursuing one of the lesser gang members. Indeed, while the gang has a substantial membership and its leadership has formidable power, the Blasphemers lack the skills of a crucible and its range of abilities and contacts. Even something as mundane as straight-

ening out a mortal associate's parole papers can earn a crucible the Blasphemers' respect.

The Blasphemers single out crucible members with a street background — or, even better, an actual gang affiliation — for particular attention and seek to establish their credentials. Why are they with the crucible? Why aren't they running with their own gangs or watching out for their own neighborhoods? The subject may turn to membership in the gang — which is always looking for new recruits — but while the majority of the gang's members are sufficiently weak to be dominated by the leaders, members of the crucible are quite possibly their match and, thus, not lightly inducted into the

DEMONSTRATING FAITH

Like most gangs, the Blasphemers have a series of trials and initiation rituals that each prospective recruit must pass through before the gang will accept him as a member of the group. For low-level recruits, their "initiation" may be nothing more than to retrieve an item from enemy territory or, perhaps, deface some object of significance to an enemy gang. More potent recruits, however, face tougher and more personal challenges that not only test their abilities, but their willingness to take that extra step for the group. At the very least, a prospective member must face a threat of comparable power to his own, be it a hostile ghost, a pack of weak but hungry drones or, perhaps, a Spectre that has been terrorizing the ghostly inhabitants of the area. On at least one occasion, the Blasphemers set a prospective recruit up against a Jason (with predictably bloody results).

The true test of commitment many recruits face, however, concerns their relationship with the living. The Blasphemers' leadership needs to know if the prospective associates have what it takes to be part of the gang. As such, the recruit must kill a target selected by the existing members, usually an individual connected with a rival gang. Whether they perform this task physically (e.g., using a meat body and a gun or manifesting and pushing the mark under a truck) or via Horrors (for example, possessing the victim and making him open fire on police) is at the recruit's discretion. If he does this and the other tasks set for him, he is welcomed into the gang with all its attendant benefits (respect, a sense of belonging and influence among the group) and responsibilities (loyalty to all in the gang, obedience to superiors and oversight of more junior gang members).



group. Potential recruits of the characters' caliber have to prove their trustworthiness and value, a hazardous but potentially worthwhile endeavor.

Once the crucible has established a relationship with the Blasphemers, maintaining the association requires little more than the occasional favor traded back and forth. However, the more frequent the contact, the closer the relationship and the more favorable the Blasphemers are to the crucible. Indeed, if the crucible provides the Blasphemers with a steady stream of business (either directly or via referrals), the gang may regard the characters as an honorary (if not actual) extension of the gang.

Characters who have built up a relationship with the Blasphemers can easily use the gang to justify a number of Backgrounds, in particular Allies. It may even be possible to take one of the Blasphemers' leaders as a Mentor — all of them are powerful and experienced, at least with regard to street life and existence as a post-life entity, able to tutor members of the crucible in facets of their existence that working for Orpheus denied them. The Blasphemers can also serve as intermediaries in efforts to gather equipment and information and may provide Contacts (either the Blasphemers themselves or their allies) and even Arsenal (while the spirit Blasphemers themselves don't have much use for firearms and the like, their mortal agents and allies do). Their associations with petty crime (and not-so-petty crime in the form of contract murders) nets the Blasphemers and their associates fair quantities of everyday property that the gang is willing to trade with those it knows.

Perhaps the most crucial thing the Blasphemers can provide via their own efforts and that of their allies is information. With their reach stretching throughout the state's gangs, the Blasphemers have access to large quantities of information, albeit not much that is immediately relevant to the crucible's quest — the actions of gangs and their members, the latest alliances, feuds and so forth. The Blasphemers can, however, point the characters in the direction of street-level pigment dealers (though not to any of the high-level distributors or the ultimate sources) and to other groups that are active on the street and in the neighborhoods, particularly those catering to the addicted and needy who are at odds with gang-related drug dealing. The Blasphemers and their associates can also serve as an "early-warning system" for the crucible, relaying any news they hear on the street about those seeking the characters and deflecting queries that strike too close to home, allowing the crucible the chance to react or flee. Indeed, a refuge at the heart of Blasphemers territory is as secure a location as the crucible will find anywhere in the city, providing the ghost gang is kept happy.

DEALING WITH THE BLASPHEMERS

While establishing a relationship with the Blasphemers poses little problem for those with appropriate experience and knowledge, a wrong move (particularly during initial contacts) can turn a relationship, in any stage, into a bitter feud. It is also possible that the crucible's enemies could set the Blasphemers against it, an extension of the contract killings the gang members have undertaken. Indeed, the Blasphemers may actively search out the crucible as a result of such a "contract," ambushing the characters on the street or in a location they believed safe. The Blasphemer's sense of loyalty to their friends means that they won't simply turn on their allies — so those who have built up a solid relationship with the gang need not fear a sudden betrayal — but those on shaky ground as clients or simple associates may not have such good fortune.

As a whole, the Blasphemers are more than a match for a crucible, with the core group of leaders approaching or exceeding the crucible's abilities and the dozen or so lesser ghosts serving as shock troops (and cannon fodder). In practice, however, the gang rarely gathers in one place, and the crucible could — if the need arose — seek to defeat the gang's constituent parts, stripping away the weaker members and then overpowering the leaders. In attempting to do so, however, the crucible should take care not to become overconfident and allow the tables to be turned — the greatest mistake the characters could possibly make would be to attack the Blasphemers and fail to take down their targets. In such a case, not only would the element of surprise be lost as the escapees warned their comrades, but word would quickly spread among the mortal gangs as to the crucible's activities, potentially leading to a united front against the characters and their isolation from many aspects of "street" life.

Of course, the crucible need not dirty its collective hands. If the characters have sufficient evidence, the crucible could set either the media, the local police or the FBI on the gang. The last is the most likely to respond effectively, already familiar (or at least acquainted) with the supernatural thanks to its investigation of Orpheus and interested in the gangs for their criminal activities. The Blasphemers and their allies are of particular interest to the FBI because of their alleged involvement with contract murders (and doubly so if the Blasphemers have been involved with hunting down the remnants of Orpheus). Conversely, while the police have dedicated gang task forces, they deal in credible facts and attach little credence to stories of ghosts and supernatural gangs, regardless of what might appear in the media. On its own, the story of a gang is not



likely to attract the attention of the media — such events are part of everyday life, though gang-related murders still make the news — and the supernatural angle is difficult to prove (particularly in this age of CGI effects). Most likely, the crucible attracts the attention of small-scale and fringe media groups who are ill-equipped to deal with the Blasphemers or to offer a credible platform for their unmasking. Even if the crucible does manage a major-media expose of the Blasphemers, the impact of such an endeavor is somewhat in question: The gang itself worries little about the coverage — most of its members are dead already, so what do they care about stories in the media? — though it may draw unwanted attention (from the police, the media or “sightseers”) to its mortal associates and allies. It is this interference with its business that has the greatest impact on the gang (and earns the crucible its enmity), but nothing prevents the spook element of the gang from simply relocating.

THE DEA

Overview: Recent events in the United States have gradually expanded the capabilities of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Now an active part of homeland security, the DEA has been able to build upon the idea that enemies of America fund their activities, in part, through the sale of drugs. The Patriot Act has also offered government agencies ways to circumvent normal procedures for search and seizure, particularly when it is believed that terrorist agencies are involved. Some consider this rhetoric a little extreme, but in the world of **Orpheus**, reality is even grimmer than the public perceives it be, even the portions distorted by media hype and corporate greed.

If the logic holds that greater threats to the United States require its government to have more power — and few restrictions on its legal enforcement powers — then current events may strengthen the DEA considerably. In politics, as in physics, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Tragedy can send millions into despair, but it can galvanize millions more into action. Regardless of whoever is responsible for today’s tragedy — a network of criminals, a militia of survivalists, a cult of religious followers or isolated students carrying guns to school — when the body count mounts, a firestorm of controversy is unleashed.

Which leads us to today’s headlines: A poisoned drug shipment has killed hundreds of people — the initial body count is set at 318. Most of the victims were under 25. Many of them were students whose parents may have never suspected their children were involved in drugs. Immediate evidence suggests that there was a

pattern to where the strychnine-laced shipments were released, but the purpose behind it remains a mystery. On television, on the radio, in newspapers, around water coolers, the same question recurs: “Why did this tragedy have to happen?” Inevitably, authorities ask the next question: “What can we do to see that something like this never happens again?”

A media-savvy public is hungry for answers, faced with the horror of living in an unpredictable and shocking world. The mass media is ready to supply quick and easy answers. In the wake of catastrophic deaths, public outrage demands a quick and easy solution to the problem, even if no such solution exists. Something must be done, drastic measures must be taken, and we need all the answers now! Parents point fingers; would-be pundits write essays; radio talk shows spew a deluge of drastic solutions. Every speaker and listener alike is hungry for more information, if only to confirm his or her own beliefs and stereotypes.

The authorities — including the FBI and the DEA — are in a position to supply answers, but not until they have the evidence to support their case. Some say the wheels of justice grind slowly, but a panicked populace wants a focus for its anger and outrage *right now*. A media frenzy contributes to this manic atmosphere, but the same pundits who cry for action also have a short attention span: It’s likely that next week’s headline, or even tomorrow’s, might shift to another topic. Inquisitive minds want to know what’s really going on, and government investigators are hard-pressed to give an explanation. If the truth isn’t acceptable, they’ll need to provide enough evidence to cover it up. Either that, or they’ll need to find a suspect, a profile or an organization to place on the firing line.

Enter the Drug Enforcement Administration. The DEA is also scrambling for answers, and it has had to begin its investigation with what it knows. Its suspects include at least one pharmaceutical company, but every one of these suspects has responded to accusations with carefully managed media spin. The usual network of seedy drug dealers have had their names and faces paraded across television screens, just long enough to inspire fear and loathing in the general populace. Lawyers have been mobilized, and the “alleged” suspects are building their alibis.

And then there’s another suspect: a fringe company named Orpheus that was recently targeted by the FBI on charges of corporate espionage and more. Some evidence suggests that the company may have been trafficking pigment — the same substance used at the high schools and raves where the unpleasant incident took place. The PDET (Pigment Drug Enforcement Taskforce, a special unit of



the DEA) initially cleared Orpheus of any such collusion, but given recent events, has decided to reopen its investigation into the matter. Results of the preliminary investigation have been inconclusive, since much of the evidence that could have shut down Orpheus was destroyed in the conflagration that suspiciously followed the raid. Yet, sources claim that several former employees of Orpheus were seen in the vicinity of at least one of the “alleged mass murders”... and the suspects have not yet come forth for questioning.

Simple, no? The public wants an answer now, and if the survivors of the Orpheus raid want to prove their innocence, they’ll need to start asking questions too. There’s a supernatural significance to pigment — is there a supernatural cause behind the killings? Mass murder has resulted in hundreds of ghosts being released into the surrounding spirit world — but what’s the pattern behind the sinister design?

If something paranormal has been motivating recent events, only Orpheus is really prepared to uncover the truth. If Orpheus agents were anywhere near the most recent tragedy when it took place, they automatically become suspect. Even if they got there in time to save a few lives, DEA agents want to know how the crucible found out so quickly... and why it didn’t go to the authorities immediately with this information. For lack of a better target, the DEA may end up pursuing the crucible, unless Orpheus’ agents can turn up better leads.

While this investigation may be difficult for Orpheus, the DEA no doubt faces its own share of difficulties. DEA agents should be on the scene as fast as they can mobilize, but they won’t be the only government investigators present. The local police force wants to take care of the initial investigation, and its officers will be resistant if the “feds” want to wrap up the case for them. Suspiciously, FBI agents are also on the scene, perhaps asking a different series of questions than the DEA agents — many of them involving Orpheus. The Drug Enforcement Administration is under a great deal of pressure to crack this case, but it also faces some competition, and even outright opposition, from other agencies.

The most notable and obvious conflict is the battle over jurisdiction. While DEA agents are scrambling for what resources they can get to combat this menace, they have to compete with other agencies to accomplish their goals. For a start, the local police department (in whatever city the chronicle is set) resists the idea of the “feds” stepping on its toes. For officials in local law enforcement, the chance to crack this case is a chance to not only advance individual careers, but also to secure more funding for local operations. Of course, some idealists are motivated by actually serving and protecting the general public, but in

the long run, that naturally involves promotion and increased job security. The ends justify the means.

Anyone watching the news should also wonder what the FBI is doing here. Publicly, the Bureau is already making claims to act in interest of national security, but right now, most of its efforts seem focused on bringing in former Orpheus operatives for questioning. Recent reports indicate that there’s a lack of cooperation between the FBI and the DEA — which raises the question of why these two government agencies aren’t working together. Does the Bureau have a hidden agenda? The answer is almost certainly “yes,” and it seems to relate to Orpheus, but tracking down the real story is more difficult.

In the initial days of the case, the DEA probably turns up most of the basic evidence, but that won’t stop the FBI from contesting with it for access to the crime scenes, the evidence, the suspects and, most importantly, the media. Initially, none of those clues seem to lead to Orpheus, but that won’t stop the FBI from treating Orpheus agents as “the usual suspects.” As long as the DEA is involved, the crucible should have a better chance of conducting its own investigation, since there’s a lack of hard evidence leading to the crucible. The Bureau, by contrast, is currently more concerned with its image and public relations. As the FBI gains more influence over the case, the chances of Orpheus agents facing harassment from the authorities increases.

The DEA is efficient at tracking down the mundane, physical components of the investigation, but sadly, it is entirely out of its depth when dealing with supernatural components. The fact that ghosts have been created from this outbreak does not matter to DEA agents focusing on basic procedure. Ghosts and Spectres interfering with their technological equipment, including surveillance equipment, makes hunting the responsible parties even more difficult. Bringing in low-level dealers proves inefficient. The bottom feeders are either dead (often of either suicide or bizarre accidents) or have no idea who poisoned the pigment shipment. Indeed, it seems that only a very few dealers received the tainted drugs.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

When the crucible is ready to hunt down the pigment dealers, some of the benefits of an alliance with the DEA are obvious. DEA agents have access to far more information and resources than the crucible does, which would provide Orpheus agents with more leads than they could possibly find on their own. Such an alliance is a double-edged sword, however. The crucible probably wants to form its own plans for what to do with those responsible, and it’s entirely possible its solution



isn't entirely legal. The DEA is out to secure legal evidence for a fair trial, and if the crucible strays from that goal, the alliance quickly comes to an end. In fact, it's possible that all of its hard work could be undone by breaking with the DEA — and possibly result in charges of obstructing a government investigation.

Working with the DEA also means that the characters face increased opposition from the FBI. If the FBI can implicate the crucible in a crime, it'll no doubt try to discredit its rivals in the DEA at the same time. Granted, the Drug Enforcement Administration has used some real sleazebags in the past as informants and turncoats, but the sensationalist nature of this case distorts the truth. If the FBI can bust Orpheus agents who are working for the DEA, it'll seize some prime media publicity — and the FBI is all about publicity at this point.

If a supernatural or paranormal explanation exists for the hundreds of tragic deaths that took place, it is inevitable that the DEA and the crucible disagree on what to do next. The Drug Enforcement Administration is prepared to use established tactics to bust drug dealers, to uncover the network of distributors and to trace the drug back to its source. "Ghostbusting" is not part of its mandate. The media will have a field day reporting on anything remotely spooky or supernatural,

but the DEA must remain focused on punishing the criminals who released the poisoned shipment.

If the crucible's efforts lead them toward a less mundane explanation of recent events — such as any story involving spooks, ghosts and Spectres — its usefulness to the DEA comes to an end. In this instance, it is possible that the government agents may suspect the story is being fabricated to divert attention away from the (once again suspicious) crucible, or they may declare any deals of amnesty are off.

Once the crucible throws in with the DEA, its independence is compromised. The crucible puts itself at risk, but the DEA calls the shots. It dictates the means and the methods the crucible may use. The notoriety of the Orpheus agents might make them candidates for a sting operation. Maybe they'll be asked to wear a wire while approaching a suspected member of a pigment cult, and the DEA agents who send the crucible in are probably completely unaware of any possible supernatural complications. If such an operation works, the DEA takes credit — if it fails, it blames the crucible. A permanent alliance with the DEA cannot save the crucible, but if the former Orpheus agents can judiciously manipulate their DEA allies, they may find an edge in the investigation they'd never have uncovered on their own.



DEALING WITH THE DEA

The DEA is far more focused in its investigation than the FBI (or other government agencies involved) and far more open about its true agenda. There's no sinister conspiracy here: A shipment of drugs has killed hundreds of people in a single night, and these feds are out to track down the criminals responsible. As long as the agency has a clearer target than the crucible, the bulk of its investigative efforts will be focused elsewhere.

If the DEA doesn't have obvious suspects, then it's going to be scrambling for leads. Questioning the crucible is one of them. The most direct way to defuse any further heat here is by sending someone to approach the DEA and offer it the crucible's services. The DEA might be willing to barter or might just seize on an opportunity to slow down the FBI's publicity campaign. Both agencies are in "turf-war mode" during this investigation, since each wants to prove it is more instrumental to the investigation. Playing the DEA as a potential ally against the FBI can do wonders to advance the plot.

Of course, the DEA isn't a single entity. It is entirely possible that the crucible may find one friendly DEA agent while other officials inside the agency question such an alliance. Somewhere inside the nearest DEA headquarters, meetings about working with the crucible take place. Not everyone is going to trust the characters to the same degree (or at all). One DEA director might do everything he can to aid the crucible's investigation, but another may insist on oversight authority, ready to cut his co-worker off at the knees if the crucible fails. When the crucible responds with a supernatural explanation of what's going on, someone on the inside may be willing to entertain the idea, but that doesn't mean selling it to his superiors is easy. As with the FBI, the Orpheus agents are off the hook if they can present the DEA with bigger fish to fry. If they can turn over legal evidence and supply names for people developing or creating pigment, they'll have an ally, not an enemy.

THE FBI

Overview: In theory, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has limits on its legal enforcement powers. Publicly, it cannot pursue an investigation unless evidence of a possible crime exists — and even then, it must be one of the federal or felony crimes that falls under its jurisdiction. Government agents can't harass American citizens without following proper procedures (at least not legally). An agent's vague hunch or an implication of misdoing is insufficient to justify a government investigation.

When certifiably "weird shit" happens, the Bureau doesn't confront such problems by sending out Mr. Smith clones in black suits to threaten bystanders and

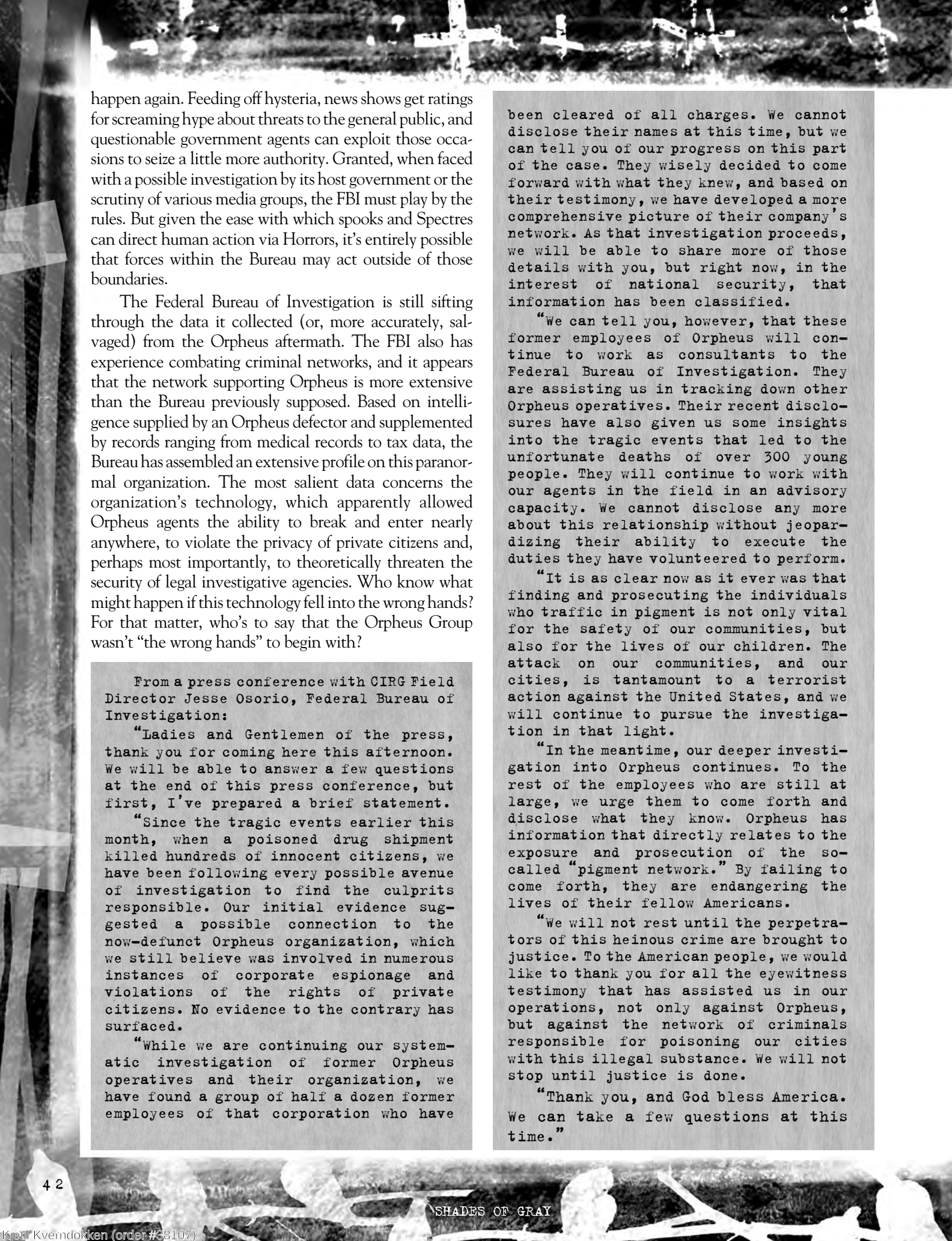
abduct witnesses. *X-Files* aside, federal agents can't devote all their time to tracking down unusual events — on every case, they must prove (or, at least, should prove) that a suspect has perpetrated a crime that falls within the FBI's jurisdiction. This principle doesn't apply as much in *Shades of Gray*: The FBI has the authority to investigate what the crucible is doing and the authority to arrest, detain and even harm the characters under the flimsiest of pretexts if its agents can prove (or even suggest) a threat to "homeland security."

In our last installment, *Crusade of Ashes*, the FBI organized its witch-hunt against Orpheus, a once-insular organization now exposed by sensationalist and paranoid media. To pull off this feat, it had to secure warrants, which means it had to provide evidence to a judge that the company was involved in criminal activity. And, in fact, the Bureau had plenty of leads on crimes perpetrated by Orpheus agents, from simple breaking and entering to outright corporate espionage. If it is playing by the rules, it has gathered enough information since then to conduct further legal investigations.

In recent years, the Bureau has expanded its authority and gained considerable influence, thanks to some useful PR from the media. For decades, its mandate has involved counterintelligence investigations (a function that's been in decline recently) and counterterrorist operations (one that's importance has grown considerably). Since the start of the new millennium, the FBI has been working in an environment where any potential threat to national security can be distorted by the media as a possible resource for terrorists. New legislation has removed many of the limits on its enforcement powers, at least where counterterrorism is involved.

The RICO Act bolsters other avenues to investigation. Originally, this set of legislation empowered the FBI to stop interstate criminal activity, giving its agents the authority they needed to shut down organized crime syndicates. In the modern world, several branches of Orpheus are coordinating their activities across state borders. Since some of those operations are of questionable legality, Orpheus is under suspicion as a similar syndicate, one that's using millions of dollars to finance corporate espionage. If the feds can establish a "pattern of criminal activity" within Orpheus or among Orpheus employees, they can nail anybody who works for the company and subject them to very long jail terms indeed.

In this environment, if (hypothetical) forces within the FBI have more sinister motives — agendas other than enforcing the law — they certainly have the resources to make their enemies' lives a living hell. It's been said that J. Edgar Hoover used his position in the Bureau to persecute some of his political enemies. If it's happened before, it can



happen again. Feeding off hysteria, news shows get ratings for screaming hype about threats to the general public, and questionable government agents can exploit those occasions to seize a little more authority. Granted, when faced with a possible investigation by its host government or the scrutiny of various media groups, the FBI must play by the rules. But given the ease with which spooks and Spectres can direct human action via Horrors, it's entirely possible that forces within the Bureau may act outside of those boundaries.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is still sifting through the data it collected (or, more accurately, salvaged) from the Orpheus aftermath. The FBI also has experience combating criminal networks, and it appears that the network supporting Orpheus is more extensive than the Bureau previously supposed. Based on intelligence supplied by an Orpheus defector and supplemented by records ranging from medical records to tax data, the Bureau has assembled an extensive profile on this paranormal organization. The most salient data concerns the organization's technology, which apparently allowed Orpheus agents the ability to break and enter nearly anywhere, to violate the privacy of private citizens and, perhaps most importantly, to theoretically threaten the security of legal investigative agencies. Who know what might happen if this technology fell into the wrong hands? For that matter, who's to say that the Orpheus Group wasn't "the wrong hands" to begin with?

From a press conference with CIRG Field Director Jesse Osorio, Federal Bureau of Investigation:

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the press, thank you for coming here this afternoon. We will be able to answer a few questions at the end of this press conference, but first, I've prepared a brief statement.

"Since the tragic events earlier this month, when a poisoned drug shipment killed hundreds of innocent citizens, we have been following every possible avenue of investigation to find the culprits responsible. Our initial evidence suggested a possible connection to the now-defunct Orpheus organization, which we still believe was involved in numerous instances of corporate espionage and violations of the rights of private citizens. No evidence to the contrary has surfaced.

"While we are continuing our systematic investigation of former Orpheus operatives and their organization, we have found a group of half a dozen former employees of that corporation who have

been cleared of all charges. We cannot disclose their names at this time, but we can tell you of our progress on this part of the case. They wisely decided to come forward with what they knew, and based on their testimony, we have developed a more comprehensive picture of their company's network. As that investigation proceeds, we will be able to share more of those details with you, but right now, in the interest of national security, that information has been classified.

"We can tell you, however, that these former employees of Orpheus will continue to work as consultants to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They are assisting us in tracking down other Orpheus operatives. Their recent disclosures have also given us some insights into the tragic events that led to the unfortunate deaths of over 300 young people. They will continue to work with our agents in the field in an advisory capacity. We cannot disclose any more about this relationship without jeopardizing their ability to execute the duties they have volunteered to perform.

"It is as clear now as it ever was that finding and prosecuting the individuals who traffic in pigment is not only vital for the safety of our communities, but also for the lives of our children. The attack on our communities, and our cities, is tantamount to a terrorist action against the United States, and we will continue to pursue the investigation in that light.

"In the meantime, our deeper investigation into Orpheus continues. To the rest of the employees who are still at large, we urge them to come forth and disclose what they know. Orpheus has information that directly relates to the exposure and prosecution of the so-called "pigment network." By failing to come forth, they are endangering the lives of their fellow Americans.

"We will not rest until the perpetrators of this heinous crime are brought to justice. To the American people, we would like to thank you for all the eyewitness testimony that has assisted us in our operations, not only against Orpheus, but against the network of criminals responsible for poisoning our cities with this illegal substance. We will not stop until justice is done.

"Thank you, and God bless America. We can take a few questions at this time."



Exploiting fear of the unknown, one special director found enough evidence to secure a warrant, leading to a legal search of an Orpheus facility and seizure of the branch's records and assets. Citing possible instances of corporate espionage, terrorism and invasion of privacy, the FBI launched its investigation into Orpheus and the agents on its substantial payroll. No one knows how many informants were hidden within the organization — or even whether they were working for the same organization. Not long after the feds arrived on the scene, operatives employed by another, less legal group detonated explosives throughout the Orpheus building, destroying physical and electronic evidence that the government agents couldn't gather fast enough. Since then, Orpheus has been shut down, but its agents are still at large... and might still pose a threat to the populace. Employees who have gone underground or who fled from the authorities are drawing suspicion toward themselves by not coming forward.

Under the watchful eyes of reporters and fed by a carefully managed media frenzy, a host of other legal agencies have contested for jurisdiction over the resulting investigation. The Bureau officially broke the case, but local law enforcement was actually on the scene first and took a great deal of evidence into custody. The feds recovered much, but not all of, those materials seized from Orpheus — some of it may be available for sale on the street. The police have attempted to stake their claim by citing local concerns. Recently, they've been resistant to having higher authorities tell them how to do their jobs. Unfortunately, the debate they've launched has given government agents more time to work quickly behind the scenes. While official FBI sources recite sound bites for the public about "threats to national security," including capabilities that "may fall into the hands of terrorists," government agents are working quickly in the shadows, away from the watchful eyes of reporters. With access to names, places and financial data, it may even be possible for the FBI's operatives to exploit more subtle and covert information, pursuing Orpheus agents as witnesses, criminals or collaborators.

The carefully defined world Orpheus agents once knew is gone. Threat ratings and dossiers have been incinerated. Mysteries and subterfuge remain. Not long ago, a wealthy and successful organization was able to provide Orpheus agents with substantial resources. Their facility harbored researchers, a safe place for projectors to keep their bodies while sleeping or skimming, a corporate support structure with everything from cafeterias and gyms to health care and the sort of financial advantages needed to ensure a comfortable life outside of work. Orpheus was dutifully documenting all that it

had encountered in the supernatural world. Even though there was far more paranormal activity out there that they *weren't* equipped to deal with, a steady paycheck granted by a benevolent corporation gave Orpheus agents the illusion of safety... until now.

By the start of **Shades of Gray**, an FBI witch-hunt — and a few well-placed explosives set by an unknown group of mercenaries — has now blown that illusion to Hell. An Orpheus agent might have good credit, money in the bank and a good home, but the government has seized, confiscated or monitored those resources. Former contacts, especially extralegal ones, may have had reasons to inform the government of what they know about the agents: Former friends may now be turncoats. Allies might have betrayed them by now, possibly out of patriotism, suspicion, bitterness about being misused or as a tool for plea-bargaining. Orpheus was once a relatively safe and financially secure support structure for the crucible at the heart of our story, but even after the witch-hunt dies down, the FBI still has its eye on the characters.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation can be a powerful adversary if the crucible doesn't watch its step. *X-Files* notwithstanding, it doesn't exist to investigate the supernatural. It is an organization with the authority to investigate over 250 types of federal crimes, and at this point, the jury's still out on whether Orpheus was really a criminal organization. The crucible is under suspicion, and if it doesn't keep to the shadows — or come out of the cold and ally with the feds — the crusade against the characters could easily start up again. If they choose to switch sides and work for the group that's been hunting them, on the other hand, they need to disclose everything they've learned, prove their innocence and play by the agency's rules. Otherwise, accessing the life they've left behind requires a lot of hard work... and possibly criminal activities.

Life could be worse, of course. The crucible could potentially make things much worse for itself. In the past, the FBI has treated the crucible as armed and dangerous, but if no one's fired off weapons, the next phase of the investigation should go much easier. Since agents are flesh and blood, drawing a firearm is a poor solution to dealing with the FBI. When guns are drawn, agents get hurt (or killed) on both sides, and an accusation of a possible crime would be complicated by charges of assault, battery, manslaughter or murder. From that point on, the investigation becomes a manhunt, and any possibility of peaceful resolution goes straight out the window. Orpheus agents shouldn't respond to government intrusions with violence unless they're prepared for government agents to open fire.



Staying clear of the law may require the crucible to actually commit crimes to seize what it needs, but the feds are watching. Looking over their shoulders, Orpheus agents may notice signs that they're still being watched, even when they're keeping to the straight and narrow. This suggests there may be agents of the Bureau that have extralegal objectives as well. Curiously enough, the Orpheus agents at the heart of our story have a habit of being near ground zero whenever another sinister occurrence takes place. The world of **Orpheus** is a political and supernatural minefield. One false step can have drastic consequences.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

By the start of this book, the crusade against Orpheus agents has reached its peak. It is possible that the Bureau may have gathered enough information to implicate Orpheus agents in various crimes. To justify its raid on the Orpheus facility, the FBI may be ready to throw the characters to the wolves. The feds have been working overtime trying to bring the characters in for questioning... and it's entirely possible that the heroes of our story have played along. In fact, socially adept characters may be able to form a tentative alliance with the very forces that have almost destroyed their lives.

If the characters haven't been brought in for questioning, they may want to try to start some kind of dialogue with the government agents who have been shadowing them — but not without great risk. Phone calls can be traced, drop points can be compromised, and go-betweens willing to deliver messages may find themselves investigated in turn. Once the crucible shows itself, law enforcement authorities can (and will) bring in suspects and hold them for up to 72 hours for questioning (or much longer, if the can bring homeland security into the equation). After that time has expired, if the Bureau has enough evidence to bring the case to trial, the crucible may spend a little more time behind bars.

In any of these cases, representatives of the Bureau might threaten further complications unless the crucible's agents can plea bargain, play along or ensure some way of tracking down the real party responsible. Resourceful characters may be able to supply enough information to prove to the Bureau that they're both on the same side. If the heroes can prove that Orpheus and the FBI have a common enemy, it may be possible for them to pool their resources — or for their characters to at least use their own resources without being hounded by the authorities.

One possible scenario could then involve regular meetings with a contact inside the FBI. Speaking from a position of authority, the agent would then ask for regular updates on the crucible's investigation. That may happen in an office as part of a meeting, or it may

even involve unexpected messages on a cell phone, pager or e-mail server. Lesser, yet professional, FBI agents are then assigned to the case as part of a separate investigation. They won't have the same handicaps as the crucible, though. For instance, they don't need to disclose what they've found to the crucible. The FBI supplies the characters with information on a need-to-know basis. For example, the FBI's criminal database is strictly off-limits for the crucible. Even the CIA can't access that information.

So long as this alliance is in effect, the FBI has no tolerance for any non-legal methods used in the investigation (depending on how convincing or suspicious the characters are by this point, this may or may not involve a moratorium on projecting). The Bureau wants hard evidence it can bring to trial, and it insists on making the collar and deciding how to present the case. When the investigation is over, the FBI's own agents receive far more credit than the crucible. Sound demanding? If the crucible objects, its representative in the Bureau presents himself as the "good cop," threatening what his rivals in the Bureau (the "bad cops") will do if the crucible doesn't play along. The alternatives to cooperating with the authorities can be much, much worse.

Orpheus agents have Background points that their players have spent to build ties with people, resources and organizations that the characters can use. In nearly every permutation of the plot, the resources provided by a temporary alliance with the FBI can't equal those advantages. Then again, the unpleasant nature of working with the Bureau in this story may be more palatable than the thought of both being hunted and facing the supernatural horrors behind this plot alone.

DEALING WITH THE FBI

For a crucible that can't work with the FBI, or at least stay out of its way, the Bureau can be a particularly tenacious adversary. The witch-hunts of the last episode have passed (for the most part), but the Bureau still has reasons to dog the characters' footsteps. Its reputation is at stake, after all, and if high-ranking officials in the organization are going to seize more power and glory, they'll need to have public support behind them while doing it. Much of the FBI's campaign is geared to using public support to propel its own initiatives. Thus, one way to deal with the FBI is by derailing the Bureau's smear campaign, turning former conspirators within Orpheus into heroes. Figuring out how to do this a little more difficult.

In the short term, the agents in the crucible have plenty of Backgrounds they can draw on. Such advantages are often overlooked (both by novice and experienced players), but whenever government agents



start freezing bank accounts, staking out homes and tracking license-plate numbers, the former Orpheus agents should scramble for any edge they can find.

For a start, let's look at the basic Backgrounds:

- The Contacts Background might allow a character to get in touch with “friendlies” in the media, even if they work at a minor radio station or a fringe newspaper. If mass media is covering a story, you can be sure that there's someone *somewhere* who wants to tell the other side of it.

- An agent who's well connected or politically empowered enough to have the Influence Background may be able to convince other politically oriented people to rally to the crucible's defense. If the government is expanding its authority, maybe there's a watchdog group or an incumbent candidate who wants to make an issue of it. The FBI's smear campaign against agents of Orpheus requires some long-term spin doctoring, so this early in the game, someone could advance his career by coming to the crucible's defense.

- When you can't convince people with rhetoric, money talks. The Resources Background speaks its language. For instance, hiring a freelancer who wants steady work — such as a lawyer, a political activist or a private detective — can give the crucible another useful ally in a difficult time. The fact that they are fairly anonymous professional acquaintances, instead of long-term personal friends, shields them from guilt by association.

- Anyone with Status or Fame (see p. 112) is going to be magnet for the media, drawing reporters with microphones to capture sound bites. Imagine the advantages of setting up an exclusive story with an independent reporter, for instance. Influencing an organization to help out can be even more useful than recruiting individuals.

- And *Allies*, of course, can be useful for everything from running simple errands to setting up a diversion for investigators. An ally might be able to act as a drop point for communication with the authorities, for instance, but such tactics have risks. There's a limit to how much an ally will put himself at risk. Otherwise, he may become the next target of the government witch-hunt at hand.

If the crucible is particularly effective, its investigation may turn up a bigger target than Orpheus, but that requires enough evidence to lure the FBI in a different direction. Again, an investigative agency needs evidence and proof to justify further scrutiny — hunches and suspicion are insufficient. Several other Backgrounds present possibilities here:

- Someone with the Arsenal Background might be able to research who bought the weapons and explosives for the Orpheus raid.

- A Detective License has obvious benefits to this investigation, along with actual legal protections that allow it to be used (such licenses have probably been revoked in the wake of the events of **Crusade of Ashes**, but flashing a PI license in people's faces is still a good way to bypass a lot of bureaucratic roadblocks).

- A Patron may be willing to act as a go-between between the characters and the FBI.

Using any of these tactics can buy the crucible more time, which it will presumably use to investigate the various factions, to chase down various Spectres or, best of all, to find out the source of the poisoned pigment shipment and the real parties responsible for the recent suffering. With knowledge, the crucible is better prepared to defend itself and to answer questions — which might lead it to the “Allies and Not Enemies” section listed above.

THE MEDIA

Overview: We live in a society dominated by the media. It pervades our lives in the form of TV, radio, newspapers and the Internet — even beamed directly to each of us through mobile-phone technology. An insatiable desire has emerged for up-to-the minute news — and for news on the lives of the rich, the famous and even just the flavor of the hour. Broadcasters have to feed this desire and are constantly on the look out for “news,” whether it be details of the latest tragedy or current styles, some seeking to educate, most to titillate. Once an event could escape notice or not appear in the media for days, but today, the emphasis is on instant news, instant gratification. “Up to date” may as well be “out of date.” In today's media, an hour or even a few minutes can make the difference between success and failure. Andy Warhol said, “In the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes.” That future is now.

The crucible's past actions likely draw the media to the characters, either in pursuit of events or simply because of who and what they are. The more overt the group's actions, the more likely it is that the characters will be to be singled out for attention. They may attempt to keep a low profile and “slip beneath the radar,” avoiding media attention, or the crucible may — deliberately or otherwise — court it. For example, if the crucible is at one of the raves where poisoned pigment appears, one or more of the characters are almost certainly targeted by the media if they remain at the scene, either because of their actions or as bystanders, with the awkward questions that brings (“What were you doing at this [illegal] event? Did you know any of the deceased? Did you partake of illegal substances? You are lucky to survive — was that because you supplied the drugs?”).



Of course, the crucible's own actions are not the only factors that draw the media to it. The destruction of Orpheus is big news, and the simple fact of the characters' former membership in the organization is enough to draw attention as "investigative journalists" track down Orpheus employees. Likewise, the FBI (and other groups) may exploit the media's reach and influence, releasing (publicly or via leaks) the identities of those they wish to question and letting the journalists do their legwork. Such partnerships may be official or otherwise. A zealous editor may be willing to compromise his integrity by selling out the crucible irrespective of the reporter's promises to the characters (to curry favor with the feds, providing, of course, his crews are there to film the takedown), or the FBI may simply follow the reporting on TV and act accordingly. Indeed, a station's cut from its regular programming to live coverage of a police/FBI operation may be the only warning the crucible has of its pursuers closing in on its safe house or motel room. Of course, the feds are not the only ones to be watching the news or exploiting the media, notably the perpetrators of the massacre at Orpheus who seek to tie up the "loose ends" left by their assault use the media to their advantage as well. Even if the media doesn't focus on the crucible, its appearance in reports — even in the background — may be sufficient to allow the group's enemies to act.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

While the statement "there's no such thing as bad publicity" is flawed, it does have a basis in truth. A character need not be a "goody two-shoes" to become a media darling. Indeed, the opposite may be true in many circumstances, with the "bad boys" becoming the focus of attention and adoration, frequently as the "people you love to hate." The key is presentation and the ability to play to (or manipulate) the audience and/or media. For example, a suave, sophisticated crime lord is more likely to gain good press than the stuttering representative of a charity, no matter the justice and righteousness of their respective causes. As such, a media-savvy crucible can turn the attentions of the press and TV to its own advantage or, at least, mitigate their effects on the characters' activities.

One option is for members of the crucible to provide the media with information on the supernatural, either behind the scenes as advisors (paid or otherwise) or as "experts" interviewed by the journalists. Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages that govern the characters' approach and determine the limitations on their activities. Advisors must convince the media of their value and veracity, not difficult if the characters are already high-

profile experts in their field (particularly if already known to the media), but considerably more so if they are unknown or are the target of an existing media investigation. If accepted as advisors, however, the members of the crucible can influence the situation, including the content and direction, from behind the scenes and, thus, keep a low profile while pointing the media toward areas of interest (and away from those that might be harmful to) the crucible. An individual who is merely a source of background information has minimal influence on affairs, but one who is a major advisor — perhaps even paid a retainer to be on call — has more. As always, the biggest problem is the first hurdle, being accepted as an authority on the subject of the supernatural. This requires a combination of factors, notably a demonstration of the character's skill, a level of belief on the part of the journalist and/or her editor (since skepticism about the supernatural remains) and a need or desire by the media for an appropriate expert. The fall of Orpheus, as well as similar attacks on Terrel & Squib, have done much to generate demand for "experts on the paranormal" but distinguishing themselves from other so-called experts — genuine and otherwise — presents the members of the crucible with a substantial challenge. Characters with a high Status or Influence Background have a substantial advantage in getting the initial "foot in the door," as do those with the Fame Background (see p. 112 of this book). Contacts and Mentor may likewise create an opening, but as such efforts involve going through a third party rather than being outgrowth of the crucible's abilities, they are less likely to succeed. Used in combination with more direct means, however, such advantages can play a decisive role. Once accepted as advisors, the characters need to justify (and maintain) their positions, requiring a combination of intelligence and skill. The Occult Knowledge can be important to the characters' influence but may be secondary to their ability to present ideas in a comprehensible manner, most likely using Intelligence or Charisma — it isn't necessarily what you say but how (or when, or to whom) you say it. Those seeking to influence program making and the direction of investigations find Manipulation is the key Attribute, though Subterfuge is likewise important, the scale of the manipulation governing the required Attribute and Ability levels. For example, failing to mention a key detail of Orpheus' past in a briefing may only require a single dot of Subterfuge to avoid giving away the falsehood, while redirecting a journalistic crusade hellbent on unmasking a scandal (perceived or otherwise) may require three or four in each of Manipulation and Performance.



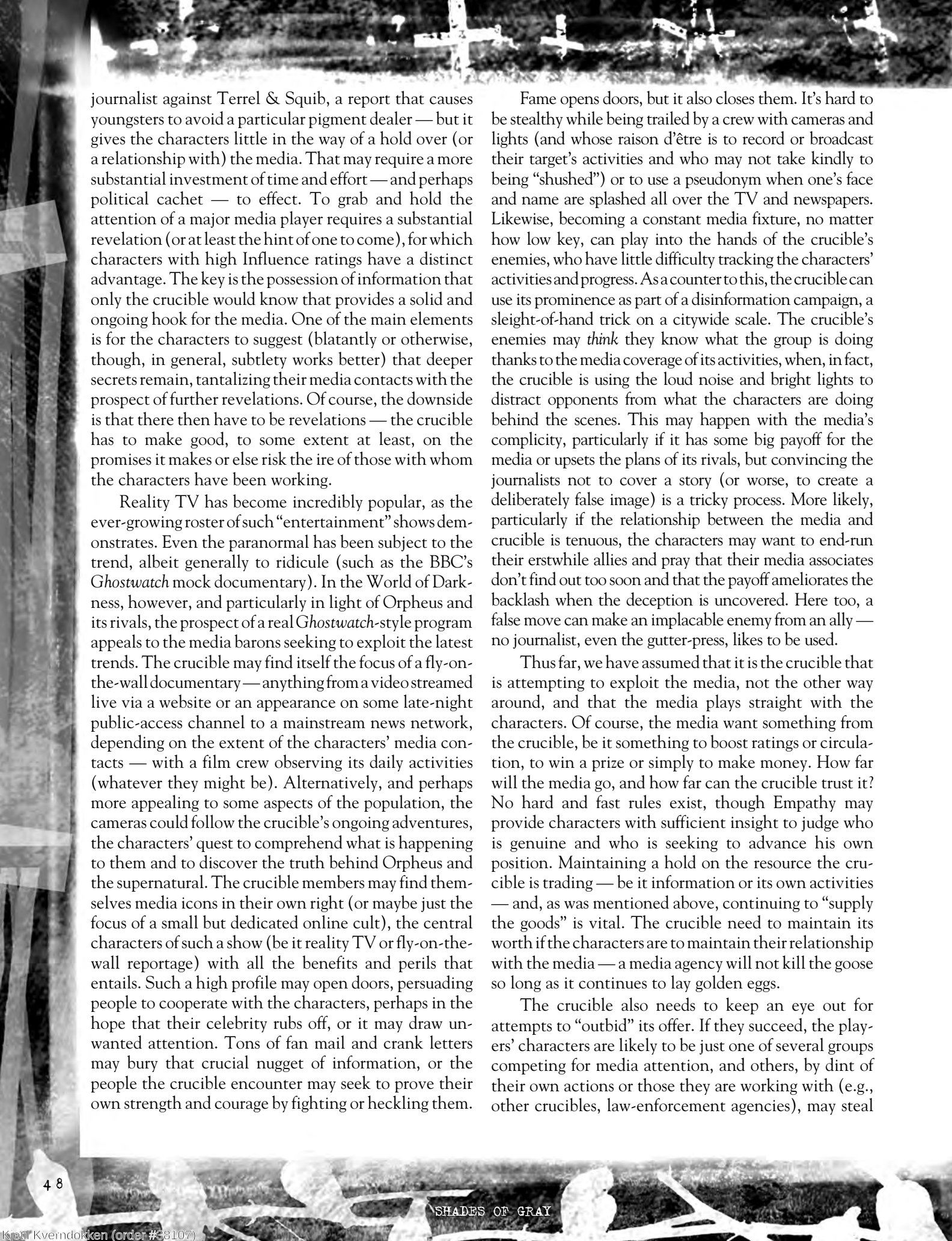
Characters who appear in front of the cameras face a whole range of additional challenges and opportunities, though some aspects of their media involvement are easier than for those attempting to work behind the scenes. The problem is remaining in control of the situation, working as the journalists' allies rather than their prey. Much of this depends on the characters' profiles and actions — if the crucible contains wanted felons or the media already know of them, they find themselves at the center of a feeding frenzy, chased by zealous journalists seeking to boost their ratings or perhaps win recognition for their journalistic talents. Some may even be looking to uncover “the truth,” be it about the existence (or nonexistence) of the supernatural, the secret of Orpheus and its demise or the role of the “government conspiracy” in it all. Getting a journalist's attention — for good or ill — is simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time. For example, reporters may canvass the characters on their views regarding the “sudden prevalence of ghost hunters,” or the media may target one or more characters for hard questioning because of their presence at a poison pigment rave or a known association with Orpheus. Once again, the Fame Background is a sure-fire way of drawing media attention, either because of the cachet of getting a sound bite from a prominent figure or the press' (and the public's) fascination with building up (and tearing down) celebrities. For example, a TV report may single out a famous person for praise after she helped give medical attention at the scene (even if she just helped someone who twisted his ankle in the panic to escape while all around them paramedics strove to help the dying) or vilify her for her presence (“Superstar in Death-Drug Rave Shock!”). Ensuring the coverage is more of the former and less of the latter is a challenge for any personality, let alone those involved in such a sensitive field and linked (directly or otherwise) to several multiple-homicides. A high Appearance rating may likewise be of value, particularly if the media in question is TV. Looks and fame, however, only take the characters so far. The crucible needs to back this image up with something more substantial.

Characters with high Charisma, Appearance or Performance (and perhaps Manipulation) ratings are best suited to such endeavors, allowing them to direct — subtly or otherwise — the media's attention. A high Wits Attribute can likewise be useful, allowing the character to bamboozle, outthink or even just embarrass her “opponents.” Such an aggressive stance may not, however, be in the crucible's best interests. An embarrassed reporter may just dig deeper to uncover “dirt” on the character as a means of revenge, while one whom the characters manipulate — overtly or not — may regard himself as a friend of the crucible and its members. The Performance Ability is essential to those hoping to

appear credible in front of the camera, incorporating a wide range of skills such as how to speak to an interviewer or audience, how best to look in front of the camera, an understanding of the importance of body language and how to exploit it and even the ability to avoid stage fright. For example, giving an entertaining interview might require a Charisma + Performance roll, while one that puts across the crucible's point succinctly and clearly might be a Wits + Performance roll. In a debate, such as might occur if the characters appear as guests on a chat show or a news-issues program, this may be a resisted and/or extended action.

If the crucible and the media are working together, the questions the characters face — if any — and the rigor with which their actions and assertions are judged are more lenient than they would be if the characters and the journalists had an antagonistic relationship. To some extent, this relationship is dependent on the journalist and his particular type of media: A scandal-merchant is focused on only the dirtiest aspects of a story and is not swayed by any arguments to the contrary, while a scientific (or para-scientific) journal focuses on technical matters to the exclusion of the “human” angle. The journalist's motivation may be easy to divine — for example, a gossip columnist looking to uncover (or create) a situation he can use to his advantage or a ghoulish crime reporter looking to total the night's body count — or might be more subtle, with perhaps several agendas running concurrently. A noted investigative journalist might be looking to do the public a service by uncovering “the truth” but might also be looking for the hook to sell newspapers or boost viewing figures *and* look for that knockout exposé that will win him a Pulitzer. If the crucible wishes to manipulate this individual for its own ends, which agenda do the characters target? The public one? His deep-seated longings? Furthermore, *what* is required? A well-placed suggestion, an exposé or perhaps a bribe? In such circumstance, Empathy and Intuition are pivotal, combined with Perception (for body language and other visual clues) or perhaps Wits (for more subtle manifestations). Of course, knowing the journalist's reputation — reading his articles, watching his shows, etc. — provides most of the insight the characters need.

What can the crucible offer the media to keep them on its side? Information is the simplest thing, but also the least tangible. The members of the crucible might serve as advisors or perhaps provide an interview, but once the reporters have what they want, what use does the media have for the characters? Granted, the snippet of information provided may bestow all the influence the crucible desires — perhaps a suggestion that sets an investigative



journalist against Terrel & Squib, a report that causes youngsters to avoid a particular pigment dealer — but it gives the characters little in the way of a hold over (or a relationship with) the media. That may require a more substantial investment of time and effort — and perhaps political cachet — to effect. To grab and hold the attention of a major media player requires a substantial revelation (or at least the hint of one to come), for which characters with high Influence ratings have a distinct advantage. The key is the possession of information that only the crucible would know that provides a solid and ongoing hook for the media. One of the main elements is for the characters to suggest (blatantly or otherwise, though, in general, subtlety works better) that deeper secrets remain, tantalizing their media contacts with the prospect of further revelations. Of course, the downside is that there then have to be revelations — the crucible has to make good, to some extent at least, on the promises it makes or else risk the ire of those with whom the characters have been working.

Reality TV has become incredibly popular, as the ever-growing roster of such “entertainment” shows demonstrates. Even the paranormal has been subject to the trend, albeit generally to ridicule (such as the BBC’s *Ghostwatch* mock documentary). In the World of Darkness, however, and particularly in light of Orpheus and its rivals, the prospect of a real *Ghostwatch*-style program appeals to the media barons seeking to exploit the latest trends. The crucible may find itself the focus of a fly-on-the-wall documentary — anything from a video streamed live via a website or an appearance on some late-night public-access channel to a mainstream news network, depending on the extent of the characters’ media contacts — with a film crew observing its daily activities (whatever they might be). Alternatively, and perhaps more appealing to some aspects of the population, the cameras could follow the crucible’s ongoing adventures, the characters’ quest to comprehend what is happening to them and to discover the truth behind Orpheus and the supernatural. The crucible members may find themselves media icons in their own right (or maybe just the focus of a small but dedicated online cult), the central characters of such a show (be it reality TV or fly-on-the-wall reportage) with all the benefits and perils that entails. Such a high profile may open doors, persuading people to cooperate with the characters, perhaps in the hope that their celebrity rubs off, or it may draw unwanted attention. Tons of fan mail and crank letters may bury that crucial nugget of information, or the people the crucible encounter may seek to prove their own strength and courage by fighting or heckling them.

Fame opens doors, but it also closes them. It’s hard to be stealthy while being trailed by a crew with cameras and lights (and whose *raison d’être* is to record or broadcast their target’s activities and who may not take kindly to being “shushed”) or to use a pseudonym when one’s face and name are splashed all over the TV and newspapers. Likewise, becoming a constant media fixture, no matter how low key, can play into the hands of the crucible’s enemies, who have little difficulty tracking the characters’ activities and progress. As a counter to this, the crucible can use its prominence as part of a disinformation campaign, a sleight-of-hand trick on a citywide scale. The crucible’s enemies may *think* they know what the group is doing thanks to the media coverage of its activities, when, in fact, the crucible is using the loud noise and bright lights to distract opponents from what the characters are doing behind the scenes. This may happen with the media’s complicity, particularly if it has some big payoff for the media or upsets the plans of its rivals, but convincing the journalists not to cover a story (or worse, to create a deliberately false image) is a tricky process. More likely, particularly if the relationship between the media and crucible is tenuous, the characters may want to end-run their erstwhile allies and pray that their media associates don’t find out too soon and that the payoff ameliorates the backlash when the deception is uncovered. Here too, a false move can make an implacable enemy from an ally — no journalist, even the gutter-press, likes to be used.

Thus far, we have assumed that it is the crucible that is attempting to exploit the media, not the other way around, and that the media plays straight with the characters. Of course, the media want something from the crucible, be it something to boost ratings or circulation, to win a prize or simply to make money. How far will the media go, and how far can the crucible trust it? No hard and fast rules exist, though Empathy may provide characters with sufficient insight to judge who is genuine and who is seeking to advance his own position. Maintaining a hold on the resource the crucible is trading — be it information or its own activities — and, as was mentioned above, continuing to “supply the goods” is vital. The crucible need to maintain its worth if the characters are to maintain their relationship with the media — a media agency will not kill the goose so long as it continues to lay golden eggs.

The crucible also needs to keep an eye out for attempts to “outbid” its offer. If they succeed, the players’ characters are likely to be just one of several groups competing for media attention, and others, by dint of their own actions or those they are working with (e.g., other crucibles, law-enforcement agencies), may steal



the crucible's limelight. Once the characters are "has-beens," their worth diminishes greatly. As such, when faced with competition, the characters may need to up the ante to retain their influence with the media. This may be in the same manner as maintaining their relationship with the media concerns — revealing more information or demonstrating the uniqueness of their perspective — or it may take on new forms such as increased risk-taking or more frequent coverage in an effort to outdo the opposition (and hoping their rivals do not likewise up the ante too far). Another threat is the "sellout," the base treachery that pulls the rug out from under the characters' feet with little or no warning. Perhaps an outside group puts pressure on the media agency to cease its activities, perhaps it takes the form of political or financial pressure — or maybe something more insidious such as a possessed executive who can take direct action against the crucible. Such attacks may take the form of a legal cease and desist order (perhaps claiming copyright violation or harassment of witnesses) or might be more tenuous, such as suggestions of falling ratings or increasingly unrealistic expectations of what the crucible can provide ("What do you mean we can't film you 24-7?"). Most dangerously, the actions of rivals or betrayal by allies can land the characters in an existence-threatening situation. Can the crucible predict and counter such moves, and if so, will the media agency be grateful?

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

The media exerts phenomenal power in modern society, informing us and shaping our outlook. Media groups have elevated (and destroyed) companies, governments and even countries, and wars are fought almost to match the schedules of primetime TV. No politician or corporation willingly challenges the media — they seek to keep it on their side, using it to their advantage and against their opponents. So, what happens if the crucible must face this implacable force? Will it destroy them, or can they turn it to their own advantage?

The media is not a monolithic entity (massive concerns such as AOL-Time-Warner or the BBC probably won't be interested in the crucible's small-scale activities), but rather, a "pack" of like-minded individuals, sometimes working together to run down prey but then squabbling over the juiciest morsels. A crucible has little hope of facing down the entire media but can, with judicious action, divert its interests.

One method, albeit a passive one, is for the characters to hide — or at least keep a low profile. If the crucible can do so for long enough, another story will come along and seize the place in the headlines the characters occupied, resulting in the journalists flitter-

ing off to the next story to seize their fancy. This relies on two factors that are beyond the crucible's control: another story surfacing of significant magnitude to take the crucible's place in the news cycle, and the characters (and their actions) being sufficiently innocuous that the media loses interest. If the crucible has made the FBI's most wanted list, then even the lowest profile does little to dampen media enthusiasm for the characters (at least in the long term — other stories may slip in and out of the headlines) and even *rumors* of their whereabouts may be newsworthy on some channels or in some papers. Even in less noteworthy cases, waiting out the media storm can also be time consuming. How long until they are no longer newsworthy? Should the characters wait even longer to safeguard themselves or take the risk of resuming their lives possibly too soon and risk undermining all they have worked to achieve?

A more proactive strategy may thus be called for, allowing the crucible to direct the media's attention away from it rather than waiting for journalists to lose interest. Divide and conquer is possibly the most effective strategy, with the characters building up a relationship with a particular individual within the media (be it a reporter or a media agency) who thus has a proprietary interest in the characters' fate. The idea of "exclusivity" plays well here, allowing the characters to dangle the possibility of a unique story before their tame media. Such exclusivity works well to sell papers or to boost viewer figures, and the "buyer" likely works diligently to protect its exclusive source, running interference with the other aspects of the media. This may leave the crucible free to act (provided the characters don't draw too much attention to themselves), though the prospect exists of an overly protective partnership where, in attempting to guard its source, the buyer limits the crucible's actions considerably. Furthermore, the "exclusives" the crucible provides need to be of sufficient significance to warrant its media "ally" taking action on the crucible's behalf. A more dangerous strategy is to try to preempt the media by giving it something even juicier to chase, distracting it from its pursuit of the crucible. It is quite possible that the characters know a number of secrets that they can barter to their own advantage. Of course, this runs the risk of drawing the new target's ire down on the characters, but the story's impact may be sufficient to allow the characters to escape under cover of the media frenzy.

Another possibility is to try to squash the story, though this can be extremely dangerous and has the potential to backfire spectacularly. An appropriately connected group can apply pressure to journalists (perhaps with blackmail or maybe just naked threats),

promising dire repercussions unless they drop the matter. This particular method is not, however, likely to help the crucible's cause — the characters' actions may only serve to heighten suspicion of their actions and lead to further investigations. More likely to succeed are efforts by well-connected crucibles to go over the journalists' heads, to editors or to owners whose dictates are more likely to be heeded by those in their employ. It is in the journalists' nature to question things, however. If told by "on high" to drop the investigation, they might do so, but not without asking why.

SPECTRES

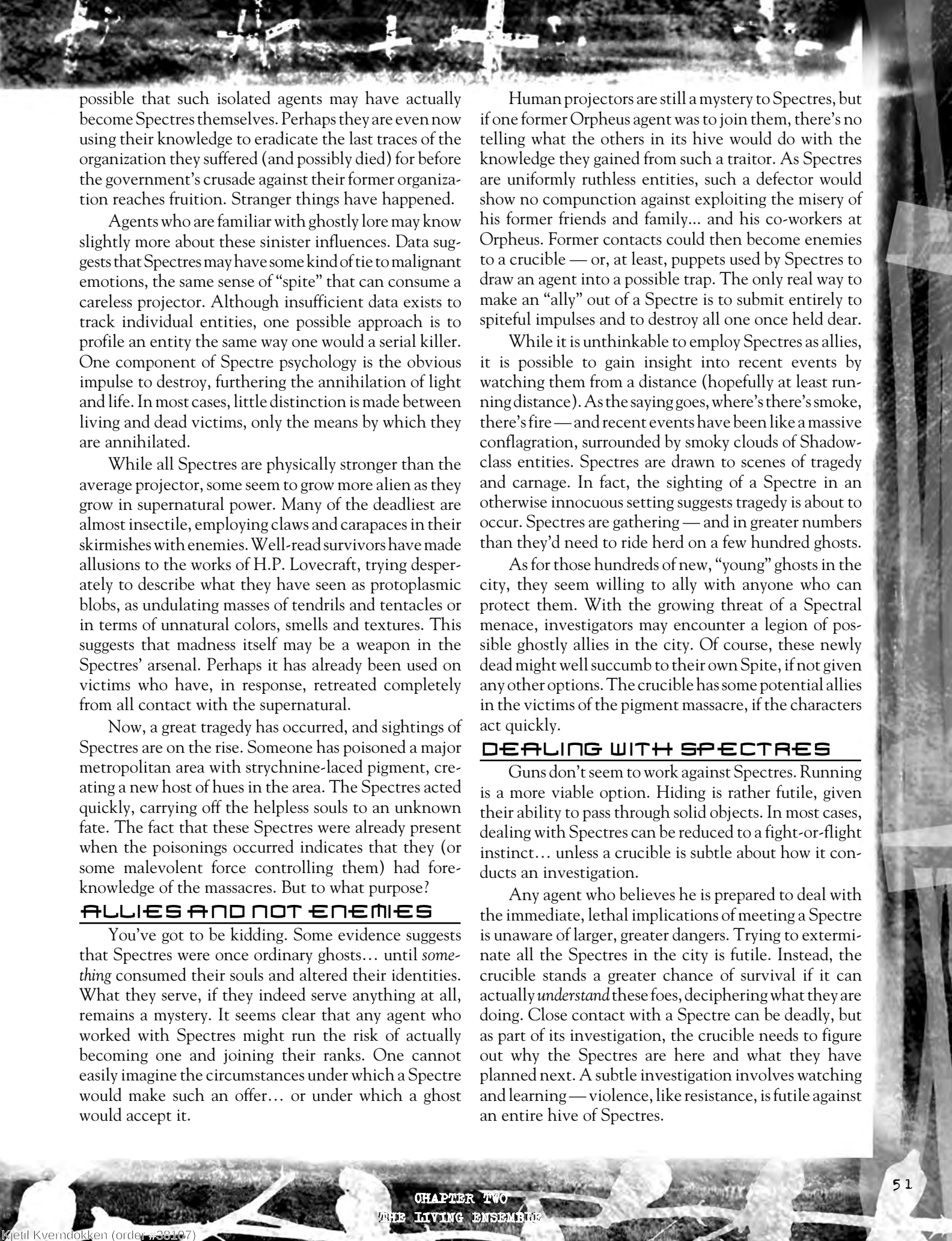
Overview: Theories abound on the true nature of Spectres. Some Orpheus agents believe Spectres are ghosts that actually feed on "negative energies," such as hatred, despair or fear. Others suspect that Spectres actually sustain themselves on the terror of other ghosts, torturing them by severing their connections to the people and places that tie them to the living. Still others believe Spectres may gain power by exploiting and harassing human projectors, particularly if they inhabit the helpless body of a skimmer or sleeper. Little evidence supports any of these claims, but all three of them carry a common thread: Spectres are obvi-

ously hostile, and they can be dangerous to anyone investigating the supernatural.

Orpheus, when it was still operational, had compiled all the data its agents had submitted about this supernatural menace, passing it along to new recruits. Spectres had been given the threat tag "Shadow-class Red." In almost every case, the projector initiating contact with a lone Spectre was attacked. In a few rare instances, the entity fled, but only to gather others of its kind and return in force. Official Orpheus policy was to flee such an encounter and report back on what was learned. Communication was only deemed worth the risk if an entire crucible was involved. With the sudden termination of Orpheus' operations, official protocol has been abandoned. Each surviving crucible now has only the resources it can acquire by itself.

Over 40 Orpheus agents have died from contact with Spectres, but unfortunately, since Orpheus' destruction, it has become nearly impossible to keep track of exact data on casualties. Other Orpheus agents have been left out in the cold since the last FBI raid, but since the survivors are still in hiding, there's no telling how many of them have survived (or if they haven't, what killed them). For those who were capable of projecting, or for those who were actually ghosts, it is entirely





possible that such isolated agents may have actually become Spectres themselves. Perhaps they are even now using their knowledge to eradicate the last traces of the organization they suffered (and possibly died) for before the government's crusade against their former organization reaches fruition. Stranger things have happened.

Agents who are familiar with ghostly lore may know slightly more about these sinister influences. Data suggests that Spectres may have some kind of tie to malignant emotions, the same sense of "spite" that can consume a careless projector. Although insufficient data exists to track individual entities, one possible approach is to profile an entity the same way one would a serial killer. One component of Spectre psychology is the obvious impulse to destroy, furthering the annihilation of light and life. In most cases, little distinction is made between living and dead victims, only the means by which they are annihilated.

While all Spectres are physically stronger than the average projector, some seem to grow more alien as they grow in supernatural power. Many of the deadliest are almost insectile, employing claws and carapaces in their skirmishes with enemies. Well-read survivors have made allusions to the works of H.P. Lovecraft, trying desperately to describe what they have seen as protoplasmic blobs, as undulating masses of tendrils and tentacles or in terms of unnatural colors, smells and textures. This suggests that madness itself may be a weapon in the Spectres' arsenal. Perhaps it has already been used on victims who have, in response, retreated completely from all contact with the supernatural.

Now, a great tragedy has occurred, and sightings of Spectres are on the rise. Someone has poisoned a major metropolitan area with strychnine-laced pigment, creating a new host of hues in the area. The Spectres acted quickly, carrying off the helpless souls to an unknown fate. The fact that these Spectres were already present when the poisonings occurred indicates that they (or some malevolent force controlling them) had foreknowledge of the massacres. But to what purpose?

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

You've got to be kidding. Some evidence suggests that Spectres were once ordinary ghosts... until *something* consumed their souls and altered their identities. What they serve, if they indeed serve anything at all, remains a mystery. It seems clear that any agent who worked with Spectres might run the risk of actually becoming one and joining their ranks. One cannot easily imagine the circumstances under which a Spectre would make such an offer... or under which a ghost would accept it.

Human projectors are still a mystery to Spectres, but if one former Orpheus agent was to join them, there's no telling what the others in its hive would do with the knowledge they gained from such a traitor. As Spectres are uniformly ruthless entities, such a defector would show no compunction against exploiting the misery of his former friends and family... and his co-workers at Orpheus. Former contacts could then become enemies to a crucible — or, at least, puppets used by Spectres to draw an agent into a possible trap. The only real way to make an "ally" out of a Spectre is to submit entirely to spiteful impulses and to destroy all one once held dear.

While it is unthinkable to employ Spectres as allies, it is possible to gain insight into recent events by watching them from a distance (hopefully at least running distance). As the saying goes, where's there's smoke, there's fire — and recent events have been like a massive conflagration, surrounded by smoky clouds of Shadow-class entities. Spectres are drawn to scenes of tragedy and carnage. In fact, the sighting of a Spectre in an otherwise innocuous setting suggests tragedy is about to occur. Spectres are gathering — and in greater numbers than they'd need to ride herd on a few hundred ghosts.

As for those hundreds of new, "young" ghosts in the city, they seem willing to ally with anyone who can protect them. With the growing threat of a Spectral menace, investigators may encounter a legion of possible ghostly allies in the city. Of course, these newly dead might well succumb to their own Spite, if not given any other options. The crucible has some potential allies in the victims of the pigment massacre, if the characters act quickly.

DEALING WITH SPECTRES

Guns don't seem to work against Spectres. Running is a more viable option. Hiding is rather futile, given their ability to pass through solid objects. In most cases, dealing with Spectres can be reduced to a fight-or-flight instinct... unless a crucible is subtle about how it conducts an investigation.

Any agent who believes he is prepared to deal with the immediate, lethal implications of meeting a Spectre is unaware of larger, greater dangers. Trying to exterminate all the Spectres in the city is futile. Instead, the crucible stands a greater chance of survival if it can actually *understand* these foes, deciphering what they are doing. Close contact with a Spectre can be deadly, but as part of its investigation, the crucible needs to figure out why the Spectres are here and what they have planned next. A subtle investigation involves watching and learning — violence, like resistance, is futile against an entire hive of Spectres.

Stealth is a far more useful asset here than strength, along with the ability to track down survivors of encounters with Spectres. Questioning witnesses is much safer than witnessing events firsthand. Supernatural talents of prediction and psychometry may be particularly useful, since an investigator who can distance himself through time can reduce the risk of direct contact. If, as some suspect, a hive mind is directing these entities, there must be a pattern to its activities.

If any Spectres are working alone or independently, the chances of surviving direct contact increase. Direct questioning is a method that has never succeeded. Studying a crime scene after the fact is much safer. If the crucible hopes to face a Spectre up close and personal, it must stand together or be destroyed. Whatever the tactic of investigation, the crucible must remember that it has strength in numbers. No one skimmer or sleeper can hope to face one of these horrors alone. The

crucible must coordinate its efforts. The Spectres opposing it certainly will.

TERREL & SQUIB

Overview: Terrel & Squib was Orpheus Group's primary competition, along with the more militant NextWorld, in the days prior to the attacks that wiped out Orpheus and other, smaller competitors. Formerly a small pharmaceuticals company, it burst onto the paranormal investigations scene following Orpheus Group's triumphant debut. It had more capital behind its operation than Orpheus could dream of, and its scientific credentials made it an attractive alternative for those who needed proof of what they were experiencing. T&S's other prime attraction for clients was the promise of full discretion, "no questions asked" service, a policy that endeared it to the rich and famous. (Orpheus provided this service as well, of course, but Terrel & Squib was more aggressive in pursuing such contracts.)

Terrel & Squib Survive Attacks of Terror

by Marsha Huntley

The recent shocking round of attacks on the leaders of the new paranormal investigations industry has left Wall Street, and indeed all of America, reeling. The FBI believes that domestic terrorists are behind the threat, while others suggest international terrorism. Religious groups across the nation have disavowed any knowledge of the attacks, instead decrying the perpetrators. Experts, however, have suggested that a parishioner might have taken to heart the Biblical verse "Do not suffer a witch to live."

Despite all the controversy, however, the paranormal-investigations firm Terrel & Squib has come to the forefront in recent days as one of the bastions of sanity and reason in an otherwise chaotic time. The founders of the company, John Terrel and Dr. Lionel Squib, held a press conference earlier today in which they pledged \$50,000 dollars to the families of those lost in the brutal attack on the T&S facilities. Over 30 individuals were killed in the attack, with as many as 16 still reported missing.

Though most such investigations firms are closing shop, Terrel and Squib seem devoted to continuing their research and activities in that industry. "The attacks devastated our employees, naturally," said Terrel, "but we feel that this is too important to simply turn our backs on and forget it exists. We owe it not only to ourselves, but to those who passed on before us to ensure that no one is trapped between this world and the next, causing harm to stranger and loved one alike. Our clients depend on us, and we intend to be there for them."

Despite those brave sentiments, however, one has to wonder how easy that will be for the company to actually do. Following the attacks, Terrel & Squib's stock price dropped nearly 50 points in a single day, with smaller increments over the following week adding to a total loss of nearly 80 points. The prices have shown a recent rally, as the company worked to preserve its image and reach out to its investors. Financial experts, however, continue to express doubt that the company can pull through in the face of so much hardship.



Dr. Lionel Squib and John Terrel share a rare moment of laughter during their press conference

Other sources, however, suggest that the pharmaceuticals division of the company may, appropriately enough, provide the shot in the arm T&S needs. Unnamed sources within the company itself have spoken of a new miracle drug in the works, a scientific breakthrough that will speed psychiatric concerns forward another 50 years. There has been no official word on anything of the sort from the company, however, and no evidence of it in the annual reports.



Despite its wealth of resources and personnel, however, Terrel & Squib's business practices always mystified Orpheus' researchers. Comparatively speaking, very few due actual projectors were fielded for any one assignment, and the company's shoddy research methods resulted in an "in-the-field" death toll that Orpheus would have found unacceptable. Still, Terrel & Squib never seemed to hurt for new employees, suggesting that it had something to make up for the slipshod way it did business. Certainly, its public image never tarnished, no matter what occurred.

The management at Terrel & Squib was always happy to talk with operatives from Orpheus and would often "headhunt" them, approaching individuals with offers of substantial bonuses, excellent benefits, company-paid housing or automobiles and other pie-in-the-sky offers. Some took the company up on its deals, some didn't. Following the attacks and the demise of most of T&S's projecting division, the company has stepped up such employment strategies in earnest. It is looking to rebuild, especially now that its competition has vanished, and anyone with experience is highly sought after.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

If the characters are interested in continuing their careers as projectors under Terrel & Squib's banner, they can expect a number of perks to accompany the decision. It is likely that the characters may be pursued by any number of groups, ranging from unknown assailants to the FBI and the media. Terrel & Squib can put an end to much of that. Although the FBI won't give up just because the crucible has a new job, T&S intercedes with the FBI as much as possible, trying to nudge the organization in another direction for the main attraction of its PR circus.

T&S is also happy to provide more tangible means of protection as well, from secured luxury housing, to bodyguards, to invisible surveillance, should anyone have the ability to chase the crucible there. The characters are kept protected and secure, down to the company forging new identities for the crucible's members. In addition, they are well paid, even better than they were at Orpheus (up to 35 percent higher than their Orpheus salary) as experienced projectors. They have full medical benefits and a generous retirement package, should any of them stay with the company long enough to earn it (20 years). Add onto that the chance to see the personal lives of some of

the most famous and influential individuals in the Western world (and possibly form an acquaintance with these individuals), and it's easy to see why someone might want to work there.

The downside to all of this, however, is that there's a point when protection transforms into captivity. Employees are unceasingly monitored "for their own protection." If they showed up on the run from someone, that might even be true. In addition, Orpheus is correct about Terrel & Squib's questionable methods. The crucible members may easily find themselves longing for the days when they worked for Orpheus and could be relatively sure about what they'd find on an assignment. In addition, for all that the company is ostensibly investing in the characters, it seems rather laissez-faire about safety procedures or the welfare of its employees on the job. So long as the assignment is completed, no matter how or why, the company's happy, regardless of the loss involved.

Despite this uncaring approach to work, T&S is exceptionally careful to make sure none of its employees leave the company for anything other than a health-related incident or full retirement. Management closely watches anyone who seems unhappy and eventually transfers such employees into a different division entirely if the problem does not improve. As each division is kept completely sealed off from the others, the individual effectively disappears altogether from the perspective of his former co-workers.

DEALING WITH TERREL & SQUIB

In an effort to neutralize the less pleasant side of working for Terrel & Squib, the following tactics can provide some assistance. A character with allies within Terrel & Squib might have access to greater freedom or trust from the company than she'd otherwise enjoy, thanks to her friend standing up for her. Contacts among the rich and powerful could serve to net the characters more information about the clients they're assigned to help and the problems that are actually occurring. Those who obtained detective licenses through Orpheus can still put them to good use, allowing members of the crucible to find that type of information for themselves when there's time or contacts aren't available. Those with influence in society or big business could prove valuable enough to both the crucible and Terrel & Squib that they might even become spokespersons for the company, using that information to both reassure potential clients and maintain a good public image for T&S.

STORYTELLERS SECTION

Now that the players have had their moment in the sun, it's time for the Storytellers to have theirs. Whether it's new information on old adversaries coming to light or another group clamoring for its piece of the characters' hides, this is where the Storytellers can find the dirt on what's really going on.

The following list of important groups in the **Orpheus** saga to date covers the organizations listed in the players sections as well as series of both new and expanded groups that have recently taken to the playing field. These are the DEA, the FBI, the NSA, the Blasphemers, the media, NextWorld, the pigment cults, Radio Free Death, Spectres and Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals. Storytellers are encouraged to read the players section as well (which covers most of the aforementioned groups) in order to gain a full understanding of the organizations in question.

The NSA's presence in prior books was kept to a minimum as the organization deliberately stayed out of sight. Now, the Storyteller can learn the truth of its involvement with Orpheus, along with the methods its personnel use to keep themselves out of the limelight. Terrel & Squib has been known as a competitor of the Orpheus Group for some time. This supplement reveals the truth behind its odd methods as well as its stake in the destruction of Orpheus and the secrets of its success. NextWorld's decline as a force is outlined in brief, as well as the means and ways of the Radio Free Death broadcasts (a garbled source of eerie transmissions for those on the shady side of death) and their host, Terrence Green. The sudden rise in the number and visibility of Spectres earns them a mention as well. Finally, a rising new threat is detailed, collectively called the pigment cults, a scattering of quasi-religious groups centered on pigment, a highly addictive street drug with some unusual side effects.

Each entry in this section has headings as follows:

Background: Prior to this book, the information given to the Storyteller about any specific group was largely limited to what Orpheus would have known or guessed. With the destruction of the Orpheus Group, however, that method has become moot. For this supplement, this heading instead gives the information Orpheus wouldn't have known about, including the groups' current agendas.

The Current Plan of Attack: This heading deals with the current actions or plans of the organization being discussed. Storytellers are encouraged to mine this

STORYTELLER HINTS: USING THOSE BACKGROUND POINTS

Some Storytellers believe that drawing on a Background is easier in the downtime between game sessions than in the midst of play. To encourage this, they set aside time at the end of each session (usually around the time they award experience) and ask if anyone wants to use them.

For instance, one technique involves handing out slips of paper, then asking each player to designate one Background for his character to use during that downtime. The players write down their answers and hand them in. During the next session, the Storyteller then weaves plot elements into the story showing the results of their inquiries.

Backgrounds don't always have immediate returns on their investments, but that shouldn't stop a character from trying to make a phone call or send an e-mail in the midst of the adventure. To encourage your players to think about this possibility, you might prompt them by having someone represented by one of their Backgrounds call *them*. Perhaps a patron manages to track down where the crucible is and makes a phone call, or an ally leaves some clue that she stopped by a hiding character's apartment, car or usual hangout. To keep this rolling, don't have the government automatically shut down all of the crucible's means of communicating with the outside world. You may want to ease up on phone surveillance and e-mail monitoring when you expect them to use these assets (the FBI is hardly infallible, after all).

A third technique is setting aside a "prelude" of sorts at the start of a session to ask more background questions about the characters. In addition to questions about friends, family and personal history, send out a round of questions of what the character's various Backgrounds might represent. That should give them a broad enough hint to get them thinking.

The characters can't solve their problems entirely with Backgrounds, but as described in the various "Dealing with" sections of this chapter, any one of them can at least provide a lead. If the characters start to feel powerless and overwhelmed by a vast and uncaring government that looks like its out to destroy them, encouraging them to look at their character sheets and Backgrounds is a strong idea. This doesn't have to involve asking outright, "Do you have Backgrounds you can use?" Instead, an occasional bit of contact with the allies, patrons, contacts and other personas you've set up as part of your chronicle's backstory gives them resources they can use.

information for adventure ideas, customizing as needed to suit the needs of their chronicles.

Allies and Not Enemies: Not every organization in the game is a psychopathic group out to kill the characters—and even if one is, it doesn't mean it can't be dealt with. This information focuses what might happen if the characters are allied with the group or organization in question, including the benefits, rewards and limitations of such a relationship. This heading is only present for the groups not previously covered in the "Players Section."

Dealing with the Organization: This section covers methods of dealing with the organization in question that might be useful to the crucible as a whole, covering anything from neutralizing the threat the organization may pose to allaying the group's suspicions and joining its side. The possible uses of Backgrounds to influence or affect the group are given special attention, encouraging the players to actively put their knowledge to use.

Note to players: The heading "Storytellers Section" should be enough. We urge you not to read this part of the book, as information here could severely compromise your enjoyment of the game (and possibly the Storyteller's enjoyment of running it). Keep in mind that, even if you actually enjoy knowing what's going on

behind the scenes, it could instead ruin someone else's enjoyment of the game if you forget and slip a spoiler into casual conversation. All in all, it's probably preferable for everyone if you just slide on by this bit of the book and pick it back up elsewhere. Enough disclaimers already. You've been warned.

THE BLASPHEMERS

Background: The Blasphemers are more complex than they seem at first. Yes, the bulk of their members are former gang members, but the four ringleaders have a somewhat more sinister background: Each is a former "member" (though "victim" might be more appropriate) of Project Flatline, former internees of the Marion Federal Penitentiary who were used in the initial experiments with projecting. Terrence Green, as Radio Free Death, might already have made vague comments about "Orpheus' predecessors," which applies as much to the core membership of the Blasphemers as to other Flatliners. Like their fellow members of the project, those who formed the Blasphemers were among the toughest in Marion Federal Penitentiary, survivors of numerous fights both in and out of prison. Their experiences made them ideal candidates, but unlike many of the other Flatliners, they had been the leaders and



lieutenants of various gangs before their arrest and imprisonment. Although initially sundered by the antagonistic relationships that color such groups, the quartet — Carlton Jackson, Lucas “Big Man” Broad (who serves as the group’s de-facto leader), Stephen Moluxe and Jeffrey Rose — found their common experiences helped them work together, bound together in an association that went beyond allies. In effect, the gang-origin Flatliners formed a crucible and may have provided the impetus for Orpheus to establish the fully fledged system in Project Echo.

This “spook gang” did not instigate the escape from Marion, but the four welcomed their newfound freedom and the opportunities it offered them. Whether as a result of their own ties or for other reasons, the gang members did not feel any kinship with the ringleader of the “breakout” and refused to aid his mission (the details of which the gang members were never party to, though their refusal to aid Bishop led to his calling them “Blasphemers”). Instead, they set out on their own. Out in the city, the Flatliners found that they were not the only ghosts, though they were among the most powerful. Returning to their old haunts, the gang of Flatliners encountered many spooks created by the brutal gang lifestyle, most of whom were little more than drones. The reaction of these ghosts confused the Flatliners initially — each was locked in its own pocket universe, little different from mortal life — but eventually, they discovered the secret of raising these self-involved spirits to consciousness. In short order, the gang had a small army of spooks loyal to the core group and chose to adopt the name Bishop had given them: the Blasphemers. Moluxe and Rose split off from the other two, forging their own alliances and making their own way (which is detailed in **Crusade of Ashes**). Broad and Jackson, however, had other plans.

As the only ghost gang in the city, the Blasphemers faced none of the rivalries that usually accompany gang life and, as a consequence, lacked the sense of identity many of them longed for. The Blasphemers soon became bored with their existence and began to quarrel among themselves, which could easily have destroyed them. Instead, “Big Man” came up with the idea of working with the mortal gangs as “ghost mercenaries,” offering their unique services — either directly or, more often, through the aegis of their mortal agents — in exchange for money, resources and status.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

Storytellers should note that the Blasphemers presented in **Crusade of Ashes** and those mentioned here are almost two distinct organizations. The Blasphemers

WHAT THEY KNOW

While Stephen Moluxe and Jeffrey Rose know little about Uriah Bishop and Project Flatline (as revealed in **Crusade of Ashes**), their two compatriots know a little more. The Flatliners among the Blasphemers might be persuaded to aid the crucible’s cause, but their knowledge of what happened to the other members of Project Flatline — or even details of the project itself — are rather sketchy. At best, the Blasphemers can reveal the existence of the endeavor and the (presumed) complicity of the government in its operations. The Blasphemers *do* know that other Flatliners exist, perhaps as many as a dozen, but not their locations or agendas. The gang knows that the Flatliner leader, Uriah Bishop (they know his name as a result of their time with Project Flatline), had some plan, though not precisely what. The gang leaders suspect it may have some link to the religious visions Bishop claims to have had, relating to the true nature of ghosts and their allegiance to some ill-defined mother figure. This relationship seems to have occurred once Uriah Bishop began training as a projector. The Blasphemers know that Bishop regards them as heretics and unbelievers — hence their nickname — and that some dark figure haunts their dreams, though whether that is Bishop or some hitherto unknown threat, the Flatliners don’t know.

In effect, the Blasphemers can provide some vague details about Orpheus’ long-lost history and those who were its tools but nothing about current plans, locations or identities.

under Stephen Moluxe and Jeffrey Rose are the front-line gang members and relative cannon-fodder for the other two Flatliners, Broad and Jackson. Moluxe and Rose are almost jokes given their grandiose and flamboyant nature and are fully intended to act as screening mechanisms. Thus, any arrangements made with the Blasphemers presented in **Crusade of Ashes** do not apply here (though the Storyteller has final say on the matter). While Broad and Jackson are Blasphemers, they don’t trust Moluxe or Rose enough to judge outsiders effectively. Thus, all information presented herein that pertains to the Blasphemers applies to Broad and Jackson, as well as the gangbangers directly loyal to them and their two mortal handlers. This group tries distancing any ties between itself and the self-styled demagogue, Moluxe and his crew.

The Blasphemers have little in the way of a personal agenda and are, for the present at least, content to

relive their mortal lives, influencing the mortal gangs around them and establishing a reputation for themselves. Their attitudes are, however, mercenary, and they have no compunction about selling their services, although the gang leaders have some standards regarding with whom they will and will not work. The Blasphemers do not work for any group that acts against their interests — for example interfering with the actions of allied gangs or aiding a rival group — nor do they work (openly at least) for any government or law-enforcement agency. In practice, however, this latest prohibition is somewhat soft — the gang does not work hand-in-hand with the police or the FBI, but it may use back-channel means to work with them if, in doing so, it can garner a reward, which one of the gang's mortal agents can claim and use for the benefit of the gang. Likewise, it is possible to overcome the Blasphemers' objections to a particular employer with significantly high offers of recompense. Conversely, the gang will, under no circumstances, take direct action against a current employer (though it may let slip certain facts about him if its interests are best served by doing so, particularly if the employer has demonstrated bad faith or taken action against the interests of the Blasphemers or their allies). In short, while the Blasphemers do not betray their friends, sufficiently large bribes (or commensurate recompense) might persuade them to do almost anything else.

The only guaranteed way to stir the Blasphemers into action is to insult them, by word or by deed. The gang members are proud of their status and achievements and resent interlopers or those who denigrate their successes. Directly insulting the gang or harming one of its members elicits bloody and violent reprisals, leading to a vendetta that may dog the crucible's heels even if the characters move away from the Blasphemers' direct influence (though it may earn the characters some respect from the gang's mortal opponents). Meddling in or opposing the Blasphemers' schemes may likewise cause offense to the ghost gang, although exceptions exist. If the crucible is the target of a Blasphemer action (for example, as a result of a contract), then actions the characters take in their own defense are largely acceptable. Likewise, the Blasphemers have little problem if a conflict erupts with one side aided by the Blasphemers and the other by the crucible (indeed, they may relish the challenge of a gang war among ghosts). If the crucible moves to block the Blasphemers' actions (i.e., the gang itself is being targeted, rather than fighting to control a resource), then the gang's leaders construe the crucible's actions as a direct challenge to their authority and power. If this was accidental — for ex-

ample, the crucible was called on to deal with a haunting that happened to be carried out under the Blasphemers' aegis — then there might be some grounds for apologies and reconciliation (after all, it was just "business" not a direct attack on the Blasphemers) — but only if the crucible acts quickly and appropriately. Once started on the path of vengeance, the Blasphemers are difficult to deflect and unlikely to stop. Indeed, in such a confrontation, only two results are likely: The crucible falls or the Blasphemers do.

DEALING WITH THE BLASPHEMERS

The Blasphemers' entry of the "Players Section" of this chapter gives most of the details on how the gang might be contained and dealt with and does not need repeating here. It is worth stressing that, given their background and "age" as post-life entities, at least two of the four Flatliner leaders of the Blasphemers are as powerful, probably more so, than the members of the crucible. Most have access to the third-tier Horror appropriate to their Shade (as detailed in Chapter Three), including one with Broadband Ghost who handles the Blasphemers' electronic transactions (though Storytellers may also update Rose and Moluxe to wield third-tier Horrors as well). The leaders of the Blasphemers are also experienced scrappers, having dealt with challenges from several of their recruits who sought to usurp their powers and privileges, and are thus wary of efforts to undermine their authority. If the leaders suspect outsiders of doing so — even outsiders with whom they have a profitable relationship — the gang takes preemptive action, usually going for maximum gruesomeness as an "object lesson" to others who might oppose it. The gang leaders exploit their supernatural powers to maximum effect, conjoining Horrors to gain the added benefits, and do not quail from calling on their allies for aid against the crucible's mortal bodies and resources. The two mortal Blasphemers, Josiah Morton and Edward Water, lack the innate power of their spirit brothers but have the advantage of exploiting the gang's wealth and physical resources (which are of little practical use to most of the ghost gang) and also revel in the prestige of their position as the gang's public face. This is not to say, however, that the mortal Blasphemers are weak. They are skilled fighters (at least two dots in each of Brawl, Melee and Firearms) and have few scruples about when and how to act. Furthermore, each is almost always accompanied by one of the low-level gang ghosts, who can act on his behalf or call for support, as needed. Those hostile to the Blasphemers who have sought to target the gang's "weak" mortal members quickly find themselves disabused of any such notions.

LUCAS "BIG MAN" BROAD

Growing up in the streets gave Lucas Broad great insight into human nature: He worked almost exclusively with his extended family and shunned those around him. By the age of 12, Broad was running with the local Bloods and was only 14 when he killed his first man — a member of another gang who had unwisely strayed onto the wrong turf. Tall and with a girth to match, "Big Man" (as he became known) was an imposing figure who quickly gained an appetite for killing. Appointed as one of those who patrolled the turf and prevented incursions or else provided muscle at one of the many drug deals the gang brokered, Broad quickly gained a reputation for strength and ruthlessness in equal measure. Fate smiled on him for several years as he survived shootings, stabbings and one crude bomb attack by a rival gang. His luck ran out, however, when a drive-by shooting in which he participated killed the slumming scion of some uptown family and the cops came down hard on the gangs. Arrested in the sweep, Broad was later convicted of five counts of murder and sentenced to death. He was only 19.

At Marion, he fell in with other incarcerated gangbangers drawn by his reputation and charisma. Regarded as a troublemaker from the outset, the prison authorities handed him over to Project Flatline. Several other gangbangers were assigned to the project and found that each benefited from working together in their supernatural activities. With the destruction of their bodies, the members of this little clique found themselves free and had no intention of joining Uriah Bishop. Instead, Big Man suggested return to what they knew best — gang life — and thus were born the Blasphemers.



Image: Lucas is called "Big Man" for a reason. Over six and a half feet tall and hugely muscled, Big Man is the kind of man who made police call for backup at a glance. Big Man is black and appears to be in his early 20s, but his face is scarred and twisted.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 4, Computer 2, Drive 2, Expression 2, Finance 1, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Intuition 1, Leadership 2, Melee 2, Occult 1, Streetwise 3, Survival 2

Shade: Poltergeist

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Competitor

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 6

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Anathema, Congeal, Helter Skelter, Juggernaut, Puppetry

THE FBI

Background: When the "Bureau of Investigation" was originally founded in 1908, its original goal was to investigate on behalf of the Attorney General's office. Unarmed agents tracked down organized crime syndicates and bank robbers. They were only marginally effective until agents gained the authority to make arrests — along with the authority to use firepower, such as the infamous Thompson submachine gun. Continually evolving, the Bureau has undergone a vast series of changes over the last century. After J. Edgar Hoover became its director in 1924, he reformed it from a corrupt organization to a professional outfit... but then altered it into a shadowy organization that spied on "threats" to the United States, often focusing on those who offended or rivaled Hoover's own political beliefs.

During the Cold War, the FBI's powers as a counterintelligence agency grew, and its position as an anti-terrorist organization expanded. (That first function is not as important today, but the second is a growing priority.) After the 1970s, the success of its Behavioral Science Unit, along with high-profile cases involving the apprehension of serial killers, gradually changed its image to a high-tech and highly educated investigative branch essential to law enforcement. As portrayed in more recent movies and television programs, Clarice Starling and Fox Mulder are a far cry from Jimmy Stewart's agent, Chip Hardesty, in the 1959 film *The FBI Story*.

The modern incarnation of the FBI is responsible for enforcing over 250 federal laws. Its jurisdiction

extends to (but is by no means limited to) white-collar crime, organized crime, robbery of insured banks, federal narcotics violations, kidnaping, interstate criminal activity and (of course) counterterrorism. After the Cold War, its authority and resources in this last area of investigation steadily grew until, in the post-9/11 world of homeland security, it became one of the Bureau's primary functions.

The X-Files notwithstanding, the FBI really has better things to do with its time than to investigate the supernatural — unless paranormal activity is somehow tied to criminal activity. Orpheus' possible involvement in corporate espionage merits close inspection, but behind the scenes lies another reason for such scrutiny: discovery of the group's projector technology. The FBI relies on top-notch surveillance, but Orpheus has an edge in that field no government agency can muster. In fact, a paranoid patriot may even suspect that such unknown forces could even be watching *him*....

Throw in the involvement of other agencies, and a routine investigation explodes into a firestorm of competition and controversy. In the interest of counterintelligence, an FBI special director has demanded to know where Orpheus' data was going — and if anyone hostile to the United States was paying for that information. If this was an open investigation, investigating this potential crime could theoretically fall within the Bureau's jurisdiction. Since this activity poses a possible threat to national security, higher-ranking officials have debated on what would happen if it fell into the wrong hands.

If this seems like a stretch, then read between the lines: What would happen if it fell *under the control of another federal agency*? The Bureau has always had a record of isolating itself from other such agencies. In fact, it's the only government agency that does not open its intelligence databases to the CIA. The thought of someone compromising the FBI's security is catastrophic... and the potential for controlling such technology is tantalizing.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

Behind the scenes, isolated cells of agents are not only evaluating Orpheus' projector technology, but also theorizing how they can acquire it. By discrediting the Orpheus agents who use it, they continue to investigate ways to bring similar technology under their own control. Idealists may see this acquisition as a way to investigate crimes with thoroughness unequalled by mere physical operations. Others see it as a way to expand the government's ability to maintain its homeland security, a technological edge that can guarantee safety from foreign threats.

A few realists know the reason behind the FBI cleaning house and "sanitizing" Orpheus: One of its own agents was trying to infiltrate the facility. That agent's undercover mission was to gather more information on the new technology, but it failed horribly when two other groups moved in. The NSA had its own reasons to monitor Orpheus, but more importantly, Uriah Bishop learned of the undercover agent's involvement. The FBI mole never expected a group of mercenaries to detonate explosives in the facility, but when they did, the FBI director who sent him in realized he would have to quickly cover his own tracks. Persecuting former Orpheus agents is only the first step.

In **Crusade of Ashes**, the FBI "tagged and flagged" Orpheus agents. Payroll records and other personal data presented a trail any skilled Bureau investigator could follow. A more covert conspiracy within the FBI took this hunt a step further. Any Orpheus agent using an ATM to make a purchase, swiping a credit card through an electronic reader or presenting a driver's license to a police officer left a trail for the FBI to follow. This technology is still in place in the current episode. The Bureau doesn't just send in a SWAT team moments after someone buys a tank of gas. Instead, the poor clerk involved in the transaction might make a quick phone call to the "authorities" when the transaction doesn't go through.

By the time a poisoned shipment of pigment slaughters an innocent population of American citizens, unleashing new hues into the city, the characters of your chronicle are no longer the real threat. The FBI witch-hunt should be winding down by then, but the Bureau still has valid reasons for keeping tabs on the characters. That means continuing to watch the trail they leave behind, if only to check for any connection between Orpheus agents and the poisoned drug shipment. The feds very presence should keep the characters honest, their operations legal and their actions cautious (or, perhaps, push them further underground and into illegal activity).

After the events of the last episode, the pendulum of popular opinion has begun to swing back again. Zealous supporters of the government's attempts to seize more authority are now facing counterarguments. The media, which has boosted its ratings by portraying FBI agents as heroes, has now begun to realize there's another story to be heard, one in which they question the Bureau's actions. (By arguing each side of this controversy — but only when it suits their own interests — reporters can claim a degree of "objectivity.") The FBI's inquisition has probably turned up little except rhetoric at this point, and the sound bites have become stale. Despite this, the FBI is continuing its investigation to justify the extreme measures it has taken, which means that it is only a matter of time before an

Orpheus agent is set up as a scapegoat. If the characters are discreet, it won't be them.

FBI agents are doing their best to keep the media's attention focused on this "great threat to the privacy of all Americans." If they have no solid leads on the villains responsible behind the poisoned drug shipment, they'll continue to gradually supply information about Orpheus to the public, making it look like they're making progress. It is in the characters' best interests, then, to conduct their own investigation quickly, if only to divert attention away from themselves. The Bureau should begin this episode with vague allegations that there "may be a connection" between the characters and this poisoned drug shipment. That's enough to set up further disclosures if the Orpheus agents stray from where the FBI wants them to go.

DEALING WITH THE FBI

From the characters' point of view, the FBI probably looked like one of their most formidable enemies at the end of the last episode. This isn't entirely true. Although the Bureau has tagged agents, the NSA has access to that same data. The Bureau has put up rewards leading to the arrest of the characters, but every *Silent Witness* announcement or show like *America's Most Wanted* broadcasts to the opposition how much the agency claims to know. In a way, the FBI is less powerful than some of the forces in this story precisely because it is more visible.

In addition, more Spectres have entered the city, and this should alter the FBI's tactics accordingly. The rise of this new Shadow-class threat has presented another reason for the FBI to take interest in recent paranormal activity. The FBI doesn't know about the existence of Spectres, but its agents will see evidence of the atrocities these ghosts are committing. More suspicious unexplained crimes means more possible leads against projectors, particularly Orpheus agents.

After the pigment massacres, a few Spectres begin to indulge their predator instincts among the common populace. While most seem to be watching and waiting to judge how best to exploit the city's new population of spirits, a renegade few have begun to hunt human prey. The ruthless and alien nature of these predators has attracted some of the FBI's more psychological investigators... who would no doubt consider projecting Orpheus agents as primary suspects in these paranormal plots. A Spectre's ability at subterfuge and misdirection could easily bring further suspicion against an Orpheus agent who threatened its own interest. (This is also true of any spirit character's twin.)

As more supernatural powers enter the plot, the FBI slowly become a less formidable threat. For instance,

ghosts and Spectres have it within their power to use Puppetry or Unearthly Repose on FBI agents, exploit them, frame them and then shift all blame on the Bureau. If anything, the Bureau is nearly helpless compared to some of the other factions. Over time, this shifts the possibility of an alliance between the agency and Orpheus agents from entirely unthinkable to only marginally useful. The more time and evidence the crucible has, the more likely it is that it can actually strike a deal with the FBI. However, if the characters are fooled into thinking that overcoming the FBI is the real resolution to this plot, you've successfully set them up for bigger and more dangerous problems later in the chronicle.

MATTHEW GIBSON, FBI ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

In any corporation or organization, a bold few make dangerous choices in their office politics, preferring to "do the right thing" instead of "playing ball." As an astute and charismatic assistant director, Matthew Gibson prefers the first catchphrase to the second one. When he first examined the data on the investigation of Orpheus, he became suspicious. Something didn't add up. The surviving agents were being vilified as criminals — practically as enemies of the state — but the way the evidence was gathered suggested the Bureau had an agent undercover long before the Orpheus facility was destroyed. There had to be some other reason. Gibson smelled a cover-up... and was smart enough to keep his mouth shut.

Instead, he has since been quietly exploring the idea of actually finding a way to work *with* the surviving agents. They no doubt have more information, not only



about what was happening within Orpheus, but about who's really behind that poisoned drug shipment. He certainly won't obstruct a Bureau investigation, but if the crucible is brought in for questioning and the FBI can't nail the characters to the wall, he'll advance the idea of working with the agents instead of against them. In the meantime, he's been quietly politicking around the office, sizing up who stands to benefit from a witch-hunt against Orpheus.

At the top of the list is a rival of his in office politics, a paranoid patriot who's definitely more in the "play ball" category. Assistant Director Charles Magnus is a more outspoken investigator, one who seems to spout a great deal of invectives and rhetoric about the necessity of catching the "bad guys" working for Orpheus. Magnus has a long history of conducting covert (yet perfectly legal) investigations, operations that have the sanction of his superiors but are kept hidden from other directors, such as Matthew Gibson and Jesse Osorio (see **Crusade of Ashes**). Osorio was a "face," someone to head the investigation in the public eye while people such as Gibson and Magnus made the more important decisions. Now, Matthew suspects that Charles Magnus may have actually sent a mole into Orpheus long before explosive charges just happened to destroy what was left of the facility, covering up all traces of the investigation.

Matthew Gibson is willing to risk working with the crucible to find out more, but if it fails him, Charles Magnus will no doubt get more support for implicating the characters in criminal activity. Gibson wants to keep his "face time" meetings with the crucible in his office to a minimum. Instead, he's empowered two FBI agents to conduct their own separate investigation, which involves periodically checking in with the crucible to see what it has learned.

Gibson isn't prepared to destroy his career to shield Orpheus agents from further investigation. Instead, he wants to find out the truth. He'd prefer for the FBI agents working for him to find it. Even more importantly, he'd like to get credit for uncovering what's going on with the pigment dealers, get a promotion and find a way to keep "shadow operatives" such as Magnus in check. As long as he can further those long-term goals, Gibson's willing to bargain with the crucible. He insists on drawing up the game plan and, ironically enough, warns the members of the crucible of what will happen them if they don't play ball.

Image: Gibson is a Caucasian man in his early 30s. He is thin and has pale, pinched features. He rarely smiles, and when he does, he looks like he's trying to laugh at a joke he doesn't get. He wears

brown, uninteresting suits and fades into the background easily — which he considers a great perk.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Expression 2, Firearms 4 (Glock), Intrigue 3, Investigation 4 (Criminal), Law 2, Leadership 3, Politics 3, Science 3 (Psychology), Security 2, Subterfuge 3

Nature: Crusader

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Glock 9mm

THE DEA

Background: When originally founded in 1973, the Drug Enforcement Administration's primary duty was the enforcement of federal anti-narcotics laws. The incredible rise of illicit drug use in the United States since then has led directly to the growth of the DEA. It's at least four times larger than it was 30 years ago, and its budget has increased proportionally. Its specialties include conducting undercover investigations and maintaining a network of criminal informants. Some criticize the agency for wasting its time on small "buy-bust" operations, but it has also done an outstanding job in seizing forfeited assets, acquiring hundreds of millions of dollars each year as part of its operations. The DEA is also active in operations abroad, including investigations out of its 60 foreign offices — however, much of the action in **Shades of Gray** concerns its domestic operations.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

Now that a poisoned drug shipment has killed hundreds of citizens, investigating this high-profile atrocity falls directly under the agency's jurisdiction. Like the ambitious directors of other government agencies, high-ranking officials in the DEA know a good political opportunity when they see it. The media frenzy about the poisoned pigment crisis allows them to seize resources quickly to investigate the incident. The DEA's already competing with the FBI and the local authorities to find out the truth, so the agency that can "solve the case" is on its way to proving its usefulness, justifying its existence and pushing for more government funding. No other agency is as equipped to deal with this investigation — and if it succeeds, the DEA's authority may even expand.

Such a high-profile case comes at a critical time in the agency's history. During a time when the federal government is undergoing reorganization, the DEA is one of many agencies currently requested to make

counterterrorist operations a higher priority. Some high-ranking officials within the organization have resisted this shift in goals, claiming that it diverts away from the DEA's original mandate of stopping drug trafficking. Others contest that shutting down a terrorist organization that can gain quick and easy money from smuggling, buying and selling drugs is a higher priority than, say, an organized South American drug family thousands of miles away. The chance to bust the distributors of pigment satisfies the agendas of both groups. Since the DEA is completely unprepared to combat the paranormal, the chances of it finding the parties responsible are slim... unless it can gain the cooperation of investigators such as the ones who have fled from Orpheus.

The FBI, the DEA and local law enforcement would all get further in their investigation if they worked together, but political reasons prevent them from doing so. On an individual basis, it's difficult to promote everyone involved. The media wants a hero, and the hero's career stands to benefit immensely from such exposure. In an era when many government agencies are being gathered under the single umbrella of homeland security, the DEA has the chance here to show the need for its own autonomy, remaining focused on the drug trade first and foremost.

DEALING WITH THE DEA

All of these political concerns are critical to high-ranking DEA officials, but they're all academic if you, as the Storyteller, can't demonstrate how DEA agents work in the field. The easiest way to ground these ideas in reality is by assembling a group of "rival investigators" working for this agency. When you're preparing for your next game session, ask yourself how they'd conduct an independent investigation. Plan out what they're investigating for the next day or two, perhaps setting up a timeline for their discoveries. The agents don't need to arbitrarily run into the crucible. Instead, there's a chance each session that their paths will cross. At some point, the DEA agents may try to stake out the crucible. If the characters eventually decide to work with the DEA and manage to acquit themselves, you won't be at a loss to explain what they've been doing so far. This group should stay focused on the everyday (as in "not the supernatural") aspects of the investigation.

Next, you'll need to fabricate a higher-ranking DEA official to represent the agency's political concerns. If the crucible tries to place an anonymous call to the DEA, the phone call is routed to this official. When DEA agents manage to trace the crucible's phone calls, he's the one who wants to speak with the Orpheus agents personally. He may offer them temporary amnesty if they speak with him, and he conducts the initial inter-

views where the members of the crucible disclose what they know. And when he offers to help direct them in the field, he says that working for him will help keep the FBI off their backs.

The rival DEA agents won't like this idea at all... unless the crucible can prove there's something behind this atrocity the feds are completely unequipped to handle. When the agency's operatives have the first encounter with the supernatural, the characters should have the pleasure of being nearby. In the episodes to come, the heroes will have to contest with greater horrors — by contrasting their characters' actions with the rival DEA investigators, the players will realize that the game isn't over yet. The DEA should bust some drug dealers before this episode is over, but in the long run, it's the characters who actually solve the mystery... and hopefully save more lost souls.

VINCENT VINETTI, DEA UNDERCOVER AGENT

Vinnie grew up as a liar and a thief, right up to the fateful day he made a plea bargain with the DEA. After all, he was just a kid, running sealed packages from one part of town to another. He could see the kind of job security the thugs who hired him had, so he switched sides. When he turned 18, after a short stint in juvenile hall, he barely qualified for his student loans to get into community college. Four years later, he used his degree in chemistry and his high grades to get a job in local law enforcement. A few successful drug busts gave him the credentials he needed to work his way up... into the same organization that changed his life back in high school.

Vinnie works with a small team of DEA agents in the field. Two of them work surveillance, one is a heavily armed combat specialist, and Vinnie is the "face" who actually interacts with criminals. The DEA gives him the briefing and falsified backgrounds he needs to do undercover work. All patriotism aside, it's the adrenaline rush of living on the edge that keeps him in the game. With his understanding of the criminal mind, and the criminal trade, he gets to play both sides of "cops and robbers." As long as that amuses him, he'll keep doing it.

This latest case he's on, however, isn't so amusing. He's been set up to infiltrate a drug syndicate that's pushing a hallucinogen called "pigment." He's read all the stories on the news about the hundreds of kids who've died because of a poisoned batch, and naturally, he wants vengeance against these scumbags as much as anyone else. But something about this case just doesn't seem right. The dealers' methods are odd, their soldiers know almost nothing about their employers, and their business isn't profitable. It's almost as though this group's



primary objective is to kill. Simple greed he can understand, but mass murder is an alien concept to him.

His superiors have made a deal with some amateur informants to help him out. He's taking some big risks running jobs for the drug dealers, but he's also supposed to keep in contact with the former employees of a group called Orpheus. They're not cops... more like... ghostbusters. As part of his latest op, he's supposed to meet with them regularly and talk about what he's learned. He and his team are risking their lives to uncover hard facts. He doesn't know what these amateurs are doing in return for that.

If they can help him track down the mastermind behind this operation, that's fine by him, but he's hesitant to listen this "crucible's" advice. Running this investigation by the book should wrap up the investigation quickly, but following advice from some *Scooby Doo* refugees seems like a good way to get killed. It would take something truly terrifying to convince him otherwise....

Image: Vinnie is an Italian-American man in his late 20s. He is missing several teeth and has a squashed-looking nose and a thin, greasy mustache. He is balding, but attempts to cover by combing over what hair he has remaining. He wears shirts that are too small for him and a leather jacket that should have been retired years ago (he considers it lucky).

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

Abilities: Alertness 4 (Ambush), Athletics 3, Firearms 4 (Shotgun), Investigation 3, Law 3, Linguistics 2,

Science 3 (Chemistry), Security 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 4 (Drug Trade), Subterfuge 4 (Criminal)

Nature: Judge

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Franchi SPAS-12 semiautomatic shotgun

THE MEDIA

Background: The media is an everpresent part of society and can play as big or as small a role in a chronicle as the Storyteller desires. It may be almost non-existent, appearing as background element of the plot and perhaps serving as a conduit for information the Storyteller wishes the crucible to have, or it can play a direct role in the story, either as one-off plot or perhaps as a recurring story element. In other chronicles, the media could take center stage (after the characters, of course) and shape the way the crucible acts and the chronicle develops. Unlike several other groups in *Orpheus* chronicles, the media does not have hidden agendas regarding the crucible, but this does not mean the media refrains from harassing it, nor does it preclude the media's involvement with the characters' enemies.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

While some elements of the media may continue to regard the crucible as newsworthy, most lose interest in the characters as fresher stories emerge and take their place in the news cycle. The casual journalist loses interest in the group within days, if not hours, but an investigative journalist, dedicated to his story, may dog the characters' heels for months, particularly if his editor is convinced that the pursuit is worthwhile. The greatest danger to the characters is reawakening the media's interest in them (assuming that any hubbub surrounding the fall of Orpheus has died down), which is most likely to occur if people recognize (or, even worse, film or photograph) the characters at the poison pigment incidents. Not only does that bring the media down on the crucible, but it also focuses the interest of other groups, notably the FBI (who, if it suspects the crucible in connection with the fall of the Orpheus Group, automatically finds the characters' association with the pigment deaths suspicious) as well as the characters' rivals and enemies. The crucible may also renew media interest in other ways — a spectacularly botched operation, for example, or perhaps a betrayal by a rival or an erstwhile ally. Of course, if the group has maintained media contacts throughout the chronicle its profile may already be high, in which case, renewed interest in the crucible may represent a shift in emphasis — for example, media darlings becoming the focus of a hate

campaign (that “build ‘em up, tear ‘em down” situation again). In general, however, if the characters keep a low profile and don’t rock the boat, the press is unlikely to hound them.

GEMMA CHALK

Gemma Chalk has always been a believer, convinced since an early age of the existence of ghosts and the supernatural. Indeed, it would be fair to say it became her obsession. She read every book she could find on the subject as well as subscribing to a range of UFO and ghost magazines. It came as no surprise to her family when she secured a job with *The Midnight Star*, a tabloid specializing in lurid tales of aliens and ghosts, working first as a gopher and then as a junior reporter. The charlatanism Gemma found horrified her — many of the so-called ghost stories she investigated were nothing more than hoaxes intended to scam people out of their money or to satisfy the perpetrator’s desire for attention, and she made it her mission to uncover such frauds. Nonetheless, among all the frauds and attention seeking, there were cases that she could not explain, events that were — to all appearances — genuine, the grail she had been seeking for so long. Orpheus in particular has attracted her attention, and she is determined to divine the truth behind the organization and its demise. When faced with a story, Gemma uses everything in her arsenal to get at the truth — her intelligence, her looks and her complete amorality — and doesn’t particularly care what the price is to others.

Image: Gemma is an extremely thin woman in her mid-20s. She has shoulder-length brown hair, bright blue eyes and a heartwarming smile. She dresses for ease



of movement but isn’t above dressing to arouse rather than merely to impress if she feels she can get a better story that way.

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 2, Computer 2, Drive 2, Empathy 3, Enigmas 2, Expression 2, Firearms 1, Intuition 4, Investigation 4, Law 2, Occult 2, Performance 3, Streetwise 2

Nature: Conniver

Willpower: 5

Equipment: .38 Special

NEXT WORLD

Background: In the glory days of the psychic projection and investigation industry, three major competitors held the market: NextWorld, Orpheus Group and Terrel & Squib. The former was strictly a “word of mouth” company, content to use its formidable reputation as “private security” among the political and social elite as its only marketing tool. The latter two operated as public interests, with relatively large amounts of media fanfare associated with their clients and operations.

Now, in the twilight of that heady period of wealth and glory, Orpheus Group is gone — decimated at the hands of mystery assailants and its employees either dead in “accidents” or on the run for their lives. Terrel & Squib suffered a similar attack, gutting its projecting division and forcing the company to fall back on its pharmaceutical interests to stay in business. The only one left is NextWorld, who made it unscathed through this period of terror. To an uninformed observer, NextWorld should be reaping all the benefits that having a monopoly should bring, given that its main competitors have been wiped out. That does not seem to be the case.

In truth, NextWorld survived the wave of terror because it caused it. NextWorld was behind the attacks that brought Orpheus and Terrel & Squib to their knees, a masterstroke designed to rid it of all organized competition. Its plan worked, leaving NextWorld in control of the market. Competing projectors are either dead or on the run, and no one is left to watch the watchdog. So why doesn’t NextWorld appear to be reveling in its success?

Despite the lack of any notable competition, NextWorld is crumbling from the inside out. The company has suffered a major internal shakeup over the direction it is taking. Almost all of the major management and corporate-level administrators either changed jobs or disappeared. Untold numbers of agents have left the company (one way or another) — even the Chair-

man of the Board, Sir Alfred Williams, was replaced with Alexis Derkov in a not-so-quiet coup. The entire group has stopped taking on new clients, instead going on permanent retainer for a few individuals and small corporations, as well as relying on the lucrative open-contract enacted by its mystery benefactor — who hired NextWorld to eliminate Orpheus and T&S in the first place. The most puzzling thing, however, is the only real common thread that all these jobs have: hunting down and wiping out all projection-capable businesses (and their agents, as well).

This single-minded determination has truly put a stranglehold on the company's growth, not to mention attracting more attention than it has ever had before — a situation that does not bode well for NextWorld. Little mention of its name has yet been made in the press, but it's only a matter of time. While most of the agents who "gave notice" are accounted for in the obituaries or missing-persons reports, a few remain at liberty. So long as that remains true, NextWorld is living on borrowed time.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

NextWorld's current plans are simple: Wipe out all possible competition, including any projectors who might pose a threat in the future. The company is pursuing these plans regardless of the cost to its operatives or the company as a whole, sacrificing everything (and cannibalizing its own resources when necessary) to pull it off. NextWorld's behavior is largely incomprehensible to those who have watched the company perform thus far, which only adds to the death spiral as its word-of-mouth reputation takes a serious blow. At the rate they're going, it will manage to succeed in its goals of wiping out all possible competition within months — of course, at that point, there may be nothing left of NextWorld to speak of, either.

Naturally, part of this overwhelming drive stems from the open-termination contract against surviving projectors. Where once the mysterious antagonist responsible for contracting NextWorld against Orpheus proved a potential ally — through his control over the Spectres — he is now NextWorld's worst fear. In an effort to prod NextWorld into garnering results, NextWorld's mysterious client may be using Spectres as a warning. Several operatives for the mercenary company report being attacked or harried by Spectres. The message is all too clear. Finish the job you were paid to do, or suffer Orpheus' fate. Thus, NextWorld's operatives are desperately trying to earn results before they too become the hunted.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

No alliance is possible with NextWorld as a whole at this point. The organization is set upon the destruction of all other projecting groups (and the projectors who work for those groups). It isn't taking any new clients, it isn't negotiating any contracts, and it isn't interested in taking on any "new hires." If NextWorld didn't know you before, it certainly doesn't want to know you now.

At the same time, not everyone in the company is happy with the direction the organization has taken. Ever since NextWorld declared war on the other projecting firms, there have been dissenters and defectors on every level of power, from the front-line projectors to the head office. Acting as security and taking out the occasional raving third-world madman was one thing. Murdering dozens of civilians in the name of corporate profit (and seeing the effects of such actions as spooks) is something else altogether. Those dissenters who haven't yet shuffled off their mortal coils could prove to be valuable allies, assuming the crucible can find them and convince them any alliance proffered isn't a trap.

Most of the NextWorld employees who didn't "get with the program" have moved on, either willingly or unwillingly. Still, a few within the organization might have pangs of conscience about what they're doing. While finding them could be next to impossible, a successful appeal to their better natures might just let the characters live that much longer... or get them killed sooner. It's hard to say which.

DEALING WITH NEXTWORLD

NextWorld has devolved from its position as a mover and a shaker to little more than a tool bent on its own destruction. It cannot recover what it has lost, and apparently, no one within the corporation even wants to try. Though the odd NextWorld agent (or former agent) may show up from time to time, they've played their part in this chronicle. If the crucible finds a way to remove NextWorld from the picture, let it do so. If not, NextWorld will self-destruct on its own. Either way, the question the players should be asking at this point is "Why did this happen?"

THE NSA

Background: A number of old stories talk about dealing with the devil. None of these stories have particularly happy endings. Still, some people accept whatever is offered if it helps them reach what they want in the end. This is a story about just such an arrangement and the ways that people are still paying the price for that deal long after the destruction of the main participant.

Some time ago, a wacky little cryo-facility opened in sunny California calling itself Orpheus. It was founded on the precept that it should be possible to place individuals with advanced terminal physical conditions into cryo-storage, then thaw them out and bring them back to life later, after medical science had advanced enough to treat their conditions. Being California, the idea took hold. While never becoming fully mainstream, Orpheus did enough business that its owners were able to stay solvent and pursue their dreams of keeping people alive.

Finally, after a few advances in medical technology, the day came when a couple of their first clients could actually be treated for what was formerly a fatal condition. Orpheus thawed them out and revived them, creating a minor miracle of its own in the process. The individuals, however, had odd stories of their own to tell. It seemed that they had somehow experienced an out-of-body state during their long time in cryo-stasis. They reported existing in a spirit form and were inexplicably aware of news and events that had occurred while they were frozen. Orpheus' scientists were fascinated.

Sensing a new opportunity, the brains behind Orpheus began doing research on these unexplained phenomena. They tested subject after subject, but were unable to replicate the results that the first two subjects had reported. They also found that while cryogenics might sell to the beautiful people in California as a wise investment, studying ghosts did not. Their research was laughed off the world's scientific stage, and their grants (and cryogenics profits) were rapidly drying up. Just when things looked most desperate, though, is when help came from a very shady corner.

Orpheus had just reached to a crucial point in its research (and lack of funding), when individuals approached the company from the NSA. These individuals claimed to represent certain interests in that organization who were well aware of the "ghost world" Orpheus was investigating. They offered the financial backing of at least one division of the NSA in a silent partnership in exchange for full disclosure and "informal observer" status, to ensure that none of the test subjects breached national security. Orpheus accepted without hesitation.

Since that time, the NSA has worked hand-in-glove with Orpheus in its research and activities, including setting up (and then covering up) Project Flatline, as well as taking Orpheus' first batch of successful projectors (then promptly losing most when the Spectres attacked). Most of Orpheus' employees were unaware of the connection between the two organizations. Still, the NSA's habit of making use of Orpheus' special operatives to influence the national and international political scene undoubtedly raised some eyebrows.

The NSA was careful never to pull too many of these assignments — and rarely with the same agents twice. The NSA is nothing if not careful.

Now, however, the raid on and the destruction of Orpheus has put the NSA in a precarious position. Under no circumstances can the NSA be linked with Orpheus, lest an extremely messy and damaging can of worms be opened. The NSA went through immediately after the raid and stripped its presence from the Orpheus networks and data banks, but some loose ends aren't as easily tied up.

In addition to the physical traces of the NSA's involvement with the Orpheus Group, the projectors who worked for Orpheus present added complications. Any one of them might make the connection (or might be capable of making the connection at some point in the future), so almost all of them have to go. With the dissolution of Orpheus, the NSA no longer has the capability to create and train projectors for its own uses. The only answer for them is to exterminate any possible liabilities — which, naturally, includes the crucible.

The NSA is too cautious to do this firsthand — it hires others to do its dirty work for it. For surveillance purposes, the NSA piggybacks off the FBI's intelligence. For actual network, it hires mercenaries and third-party killers, collectively known as Death Merchants, and sends them after the projectors who survived the attack. Thus, in **Crusade of Ashes**, the NSA is mysterious antagonist #2.

Typically, the NSA is very careful about which Death Merchants it works with, making sure never to work with the same people too often. For the most part, those in the Death Merchants neither know whom they're dealing with or care, so long as the money is placed in their Swiss accounts and the instructions are clear and come from the correct blind drop. As far as they know, they could be working with the FBI, the CIA, the NSA or some other group or individual, either foreign or domestic. They are hardened professionals and would kill their own mothers for the right amount of money.

Eventually, however, someone always gets sloppy.

The NSA wants the crucible dead and gone. The projectors are expendable assets, and the organization wants them expended now before they can do any damage. The NSA is willing to cut off and disavow the branches of the organization that had contact with Orpheus in order to achieve deniability and prevent possible bad publicity, complete with all the possible messiness that this entails for the members of those departments. It's those departments, then, that have the most to lose should the NSA connection be revealed —

and all it takes is one overanxious person to forget to check something for everything to blow up.

In this case, that fatal misstep happened in contracting the latest group of Death Merchants. The group in question is professional to a T, made up of heavy hitters who can pull off almost anything... and they've worked with the NSA before. They know the NSA, have contacts there and know who hired them to kill the crucible. The NSA doesn't realize what has happened, and the Death Merchants aren't telling for reasons of professional pride and self-preservation, if nothing else. Still, like any good mercenary, the Death Merchants in question will happily roll over on their employer if it means their lives will be spared. The fact that they know their employer in this case means that's even easier this time. Players who target their would-be assassins could actually get some results from it in this case, giving the players a lead to one of the deadliest forces in this drama.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

The Death Merchants want the characters gone. They have a certain amount of professional pride in their work, and continually missing their targets reflects badly on their future prospects. As the attacks continue, any attempt at subtlety is utterly abandoned as brute force becomes the weapon of choice. While the NSA approves of the Death Merchants' zeal in pursuing their targets, the attention these blatant attacks receive is not one bit to its liking.

In addition, the Death Merchants' mystery employer (the NSA) is getting increasingly desperate the longer those loose ends remain at large. If anyone connects the NSA to Orpheus, several long-term government men and women can expect to wave their pensions (and other equally important items of security) goodbye, as they are marked as sacrificial lambs for the good of the organization as a whole. They've had their training on how to take the fall. They know what to do to maintain good relations with the NSA in the future, thus ensuring that they *have* a future to look forward to. None of that, however, means that it's a path they want to tread.

To that end, the NSA decides to switch horses midstream, as their current contractors continually fail to deliver the goods. They instead employ a new cadre of Death Merchants, the best that money can buy. These individuals are the cream of the mercenary crop, with a near-perfect success rate. They replace the current batch of Death Merchants, bringing in fresh new faces and methods in the hope of catching the crucible unawares.

Unfortunately, there's a catch. As mentioned earlier, this group of Death Merchants knows who their

employer is. Whether the characters can take advantage of the NSA's sloppy contracting is up to them, but it's one of the best chances they'll get to tie the NSA into all of this with any sort of proof. This group of Death Merchants should also constitute the biggest challenge the characters have faced to date. If they manage to get the information about the NSA, they should definitely feel they earned it.

The new group of Death Merchants plans its attacks carefully. No longer do they spring to attack as soon as a sighting of the crucible occurs. Given the failure ratio of the preceding unit(s), this unit again goes into surveillance mode, checking and rechecking the information it has. The Death Merchants track the media coverage and the FBI information forwarded by the NSA, but instead of being proactive, they lay an ambush once they are certain it's something the crucible will walk into without realizing it.

Once the ambush is sprung, the group works together flawlessly. They have a number of contingency plans in case things go down badly and are well trained enough that their morale is almost impossible to shake. They do not have any projectors or Spectres on their side, instead relying solely on physical approaches. If captured and interrogated, they gladly use the identity of their employer as a bargaining chip before abandoning the job entirely as a bad business arrangement.

The NSA relies on the Death Merchants a great deal for its day-to-day covert needs. An organization so skilled in operating out-of-sight, however, knows better than to put all its operatives in one basket, so to speak. Should the efforts to eradicate the crucible fail, the NSA has a number of tried and true contingency plans in place. It has absolutely no desire to take an active hand in matters, but if its agents believe for an instant that their secrets are being compromised, they act without hesitation.

The first and most pressing problem for the NSA (and the thing they fear the most from the crucible) is the possibility that its link to Orpheus will be discovered and made public. The NSA hates media attention for any reason, much less negative media attention. No shadow survives long under a direct spotlight. Should the characters manage to find the link between the two and make it public, the NSA goes into damage-control mode, isolating and eradicating those cells responsible for any dealings with Orpheus.

Once those cells (and the people in them) have been disposed of, the leaders of the NSA backpedal at the speed of sound. They clean house and shake off the detritus, reorganizing as needed to at least give the impression that the few people responsible for this



outrage have been removed from any position of authority. Scapegoats are named, some people might even do some jail time, and soon, their 15 minutes of fame are up and life goes on as normal. The resulting scandal, however short lived, might even convince the NSA to leave the characters alone, as nothing more can be gained from pursuing them. The worst that could happen would have happened, and attempting to kill or silence the crucible at that point would only exacerbate the problem and continue to attract attention.

On the other hand, the characters may remain unaware of the link between the NSA and Orpheus. Even if they do discover it, they may decide not to go to the media with it. The crucible might decide to sit on the information or else to attempt to blackmail the NSA into calling off its Death Merchant dogs and leaving the crucible alone. These options really play into the NSA's hands, leaving it in complete charge of the situation. The public at large (via the media) is the only thing it fears. So long as the NSA knows it isn't in immediate danger of exposure, it exerts the full measure of its resources to ensure that never happens.

So long as the characters remain ignorant of the NSA's involvement, the pressure from the Death Merchants remains constant (and possibly predictable, at least until the arrival of the new unit). The NSA only starts turning up the heat on other fronts once it realizes the characters know who is behind their recent woes. Once the NSA (likely through the courtesy of the FBI's superior surveillance capability) realizes that the crucible knows about it, it takes off the kid gloves. The threat from the Death Merchants remains constant, but the NSA launches its own investigative forces as well. Those forces attempt to gain as much information about the characters as possible before gathering resources (all the Death Merchant teams, possible government snipers, clean-up teams, etc.) to launch a no-holds-barred surgical strike, using anything the characters hold dear to lure them into the open.

This information-gathering campaign, however, is not simply a way of finding the crucible members' weaknesses. It's also an attack of its own, designed to give the NSA information to justify using whatever force is necessary. The primary goal of this investigation is to gather information to implicate the characters in "seditious acts" against the federal government, establishing them as traitors and spies, thus discrediting them and casting the NSA in a heroic light.

This smear campaign begins in the days just prior to a strike against the team (giving more weight to the FBI's warnings and press coverage), ensuring that the real actions of the characters are lost behind the

smokescreen the NSA creates. Keep in mind that the NSA had full access to all the information from Orpheus, including mission summaries, briefing and debriefing transcripts and tapes, video coverage, complete dossiers on all projectors — the characters included — and any other data that Orpheus scientists collected in their research. Any or all of that can be used against the characters as necessary, especially should they have ever taken part in one of the NSA's "special" assignments — all evidence carefully edited, of course, to remove any NSA involvement and put the blame squarely on Orpheus.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

Trying to get the NSA or the Death Merchants on the crucible's side might be reasonably equated with trying to get a thunderstorm just to rain on your neighbor instead of you. Still, not everything is a lost cause. A dedicated group of characters might even be able to turn one or more members of these organizations to their side — or even join the organization in question and, thus, avoid all this unpleasantness (and instead sign up for different types of unpleasantness later on). The first question is whether to try to turn the tool or its wielder — that is, the Death Merchants or their employer, the NSA.

The Death Merchants aren't likely to decide to take the side of their target, regardless of the incentive. After all, it's bad for business. Undoubtedly, nearly every mark who gets close enough to them makes a similar offer of money or goods or just general begging, and they make their reputations on being unmoved by that sort of nonsense.

Still, the members of the crucible aren't your everyday targets. It's clear they could offer a number of incentives that most individuals, even rich or powerful ones, couldn't hope to match. Having one (or more) Death Merchants on the side of the crucible can do wonders for its continued existence. A sympathetic Death Merchant can give the characters the inside track on the opposition, including warnings, information or even favors.

The Death Merchants can be turned to the characters' side by a number of methods. The characters and any given group of Death Merchants may have crossed paths any number of times, occasionally even with conversation or information exchanged. The crucible, during its time with Orpheus, might well have engaged in wetwork or other "black ops." It's not inconceivable, then, that these particular Death Merchants know of the characters (word gets around in any community, after all), and so, the characters and these elite Death Merchants might have a rapport — or at least the

foundation of one through reputation. That sort of background can create the basis of a relationship, especially if the crucible managed to do an individual Death Merchant some sort of favor in the past. A bribe goes down easier if the person you're bribing has reason to like or respect you. Alternatively, having a marker the members of the crucible can call in is also a strong incentive for the person who owes the characters to "pay up" and let the crucible go, either faking the characters' deaths or simply chalking it up to a missed opportunity.

If that sort of history with one of the Death Merchants isn't an option, a Merchant might need other things one of the characters could provide. Perhaps the Merchant has heard of projection and is worried about his dearly departed relative. Perhaps he has reason to believe someone is after him and needs the crucible to help him find out who and why. Perhaps he just needs the characters' help with a more mundane issue (or believes he will) and, thus, saves them so that they'll owe him — big. It's a wide-open field, with very few limits on what can happen.

The trick in making a Death Merchant betray his contract is in knowing the reasons why he would agree to such a thing. Remember that mercenaries often have a strict code of business ethics, if not morality. To some, it might even look suspiciously like honor, insofar as their professional reputations are concerned. Anything that would make them break a contract has to be significant in order to overcome their traditional reluctance to back out on a deal. Contracts are never personal, never close to home. The moment it stops being "just business" is the moment the Merchant runs the risk of slipping up. If a mark can break through that level of emotional detachment, she stands a much higher chance of convincing him to see things her way.

Getting on the NSA's good side can be even trickier than successfully dealing with the Death Merchants. After all, there might be anywhere from roughly one to four Death Merchants at most that need convincing at any one time, and winning over one goes a long way toward winning over the others. No overreaching structure or administration exists to keep the crucible out and the Merchants in, just self-motivating individuals with a job to do.

The NSA, however, has traditionally been a bastion of government insiders and career spooks. If they didn't recruit you personally (and then most likely when you were straight out of college), they weren't interested. The ultimate in "don't call us, we'll call you," the odds of getting into the NSA from anywhere else were close to nil. While the technology level of the organization has always run toward the cutting edge (and then

some), the willingness of the agency to participate in less concrete exercises has been relatively low, surpassed in that respect only by the FBI. If the NSA can't control you or what you can access, it has no interest in bringing you on board.

Still, nothing says it has to stay that way forever. It is entirely possible that the crucible performed some of the NSA's black ops assignments under Orpheus. If so, assuming positive results, some of the more forward-thinking members of the NSA might be interested in developing a projector cadre of their own, tapping into a resource that will keep them ahead of other nations and beyond the purview of their superiors. Some particularly enterprising agents might take it upon themselves to try to recruit the characters, promising to bring them on board and end the FBI's campaign against the crucible. It's even possible that some characters might approach the NSA themselves, looking to make an alliance and get out from under the gun in exchange for using their skills on the NSA's behalf.

If the crucible is interested in contacting the NSA, the characters need to be very circumspect in who they contact and how. Their best plan of attack is to study the NSA, observe it carefully (possibly through projection) and find a younger, up-and-coming agent with both ambition and responsibility. They need to contact that agent (again, projection skills might provide the best method of cutting through security) and leave a message explaining their desire and intent. A real-life meet could then be set up, in which they begin to make arrangements to join the organization.

If an agent wants to recruit the crucible, he'd need to work in much the same way. Piggybacking off FBI information, he'd want to arrange to meet with the crucible before any Death Merchants showed up (possibly redirecting them with false information or calling them off). Once he's established contact, he can arrange for the group to fall under the protection of the NSA; the FBI would have to drop its inquiries, and the Death Merchants would be called off the hunt. This should, if possible, be done before the characters are aware that it is the NSA behind the attacks. An agent will have far better luck recruiting a group who thinks of the NSA as neutral rather than the force behind the scenes trying to orchestrate the characters' deaths. Overcoming the crucible's reasonable fear and concern would be difficult otherwise, but not necessarily impossible if the agent can prove it is within his power to do what he claims and if he can distance himself from the NSA personnel who ordered the hits on the characters.

In either case, once the characters are inside the NSA, their degree of personal freedom and control over their

situation is likely to be lessened significantly. While not under arrest in any way, they now work for the agency that specializes in protecting secrets and uncovering threats to national security, including checking its own members. Many of the agents and the administration do not trust the characters, so to say that they'll be watched is something of an understatement.

The ever-present information about the NSA's connection to the Death Merchants is also a factor to be considered. If the characters were unaware when joining the NSA, how do they feel upon finding out? Do they wish to cut ties with the group or consider it water under the bridge? Those who decide to leave the NSA will quickly find out that it's easier to get in than to leave (and getting in is rarely easy). The NSA has a low opinion of defectors and significant leeway to deal with them as needed, given its close involvement with preserving national security. The planned smear campaign contingency would be nothing compared to what would happen if the crucible tried to leave the NSA under any but the most extraordinary circumstances.

For those unwilling to leave but uncomfortable staying, the possibility exists that the crucible could try to use the balkanization of the NSA to its advantage, playing one faction off against another and gaining power in the process. Getting involved in that sort of intrigue is no easy decision to make, however, with the characters having the capacity to lose everything should the factions ever realize what is going on. Alternatively, the crucible could use its time inside the NSA to gather information, using the evidence it finds to expose the NSA and betray the organization to another law-enforcement agency. Given the rivalry that exists between governmental departments (the FBI, the CIA and the NSA especially), evidence of corruption or wrongdoing by the NSA could turn out to be the favorite subject of any of those other agencies, giving the other groups the edge they needed to snatch power from the NSA for their own uses.

Local police or state agencies might also be interested, especially if the NSA can be linked to crimes in their area that remain unsolved. Could the characters pull off that kind of betrayal, however, never once slipping as they play the role of loyal drone workers? What would happen if they were caught? Nothing is for certain, but it's a fair bet that the NSA would consider that path of action traitorous and punish the crucible accordingly (or kick it out entirely and order the Death Merchants to take up where they left off, the Storytellers' choice).

DEALING WITH THE NSA

So, how can the characters get out from under this particular landslide? The characters' best bet for neutralizing the Death Merchants is to make the connection

between the NSA and Orpheus and then expose that connection. If the characters don't have the information to do so, however, steps can be taken with the Death Merchants themselves to alleviate the problem.

With the Death Merchants, neutralizing the threat they pose is largely a matter of tracking down the opposition and eliminating them. This can be done in a number of ways, but the odds of success are greatly increased if the characters go to them, instead of letting the Death Merchants find the crucible. With that caveat, let's look at the methods likely to succeed.

Death Merchants are strictly professionals. They've been doing this a long time, and they're experts at not leaving behind traces at the scene of the crime that could identify them. That doesn't mean, however, that they're immune to being tracked (especially by ghosts). If the crucible knows the Death Merchants are after them, it isn't hard to trace them back before they realize they've been made. The characters have to be extra careful not to act as though they know the Merchants are there, so as not to tip them off and encourage them to go undercover.

Once the crucible spots the Merchants and decides to confront them, the next question is "where?" Provided the Merchants can be cornered before they run off, public sites provide the incentive for everyone to play nice and keep the fighting to a minimum. Death Merchants are professionals, as stated above, and that means they don't act without a plan in place unless forced to do so. They'll retreat rather than engage if they have the option, at least until the engagement is on their terms. If the characters can confront them before they are ready to fight, the odds of having a successful conversation increase dramatically.

Assuming that the characters find the idea of a public site too... well... public, especially given that the crucible is the target of a publicity campaign by the FBI, a private meet isn't out of the question. This requires finding where the Merchants are holed up, though, and delivering the message there. The Merchants won't be too pleased with the idea of the crucible knowing where their base is (and it'll probably be moved within the hour), but if the characters don't come in with guns blazing, the Merchants should be willing to listen to what the characters have to say.

As addressed earlier, it is possible for the characters to buy off a group of Death Merchants, either with money or services. This type of arrangement never comes cheap, however, as no mercenary wants a reputation as someone who can be bought off a contract. The crucible might well decide that the price is more than it is able (or willing) to pay, but the option is there. Don't

THE DEATH MERCHANTS BY THE NUMBERS

We haven't provided game Traits for the "elite" Death Merchants, largely because you, as the Storyteller, know your players and their characters better than we ever could. What might be a near-deadly challenge for one group is nothing more than a brief interlude for another. So, instead of providing ready-made characters to pit against the crucible, consider the following when designing them:

- **They know the characters.** The NSA has provided the Death Merchants with dossiers on the crucible's members. The agency doesn't bother with characters who are already dead (the NSA is still shaky on how to rid itself of ghosts), but if the characters are sleepers or skimmers, the Death Merchants know it. They have basic information on Horrors and manifestation, as well, but the dossiers only go up to the last mission the characters' undertook for Orpheus (meaning that the NSA is unaware of any new developments in the characters' capabilities). More importantly, though, the Death Merchants know the characters' religions, routines, habits, any allergies or illnesses and any other personal information included in the dossiers.

- **They fight dirty.** Initially, the NSA preferred the Death Merchants conduct clean kills, with as little collateral damage as possible so as not to draw the FBI into investigating too deeply. Now, that's changed, and the NSA is willing to overlook indiscriminate sorties. The Death Merchants aren't being paid to fight honorably or to make deaths look like accidents. They're perfectly willing to have one member trick skimmers into leaving their bodies and letting another put bullets into their

unconscious forms with a sniper rifle. They're happy to use loved ones as leverage. Confronting the Death Merchants head-on forces the mercenaries into a stand-up fight, which is dangerous in itself, but it does limit their options.

- **They are only human.** Most mercenaries can't project. They can't see ghosts without Kirlian goggles and cameras, unless they have them active *all* the time, and that's just a plain nuisance. At best, an especially sensitive Death Merchant might be able to sense a nearby spook (requires a Perception + Awareness roll, probably at a high difficulty). The biggest challenge the crucible has is getting enough tactical advantage over the Death Merchants to make best use of the characters' supernatural powers. Once they can do that, however, the day is probably won.

- **Consider specialties.** One Death Merchant might be an explosives expert. Another might be a crack shot. A third might specialize in poisons. Watch a few espionage thrillers, and consider what sort of methods a team of Death Merchants might use — then decide what chance the characters have of figuring out that they are about to die.

- **Personality goes a long way.** What are the Death Merchants like? Is one a devout Catholic, going to confession every few days? Do a pair of mercenaries make bets on which of them can score a kill first? Is one a lady's man? One of the biggest advantages the Death Merchants have is foreknowledge of the characters' personalities. If the characters can gain similar information on their foes, they can make use of the same tactics — but that means that you, as the Storyteller, need to know and present that information.

be afraid to make the players really sweat this one out. It *should* give them pause. The Merchants should never agree to sell out cheap, though making them trade on future favors (making sure that those favors do come up again at an inconvenient time and are difficult to accomplish) is reasonable.

Should the characters not wish to deal with the Merchants, they can always try hunting the hunters. By setting a trap for the Death Merchants to walk into, the characters can turn the tables on the mercs and possibly rid themselves of at least one group of pursuers. This is a difficult option for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the Death Merchants entire livelihood revolves around stealth, fighting and killing. While some members of the crucible might be able to say the

same, it's unlikely that all of them are as skilled as the Death Merchants. The characters may have to rely heavily on Horrors, their projecting talents or the element of surprise to defeat the mercenaries.

Even should the crucible defeat and kill a group of Death Merchants, the NSA isn't likely to let such a small setback stop it. Given the security it feels in its anonymity (and with good reason, except for the elite group they hire when things turn serious), the NSA expects a few losses in such a big operation. Should one group fail or be killed, another is hired to take its place. The pool of available Death Merchants isn't that large, though, so the length of time between groups of assassins should grow steadily larger as the NSA has to dig deeper for willing candidates.



Then again, the Death Merchants are just the tools. If they really want the assassins off their backs, the characters need to go to the source: the NSA. Naturally, there is no way to completely “get rid” of the NSA. It’s a major government institution, with more power than the characters can ever dream of exerting.

The NSA can be dealt with, however. The agency is largely made up of small, independently operating cells, such as the ones associated with Orpheus. Those cells receive instructions from higher up but also have a good degree of autonomy in how their instructions are carried out. They are the ones who have sent the Death Merchants after the characters, listened in on FBI surveillance and authorized other “necessary” measure to resolve the problem without involving the organization as a whole. It’s those cells the characters have to deal with, turning an overwhelming goal into an almost manageable one.

The players’ characters can attack this problem in a number of ways. The first step for almost any of them, however, is twofold: linking the NSA with Orpheus and the Death Merchants, and identifying the cells or individuals within the NSA that are responsible for dealing with the characters. The latter is best accomplished through convincing the Death Merchants to find out or sell out the identity of their NSA contact (given that they typically receive instructions through a remote address, this is more difficult than it might seem with any but the elite group, but it’s not impossible).

Once the specific cells or individuals within the NSA have been found, the characters have to choose how to deal with the problem. If the crucible chooses to attack the NSA to eliminate the direct threat, it should be prepared for the agency as a whole to close ranks and come after it. Law-enforcement agencies have a reputation for taking care of their own, and the NSA is no different in this respect. Whereas the characters previously had only the efforts of a few specific cells to deal with, they would now have to deal with the entire organization and all the force it can bring to bear. If possible, dissuade the players from having their characters pursue this option (or give their characters the chance to know what is likely to happen, whether they succeed or fail).

Another option is for the characters to offer their services to the NSA, the possible results of which are covered in the previous section. If they choose not to go that route, they might decide to use the information they have about the NSA for their own benefit. Black-mailing the NSA cells can work for the short term, but only for as it takes for either the NSA to cover its assets and immunize itself against potential damage or to find

out what the characters' weaknesses are and use them to put a stop to the problem. Alternatively, the characters might choose to go public with the information, taking it to either the media or a rival law-enforcement agency. The latter choices are the most likely to neutralize the NSA on a long-term basis.

One thing that needs to be kept in mind when dealing with either the Death Merchants or the NSA is that, if any given attempt at surveillance, communication or aggression fails, everything becomes just that much harder to accomplish. Security tightens, personnel are replaced, bases move, plans change, and everyone goes on alert to see that nothing of the sort happens again. The odds of making a successful second attempt are poor, and the odds against succeeding at a third are astronomical. If the players aren't able to calculate that equation on their own, feel free to make it obvious to their characters.

PATRICK REDFERN

Patrick has a long history with the NSA, with nearly 20 years of service behind him and an excellent track record. He has a reputation for being something of a maverick, but with an unerring eye for the next big breakthrough in intelligence-gathering technology and implementation. That "visionary" status, combined with an utter lack of ethical or moral standards, was what led him to Orpheus in the first place. He is the one who arranged for Orpheus to get the funding, and he's the one who arranged for the cover-up when everything went bad.

Redfern has a personal history with ghostly phenomena that goes back to his childhood. He had a

number of encounters with supernatural phenomena as a child and believed his house was haunted. His graduate thesis in college dealt with the expressions of intuition and minute physical evidence in the psychiatric community, a paper some regarded as coming perilously close to making a case for extra-sensory perception. Thus, when he heard about Orpheus's findings and search for funds, he immediately envisioned the possibilities and had his agents approach the company.

Redfern himself had almost nothing to do with the day-to-day operations of the three cells charged with overseeing Orpheus and its projectors, assigning black ops to those employees and collecting and interpreting the data that the researchers gathered. He analyzed the intelligence that was gathered and gave general directions but nothing more. He is taking a personal interest in the efforts to clean up the mess left in the wake of Orpheus's destruction, if only for the fact that he has no intention of sacrificing his career for the sake of a few nobodies who are determined to louse everything up.

Image: Redfern is a Caucasian man in his early 40s. He has white, thinning hair, strong features and a permanent determined stare. He wears expensive suits. He realizes that this immediately sets him apart from other field agents, but Redfern is firmly of the opinion that "the clothes make the man."

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

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 3, Expression 3, Firearms 3, Intrigue 4, Intuition 3, Investigation 4, Law 3, Leadership 2, Linguistics 2, Politics 4, Subterfuge 3, Technology 3

Nature: Scientist

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Glock 9mm

PIGMENT CULTS

Background: Numerous "pigment cults" dot the city, exploiting the sudden popularity and addictiveness of black heroin. What is not widely known, however, is that while the majority of these groups are merely exploiting pigment, a small hardcore are religiously devoted to it. These pigment cults follow agendas far different (in their ultimate objective, if not their methods and organization) from the many other cults. Exactly how many exist is unspecified — three are presented here, and a fourth in Chapter Four — but the Storyteller may certainly create her own, perhaps using these as templates or inspiration.





Like most cults, each pigment cult focuses on a charismatic individual who mandates the rules and doctrine for the lesser members, almost always to advantage of himself and a core clique. This individual may be a recluse, seeking to guide his flock, or he may be worldly, using his (in the majority of cases, the leader of such groups is male) position for self-gratification, be it a desire for sex, influence or wealth. Real world examples range from withdrawn (but no less dangerous) individuals such as Shoko Asahara of Aum Shinrikyo to “mainstream” televangelists (some of whom have a genuine desire to preach, while others are in it for the money) to overbearing individuals such as Vernon Howell, better known as David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians. While most pigment cults have a living figurehead to whom the lower echelons of the cult look for guidance, the true leaders of the pigment cults are all ghosts. More specifically, the ghosts who lead the pigment cults met and died in Project Flatline. They lead their respective groups by manifesting, by borrowing bodies or through mortal lieutenants. As their collective name suggests, the cults are also closely entwined with black heroin, but unlike Terrel & Squib — who distribute pigment to the street via a series of dealers, targeting the college and party scene — the cults incorporate it into their existence, giving it the role, overtly or otherwise, of a sacrament.

The first of the cults presented here operates under the guise of a religious group, calling itself the Church of the Children of the Angelic Host, adhering to the trappings of a regular congregation, albeit with a secret inner membership and clear cult overtones. The second, known as First Step, bucks the trend of a religious focus for these groups and is instead linked to drug-support groups, exploiting the horror and addiction its members encounter to advance the cult’s cause. The third group is the Aphrodite Society, which mixes attributes of a classic religion-based cult with a matchmaking service.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

Each of the three cults detailed here differs somewhat in form and methodology, but a number of common factors in each are worth examining first. Each seeks to dominate its members’ lives, a key distinguishing factor between cults and more benign groups (such as churches or self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous), which, while becoming part of their members’ lives, work together to help the individual rather than exploit him. In the case of the pigment cults, this exploitative nature may well be less apparent than in classic cults, and as such, they are more insidious.

Control is one of the key elements of any cult. In almost all cases, the cults seek to recruit the vulnerable, perhaps in the wake of bereavement, addiction, a failed romance or even loneliness. Newcomers to an area are particularly vulnerable, lacking an immediate “support network” of friends and family. Cults may seek to attract people with advertising or, more likely, via a series of “recruiters” who look for appropriate victims and invite them along to the group. In many cases, such invites are made under false pretenses — “Do you want to meet some of my friends?” or “Would you like to come with me to my church?” — before springing the cult’s true nature on the recruits. In such cases, a recruiter might build up a relationship with a victim as a friend or a lover, who thus feels obliged to stay, either humoring his “friend” or because of genuine interest (particularly if the recruiter has done her job well in sounding out the recruit). The victim-recruit might well find himself surrounded by a host of new “friends” eager to extol the virtues of the group. These cultists might simply be a general welcoming party or might be targeted to the new recruit’s situation and desires. For example, a young, single male working in the IT industry may likely find himself “welcomed” by a group that comprises young, attractive women and other IT professionals (probably successful ones as a suggestion of what the victim might gain from his membership of the cult). These recruiters may be extremely solicitous, extolling the virtues of the victim and the cult, listening intently to what he says and even dangling the prospect of readily available sex, drugs and the like (a “honey pot” to lure the victim into the group’s clutches). This practice, commonly known as “love-bombing,” overwhelms the recruit (particularly one who’s lonely and vulnerable), though it can easily be overdone and scare the recruit away.

Once these “friends” have drawn the recruit into their ranks, the cult applies pressure to maintain its grip over the victim. This may be in the form of bribery (the prospect of sex, drugs and the like), a threat of some kind (isolation, intimidation, addiction) or simply in the form of “conditioning.” The group attempts to persuade the prospective recruit that only it can offer salvation/“the answer” and that he must adhere to its methods to receive such privileges. The cult seeks to isolate its new recruit from any friends and family he has to minimize the chance of contrary ideas impinging on the recruit’s consciousness before it has taken root and also to limit the number of objectors, and it likewise promotes a cult-first exclusivity to the recruit’s lifestyle and contacts for similar reasons. Where some crisis brought the recruit to the cult, the cult might seek to prolong or exploit that

problem so that the recruit becomes increasingly dependant on his new “friends,” which may become a self-reinforcing action. For example, a lonely individual joining a group is encouraged to shun non-cult contacts, increasing his reliance on the group and, thus, its control over him. Another example is First Step’s drug program, which follows a deliberately harsh regime to make the victim even more dependant on the cult, swapping one addiction for another. This “addiction” can be fueled in a wide range of ways — physical or psychological pressure, political or commercial indoctrination (pyramid schemes function in much the same manner as cults), religion and even modifying the “recruit’s” biochemistry (either through overt drugging or, more likely and insidiously, by simply altering his diet and consumption patterns, for example drastically reducing the protein intake of meals).

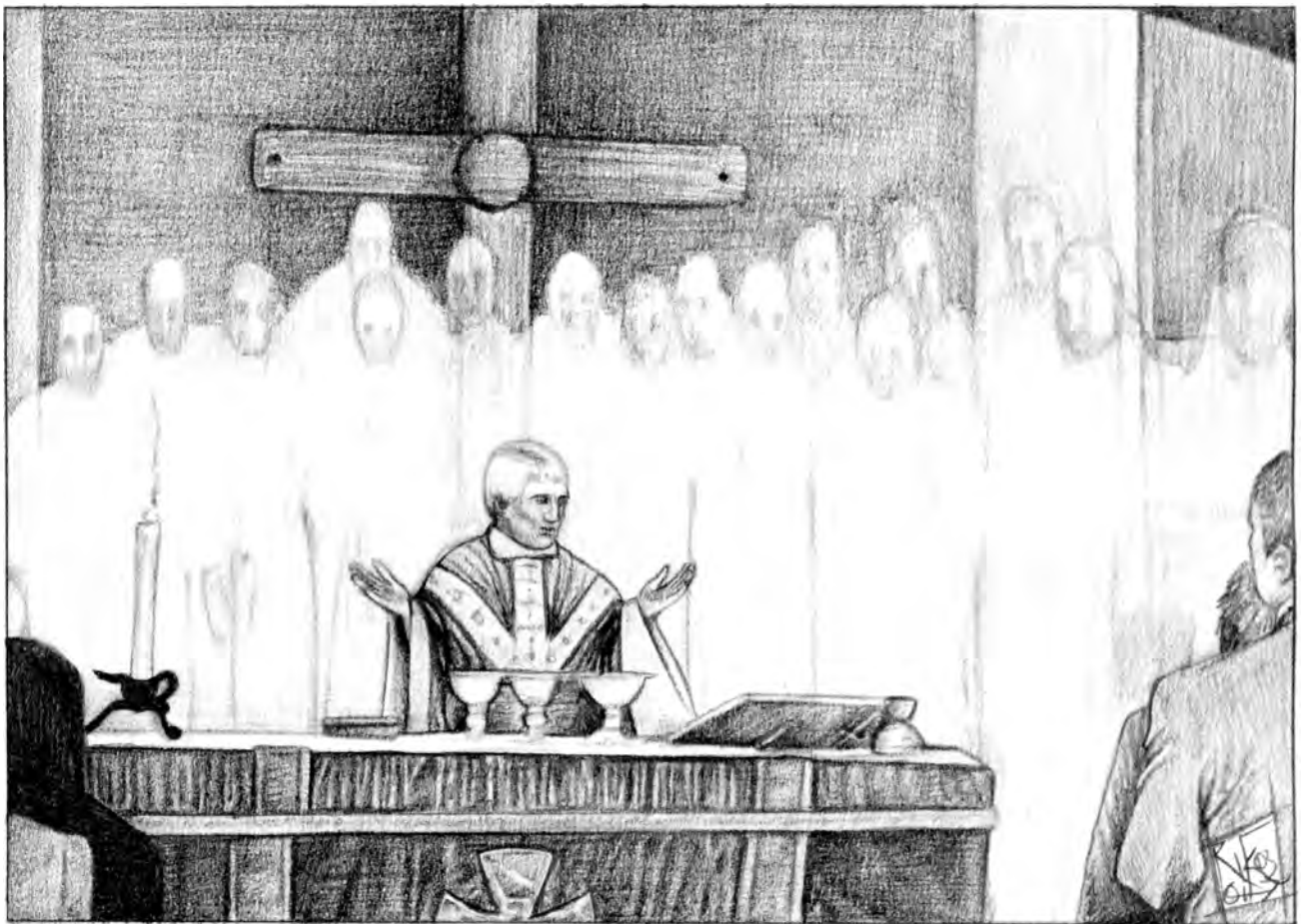
What is it that the cult desires? This can vary considerably and may include power, influence, wealth or some combination thereof. Some cults mercilessly exploit their members, seeking to gain control of their money and goods, their contacts or even their bodies — no small number have made sexual obedience to the leader and his lieutenants a core tenet of the group (something the Aphrodite Society takes to unusual lengths). Others simply seek to extend their influence over a group of people, in effect providing the leader with a power trip he might not be able to obtain by other means. Simply boosting their membership is the common goal of all of the pigment cults, increasing the number of people who are addicted to and regularly partaking of black heroin. Surprisingly, however, especially given the lengths the cults go to recruit and maintain membership, individuals do leave the cults — or at least stop attending their gatherings. Some of these individuals genuinely forsake the cult — perhaps after being rescued and deprogrammed by friends and relatives — but others simply disappear. The rank-and-file attendees rarely see these “lost” members again but are typically told that they have been inducted into greater mysteries (or otherwise advanced beyond the need to attend normal meetings).

THE CHURCH OF THE CHILDREN OF THE ANGELIC HOST

The Host began its existence as an evangelical Adventist church, catering to inner-city communities under the ministry of Reverend Cale O’Reilly. The church had a small but dedicated following, who attended O’Reilly’s spirited services that — unusually for an Adventist church — retained the sacrament of the

Eucharist. This small but loyal following was shocked when doctors diagnosed O’Reilly with pancreatic cancer, for which he refused treatment because of his faith. O’Reilly sickened and was on the verge of death when a miracle happened. According to the Reverend, he received a visitation by the spirit of Christ, who healed his sickening body and took the scales from his eyes, calling on him to go forth into the world with undimmed sight and bring the truth to the people. Cale could see the world as it really was, with angels all about, and could call on them for support and even to create miracles. Overnight, his congregation’s numbers boomed, many claiming to see angels all around them, as O’Reilly’s sermons preached. His followers likewise felt themselves compelled to attend sermons, a deep-seated longing taking root in their souls, which ached terribly if they failed to partake of the weekly mass. Many believed this was God’s true voice speaking to them through Cale’s ministry, supported by rumors miracles enacted by his ministry — the ill regaining health, the lame walking again. No one suspects the truth.

The Eucharist uses communion wine laced with pigment, and as a consequence, the “angels” seen attending O’Reilly are ghosts, while the compunction to attend the Eucharist is the dull ache of pigment addiction. Indeed, O’Reilly is no longer really who people believe he is, but rather, his body is a puppet for one of the Flatliners, Bruno Tavoularis, a highly accomplished Skinrider. Bruno found religion while in Marion, its fiery intensity reflecting the depth of his crimes and his desire for repentance. After joining Project Flatline and “escaping” the prison’s confines, the Flatliner’s leader, Uriah Bishop, set Tavoularis to his present task, spreading O’Reilly’s ministry and overseeing the covert distribution of pigment to the faithful. Bruno, in O’Reilly’s body, has only limited contact with Bishop, to whom he sends those who are “especially blessed” by the sacrament (i.e., those who are most affected by the pigment and whose souls demonstrate high Vitality). What Bishop does with these individuals, Tavoularis neither knows nor cares. He has, however, begun to question his faith. While unswerving in his belief in Jesus Christ and the Trinity, visions of the wrongness of God torment Tavoularis. In his visions, God isn’t the Charlton Heston-esque image of popular culture. In his dreams, God isn’t even male, but rather, takes the form of an aged woman, a vision shared by no few of the churchgoers he hands over to Uriah Bishop. Furthermore, while he has been able to mask the progress of O’Reilly’s cancer with his Contaminate Horror (see p. 105), Tavoularis has not been able to slow Cale’s decline and knows that the



preacher's body will soon fail. The Flatliner has been wracking his brain to find a way around this, with little luck so far.

FIRST STEP

Drug addiction has long been a curse of society, and various groups have emerged to combat it, including recovery programs, detox therapies and support groups. One such group that emerged in the mid-1980s was First Step, a drug rehabilitation program that specialized in weaning addicts off hard drugs with a combination of counseling, group support, prayer and alternative medications (such as methadone). For much of its history, the group was a small but effective organization, with a high transitory membership and a surprisingly low readdiction rate. Its members emerged with their faith (or at least self-confidence) strengthened and their determination to live a normal life reinforced. In recent years, First Step found its success rate falling and membership numbers growing. Drastic action was necessary, and on the advice of the aged project director Dr. Sarah Franks, First Step began to use a compound specially formulated by Terrel & Squibb pharmaceuticals to wean its addict members off other drugs. At the same time, Franks emphasized the spiritual aspects of the self-healing process, quickly

establishing herself as the grandmother figure of the group. First Step's success rate soared, with fewer and fewer members relapsing — publicly, at least.

Dr. Franks' miracle drug was, of course, pigment, and while it allowed those who took it to escape their other substance-abuse problems, it became the focus of their lives. Franks, an addict herself, has formed those dependent on the drug into a coterie about herself, who hang on her every word and are loyal to her whims. She is not, however, the supreme power in the cult, but rather, is the mortal lieutenant of another Flatliner, Harper Forester. Together, they manage the First Step cult within the larger concerns of the organization, catering to the needs and desires of their followers, in particular those questing for a deeper understanding of the spiritual universe, in particular life after death. Forester is quite happy to take a back seat in this — he has other affairs to manage in addition as serving as a conduit to Franks and the cult — and seems to find Franks' role in the group amusing and strangely appropriate. What concerns both Franks and Forester are the individuals — in escalating numbers — who seek First Step's aid and already know of the covert aspects of Franks' program. These individuals (whom Frank's calls "death-seekers" after their desire to commune with the dead) are

both a curse and a blessing to First Step. On the one hand, the death-seekers are a ready source of willing converts, easily indoctrinated into the cult's structures and beliefs. On the other hand, their number and foreknowledge — presumably from existing members who talk too much — poses a grave risk to the organization.

THE APHRODITE SOCIETY

Arguably the closest of the pigment cults to the classic “cult” model, the Aphrodite Society serves to provide guidance for the lost and the despondent, its public objectives being to furnish its members with a focus for their lives. Less publicly is its role as a “matchmaking” agency, an aspect of its work investigated on several occasions by the police because of suspicions of prostitution. While sex is regular occurrence between the Society's members — and indeed encouraged by its leaders as a means of fostering closer bonds — no evidence has been forthcoming of sexual impropriety despite hearsay to the contrary, though several members do have prior convictions for solicitation and drug possession. In fact, drug use within the Society is rife, with the former drug of choice, cannabis, now replaced by pigment. The Society's leadership has always encouraged self-discovery, particularly through drug use, but the adoption of pigment has led to a shift in outlook from the “higher planes” to what the cult leaders call “the underworld.” A fascination with the supernatural, indeed with the whole cycle of birth and death, is deeply ingrained in the cult's membership and shapes its teachings. The cultists seek to understand this process, which they believe can only be done by fully immersing oneself in the experiences of life — a major factor in the prevalence of drugs and sex.

In the Aphrodite Society, the Flatliners found an organization that suited their needs with very little change necessary. A fascination with the supernatural already existed, and making the switch to pigment required only minimal nudging. Harper Forester holds the cult's leader, a weak projector called John Star (real name Raymond Preston), solidly in his thrall, and the cult's “messiah” obeys the Flatliner's every command. In Star, Forester has a useful and ever-present catspaw (albeit one who is, in Forester's opinion, overly keen to exploit his position of power), but occasionally, the Flatliner manifests as one of the “higher powers” that advise the cult leader, using his Horrors to enact several minor “miracles” to convince doubters of his status. In addition to serving as a filter for the more sensitive pigment users (who “ascend” from the cult into Bishop's care), Forester has exploited the Aphrodite Society to reward numerous other spirits in his employ. With their willpower weakened by their pigment use and their

mindset already predisposed toward opening their conscious to “higher powers,” the members of the cult are wide open to possession by Skinriders, who then use and abuse their borrowed bodies under the auspices of the cult's permissiveness. Star easily explains away the sudden shift in behavior of these individuals — the cult teaches that the higher powers sometimes direct the actions of the enlightened. Unfortunately for Forester, the sensations experienced by the Skinriders while possessing the cultists has proved intoxicating, and on more than one occasion, a spook has gone too far, damaging the body she was using or one of its partners. Forester punishes such carelessness severely.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

Joining one of the pigment cults is a relatively easy task, as each is constantly looking to recruit new members. Retaining an independent mind is an entirely different matter, particularly given the use of pigment in each and the techniques each uses to undermine the will of prospective members and to retain control of those who do join. Given that members of Orpheus have an insight into the supernatural already, characters with sufficient Performance skill may be able to bluff their way into a cult without actually taking pigment, though this is resisted action (Manipulation + Performance versus Perception + Empathy, difficulty 8).

The major issue is *why* a character would seek to join (or infiltrate) one of the pigment cults. None are likely to work with the crucible — the cults' agendas are likely contrary to those of the characters — though they may serve as a vital repository of information for crucibles investigating pigment or the Flatliners. Unfortunately, the cults, while a fertile ground for creating hues and indoctrinating members, have little knowledge about the larger scheme of things. Some cultists disappear, and no one, with the exception of the Flatliner “messiahs” (and not always them), knows where they go, and for the present at least, attempts to investigate turn up dead ends. Supplies of pigment arrive — again, few know from where — and are difficult to trace back (see Chapter Four).

DEALING WITH THE PIGMENT CULTS

Individually, the pigment cults are relatively weak, lacking the abilities and resources of a fully-fledged crucible, and can be brought low with judicious planning. How the characters do this, and whether it is worth their while to do so is something that the crucible should think long and hard about.

Each cult requires slightly different methodologies, but the core principals of each are the same. Most cults

center on a charismatic individual, and removing that person often shatters the group. The easiest option here is to kill the leader, though doing so risks creating a martyr or — even worse — a messianic figure (particularly if he or one of his comrades can use Horrors to perform what appears to be a resurrection or an ascension to Heaven). Major religions have started with less. Discrediting the senior cultist may be a better way of shattering the cult, though convincing the cultists of their leader's fallibility is a long and difficult process, as many of them are willing to deny even plain facts. Also, some cults persevere in the face of losing their leader. Some cults collapse in such circumstances, while others reform — wholly or partially — around another suitably skilled individual, possibly a lieutenant in the organization. This is particularly true of the pigment cults where the figurehead body does not necessarily coincide with the brains behind the operation — eliminating Cale O'Reilly might well collapse the Church of the Children of the Angelic Host, but First Step would certainly survive Sarah Frank's removal. The case of John Star and the Aphrodite Society isn't so clear-cut. It is the closest to the classic model of a cult and focuses on Star, but the prevalence of Skinriders in the cult would make the appearance of a new figurehead impossible to predict. An enterprising spook could establish herself as the boss of the group and, thus, undo the crucible's work.

Another option would be for the crucible to usurp the leader's position, either by discrediting or eliminating him or simply by establishing themselves as equals of the cult leader by judicious use of Horrors to enact "miracles." Doing so would not, however, eliminate the power and influence of the cult, just refocus it on the characters and, furthermore, may lead to an expansion of the cult as rumors of new "miracles" or a new guru circulate. This is particularly problematic if the crucible contains high-profile members (i.e., those with the Fame Background; see Chapter Three). Do the characters really want themselves linked to the cults? Certainly, the last thing they should do is attract attention to the cult, unless it is the form of a devastating expose and subsequent investigation by the authorities. Attempting to usurp a cult also brings the crucible into conflict with the Flatliners. The characters may not yet be able to establish how the cults interact (if at all), but their ignorance doesn't mean that others take kindly to their interference and may invite a devastating counterattack.

A fourth method might be to cut off (or at least disrupt) an essential facet of the cults existence — their drug supply. Tracking this down is a formidable task, and even if the crucible can do so and shut it off, the cults might well have reserves. Furthermore, suddenly cutting the cultists off from their supply of drugs is not likely to

do them any good. Some cultists may suffer serious (and potentially fatal) withdrawal symptoms or take to crime to feed their habit. Such a method may be particularly harsh on members of the Angelic Host who are not wholly aware of their addiction and who would struggle to comprehend what is happening to them. Of course, the crucible may be hard-hearted enough not to care about this....

HARPER FORESTER

When the feds attempted to arrest Harper Forester for working as a mob accountant, the resulting shootout left two officers dead, another in a wheelchair and Forester in the Marion Federal Penitentiary, sentenced to die. He quickly adapted to the brutal regime, his intelligence earning him respect and disdain in equal measure. Those who feared him did so because they felt threatened by his intellect — including some of the guards who "volunteered" him for Project Flatline. Although lacking the killer instinct that made Uriah Bishop the preeminent Flatliner, Forester was a capable lieutenant and saw the benefits of Bishop's plan even while he did not wholly comprehend the enormity of what lay behind it. Freed of his body by the fire, Forester works diligently to make good Bishop's plan, managing two of the pigment cults and overseeing numerous lesser spooks.

Image: Forester appears to be in his late 20s. His gauze has a slightly grayish cast and he always appears in the prison issues he was wearing when he died.

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



Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Leadership 3, Etiquette 2, Finance 3, Firearms 3, Investigation 1, Law 1, Melee 1, Occult 2, Science 1

Shade: Banshee

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Director

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Forebode, Pandemonium, Puppetry, Wail

RADIO FREE DEATH

Background: For some time now, every night at midnight, a sort of “daily spook news report” transmits over a satellite cable channel, apparently directed only at those who can project (or who are already dead). It contains bits of news, sometimes relevant, sometimes apparently not. Orpheus was aware of these transmissions but didn’t know who was doing it or why. It urged the characters not to listen to whoever was making these broadcasts, out of fear that someone might be trying to set the characters up or use them for his own ends.

As time goes on, however, the characters may have begun to rely on this otherworldly correspondent. If they’ve acted on his messages at all, then the information has become more tailored (because he knows he’s getting through). The information has all been local (to the city in which the chronicle began) and apparently coming from a helpful source. The person behind the transmissions is one Terrence Green, an ex-con and Flatliner looking to make his contribution to society — even if it is after death.

Terrence grew up in the projects, with little between him and death except attitude. He found his way in the world by joining the local Crips and enforcing their reputation (as well as his own). He helped expand their territory by eradicating rival dealers, soon gaining a rep for being utterly ruthless in pursuit of his goals. He was eight years old when he first joined the gang as a runner. He was 11 when he was shot for the first time, 12 when he robbed the local convenience store and landed in juvie and 14 when he killed for the first time. His life on the streets came to an abrupt end at 16, however, when he was tried and convicted for playing the triggerman in a drive-by that killed several bystanders. The only thing that kept him from receiving the death penalty was his age, leaving him with 40 years in the penitentiary.

Terrence soon discovered that prison and the projects weren’t all that different. He joined up with a gang in

prison too, the one responsible for smuggling drugs. During his first four years in the block, he survived various attacks and brawls and earned a reputation as one of the toughest guys behind bars. Unfortunately, the prison had a zero-tolerance gang policy, enforced with a minimum two-year sentence in maximum-security solitary confinement.

As the administration busted various gang members, one gave up Terrence and four other convicts to save himself. Terrence went immediately to solitary and spent the next two years in silence. The only human contact he had was with the two silent guards who escorted him to his 30 minutes of “free time” per day in the basketball court. Otherwise, his world was a small room with no windows, a static-filled black and white TV and a one-book-at-a-time allowance from the prison library. The end result was the most education he’d ever had.

When he came out of solitary, he had both a stronger sense of himself and a grudge to settle. He killed three of the five people he suspected of ratting him out (all of whom were innocent) and ended up on death row before he could finish off the other two. Once on death row, he spent seven years in limbo as his appeals dwindled, his fear grew and his regrets piled up. He converted to Islam with the help of the convict across the aisle and changed his name to Fareed Mustafa Muhammad, in the hope that there might be something more for him than the wasted life he’d had. All that seemed left was to wait for death and pray.

When Project Flatline came up, however, it seemed a chance sent from Allah. He was considered a viable candidate for the project, and it gave him a chance to do something good, to redeem himself with a selfless act and, perhaps, to enter Paradise after all. In an effort to justify his life and worth, he joined the project — only to have his beliefs and faith shattered, scattered upon the Wasteland like so much dust. The world he found had nothing to do with anything mentioned in the Koran or the Bible, what little he remembered of it from Sunday School as a child. He found himself wondering if there was actually a God or an accounting of sins at all. In the face of the Wastelands, his faith collapsed utterly.

For some, this might have been a devastating moment. For Terrence, however, it was a revelation. The belief that he could start again fresh, without dragging the weight of all his past deeds behind him was invigorating. He threw himself into that world, buoyed by a sense of a responsibility and a belief in the second chance he’d somehow stumbled into.

When the other Flatliners escaped into the world as ghosts, Terrence went with them. He had no hope of a new beginning back in prison, and there was no point in

going back when he had so much yet to do. His body died in the fire started by Orpheus and the NSA to cover their “failure,” but Terrence didn’t care. He had everything he needed to continue on as something more than he’d ever been when tied to skin and bones.

After his escape, Terrence kept an eye on the Orpheus Group and its entrepreneurial efforts. He also made an effort to learn about the supernatural world around him, including a bit about the wholesale disappearance of ghosts three years ago, but came away with nothing he could claim with any certainty. Unwilling to lead anyone astray, he has continued to keep his mouth shut about things he isn’t sure about, regardless of what others want him to do.

Terrence was content to stick to his unique form of backseat driving until the attack on Orpheus occurred. After that, he began trying to contact the characters directly, targeting them in his transmissions. He’s spent a lot of time observing the various players on the field, and he’s become convinced that the characters are worth helping. If he can help them, he will, but he won’t necessarily risk his own neck to do it. He knows other forces out there have an unhealthy level of interest in him, and he isn’t willing to give up his newfound existence for somebody he doesn’t know.

THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

Terrence’s time investigating the afterlife has come up with some interesting developments. He’s seen a lot of really disturbing things occurring, and he’s very concerned. Now that he’s made contact with the crucible and observed the characters a bit, he wants to clue them into some of what he thinks is going on.

For starters, Terrence is more than aware of the NSA’s connection to Orpheus, as his participation in Project Flatline would suggest. He and his prison companions always knew that their participation was courtesy of the government. Very little effort was made to hide that fact, actually, especially since no one else would have that kind of access to death-row inmates. None of them were ever going to make it back to the outside, even if they survived the experiment. The NSA also never predicted that dead men might be able to tell tales, something completely outside its experiences at the time. That the Flatliners got away — and knew for whom they were working — was a large contributor to its decision to keep a low profile from that point on.

If the characters are still unaware of the NSA’s involvement with Orpheus or its relation to the Death Merchants, Terrence is glad to fill them in (provided they can contact him). His experiences as a Flatliner (and subsequent murder at the hands of the NSA-led

Orpheus Group) have left him with little love for the organization — not, of course, that his living days on the streets and in prison had endeared him to authority in any form. Between that sympathy and his natural dislike for those who abuse power, he’s happy to help the crucible get out from the line of fire if possible by giving them the information they lack.

Terrence can also be used as a source for more specific information on nearly anyone, whether through a deceased relative who’s become a ghost or some other tethers that someone might have. This type of information could be the key to turning a Death Merchant or convincing a reporter to back off. If the characters need a hand in that regard, don’t be afraid to use Terrence to give them a head start.

Next, Terrence is really worried about the recent wave of pigment deaths. The waves of ghosts billowing into the hereafter is without precedent in his (or anyone else’s that he can find) memory. Everyone that died from using the drug has become a hue. They aren’t anchored by anything but the drug, making them clueless, aimless spirits — in other words, sheep waiting to be fleeced.

Terrence had a small inkling that something was wrong with pigment for a while, but there was nothing he could pin down. Most of the people who used it had other issues going on in their lives. There was nothing to say whether or not “ghost X” would have become a ghost, even if she’d never touched the stuff. Still, the numbers he was seeing didn’t seem right. Since the mass deaths, he has *known* there’s a problem and has set out to find out what it is.

In checking up on pigment, he discovered that it was being distributed not only by street dealers, but by some odd cults as well. Upon closer investigation, he realized that he knew some of the people involved in the cults — they were his old “buddies” from Project Flatline but bore little resemblance to the men he once knew. Terrence wasn’t foolish enough to try to confront them. That just isn’t his style. Instead, he used his contacts and skills to try to trace pigment back up the chain. Imagine his surprise to learn that Orpheus’ main competitor, Terrel & Squib, was the manufacturer of the drug. The otherwise reputable company was making quite a side venture out of manufacturing pigment and getting it out on the streets, whether through the regular street distributorship model or the cults.

Terrence has never been confident of the altruistic impulses of the corporate world. The level to which this was being carried set off warning signals for him, however, especially since he couldn’t see any signs of sudden amazing wealth in anyone. The drug is practically being given away on the streets — in fact, the cults *are* giving it away, with no (obvious) strings attached.

On top of that, further investigation at Terrel & Squib has revealed that things there definitely aren't what they appear to be. While most of the company is on the level, the top echelons are corrupt beyond the worst fears of the characters. It doesn't take too long wandering the compound behind the scenes to discover that Squib is actually a Spectre, walking around in human form and orchestrating the whole event. Terrel seems to be human, but there's no telling what hold Squib has over him. Regardless, it's a sure bet that Squib is behind the manufacturing of pigment and that the sudden influx of dead users is no accident.

The part of all of this that really concerns Terrence, however, and that should trouble the characters too, is the way all these seemingly unconnected events have begun to resolve themselves into a nasty image. Though the connections are becoming clear, the whys and hows are still a mystery. Terrence is left with the unsettling feeling that he hasn't yet seen even half of what's going on, and trying to imagine what the other half could be isn't a pleasant experience.

In addition, Terrence has a new friend he'd like to introduce to the crucible. Her name is Grace Ishida (see Chapter Three), and she's unlike any other ghost that Terrence has met. Grace calls herself a Phantasm, a term her old employers — Terrel & Squib — coined. Terrence hooked up with her when he was investigating T&S, and they discovered they were on the right track after they had to escape an attack by both Spectres and T&S company goons.

Grace has some impressive and heretofore unseen powers and might even be able to teach her abilities to the crucible in exchange for its help. She has a personal stake in keeping other young street kids out of the hands of Terrel & Squib, normal street predators and Spectres. Doing her some favors along those lines (or helping Radio Free Death in general) carry weight with Grace and predispose her in the characters' favor.

ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

Regardless of the crucible's general outlook on the world, or any ideological differences its members might have with Terrence, the characters still have a much stronger chance of being allied with him than not. He needs all the help he can muster if anyone is going to put up a fight, so despite any minor (or major) personality quibbles, he'll do what he can to set such things aside and cooperate with the characters.

Terrence actually offers a unique opportunity for the crucible. He can help them understand past events (from Project Flatline on) to current events to what's going to happen in the future. He has connections far beyond those the characters can muster and can act as a

way to keep them on track even when it seems all hope is lost.

Specifically, Terrence can help with information about Terrel & Squib, given his recent information-gathering raid, and about the Flatliners who are running the cults. He knows they're following something sinister, something that has twisted them even further than they began, way back on death row. He doesn't know what that is, though, and he won't comment on things of which he isn't 100 percent sure.

The only way that Terrence refuses to help the characters and considers them an enemy is if they do something foolish such as join the pigment distribution network or help the FBI (or even the NSA) capture rogue projectors. He knows just enough of what's going on, in addition to his strong desire for self-determination and dislike of authority, to refuse to deal with anyone who seems to have "sold out to the Man." He understands the need for self-preservation but not at the expense of innocents... not anymore.

DEALING WITH RADIO FREE DEATH

Players are unpredictable, and so, the possibility exists that the crucible may end up at odds with Terrence Green. While he is a highly capable survivor, he isn't invulnerable. If things are timed right, he can be taken down, especially with swarm tactics.

The problem with this scenario is that Terrence has friends — lots of friends, in fact — all of whom would be exceptionally annoyed if he were destroyed. Grace Ishida is first in line among them, if only for the close working relationship the two have, but plenty of other people owe their lives (or existences, in the case of ghosts) to him as well.

While Terrel & Squib and the cults might thank the characters for taking care of Terrence, most other projectors or spirits they might run into just want to kill them on sight for putting an end to Radio Free Death, if not Terrence himself. Assuming the characters have no wish to join forces with the bad guys, the most likely way of dealing with Terrence is to join forces with him and help him fight the good fight.

TERRENCE GREEN

In life, Terrence was a two-bit convict. In death, however, he's become something much, much more. He still isn't exactly virtuous, not even by his own definition, but he's true to himself and others. He has no need to be defined by anything other than his words and actions, and that alone is enough to give him the kind of strength most others can only envy.



Terrence is the sole proprietor, reporter and broadcaster of Radio Free Death, a 30-second snippet of ghostly news and information. It is broadcast at midnight on a local cable satellite channel in a burst of static, disguised as transmission difficulties. He and his associate, Grace Ishida, are working to protect those innocents who come into their paths and to uncover the truth behind some truly troubling events that have occurred lately.

Terrence is a no-nonsense kind of person. He is disarming and charismatic, with a wit and confidence that are refreshingly genuine. He has little in the way of formal education, but his stint in the pen gave him the chance to make up for that by educating himself. He uses that discipline and knowledge to determine his own fate, something that he had to die in order to accomplish.

Image: Terrence stands roughly six feet tall when manifested. He is African-American with a very dark complexion and light brown eyes. He wore his hair close cut in life, almost bald, and that's one thing that hasn't changed. He is thin and wiry and uses slow, measured movements. His voice is deep and pleasant, a stunning counterpoint to the content of what he usually has to say.

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

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Expression 2, Firearms 3, Intuition 3, Law 2, Leadership 2, Meditation 1, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 5

Shade: Haunter

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Survivor

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 8

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Bedlam, Broadband Ghost, Inhabit, Unearthly Repose, Witch's Nimbus

SPECTRES

Background: The very act of becoming a Spectre changes a ghost's identity forever, trapping him in an endless loop of angst and spite. Human sensibilities are replaced by an alien agenda. Spectres are drawn to human suffering. Thus, the mass annihilation of innocents draws them in swarms. The hues created by the recent poisoned drug shipment aren't just innocent, they're ignorant, ready to be exploited by older and more experienced ghosts. One would think the Spectres would descend on this new populace, feasting on the terror and shock. And indeed, the events of that fateful night led to a spiritual "feeding frenzy" as a first wave of Spectres harvested many souls — but not all of them. The Spectres' have been watching and waiting.

Shifting blame is one of the tactics Spectres use best. Puppetry gives them a major edge over their mortal rivals. In fact, when a circle of Spectres decides to work together, they can turn the most unthinkable assortment of mortals into a possible conspiracy. For all their Horrors and Thorns, they can also be exceptionally subtle in the physical world, interacting behind the façades of many different living masks. This could make them nearly unstoppable if they preferred to use brute-force tactics, but unlike mortals, Spectres sometimes act like they have all the time in the world to carry out their agenda. Perhaps they really do.

Some of the most valuable bodies they can infest and suborn are those of skimmers, sleepers and other former Orpheus agents. When a projector leaves his body defenseless, he's presenting an opportunity for a Spectre to seize it and exploit it. When a sleeper allows his body to fill with Spite, each mote of corruption that taints the body works in the Spectres' favor. Temporary political alliances and achievements mean little to the Spectres. Trafficking in suffering and souls is far more profitable than transient, physical concerns. Power wanes, but souls are forever.

Human hosts aren't their only tools. When spying on humanity, Spectres can also inhabit the bodies of animals, easily overpowering the spirit of a housecat or a stray dog to create a vehicle for interacting with the real world. If the characters need a little more paranoia, land a flock of birds on their front lawn or send a stray cat to their doorstep. Spectres can also inhabit phone lines,



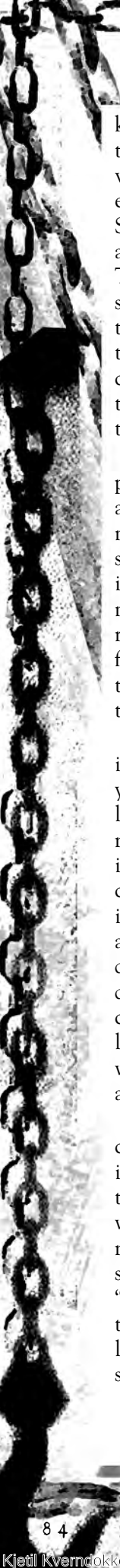
computers, televisions — all of the same devices Haunters use to spy on the physical world. This tactic works particularly well after the characters have scored a victory against a mundane, physical enemy. The characters may already fear men in black suits acting on behalf of the government, but when you're "telling ghost stories for ghosts," it never hurts to turn the environment against them as well. At this stage of the story, every time a Spectre watches and waits, it's foreshadowing for this faction's involvement later on.

In this episode, a host of Spectres descends on the city, and the first hives appear. Much of this occurs away from the characters at first — but the wisest Spectres wait and see, not only scheming about what to do with all these fresh souls in the afterworld, but also watching Orpheus agents to gauge their possibilities. When the rest of their swarm arrives, they'll be ready to cull the population of ghosts trapped here for the last three years — but not to feed their own appetites. They are indeed waiting. Contrary to the immediate motivations of agents working for the FBI, the DEA and even Orpheus, Spectres are making long-term plans.

Obviously, the most obvious danger posed by Spectres is the direct threat to life and limb. When a ghost or projector encounters a Spectre, violence is the usual outcome. However, it is important that these entities present opportunities for more than mere mayhem. When a lone Spectre runs instead of attacking, many characters either wonder why or immediately follow and investigate. Former Orpheus agents at this point stand to gain little by trying to destroy Spectres one by one, since more always seem to appear later. The characters initially have little reason to try to understand them, either, since most who try to do so ensure their own (permanent) demise. With this in mind, a clever Storyteller should try to use Spectres as something more than a means to trigger a fight-or-flight instinct.

One effective way to do this is by introducing a few individual Spectres into the chronicle, each with its own background and motivations. Few, if any, agents have survived more than one encounter with the same Spectre, but the story becomes more interesting if the characters can see the results of a Shadow-class predator's craft. While all Spectres have access to a hive-mind, that connection doesn't preclude them from occasionally going astray. They may be watching and waiting to see what other factions in this shadow play might do, but in the meantime, they need to sustain themselves on suffering and spite. Like any predator, they need to hunt from time to time — and a few of the weak-willed Spectres succumb to this urge.

One fairly easy way to advance this is by setting a Spectre loose in a city as a sort of "supernatural serial



killer." If the agents can't survive a direct confrontation, they should at least be able to see the remains of a slain victim or evidence at the crime scene. Mundane law enforcement would be oblivious to the activities of Spectres (or any other variety of ghost), but Orpheus agents would no doubt suspect such an entity right away. This feeds directly into the practice of "telling ghost stories for ghosts," since only ghosts and projectors have the background to fully understand and oppose this threat. Giving them one enemy for one small victory can restore the crucible's confidence... and the characters will need it when they see the magnitude of horrors that awaits them.

Such rebellious Shadow-class entities don't just pose a threat to a crucible. They also create trouble for any agency that enforces the law. Tracking down a serial murderer falls into the jurisdiction of the FBI, for instance. If the crime involves exploitation of drug victims, it may draw in the DEA as well. A crucible agent may be motivated to investigate such a crime to protect her own reputation, since the supernatural angle may implicate former Orpheus employees. A clever Spectre may then try to frame an agent for the crime... forcing the projector or ghost to take a closer look at what it has done.

If it seems possible that the crucible might be interested in an alliance with a government agency (and you want that to happen in your game), the threat of a lone Spectre may actually encourage one. If the FBI needs to hunt down a supernatural serial killer, for instance, and it has already begun a dialog with the crucible, recruiting the characters to help out with the investigation is one way to test their alliance. If there's any possible connection between the behavior of these dark spirits and the recent outbreak of pigment-related deaths, both the Bureau and the characters have a common motivation for finding the culprit. Once you've let this monster loose, it may also become an effective way of cleaning up loose ends in a story, since it can kill a few extraneous characters in this drama.

It's just as possible, however, that some ghosts created by the pigment massacres, or spirits that dwelled in the city before those events, do everything they can to help Orpheus agents find out the truth. They may be willing to spy, scout or shadow criminals in the pigment network or government agents... or even risk their souls stalking Spectres. When presented with these sorts of "good" ghosts, the Spectres may not have the patience to corrupt them gradually. The Spectres are far more likely to kill a ghostly ally of Orpheus outright. For the sake of a long-term chronicle, setting up a ghostly ally to

die is preferable to killing the characters outright — provided the game maintains enough peril to be challenging and Storyteller characters aren't a dime a dozen (if death is treated too cavalierly, it loses its impact in the story).

A veteran ghostbuster may have a different take on this mystery, seeing the Spectres not as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an uncaring and impersonal force that must merely be avoided. Some Orpheus agents believe that Spectres exist to ultimately serve entropy and oblivion. Ghosts often remain near the living, it is said, because of their ties to people, places and emotions that were important to them. Spectres merely help them to "move on," not to some lie of an afterlife, but into the void of nothingness. It's a rather fatalistic take on the investigation, but considering the body count Spectres are wracking up, it may also be a pragmatic one.

While Orpheus has recorded few instances of an agent confronting a Spectre and surviving, it is important to allow the crucible some victories along the way. The crucible must fight for more than the chance to clear its members' names. Conflicts with Spectres illustrate that the characters have the power to oppose an enemy no one else really can, certainly not government agents unschooled in the mysteries of the supernatural world.

Each soul that defies death to exist as a ghost and each sacrifice averted will prove a blessing in the end. The characters have gone from being paranormal freaks working for vast amounts of money to humanity's defense against a growing evil. They may need to sacrifice all that they have to keep the forces of darkness at bay, if only temporarily. Hunted by the law, they must perform acts of heroism a panicked populace cannot fully appreciate or reward. If the Spectres really are ultimate evil personified, they should exist to contrast the light and life represented by the crucible. Even if good cannot ultimately triumph over evil, its agents are obligated to die trying and to do so heroically. With a host of Spectres in your story and a long-term chronicle unfolding, make sure you take your time revealing the Spectral menace. Savor the experience — with six books in the series, it will be a long time before this cinematic adventure fades to black.

EZEKIEL, SPECTRAL SERIAL KILLER

Killing is good. Suffering is delicious. Humans are such easy prey. Soon the hive will transform the world into

one great feast, but the waiting is so long... so very long.... Sustenance is essential for survival. One or two victims wouldn't be missed, would they?

The friends and relatives of the new ghosts, they are suffering so much now. Is it wrong to put them out of their misery? Kill one or two of them, yes, the former friends and family of the new hues. It would keep the rest of the ghosts in line. The hive would understand. The hive would like it even more if we could make those fools from Orpheus watch. Make them see what we can do, yes? Maybe even... make it look like they did it? Such a delightful game, yes.

Ezekiel hasn't been a Spectre long. Apart from his obvious Stains (bloody claws on his fingertips and the black, foul-smelling footprints he leaves), he still looks like a "normal" ghost. He doesn't remember his human life or even his name. "Ezekiel" is the name the children in the ghetto gave him, and they have developed the habit of walking in other people's footprints "so Ezekiel can't follow." This method of confusing the Spectre doesn't actually work, but Ezekiel lets the children pretend it does. It will make their pain so much more flavorful when he finally does come for them.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Occult 1, Stealth 3

Nature: Deviant

Willpower: 6

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Puppetry



TERREL & SQUIB PHARMACEUTICALS

Background: On the surface, Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals looks like an innocent victim of a brutal crime, much like Orpheus. As with Orpheus, however, looks can be deceiving. The same sort of attack that decimated the Orpheus group also severely damaged Terrel & Squib (along with a number of other, smaller projecting firms, shattering the industry). Its best and strongest agents were killed, with many more wounded or left unable to function. If it were not for the company's pharmaceutical base, it'd be little more than a memory at the moment, suffering the same fate as the now-maligned Orpheus Group. Or would it?

Terrel & Squib started out as a strictly pharmaceutical concern, struggling to make its way in an already packed market with much larger competitors. The company was headed by John Terrel, a 90s stock magnate with an exceptional financial brain and the money to prove it, and Dr. Lionel Squib, a biochemist with a Harvard Ph.D. and more than 100 drug patents to his name. They moved into the paranormal investigations industry not long after Orpheus opened its doors, following Squib's discovery and creation of a drug called pigment.

Pigment was never released to the public. Squib somehow became aware of its paranormal properties and, instead, suggested that the company shift its focus, pointing to Orpheus' success and the wide-open field of the industry. Terrel agreed, and Terrel & Squib opened its doors soon thereafter, backed by more money than Orpheus could have ever dreamed of having.

Terrel & Squib's primary market was made up of rich, high-profile clients. It charged enormous sums but took on all jobs, no questions asked. Unfortunately, in many cases, T&S *should* have asked more questions, but instead, it wound up sending its large, well-equipped teams on missions blind, leading to a huge turnover in personnel when (for example) a simple haunting turned out to be worse than anyone had imagined.

Orpheus was always mystified by Terrel & Squib, never understanding why a company with so many incredible resources should use such shoddy work practices... and be so short on actual skilled personnel. It made a lot of money, but it never seemed to put it to any sort of good use. Unfortunately, Orpheus dissolved before it could discover the answer to that question — something that would likely have horrified Orpheus even as it saw the chance to discredit the opposition.

In truth, neither Terrel nor Squib are innocents in this field. In fact, Squib isn't exactly Lionel Squib at all

any more, but a Spectre who wears his face and clothes (and who once wore the body of Dr. Amours Katilian, the now-deceased botanist who gave Orpheus the plant that allowed it to refine skimmer projection). Terrel is still Terrel, but dominated and browbeaten by his partner into being a willing participant in the creature's schemes. The creation of pigment was hardly an accident, though the motivations behind it are uncertain: After all, no one really knows except Squib, and he's certainly not telling.

T&S's callous treatment of its agents and its reliance on ghosts instead of humans as agents are far more understandable in this light, since the Spectre would prefer to work with people he could control more easily. At the same time, this also explains pigment's strongly addictive powers, if not all of its side effects. It's this drug that enables people to work for T&S as skimmers, meaning that the company deliberately addicts them, then sends them out to "work" for their fix. This also explains why the agents are rarely given any meaningful information about their jobs, because, so far as T&S is concerned, there's always another addict where that one came from.

Terrel and Squib were well aware that the attack on Orpheus (and then on their own company) would take place. They're playing a much bigger game than just paranormal investigations, and so, they sacrificed a few pawns to further their gambit. Allowing the attack to take place let them get rid of a few of the company's more powerful projectors and ghosts, some of whom were growing suspicious and might have acted against the company. The attack, happening at the same time as the attack on Orpheus, has effectively painted T&S as one of the victims of this tragic occurrence, diverting the spotlight from it and keeping its pigment-production operations out of the public eye.

Still, many goings-on remain unexplained with Terrel & Squib, specifically the distribution of pigment as the new street drug of choice (not to mention the cults that just give it away). Profit is obviously not its main consideration and neither is forced recruitment, since far too many people are taking the drug to find the few who would make promising agents. Thus far, it has kept its link to the drug under wraps, but the Spectre currently known as Squib is certainly having his way with the company. The only question is whether Terrel & Squib (both the company and the individuals) can keep themselves from being suspected long enough to succeed in whatever chilling plan they are enacting.

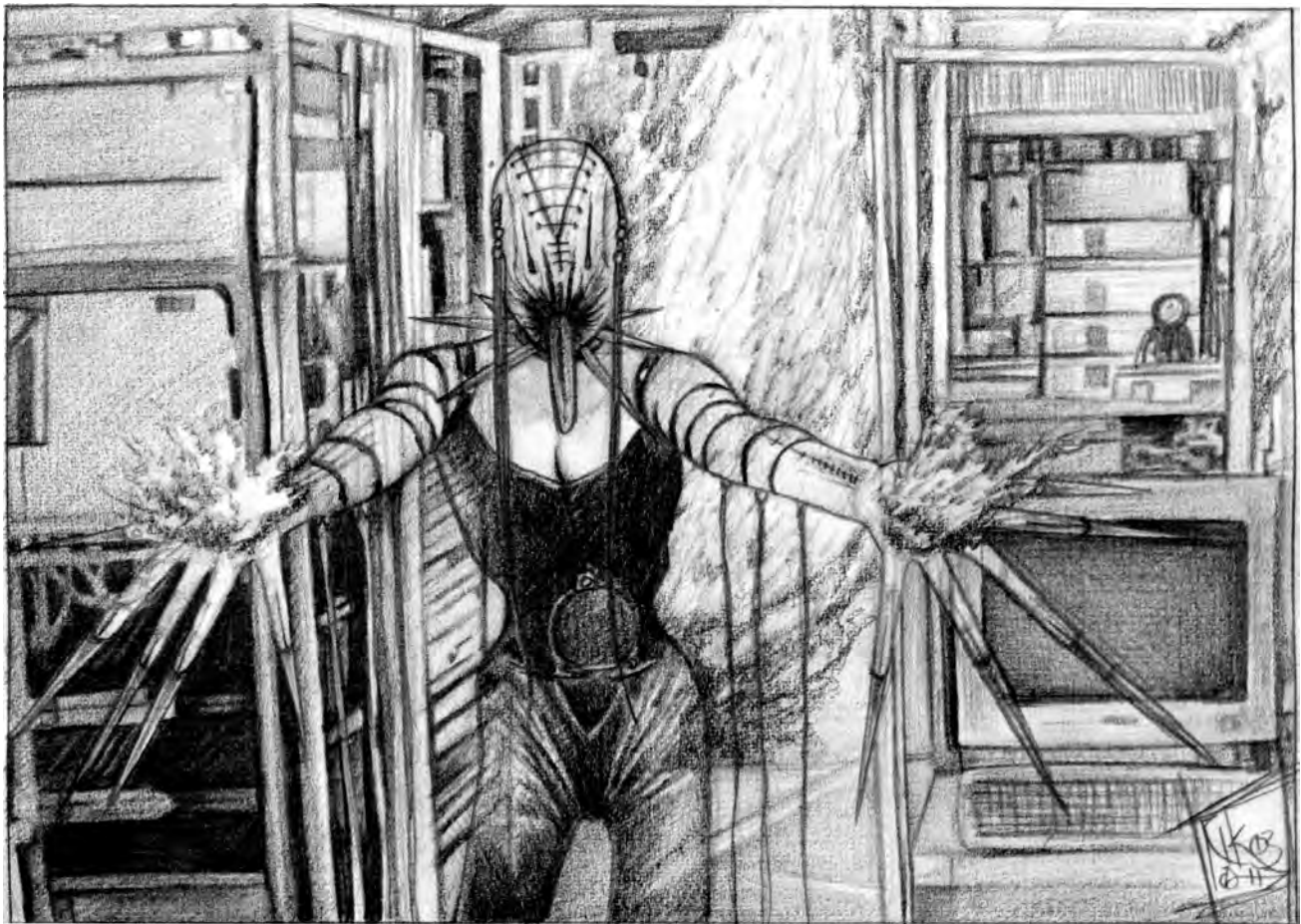
THE CURRENT PLAN OF ATTACK

The reason behind the attack on Terrel & Squib was really twofold. First, it should be clarified that T&S arranged for the attack through NextWorld. The first reason was to have an excuse to get rid of those among Terrel & Squib's projectors who might be getting a bit suspicious of the company and its chief executives. The last thing Squib wants is a projector or ghost close to home getting powerful enough to challenge it—or even detect the Spectre-possessed doctor's true nature. Still, you can't have people dying on the job constantly without attracting some attention, so the attack performed a great service for him in that regard.

The second and more important reason for the attack was for Terrel & Squib to divert attention away from itself. By appearing as the victim, the company is spared from the scrutiny it would endure if it were the only paranormal investigative firm in the industry to emerge from the fracas unscathed. Given both the leadership of the company and the organization's most recent acts, any sort of publicity would be the kiss of death for Terrel & Squib's future plans.

In order for the company to remain a viable front and production facility for pigment, Terrel & Squib relies on remaining low-key and compartmentalized. Although the company heads are a Spectre and its mortal servant, the company itself is not entirely malicious, certainly not in the way that NextWorld and the Death Merchants are. Most of the employees there believe that they are helping humanity. Production is broken into discrete sections, so that one group never knows what happens before or after its portion of the process. It's a situation where the left hand never knows what the right is doing, multiplied myriad times throughout all divisions of the company.

Of those who have somehow learned the truth, the ramifications of their knowledge are unpleasant. The few who have no issue with the effects of pigment or the marketing strategy of the CEOs end up working directly for them, furthering the chief officers' goals and reaping rewards in the process. Others with more of a conscience either find themselves the victims of tragic accidents or somehow manage to escape, such as Grace Ishida, Terrence Green's new partner at Radio Free Death. Squib isn't keen on letting anyone get away with his secrets, however, so any character who stumbles onto the truth and lives to tell about it can expect to be on the run from that point on.



ALLIES AND NOT ENEMIES

If some unwitting (or completely amoral) characters want to join Terrel & Squib, they should find it extremely easy to do so. T&S is always in need of experienced agents, especially those who might need the sort of protection it could offer (and, thus, give T&S a handy bargaining chip). The pay is great, the health benefits are reasonable, and it's a high-profile, reputation-making job that could open a lot of doors down the line.

To counteract the T&S perk of being able to hobnob with the beautiful people and their resident ghosts, characters who make that decision should find themselves wondering if they've somehow had "target" tattooed on their backs without realizing it. They are sent in blind on assignments that range from cakewalks to bloodbaths, with no differentiation between them. Terrel & Squib, while needing people to continue fronting the organization, uses these assignments as a way of testing their projectors. Squib reviews his projectors' performances to determine who might actually pose a threat to him and his plans. He then arranges to cull the strongest threats by arranging for their deaths/"transfers" to other divisions of the company. The char-

acters are treated as expendable because they are, at least in T&S's eyes. Enough of that attitude should come through to make them uneasy, at best.

Terrel & Squib believes in recruiting every projector it can get its hands on, if only because Squib doesn't want to take the chance of a loose cannon causing problems with the pigment trade. It uses word on the street through its pigment-distribution lines, letting Squib's dressed-down street helpers test and evaluate those who come through that avenue and hiring and exploiting those who meet the criteria. Terrel & Squib's name isn't mentioned until or unless the individuals are recruited, so that, by the time they know who they're dealing with, it's too late (and they can't get their pigment fix any other way).

For professionals working with other paranormal-investigation firms or former Orpheus employees, T&S employs special recruiters who treat projecting as any other highly specialized and valuable occupation. The characters are wined and dined and courted like any other much-sought-after professional, with every inch of the red-carpet treatment being used to entice them into coming on board with Terrel & Squib. If those

professionals happen to be fugitives, T&S presents itself as a harbor in the storm, sending out some of the best (and most content) projectors to find the fugitives, provide them with whatever they need and offer even more help if they'll come to work for T&S. The characters would probably be approached as spooks, where T&S recruiters are less likely to be taken for one of the less friendly groups pursuing the crucible.

DEALING WITH TERREL & SQUIB

Assuming that the characters want nothing to do with Terrel & Squib's overtures, the odds are good they'll discover that the corporation is behind the pigment distribution. If this information motivates them to want to take down the company as a whole, they'll have their work cut out for them.

Unfortunately for the characters, Terrel & Squib as a company is far too well entrenched to be vulnerable to most types of attack. The company as a whole is guilty of nothing (except perhaps pigment addiction). Its employees believe that they are truly working for the betterment of mankind. Those aspects that the characters are likely to focus on are kept carefully segregated from the company as a whole. The company has little physical record of its role in pigment distribution, certainly nothing that would send up any red flags to investigators. Legal action won't stop them, physical attacks won't stop them (and could likely result in a number of innocents being injured or killed), and character attacks in the media are largely shrugged off. So, how is such a monster to be stopped?

The answer? Cut off the head.

In order to change Terrel & Squib's direction as a company, the driving forces behind the pigment plot, namely Terrel and Squib themselves, must be removed. These two have to be handled carefully, though. Squib is a Spectre and, so, immune to most types of leverage that the characters might try to use against him, while Terrel is a financial wizard who's used to playing hardball in the world of big business. Attempts to intimidate him are almost certainly doomed to failure.

Ultimately, Terrel and Squib are both very motivated to continue with their plans because they are acting in their own interests. They personally believe in their plans, and have no interest in compromising or changing those plans. They will not stop until something (or someone) stops them, a lesson that could take an unsuspecting crucible a while to learn. If the characters obtain evidence of what the pair are up to and attempt to blackmail them, either to ensure their own

safety or to stop the two men, they crucible quickly finds itself the target of unprecedented Spectre hostility. Threatening Terrel and Squib only gives them a chance to take the characters out before they can actually cause any problems.

If the crucible wants to take Terrel and Squib down, it needs to strike hard and fast. If they join T&S and wish to act from the inside, a well-planned raid against key targets could disable T&S for a while. This strategy must accomplish the following to be successful: The current pigment in production must be destroyed, the R&D information on pigment must be destroyed, and Terrel & Squib must be killed or otherwise removed from the picture. Terrel is only human and has no projecting capabilities. Killing Squib, though, is a bit more difficult. Dr. Squib is currently possessed by a Reaper — and has been for some time. Should Squib himself be killed, the Spectre still has to be dealt with — and must be, before it can escape and possess someone else.

If the characters don't wish to take T&S on alone, they can always try and bring in the federal agencies in an attempt to shut down the company. The FBI would welcome the opportunity to look like a hero, assuming that the crucible has enough evidence to convince it to listen in the first place. The DEA would also be very interested (and far more likely to listen to the characters). The Drug Enforcement Administration is determined to put an end to pigment, and nailing the manufacturer and main distributor in one blow would be a huge PR boost for the agency. The NSA, of course, would still sooner kill the characters as listen to them, but if someone has contacts within the NSA, they could perhaps be used to help the crucible pass on the information to someone who would use it wisely. If the federal agencies arrest Terrel, he disappears from the picture. He's still not entirely harmless, but his assets are frozen and confiscated, and he'll be locked up somewhere far away (or at least tied up in litigation for a year or two). Arresting Squib, on the other hand, only serves as a delaying tactic. If the Spectre inhabiting Squib believes his cover has been compromised beyond repair, it'll end the possession and kill the scientist. It'll continue trying to find someone at Terrel & Squib who can continue its work, however — at most, the characters have bought themselves some time. They still have to track it down, though, or the whole thing starts again in a few months to a year.

Should Terrel or Squib escape, pigment production vanishes from T&S and, instead, moves underground, headed by whichever one is still around with the procedures perfected by T&S. It is imperative that both be

killed or removed from the picture, regardless of what else happens. There is no other way of stopping the threat they pose.

DR. LIONEL SQUIB

Dr. Lionel Squib was born in the Midwest, in a rural Illinois town called Pontiac. He worked his way through Harvard University, eventually earning his doctorate in biochemistry. He immediately began work in the private sector on drugs designed to help treat schizophrenia. He enjoyed astounding success during his time there, earning patents on more than 100 new drugs.

Inspired with confidence after his successes, Squib quit his job after being introduced to John Terrel, a financial wizard who made his fortune in the dotcoms. The pair founded Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals, marking their entry into the business world together and enjoyed limited success, finding it harder than they thought to break into the thoroughly dominated industry.

It was during that period when the Reaper Malevoy visited Squib. This Spectre had a job in mind and needed a tool to do it, and the scientist was exactly the person it needed to get the job done. It possessed Squib, taking up permanent residence behind the doctor's eyes. Squib immediately began work on two key projects: breaking Terrel and developing a new compound he had in mind. The first was easy. Between Squib's new viciousness and the Horrors he could bring to bear, he soon had Terrel cowering at the sight of him. The new compound took a bit more work.

The Spectre used Squib's expertise combined with its own unholy knowledge to create pigment. Squib then opened Terrel & Squib's paranormal investigations division and arranged for the drug's street distribution through the cults and the dealers. Most people who knew Squib never even noticed the change, sad to say. He had always been a quiet, introverted man, and when his personality grew meaner and more aggressive, people just assumed that success was changing him.



Image: Squib is an unassuming man, standing about 5'8" tall, with thin brown hair and a heavy build. He wears tinted glasses and tailored (if somewhat rumpled) clothing under his ever-present lab coat. He used to smile easily, but now, his smiles are rare and usually unnerving.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Computer 2, Intuition 2, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Medicine 4, Melee 5, Occult 2, Science 4 (Biochemistry), Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Chill, Hive-Mind, Manifest, Puppetry, Rend, Tentacles (barbed; chains) x 2, Virus



CHAPTER THREE: THE UNEARTHED PLAYERS GUIDE



If you fuckers had tried this a month ago, you might have taken me down. But I've learned some shit since then. Just remember: No shame in losing, and you won't have any fun.

— Ben Cotton

Casares: What is a ghost? A tragedy condemned to repeat itself time and again? An instant of pain, perhaps. Something dead which still seems to be alive. An emotion suspended in time. Like a blurred photograph. Like an insect trapped in amber.

— El Espinazo del Diablo (The Devil's Backbone)

This chapter presents a selection on new options for **Orpheus** players. We begin with a new Shade, the Phantasm, a master of dreams and illusions. Like all Shades, the Phantasm possesses two distinctive Horrors. All Phantasm characters begin with the illusion-casting Horror called Bedlam, while they can learn the dream-shaping Horror of Sandman more easily than spooks of any other Shade.

Next we offer new Horrors for every Shade known, including Phantasms. Once a spook masters the two favored Horrors of her Shade, she can progress to these *third-tier* Horrors. The characters need these formidable new Horrors, too, if they want to survive the threats and solve the mysteries that swirl around them.

We also provide seven new roles for characters — possible histories that tell how a spook brushed with death, added to the 20 from **Orpheus**. The chapter concludes with 10 new Backgrounds to represent your characters' evolving relationship to the worlds of the living and the dead.

The presentation of Phantasms and their Horrors presumes that you have already begun your **Orpheus** chronicle. Phantasms and their Horrors are new elements in the ongoing story. Most spooks can learn Bedlam and Sandman if they can find a Phantasm to teach them. The crucible can also gain new members, including perhaps a Phantasm, as old characters meet their final reward or fall to Spectre-hood. If you have not yet begun a chronicle, you could begin with Orpheus knowing about the Phantasms and include this Shade as an option for the players. That may require some changes to “The Pale Rider” and the suggested stories in **Orpheus** and **Crusade of Ashes**, though. The upcoming supplements to **Orpheus** all assume that characters know about Phantasms.

If you follow the metaplot that runs through these supplements, however, we recommend that characters receive no guidance about learning third-tier Horrors until they begin the events of “The Pale Rider.” Third-tier Horrors make the mystery of pigment too easy to solve: It is enough for the characters to learn that such advanced powers exist... and that certain spooks already know them. Developing these new powers can become an important new goal for the characters.



PHANTASM

I have a dream... and I'm going to share it with you. Whether you like it or not.

In some ghost stories, the spook becomes visible to only one person, or the victim of a haunting sees other things that no one else can see. Many ghosts also make themselves known through dreams... or nightmares. Such visions betray the presence of the Phantasm, an elusive and illusive Shade that Orpheus never discovered in its researches. An encounter with a Phantasm can leave both the quick and the dead wondering if they have gone insane, as dream and reality blur.

In life, prospective Phantasms cared more about their own thoughts than the world around them. Some of these people fled from reality to hide in idle fancies. Others tried to share their imaginings with other people as writers and artists. Still other latent Phantasms strove to act out their dreams in real life or to make their visions real as inventors, reformers and organizers... or tyrants and madmen. The dictator who turns a nation into one vast howl of terror follows a dream as much as the idealist who quests for justice and healing.

Potential Phantasms are not always easy to spot. For every artist or activist, a dozen people conceal vivid imaginations behind a quiet, ordinary life. The housewife who loses herself in soap operas or the clerk who fantasizes about winning the lottery may be just as much a latent Phantasm as a philosopher wrestling with ultimate truth or the science fiction fan who hates today because it isn't yet tomorrow.

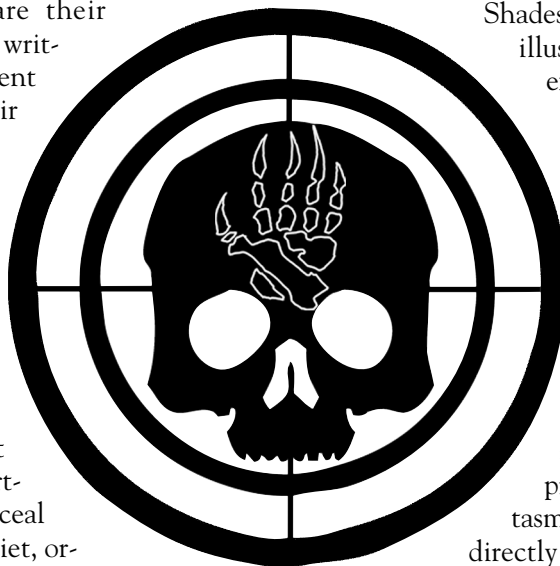
In death, Phantasms gain the power to project their dreams and fancies into other minds. They lived for imagination, and now, the world of dreams becomes their playground, their refuge and their weapon. A Phantasm cannot make his visions real and solid — but he can impress them on other minds so vividly that victims cannot tell what's real or illusion. Spooks of this Shade also easily gain the power to enter other beings' dreams. They can observe a dream, interact with it or shape it to a vision of their own choosing. An especially practiced Phantasm can even slip from one dreaming mind to another, flitting about the world.

The exceptional subtlety of their powers makes Phantasms hard to notice unless they want to be seen. Unwary ghosts or mortals can easily mistake a Phantasm's illusions for reality — or at least for some other ghostly power. A Phantasm cannot materialize objects like a Poltergeist, but he can make others *think* he did. He can't read the past like a Banshee or enthrall people like a Wisp, but he can walk through dreams and learn others' traumas, fears and fantasies. A skilled Phantasm can cloak himself in illusion to appear as someone else or vanish from sight entirely. Of course, Phantasms can learn the trademark Horrors of most other Shades, given time — but dreams and illusions remain their area of greatest expertise.

As spooks, Phantasms can indulge their taste for fantasy to the fullest. The weakest and most self-absorbed Phantasms — the drones and blips of their kind — may trap themselves in a single ever-repeating dream or nightmare. Less passive Phantasms may haunt the living as voyeurs of dreams or amuse themselves with their own projected fancies. Stronger Phantasms may try to share their dreams directly or play them out with the help of mortals or other ghosts. This can be as harmless as a dead playwright using dreaming minds as a stage. It can even be noble, such as a Phantasm who drives a killer to confess by sending her visions of her victim. An activist Phantasm can comfort, advise, teach or propagandize through visions... or delude, derange and torment his victims. Some dreams are monstrous and perverse. A Phantasm who drags hapless mortals into his wish-fulfillment nightmares of power, lust or revenge can destroy lives as cruelly as any Spectre. The powers of dream and illusion can drive a victim mad... or convince other people that a victim has lost her mind.

Horrors: *Bedlam*, *Sandman*, *Dream-Walker*

Manifestation Forms: By expending **zero Vitality points**, a Phantasm can appear to the living as a shadow with nothing to cast it, moving but flat and without any details except an outline. In this form, a Phantasm cannot affect physical objects. The Phantasm can also



whisper short sentences. Such a form does not usually attract attention if the Phantasm stays quiet, though it allows the spook to use all its powers upon the living.

A Phantasm who expends **one Vitality point** manifests as a humanoid figure but remains dark, indistinct and translucent — a three-dimensional shadow. In this form, the Phantasm can speak almost normally. The spook's voice has its normal volume but retains a hollow, echoing quality. No one could mistake the Phantasm for anything but a spirit, and the ghost still cannot manipulate physical objects.

By expending **two Vitality points**, however, a Phantasm can manifest as an apparently real, solid human being. In this form, a Phantasm can apply his full Physical and Social Traits to affect people and objects. Like most spooks, the Phantasm appears as he did in life, possibly modified somewhat by his self-image. A Phantasm could use his Horrors to alter how other people perceive his form, though. Phantasms with high Spite ratings retain the hollow quality of lower manifestation forms and seem to merge with deep shadows.

Base Vitality: 6

Base Spite: 2

Base Willpower: 4

Recommended Natures: Architect, Avant-Garde, Celebrant, Dreamer, Gambler, Visionary

GRACE ISHIDA

Grace Ishida's parents made sure she knew Tokyo as well as San Francisco, making her not just multilingual, but multicultural. Her comfortable and cosmopolitan upbringing did not prevent adolescent clashes with her business executive

parents, though. Grace wanted to be an artist. The more her parents pressured Grace to seek a "respectable" career in technology or business, the harder she rebelled. At 16, she ran away rather than be sent to a boarding school in Tokyo.

Her pride would not let Grace go home, no matter what danger she faced. She prostituted herself a few times (terrified that she would contract AIDS, though she never did), fought off rape attempts and survived two stabbings. Survival didn't leave time for painting, though.

In a moment of anguish at her life, Grace turned to a new drug. While high on pigment, Grace imagined herself painting by will alone, and she heard the strange midnight voice of Radio Free Death. She had to experience it again. And again.

Fortunately, a street rescue program found Grace. Unfortunately, Terrel & Squib ran the program. The program's meditation techniques taught Grace to project as well as to control her cravings. The company immediately offered her training and a job. Her power to "paint" psychic images as a ghost fascinated the researchers, who had never seen its like before.

During her training as a skimmer, however, Grace met Terrence Green. They found graphic proof of Green's suspicions about Terrel & Squib when Spectres and company goons both tried unsuccessfully to kill them.

Grace and Terrence now work together to uncover the truth about Terrel & Squib to broadcast on Radio Free Death. Grace also tries to protect street kids from mortal predators, Terrel & Squib recruiters and the increasing numbers of Spectres. Though a young woman and not large, she speaks and acts with uncommon self-confidence. Grace wears her straight, black hair cut short and often dresses in a black vinyl trenchcoat.





BEDLAM

Grace couldn't run much longer. She stumbled into an alley and wedged herself between a dumpster and a stack of cardboard boxes. The young Phantasm needed to catch her wits.

The two Lost Boys stalked into the alley about 20 seconds later. They looked back and forth for the glow of her soul as they chanted, "Red rover, red rover, send Gracie right over!"

Grace peeked out from behind the dumpster and concentrated on the two Spectres. In her mind's eye, she saw one Lost Boy grow into a copy of herself, shining with the light of a vital soul. The other Lost Boy turned, shrieked "Tag — You're it!" and leapt upon its brother.

This Horror produces illusions. A spook with this power can imagine something, and another person sees it — or hears it, tastes it, smells it or feels it. Bedlam is the trademark Horror of the Phantasms, though most other spooks can learn it.

An iridescent, silvery shimmer ripples across the eyes of a spook who projects an illusion, but the Horror gives no other sign of its use. A Phantasm imagines the illusion as if he really saw, heard or sensed it himself. At first, a spook needs to spend time concentrating on a daydream, but a practiced Phantasm can project an illusion in seconds.

A Phantasm can project a waking dream into the mind of just one person or craft an illusion that any person can sense. Such a strengthened illusion registers on cameras, tape recorders and other machines. The spook himself experiences his illusion just as vividly as the targets, which makes the Horror a way for ghosts to enjoy sensations normally denied to the dead.

Wild, fantastic illusions can make an unwary person doubt her sanity, especially when other people nearby insist that *nothing's there*. Bedlam's greatest power, however, lies in its subtler applications. A Phantasm can make one person hear something other than what another person actually said and, so, set them at odds. Bedlam can subtract sensations instead of adding them, so a target does not see, hear, smell or feel a danger. A spook with this Horror can disguise himself to look like someone else or work an endless variety of other deceptions. The Horror cannot exert the slightest trace of force against solid objects. Bedlam can disguise the use of other Horrors, though. For instance, judicious use of Helter Skelter could make an illusory creature seem to pick up and hurl an object.

System: Crafting a single illusion, for a single target, does not require any dice rolls but always counts as a full action. A Phantasm can affect anyone he can see, whether spook or mortal, within 100 feet. Spooks must

manifest at least a little (their zero Vitality manifestation) to affect a mortal.

Bedlam illusions affect one sense, plus one for every point of Vitality invested in the power's use. Thus, if a spook invested two Vitality points in a use of Bedlam, the resulting illusion would affect three senses. Although Phantasms most commonly create visual chimerae, a spook can send hallucinations of sounds, tastes, smells or other senses. Since a spook can expend up to five Vitality, an illusion can affect up to six senses, including less familiar senses such as balance, hunger or the mystical Vitality sense that directs Spectres to their prey. A spook can affect touch, hunger and other senses "internal" to the body only when he invests at least three Vitality in a Bedlam effect, with sight, hearing and either taste or smell mandatory. Phantasms can fool mystical senses only by expending five Vitality.

Example: Grace Ishida wants a Death Merchant to think that she has chopped his arm off. This requires Grace's player to spend three Vitality points. The affected senses are sight (Grace pulls out an illusory blade and swings it at him), hearing (the swish of the blade and the "splurch!" as it goes through his arm), smell (the odor of the blood that fountains from the wound) and touch (the pain of the cut and the feel of blood, bone and meat as the mercenary clutches at his arm).

Enhancing an illusion so that anyone can sense it costs another two Vitality. This does not let a spook expend more than five Vitality on an illusion. The full range of Bedlam options, therefore, proceeds as follows:

Zero Vitality:	Affect one sense for a single target.
One Vitality:	Affect two senses for a single target.
Two Vitality:	Affect three senses for a single target, or one sense for general perception.
Three Vitality:	Affect four senses for a single target, possibly including touch, balance or other "internal" senses, or two senses for general perception.
Four Vitality:	Affect five senses for a single target, or three senses for general perception.
Five Vitality:	Affect up to six senses for a single target, possibly including supernatural senses, or four senses for general perception, possibly including touch.



An illusion can last up to a full scene with no need to expend more Vitality, so long as the spook pays attention to maintaining the false sensations. If circumstances force the spook to depart or take fast, violent action, the illusion lasts one turn longer, plus one turn per Vitality expended. A spook can use Bedlam while fighting or fleeing, but the illusion lasts only (Vitality + 1) turns in all.

Bedlam can never cause real, direct harm. An illusion can make a person think she suffered a wound, though, and the Storyteller can assess whatever wound penalties seem appropriate. As soon as the illusion ends, though, the victim finds herself completely unharmed.

If the target of Bedlam tries to resist an illusion, her player can attempt a Willpower roll with a difficulty of 6 for zero or one Vitality attacks, 7 for two to three Vitality attacks or 8 for four to five Vitality attacks. Success indicates that the target ends the hallucination. The target must suspect that her senses are playing tricks on her. Characters do not automatically receive a chance to resist.

A Phantasm can also project illusions at one person after another, but in that case, each illusion incurs its own Vitality cost. Starting one illusion while maintaining a different illusion on someone else requires a Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 6 for the first additional illusion, 7 for the third, 8 for the fourth and 9 for any subsequent targets). A spook can inflict just one illusion on an individual at a time. If a Phantasm wants to change an illusion in a drastic way, such as adding new senses, he must expend the Vitality to craft a new waking dream.

In any case, Bedlam illusions are discreet additions to or subtractions from the environment. A spook cannot completely change what a person senses. A Phantasm could make a person see a snake, hear a voice or smell a perfume that isn't there. He could not make a person hallucinate that she'd instantly traveled to the top of the Empire State Building — that's too all-encompassing an illusion.

Bedlam briefly links the minds of the user and the target, and this link enables Phantasms to work around possible areas of ignorance. An illusion is not just as realistic and accurate as the spook imagines, it becomes as realistic as the *target* imagines. For instance, a Phantasm who knows nothing about firearms could still evoke a detailed image of a Glock pistol from the mind of someone who did know about guns. (If the target did not know about guns either, the Phantasm would merely evoke “a big gun” — but since neither person could recognize inaccuracies, there's no harm.)

A Storyteller may ask for various dice rolls from the players of either the Phantasm or his target, depending on the circumstances. For instance, if a Phantasm tried to impersonate a rock star through illusion, the Storyteller might ask the player to roll the spook's Wits + Performance (difficulty 6) to fool the star's manager.

Benefit: By conjoining his power to another spook's Horror, a Phantasm renders that other power more difficult to resist. Many ghostly powers work through the mind and soul, and Bedlam's subtle nature slips past even the strongest psychic defenses. If the target of a Horror receives any roll to resist the effect, conjoined Bedlam increases the difficulty of that roll by two. The donor spook vividly imagines the recipient's Horror acting with greater power and the victim succumbing, while the recipient feels a moment of dreamlike detachment.

SANDMAN

Grace stood, unseen and intangible, over Karen. She guessed that the girl sleeping in the nest of newspapers was about 12. Grace's ectoplasmic fingers brushed into Karen's hair as she gazed down at the girl's head. In moments, the visions appeared in her mind. Karen dreamed of turkey dinners. Now, to look for Karen's family: The girl must have someone to take her in. Grace's inward vision shifted away....

A minute later, Grace stumbled away. The drunken mother, the series of boyfriends who hit Karen or wanted to touch her in the wrong place... and the turkey dinner had been at the home of a now-dead grandmother. Finding Karen a home would not be so easy.

Ghosts and projectors operate in a side of the world that mortals do not see. Spooks who learn Sandman, however, can enter an even stranger realm, the world of dreams. Not only can Phantasms watch the dreams of sleepers, they can actually enter those dreams and shape them to their will. This Horror also enables ghosts to sleep and dream, something they cannot experience any other way. Sandman carries special dangers, however, for every dream ends in time.

A Phantasm must touch the head of her target to employ this Horror, though the spook does not have to materialize in any way. As the Phantasm slips into a reverie, she sees her target's dream play out before her mind's eye. Other spooks (or other creatures who can see ghosts) see flickers of the dream slide across the Phantasm's body like a film projection. This is enough to recognize the Horror's use but never enough to gain useful information. If the Phantasm chooses to enter the dream, she seems to step inside her target's head, shrinking as she goes as if that one step took her very far away, before she vanishes.



System: Spooks with this Horror learn that people *always* dream a little, but the mind usually keeps these shreds of dream pushed out of the conscious mind. Catching the evanescent threads of dream requires a Perception + Awareness roll. The difficulty depends on target's state of consciousness. A target currently dreaming (in what scientists call REM sleep) is difficulty 6. The transitional state before and after dreaming is difficulty 7. Deep, normally dreamless sleep imposes a difficulty of 8. A Phantasm can also enter the latent dreams of a person who drowns or is in a light trance, such as zoning out in front of the TV, but this is also difficulty 8. The same difficulty applies for all intensities of Sandman.

The amount of Vitality a spook expends determines how completely it joins a dream. At **zero Vitality**, a Phantasm merely watches her target's dream but cannot affect it. Phantasms usually probe a dream at this level before embarking on deeper explorations, since a spook can always expend more Vitality for a deeper connection without the need for the player to roll again.

Expending **one Vitality** does not grant any greater access to a dream, but this level enables a spook to put a ghost to sleep. The ghost must be willing for this to work. While asleep, a ghost may dream just like a mortal,

and the Phantasm can observe and affect those dreams using other applications of Sandman.

Although natural dreams may reveal much about a person, a Phantasm might have to watch a lot of them and study the person's life to gain a context for interpretation. At **two Vitality**, a spook can nudge the target's dreams to reveal information about that person's life. This calls for another Perception + Awareness roll (at the same difficulty as before). For each success, the character can seek and discover one brief fact about the subject. For instance, a Phantasm could touch the dreams of a businessman and nudge his dream to reveal how he really feels about his wife — or the number for his Swiss bank account. A spook may attempt this sort of questioning only once per dream. At this or lower levels of Vitality expenditure, contact with a dream lasts until the spook stops concentrating or the dream ends. Dreams seldom last longer than 10 or 15 minutes, though they may seem to last longer to the dreamer.

At **three Vitality**, a Phantasm can enter a dream, move through it and interact with any characters in the dream. She can prod the target's unconscious mind to answer questions, as at the previous level, but cannot change the dream to a great degree. For each success rolled, the Phantasm can carry one additional spook



into the dream, but such characters cannot affect the dream at all unless they too know this Horror.

By expending **four Vitality**, the spook can alter the dream. Each attempt to change a dream calls for a Charisma + Awareness roll, with the difficulty set by the extent of the change. Adding a single object to a dream or talking to the dreamer would be difficulty 6. Changing a significant aspect of the dream (for instance, changing day to night) would be difficulty 7. Completely changing a dream (turning a pleasant dream to a nightmare) would be difficulty 9. At this level, a Phantasm can declare her presence to the dreamer or remain hidden, as she wills. She can also make sure her target remembers the dream when he wakes up. The Phantasm can apply all her Social Attributes and communications Abilities to shape the dream — for instance, a dream meant to frighten a miser into changing his ways could call for a Manipulation + Intimidation roll (difficulty 7) in addition to the basic roll to take control of the dream. Once a Phantasm reaches this level of connection to a dream, she can keep making changes without the need for more Vitality expenditure. Spite-heavy Phantasms tend to create nightmares no matter what they intend, though.

At **five Vitality**, a Phantasm can shape a dream that evokes her target's deepest hopes, joys and ideals — or his deepest fears, failings and miseries. This requires a Charisma + Awareness roll (difficulty 8). Each success causes the dreamer to gain or lose a Willpower point. A Phantasm can bolster or attack this way only once per dream.

Rolling a botch for any Sandman application makes the target wake up immediately. This is bad: If a person wakes up for any reason while a Phantasm occupies his dream, the spook's player must roll the character's Willpower (difficulty 8). Success means that the spook is merely ejected from the vanishing dream and loses a point each of Vitality and Willpower. Failure means the spook is trapped in the target's mind until he dreams again. At that time, the character can attempt another Willpower roll to escape. Botching means the spook finds herself violently ejected from *someone else's* dream, perhaps thousands of miles from where she began... a hint of a greater power to master.

Any use of Sandman counts as an action. The nature of the Horror utterly precludes any use in combat: Such a foe is neither asleep nor willing. A character cannot use Sandman on two targets at once.

Benefit: A Phantasm who conjoins Sandman to another spook's Horror can extend her dream-insight through that Horror. When the other character uses his Horror to affect a target, the Phantasm learns one previously unknown fact about that target. For instance,

DUELING DREAM-SHAPERS

Conceivably, two spooks with Sandman might try to shape the same person's dream. To usurp control of a dream, the second spook must have spent at least as much Vitality as the first Phantasm. The two players both roll Charisma + Awareness rolls (difficulty 6 for the defender, the attacker's difficulty set by the extent of the change she wants to make to the dream, as for the four Vitality level of Sandman). The character who gains the most successes wins. If neither character controls the dream yet, each spook's difficulty is set by how much she wants to change the dream. Either player can spend a Willpower for an extra success, of course.

Subsequent attempts to take control of a dream require that the attacking spook expend one Vitality point just to make the attempt. A dream-shaping duel lasts until one spook gives up or runs out of Vitality or Willpower or until one manages to drive the other away using other Horrors.

suppose a Phantasm conjoined her Sandman to a Hunter's Witch's Nimbus. When the Hunter attacks a Spectre with a jet of fire, the Phantasm could ask, "Where does this Spectre normally lair?" and receive a vision of the Spectre's hive. Both the recipient and the target of the recipient's Horror strongly feel that the Phantasm stands next to them. They can almost see the spook looking over their shoulder — but no one's there.

THIRD-TIER HORRORS

Characters learn Horrors in a particular order. First, a character learns the Horror that defines her Shade. We call these "first-tier" Horrors. Each Shade also comes with a second Horror that characters learn more easily than others. These constitute the "second tier." Once a character learns these two Horrors, she can learn a third and more formidable power. These "third-tier Horrors" often combine aspects of their two prerequisites, at least in a metaphorical sense.

The third-tier Horrors retain some association with particular Shades. Spooks of a given Shade more easily learn the two prerequisite Horrors, so they have a head start on learning one third-tier Horror as well. The descriptions of the Horrors sometimes speak of characters in terms of Shades, as "the Skinrider" or "the

WHO HAS WHAT

Like other Shades, Phantasms possess an automatic Horror, a favored Horror and two Horrors they can never learn. All the Shades also now receive third-tier Horrors. Naturally, each Shade has one third-tier Horror that characters cannot learn because its prerequisites are denied to them. The extended table now goes:

Shade	Automatic Horror	Favored Horror	Third-Tier Horror	Banned Horrors
Banshee	<i>Forebode</i>	Wail	Pandemonium	Helter Skelter, Congeal, Anathema
Haunter	<i>Inhabit</i>	Witch's Nimbus	Broadband Ghost	Forebode, Wail, Pandemonium
Phantasm	<i>Bedlam</i>	Sandman	Dream-Walker	Inhabit, Witch's Nimbus, Broadband Ghost
Poltergeist	<i>Helter Skelter</i>	Congeal	Anathema	Unearthly Repose, Storm-Wending, Beckon Relic
Skinrider	<i>Puppetry</i>	Juggernaut	Contaminate	None yet known
Wisp	<i>Unearthly Repose</i>	Storm-Wending	Beckon Relic	Puppetry, Juggernaut, Contaminate

Haunter," but that merely reflects who's likely to gain a Horror first. Characters of any Shade can learn most of these new powers — once they learn the prerequisites.

Just like first-tier and second-tier Horrors, third-tier Horrors cost 15 experience points to purchase.

BANSHEE: PANDEMONIUM

"It's too damn fast!" Tom said as he leapt away from the whirling, amorphous mass of talons. Silver streams of gauze trailed from his chest, where one of the claws had struck.

"Stay calm," Kate said as she too dodged the uncannily swift Spectre. "Now — hit with everything you've got!" Her voice rose in a soft, multitonal hum. She saw her Skinrider partner lunge for the Spectre a thousand times, flames of Vitality bursting around his fists. She saw the future in which Tom landed squarely on the inhuman spirit and pushed all her force of soul and will to make it real. As Tom jumped and swung, a thousand worlds collapsed into one. The Spectre swerved to avoid the Skinrider, but Tom was already there. The Spectre burst into tatters of shrieking darkness under the onslaught of fists wrapped in silver flame.

This Horror combines the time-spanning power of Forebode with the physical power of Wail. Through Pandemonium, a spook can go beyond sensing the future to shaping it. The success or failure of any challenging task depends on a host of factors beyond conscious control, from the weather to momentary distractions. A Banshee's unearthly singing or humming opens her mind's eye to this ever-shifting swirl of random factors, and she can choose factors to bless an endeavor with success or curse it with failure. Once a Banshee attains this power, anything she or her friends attempt can carry this weight of probabil-

ity in its favor, while their opponents suffer a corresponding burden of bad luck.

System: Depending on how much Vitality the character expends, the Storyteller adds or subtracts dice from a task's dice pool, to represent the weight of luck working for or against the endeavor. A Banshee can apply good or bad luck to any task challenging enough to require a dice roll and to any person, spook or mortal — even herself. For instance, a Banshee could use the Horror to lie her way past a security guard (increasing her Manipulation + Subterfuge pool) or to help a surgeon perform a difficult operation (increasing his Dexterity + Medicine pool). On the other hand, she could make a thug running through a junk-strewn alley become clumsy (reducing the target's Dexterity + Athletics pool). Pandemonium can even apply to the dice pools involved in wielding Horrors, such as reducing the Manipulation + Intimidation pool for a Skinrider attempting to possess a mortal.

Pandemonium has some limits. The bonus or penalty can apply to only one dice pool at a time, for a task the target performs when the Banshee uses the Horror. If the target attempts two actions at once, Pandemonium affects only one task. The Banshee can apply Pandemonium to only one character in a turn. The target also needs a dice pool to begin with: If a character absolutely cannot perform a task because he lacks the necessary Knowledge (or it's physically impossible), all the blessing in the world won't help. Conversely, no amount of bad luck can thwart an automatic action that doesn't require dice pools or a reflexive action that isn't a willed task, such as a soak roll.

Pandemonium has a range of just 10 yards. A character must manifest at a one or two Vitality level to use the Horror on a mortal target. Pandemonium has no direct effect on objects, although the entire world can



seem to help or hinder its target — from computers that blue-screen to bullets that ricochet and strike an enemy from behind. The duration of the blessing or curse and its severity depend on how much Vitality the player spends on the power:

Zero Vitality: Add/subtract one die on one roll only.

One Vitality: Add/subtract two dice on one roll or one die on two separate rolls.

Two Vitality: Add/subtract a total of three dice divided among as many as three rolls.

Three Vitality: Add/subtract a total of four dice divided among as many as four rolls.

Four Vitality: Add/subtract a total of five dice divided among as many as five rolls.

Five Vitality: Add/subtract a total of six dice divided among as many as six rolls.

Note that Pandemonium does not affect the difficulty for a dice pool. Neither can it reduce a dice pool to zero (it cannot make a task completely impossible) or force a botch.

Pandemonium always works, with no need for the Banshee's player to roll dice. If a character wants to bless or curse a target without the other person noticing, however, the Storyteller can ask for a Wits + Subterfuge roll, with a difficulty set by the local noise level or other distractions. For instance, the difficulty might be 6 on a busy subway station, 9 in a hushed art museum and no roll at all at a raucous party.

A character cannot use the Horror repeatedly on the same person to make him more and more lucky or unlucky. Until the first blessing or curse runs its course, the character cannot impose a second. Blessings or curses do not "stack" either. If, for example, one Banshee laid a two Vitality blessing on a task and another Banshee granted a three Vitality blessing, the task would receive a bonus of four dice, not seven. One Banshee can bless a task while another Banshee curses it, though.

Benefit: When a Banshee conjoins Pandemonium to another character's Horror, her song opens the recipient's mind to the kaleidoscope of random factors so he knows exactly how to use his Horror for the best possible effect. Spooks compare it to an athlete's confident feeling of being "in the zone," when he cannot fail. The next action the character attempts using that Horror takes place at a difficulty 4 lower than usual. It

doesn't matter if the Horror itself does not involve a dice pool, so long as the next task involves that Horror in some way.

Example: Chet Mason uses Juggernaut to shoot three targets in a single turn. Kate Dennison conjoins her Pandemonium to his Juggernaut. Mason's Horror needs no dice rolls, but shooting three people does. Kate's Benefit therefore applies to the Juggernaut-accelerated gunplay.

The duration of the Benefit depends on the duration of the task that involves the conjoined Horror. This is usually an instant or one-turn action, but the Benefit still applies if a task takes longer to complete.

HAUNTER: BROADBAND GHOST

Chuck Volper whistled as he logged onto the chat room. Sweet little Muriel accepted him as an online pal. Soon he would suggest that they meet physically and then... they would meet... physically.

Unexpectedly, the little yellow road of legal paper uncurled at the corner of his computer screen. Instead of the usual paperclip-man, however, a tiny sports car drove onto his screen. It expanded until Chuck could see the man behind the wheel and a drawling voice crackled from his speakers.

"That's some mighty unpleasant stuff you've got on your hard drive, Mr. Volper. And from your logs, I get the feeling you like to do these things yourself, not just look at pictures. I don't think I can allow that."

Chuck Volper's hair rose as the room around him crackled with electricity. His nose registered the odor of ozone before the pain began.

Broadband Ghost refines Witch's Nimbus into a far more versatile Horror and adds elements of Inhabit as well. A spook with this Horror goes beyond radiating fire or electricity to become those forms of energy. The Haunter can also merge with existing flames, electrical currents, magnetic fields and radio waves. Characters with this Horror can ride the power grid, manifest through flames or become their own radio or TV station. They can also lash out with heat or electricity. The Horror has more subtle applications, too — during the attack on the Orpheus compound, NextWorld's mercenaries used it to rifle through Orpheus' files and dig up information on its agents.

System: Using Broadband Ghost, a character can transform himself entirely into fire or electricity. In such forms, the spook can damage other spooks or can manifest to harm material objects or people. The spook becomes completely immune to physical attacks while



manifested, however. Bullets, blades, blunt objects and fists pass through the spook's body as they would through a flame or an electrical arc. Use the systems for Witch's Nimbus for the damage dealt by a spook's touch or ranged attacks.

More importantly, a character can merge with existing flames or electromagnetic fields and currents. Any Haunter can possess a radio or a computer using Inhabit, but it takes Broadband Ghost to read what's actually in the computer's memory or to make the radio broadcast a message to other radios. As the spook expends more Vitality, the effects of the Horror become more removed from ordinary human experience.

At **zero Vitality**, the spook can manifest through flames or electrical devices such as TV screens or neon lights. The spook must appear in something like its mortal appearance, though it remains obviously an image. A character can talk in this form.

For **one Vitality**, a Haunter can create any image he wants in the glow of flames or electronic phosphor screens. He can project Witch's Nimbus balls of fire or electricity at the zero Vitality level from inside a possessed machine. He

can also create areas of uncomfortable heat or prickling electric charge in areas about 10 feet across, at a range of 10 feet, whether he chooses to manifest or not.

Two Vitality lets a spook merge with electrical currents and "ride" them along power lines and through appliances. The character can reach any place the power grid reaches, but navigation becomes difficult over long distances (see below for details). The ghost can also project Witch's Nimbus effects at the one Vitality level to create a damaging aura around a possessed device. For instance, a Haunter who possessed a microwave oven could deliver a shock to anyone who touched the device. This does not, however, cost the spook any more Vitality: It's an innate aspect of the Broadband Ghost form. If the character wants to project greater attacks, he must use Witch's Nimbus directly and pay the added Vitality cost.

At **three Vitality**, a Haunter can sense and manipulate a broad range of the electromagnetic spectrum. He can see in infrared or ultraviolet light, hear radio broadcasts or feel electromagnetic fields and ionizing radiation. The character can create or control electrical and magnetic fields. For instance, a Haunter could wipe magnetic storage media,



though not read the contents. The character can emit radio or TV broadcasts at will, but his range is limited to a few miles.

Expending **four Vitality** brings a quantum leap in delicacy and precision. Now, the character can read or write directly to computer memories as he moves among the circuits. The spook also gains the power to project Witch's Nimbus effects at the two Vitality level for free, dealing two health levels of lethal damage to whoever touches the possessed device.

Five Vitality brings the apex of the Horror, as the character gains mastery of radio waves. He can slip his broadcasts into existing radio or television feeds or travel at the speed of light along radio transmissions. A Hunter can also project Witch's Nimbus effects from a device at the three Vitality level for free, including hurling bolts of flame or lightning at a range of 10 yards. For instance, a spook could possess a TV set and shoot electrical bolts at people in the room.

Activating this Horror counts as a normal action. Broadband Ghost remains active for a full scene. At any time during that scene, the character can feed another Vitality point into the Horror to increase its effect. Any sort of attack or manipulation of the environment using this Horror also takes an action. A character cannot possess or control more than one machine at a time. Broadband Ghost does not require any special concentration to maintain, though the Storyteller may rule that characters must focus all their attention on particularly delicate tasks, such as rewriting a computer's memory.

Just as with Witch's Nimbus, attacking at range using Broadband Ghost calls for a simple success at a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6). Manipulating machines, creating images on TV screens, projecting radio signals, reading electrical or magnetic records and the like all require an Intelligence + Technology roll with a difficulty set by the Storyteller. A conceptually simple task such as making the TV weatherman say, "I know what you did," might incur difficulty 6. Rewriting the access codes to a computerized security system might be difficulty 8 or 9.

Distance	Difficulty
Less than 1 mile	5
1 to 10 miles	6
10 to 100 miles	7
100 to 1,000 miles	8
More than 1,000 miles	9
Tracing a radio signal to its source	-1 difficulty

Broadband Ghost lets a character travel around the world along the power grid or radio broadcasts. A character who travels as electricity is limited to where power lines go. A Hunter can begin a radio-wave journey anywhere, but must reappear at an active transmitter or receiver. Another character sending messages by Broadband Ghost counts as an active transmitter.

The great difficulty of radio or power-line travel lies in picking the right place to reappear when you move so fast. For a Hunter to reach a desired location, the player must roll the character's Wits + Alertness. The difficulty depends on the distance:

The number of successes determines the character's accuracy: One success means an error of 10 percent of the desired distance; two successes indicates an error of just one percent; and three successes means the character arrived exactly on target.

Benefit: A character can use Broadband Ghost to quadruple the duration of a conjoined Horror. An instant effect lasts four turns instead of one, while something that would normally last two hours now lasts eight. The Hunter sends a puff of glowing motes or embers to the beneficiary, who suddenly hears the hiss and crackle of radio and electrical currents, with the deep, soft hum of the Earth's magnetic field underlying it all. The beneficiary can hook her Horror into this geomagnetic power, which sustains the effect far longer than is normally possible.

PHANTASM: DREAM-WALKER

The pigment dealer continued to snore as Grace slipped through the wall. She laid her intangible hand on his forehead as she stared at a point inside his skull. The flicker of his dreams played in her eyes. Where do you get your supply? she silently asked as her soul touched his dreaming mind. In moments, the face of a young man with savagely cropped blond hair coalesced out of the dream. Grace felt the dealer's fear and envy of the man.

Now, where did the supplier live? Grace decided to take a chance. While holding the supplier's face in her mind, she imagined herself stepping into the dealer's head. She plunged through a torrent of dreams and seized the one that felt right to her. The Phantasm found herself in the bedroom of an elderly couple.

Not quite on target, she thought. But the blond man probably lived nearby. She walked out the wall to survey the street of run-down old homes and note the address. She would investigate further tomorrow, when she was back in her body.



Some mystics and psychologists believe that all human minds are linked to a common reservoir of archetypal stories and symbols that manifest through dreams—a collective unconscious. Spooks who learn this Horror can't shed any light on archetypal symbols, but they know for a fact that all human minds are linked through their dreams. A spook who learns Dream-Walker can step into one person's dream, then step out of another person's dream... perhaps thousands of miles away. Phantasms can even carry other spooks along on this dreamland express.

Dream-Walker also enables a spook to probe a person's social connections through his dreams. Strong emotions create a bond between people that a Phantasm can trace using this Horror. Any emotion will do.

Like with Sandman, a spook must touch her target's head to use this Horror. The character does not need to manifest in any way. Flickering images of dreams play across the spook's body as she touches her target's mind. When the character steps into the dream, she seems to shrink and vanish into her target's head. To her, and to anyone she carries with her, it's as if she steps into a kaleidoscope of dream images, then steps out of another person's head a bit later. Dream-Walker affects spooks as well as living people, though the Phantasm must use Sandman first to put a ghost to sleep.

System: To find a person's associates using Dream-Walker, the Phantasm's player rolls the character's Wits + Empathy (difficulty 6). If the roll succeeds, the character receives a vision of one person to whom her target feels a strong connection. This does not necessarily mean affection: The target could just as easily hate, fear or envy the other person. The probing spook does not know the other person's name, only the emotion that her target feels. The Storyteller should give the character a one- or two-word description of that emotional resonance, such as "love," "disgust" or "amused irritation." This use of Dream-Walker costs **zero Vitality**.

By expending one to five Vitality, the character can transport herself and other people from one dreaming mind to another and, so, cross great distances in a short time. The character can seek a particular location or a particular person, but the dream-traveler can only reach places where someone currently sleeps. The more Vitality the character expends, the further she can travel and the more people she can carry with her:

- One Vitality:** Transport yourself up to one mile.
- Two Vitality:** Transport yourself up to 10 miles, or one additional person up to one mile.
- Three Vitality:** Transport yourself up to 100 miles, or at most, three additional people up to 10 miles.
- Four Vitality:** Transport yourself up to 1,000 miles, or at most, five additional people up to 100 miles.
- Five Vitality:** Transport yourself anywhere in the world, or at most, seven additional people up to 1,000 miles.

This application calls for a Charisma + Intuition roll (difficulty 8, difficulty 6 if the Phantasm seeks a person to whom her dreamer feels a connection, as determined above). The number of successes determines how close the dream-traveler comes to her target location:

- Botch:** Lost in dreamland! Random location, anywhere in the world.
- Failure:** Power does not activate.
- One Success:** Error of 10 percent of the distance you intended.
- Two Successes:** Error of one percent of the distance you intended.
- Three Successes or More:** Exactly on target or the exact person you intended (or at least the nearest sleeper).

Contacting a person's dreaming mind takes a full turn of concentration. Both entering and leaving the "dreamland express" take a full turn, and the travel in between takes one turn for every point of Vitality expended.

Benefit: A Phantasm can use Dream-Walker to create a psychic link between two spooks. One can be the Phantasm herself, or she can link two other characters. The Phantasm and the other characters must touch to establish the link. Once established, however, the link ignores distance and can even cross into dreamworlds. For one and only one action afterward, the two characters can assist each other by applying one spook's Benefit to the other character's Horror. The link dissipates if the characters do not use it within 24 hours of its inception. Until the link is used or dissipates, the participants each feel like the other spook is next to



them, almost visible out the corner of their eyes. A Phantasm cannot link two more characters until the first link ends.

POLTERGEIST: ANATHEMA

Ben Cotton lunged through the wall just in time to see Chet Mason trip up one gunman with his cane — but the other thug had his gun out and ready to fire, and Mason was in his aged, very mortal body....

“Mother-fuck!” Ben screamed as the gun boomed. Silver whorls burst from his body and bounced around the abandoned factory faster than the eye could follow. One whorl coiled around the gunman and yanked him off his feet. Another curled around Mason. The gunman squawked to find himself hanging upside down in midair. Mason’s eyes widened as he saw the bullet hanging a foot from his chest, pinned by silver light.

Building upon Helter Skelter, Anathema can exert much greater force than the other Horror. It can affect people, other spooks or the character himself. A Poltergeist with this Horror can play with motion in many ways, even to redirecting the force of gravity. Anathema lets spooks walk on walls, stop bullets in mid-flight, smash down doors, send their enemies flying or squeeze them in a powerful spectral grip.

Like Helter Skelter, Anathema grows out of rage and will. A spook might clench his fists, curse a blue streak, snarl in raw fury or clench his jaws and glare in icy silence — however the character normally expresses anger. Swirling waves of silver light burst from the character, typically visible only to other spooks. If a character employs this Horror while manifesting, however, mortals and spooks alike see the character’s surroundings ripple and shiver as if seen through water. The silver waves curl around their target as they lift, hurl or otherwise change its state of motion.

System: Anathema does not require any dice roll to activate, but each attempt to affect a target calls for a separate Dexterity + Intimidation roll (difficulty 6) to act quickly enough and to focus one’s anger upon the target. Normally, the player needs only a simple success. The Storyteller may increase the difficulty or demand multiple successes for precise or complicated uses of Anathema, since the Horror lacks the precision possible with Helter Skelter. Every use of Anathema counts as a full action. Sentient targets can try to dodge Anathema attacks. A character must manifest to some degree to use Anathema on living people or mundane objects.

The player expends zero to five Vitality points when the character uses Anathema. The more Vitality spent, the greater the force the character can exert, quell or redirect. The spook can represent that force in a variety of ways: as a weight lifted or pushed about, as actual Strength exerted against a person or object or as health levels of damage removed from a physical attack, as the force of Anathema struggles to hold back a fist, blade or bullet. When stopping an attack, the player must spend enough Vitality for the Horror to block the “base” damage of the attack, not the damage when considering successes on an attack roll. For example, if an attacker shoots a target with a .38 Special and the Poltergeist attempts to stop the bullet with Anathema, the player must spend at least three Vitality as the base damage of a .38 Special is 4. Even if the attacker’s player scored four successes on the Dexterity + Firearms roll to hit (which would normally raise the damage to 8), the Poltergeist only has to be concerned with the base damage. The Storyteller is under no obligation to inform the player how much damage an attack inflicts, however, so the player must often guess at how much Vitality is needed to stop an attack completely.

A character can use Anathema to attack by slamming a person or spook around or hitting her with some large or fast-moving object. In that case, simply assign Strength-based damage. Weapons such as axes, kitchen knives or power tools inflict lethal damage. Hurling furniture or smashing a person against the walls, floor and ceiling inflicts bashing damage.

Not all uses of Anathema are violent and spasmodic. A Poltergeist can use Anathema at zero Vitality to redirect gravity so he can walk on walls or ceilings or enable another spook to do so. The character can also perform acrobatic feats that defy gravity and common sense, such as running along a clothesline or balancing on a twig. For each Vitality expended, the Poltergeist can redirect gravity for one other character. Thus, by expending five Vitality, the Poltergeist can let six spooks or people walk on the ceiling or otherwise defy gravity. Alternatively, at the five Vitality level a Poltergeist can simply redirect gravity in an area about 30 feet wide to any nearby surface. A Poltergeist can also use Anathema to grapple another character or to lift people or objects. A character can even fly for a short time by lifting himself, though this requires expending at least one point of Vitality.

Anathema remains active for (Vitality + 1) turns before the character must activate the Horror again.

Zero Vitality: 100 lbs.; Strength 2 force; or one health level of damage blocked.

One Vitality: 400 lbs.; Strength 4 force; or two health levels of damage blocked.

Two Vitality: 1,000 lbs.; Strength 6 force; or three health levels of damage blocked.

Three Vitality: 2,000 lbs.; Strength 8 force; or four health levels of damage blocked.

Four Vitality: 5,000 lbs.; Strength 10 force; or five health levels of damage blocked.

Five Vitality: 10,000 lbs.; Strength 12 force; or six health levels of damage blocked.

All Anathema effects have a range of 100 feet. A character cannot use two separate Anathema effects at once, but he can affect more than one object at a time by taking a multiple action (see p. 211 of

Orpheus) and reducing the effect by one Vitality level per additional target.

Example: Ben Cotton tries to send three Death Merchants flying with a single wave of Anathema. His player expends five Vitality. Ben attacks the first mercenary at -3 dice, the second at -4 and the third at -5, while each attack exerts Strength 8 instead of 12.

Wall-walking forms a limited exception to this rule: A Poltergeist can redirect gravity for himself alone without suffering any penalty on attacks upon other targets.

Benefit: A Poltergeist can hurl a roiling silver wave of ghostly force to a crucible-mate as the other spook activates a Horror. The wave of visible rage wraps around the recipient, who feels a surge of anger and energy that she feeds into her Horror. This adds an additional four Vitality to the Horror, though the donor Poltergeist expends only one Vitality to grant the Benefit. The raw force of the recipient's Horror cannot exceed the five Vitality level, but the added force can extend the Horror's duration. The real advantage of the

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From: Alex Dexter
To: John Pritchard
Subject: New Developments
Attachment: Case94727a.doc

John,
You need to look at this. It went out as circular from the Serial Crime Unit — it's now in its jurisdiction as this latest victim, the fourth, was across the state line — but I think there's something more to it than initially meets the eye. A quick précis:
First off, while we've seen this kind of brutality in more mundane cases, the strength required to inflict the injuries would exceed human norms. Drugs are a possibility — and might tie in to other aspects of the case — but I have difficulty accepting that the killer could work with the precision he also demonstrates if he were stoked up. Secondly, the MO is in line with both Forest Hills and West Creek. Yes, I know what the official report is there, but you and I both know this isn't just some local psycho escaped from the asylum. There is a method in the madness, but I'm damned if I can see what it is at the moment.
Thirdly, victim #3 was more than prepared and managed to cap off almost a magazine of 9mm rounds before having her arm ripped off — they found the hand still clutching the weapon about 15 feet from the rest of the body — and while there are plenty of shell casings around the body, Forensics only managed to pluck two shells out of the walls. Bear in mind that this was inside, so it's not like our Jane Doe missed the building. So where did the rest go? Remind you of a certain someone who got up after a whole Beretta magazine had been emptied into him? Thought it might. For the moment, the SC boys are puzzled by the development — they think there was more than one killer and that the one(s) the JD lacked were carried away. Forensics from outside the property indicates only one unsub though.
Now, the lucker — our friend here left a calling card. Nothing as elaborate as West Creek, but with some of the same elements. No riddles this time, but a dedication of sorts with two of the bodies and evidence that some form of signature was left with the others too but was washed away by the rain. At the third incident, the victim's blood was used to write "for the mother" on a wall, while number two saw what appeared to be "a child's gift" carved into the victim's back.
I don't know what the "dedications" mean, but the rest of the evidence points to a Jason. If that is the case, the SC boys could be well out of their depth. I suggest we send some of our boys in to investigate the situation and deal with the unsub if we can track him down, even if doing so means pulling people off the Orpheus renegades case. Just make sure they know what they're up against.
Thanks,
Alex

Benefit is that the recipient can wield five Vitality effects while expending only one Vitality.

SKINRIDER: CONTAMINATE

Chet Mason sighed as his shoulders slumped. "I didn't want to do this, Farrel," he said. "But I can't leave you in Zoë's body. I know she'd call that a fate worse than death... but I can give her that at least." The old soldier's translucent fist suddenly shot forward into the chest of Zoë's body. Mason's eyes burned like coals as the silver threads of Zoë's life twisted and darkened. Her body flushed, and sweat burst from every pore.

"That's hemorrhagic fever," Mason said. "It kills quickly. Though not painlessly. I know. I saw three of my buddies die of it in 'Nam. It's time for you to die for good, Farrel."

Zoë's mouth worked like that of a fish out of water as her body slumped to its knees. "No," she whimpered. Farrel's ghost erupted from her body — and Mason instantly grabbed him.

"They always fall for it," he said as he drained the rogue Skinrider's life.

An experienced Skinrider can touch another being and induce the symptoms of disease — or relieve them. Contaminate thus combines Puppetry's influence over other beings with Juggernaut's power to channel Vitality into a spook's gauze. A Skinrider concentrates upon the skeins of Vitality laced through living people or ghosts and sends tendrils of his own Vitality along them. When the spook ameliorates a disease, his eyes shine silver, as do the threads of Vitality that feed into and strengthen the target's own life force. If a spook sickens his target, his eyes glow smoky red as the Spite-darkened tendrils twist, pinch and rip the target's Vitality.

Contaminate does not produce real disease, with real germs, tumors or other physical effects. The Horror merely induces the symptoms, which mightily puzzle any doctor who examines the victim. Contaminate cannot truly heal the organic causes of a disease, either, though patients may appreciate a few hours of relief. One spook can even heal the symptoms created by another. Contaminate may also heal psychosomatic ailments such as hysterical paralysis, though the underlying psychological causes remain and may produce a relapse later on.

System: A character can invest from zero to five Vitality points into Contaminate. The Horror's effects last one hour, plus one hour per Vitality point expended. Thus, if a spook invests three Vitality in an attack, he induces four hours of simulated sickness or health.

Contaminate is an instant attack, though the effects continue without the need for any further attention from the attacker.

To use Contaminate, the attacker must touch his target. The player rolls Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 6) to attack, or Dexterity + Medicine (difficulty 6) to heal. The number of successes rolled tells the magnitude of Contaminate's effect. Dodging can reduce the number of successes, just as with any attack.

The attacker can induce the symptoms of any disease he wants, from the common cold to allergy attacks, cancer or arthritis. In game terms, we represent this "special effect" of disease by reducing the target's dots in Attributes. The target loses two dots in Attributes per success rolled. The attacker has some say in which Traits he affects. Most disorders are best represented as reductions to Physical Attributes, but some diseases could affect Mental Attributes or Appearance. For instance, a blinding migraine could reduce a victim's Perception, while flesh-eating strep could affect a victim's Appearance. The attacker must divide the Trait loss between at least two Attributes, as follows:

One Success:	Strip one dot each from two Attributes.
Two Successes:	Strip two dots each from two Attributes.
Three Successes:	Strip three dots from two Attributes
Four Successes:	Strip three dots from two Attributes, plus one dot from two different Attributes.
Five Successes:	Strip three dots from two Attributes, plus two dots from two different Attributes.

If the attacker's player rolls three or more successes, the Skinrider can paralyze one of the victim's limbs or cripple one sense, as a suitable disorder to explain Attribute loss. For instance, a paralyzed arm or leg could justify a loss of Dexterity, while blindness or deafness could drastically reduce a victim's Perception. Of course, the Storyteller has final say over whether a particular disease could cause a particular Attribute loss. If the proposed disorder does not seem like a plausible way to, say, reduce a victim's Strength, the Storyteller may propose a more appropriate sickness. The player always gets to choose which Attributes are reduced, though, and the dice remain the final arbiter over Contaminate's effect. If any Attribute drops to zero, the victim is probably incapacitated to a large degree. (See "Attributes at Zero" on p. 167 of *Orpheus*.)



Healing works in the opposite way. The Storyteller represents a real disease by reductions to the sick person's Attributes. The player then rolls to see how many dots of Attributes the Horror temporarily restores. Three or more successes can temporarily restore sight to the blind (if the person has eyes at all), hearing to the deaf or make the lame walk. The Horror cannot regrow destroyed organs or body parts, though.

Contaminate's effects are not cumulative. The reductions (or restorations) to Attributes are always counted from their starting condition. Thus, if a Skinrider strips two dots from a victim's Strength, then strikes again and strips away three Strength, the victim loses three dots (the largest single loss) rather than five.

The Horror affects the quick and the dead alike. Spooks can't really get sick, of course, but imaginary bodies of gauze can suffer illness just like the living.

Benefit: Contaminate provides a Benefit to other Benefits. The Skinrider touches his recipient. Tendrils of his own Vitality join the recipient's as she offers a Benefit to a third spook. The second spook's Benefit can augment *two* of the final recipient's Horrors instead of just one. The second spook could even turn around and apply a Benefit to two of the Skinrider's Horrors on the same turn (though not to Contaminate itself). The Skinrider's recipient must offer the augmented Benefit on the same turn that the donor acts.

Spooks find this "doubling" effect extremely peculiar. For several minutes afterward, both the Skinrider and his immediate recipient feel like they are each two people, themselves and one another. They may use each other's mannerisms, finish each other's sentences or both respond to a question addressed to one of them.

WISP: BECKON RELIC

Jeff gasped, "Get us out of here, Carruthers!" Before them loomed the brick wall that closed off the alley. Behind them, the pigment cultists moved in, knives at the ready.

"Can't," Blink replied. "You've got a body, so I can't carry you out." He thought furiously. "Maybe I can do something else." His eyes crossed as he looked sideways to reality. His fingers stretched, thinned and warped as he reached into the Stormwall. Weapon, he thought. Or a distraction. Weapondistractiweapondistractiweapondistracti

His hand closed around... something. Blink pulled it out and found — a wad of cash. A big wad of cash. All hundred-dollar bills, though they didn't look right. Well, he didn't have time to try for anything else....

"Free money!" he bellowed as he threw the bundle of oversized bills at the cultists. Half the gang dove at the fluttering paper, tripping over each other and their comrades.

"Come on!" Blink said as he dove for the scrum. A few hands grabbed at Blink and Jeff as they scrambled over the confused, fallen cultists. They escaped the alley in seconds.

Behind them, an outraged voice shouted, "Hey — this is play money!"

Confederate money, really, Blink thought. But he wasn't about to go back and correct the cultist's mistake.

Beckon Relic enables a spook to conjure objects. He reaches into the Stormwall, as he would to perform Storm-Wending and then makes a wish backed by the magnetic lure of Unearthly Repose. *Something* responds by sending the Wisp an object that serves his current needs. The spook doesn't know exactly what he'll get or how the object is useful. A Wisp who wants to open a locked door might receive a set of lock picks... or a sledgehammer. A clever and sensitive spook has a better chance of pulling out something he really wants, but no one can fully control this Horror.

Spooks dubbed these conjured objects "relics" because the objects sometimes seem very old. Wisps who sought weapons have pulled modern pistols from the Stormwall, but also flintlock rifles, cavalry sabers, Mongol bows and stone axes. Some objects also seem to be personal mementos, bearing monograms or a person's name. Relics are clearly the same sort of object as the mysterious artifacts that some spooks receive (see **Crusade of Ashes**), but artifacts appear spontaneously but repeatedly, while a character seldom conjures the same relic twice.

Relics seem more "real" than the objects Poltergeists craft using Congeal. Characters can pass relics from person to person. They are ectoplasm, however, not normal matter. A spook can carry a relic with him as he manifests or disappears. In time, relics vanish back from whence they came.

System: A Wisp can expend up to five Vitality on this Horror. The more Vitality a spook invests in Beckon Relic, the larger the object he can pull from the Stormwall. The Vitality levels provide upper limits: A character may still receive something smaller than his Vitality expenditure permits.



Zero Vitality:	Very small object (lock picks, diamond ring, fountain pen, magnifying glass, etc.)
One Vitality:	Small object (knife, pistol, transistor radio, power drill, book, vase, etc.)
Two Vitality:	Medium object (sword, rifle, boom box, opera cape, crowbar, telescope, etc.)
Three Vitality:	Moderately large or heavy object (marble bust, battleaxe, tower shield, tapestry, etc.)
Four Vitality:	Large object (suit of armor, tombstone, bicycle, machine gun, police ram, etc.)
Five Vitality:	Very large object (automobile, biplane, bed, life-size statue, sarcophagus, etc.)

Each time a spook tries to use Beckon Relic, the player rolls the character's Wits + Awareness. The difficulty depends on the generality of the intended purpose. "A distraction" or "a weapon" could be nearly anything, for a difficulty of 6. "A gun" is more specific, for a difficulty of 7, while "an automatic rifle" would be so specific as to impose a difficulty of 8.

The number of successes rolled shows how closely the actual relic meets the character's wish. At one success, the relic is barely relevant. At three or more successes, the character gets whatever *reasonably common* item he would consider most useful. (Sorry, no relic mass spectrometers out in the great beyond.) If the player rolls a botch, the character receives the most irrelevant and annoying thing the Storyteller can imagine (but don't be surprised if the players think of a use for it after all).

Beckoning a relic is an instant action but not a reflexive one. The relic appears in the character's hands or beside him. Machines all work, even if they lack a proper power source. Relics last up to a full scene. They may disappear sooner if no one holds them or pays attention to them for a few minutes. A character can conjure as many relics as his Vitality permits.

Relic weapons inflict the same damage as their mundane counterparts. No rule except the maximum relic size, the number of successes rolled and the Storyteller's whim governs which weapon the character receives. If the Wisp is lucky, he conjures a Browning automatic rifle or a great sword. If he isn't, he conjures

a tiny derringer or a strange-looking Oriental weapon whose use he can barely fathom.

Spooks can carry small or very small relics when they travel by Storm-Wending, Dream-Walker or Broad-band Ghost. They can also carry larger relics by Storm-Wending or Dream-Walker, but each medium-sized relic counts as another character, a large relic counts as two characters and a very large relic counts as three for purposes of range, Vitality expenditure and the maximum number of characters a spook can carry along.

If a spook manifests while holding a relic, the relic manifests as well. Such objects work just like mundane items of the same sort (although guns may or may not be loaded). If a manifested relic leaves contact with the spook that summoned it, it fades away after a number of turns equal to the original Vitality expenditure.

Benefit: With a flip of the wrist, a Wisp with this Horror rips out a bit of the Stormwall and tosses a darkly swirling ball to his recipient, who absorbs it into her own Vitality as she activates a Horror. She sees the Stormwall herself for a moment, as her Vitality bounces off it and reflects back to her. This loop enables the recipient to apply her chosen Horror's Benefit to itself. For instance, a Haunter could activate his Witch's Nimbus and double its duration to two scenes instead of one, or a Banshee could reduce the difficulty of her own Forebode. A character using her own Benefit does not require another action. She can activate the Horror and the Benefit during the same full action.

NEW ROLES

The following roles provided even more options for characters backgrounds, adding to the possibilities found in **Orpheus**, including variants for medium- and high-powered campaigns.

ROLE: BOUNTY HUNTER

Description: It's the thrill of the chase you enjoy, tracking your quarry and then taking him down, all while keeping within the confines of the law. Well, mostly. Maybe it's the challenge, pitting your wits and strength against his, or perhaps the adrenalin rush, that split second of "will he come quietly or will the lead fly?" You became a judge of when to press your luck and when to duck, learning when to trust your instincts and when to keep them in check. Insight was the key, knowing how an individual would react even before he did. Okay, so there were times you couldn't do anything about it — the odd one boozed up or high on PCP or crack, but having him throw you down a flight of stairs or bounce you off a car hood was part of the thrill, right?

Then, one day, things went badly wrong, and a violent mark didn't go down when you shot him. Instead, he beat you within an inch of your life and left you for dead. You were a long time recovering in the hospital, and while you were there, you began to see people... things... that couldn't exist. The docs thought you had gone nuts, your stories of "ghosts" in the wards a sign that it wasn't just your body that had been damaged.

That was when Orpheus approached you. Its people told you that your brushes with death had taught you to recognize the truth in the world, to see beyond the mundane and to recognize the next level of reality. Orpheus showed you the truth and asked you to join the company — its operation needed people with your mix of skills and experience, as well as the sort of insight you could provide as regards the practical application of the law to private endeavors and the legality — or otherwise — of a wide range of operations. Orpheus made you welcome and opened up a whole new world of thrills and chases that you couldn't even have dreamed of before.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social

Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Awareness, Brawl, Intuition, Streetwise

Skills: Drive, Etiquette, Firearms, Melee, Security

Knowledges: Bureaucracy, Investigation, Law, Politics

Variations

Medium — Debt collector (add +1 to Attributes, +3 to Abilities and +4 to Backgrounds)

High — Gangland enforcer (add +2 to Attributes, +7 to Abilities and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: HOBO

Description: It was a vicious circle. You moved to the big city in search of work so you could afford somewhere to live, but without a place to live, no one wanted to hire you. You lived in a squat and panhandled for money or else scavenged from trashcans. Your fellow residents were far from helpful too — it's a dog-eat-dog world — and they stole what little gear you managed to stash. Now, you'd like to claim you stayed clean through all of this, but no, somewhere along the way, the demon drink got its claws into you. What money you did managed to scrounge went to buy cheap beer and wine. You weren't a pleasant drunk, and your companions kicked you out of the squat, forcing you to live in doorways and alleys. It wasn't too bad in summer, but when it rained, or in winter, it was Hell. You nearly died

several times that first winter, mostly because of the cold, but once because you pissed off another hobo, who beat you severely. And then there were the up-town kids: vicious bastards who took a perverse pleasure in kicking and beating people like you. One time, you heard them approach not long after you'd curled up drunk and exhausted in an alleyway. Somehow, you knew the thugs meant to start a fire, as they'd done two blocks over last week, but couldn't rouse yourself to flee. The tormentors got closer... and then, the alley seemed to come alive and pelt them with debris. The thugs fled, and you were left alone, but not for long.

At first, you thought Orpheus was just another community outreach program, but the people you met seemed as interested in learning about what happened as they were about rescuing you from the streets. You didn't care. If they'd provide shelter, food and clothes, you'd tell them whatever they wanted to hear.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social

Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges

Talents: Awareness, Brawl, Empathy, Expression, Streetwise

Skills: Crafts, Performance, Stealth, Survival

Knowledges: Law, Linguistics, Occult

Variations

Medium — Professional beggar (add +1 to an Attribute and +5 to Abilities)

High — Street vendor (add +1 to an Attribute, +6 to Abilities, +3 to Backgrounds and +2 to Vitality)

ROLE: PROSPECTOR

Description: Maybe it was the love of the outdoors, the wide-open spaces and the ever-changing landscape, that drew you to a life of prospecting, or maybe it was the desire to "strike it rich" and retire early. The reality certainly wasn't what you expected, but you enjoyed it nonetheless. Gone are the days of traipsing round in the wilderness, panhandling in streams, though field trips feature heavily in your new employment. No, today it all starts with satellite images and seismic sensors, though someone has to go out there and set the sensor charges or conduct test bores. That carries some risks, but by far, the greatest danger you faced was the people, either other workers or — more often — the natives. Most of the places where prospecting is most prevalent aren't the safest in the world, wracked by internal disputes or criminal cartels. Each wants its cut and the "or else" can be painful, if not fatal, as you found in Kazakhstan.



There, someone took offense at your presence and kidnapped you and several colleagues, starving and beating you until your rescue by local forces. Then, there was the incident with the blowback and the time when the fuse was somewhat shorter than expected, but you don't like to think about those much.

Somewhere en route, you realized that you saw more than some of your colleagues and your dreams seemed to take on a more substantial form than was normal. You thought you were cracking up and after a lot of deliberation sought medical help. You were surprised, however, when, rather than doping you to the eyeballs, the shrink sent you to see the Orpheus Group. Your experiences and "dreams" intrigued their researchers, who taught you how to control them. The meditation and drugs produce strange feelings but seem to do the trick, and you suspect you may even enjoy this new career.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social

Abilities: (11/7/4) Knowledges/Skills/Talents

Talents: Athletics, Awareness, Brawl, Streetwise

Skills: Drive, Security, Survival, Technology

Knowledges: Academics, Bureaucracy, Computers, Linguistics, Science

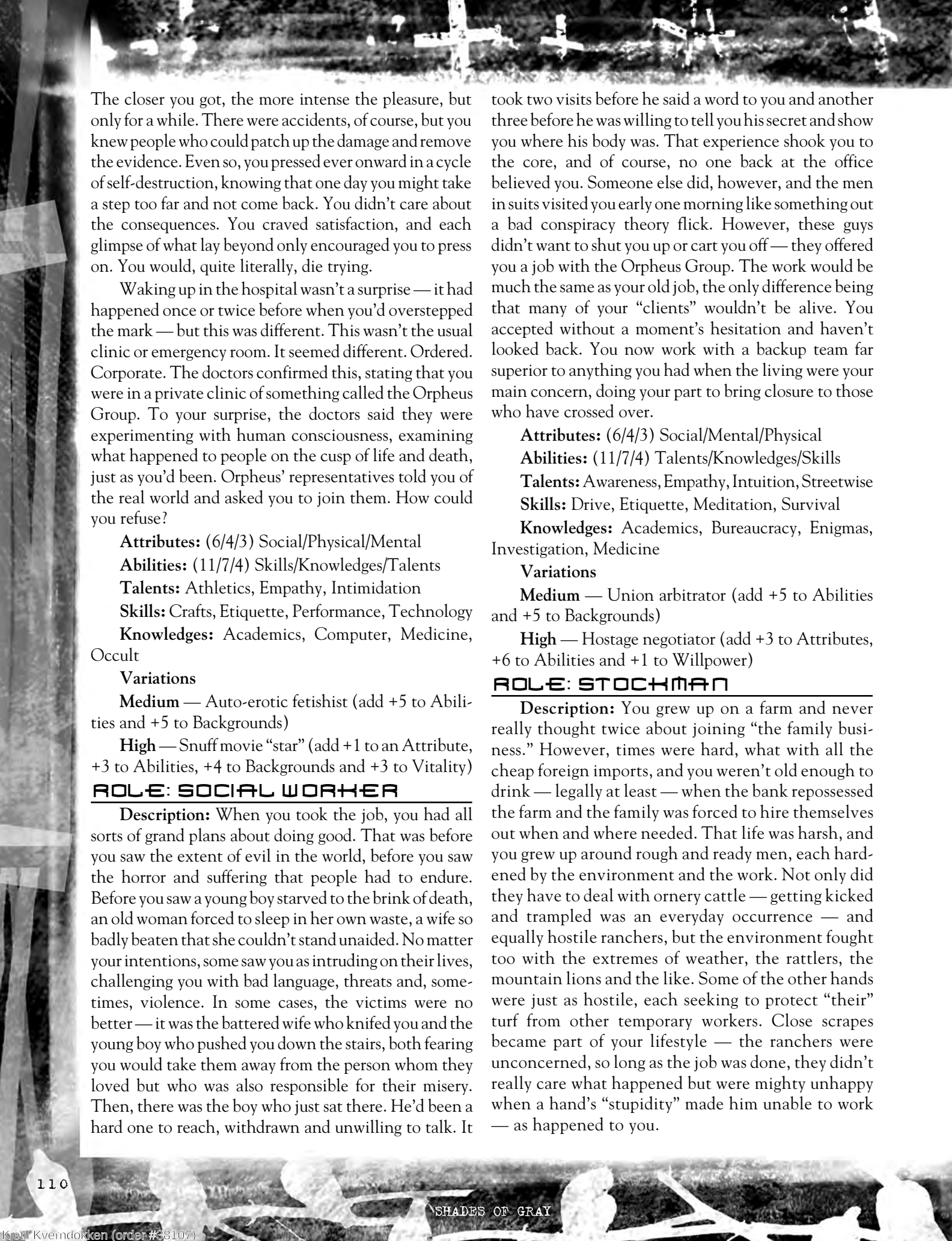
Variations

Medium — Wildcatter (add +1 to Attributes, +2 to Abilities and +2 to Willpower)

High — Rig worker (add +2 Attributes, +5 to Abilities and +2 to Vitality)

ROLE: SADO MASOCHIST

Description: You discovered your preference for unusual bed sports by accident. A bite here, a slap there. It was innocent enough at first, but it certainly got the blood flowing, that extra bit of adrenalin heightening the intensity and duration of the sensation. However, it soon began to feel tame, and you sought ever-greater challenges and outlets. Your partner, while not minding the occasional bit of "kinky stuff," was too straight-laced to go much further, and you split up, but it wasn't long before you found others of like mind, joining the fetish scene and going to clubs and events where you could expand your circle of friends. You pushed the boundaries, seeking ever more extreme outlets for your desires, pushed ever closer to the boundaries between life and death.



The closer you got, the more intense the pleasure, but only for a while. There were accidents, of course, but you knew people who could patch up the damage and remove the evidence. Even so, you pressed ever onward in a cycle of self-destruction, knowing that one day you might take a step too far and not come back. You didn't care about the consequences. You craved satisfaction, and each glimpse of what lay beyond only encouraged you to press on. You would, quite literally, die trying.

Waking up in the hospital wasn't a surprise — it had happened once or twice before when you'd overstepped the mark — but this was different. This wasn't the usual clinic or emergency room. It seemed different. Ordered. Corporate. The doctors confirmed this, stating that you were in a private clinic of something called the Orpheus Group. To your surprise, the doctors said they were experimenting with human consciousness, examining what happened to people on the cusp of life and death, just as you'd been. Orpheus' representatives told you of the real world and asked you to join them. How could you refuse?

Attributes: (6/4/3) Social/Physical/Mental

Abilities: (11/7/4) Skills/Knowledges/Talents

Talents: Athletics, Empathy, Intimidation

Skills: Crafts, Etiquette, Performance, Technology

Knowledges: Academics, Computer, Medicine, Occult

Variations

Medium — Auto-erotic fetishist (add +5 to Abilities and +5 to Backgrounds)

High — Snuff movie "star" (add +1 to an Attribute, +3 to Abilities, +4 to Backgrounds and +3 to Vitality)

ROLE: SOCIAL WORKER

Description: When you took the job, you had all sorts of grand plans about doing good. That was before you saw the extent of evil in the world, before you saw the horror and suffering that people had to endure. Before you saw a young boy starved to the brink of death, an old woman forced to sleep in her own waste, a wife so badly beaten that she couldn't stand unaided. No matter your intentions, some saw you as intruding on their lives, challenging you with bad language, threats and, sometimes, violence. In some cases, the victims were no better — it was the battered wife who knifed you and the young boy who pushed you down the stairs, both fearing you would take them away from the person whom they loved but who was also responsible for their misery. Then, there was the boy who just sat there. He'd been a hard one to reach, withdrawn and unwilling to talk. It

took two visits before he said a word to you and another three before he was willing to tell you his secret and show you where his body was. That experience shook you to the core, and of course, no one back at the office believed you. Someone else did, however, and the men in suits visited you early one morning like something out of a bad conspiracy theory flick. However, these guys didn't want to shut you up or cart you off — they offered you a job with the Orpheus Group. The work would be much the same as your old job, the only difference being that many of your "clients" wouldn't be alive. You accepted without a moment's hesitation and haven't looked back. You now work with a backup team far superior to anything you had when the living were your main concern, doing your part to bring closure to those who have crossed over.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Social/Mental/Physical

Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Knowledges/Skills

Talents: Awareness, Empathy, Intuition, Streetwise

Skills: Drive, Etiquette, Meditation, Survival

Knowledges: Academics, Bureaucracy, Enigmas, Investigation, Medicine

Variations

Medium — Union arbitrator (add +5 to Abilities and +5 to Backgrounds)

High — Hostage negotiator (add +3 to Attributes, +6 to Abilities and +1 to Willpower)

ROLE: STOCKMAN

Description: You grew up on a farm and never really thought twice about joining "the family business." However, times were hard, what with all the cheap foreign imports, and you weren't old enough to drink — legally at least — when the bank repossessed the farm and the family was forced to hire themselves out when and where needed. That life was harsh, and you grew up around rough and ready men, each hardened by the environment and the work. Not only did they have to deal with ornery cattle — getting kicked and trampled was an everyday occurrence — and equally hostile ranchers, but the environment fought too with the extremes of weather, the rattlers, the mountain lions and the like. Some of the other hands were just as hostile, each seeking to protect "their" turf from other temporary workers. Close scrapes became part of your lifestyle — the ranchers were unconcerned, so long as the job was done, they didn't really care what happened but were mighty unhappy when a hand's "stupidity" made him unable to work — as happened to you.

At first, you thought the venom from the snakebite was making you hallucinate, particularly when your spirit seemed to rise up out of your body and float around the room, only returning to your body when the other farmhands slapped your face. Had that been the only occurrence, you might have ignored it, but for many weeks thereafter, you had incredibly vivid dreams, almost undistinguishable from reality. In one, you “saw” another of the farmhands stealing, and the next day, just to illustrate how realistic but ludicrous your dreams were, you mentioned it to one of the senior hands, and he became agitated — he suspected the person you mentioned, and wondered how you knew. Was it all a coincidence? The people from Orpheus didn’t think so, though how the group heard your story you don’t know. They were sufficiently convinced to offer you a job. It pays well, unlike your old life, but you’re not really keen on the city living it requires.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Social/Mental

Abilities: (11/7/4) Skills/Talents/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Intuition

Skills: Animal Ken, Drive, Firearms, Melee, Survival

Knowledges: Bureaucracy, Law, Medicine

Variations

Medium — Hunter (add +6 to Abilities and +1 to Willpower)

High — Equestrian sportsman (add +2 to Attributes, +7 to Abilities and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: VETERAN

Description: Whoever said “War is Hell” was a master of understatement. You were young when you went to fight, naïve and eager to serve. Like thousands before, you believed all the rhetoric about the “good fight” and doing your bit for your country. You bought it hook, line and sinker, expecting to win glory and honor and to return home a hero. What you didn’t expect was to see your squad-mates turned into hamburger by enemy artillery, mines and traps, ambushed by the people you were fighting to save, who would rather kill with grenades and homemade bombs than surrender. You saw people you’d gone through boot camp with slain before your eyes: shot, stabbed, blown up, burned. You came close to dying several times, receiving purple hearts for the wounds you sustained, but your number never quite came up. Eventually, your mind broke — or so the doctors thought — and you received your discharge papers, sent home and haunted by nightmares of your comrade’s fate. You could see them so clearly, mostly when you dreamed, but sometimes, when you were

awake. The doctors gave you drugs in an effort to “cure” you, but they often only made the dreams more vivid.

Then, you heard of Orpheus and decided to see if these “ghostbusters” could help you speak with your former comrades and, thus, help lay the demons to rest. To your surprise, Orpheus agreed and inducted you onto one of its programs, and it wasn’t long before you discovered that your dreams were something more, that they had substance and that you *had* been talking to your fellow soldiers. Orpheus helped you make peace and then offered you a job, which you accepted. After all, how many others must there be out there whose real dreams haunt their existence?

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social

Abilities: (11/7/4) Skills/Talents/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Leadership

Skills: Drive, Etiquette, Firearms, Melee, Performance, Security

Knowledges: Academics, Bureaucracy, Law, Politics

Variations

Medium — Bodyguard (add +1 to an Attribute, +3 to Abilities and +4 to Backgrounds)

High — Mercenary (add +2 to Attributes, +5 to Abilities, +5 to Backgrounds and +1 to Vitality)

BACKGROUNDS

The people who worked for Orpheus and like agencies come from a wide variety of areas, with different stories and associations. Backgrounds reflect these ties, representing the people, possessions and relationships that define the characters. In **Orpheus**, these fell into two groups, those that stemmed from the Orpheus Group (Orpheus Backgrounds) and those of a more general nature (normal Backgrounds). Those presented here are all normal Backgrounds and are thus available to all characters.

ANCHOR

Hoyt Masterson felt weak as a kitten, his strength at a low ebb since burning Vitality to escape the Spectre. He desperately needed to replenish his reserves but had nothing to fall back on, his strength of will fading quickly. There was a temptation to tap the anger welling in his heart, but that was a last resort. If only there was something he could do before taking that last step... Hoyt's hands closed on his driving gloves and his memory leapt back to when he'd received them back before everything became so complicated. He luxuriated in the thought and felt his strength return, memories of better times reinforcing his power and determination.

An Anchor provides the character with a link to her past, a means of maintaining her strength when all

appears hopeless. It can bolster her Vitality, calling on thoughts of better days to reinforce her incorporeal body. In many ways, Anchor is the antithesis of Spite, though a character's Anchor points do not vary (though once they have been spent, Anchor points cannot be used again in that game session). Each Anchor point spent in this manner regains the character a point of Vitality. Anchors usually link to objects that serve as mementos, triggers for the points each contains. If the character is not in the presence of the anchor object, she cannot draw upon the points it represents.

X You have no particular mementos.

- You have one small keepsake (e.g., a locket or picture) that is worth three Vitality points.
- You have one significant keepsake (e.g., a book) or two smaller ones that are worth six Vitality points in total.
- You have one substantial keepsake (e.g., a large item of clothing such as a coat) or several smaller ones that are worth nine Vitality points in total.
- You have one large keepsake (e.g., a car) or several smaller ones that are worth twelve Vitality points in total.
- You have one massive keepsake (e.g., a house) or several smaller ones that are worth fifteen Vitality points in total.

FAME

"You're Zoë Vitt, right? I remember you from the BASE jump at Beggar's Leap. You were awesome." Zoë looked at the newcomer warily. He was vaguely familiar. Adam? Alan?

"Adrian, isn't it." His eyes widened in a grin, and he nodded, clearly surprised that she remembered his name. "Listen, could you do me a favor?"

On one level, his reaction was detached as he attempted to keep his cool, but on another, she could sense he was eager to help out one of his heroes. "Sure, Ms. Vitt. What do you need? Boards? Boats?"

"Nothing so boring. See the guy over there in the duster? Yes, him. If he follows me, can you keep him occupied for a couple of minutes?"

Fame is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is easier for others to recognize characters with this Background, and people may be predisposed to help an idol, either in exchange for a favor or simply to be able to say "Guess who I met today?" On the other hand, it is difficult for a character with Fame to escape

notice, often drawing unwanted attention from the starstruck or the authorities. Indeed, some people may single the character out simply because she is famous, irrespective of the actions of others in the vicinity. A character with Fame adds his Background rating to any Social rolls involving those who are aware of his reputation (the Storyteller might assess a Wits + Alertness roll for someone to recognize the character on looks alone). However, his rating also adds to the difficulty of any rolls that involve concealing the character's identity.

X You are Joe Average.

- You once appeared on a TV show.
- Remember that reality TV show? Well, you were on it and had your 15 minutes of fame.
- Most people recognize you, but they may not be exactly sure why.
- You are moderately famous, either well known in your field or a minor media celebrity.
- You're a household name, probably a Hollywood star or a major sports personality.

FAST REFLEXES

The representative from the Temple of the Mother of Vision was droning on and on about how sterile modern life was and how the "Mother's blessing" could remedy all of that. Blink had zoned out five minutes earlier, somewhere between "benefits of initiation" and "truly magical experience."

The second cultist hadn't contributed much to the conversation and had been flitting back and forth between her chair and another room. This time, however, she had entered the room silently and crept up behind Blink, sap raised above her head. She swung down, aiming for the base of the magician's neck. She hit the table instead.

"I understand your philosophy," he said, now standing next to her with a pistol in his hand. "You don't have to hit me over the head with it."

Whether with a quick comeback or a fast punch to the jaw, some people are born ready. The Fast Reflexes Background reflects this. A rating in this Background indicates that the character is hard to surprise and trusts himself to react instinctively, thus avoiding much of the intellectual process that slows most people down. This fast reaction time can also, at the Storyteller's discretion, lower the difficulty on certain Wits rolls, allowing the character to avoid being conned or simply embarrassed in conversation.

In game terms, the player adds any dots in Fast Reflexes to the character's Initiative rating (see p. 226 of *Orpheus*).

X Huh?

- You can guess the next line in the movie.
- You win card games such as “War” every time.
- Your family doesn’t bother trying to throw surprise parties.
- You could dodge a sniper’s bullet.
- You don’t dodge bullets — you dodge gunmen.

GHOST INSIGHT

The drone drifted toward Chet, the uniform-wearing ghost singling him out among all the members of the crucible. It seemed drawn to him. It looked right at him, as if about to speak but not quite able to do so. It remained oblivious of everything and everyone else, instead looking directly into the captain’s eyes.

“What do you want, soldier? Talk to me.”

The drone sighed, its appearance flickering momentarily, darkening and different insignia appearing on its arms. Then, it looked toward a building on the right. Three stripes. Chet wracked his brain, replaying the soldier-drone’s actions in his mind. “Monroe?” For an instant, a faint smile appeared on the ghost’s lips. “You want me to bring Sergeant Monroe to you?” Mason knew then what the drone wanted: revenge on the officer who’d betrayed and murdered him.

The character has some link to the dead that allows him to better understand the motivations and reasoning of ghosts, whether they are hues or spirits. Like Cole in the *Sixth Sense* or Carlito in *The Devil’s Backbone*, ghosts seek the character out as a means of expressing themselves in order to free themselves of the ties that bind them to the material world. This is particularly appropriate when attempting to “save” Drone- and Blip-class ghosts (see p. 258 of *Orpheus*). Characters with Ghost Insight stand out as beacons to the dead. Add the character’s Ghost Insight rating to his Vitality to determine his effective Vitality (and thus visibility) to ghosts. This effect does not apply to Spectres, however — they see the character as they normally would. Furthermore, the player may add the character’s Ghost Insight rating to any Empathy or Intuition rolls when seeking to gain information from ghosts.

X You have no special insight into a ghost’s needs and desires.

- You can pick up on some of the clues.
- You’re right more often than you’re wrong.
- You have a solid insight into what makes them tick.
- Spirits call you in when a mystery needs solving.
- Their lives — and deaths — are open books to you.

HAUNT

The young hue obviously had a spark to him. He could see the Spectres enough to be terrified, he could see the other ghosts enough to know that they couldn’t see him, and he could see the Vitality in Kate Dennison. Unfortunately, he couldn’t keep quiet. He kept repeating things like, “I’m dead. I’m fucking dead. How the fuck?” Kate glanced to the sky. They’d lost their Spectral pursuers, but not for too much longer.

“In here,” she snapped and pulled him roughly through the wall of University Hall. “We’ll go to my office.”

“What? Why do you have an office if you’re dead? Won’t they just follow us?” The kid’s eyes darted around the empty hallways as if expecting Spectres to leap out at any second.

“First of all,” she said patiently, “I am not dead. And second, no one bothers me in my office.”

The character with this Background has a place of her own. It might not be much — maybe no bigger than a closet — but it’s the character’s, and no one can take it away from her.

Any character with sufficient Resources or Allies might have a haven in which to hide from mundane problems like the police, but Spectres don’t follow the rules about warrants. This Background, however, grants the character a place where Spectres cannot follow her. The area is so attuned to the character’s own personal Vitality that the Spectres lose sight of anyone within as though they were staring at a bright light or lost in fog. Any number of spooks can take refuge in a Haunt, provided that the Haunt’s owner is present (and provided they can all fit). Without the owner, it’s just another room, no safer than anywhere else.

Spirits and hues often discover that places that they looked on as safe or comforting in life become haunts, but sometimes, a great deal of time goes by after the character’s death before she discovers the effect. Skimmers and sleepers can have haunts, but as they aren’t truly dead, they usually have to build their own safe havens. This is accomplished by spending time while projecting in the area meant to be a haunt and “tuning” the area to resonate with the character. Different Shades accomplish this in different ways: A Skinrider might momentarily possess anyone who walks through the haunt, a Banshee might spend hours there singing, a Haunter would simply inhabit the entire area, and so on. The character must spend a number of hours in the haunt-to-be equal to 20 times the desired Haunt rating (so a level two Haunt would require 40 hours of haunting), and the player must spend (desired rating x 5) in Vitality to acclimate the area. Spirits and hues have a

somewhat easier time developing a haunt: They must spend only 10 hours per dot of Haunt and (rating x 3) Vitality. Once a haunt is completed, restarting the process requires the player to spend a permanent dot of Willpower. The character may then begin the haunting process again. In this manner, the character might begin haunting a single room and progress out to make an entire house her haunt.

X You've got no safe port in the storm.

- A small haunt, no larger than a walk-in closet.
- A passable haunt, about the size of an efficiency apartment.
- A comfortable haunt, roughly the size of a one-floor house.
- You might haunt the hospital wing named for you or the tiny apartment building you used to own.
- An entire university, a high-rise hotel, or perhaps you have a number of smaller haunts scattered across the city.

LIBRARY

Annie looked pensive. "I'm sure there was a something about that in Whittakers."

"Whittakers, right." Grace glanced over at the bookcase. "Which one is that?"

"It's the blue book on the fourth shelf, with the white-and-gold writing. Yes, that's it."

Grace lifted the hefty tome. "This could be fun. There must be a thousand pages in here. Why don't we just check out Encarta or the Internet?"

"If you want to do real research, you should use real books. None of this bite-sized and predigested garbage for the MTV generation."

Grace snorted. "So, do you want me to turn the pages or not?"

Whether in books or on computer, decent reference material is vital to any research effort or for learning new Knowledges. Characters with the Library Background possess such reference materials or have access to an otherwise off-limits source of information (for example, a law firm's archives or a faculty library). A library might even represent contacts on online mailing lists or other Internet contacts. In general, such resources aren't easily portable, though it is possible to access a DVD-ROM archive in the field with an appropriate laptop (and, of course, a DVD likely has the added advantage of being searchable). The player may add her character's Library rating to any research roll and may, at the Storyteller's discretion, add it to other Knowledges (most likely

Academics, Law, Medicine and Science). Ghosts can possess the Library Background but must manifest or, in the case of electronic libraries, possess the Broadband Ghost Horror to make personal use of it.

X Books? Who needs books when you have TV!

- You have a few reference volumes.
- Your collection covers most of the obvious subjects.
- You have an impressive collection of tomes.
- In addition to the obvious works, your collection includes some of the most esoteric books.
- You have a massive collection of books or access to the best libraries.

PASSION

Grace felt the anger rising in her as the creep reached for her, the Spite buried in her soul coming to the fore. She knew the danger inherent in this, that her darker emotions would rise to the fore and dominate her consciousness. No, she wouldn't go there, wouldn't let anger and hatred control her. She would control her thoughts, think of the good times. The delight of coming to America, the taste of cotton candy. She felt her anger subside, contained — for the moment at least.

Spite is one of the gravest threats facing both projectors and ghosts, the dark side of their nature that threatens to override their consciousness and turn them into Spectres. Reducing Spite is a very difficult task (outlined on p. 193 of *Orpheus*), but characters can take steps to control the increase of their Spite. Focusing on the positive aspects of their lives can help, building up a Passion for items, people or memories that can keep negative emotions in check. This allows a character to reduce the difficulty of any rolls that may increase Spite (e.g., tapping Spite to regain Vitality). Each point of Passion reduces the difficulty of one roll by one. Such points may be spent individually or together, but each point may be used only once per day. Passion does not, however, cancel out the effects of Spite. Rather, it reduces the chances of an increase occurring, provided at least that the challenges aren't too frequent. Whenever a character gains a dot of Spite, she loses a dot of Passion.

X Your outlook provides no extra defense against Spite.

- You have some happy memories.
- You are rarely given to negative thought.
- You have a sunny outlook.
- Your buoyant mood is difficult to overcome.
- Your bright disposition keeps your dark side in check.

SHIELD

The Spectre licked its chops and snaked two wire-thin tendrils out toward Ben Cotton's inert body. Soon, it would take his flesh... and then, it would introduce his friends to a world of pain. The Spectre drooled black bile as its tendrils slipped beneath Ben's eyelids... and then, it cried out in pain as its entire slimy form burned as though splashed with acid.

A second later, its eyes opened and it was staring at the two pistols currently serving as Ben's hands. "Trespassers will be shot," was the last thing the Spectre heard.

Sleepers and skimmers must beware leaving their bodies unattended, lest passing Spectres attempt to take them over. For whatever reason, however — be it strong will, a powerful balance between mind and body or just plain, old-fashioned good luck — some projectors' bodies are inviolate (or nearly so). Characters with the Shield Background are much more difficult to possess when projecting, and some can actually inflict damage on Spectres who try.

Any time a character with even one dot in this Background is the target of a possession attempt, the player rolls Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8 - the character's Shield rating). If the roll succeeds, the character is aware of

the situation (and probably snaps back to her body post haste, if possible). In addition, the Storyteller adds the Background's rating to the difficulty of any attempt to possess the character's body while projecting.

X You take your life in your hands whenever you project.

- A Spectre has to work to possess you.
- Your body is a temple.
- Your body fights back if invaded; any Spectre attempting to possess it suffers one die of lethal damage.
- You know if anyone gets too close to your inert form; two dice of lethal damage to any Spectre trying to possess you.
- Any Spectre who messes with your body is asking to be sent back to Hell; three dice of lethal damage to anyone trying to possess it.

VEIL

Kate saw the Spectre and knew she was in trouble. The scrap with the last one had almost exhausted her Vitality, leaving her perilously weak and visible. Her instinct said flee, but she couldn't — what she sought lay just beyond, and she





wasn't about to give up now. She focused her senses and wrapped her veil about her, weaving it in with her Vitality. Her aura began to glow, then to shine, and she steeled herself, stepping into the Spectre's line of sight. For an instant, the Spectre's eyes locked on her, then it looked away, continuing to sweep the surroundings. "That's right, fucker, I'm just one of the living. Have a nice day."

A spook's Vitality plays a significant role in her visibility to other ghosts. Too high and drones see them but Spectres don't, too low and the opposite is true (see p. 190 of *Orpheus*). A character cannot easily alter her Vitality to suit her circumstances, but she can learn to control the perceived brilliance of her aura and, thus, the reaction of other spooks. A character with Veil may add or subtract a value up to her Veil rating from her current Vitality to determine her effective Vitality and, thus, her visibility. Her underlying Vitality does not change with the use of Veil, but if her Vitality changes while Veil is in effect, her effective Vitality likewise changes.

Example: A character with Veil 2 and Vitality 5 can choose to appear as a spook with Vitality 7. If that character loses two points of Vitality, she can only appear as though she had Vitality 5 (even though her actual Vitality score is 3).

- X You have no control over your Vitality aura.
- You may increase or decrease your effective Vitality by one point.
 - You may increase or decrease your effective Vitality by up to two points.
 - You may increase or decrease your effective Vitality by up to three points.
 - You may increase or decrease your effective Vitality by up to four points.
 - You may increase or decrease your effective Vitality by up to five points.

VISAGE

Tom Hayes walked toward Zoë, his spirit body bearing the scars of his recent trauma. He appeared, despite the bruises

across his face, little changed by his experience. His eyes were harder, but there were none of the Stains she expected to see on his battered frame. Zoë sighed in relief. "You had me worried Tom. For a while, I thought we'd lost you."

"Lost me?" his voice was cold and harsh. Tom grinned maliciously, and his face and body began to shift, the image of normalcy dropping away, revealing a twisted and inhuman form. "You did."

To some extent, a character's conscious thoughts control his appearance as a spook. Spite can modify this, leading to Stains twisting the character's features and body, but a sufficiently aware character can reshape his appearance and conceal his Stains. Doing so is a conscious act and ends when the character no longer focuses on maintaining his modified appearance or deliberately stops doing so. The Visage Background determines how great a modification the character can make — making minor changes (e.g., altering hair or eye color) or concealing one or two Stains pose few problems, but vast changes or hiding multiple Stains are more difficult. Visage only modifies a character's spook appearance or that of his manifested form. It does not modify the character's physical body (if he has one), nor does it change the number of dots in Attributes or Vitality level (and, thus, "visibility" to Spectres).

- X You cannot alter your appearance.
- You can change one physical feature or hide one Stain.
 - You can change two physical features or hide two Stains.
 - You can change three physical features or hide three Stains.
 - You can change four physical features or hide four Stains.
 - You can change five physical features or hide five Stains.



FROM THE PAMPHLET "INTRODUCTION TO THE TEMPLE OF THE MOTHER OF VISION"

Thank you for investigating the Temple of the Mother of Vision. It takes a brave soul to risk safety for enlightenment, and by reading this pamphlet, you prove that you would rather choose a path for yourself than be led down the same rut as the masses.



The Temple believes that the modern age has sapped the spirit of mankind. It has stolen and demonized the most powerful parts of human nature. The tenets of the Temple of the Mother of Vision offer both challenge and enlightenment.

Wisdom is not come by easily. More lies in shadow than is seen by the light. We of the Temple of the Mother of Vision believe in a great Goddess who understands our desires — good and bad, sacred and profane — far better than we do. She knows our joy and feels it with us. She knows our pain, and She weeps with us. She knows our wrath and raises Her holy hand in anger alongside our own. She feels our strongest emotions with us, and She loves us more for daring to feel them.

We believe that the greatest threat to the soul of modern humanity lies not in our fascination with sex or in violence or even in greed or deceit. Such feelings are natural. No, on the contrary, we are drowning in the smooth white seas of sterility. Where once there was wonder, now there are rules. The key to our understanding of the world we live in is the belief that, as other religions have suggested, modern man lives in a fallen state. However, we do not believe that man has fallen from goodness, but from authenticity. We have traded away passion for security, wonder for convenience and danger for boredom. The greatest plagues of our time are the sterilization of the emotional life (apathy) and the sterilization of the spiritual life (nihilism). These things act as small voids in daily life, bringing a chill to our natural warmth, and when they are as pronounced as they are in modern Western culture, they set us adrift in a boat with neither rudder nor oars. For man to triumph, to reach his full potential, he must choose sensation over numbness, acceptance over renunciation and action over hesitation.



The Mother of Vision seeks to bring down boundaries. "Us" and "them" have no meaning. Life and death are not cut off from one another, but touch, like lovers. The world is not black and white, but composed of shades of gray. The Mother of Vision helps us see beyond simple dichotomous thinking. The Mother of Vision offers an older way, a way of full feeling, full passion and full awareness.

The Visionary Mother wants us to dance with the joy of our potential and sing songs of our accomplishments. She wants us to be aroused by the scent of our own sweat, and She wants us to fight for the feelings in our hearts.

The prevailing spiritual paths have taught us to wait and to behave, but there's more to life than waiting and behaving. There is being. And the Mother of Vision shows us how to Be in entirely new ways.



The golden fish symbolize all living beings in a state of fearlessness, and migrating from place to place freely and spontaneously, just as fish swim freely without fear through water.



TEMPLE OF THE MOTHER OF VISION

Be in entirely new ways.

CHAPTER FOUR: STORYTELLING THE DEAD



How in Hell am I still alive?
— Hoyt Masterson

Jonas: Have you ever been in a place where hope was gone?
Where all that was left was patience?
— Conspiracy Theory



Welcome to the Storytelling chapter of **Shades of Gray**. This is the chapter where everything is laid out nice and neat and all (well, most) of the secrets are laid bare. Obviously, if there's any chance that you'll be playing in an **Orpheus** chronicle, you'll want to stop reading right now. Reading much further ruins the fun of playing the game, and that wouldn't be very exciting, now would it?

WHAT THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS

In this chapter, you will find out what the latest plot twists are in the ever-evolving game called **Orpheus**. A part of what we promised to provide you in this limited series was a different style of play and new chronicle options for each book. This chapter is where we fulfill our part of the bargain. While you, as Storyteller, still have the option of taking your chronicle in bold new directions of your own, we also provide some suggestions to guide you on your way.

In the core book, the characters were agents of **Orpheus** hired and trained because of their near-death experiences and their ability to project and interact with ghosts. Then, in **Crusade of Ashes**, **Orpheus** was destroyed. The characters were dealt a blow and sent reeling. Were they changed? Did the players cope? Hopefully, the answer to both questions is yes. By now, the characters should be back on their feet. They should have a chance to redeem themselves and reclaim all (or most) of what was taken from them. That shouldn't be the characters' only goal, however. By this book, they should realize that larger games are afoot and that **Orpheus'** fall was just the beginning. The characters are now in a position where they have no alternative but to finish old business because whole new issues and challenges are beginning to arise, and unless they keep up, they'll find themselves overwhelmed by the developments of the game. As the Storyteller, you're in charge of seeing to it that the pace of the game is fast enough to keep the players on their toes, but not so fast that their characters fall before their enemies. Luckily, in **Shades of Gray**, the characters learn a great deal about what's happening around them. This chapter provides you with the information necessary to let them wrap up loose ends and make their peace with the new life (or existence, anyway) ahead of them.

The following chapter begins with mechanical and housekeeping issues — how to keep the characters where they need to be given how far the game has advanced since **Orpheus** and the like. Then, we provide you with the crunchy information you'll need to run **Shades of Gray**, the information on hives, pigment and pigment cults. Lastly, we round out the chapter with a number of ideas for stories that you'll be able to use to keep your characters actively involved in the **Orpheus** metaplot.

So, now that you know what you have to look forward to, sit back, relax and enjoy the ride as we turn down the lights, pull aside the veil and show you our dirty little secrets. . . .

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Your players thought they knew what they were getting into when they signed up for playing in your **Orpheus** game. They may have liked their powers, and it may have been fun for them to play ghosts, and they may even have gotten the impression that the game was going to be easy.

Crusade of Ashes then adroitly pulled the rug out from beneath their feet. "Hey!" they cried, "this isn't the game we thought we were playing!" To which you, the Storyteller, replied with only a self-satisfied smirk. (While it is not *carte blanche* to give your players the shaft at every turn, the fact remains that each book in the **Orpheus** line changes your chronicle. Each book throws curve balls at your players. Each book introduces you (and subsequently them) to a whole new passel of secrets. Hang on to your hats, folks, it's going to be a bumpy ride.)

For right now, however, it's time to let the characters get back on their feet and catch their breath, if only for a moment or two.

WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS NOW?

People aren't static. They don't stay the same in the face of the situations life throws at them. They may grow stronger, or they may crumble before an obstacle and never grow beyond that point. The characters in **Orpheus** are the same. They should learn from their mistakes and grow into better people with the passing of time. That's a lot of what experience points are about, after all.

By this book, the characters should have changed quite a bit. In the **Orpheus** core book, the characters were agents of the **Orpheus** Group with near-death experiences and an interesting talent for projection. They were on top of things. Their advantages exceeded their disadvantages. They may even have grown a little cocky.

And then came **Crusade of Ashes**. **Orpheus** Group was cut off at the roots, and the resources the characters thought they had to draw on suddenly evaporated. Worse, they became targets. They survived the attack by **NextWorld** and a swarm of **Spectres** only to become outlaws as the **FBI** and the **NSA** turned on them to keep certain shady connections quiet.

Shades of Gray gives the characters a chance to get back on their feet, a chance to redeem themselves. Hopefully, the characters use the events in this book to take back at least some of what was stolen from them. To do that, the characters need to begin recognizing the larger pattern of events, the greater agendas that are in play in these circumstances. They need to recognize, bit by bit, that the fall of **Orpheus** Group was just the tip of the tip of the iceberg.



You, as the Storyteller, need to show them the hints and suggestions that let them get to that point. You need to guide them from being the victims they were in **Crusade of Ashes** to the heroes they need to be in **Shades of Gray**. No one else is as informed about the issues at hand or as capable as the characters are at this point. Consequently, no one else on the planet is going to be as aggressively targeted.

It's your job to make sure they have what it takes, to provide them with the information that will lead them to the next phase and, then, to let them succeed or fail on the basis of their own actions.

WHAT DO THE CHARACTERS DO?

To pull themselves from the situation they find themselves in at the beginning of the events detailed in this book, the characters need to be able to fight back. They've taken some important steps in that direction: They're no longer blind or on the run. They are, in fact, well positioned to learn many secrets that may clear up some mysteries that have been plaguing them thus far. Many of these answers are likely to lead to other questions, but that's fine. This book is, in part, about wrapping up messy loose ends (on the other hand, the deaths of 300 people and the introduction of hives and pigment cults also complicates the situation a bit). Part of that wrap-up process is going to be about making peace with their old lives. Only by giving up on the past are the characters really free to engage with the present and come to terms with the fact that the members of the crucible are tied together by some very secure bonds of camaraderie and shared experience.

WHAT KEEPS THE CRUCIBLE TOGETHER?

In real life, random strangers, or people who know each other casually, do not suddenly start hanging out 24/7 after some profound uniting event. They may or may not stick it out for the duration of said uniting event, but after that, they're home to tell their families and friends all about the weird, cool things that happened to them.

If characters in a game behaved that way, however, there would be no game. Players know this, and unless they're problem children, they'll keep their characters together even when doing so would be, by real-world standards, completely bizarre. (On the other hand, the characters might respond to their shared hardships by bonding. The crucible members, after all, are the only people who can truly relate to and support each other, which might take them well beyond the realm of "co-workers." If your players take this avenue, congratulations.)

The Storyteller, then, is in a position to help the players keep the crucible together without stretching or warping credibility beyond belief. So long as the Storyteller

sets up a situation where the players can suspend disbelief long enough to play, he's done his job.

Initially, Orpheus provided the characters with their reason to operate together. In **Crusade of Ashes**, on the other hand, the characters needed one another to survive, in essence creating a stronger whole. In **Shades of Gray**, the emphasis is on showcasing the individuals' abilities to benefit the crucible. Where once circumstance forced the group together, here they should remain a crucible because they need one another to succeed. At this point, the decision to stay together should finally become the characters' decision to make, not something forced upon them.

In **Orpheus**, the Storyteller has a number of ways of bringing pressure to bear on the characters. The fact that the characters have trained and worked together for the Orpheus Group helps a lot. Also very helpful is that they're all in the same leaky boat together: the NSA, the FBI and the occasional Spectre stalking the characters can be seen as a good reason to stick together. Group Merits and Flaws (introduced in **Crusade of Ashes**) are also very helpful for tying the characters together. If the characters stand to lose one of their few advantages by going their separate ways, then it's more likely that they'll stay together.

One major reason for remaining together is simply so they can fight back effectively. Strength through unity is essential, and the best way to show that is to shift the character perspective from emphasizing safety in numbers to illustrating that each person has (or should have) something to contribute to the crucible. The characters should want to stick together because of the competence and potential they see in each crucible member. The Storyteller might illustrate this by manipulating the action of the game in such a way that each character has an opportunity to shine, to show off his particular strengths and talents.

A completely different means of obtaining the same result is to go around the table after the game asking each player in turn how his character evolved, how he foresees changing further and what he admires about the other characters. This could even play a part in making experience point awards, if it works for you and the players are comfortable with the idea.

Another strategy is to let the characters have some downtime in a relaxed setting. After the stress of seeing co-workers die horribly, being framed by the government and being stalked by Spectres, it's good to let the characters (as well as the players) focus on their interpersonal interactions in a (relatively) fun and relaxed environment. This gives the players a sense of what their characters are like when they're not in harrowing circumstances, and it also serves to give the crucible a sense that the characters do interact as allies and friends when relaxing or having fun.



Transcript of Broadcast on KUSA, "Talk Chat with Tom Savage"

Tom Savage: Hello America, and welcome back to *Talk Chat*! Our topic today... drugs! Over 300 American children, my friends, students of the great high schools and colleges of our country, have been killed in the greatest high-school atrocity since Columbine. Some have even made comparisons to the terrorist attacks on New York City. *Three... hundred... eighteen... dead...* because of drugs. And the question of the day is this: What is the *government* going to do about it?

Now, my friends, I know that our President, our commander in chief, has done everything in his power to make sure our front-line defenders — our policemen, our firemen, our federal agents — have all the support they need to prosecute these criminals. But apparently, there are some who claim they've gone too far! Imagine that! Over 300 of our children are dead, and some left-wing anti-American cynics in the liberal media are actually being *naysayers* about the whole investigation.

You know what I say? Yes, I think you do.... I say they're not doing enough! *I'm* saying that with our very lives at stake, there are laws set up by the *former* administration that are getting in the way, helping the terrorists to get away. If you don't agree with me, it's clear that you don't have the safety of *our own children* at heart. And if you agree with me, I want to hear from you! Give me a call at 1-800-555-KUSA, and tell me exactly what's on your mind!

Well, Hell, I haven't even finished, and already, it looks like our switchboards are lighting up with outraged Americans who agree with me! Our first caller is Maria. Hello... hello, Maria are you there?

Maria: Hello? Hello, Tom? Can you hear me?

Tom: Maria! Maria, sweetheart, you're going to have to turn down your radio. Maria?

Maria: Tom... are you there?

Tom: Go ahead, Maria.

Maria: Tom, I think you're a big, fat idiot.

Tom: Well, fellow Americans, it looks like we've got a live one! Maria, how could you say such a *horrible* thing about me?

Maria: You're saying that the police, the federal government, they need to have more authority to violate our personal rights. Tom, the government doesn't even know where to look. They shouldn't be investigating American citizens. They're looking in the wrong place!

Tom: Violate our personal rights? What in *God's name* are you talking about? People are *dying*, Maria. Our children are *dying*, Maria. What are we going to do about the children?

Maria: Tom, you know as well as I do who's behind this. There's no proof of any terrorist group behind this. That's crap. They still haven't finished investigating Orpheus, and already, they're claiming there's some kind of... some kind of foreign terrorist group is involved. It's [expletive deleted!] It's totally [expletive deleted!]

Tom: Whoa, whoa, hold off there Maria. I hate to cut you off, but you don't have the *personal right* to use that kind of language on the air! You call in with some ridiculous conspiracy about the government, you don't think there's any connection between Orpheus and these terrorists, these drug dealers poisoning our children... do you have anything to back up these outrageous claims?

Maria: Well, if you would learn to read, Tom, there was a story in the *Skeptical Examiner* recently about Orpheus. It's a Satanic organization, Tom, they're working with *ghosts*, and everyone knows it.

Tom: Just a minute, Maria... let me look into my crystal ball... [plays spooky music]... ah, yes, I see... I see Maria's been smoking something tonight, huh folks? You're going to tell me that *ghosts* killed all those poor kids? Ghosts, you say. There are terrorist organizations still at large within our United States, and you're going to tell me there are *ghosts* behind all this?

Maria: Tom, I resent the implication that I'm currently smoking something... and you can't blame this on some kind of "liberal media." I'd been reading Ed Outrage's column in the *Examiner* long before I started listening to your tripe every night....

Tom: Maria, I'm going to have to cut you off. Let's see if we have a *sane* caller on the line. Hello? Hello, Samir, are you there?



PLAYING THE NEW GAME THE OLD WAY

It's possible that you and your troupe may have grown fond of playing **Orpheus** in a certain way. Maybe you liked the relatively carefree approach the game had in the first book. Maybe you like the sense of being on the run that emerged in **Crusade of Ashes**.

The Storyteller is free to make any changes he sees fit to the material he's using in his game. If you want to keep Orpheus Group active or to force the characters to continue living like fugitives while incorporating the new elements of this book, you're welcome to do that. There are several variables that you, as the Storyteller, can adjust. Feel free to place them anywhere along the continuum you want them to be: Orpheus' strength and involvement can be high, helping the characters, or absent entirely, leaving the characters on their own. Likewise, the intensity of the government crackdown can vary, depending on how hard you want to harry the characters. Other variables you can adjust to get the right feel in your chronicle are: how helpful strangers are to the crucible, how readily safe shelter can be obtained, how necessary cars (and, therefore, the character's revoked licenses) are and how powerful you make the enemy's forces. The Storyteller can toss any number of curve balls at a crucible that aren't part of the main **Orpheus** story arc. For instance, what happens if the characters confront Orpheus about its past with Project Flatline? Orpheus could turn out to be the bad guy in such a case, and the rest of the events (those of the last book, specifically) would never need to happen. You could maintain a certain level of conflict with the Orpheus Group until such time as some resolution to that comes through. If things are patched up well between the crucible and Orpheus, it's entirely possible that the characters can once more begin working for Orpheus, and *then*, the NextWorld attack could occur. In such a situation, the characters have had time to become a little more adept at managing their powers by the time they have to face serious enemies and go on the run.

You're also free to continue playing chronicles in the style of the first **Orpheus** book even as you incorporate the events from **Shades of Gray**. The trick for a Storyteller is to keep things balanced. You may want to keep the characters on the run, but it's important for them to start feeling like they have a little more control over their destiny. Roleplaying games are about having fun. If the characters keep progressing in power but the challenges never get beyond those in **Orpheus**, the players will get bored. That said, there's not a lot of fun to be had by constantly feeling helpless. Keeping the characters constantly imperiled and relatively powerless as they were in **Crusade of Ashes** isn't much fun either, and your players will tire of it quickly.

If you want to maintain certain elements from the past books, you may need to wax creative. One way to

cover a lot of territory is to say that the Orpheus Group is not destroyed but that it does go deep, deep underground after the NextWorld attack. The Orpheus Group ceases to exist as a corporation, but it recognizes that everyone who ever worked for the company is in mortal danger if it doesn't figure out what happened and why. The company therefore continues to operate, but not as a for-profit organization so much as a concern dedicated to preserving the lives of its members and investigating why the attacks occurred. This allows the characters some of the advantages of Orpheus affiliation (as many as you see fit to allow, depending on how intact you mean for Orpheus to be), while leaving putting them through the trauma of being hunted by mercenaries, Spectres and government agencies.

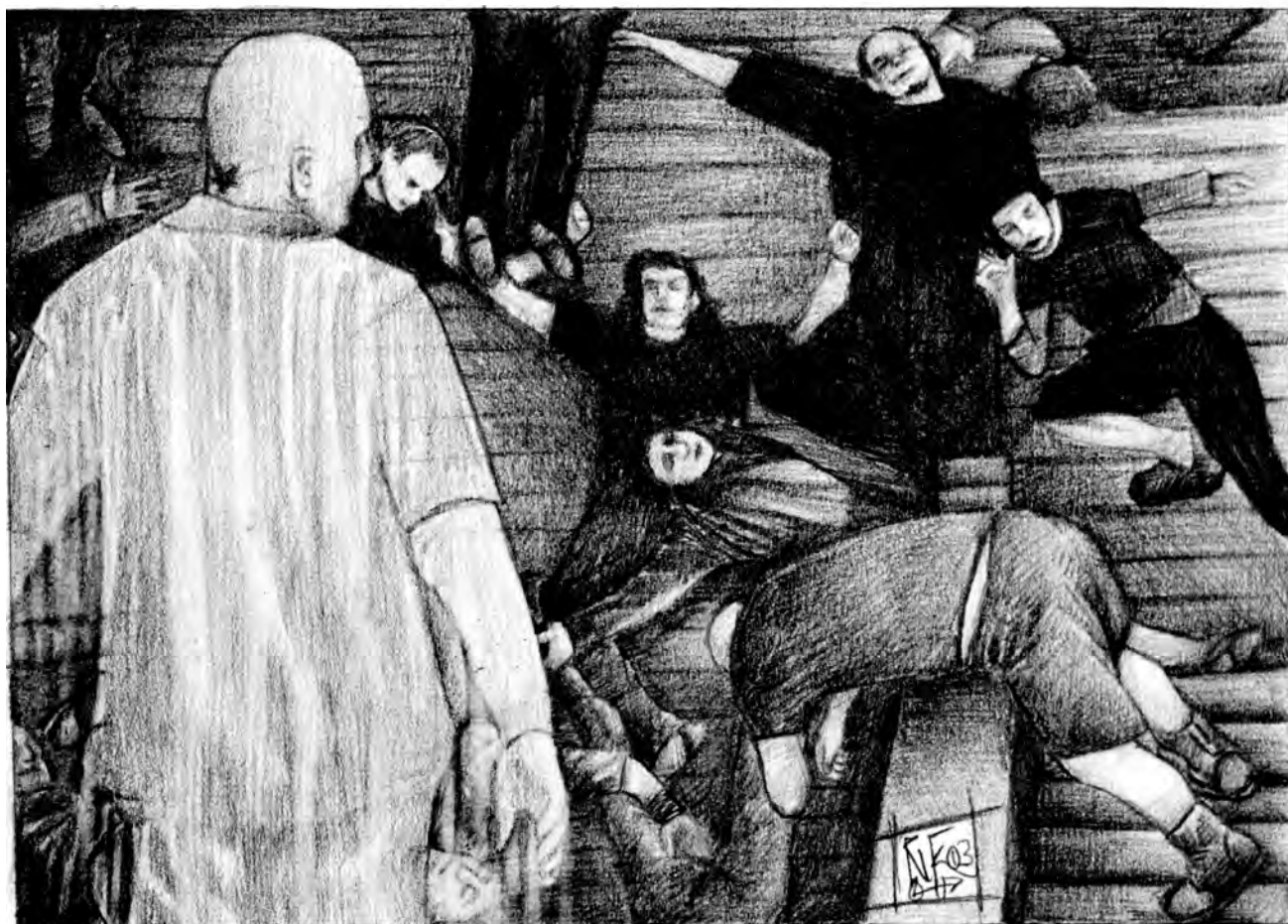
A NEW BEGINNING

Chronicles, especially successful ones, almost can't help but attract new players, and new players mean new characters. The same elements that keep the crucible together can make it hard to incorporate a new character into a crucible. Without the shared experience and the group history, it can be difficult to admit a new member, particularly given how difficult it can be for the characters to trust others in this game.

Storytellers may have to figure out how to introduce characters into the crucible who share none of the group's history. Given the pressures against even a bonded group remaining together, what kinds of reasons might there be for the crucible admitting a new member? After all, they've seen more trouble, violence and weirdness in the past year or two than many veterans. More importantly, why would such an individual want to join the crucible? If he doesn't share their history, why should he want to topple Terrel & Squib or go after the NSA?

As the Storyteller, you have the final say in what a new character's hook might be to get into the group. It's time to be creative. Among other ways, you might want to consider some of the following approaches:

- The new character has a history with one or more members of the crucible. Maybe he's someone's ex-lover. He could just as easily be a brother, best friend, army buddy, college roommate or the like. This kind of connection provides immediate tie-ins and creates a basic level of trust.
- The new character is another survivor of the Orpheus massacre and already has a history with the crucible. He's been keeping a low profile, by whatever means, and has been searching for the crucible members for survival purposes. Introducing the character in this way is helpful because it means the characters won't need to take up time explaining the situation to him.
- The new character may have information or connections that launch the crucible into one of the



main adventures listed later in this chapter. If he provides the characters with information or help, the crucible might be inclined to trust him. If he has an agenda of some sort with regard to the adventure, he may wind up taking at least a partial leadership position within the crucible, although he'll have to prove his credibility and value to the crucible pretty quickly.

- The new character could be someone affected by the events in **Crusade of Ashes** in a similar manner to that of the characters: The FBI has a warrant for his arrest, a Spectre stole his body from a makeshift sleeper cradle, the DEA thinks he deals pigment, a Death Merchant is contracted to terminate him, etc. Knowing that the members of the crucible went through the exact same experience, he seeks them out and asks them for their help. (Obviously, Storytellers should use this approach only if they're fairly certain that the group will be inclined to respond to such an approach in a humanitarian manner.)

- The new character may be a victim of Terrel & Squib or a Spectre attack that the crucible interrupts. Once he recovers from the attack, he can become a member of the crucible as a way of thanking the group for saving his life.

- The new character could also be a spook who just died, either in the attack on Orpheus or in the surge of fatalities resulting from the spiked pigment. The new character might latch onto the characters just because they're the only ones who seem to have any idea what's going on.

The best bet for bringing in a new character is to let the current circumstances in the game suggest how the new character comes into the picture. Is the crucible keeping a low profile? Maybe the new character meets them in a safe house. Is the crucible in the thick of battle with a Spectre? Maybe that same Spectre has been stalking the new character, and he jumps at the chance to assist in the creature's destruction. Is one of the members of the crucible calling home to check on his family? Maybe his wife got a mysterious and troubled call from an old army buddy of the character who, as it turns out, has been dealing with a lot of the same weird stuff.

Talk with the new player before choosing any of these. He may have history or a connection with one of the other players that helps make incorporating his character in the crucible easier.

One thing to bear in mind is that **Orpheus** offers the option of buying group Merits and Flaws. The new character's



relationship with the crucible could depend a lot on which of those Merits and Flaws he opts to buy into at character creation. A character that buys heavily into all of the group's Merits and Flaws could almost seem like a close friend of the group even from the beginning.

ANATOMY OF ADVENTURE: RUNNING THE CHRONICLE

Telling a story is the primary goal of any roleplaying game. The players and the Storyteller work together in concert to create a shared experience and a compelling tale. The players have it easy, of course. They're motivated by the adventure and the opportunity to be someone else for a while. The Storyteller, on the other hand, is in the position of creating an entire world while hoping the characters stay on certain roads. The following are some suggestions for how you can keep the chronicle running in the direction you want it to go (despite having to change gears with the release of every new book in the series):

RAILS

The Storyteller has a number of ways of nudging the characters in one direction or another. We generally call these rails. It's the Storyteller's job to determine when to put a game on rails and propel the story and when to let the characters' actions direct the action. More often than not, players appreciate setting their own direction, and it's a good idea to let them control their own fate as much as possible, but they can only do that if you've given them a clear enough sense of the world the characters are inhabiting. If the characters miss a key Wits + Alertness roll, you may need a backup plan to get them back on track.

If worse comes to worst and the players *need* to succeed on a particular roll, it's better just to invoke the automatic success rule (p. 210 of *Orpheus*) rather than send your whole game off into the woods.

Rails are good when the players have lost a sense of direction. Maybe they didn't pick up on all the clues they were supposed to. Maybe they were too afraid to launch the key attack that would lead directly into the rest of the story. In such cases, it's good to put the game on autopilot for awhile and arrange circumstances to, as subtly as possible, spoon-feed the players. It's important to avoid spoon-feeding as much as possible, lest your players get lazy (or annoyed), but at times, it's necessary if the game is going to proceed.

Most players have a knee-jerk tendency to have their characters attack whoever's attacking them. If the characters' big enemy is Terrel & Squib and you keep making them dodge FBI agents, you're going to nudge the players in the wrong direction. If the Storyteller

attacks the crucible with an enemy or presents it with a mystery, that's very likely the agenda the characters will opt to pursue. Thus, if you want to send the characters after the FBI, have the FBI put up a massive reward for information leading to the crucible's capture. Suddenly, every amateur bounty hunter out there is hunting after them. How do the characters deal with this situation? Well, that's a question that'll take a few sessions answering. The characters probably need to deal with it in two steps: Avoiding the bounty hunters needs to be their first objective, but beyond that, they need to figure out some way of getting the FBI to drop the reward.

GOALS AND CONFLICT

Remember that all stories have two general elements: a character with a goal and a conflict standing between the character and that goal. As the Storyteller, you're in charge of both presenting the goal and creating the obstacles that challenge the characters. The fun for the players is determining just how their characters, with their particular advantages and disadvantages, go about striving for the goal.

Good conflict can arise from anything that prevents the characters from achieving their goal, and remember that conflict does not have to be combat oriented. In fact, if combat is the only kind of conflict or obstacle your game contains, it's quickly going to lose its shine. Popular movies use a range of different conflicts, and it's good to bear in mind that the impediment can be internal or external (that is, within the character's head — such as a struggle with guilt or anger — or outside of him and his control entirely). Conflict can take the form of distance, as in movies such as *Planes*, *Trains and Automobiles* or *Forces of Nature*. The conflict can be trust, hence *The Thing*. The conflict can involve doing the right thing in the face of opposition (*I Know What You Did Last Summer*), unresolved issues (*Psycho*), one individual's obsession (*Silence of the Lambs*) or the search for truth (*The X-Files*). In running a chronicle, it's important to recognize that anything can be a conflict, so long as it impedes the character from reaching the goal. Therein lies the secret of crafting an interesting story. What's the goal, why does the character pursue it, and what situations arise as a result?

GOALS

Truth: The truth is a tricky and very valuable commodity because truth is information and information is power. Examples: Why is the NSA after me? Who actually controls the pigment network?

Locate: After *Orpheus*' fall, there are many things to locate, be it Radio Free Death or the Terrel & Squib pigment manufacturing plant. Examples: Where did the tainted pigment come from? The characters hear rumors of a hive somewhere in the city, but where it is?



Rescue: Whether from Spectres, a cult or some government agency, an ally/family member in trouble means a rescue operation. Examples: Helping Grace rescue teens from Terrel & Squib's "street safety" program, or saving a family member from brainwashing by a pigment cult.

Protect: Something or someone that the characters want to protect is imperiled. It's up to them to see to it that the item or the individual in question remains unscathed. Example: Maybe one of the ranking T&S executives has information he can provide if the characters promise to provide protection for his daughter, whom the corporation has threatened to force his loyalty.

Escape: The characters have been caught. Maybe they've been arrested. Maybe they're caught in the basement of T&S. Whatever the case, the characters' primary goal has become nothing more complex than to regain their freedom. Example: The crucible has somehow run afoul of a powerful pigment cult and finds itself trapped in a subbasement beneath a recruitment center. The characters have to engineer their escape, and they'd better do it before the cult's Spectres arrive....

Revenge: After all the characters endured, you can be certain they want blood. To bring out their bloodlust, however, the Storyteller often has to go for the throat, hitting them where it hurts most. Examples: Going after the Death Merchants for continued attacks, or turning the tables on the FBI.

Survive: It's only natural that one instinct when threatened or hunted is to hide instead of fight. This lot tries to survive by outlasting, outrunning and out thinking its opposition. Example: Avoid the Spectres... there's too many of them.

Not My Fight: Sometimes, the characters must accomplish something for somebody else, whether a loved one, a blackmailer or a debt-holder. The ultimate goal, however, is the favor/item/service/freedom this goal entails for the character. Example: The DEA wants the characters to bring down the pigment network before clearing their names.

Knowledge: The goal is to acquire knowledge, whether for the sake of accomplishment (the knowledge serving as trophy) or because the prize is of some value. Examples: This might include discovering what the pigment tattoos actually do or tracing Radio Free Death's transmissions to see what else he knows.

Purely Mercenary: It's all about the reward... cold hard cash and better living. There is no other reason than living in the lap of luxury. Example: Working for the Death Merchants or the Blasphemers.

CONFLICTS

To clarify what we mean by story conflicts, we present 11 of them here, six external and five internal.

External conflicts are easier to arrange than internal ones. An external conflict is entirely under the control of the Storyteller. An internal conflict needs to be carefully induced by the Storyteller with careful cues and situation engineering

Environment (external): Something in the environment is holding the characters back. It might be the weather, traffic or any other random environmental factor. This sort of thing rarely enters roleplaying games, so it makes sense to include it from time to time to inject a bit of verisimilitude into the game. Example: The characters desperately need to beat a team of Terrel & Squib agents to the ruins of Orpheus headquarters, but an enormous blizzard just dumped 10 inches of snow on the city, and the roads are closed.

Fate (external): Luck itself seems to be running out for the characters. Odd little twists of fate seem to hamper the characters. If the Storyteller is so inclined, this could be due to some strange Spectral curse. Example: The characters' luck fails them miserably not once, not twice, but three separate times while they're trying to avoid being detected by a roaming Jason. They've taken care of the Jason, but what can they do to fix their luck?

Pressure (external): The characters feel pressured to do something, whether it's their friends, their family or their boss exerting this pressure. The conflict comes when the character must do things against their will. Hoyt Masterson is a perfect example of this conflict... someone who doesn't want to commit any more crimes but feels obligated to his uncle.

Distance and/or Time (external): The conflict is distance and crossing that distance before it's too late. The conflict comes in the form of all the impeding circumstances that slow the character down or increase the distance. Examples might include reaching the rave before too many people die, or traveling across the country before a Death Merchant murders a friend.

Time (alone) (external): The clock is ticking — and not in the characters' favor. Perhaps the characters have to find missing parts and repair a friend's sleeper cradle before the machine breaks down and the body suffers necrosis and becomes irretrievable. The conflicts are those events that delay the crucible from reaching its goal. Maybe it's a matter of finding a hive before the Spectres can sacrifice a friend's ghost.

Mastermind (external): The typical scenario where the road to the goal is littered with an adversary's henchmen, agendas and booby traps. The rogue Flatliners running the cults are examples of this sort of conflict, as is the Spectre-possessed Squib.

Guilt (internal): The characters feel obligated to deal with or reach the goal because they are responsible for whatever tragedy will arise or has already arisen. The



conflict is fighting the guilt and the truth of their culpability behind the matter. Craig Forest probably feels obligated to stop the FBI's witch-hunt because they're basing their investigation off of his preliminary reports.

Doubt (internal): The circumstances arrayed against the characters seem too big to be mastered. Despair may set in. The characters need to slow down, take stock of the situation and find something to help them through their hesitation. Example: After a setback and the death of one of the bodies belonging to one of the group members, the crucible has to find its will to enter the fray one more time, even as some naysayers propose giving up the fight entirely.

Fear (internal): Whatever is happening, the characters are deathly afraid of what's coming and are reacting out of fear. The conflicts in this case are all the different impediments that play with the characters' fears. *The Thing* is a beautiful example of this sentiment, where fear drives the story with one giant push, and tiny pushes along the way to reinforce that fear. Examples from *Orpheus* might include the cults serving something they fear or someone playing cat and mouse with a Spectre.

Protection (internal): The characters feel the need to protect someone else on her journey. The conflict comes in trying to stop that which tries to hurt or kill her along the way. Examples might include Grace trying to protect the street teens from harm or Kate Dennison's mother-bird instincts toward her friends.

Anger (internal): The characters are all fired up and want to take their vengeance, but their anger makes them act irrationally. The characters need to get beyond the anger they're feeling and start being methodical and systematic before they can make any headway. Example: After a particularly vicious attack by a gang of Spectres, the crucible is enraged and inclined to revenge, but going in half-cocked will get them killed....

REGAINING WHAT WAS THEIRS

Thanks to the actions of the NSA and the FBI, the characters have lost access to most, if not all, of their former lives. Some may have simply lost access to their credit cards, while others may have lost their driver's licenses, the deeds to their homes, the titles to their cars and much more. In game terms, these things are often represented with various game mechanics such as lost Background points or Flaws.

CLEARING ONE'S NAME

Without a doubt, the hardest and riskiest method of getting a legal identity back is clearing one's own name. While this offers the greatest sense of vindication, it's also the method most likely to lead to jail time or death. Taking this road is entirely dependent on finding a scrupulously honest (and preferably high-ranking) member of either the DEA or the FBI. It's entirely possible that the contact the character chooses comes under a great deal of scrutiny from the organi-

zation he works for. The agent may need to stand up to all kinds of pressure in the character's name, and the character is going to have to behave in such a way that it inspires confidence in others if they're going to go to bat for her.

Remember that if the character takes on this challenge and roleplays it well, in addition to getting her name cleared, she might have earned a new dot (or two) of the Allies Background.

STEALING THE NAMES OF THE DEAD

While it's a hit-or-miss tactic, it's also possible for the characters to take the names of deceased individuals whose bodies were never found — mob hits, serial killer's victims, accident fatalities and the like — provided there's at least a modicum of resemblance. While such a thing is ordinarily an extraordinarily difficult proposition, being able to chat with the dead makes it a lot easier. Provided the deceased can be convinced (through bribes or threats of whatever sort), the character can gain access to the corpse's savings account number, mother's maiden name and the like. With that degree of information, the character can just step right into an established identity. The only problem with this approach is that the character may or may not bear any resemblance to the deceased. It may be one thing to have Guido's credit card info, but if Guido is a tall Italian guy and Mitzi's a short blond Jewish woman, the identity loan isn't going to work.

If the character *does* happen to bear a resemblance to the person whose identity he stole, the Storyteller is free to play with mistaken identity. A hit man may be shocked to see the guy he whacked last week come back into town and start wandering around pretending he doesn't know the people he was on intimate terms with just before his death. Police, ex-lovers and victims might also have some choice words to say to a missing individual who suddenly turns up again.

A WHOLE NEW YOU

Who need the old name anyway, right? You'd been saddled with the same old name, the same old address, the same old life for too long anyway. Now that circumstances have sort of forced the issue, the character may be inclined to look into creating a whole new identity from scratch.

Government Approved

Forgive and forget is a tune the government is happy to sing when it serves its own best interest. Even with the characters' complex relationship with the law and several federal agencies, it's entirely possible that the government might want to extend some manner of clemency or assistance to the embattled characters, not the least of which would involve helping them create new identities, either permanent or temporary, in exchange for some bit of reciprocation.

Street Legal

With enough cash and the right connections, a character can get pretty much anything he needs on the street.



That includes a new identity. The government, for all that it wishes it did, does not have a monopoly on the equipment that creates official IDs. With the right connections, it's possible to find those upstanding individuals on the street with access to such equipment. Said individuals are only too happy to set the character up with an identification bearing any name he wants.

Such folk come in two varieties. The first has simply invested in (or found or otherwise come by) equipment that is sufficiently like what the government uses that it can create identification that's close enough to legal government issue ID as to be unnoticeable. These folk tend to work out of cheap basements and make a killing providing the criminal class with drivers' licenses and passports. They can be very well connected and very suspicious. They didn't get where they were by being overly trusting, so the character will have to go the extra mile to gain their trust. This scenario presents a wide range of roleplaying options, so don't short change the player by skipping it. The Blasphemers (see Chapter Two) could certainly point a character toward people who could falsify IDs—for a price.

The other folks who can provide realistic identification are the kind government employees who actually work at the Department of Motor Vehicles or the passport office. Government work doesn't really pay well, especially at this level. Consequently, these poor souls are often eager to use their job skills (and their access to equipment) to help anyone kind enough to make a generous donation to their

petty cash fund. This approach usually involves slipping into a government office, usually long after business hours, and having a real government identification made for you by someone who does it for a living. This approach has its own advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, an ID obtained this way is indistinguishable from the real thing because, for all intents and purposes, it is the real thing. This counts for a lot in states that use holograms or similar sneaky tricks to make it hard on ID counterfeiters. On the other, it requires the characters to make a pilgrimage into the belly of the beast. While the street-level fake ID mills can be anywhere from a cheap hotel room to a back alley, to get the real thing, one has to go to the real place, and that can be nervous business for folk trying to get away with behavior as questionable as getting fake identification. Adding to the risk is the fact that the government sometimes sets up sting operations to catch the poor folk who make their fun money this way. That said, in the states that have the most sophisticated anti-counterfeiting measures in place, getting an ID this way might be the only game in town.

HAND TO MOUTH

For the truly rebellious, there's always the option of playing a character who refuses to do any of the above. Why have any identification at all? After all, isn't having such a thing just a capitulation to a fascist state anyway? Why be an entry in a database? Why make yourself traceable?





Characters choosing this approach need to conduct their transactions in cash. That's not really that difficult to do in the right places. Lots of people work for cash under the table every day. Illegal immigrants do it all the time, and so do many members of a city's underclass. This approach has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it's tax-free, easy to spend and leaves no trail. On the other hand, the kinds of jobs most likely to grant this kind of pay — cleaning rendering plants, for example — tend not to be that lucrative unless you have some particular skill that's needed in the underworld (and it's entirely likely that the characters might). Selling drugs is probably the most lucrative means of making cash in this situation, but that entails a whole additional set of skills and incurs a lot of risk. Suffice it to say that if a character doesn't have at least three dots in *Streetwise*, she has almost no chance of surviving more than a week as a dealer.

That said, depending on how the characters choose to do go about things, making cash under the table and leading a cash-only life can be a very low-stress way to live. After all, the characters don't need little pieces of plastic to know who they are, and they might find that they can survive just fine, thank you very much, on cash alone (and maybe the occasional bit of stolen gear...).

THE HIVES

Cataclysmic events are unfolding just on the other side of the Shroud. The average person on the street, insensitive to spirits, absorbed in the focus and thrum of his own day-to-day routine, can't sense them. Some sensitive people — mediums, artists, psychics and the like — are able to get a slightly better read, and the little they sense causes them nightmares and forces them to wrestle with depression — but even they pick up, for the most part, little more than flashes of extreme dread and anxiety. They may discern that certain places in the city have taken on a completely unnatural ambiance to them that feels entirely *wrong*, where only the unwise venture, but their knowledge extends no further than that.

Only those sensitive to ghosts are able to see the horror that is unfolding in city after city — and no question remains in their minds that something terrible is happening — but they still have no idea what to do about it. In blighted neighborhoods across the country, enormous masses of corrupt spiritual... tissue are pushing their way through the Shroud. The very physical world is being violated by an unnatural assault from the world of the dead, and there may be no way of stopping it. These enormous projections conform, roughly, to the shapes of buildings, although the largest take up nearly the space of an entire city block.

These intrusions are vile. They represent a form of contamination never before seen, they are polluting the

spiritual landscape around them, and worst of all, they are multiplying in cities around the globe.

These are the hives, and they are the beginning of something horrible and new.

HIVE LOCALE

Drawn to negative emotion, hives appear in the areas of a city that already show copious evidence of preexisting blight and decay. An unintentional benefit of this is that it lets the hives go unnoticed longer. The miserable are always in the grip of some horror or other, so when they begin reporting the dark effects of a hive, no one listens, and the hive grows uninterrupted.

One theory behind the hives' manifestation pattern is that negative emotions — anger, despair, hatred, fear, depression, obsession — help foster the growth of hives by acting as either raw materials or possibly food for the Spectres building them, and so, such horrors always pop up first in areas rife with those emotions. While it's theoretically possible for hives to appear in areas where these darker emotions are not especially pronounced, the probability is much lower unless the Spectres behind the hive in question have a clear reason for making such a departure from standard procedure. For example: If the Spectral forces in question deemed it necessary to create a hive across from a Terrel & Squib regional office in a relatively upscale, busy and booming neighborhood, it would likely take several times as long to infect a whole building in such a neighborhood than it would in the sorts of neighborhoods where one would expect to find a hive (but see p. 134 for a look at how the process can be expedited).

Hives are less likely to appear in areas of high traffic, but they are almost exclusively confined to cities. Consequently, the characters are more likely to stumble upon them in certain urban no man's lands — largely abandoned ghettos, deserted warehouse districts and similar areas. While the hive creation process is reasonably subtle (at least as far as the senses of the average person go), it's not entirely unnoticeable. The increase in the dark and twisted emotions that occurs around a hive is palpable, and the fewer people who wander by, the less likely it is that the creation process is going to be sensed and disturbed.

Certain areas are more prone to hives than others. Overall, urban areas are more likely to have the right kind of energy for the creation of a hive than suburban or rural areas. Only they have the areas of concentrated hopelessness and blight that call a hive from across the Stormwall. As a general rule, rural areas are, by far, the most difficult areas to grow hives in, and none appear in such places during the course of the events in *Shades of Gray*.

Within cities, it tends to be urban wastelands that attract hives. Decaying housing projects, run-down



warehouse districts, despair-drenched retirement homes and slums are all prime locales for a hive. The more crime, joblessness, disease, mental illness, horror and despair that are prevalent in an area, the more ambient negative energy the neighborhood has to offer the hive.

HIVES AS SEEN BY GHOSTS

When an average person looks at a hive, she sees nothing in particular: an ugly building, maybe, that has a faint hint of sadness or despair about it. A spook looking at that same building sees that something is unquestionably wrong, even from the early stages of a hive's development. From the moment the first folds of tainted plasm push their way into the structure of a building, something about the spiritual pollution of a hive radiates a foul gray light to the eye of a spook. While it's not impossible that a very few unusually perceptive mortals may be able to sense the "wrong-ness" of a hive from a distance, it takes a disembodied spirit to perceive the full horror of a hive. Witnessing the corruption of a hive, however, is nothing to the full emotional brunt of being inside one.

THE INTERIOR

The inside of a hive is both repulsive and oppressive. The emotional impact of a hive interior is easily the equivalent of its visual impact. A visceral sense of dread fills anyone, ghost or otherwise, who ventures in. The interior of a hive saps the will and the life of anyone who enters just as a subzero wind leeches the heat from exposed skin. Feelings of great sadness, loss, dread, self-loathing and hopelessness swell in the hearts of even the most optimistic spooks. The longer a spook stays inside a hive, the stronger those negative emotions become. These feelings are enhanced by the disgusting appearance of the hive's cancerous interior.

The walls of a hive appear, to ghosts, to have been suffused with some kind of organic mass. Both the amount and texture of the mass vary from place to place. In most instances, it is black and shiny as through it were wet or covered with a thin layer of ooze. In other areas, however, those places where the "tissue" of the hive is most obvious, it appears mottled or grainy and tends to be some shade of gray. Where the architecture of the hive deviates most from the architecture of the building it's infusing, the walls are made of black and diseased gauze. Ghosts and projectors cannot pass through these walls; they are just as solid to spooks as brick walls are to living people.

A hive is a tumor on (and in) a building. It is the living pulse of a building gone bad. It is a building whose spiritual reflection has been wounded and, overcome by despair, utterly decompensates. The human emotions caught in the walls of a hive all go rancid all at once and reveal them-

selves, to those who can see them, as twisted growths jutting out from the architecture. Enormous banks of crooked black teeth may erupt from a kitchen wall. A staircase may manifest a thick growth of sticky, wet, gray hair. Disturbing anemones of black fingers and mottled tongues may dangle lifelessly from a bedroom ceiling.

Hives, repulsive as they are in their own foul right, are not empty. In addition to a handful of the more common types of Spectre, hives are also home to three repulsive types of Spectres not seen elsewhere: Chitters, Spreaders and Hawgs (detailed below). These monstrosities make the inside of a hive as dangerous as it is vile.

THE EXTERIOR

Ghosts looking at a hive from the outside see a repulsive black mass on the landscape, like an enormous tumor. To a spook, there's no mistaking a building that has become a hive, even from a distance.

Buildings early in the process of becoming hives generally develop a black organic tracery along their structural weak points. This may give viewers the impression that a hive infects a building first through its instabilities. The tracery of black veins will begin where a building is most decayed, and that is also where the tracery will be the blackest. Tellingly, if part of the building has been rebuilt, remodeled or fixed up, the veins are almost entirely absent there, even in an otherwise mature hive.

Only when the entire building has been covered by the unwholesome organic fishnet of veins has the building truly

THE PALE RIDER COMES SWIFTLY

The first chapter of this book culminated with Spectres snatching up newly dead hues and carrying them off to Mayfair Greens (see p. 133) to help it blossom into a hive. As mentioned at the end of that chapter, such measures aren't usually required (and won't be for future hives). The Spectres simply wished that first hive to be a truly inspiring example of their power and decided that the cracks in the Shroud be forced open via sacrifice. This, then, is the fate of any hue carried off by the Spectres — to ease the birth of the very first active hive.

By using the gauze of ghosts, Spectres may speed the process of hive development. While the numbers vary depending on how big the hive is, how "ready" the building is (Mayfair Greens hardly required the extra effort, but the Spectres were making a point) and how much Vitality the sacrificial ghosts hold, assume that Spectres can make a hive out of a normal two-story house in less than a day by sacrificing roughly 20 souls.



become a hive. The process takes between one and five days, depending on the ambient despair and horror in the building and the surrounding locale. Haunted buildings and those where particularly horrific deeds have taken place, it should go without saying, progress much more quickly. After the hive is complete, the building looks (to spooks) as though some form of skin cancer is growing on it.

The hopelessness and horror that radiate from a hive affect the neighborhood for a radius of several blocks. Three blocks away, a woman refuses to soothe her crying infant daughter, sitting instead with her eyes locked resolutely on the small blurry television screen. Two blocks away, a young man decides that his girlfriend *will* put out one way or another and if she won't give him what he wants, he'll just have to take it. One block away, a man becomes so certain that his wife is cheating on him that all he can think about is the languorous look on her face as another man pleasures her, and as he waits for her to get home, he plugs in the iron and digs out his power drill....

HIVE HIERARCHY

Spectres are not anarchists. Every hive has a strictly observed hierarchy, enforced by the hive-mind, and those Spectres who act outside or against the will of the hierarchy in any way are ripped apart and sculpted into the mass of the hive itself.

A Reaper is almost always at the top of the hive hierarchy. Like the commanders of a military base, these terrifying apparitions are charged with making sure the hives blossom as intended. While very little can stop a hive from forming once the process has begun, whoever guides the Spectres intends to see that it cannot be otherwise.

A handful of Frighteners may play sergeants to the Reaper's general. A single Frightener assists the Reaper on a small hive, while the very largest hives may have up to seven. These Spectres are likely to be in charge of maximizing pain and anguish within the nascent hive, or they may be in charge of "neutralizing," by whatever means, sensitive mortals or dull-witted ghosts who come around where they're not wanted.

Beneath the Reaper and the Frighteners in the hive hierarchy are the hive's immune system, the Chitters. Chitters, while not very intelligent, are lethally cunning, and they seem to follow the will of the hive itself. Chitters only come into play in the chain of command when they've been activated by some breach of the hive, however, and so, they generally play little or no part in the day-to-day hierarchy.

Beneath the Chitters are the teams of Spreaders and Hawgs. These creatures directly contribute to the growth of the hive (although Hawgs aren't sentient and simply do whatever the hive-mind tells them to do).

Beneath the Spreaders are a number of random Spectres with no particular role in the hive aside from defense when the hive-mind demands it. Depending on the activity levels in a particular hive, the hive's location and the ambient Spectre population, a hive can wind up being a base of operations for any number of lesser Spectres including Lost Boys, Chupacabras, Fetches and other assorted Spectre types. Given the prevalence of Spectres around a hive, then, it's no wonder that the population of Jasons goes up precariously on the other side of the Shroud, making hives dangerous places for both the living and the dead.

A MORTAL'S SLOT

As if it really needs to be said, a hive is no place for a human being. Hives are, among other things, focal points for the worst human emotions. Hives take shape in those places where hope is just a nasty lie to begin with. Once a hive is fully functional, it amplifies and intensifies those emotions tenfold. The effect is a sense of palpable emotional torment that radiates from the hive. Imagine the worst loss, the worst betrayal, the worst heartbreak, the worst loneliness and the worst regret you've ever known, then imagine experiencing them all at the same time. Now, multiply the intensity of those feelings tenfold. That is the emotional signal that pulses through the walls of the hive.

For the most part, any person physically or mentally capable leaves a building that has become a hive. Those who stay typically do so for psychological reasons rather than for physiological ones. Some individuals find themselves trapped by a fascination with their own misery, and the stronger the signal of the hive, the stronger their draw to their own suffering. Those who cannot leave — for whatever reasons, mental or physical — generally find themselves on a fast spiral downward, and when they find themselves at their absolute nadir, they respond by taking their own lives. Only when they realize that the situation is *even worse* in the hereafter do they realize the true folly of their act.

From the standpoint of game mechanics, a human being loses one point of Willpower after she remains in a building that has become a hive for a number of days equal to her Wits rating (so a person with Wits 2 who stayed for four days would lose 2 Willpower). Anyone with psychic abilities or any skill at being a medium loses *three* points during that time due to her increased sensitivity to the signals of the hive. When her Willpower reaches zero, the subject of the hive's dark siren song can only take actions that promise to deliver her finally from the emotional agony of living in the hive. Any form of suicide, even the most painful and drawn out, is preferable to lingering even one more day. In many cases, when a person reaches this point, her sense of self-loathing is so strong that he *wants* to end her life in the most painful way



possible, self-immolation for example, to punish herself for being so weak, so worthless, so riddled with pettiness, evil and sloth.

Alternatively, the Storyteller may decide that the victim doesn't choose to kill herself at 0 Willpower, but rather, that she falls prey to possession by a Spectre, turning her into a Jason — in which case, all that self-loathing is soon regurgitated as caustic rage directed at anyone and everyone in striking range.

But the internal, psychological threats of living in a hive aren't necessarily the worst ones. Hives, as mentioned earlier, are also magnets for Jasons. The hive functions like a giant pulsing beacon calling the Spectre-possessed from miles around. The murder rate in the vicinity of a hive spikes and stays at a high level for so long as the Jasons keep coming. Before a mortal resident of a hive even gets to the point of taking her own life out of despair, she could very easily have it taken from her slowly and by the most sadistic means possible — by being skinned alive two inches at a time over a period of days for example or by being vivisected — by any one of the psychopaths called to the building by the hive-mind.

It's likely that the mortal authorities are already quite aware of any building with a strong enough negative psychic charge to become a hive in the first place. Such a place probably has a history of trouble. It's likely, therefore, that the police may take note of the sudden exodus of residents from a new hive. They're not likely to know what to make of it (unless they venture inside and feel why the residents are leaving), but they can easily recognize that something is terribly wrong with the site of the hive. Not even the most jaded cop stays in a hive for more than a moment or two, and he certainly won't force the building's tenants to return.

Within a week or two, the cops probably refuse to answer calls to any building that has become a hive — the madness, suicide and mayhem that radiate from the hive ensure such calls, but even cops have their limits.

THE HORRORS WITHIN

Hives are a little bit of Hell manifesting on Earth. Whatever the experience is like for mortals in the vicinity of a hive — and it is terrible — the experience is all the worse for spooks who get the entire visual effect as well. The combination of the emotional and visual miasma of a hive is often enough to make even a disembodied spook feel nauseated. Due to the intense emotional distraction, the nausea and the thin mephitic haze that fills the passageways of a hive, Perception rolls are made at a +1 difficulty.

The ambient effects of simply being inside a hive are certainly bad enough, but they're far from all a

spook has to deal with. The hive doesn't like strangers, and it has myriad ways of dealing with them.

HIVE DEFENSE

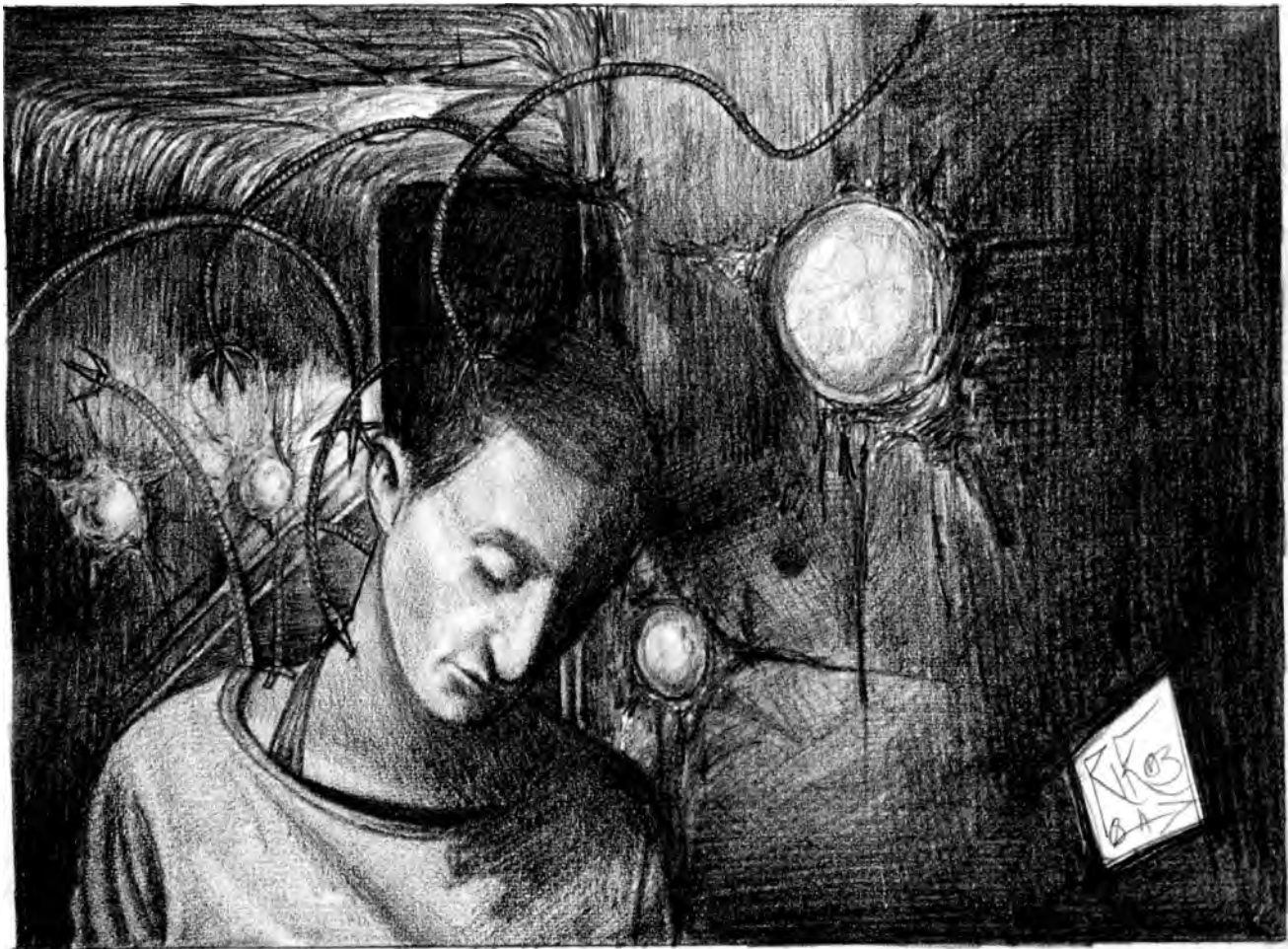
Spooks trying to shut down a hive are in for a serious fight. The Spectral forces dwelling in hives don't want them to be shut down and protect them appropriately. A single crucible, unless it has access to unusual firepower, is not likely going to be able to take out a hive, at least not without a long and vicious fight.

Hives have a passive form of defense in the form of fine tendrils with toothy projections at their very end. Any character whose Vitality is higher than her Spite is targeted by these tendrils if she stays in one place for more than a few moments. They emerge from the walls of the hive and attach to the spook. The tendrils are subtle and cause very little sensation. Noticing their touch requires a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8). Otherwise, once a tendril makes contact with a character, it siphons off one point of Vitality every turn. The spook feels weak, but she won't understand why. Breaking contact with a tendril is easy and doesn't cause any more sensation than the initial contact. It's entirely possible that these tendrils could parasitize a crucible at several different places in the hive without the characters ever realizing where their Vitality is going.

Any hive's first level of active defense is made up of the random collection of Spectres whose presence is not necessary for the growth of the hive. The kind of force this represents varies widely. A small hive may have only a Fetch or a Chupacabra, while a larger hive may have 20 Spectres ready and able to defend the hive. The disturbing thing, however, is that any additional defense these Spectres provide is exactly that — additional. The brunt of a hive's defense system is in the Chitters. Chitters are the waves of small, quick and lethal Spectres that seem to emerge from the hive's very gauze the moment invaders make themselves known.

Again, Chitters are the *brunt* of a hive's defense force, not its entirety. While Spreaders and Hawgs aren't offensive by nature, they *are* Spectres, with all the aggression and Spite that entails. They back up the Chitters as necessary and, if possible, slice the intruding spooks into thin shreds of gauze that they can then incorporate into the body of the hive. It's important to note that Spectres guard their hive zealously. A hive's Spectres attack any ghost wandering too near.

Once these three waves of defense have been put into play, the Frighteners attempt to pick off the weakest of the survivors while the hive's commanding Reaper moves in to cut down the strongest of the hive's attackers.



A hive can replace Chitters at the rate of 10 a night. They seem to grow from the hive's gauze. Replacement time for other defensive forces depends on the hive's locale and its strategic importance. A crucial hive can receive significant backup within a single day, while a hive of lesser importance, or one that isn't well situated in a particular nexus of misery, may wait up to a week to see new defenders.

Not all of a hive's defenses are directed at spooks, however. A hive can be set back, if not destroyed entirely, by the destruction of the physical building. The hive is capable of defending itself against those kinds of threats as well. Spectres with the ability to Manifest, of course, are the likely front-line defense against such attempts. Bulldozers can't do much damage if the driver is dead. Likewise, any attempt to use explosives to demolish the building requires the demolitions team to go into the building and wire it up, giving the hive plenty of opportunity to bring harm to those who would imperil its existence.

THOSE INSIDE

Within the hives lurk Spectres not seen in any other environment. It seems doubtful that any of these three

types of Spectres were ever human, but if they were, it was either long ago or they changed a great deal in a short amount of time.

CHITTERS

Chitters are the immune system of the hives. They reside within the tissue of the hive, pushing their way out only when an intruder enters. Chitters are smaller than man-sized, only four to five feet tall, but they are present in great numbers. One hive can hold between 50 and 500 Chitters, depending on its size and strategic importance. When Chitters attack, they do so *en masse*, swarming their enemies and tearing them apart.

Chitters are terrifyingly fast and lethal, and they blend seamlessly with the interior walls of the hive they're defending. They are flawless climbers and can lurk overhead or on a vertical wall as easily as they can stand still on the ground.

While they are absolutely silent when they are stalking their prey, their name comes from the disturbing high-pitched noise they make when they've made a kill.

Chitters are mindless and do not have identities outside of the hive-mind. Following are the Traits of a typical Chitter.



Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 6, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 5, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Enigmas 1, Investigation 3, Stealth 6 (3 outside a hive)

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 5

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flicker, Flit, Hive-Mind, Virus

SPREADERS

Spreaders are the tenders of the garden of blight that is a hive.

The tissue of the hive grows, mostly, as it needs to, but sometimes, the hive needs help growing around particular items — photo albums, family Bibles, family heirlooms and similar items that mitigate the hive's impact of despair. When these obstacles impede the natural flow of the hive's mass, Spreaders arrive to re-channel the growth around the obstacle. Spreaders work gauze the way sculptors mold clay. It becomes malleable in their ugly spade-like hands.

While Spreaders aren't ideally suited for combat, they are able and eager to add the gauze of ghosts (or projectors) to the hive they're tending.

A Spreader's touch weakens the integrity of gauze, giving the contacted area a gelatinous texture. Any wound inflicted by a Spreader is lethal damage, caused by the Spectre slicing off a chunk of the target's gauze. The ghost must regrow that portion of his gauze (by regaining the Vitality by whatever means the player chooses). The Spreader, however, can use the chunk of sliced off gauze to add to the mass of the hive. Skimmers are in particular danger from Spreaders. Since damage to their gauze becomes damage to their bodies, they could be taking on a serious risk by entering combat with a Spreader.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Brawl 2, Crafts 5 (hive-sculpting only), Enigmas 3, Expression 2, Investigation 1, Stealth 2

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 6

Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flicker, Hive-Mind

HAWGS

If Spreaders can be compared to masons, applying and sculpting gauze within a hive, Hawgs are the wheelbarrows full of mortar. Hawgs are thought to be a twisted

variation on Fetches because they appear to be four-legged monstrosities the size of large horses. The body of a Hawg is covered with enormous membranous sacs for carrying a slurry of blighted gauze. A fully loaded Hawg is more like a rhinoceros in size and can easily carry gauze equivalent to that of 10 ghosts.

Hawgs can take in vast quantities of gauze through their enormous sharp-toothed maws. During the creation of a hive, Hawgs bring gauze to the Spreaders and vomit it forth. The Spreaders then sculpt and splice it into the main organic growing mass of the hive. Where they get the enormous amounts of gauze they transport remains unknown, but Hawgs seem to provide a quarter of the corrupt gauze used in any hive.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Stealth 1

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 4

Spite: 9

Offensive Abilities: Carapace (+5B/5L soak), Hive-Mind, Maw

3965 WEST BURGAN AVENUE

The following is an in-depth look at the first hive that the Spectres succeed in opening (in Chapter One). While hives vary a great deal, this one is as close to typical as you're likely to find. This sample hive is designed to give the Storyteller a good idea of the backstory, layout and interior of a hive.

THE DARK PAST

3965 West Burgan Avenue is the address of the building sometimes called Mayfair Greens. In the late 60s, a thriving black business district was shut down by a racist city hall and demolished to make way for what was supposed to be a whole new approach to public housing. It certainly was a whole new approach: It was a new low.

The city politics surrounding the creation of Mayfair Greens blighted the construction of the building from its inception. A string of small but frequent riots took place in the neighborhood throughout most of the summer of 1967, until the disappearance of community activist and muckraker Tyrone Brown. Construction was brought to a halt the following winter when the mayor's advisory council on public housing deemed the initial building plans "overly ambitious and excessively costly" (by which it really meant "too nice for poor blacks") after the foundation had already been poured. Instead of designing a new building to fit the existing footprint, corrupt union workers



insisted on tearing up the old foundation and laying a new one to fit the revised and pared-down design. The irony, of course, was that the new building cost much more than the “excessively costly” building would have due to construction cost overruns. When the old foundation came up, the bound and charred remains of Tyrone Brown were found underneath the concrete.

Word spread throughout the black community, and the new building was said to be haunted. But construction went on.

When the building was finished in the summer of 1968, the poor families living in the city had to be threatened by the city government with the specter of homelessness to make them take up residence. Within the space of six months, Mayfair Greens became the sight of the most oppressive public housing in the country. Drugs and prostitution were rampant. The murder rate in the surrounding neighborhood was three times what it was in the rest of the city.

And things went downhill from there.

By the present day, the complex at 3965 West Burgan Avenue was mostly deserted. The entire complex, built to house up to 1,600 people, provided housing for just over 200, mostly indigent senior citizens and mental-health cases. The city was casually discussing tearing the place down because only the truly desperate would live there. The building’s interior hallways were dark, graffiti-covered caverns. Only one or two apartments per floor were habitable, and the doors to the others were staved in and the former apartments were full of trash, human waste, rusty needles, broken crack pipes and dead rats.

THE BLOOM

And then, something on the other side of the Shroud looked across and took notice of the ripe despair and pushed its way across. Tiny cracks opened up the barrier between the living and the dead. Tiny tendrils wedged through, securing themselves in the places where the building was weak or decayed. Fueled by the bitterness and despair of the abandoned, the black veins unfolded and stretched themselves to the top of the Mayfair Greens tower. Even with all of the hate and despair surrounding the Greens, it would have taken time for the hive to fully bloom. The Spectres were not prepared to be patient, however. The pigment massacres gave them the souls they needed to speed up the process.

Did the poisoner know about the nascent hive? It seems likely, given that the Spectres gathered around the rave site for several days before the massacre. Regardless of who knew what and what they’re motivations were, 318 people died in one night (barring interference from the characters, of course). The Spectres carried scores — possibly more — of these ghosts back to Mayfair Greens, and the Spreaders cut them to pieces and seeded the black veins with their still-shrieking gauze. Then, the veins bloomed.

The bloom was the opening for the hive’s troops. Spectres and Jasons from the surrounding neighborhoods made an unholy pilgrimage to Mayfair Greens and settled in. Then came the team of Spectres out of the blackness, to guide the full growth of the hive.

Within three days, the ambient horror of 3965 West Burgan had been sculpted into a tumor on the landscape. Of those 200 people who lived in the building, three quarters simply left without explanation, leaving case-workers, parole officers and visiting nurses surprised — and vulnerable. Of those remaining, many residing on the building’s upper floors simply threw themselves out their windows. Several doused themselves with kerosene or lighter fluid and set themselves ablaze. There were nearly 30 suicides in the space of one week. And that was far from the worst of it. One 60-year-old woman who lived with her 80-year-old mother duct taped the older woman to her bed and vivisected the old woman with a steak knife and a carving fork. She was discovered only when she began pelting passers-by with bits of organ meat.

THE MAYFAIR REAPER - TY BROWN

The Reaper overseeing the Mayfair Greens hive began making a name for himself the night he arrived. He manifested to the few residents of Mayfair Greens and even some of the folks who had the misfortune of living nearby. For the most part, the reaction was simple panic... but some of the older folks seemed to recognize the ghost. Instantly, rumors spread that Tyrone Brown, the murdered journalist whose remains were found in the foundation of the building, had returned from Hell.

Knowledgeable crucibles, of course, have no doubt realized that no ghost has been around for more than three years. This Spectre obviously chose the form and name of a legend, riding on Ty Brown’s coattails in order to elicit the most fear he could from the living.

Or perhaps he really did return from the afterlife. Perhaps he had help.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Intimidation 5, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Melee 5, Occult 1, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Carapace (+5B/5L soak), Chill, Consume, Hive-Mind, Manifest, Rend, Virus

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense
Reaper Scythe	-2	+1	9A	+0



Excerpt from the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo. Translated from the Spanish.

After following a trail of smoke rising from the jungle around the city of Mitú, authorities discovered the burning remains of what may have been a farm for plants grown illegally for the production of drugs. The plants being grown were not, as is commonly the case, coca plants, but rather, plants used to formulate a new kind of drug referred to on the street as "pigment." Three years ago, pigment was a new drug on the market and does not appear to have been grown in Colombia at all. It now accounts for over 10 percent of illicit exports leaving the country, and reports of drug activity indicate a continuing increase in the number of farms producing the drug.

The authorities also discovered the bodies of 22 field workers ranging in age from 12 to 37. The victims had not been burned, but according to authorities, had each been tortured and murdered separately after being bound with their ankles tied to their wrists.

"It looks like a farm that was producing the plants used in the manufacture of the drug pigment, but why this would happen, we are not certain," said Police Sergeant Roberto Trevino. "My initial thought was that the coca growers didn't like the competition from the pigment growers, but I don't think that's what's behind this at all. I have seen the violence connected to the drug trade before, but this is different. Drug violence is impersonal. It's cold-blooded murder to intimidate or eliminate a rival. It's meant to send a warning to competitors and nothing more. The sadistic methods employed in this massacre lead

Continued from A-4

me to doubt that it was a competing drug lord but, rather, someone who had a particular hatred for the workers of this farm. I've never seen such sheer sadism."

The accounts of the sole survivor, who was working outside the compound the night of the massacre, suggest a different tale. The young man, who would not give his name, gave the following account, "When I got back to the compound, the fields were burning, but the gates to the compound weren't open. I climbed over the fence at a place where the electrical lines weren't working, and I saw all my... I saw the people I worked with, all dead and... taken apart. And one man was still cutting on the bodies. It was Alvaro. I've worked with him for two years now. I don't know why he would do this. He was a good man, a good Catholic. He has a wife and baby in Bogotá, and he was only working on the farm to make enough money to buy a home. He talked about how he was almost there. He may have also been a little crazy, though. He talked too much about ghosts."

Authorities are now searching for the man known only as Alvaro. Given the extremity of the acts and the danger posed by the fugitive, authorities are sparing no expense in the manhunt.

PIGMENT

Pigment, black heroin or, simply, black H is a popular and relatively new street drug with hallucinogenic, narcotic and analgesic effects. It calms the user's mood. It induces a state of mild euphoria or ecstasy. It lessens the user's inhibitions.

And, if the word on the street is to be believed it allows the user to see ghosts.

The word on the street *should* be believed, because pigment does indeed allow the user to see the spirits of the departed (or any projector in the vicinity). It also does a great deal more than that. If the user has had a near-death experience, it can even allow her to temporarily leave her body with greater efficiency. If the user overdoses or otherwise dies while under the drug's effects, it traps the user's soul as a hue.

The story behind this street drug and the paranormal research interest formerly known as the Orpheus Group is a long and convoluted one.

HISTORY OF A DRUG

The drug that would eventually be known as pigment is the brainchild of Dr. Lionel Squib (or, more properly, of the Spectre inhabiting his body). While he was working on the drug, Squib still had some limited control and observed that the drug seemed to have some remarkable dissociative properties when used in the proper dosage. Unlike most drugs that seemed to allow a body's consciousness to separate from its shell, pigment was able to do so in ways that were scientifically provable: A test subject would take pigment and project his soul from his body. In the next room a researcher would have a particular array of playing cards in front of him. The projecting subject would then return to his body and write down what cards had been spread in front of the researcher. In previous research trials, no drug had ever been able to show effects that were statistically significant (although certain test subjects had shown some talent at such dissociation, but that



was independent of the effects of any drug that was being tested). With the discovery of pigment, Terrel & Squib was ready to launch full bore into its investigations of ghosts and the spirit world. (See Chapter Two for more information.)

None of this would have been possible without Squib's "guest." The Spectre has the ability to forge the gauze of other ghosts into whatever substances he wanted (this Horror is not listed in the Spectre's arsenal in Chapter Two, simply because it requires too much time and effort to be considered an "offensive ability"). In the case of pigment, he took the gauze of Spectres and made it into a thin puree of Spectral gauze that he called ichor. This ichor was then infused into the spirit of a mildly hallucinogenic plant, known to botanists as *Kakos stromithicarum*, and the combination of the plant's natural hallucinogenic qualities and the weird soul-wrenching ability of the Spectre ichor granted users the ability to project their consciousness from their bodies.

The Spectre first possessed Dr. Amours Katilian, an Orpheus botanist searching for plants of remarkable property. Katilian introduced the drug to Orpheus Group, hoping to perfect it and distribute it to a wider market — the possibility of capturing living souls either as they projected or died was too great to ignore. Because of the drug's Spectre infusion, Orpheus Group was never able to replicate the research, but its scientists did manage to render the original compound innocuous and replace some effects for others over time (essentially eliminating the drug's addictive nature and the limitations that turned operatives into spirits with less power than what the Flatliners had exhibited). Before that monumental accomplishment, however, the original projectors, including those taken by the NSA, were hues and weak-form projectors. They never registered as anything unique to the local ghost populations, thus escaping notice.

It was during Operation Flatline that the Spectre in Dr. Katilian met Uriah Bishop, who proved quite cunning and nasty for a human. The Spectre agreed to help Uriah Bishop and his cadre, if Uriah helped in establishing a pigment network to distribute the material as a drug. It was Uriah's suggestion that the Spectre abandon Dr. Katilian and find a new host... preferably someone with pharmaceutical connections.

Soon after the turn of the millennium, an unusual event occurred that affected Spectres everywhere. Where once the Spectre that inhabited Katilian was fairly independent, its free will seemingly evaporated. The Spectre still possessed enough of a sense of self to maintain its original agenda and direction, but it was now under "new management." Meanwhile, as master of its new host, Lionel Squib, it introduced pigment to its mortal partners. Terrel (and Squib's other co-workers) continued to think that pigment was nothing

more than a lucky stroke of research and had no idea that Squib was possessed.

Initial tests of pigment encountered problems. The substance had notable narcotic and hallucinogenic effects. Those who took it got a calm but energetic high with mild hallucinations in the periphery of their vision. While this was all fine and good for a street drug, it would not do for an upstanding organization such as Terrel & Squib to appear to be making such chemicals. Terrel then requested Squib to create a less narcotic version of pigment for use by the company's agents, who needed to be clear-headed as they performed their investigative work. Squib created a new version of the drug, one closer in line with Orpheus' creation, but did not lessen its addictive properties — most projectors working for T&S, as mentioned in Chapter Two, are working for their fix as well as their salaries.

Squib wanted pigment to become a widely used substance. The Spectres were very clear that they wanted pigment, in its unrefined, hallucinogenic and narcotic form, to make its way to the street. The Spectres knew that the souls of those who died either from taking pigment or after a period of habitual use would automatically become ghosts, and the more ghosts that could be made available, the more the Spectres' dark harvest would be expedited.

Meanwhile, the Spectre possessing Squib had been very busy. The ghosts of the convicts of Project Flatline, led by an individual named Uriah Bishop, had adapted well to their new condition and had performed some possession of their own, and they had put into place the infrastructure necessary to produce and distribute pigment. All of them had even fought and surpassed their original status as hues, becoming powerful spirits in their own right. Furthermore, the Spectre who taught them about pigment spread his knowledge to other Spectres via the hive-mind. Soon, pigment became a favorite product of drug lords across the globe.

PIGMENT'S SECRETS

Pigment is far more than the condensed and refined sap of the *Kakos stromithicarum* plant. While that plant provides the basic hallucinogenic and narcotic abilities of pigment, those properties aren't nearly as strong without the *real* active ingredient of the drug: Spectre ichor.

Since Spectre ichor has no actual substance in the corporeal world, the trick is to infuse the spirit of the plant from the moment it germinates with the ichor. This involves the soulforging of many Spectres into ichor, but there appears to be no shortage of Spectres, so that's not a problem. A plant that has been suitably infused differs visibly from other plants of the same species in that the plant is slightly stunted, it's far more gnarled and the leaves have a much darker coloration



than healthy *Kakos stromithicarum* plants. More importantly to those wanting to create pigment, the refined sap of those plants treated with Spectre ichor have much stronger hallucinogenic and narcotic properties and, of course, the ability to allow an individual to project his consciousness from his body.

Unfortunately for those who experiment a bit too much with the less refined street versions of pigment, there is a notable and terrible cost: The souls of those who die while on pigment become weak, pale ghosts known as hues.

The average street dealer of pigment hasn't the slightest idea why pigment works. Some few clever dealers and distributors have made attempts to reverse-engineer the drug, and some have even learned that it calls for the sap of *Kakos stromithicarum*, but no dealer not on good terms with a Spectre has a chance of replicating the effects of the very popular street drug. Those dealers who've tried selling the refined, but unichorized version can generally expect two results from selling faux-pigment: A lot of pissed off customers who feel they've been ripped off and, more often than not, a messy death at the hands of those whose job it is to protect the flow and reputation of the real thing.

Many pigment users get hooked for the long haul after trying the drug only a few times. There are reasons for this. Pigment is highly addictive, not only because of the opiate extracts that dealers typically add, but also in its own right.

Withdrawal symptoms are very like those for heroin use: fever, chills, vomiting and wracking pains throughout the addict's nervous system. Hallucinations are common, and those accompanying pigment withdrawal typically come from the darkest pits in the addict's psyche and have a pronounced emotional component. The phantasmagoric imagery is reinforced by negative emotions, typically despair or self-loathing. Subjects going through pigment withdrawal are prime candidates for possession by Spectres, and their suffering is like a neon sign to any Spectres in the area.

WHERE IT COMES FROM

The origin of real pigment is something of a mystery. The pharmacological researchers who have looked at it closely have no idea why it works. While certain mild psychotropic substances are present in the treated sap of *Kakos stromithicarum*, there's nothing to explain why the drug works the way it does. Even the strongest samples from the street have only the addition of THC resin and opium derivatives to explain the pigment experience.

The dealer on the street, then, has absolutely no idea how it works and has to rely on client feedback or personal tests to know if what he's selling is any good.

Most dealers have a vague idea that pigment is usually derived from *Kakos stromithicarum* (although, in fact, Spectre ichor can be used to taint other types of plants, which only confuses dealers and authorities more), but those who've tried getting the same results from home-grown attempts never get anything but a foul tasting black powder with embarrassingly weak psychotropic effects. That's all anyone will be able to surmise because the secret ingredient, Spectre ichor, is the key to all of black H's special effects, and that means that the pigment trade is controlled entirely by Spectres.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF PIGMENT

Despite the fact that the United States is responsible for over 95 percent of pigment consumption, only about three percent of the pigment supply originates there. The vast majority of pigment comes to the United States from farms in Mexico, Colombia, Myanmar and eastern Turkey.

Uriah Bishop controls most of the pigment production in Central and South America. His criminal background and underworld connections put him in a good strategic position to suggest to some of his associates that they might want to try growing some new and unusual crops. The vast portion of the pigment that Bishop produces is channeled to the various pigment cults. Only his excess gets sold on the black market.

Terrel & Squib, on the other hand, has used the international scope of its corporate connections to make inroads in Myanmar and Turkey. The pigment it manufactures winds up on the street and in the big dance clubs. The scope of T&S's operation is notably larger than that of Bishop's, largely because it was in a better position to fund a large move into the recreational pharmaceuticals business. Since all of its pigment is sold (and not "donated" to the pigment cults), Terrel & Squib also makes a great deal more money from pigment than Bishop, although the cults are hardly poor.

VILE HARVEST

To the naked eye, nothing more is going on in the pigment fields than the day-to-day work of farming — if you ignore the men with guns patrolling the farm's perimeter, anyway. The plants may seem a little on the unhealthy side, but for the most part, there's very little to see that can't be seen at any other site where illegal plants are being grown. Things are calm. The world is simple.

Unless you're a spook.

When a spook looks at a pigment field, he sees a violent, primordial nightmare: Feral Spectres roam freely through the fields in great numbers, the hive-mind antagonizing them into acts of intense violence toward each other. In the fields, the Spectres perpetrate random



acts of cunning and calculated violence on each other, occasionally cannibalizing one another as well. Ichor flows freely. To those who can see across the Shroud, pigment fields don't look like agricultural fields at all, but like battlefields where the most twisted psychopaths have been let loose to slaughter one another. Should the violence begin to die down, more of these feral Spectres (or some not so feral who have made powerful enemies) are brought in to see to it that the violence and mayhem never ceases.

An attentive spook may even notice the plants absorbing the spilled ichor and pumping it through their blackened vegetal veins (this requires a Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 8).

In the never-ending pursuit of efficiency, some of the pigment fields have been changed over to a new system in which organized, sentient Spectres simply gather their feral, mindless brethren together and make a group execution of them. This approach saves on time, and the sentient Spectres are then able to make sure that the ichor spills where it's needed most.

Given the twisted behavior going on just on the other side of the Shroud, one wonders why the farmers tending the pigment plants don't pick up on something odd going on. The farmers who tend to the fields on this side of the Shroud, however, chosen as they are for their ignorance and insensitivity, notice nothing.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

The pigment supply coming up from Mexico and Colombia simply piggybacks on the cocaine and marijuana trade. Cocaine has long been Colombia's most lucrative export, but throughout most of the 80s and 90s, it was also Florida's largest import. That provides the basic model for pigment importation today.

On the East Coast, the pigment barons bring most of the Central and South American pigment up through Miami or Houston. From those cities, it flows into a tightly managed distribution system that channels the drug into its wholesale channels in Indianapolis, Nashville, Atlanta, Boston, Philadelphia and New York City.

On the West Coast, the main shipments come into Los Angeles (if it's coming from Mexico or South America), where it is routed through San Francisco, Portland, Phoenix, Albuquerque, San Antonio and Denver. Pigment coming from Myanmar typically comes into San Francisco or Seattle, while shipments originating in Turkey generally wind up coming through Rotterdam, Europe's largest port city, into either New Orleans or New York City.

As a general rule, the movement of the drug is up along the coast and then inward. Clearly, pigment abuse is much more prevalent along the coasts than in places such as Laramie, Wyoming or Dubuque, Iowa.



FIELDS OF ILL FORTUNE

Spectres working for the pigment operations are strangely well-behaved, seemingly kept in line by impulses originating from the hive-mind that guides them, but from time to time, a Spectre ignores the calming buzz in its head and possesses a drunk field laborer, and then, the bodies pile up quickly. Since neither Terrel & Squib nor Uriah Bishop is interested in telling those who run the pigment farms just why this kind of event is more inclined to take place when growing pigment than when raising, for example, opium poppies, denial is the blanket response to all questions on this topic.

That said, there's no denying that more than a few disturbing outbreaks of violence have taken place in or near pigment fields, and the terrifying stories have circulated on the grapevine. Obviously, since events taking place where drugs are being manufactured just don't get media coverage, the traditional ways of hearing about these events aren't an option. But people talk. Whether their native language is Spanish, Burmese or Turkish, survivors and witnesses tell stories about grisly murders, early morning massacres and sadistic torture sprees performed by perfectly normal pigment farm workers who "just happened" to go crazy and violently kill or maim their co-workers and friends. Those who actually tend to pigment plants feel that the drug they grow is cursed or just haunted by ill fortune, but growing pigment is lucrative, and for the moment, the job pays well enough that they're willing to take their chances.

The methods of distributing pigment from larger cities to smaller vary, but for the most part, Bishop and Terrel & Squib let the organized-crime element handle the distribution in exchange for a portion of the profits. Bishop and T&S can both afford to err on the side of generosity. They're not doing this for money, after all, but as part of a larger, more disturbing agenda.

Once pigment passes into the hands of local small-time dealers, there's very little direct control over the traffic, and it's better to let the local pushers take the pigment to those individuals and places known to be popular with the pigment using crowd.

The demand for pigment continues to grow. It's the hottest new drug among the party set, but it's popular elsewhere as well: high school dopers, experimenting counterculturalists, chronic partiers and the like all find it necessary to try the drug so they can compare it with others they've had and be the first on their block to experience it. The variety of methods to partake of

pigment — it can be swallowed, snorted or injected, depending on how fast and how intense an effect you're looking for — contribute to its ongoing popularity. Club kids and habitués of the dance circuit typically prefer to use "bumpers," spring-loaded plastic devices that shoot pigment powder deep into the nostrils, while the more hardened drug abusers prefer the old fashioned, and more dangerous, intravenous injection. Swallowing pigment arguably provides the least bang for ones buck — delivering a weaker but more sustained high — but it's also the hardest method to overdose on.

Any city that has a counterculture of any real size is likely to have a number of pigment dealers working the nightclubs and the occasional street corner. According to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, the cities with the worst pigment problem, based on the number of overdoses, are, in order of increasing severity: Palm Springs, CA (where the White Party brings thousands of partiers into the city every April); Chicago, IL; New Orleans, LA; Seattle, WA; Los Angeles, CA; Cincinnati, OH; San Francisco, CA; Atlanta, GA; Miami, FL; New York, NY; and Philadelphia, PA. In Canada, the hands-down winner is Montreal.

Despite the media's aggressive campaign to highlight the horrors of pigment addiction and the unusually high overdose rates, the market for pigment doesn't dry up. On the contrary, it continues to grow at a steady rate. Pigment users make jokes about their own mortality and their likelihood of dying from a pigment overdose, and all those associated with pigment seem to show an aggressively dark sense of humor where their drug of choice is concerned. Addiction is not subject to rational thinking, however, and those users who seek what pigment provides simply adjust their thinking in any way necessary to allow themselves the high that black H provides.

And on the other side of the Stormwall, something old and vile laughs.

THE PIGMENT BARONS

While a large percentage of the pigment trade is simply allowed to ride piggyback on the trade of other drugs, typically cocaine or heroin, the main pigment farms rest in the hands of a select few. Attempts by traditional organized crime to move in on the pigment trade have been met not just with failure, but with spectacular failure and cataclysmic losses on the part of the cartels making the moves.

Each of the so-called "pigment barons" was hand-picked by either Uriah Bishop or the board of directors of Terrel & Squib. They were not chosen for their familiarity with the drug business, but for their business sense and their ability to juggle multiple obstacles effectively. Each of the major pigment-producing countries is



home to one or more of these disciplined and powerful individuals, and each and every one of them is surrounded by intense security, on both sides of the Shroud.

TURKEY

The overseer of Turkish pigment production is not a native, but a German with a long history of doing work in Turkey. The actual pigment farming takes place in the notably less civilized eastern half of the country, where Muslim fundamentalists give the authorities far more to worry about than simple farmers.

Most Turkish pigment is grown within a few hundred miles of the cities of Mu⁹ or Sivas. Both cities are well connected by rail and have relatively little problem getting their harvests to a port city, usually either Samsun (on the Black Sea) or Tarsus (on the Mediterranean Sea).

The drug trade in Turkey is managed primarily by the Marxist-leaning PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party. Drugs are simply a side interest for the PKK, however. The group's main interest is to unify all 20 million of the Middle East's Kurds, and they don't shirk from violence in pursuing their agenda. The biggest challenge Lugar Krohn is dealing with in managing the production of pigment isn't border guards wanting bribes or authorities intent on making a bust, but rather, keeping his farmers focused on the fields and not on their radical political agenda.

LUGAR KROHN

Lugar Krohn was a legitimate businessman for years before Terrel & Squibb made him a very lucrative offer to manage the distribution of pigment. While he'd always been very upright in his business dealings, the opportunity to apply his business acumen to something more glamorous than the manufacture and distribution of

plane engine parts appealed to him on a very deep level. He was approaching late middle age and had yet to do anything even vaguely exciting with his life. And while managing the drug trade occasionally posed him with ethical dilemmas, the paycheck that he was drawing from T&S was generous enough that he could afford not to think about it too hard.

With time, Krohn's common-sense approach to the manufacture and distribution of pigment landed him one of the top-level positions in the pigment chain based out of eastern Turkey. Krohn himself is German, but he has a long history of working with Turkish manufacturers, and he has a number of Turkish employees willing to make a little extra money on the side. By traveling back to Turkey from time to time and acting as overseers for Krohn, they enable their employer to keep an eye on his most lucrative business.

Image: Lugar Krohn is a pleasant-looking German man in early 40s. He has dark, wavy hair, blue eyes and a polite, dignified manner in all he does. He wears expensive business suits and acts the gentleman at all times.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Computer 2, Drive 3, Empathy 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 4, Leadership 4, Linguistics 3, Medicine 1, Politics 4, Security 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4

Nature: Architect

Willpower: 8

Equipment: .38 Special. Krohn also rarely goes anywhere without a retinue of heavily armed bodyguards.

MYANMAR

Without a doubt, Myanmar is unique. There is no other nation on Earth that is as friendly to the tourism and drug industries and so brutal to everyone else.

It is, first of all, the largest producer of opium in the world. It also rewards businesses promoting tourism with all manner of juicy government contracts, and high-rise hotels are popping up all over the capital city of Yangon.

Unfortunately for the average citizen of Myanmar, unless you're a drug lord, a tourist attractor or a member of the secret police, you're considered expendable.

Illustrative of Myanmar's approach to the "war on drugs" is the treatment received by the drug baron Khun Sa (whose name translates as "Prince of Death"). When he turned himself over to the Myanmar authorities in 1996, Khun Sa was responsible for supplying half of the heroin imported into the United States. His grim punishment was a luxurious hotel and real-estate empire, a concession to run the bus system of Yangon, a sprawling villa, four cars, 10 personal assistants, a private doctor and a military escort everywhere he went. Furthermore,





the generals in charge of his “imprisonment” granted him control over the nation’s meth labs, where Khun Sa’s men coat methamphetamine with chocolate so the kids will get hooked on the stuff more readily.

This in a nation where unauthorized possession of a fax machine, modem or walkie-talkie brings a prison term of several years. The military junta ruling the country continues to crack down on free thought and free communication. Citizens are forced to work three days a month for the government for free, secret police are ubiquitous, and the death penalty is liberally applied.

Needless to say, Nyunt Myo Han has a remarkably easy time of it as the region’s pigment lord. The secret police guarding the pigment farms show him all the respect he could ask for.

Nyunt Myo Han is a survivor of the harsh purges that took place in 1988 when a coup brought down the government of Burma and resulted in the creation of the nation of Myanmar. Before being contacted by Terrel & Squib, Han ran an import-export business in Yangon (formerly Rangoon). When T&S bluntly offered him a position as a pigment grower, he jumped at the chance. Very few people in Myanmar are treated better than drug lords.

Han finds the role of pigment baron boring, however. He likes the idea of being an outlaw in a country such as Mexico or Turkey, but there’s simply no struggle in the drug business in Myanmar, and he finds it tedious. Only two things keep Han from retiring his position: the concern that he might know so much that his life would be forfeit the moment he announced his intention to quit the business and a deep fascination with the supernatural. Unlike many of the producers of pigment, Han has paid close attention to rumors of its “ghost-vision” effects. Furthermore, he has tried pigment on several occasions, and he has seen ghosts himself, specifically the Spectres in the fields where the drug is grown. He has nightmares now because of what he’s seen, and he is terrified that he might, somehow, be destined to become one of the feral Spectres sacrificed to the pigment plants.

Terrel & Squib have no idea that Han has put two and two together. Were the company to learn that Han knows about the Spectres, it would kill him in a heartbeat. The biggest secret of pigment’s manufacture is the addition of Spectre ichor, and with what he’s seen, Han could potentially figure out that secret.

COLOMBIA

Federico Peralto was once an agent in the Colombian anti-drug agency. Cash rich, thanks to the American government’s constant flow of money into anti-drug efforts, the agency began getting sloppy and ineffectual. Peralto, fearing that his public-service record was soon going to take a nosedive due to the incompetence of his office at large, retired and went into consulting. Noth-

ing could ever be proved, but some of his clients may have worked for the cocaine-production cartels. Peralto would never tell his clients anything that he had learned *directly* from his time working for the government, but he would willingly explain to them how the government thought and what tactics it might be inclined to use in certain situations.

Señor Peralto’s ethical flexibility put him number one on the list when Terrel & Squib was looking for a connection to the drug trade in Colombia. Bishop figured, correctly, that the soil and climate of Colombia would serve beautifully for cultivating pigment plants, and the money has been flowing freely ever since.

MEXICO

Just south of the American border, in Tijuana, Consuela DelaCruz calls the shots in Mexico’s pigment-farming operations. DelaCruz has dual citizenship in both Mexico and the United States, and she has residences in both countries. DelaCruz has an MBA from the UCLA Graduate School of Management. From her Los Angeles bungalow, DelaCruz watches over the importation of the drug and makes sure that bribes are paid where they need to be paid. She spends most of her time in her mansion in Tijuana, however, from where she makes frequent trips to the United States to coordinate with new buyers and discuss the best methods of smuggling pigment across the border.

THE NEWEST POISON

Pigment can already be delivered in more ways than most drugs currently available. It can be swallowed, injected or inhaled. And now, it can be applied to the skin. While the original version of pigment was typically taken in pill form, Terrel & Squib has developed a powerful variant form of the drug contained in a tattoo patch.

The drug operates just like regular pigment does, with a few special qualities. First, the high from the drug has a longer duration. Second, once applied, the “tattoo” remains wet and can be transferred to others by touch. It begins as a solid black design, often tribal in nature or using a popular character or icon. When first applied, it has a concentrated high that lasts far longer than the injected or inhaled versions, and slightly longer than the pill form. Each time someone touches the tattoo, some of the drug bleeds off onto the next person, giving them a rush as well (though nothing compared to that experienced by the person wearing the original tattoo). As the tattoo is transferred to others, the high experienced by the original wearer diminishes as well, and the longer this goes on, the more diluted the high the receiver gets until the tattoo is totally dissipated.

The “node,” or original user, retains the largest dose of the drug and can dispense it multiple times.



Eventually, the tattoo becomes too diluted to mark or influence anyone. By that point, however, multiple folks have a mild jones for the drug.

The pigment variant's special effect of anchoring a soul to the Wastelands and allowing projection is due entirely to the Spectre ichor used in its creation. This would be bad enough as it stands, but the tattoo patch is even worse. The Spectre ichor contained in the tattoo patches is still self-aware to a slight degree, and it *wants* to be spread around as much as possible. As a result, "tattooed pigs" (slang for pigment users who commonly apply the tattoo patches) experience heightened euphoria and sexual desire — they just want to touch and rub up against everyone in their vicinity. "Trading ink" — sex between two people both using the patches — results in an ebb and flow of euphoria, a rush that comes and goes in time with the user's pulse.

The authorities haven't learned to watch for the patch tattoos yet, even as the volume of patch tattoos begins to compete with other delivery mechanisms in popularity. When the tattoos do come to the attention of the authorities, it's likely to be for one main reason: The biggest consumers of the patch tattoos are adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19. Taking pigment no longer has the stigma of shooting up, snorting or even taking a pill. It's now as easy as putting on a tattoo from a box of Cracker Jacks.

The authorities won't be in the dark about this new delivery system for long. Once the underage casualties start mounting, it will be a very short time until the police make the connection. Until then, though, a lot of kids are destroying both their lives and their afterlives to get a tattoo high.

ANATOMY OF A PIGMENT CULT: THE TEMPLE OF THE MOTHER OF VISION

This section provides an in-depth look at the Temple of the Mother of Vision, including a look at the techniques the cult uses to attract members. Other pigment cults use similar techniques, but their particular front story (or theology, as they're likely to call it) can vary a great deal.

TEMPTERS

A known and oddly familiar sight around college campuses, rave sites and in the neighborhoods of cities where the lost congregate, the followers of the Temple of the Mother of Vision offer a new hope to those who are tired of the world as it appears to be. They offer

insight, knowledge, enlightenment and a new sense of wonder in a world that seems largely dead otherwise.

Some of the wonder they provide through their philosophy of the Mother of Vision, a vaguely Wiccan theology of a great and powerful mother figure, a figure of great primordial power who is due to return with treasures of insight and understanding for all who recognize and revere Her. As an initial token offering to those of faith, the Mother of Vision offers the holy communion of "the food of wisdom," known on the street by its more common name, pigment.

Consequently, the members of the Temple of the Mother of Vision fall along a broad range from those seeking true spiritual enlightenment to those hanging around waiting for free drugs.

It hasn't always been like this.

ORIGINS OF THE CULT

Shortly after pigment became available, a woman named Elizabeth Gibbons, already prone to "mystical visions" (though very few of her acquaintances believed she was anything but a bit unhinged), tried the drug. She expected an easy high. Instead, she saw amazing things. She saw the dead, she saw devils, and she saw a vast star field that whispered things to her.

When Gibbons first tried telling people about her vision, their original assessment — that she was nuts — didn't change much. Gibbons was frustrated at first by their lack of understanding, but then, it occurred to her that she was approaching things entirely from the wrong direction. She was trying to give them *her* experience, when the best way to approach the situation would be to let them have their own experience of the great force she saw. So, she would talk people into trying pigment (or, on rare occasions, slip it into their food). Being on the drug changed everything. While no one else saw the great force out among the stars, they did see the ghosts and the devils (more properly, Spectres) just on the other side of the Shroud, and suddenly, people were much more willing to listen to Gibbon's interpretation of the world.

In the space of a few months, Gibbons cobbled together a group of would-be mystics and visionaries. They met at her house once a month to take pigment and to compare notes on their experiences. When they realized that they were all seeing the same things on the other side of the Shroud, people began paying attention to the other things Gibbons said. More importantly, they began to view her as something of a spiritual leader.

Gibbon's odd little group wound up making it into the newspapers (with a headline reading "Woman Guides Group to Wisdom"), and not long after that, she was visited by a "presence" that called itself Nacrael. This presence told her that she had been among the first to



see the truth of the Mother of Vision and that she would do well to bring her knowledge and vision to as many people as possible.

In a short amount of time, feeling that she was finally reaping the benefits of a spiritually active life, Gibbons became suddenly very driven. Pigment appeared randomly in places all over her house: in the cupboards, in her sock drawer, in her purse. She took this as a miracle, and she began providing pigment to those initiates who showed a real interest in the return of the Mother of Vision.

Those who were also able to see the Great Mother were recognized as the chosen, and they were given leadership positions as Gibbon's little enterprise became a legitimate and government-recognized church. In time, a hierarchy evolved within this organization, and it became intent on attracting new members.

Three years later, Elizabeth Gibbons is a wealthy woman who spends most of her time meditating on the return of the Mother (i.e., wasted out of her mind on pigment and talking with ghosts). On those rare occasions when she chooses to make an appearance, it's normally to make some vague (and often somewhat disturbing) statement about the Mother's imminent return and the drastic change Her great presence will bring. The day-to-day running of the Temple of the Mother of Wisdom is handled by the other high-ranking members, who seem to have a much more businesslike approach to running the Temple.

THE PURPOSES IT SERVES

The Temple of the Mother of Vision serves several purposes, some benign, some not. The face the church presents to the world gives one account of its business, but its many hidden agendas trail behind it like a tangle of roots.

Initially, the cult claims to potential members that it seeks to share the wisdom and the lost mysteries of the Mother of Vision, an intimidating but ultimately benevolent primordial goddess figure. In the early stages, the cult introduces candidates to the theology of the Mother of Vision. The cult emphasizes how the sterilized modern age has stolen the magic from people's lives and left them little more than television-watching consumer automatons. True understanding of the primordial underpinnings of the universe has gone completely underground, and those who seek to reveal it are considered dangerous to the status quo. The secret to getting the most out of life, says the Temple, is to get in touch with the primordial self, to master the mysteries of birth and death and to reclaim the knowledge that was lost.

At the next level of initiation, the cult provides its members with a quick and easy way to access the

mysteries of death: in a grand ceremony, complete with ceremonial drumming and exquisite ritual garb, the ranking cultists provide the initiates with the "vision blessing of the Mother" (i.e., pigment) and tells them to look into the void. As the drug alters the new initiates' senses, they are told to recount all that they see. Most claim to see ghosts or other strange, frightening creatures. Those who claim to see a vast, shadowy figure approaching the world from some dark beyond are marked for quick upward mobility within the cult. The rest get to climb the ladder to the different degrees of initiation at the standard pace and at the standard cost structure.

The "vision blessing" is the Temple's core ceremony. Based on that practice alone, the Temple of the Mother of Vision functions as a key distribution network, resulting in many new pigment users a year. Depending on whom one talks to, the use of pigment as part of a religious ceremony may be less legally actionable than the use of pigment as a party drug at a rave or similar event, and so, the cultists tend to be a little more direct in the way they push the drug.

Secondarily, the Temple is a means of finding psychically sensitive people. The Temple of the Mother of Vision hopes to collect a group of individuals sensitive to the events taking place on the other side of the Shroud. These gifted individuals are often capable of seeing more than the standard initiates can while under the influence of pigment, and they are honored as being "more blessed by the Mother" than the rest and kept separate from the "commoners" as much as possible.

HOW PIGMENT FIGURES IN

Pigment plays a variety of roles in the cult depending on how far one is along the initiation path. At the basic level, pigment is considered a "vision blessing," a sort of holy communion, a formal reception of the ancient knowledge of the Mother of Vision. Most initiates in the cult never advance beyond that point, and many are content just to have a convenient source of pigment. The cult doesn't actually care if its members believe the theology surrounding pigment. As long as members are partaking of "the wisdom of the Mother," then all is well.

At the next key level of initiation, the cult explains that the Mother seeks to reward those who are open to Her knowledge, and to them shall go the rewards of eternal life, and their spirits shall never be forced to take their leave of the world. The cult is half right in this regard. The souls of those who make heavy use of pigment do not move on, but stay in the material world, out of view except to those who can see ghosts. How much that delivers on the cult's promises of "eternal life"



depends on the outlook of the faithful. The cult has no problems passing off such half measures as eternal life (especially when the audience is so high on pigment that none of its members can formulate a coherent sentence, much less ask critical questions).

But even that's not the entire truth. The leadership of the Temple of the Mother of Vision believes that something big and potentially cataclysmic is going to take place soon and that souls should be waiting around the physical world as guides, as translators or, potentially, as sacrifices. This knowledge is absolutely secret, however, and none beneath the eighth degree of initiation knows anything about such things (for more on ranks, see the section on "The Hierarchy," below).

CULT RECRUITMENT: FINDING THE LOST

Satisfied or happy people are inappropriate targets for cult recruiters. A person who is content has no impetus to make changes in his life, particularly not the enormous, radical kinds of change requested by the Temple of the Mother of Vision. The ideal target for recruitment is young, lonely and questioning certain aspects of her life. College freshmen are ideal candidates for recruitment. Not only have they recently left the comfort and safety of their families, they're also likely to be questioning many of the shibboleths of their previous existence. They may be questioning the faith they grew up with, and they're likely not to have a solid network of friends.

The cult rents storefronts out of which it does the vast portion of its recruiting business. Recruitment is a multistage process. The truths of the Manifesting Angel are not easily or rapidly understood, and the cult uses different degrees of initiation. The initial steps on the path to enlightenment are easy and free, while the higher degrees of enlightenment cost the faithful. The highest levels are quite expensive.

In addition to their storefronts in college neighborhoods and the seedier sections of town, recruiters frequently go to college campuses to find just these lost souls. At various fairs on college campuses and the like, they may set up booths next to the likes of Campus Crusade for Christ to set themselves up as an alternative to the boring religion of the students' parents.

The recruiters normally cast themselves in a very positive light. They'll lure the student with promises of many friends, fun times and, of course, great spiritual understanding. For a lonely student, few things could be more tempting.

FIRST CONTACT

If a potential recruit reads the group's materials, he may be curious enough to attend an initial meeting. More members of the cult than actual recruits com-

monly attend such meetings. These individuals pretend that they're also thinking about joining and pretend to be breathless with excitement about what the church has to offer. The net result is that the actual recruits are left with a vague notion that, if they don't get involved with the church, they'll be missing out on something amazing and highly worthwhile.

Attractive members of the cult are assigned to potential recruits of the opposite sex. While the cult member doesn't actively suggest that joining the cult will get a prospective recruit laid, the elements are there for the candidate to draw his own conclusions.

The cult's primary goal at this point is to isolate the potential recruit from his friends, family and those who might support his old belief or value system. To this end, the recruiter tries to get the candidate to attend a "joyful retreat" at some distant campground or similar environment. At that point, the cult feeds the candidate the fundamentals of the Temple of the Mother of Vision, specifically, that the living can touch the world of the spirit very simply, with nothing more than a taste of the great enlightener (pigment).

The cult downplays the notion of pigment as a drug and highlights its functions as a "catalyst for spiritual awakening." The cult members control the tone of the events, the activities the candidates take part in and even the candidates' sleeping time. Inevitably, the events of the retreat run late into the night and start early in the morning, ostensibly to pack as much into one weekend as possible, but in reality, to make sure that the candidates are sleep deprived and less capable of thinking critically or arguing with the recruiters.

THOUGHT REFORM: THE CULT TECHNIQUE

Cults have long used the same basic techniques to recruit and retain members. The process of thought reform (also known in some circles as "brainwashing") is a studied and scientific method of stripping away the will and personality of a person and molding him into a perfect specimen of the cult ideology. Many cult leaders and recruiters may be unaware of the names of the methods listed below, but effective cult leaders employ them all. The following methods and subsets are among the more popular methods of gaining control over followers. They should give you an idea of how the cult might work on the characters (or their friends or loved ones).

• **Milieu Control:** Milieu, or environment, control is a tactic by which a cult attempts to manipulate every aspect of a target's world and life, from what he reads to who he talks with to, in particularly effective cases, the very thoughts in his head. In its most basic form, milieu control is nothing more than advanced peer pressure. It's natural human tendency when surrounded by a group to go with the flow and avoid making comments



METHODS AND MADNESS

Members of a crucible might believe that they can easily resist the indoctrination techniques used by the cults, in particular love-bombing, and subject themselves to indoctrination without realizing how dangerous the situation is. The cults' methods wear down the targets' Willpower, making them susceptible to the cult leader's suggestions and "advice," and even the most strong-willed characters may find themselves hard-pressed to resist for a protracted period. Some of the main techniques used by the cults are:

Love-bombing: In this technique, a group of "welcomers" seeks to overwhelm the resistance of the inductee with excessive praise, flattery and attempts to empathize with the target. Its strength is in the "pack" method — the welcomers outnumber the inductee by a large margin (quite often five or six to one) and, thus, give the target little respite while none of them is, individually, overbearing. In game terms, this technique is represented by an extended, resisted roll between the target and the group (made every 15 minutes), the inductee's player rolling Willpower (difficulty 7) and the Storyteller rolling the welcomers' Manipulation + Empathy, pooling their successes. When the net achieved by the welcomers exceeds the inductee's Willpower, the inductee loses a point of temporary Willpower, and the number of successes achieved by the welcomers decreases to 0. If target's Willpower drops to 0 in this manner, his ego collapses, and the cultists succeed in their indoctrination. The inductee may also attempt to stop the process by walking out of the cult, though once the love-bombing has begun, this attempt requires the inductee's player to make a separate Willpower roll (difficulty 8).

Intimidation: Although hardly subtle, threats are a common method of retaining control over cult members, be it an overt threat to withhold something (food, drugs, sex), a whispered hint that a secret might be revealed or even just an intimation of physical violence. The methods used vary from character to character, though the mechanics are generally the same. The defender's player rolls Willpower, opposed by aggressor's Manipulation + Intimidation. If the aggressor wins, the target loses a point of temporary Willpower. The difficulty of both rolls is 7.

Diet/environment management: One of the most insidious methods, controlling the diet (and, thus, body chemistry), sleep patterns, temperature and the like provides cults with a method of keeping their

adherents compliant. Each day, the player must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 8). If the roll fails, the character loses a point of Willpower (two points in the event of a botch).

Peer pressure: Most cults are, internally at least, conformist cultures. Any actions by a character within the cult who seeks to buck the rules after having her Willpower reduced to 0 (during indoctrination or love-bombing) require either a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or a point of Willpower to carry out.

Addiction: One of the surest ways to ensure control over its members is to addict them to a substance that only the cult can supply. Pigment is ideal for this, as it is intrinsic to the cults' activities and highly addictive. Characters can obtain it outside of the cult via a plethora of street dealers, but knowing precisely where to get it — or even precisely what they are addicted to in some cases — is a challenge for many cultists (the members of First Step are an obvious exception to this, in all likelihood being intimately linked to the city's drug culture). Even the initial symptoms of withdrawal likely cause great concern among the cultists, in particular to members of O'Reilly's church, who have no idea that their sacrament has been spiked, prompting many to flee back to the cult — which is precisely the reaction the Flatliners intended.

Deprogramming: The flip side of cult tactics involves overcoming a cult's indoctrination, a technique known as deprogramming. In some regards, this process is like overcoming an addiction and requires a combination of time and willpower as the deprogrammer works against the mental conditioning. This process requires a resisted roll (made daily) of the cultist's Willpower versus the deprogrammer's Manipulation + Empathy (or Manipulation + Medicine with a specialty in Psychiatry). The deprogrammer must achieve net successes equal to the target's Willpower to free her of the indoctrination, though the ex-cultist may backslide into her indoctrination if presented with an opportunity. The only way to avoid this is for the deprogrammer to achieve a number of successes equal to (the target's Willpower $\times$ 4) and for the ex-cultist to maintain a temporary Willpower score of at least 2 or to avoid backsliding for a full month. Even after that, the ex-cultist's Willpower is one lower for purposes of resisting brainwashing and mental powers (such as Unearthly Repose) used in conjunction with cult rhetoric. This penalty persists until the player raises the character's Willpower rating with experience points.



or committing actions that offend those around you. Over time, this level of control is used to wear away any cynicism present in the target, normalizing, in the victim's mind, ideas and actions that he once would have found abhorrent or absurd. Invariably, milieu control is used to engineer an "us against the world" attitude, making a target unwilling even to consider leaving the cult. It's similar to a stern parent raising a child — with absolute control over a person's physical and intellectual life, it is only a matter of time before you can bring that person over to your way of thinking.

"Me?" she said. "Oh, I don't believe in ghosts."

The group looked at her in tandem, horrified.

"What do you mean you don't believe in ghosts, Mary? It's our knowledge and understanding that there is life on the other side that unites us," said Peter in his calmest voice.

"Oh, well, what I meant was I didn't used to believe in ghosts."

The group sighed in relief, and Mary reminded herself to believe in ghosts from now on or to keep quiet about it.

• **Mystical Manipulation:** Mystical manipulation is usually used on second-level cult members, those who have already been recruited into the group. These neophyte members are subtly influenced so that they "spontaneously" find themselves acting in the group's interest. These "spontaneous" actions, actually planned by higher-ranking cult members, are pointed to as proof of the new member's enlightenment.

Mystical manipulation also describes the process of deifying the cult leader (either as a god, alien or other "higher being"). Once victims are convinced of the enlightenment or godhood of the leader, they are tied to the group by that leader convincing them that he and only he holds the key to enlightenment. Once cult members are convinced they are acting in the service of a god and that only by serving this god will they be saved (or enlightened or brought great wealth), it's simple for them to justify lying to new recruits. Mystical manipulation allows recruiters and cult members to internally justify what they subconsciously know to be wrong or evil actions. Anything is worth doing if it is the will of "God."

"I can't do it."

"Come on. You have to. He wants to be able to see the world just like we do. He deserves at least that much."

"Come on, Paul. The kid's only nine years old. He's too young to be taking this stuff."

"Are you thankful for the gifts we've received from Mother Gibbons?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe that you've gained enlightenment from the things she's said to us?"

"Yeah."

"Then how can you put your own spiritual enlighten-

ment on the line now by refusing to perform a duty for her and for the Temple? She would never ask you to do anything wrong. You know that."

"Okay, fair enough. I'll give the kid the vision blessing. But I'm sitting right next to him after that."

"That's fine, Tom. I'm sure the Mother would want you to do just that."

• **The Demand for Purity:** An extension of milieu control, the demand for purity emphasizes black-and-white thinking and an us-versus-them mentality. The cult stresses the differences between the absolute good and purity of the group and the absolute evil and impurity of everything else. Members must constantly change and evolve in order to conform to the group norm. Failure to do so is indicative of a lack of purity, which is openly criticized or punished by group leaders, causing shame and guilt to grow within the members. When sufficiently chastised, members do anything to regain acceptance or praise.

"Sheila, if we don't provide others with the blessings of vision, who will?"

"I just don't know about giving all this stuff to those raver kids, though."

"Look, you're at a critical point in your enlightenment process right now. You can either side with the Temple and all we stand for, or you can stay with the blind and the impure. What's it going to be?"

She sighed. "Okay, I'll do it. I don't know what came over me. Thanks for the guidance, James."

"Hey, no problem. That's what I'm here for."

• **Confession:** Confession, in this case, goes far beyond the more benign forms found in ordinary religious, legal and therapeutic expressions. Many cult members become almost addicted to the act of confession, often making up sins as a way of saying "Look how far I've come." The confession itself is usually done in a small group. The member confesses to a cult-labeled sin, which is followed by criticism from the group and self-criticism from the confessor who now "sees the error of his ways," with a thrust toward accepting the wrong behavior and working toward change. There's a competitive slant to confession as members attempt to one-up each other as a way of showing their absolute surrender to the group. The more they accuse themselves, they think, the more of a right they have to accuse others. Due to this dynamic, it often seems that the cult's most devoted adherents were once the greatest sinners.

"I used to think Mother Gibbons was just a whacked-out old junkie."

The room grew silent. One woman let out a small gasp of horror.

"I know. That's how lost I was. Since then, I've striven to look more closely at the wisdom she reveals, and I've seen



that I was the one who was out of his head, not her. I can't tell you how much happier I am these days. I can't even begin to tell you what a great thing the Temple has been for me."

• **Loading the Language:** Human beings think in language (try to have a full thought without using words). By controlling and altering that language, a cult can control how its members think. Gibberish, repetitive phrases and elitist jargon help to: a) set the group off from the rest of the world (they don't speak the same way we do) and b) discourage free thought or criticism of any kind. The newspeak of 1984, with its rapidly shrinking dictionary, is, of course, the best known example of "loading the language" brought to extremes. The basic human need to conform and the desire to understand those around us leads many to willingly adopt cult lingo. Cultists who eventually leave the group often have difficulty readapting to the speech patterns of the real world.

Cults use additional broken down methods and sub-methods (many of which overlap), as well as different ways of classifying thought control. To oversimplify, effective thought control requires subtle and skillful manipulation of a target's environment, diet, mind and emotions. When fully indoctrinated, a cult member does not so think much in terms of "I" as in terms of "we," fully convinced that the cult is the purest and most truthful group in the world and that any criticism of its doctrine is not the fault of the cult, but the fault of the criticizer. At this point, even the most skilled deprogrammer has difficulty bringing the cultist back from the breach.

"Hey, a new batch of the vision blessing came in today. You want to try some?" Peter asked.

"Oh, man, yeah. I've had a crappy day trying to talk to recruits at the mall. I could really use some pig... some of the, uh, vision blessing."

"The Mother appreciates your tending to the blind. Have a good evening." And with that, Peter tossed a baggy full of black powder to his roommate and smiled.

THE HIERARCHY

The Temple of the Mother of Vision technically has 10 degrees of initiation, but only nine of those are accessible to mortal candidates. The 10th degree of wisdom is attainable only by those who become one with the angel Nacrael (which happens only when a member dies).

The first degree of initiation includes those who have read the Temple's theology and find it interesting.

To reach the second degree of initiation, a new member must go on a Temple retreat for at least a weekend and learn the ways of the group. After the retreat, it's generally clear whether an individual is a good candidate for Mother's enlightenment or not.

At the third degree of initiation, the initiate is given the blessing of vision, i.e., he participates in the ritual wherein he partakes of pigment and shares with the group what he has seen. This is the level at which most Temple laity stop their advancement through the church. At this level, members are expected to pay a tithe to the Temple in the form of time recruiting new members or money (10 percent of the member's annual income).

The fourth degree of initiation involves mastering the basic exoteric theology of the Temple of the Mother of Vision in preparation for recruiting new members. Those members who want to take up full-time residence in one of the temples (communes owned and paid for by the cult) and pursue the Mother's teachings full time in an effort to become a "vision monk" (or "vision sister") are expected to sell all their worldly belongings and donate the proceeds to the cult. While not many members do this, those who do are utterly at the mercy of the cult and are often chosen to perform the organization's less pleasant duties. A vision monk who refuses a task assigned to him by the Temple is denied pigment — a potent threat considering that, by the time a member becomes a vision monk, he has such a pigment habit that the withdrawal symptoms are *extremely* unpleasant (see p. 137). Vision monks are provided for well, however: So long as they perform the cult's dirty work, they are rewarded with ample pigment, plenty of complex esoteric teaching and, for good measure, an array of sexual partners in the form of younger initiates seeking the true "primal wisdom."

The fifth degree of initiation involves a "management" position in the cult. The member may be put in charge of an important project, a recruit drive or a temple. To attain this level of initiation, members must be unusually intelligent, attractive and charismatic. It does not behoove the Temple to promote the dregs of society or anyone who would not reflect well on the organization: The exception to this rule is those individuals who show a pronounced degree of psychic sensitivity. Sensitives are allowed to advance to this degree, but they are then placed in special positions where initiates of the sixth or seventh degree can discretely monitor them.

When a member reaches the sixth degree of initiation, he is placed in charge of a team of fifth degrees, and he is made responsible for recruitment in a particular geographical region (e.g., a particular neighborhood or a specific college campus). He is also given a budget as well as income goals — based on the size and profile of his region — that need to be met.

At the seventh degree, adepts of the Temple are allowed to officiate over the vision blessing ceremony. A great deal of study and apprenticeship is involved in arriving at this level of initiation. Members must have a



great deal of charisma to attain this level in the Temple of the Mother of Vision. They are also privy to many, though by no means all, of the cult's dirty little secrets. Those who make it this far, however, are expected to be sufficiently indoctrinated, or just so loyal to the Temple, that they may be trusted with some of the knowledge of the Temple's ugly side without taking that knowledge to anyone who shouldn't know it. Also, at this level, the repercussions for disloyalty become grave. Those who betray the Temple after attaining this degree of initiation may find themselves prone to shockingly bad luck as the cult's "guardians on the other side" take care of the Temple's business.

The eighth degree of initiation comes to those who take risks to help distribute the "vision blessings" of the Mother — that is to say, those who help organize the distribution of pigment through the cult's various storefronts and assorted "congregations." The loyalty of those reaching the eighth degree of initiation is tested a great deal, particularly during the early days of their holding that degree. The amount of power and money that an eighth degree is responsible for is significant. Eighth degrees are also responsible for overseeing a number of the regions run by sixth degrees. One eighth degree, for example, might be in charge of all the sixth degrees in a particular state.

The ninth degree of initiation contains only three members: Elizabeth Gibbons (the cult's founder), Frida Stone and Richard Haskins. Stone is a psychologist guiding the cult's recruitment efforts, and Haskins is the man with the connections to the pigment. Gibbons is still responsible for writing the cult's spiritual doctrine, although everything she writes goes through Stone first. Gibbons is an extremely sensitive psychic, and the vast quantities of pigment she's consuming give her a great deal of insight into the spirit world. With the exception of the messages that Gibbons is being fed through Nacrael, the material she writes shows a great deal of insight and, frighteningly, prescience. When the time comes for her to become a martyr, the material she is writing now will do her proud.

At the top of the hierarchy of the Temple of the Mother of Vision is Nacrael, the Manifesting Angel. It is through Nacrael's wisdom that the enlightenment catalyst was sent at this dark time as a light in an otherwise dark world. Through the blessing of the enlightenment catalyst, mankind will have a reliable method of reaching out and touching the spirit world.

THE ETHOS

Among the majority of the faithful, the view of the cult is "quiet on the outside, crazy on the inside." In public or in places where cult members may be discussing the church within earshot of the uninitiated public, the only acceptable way of discussing the Temple of the

Mother of Vision is as a humble group seeking wisdom and enlightenment. Any interview granted to the media unquestionably takes such an approach.

During church functions, however, the philosophy is vastly different. The sterilized modern world is spiritually bankrupt, and true wisdom can only be gained through getting in touch with humanity's basic drives. Translation: At the Temple's retreats, most members consume large quantities of pigment and get in touch with each other, often in groups of three or four. Only by knowing transgression can one truly know virtue.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

At first glance, the Temple of the Mother of Vision appears to have an awful lot of rules largely imitating more liberal Christian sects: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you, do not kill, etc. This has more to do with meeting people's expectations of a religion than anything else. The only rule that is actually enforced is "Do not talk about the church at inappropriate times or in inappropriate places." Inappropriate is a loose enough word that it gives the cult the advantage in dealing with those members it wants to punish. The only time it is explicitly acceptable to talk about the Temple of the Mother of Vision is during a recruitment rally. Aside from that, there are many times when discussing the church even in vague terms it is considered extremely bad form.

THOSE DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS

For all its outward emphasis on spiritual enlightenment, the Temple of the Mother of Vision is riddled with moral and ethical transgression.

Arguably, the worst of these problems is the church's real reasons for distributing pigment. The rationale behind anchoring the souls of the faithful to the physical world has nothing to do with giving them an approximation of immortality. On the contrary, it's all about ensuring a fine crop of fresh souls for the devouring when the Mother of Vision arrives.

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

The dogma of the cult is only reinforced by the fact that the members of the church can sense and feel the Temple's invisible "defenders of the faith." The cult has retained a handful of spooks of various types through its highly persuasive "Manifesting Angel" Nacrael (the Flatliner Jason Hein). Only Temple members of the sixth degree of initiation and up know of the existence of the Temple's ghost and projector agents and only the upper echelons of the hierarchy (as determined by the Storyteller) can make an appeal for the spooks to carry out some mission on the Temple's behalf.



CROSSING THE CHURCH

The cult is well aware that the possibility exists for great compromise should a highly initiated member decide to break from the church and begin revealing some of the cult's less attractive secrets. To that end, it makes sure that members know from early in the initiation process that "the faithless" who fall away from the Temple of the Mother of Vision are considered worthless individuals, blasphemous and lacking in all spiritual value. Occasionally, darker threats surface against those whose lack of faith comes into question. Any such threats, however, are so vague and so carefully worded that it never seems like an actual threat until later when the member has a chance to give the words some thought.

The reprisals from crossing the Temple increase with the rank of the initiate. An initiate of the first through third degrees doesn't know enough to cause any harm to the Temple, so no reprisals are necessary at that level. Starting with the vision monks at the fourth degree of initiation, however, the cult *does* levy reprisals — and fairly unpleasant ones. Depending on the degree of transgression, reprisals can range anywhere from depriving the individual of social interaction to a fatal accident. As the initiate works through the ranks of the Temple, the potential reprisals grow increasingly worse. Any member of the sixth degree or higher who betrays the cult disappears or suffers an inexplicable (but always fatal) accident. The spooks backing the cult see to that.

THE MANIFESTING ANGEL - JASON HEIN

Many of the worst threats made toward suspect members can and are backed up by the Temple of the Mother of Vision's secret weapon, a powerful ghost who acts as the organization's spiritual patron and enforcer.



Before his role as a guinea pig in Project Flatline for Orpheus, Hein was a high-stakes con artist. After talking his way out of several convictions, a judge finally sentenced him to a long term in a maximum-security prison. When his cellmate attempted to rape him, Hein killed him and was sentenced to death for it. When Flatline gave Hein the chance to escape as a ghost, he took it readily. Hein considers himself one of Uriah Bishop's key lieutenants. As such, he received a starring role in the major production called the Temple of the Mother of Vision. Since the Temple was founded two years ago, Hein has been the behind-the-scenes manipulator of the cult as the angel Nacrael. Sometimes, that requires him to utter cryptic messages in Elizabeth Gibbons' ear. Other times, it involves setting Spectres on those who have fallen away from the Temple. It also requires constant communication with Bishop to keep the pigment flowing.

Image: Hein is a tall, slender spirit, with a boyish, attractive face and luminous eyes. When manifested, he moves with deliberate grace and glows with heavenly radiance.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Drive 2, Empathy 4, Etiquette 4, Expression 4, Leadership 3, Performance 3, Security 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 5

Shade: Wisp

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Trickster

Willpower: 9

Vitality: 7

Spite: 6

Offensive Abilities: Beckon Relic, Bedlam, Forebode, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose, Wail

GHOST STORIES

Now that we've provided you with some of the dark and shocking secrets of the world of Orpheus, it's time to let you have your wicked way with them. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where you weave the information we've just given you into dark and vivid tales to enlighten, stun and horrify your players.

Note: These stories are not just throwaway adventures to keep your players busy until the next supplement comes out. We want you to involve your players as fully as possible in the unfolding madness. Their characters shouldn't be spectators — as the world changes, the players should feel as though their characters helped to change it (or, perhaps, failed to change it in the right ways). Pull them into the action in as many ways as you



can. Give them concrete details in your descriptions that put them in the story. Let them really smell the spicy aroma of pigment. Let them see the hive full of decomposing corpses. Let them hear the persuasive oratory of the preacher of the pigment cult.

Without further ado, we provide you with no fewer than seven amazing ghost stories.

MISSION NAME: MEETING TERRENCE GREEN

BACKGROUND

The spook known as Terrence Green is behind the midnight broadcasts of Radio Free Death. He keeps his eye out for supernatural events in the characters' city and does his best to keep the local ghosts and projectors apprised of what kind of badness might be coming down the pike. He also happens to know a great deal about the enemy. In fact, the enemy thinks he knows far too much about them. Consequently, they send a team of NextWorld mercenaries after him.

Luckily, the characters arrive on the scene just in time to provide some back up. Not only does the characters' presence rout the attack on Green (hopefully), it helps them forge a connection with the astute and well-connected Green (nothing benefits alliances so much as shared enemies).

LOCATION: MORGAN LOFT CONDOMINIUMS

Terrence Green is a clever man, and so, he tries not to make his Radio Free Death broadcasts from the same place every time. On the night the characters run into him, Green is using Broadband Ghost (see p. 99) to make his Radio Free Death broadcast from the roof of the Morgan Loft Condominiums, an upscale and posh building of condos furnished in rich art deco style that caters to high-end yuppies.

Security in the building is tightly enforced, so characters who aren't projecting may have a hard time getting in, much less up to the roof.

HOOKS

The characters may be big fans of Radio Free Death, or they may simply know someone who is, but they (or their friends) hear an RFD broadcast in which Terrence Green, the anonymous host of the show, is asking for assistance to avoid a group of vicious spooks attacking him.

Alternatively, the characters could learn through contacts that NextWorld is planning a strike against Radio Free Death, and they might decide to intervene on Green's behest.

INTEL

This is the mother lode. Terrence Green knows a lot about what's going on. He may not have put all the

pieces together yet, but he's well informed. If the characters help him out of a scrape with NextWorld, Green is likely to be very grateful and very talkative about what he sees going on.

Green believes a number of things: Hives appear to be something large poking its way through the Stormwall. He believes that the ghosts who resulted from the spiked pigment were created for a reason, though he's not clear on just what that reason is. At your discretion, he may also have some *vague* idea of how pigment is manufactured, but he should only tell the characters enough to spark their interest, not enough to answer that particular question for them.

Anything else you want Green to know is fine. This is a good opportunity to fill in gaps in the characters' knowledge if there are important clues they've missed.

THE OPPOSITION

The mercenaries are from NextWorld (see p. 64) and they are used to dealing with targets who are unusually hard to kill. Luckily for the characters, they are expecting to find Green alone (based on their profile of him) and sent only a small force of mercs to take him out. Taking the mercenaries on is still no walk in the park. NextWorld teams are armed well beyond what they actually need for their mission objectives (meaning that the characters can face opposition on both side of the Shroud), and they're also trained to react quickly and effectively to changes in their mission plans. While this is meant only to be a small assassination team, the Storyteller is welcome to increase the number of attackers if he thinks it benefits the story. The mercenaries are really secondary to the most important aspect of this story: the characters making friendly contact with the "celebrity spook" Terrence Green. The crucible shouldn't need to recuperate a great deal before it can focus on him and the intel he provides.

THE BRASS RING

Characters who rescue Terrence Green could have no better ally than the voice behind Radio Free Death. While communication between spooks is one of their major weaknesses when fighting the well-connected Spectres, Green does a good job of keeping the world (or those individuals in it who listen to him) informed about what's unfolding on the other side of the Shroud. Not only does he stay alert and provide what information he knows, other ghosts, eager to help his efforts, keep him informed of what's going on in their area. Green, therefore, is probably the best and most accurate clearinghouse of information the characters do or will have access to. If the characters have missed important bits of the storyline or haven't made certain connections, using Green is the perfect way to remedy such a situation. Green doesn't know everything, obviously, and he shouldn't be used like a *deus ex machina*, but he's the perfect character to provide information that the characters just didn't find.



MISSION NAME: THE TRUTH ABOUT PIGMENT

BACKGROUND

Pigment is far more than the popular club drug it appears to be. The plants used to create pigment are suffused with the ichor of Spectres, granting the drug made from them properties it wouldn't normally have — such as allowing the living to see across the Shroud. Pigment also has a much darker function: It prevents the souls of those who've used it extensively from passing on to their rightful end after death. Pigment users wind up being hues. While this is a terrible predicament for the poor soul stuck in limbo, it's great if you're a Spectre wanting to reap a soul. Consequently, Spectres are an integral part of the pigment trade.

LOCATION: ANY PIGMENT FARM

Any farm where pigment plants are grown is an appropriate setting for this story. The pigment trade extends far and wide around the globe. The characters may have to travel for this one, which may be just what you want as Storyteller if your stories have been getting too dry and need a dash of exoticism to spice them up a bit. The ideal locale for discovering the truth behind pigment would be one of the large pigment farms located outside of the United States (in Mexico, Colombia, Turkey and Myanmar) where feral Spectres maim one another to provide the ichor necessary for the tainting of the pigment plants. The crucible must be extremely resourceful and good with investigation to track the pigment supply back to one of the farms, however. Drug dealers are not lax with security, especially not at the levels at which Terrel & Squib or Uriah Bishop operate. This story, therefore, is likely to be the culmination of several sessions of game play if the characters actually play out the experience of getting to a locale such as Myanmar or Colombia.

HOOKS

If the characters are good at investigative work, they could theoretically follow the flow of pigment back along its distribution lines to one of the major farms.

If the crucible knows anyone who might be considered psychic or sensitive, that individual may have an odd vision — involving open fields of plants, battling Spectres and the drug known as pigment — that might provide enough impetus to push the characters into investigating some of these connections. This approach would obviously be easier if the psychic could also provide some clues as to the whereabouts of these fields, but how much the crucible discovers this easily is up to the Storyteller.

Alternatively, one of the pigment barons, most likely Nyunt Myo Han since he's the only one who's

actually known to have learned the secret of pigment production (described on p. 136), might hear about the characters and offer to exchange all the information he or she knows in exchange for protection from the forces behind the pigment trade (most likely Terrel & Squib, since it controls the Asian pigment farms, but Uriah Bishop could also be exposed if the Storyteller so desires.)

The characters might observe some strange behavior by Spectres — a hunt for feral Spectres in the streets — and then follow the Spectres back to a small warehouse or extensive basement where small amounts of pigment are produced domestically. As they see the sentient Spectres set the feral Spectres on one another amidst the pigment plants, a new sort of realization might suddenly dawn in the characters' minds about just what's entailed in the production of this popular drug.

INTEL

Key to this adventure is the characters realizing what makes pigment do what it does. Without the ichor of Spectres suffusing the pigment plants from the other side, the final drug has none of the supernatural property that pigment is known for (that is, seeing ghosts), nor are the other pharmacological effects (hallucinogenic and narcotic) as pronounced. To make sure that the characters comprehend the full impact of this adventure, you may want to let them either try to cultivate pigment plants on their own or talk to someone who has tried so that the characters are clear that the plants used to make the drug differ from normal plants in some small way that is both crucial to the mystery *and* incredibly difficult to discern.

When the characters actually witness Spectres fighting in the fields of the pigment plants, their players may roll Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8) to note that the plants are somehow absorbing the ichor spilled by the wounded Spectres. Perceptive characters see the Spectres "bleeding" black and brackish ichor as their fellows tear them apart and notice the stems of the plants darkening slightly in color. If a player scores four or more successes, his character notices a peculiar odor in the air — something cloying and sweet but leaving a bitter tang after the initial scent. This odor is the same one that pigment gives off while being "cooked up" before being injected (which the character may or may not recognize).

THE OPPOSITION

Finding out the truth of the nature of pigment production causes the characters to run afoul of a large slice of the adversaries in the game. The characters' immediate adversaries are the various drug dealers and shady types that the characters will need to deal with to get this far. Beyond that, they can wind up in conflict with Uriah Bishop and his Flatliners, Death Merchant mercenaries, rogue cops or FBI or DEA agents and similar opponents.



At the moment of discovering the secret of pigment, the characters' greatest opponents are probably the Spectres watching over the fields. It's up to the Storyteller to decide how tight security is, but the pigment fields are a key element of the enemy's plan, so they are unlikely to be weakly protected. On the living side of the Shroud, gun-toting thugs are likely to be working for the pigment barons. At the Storyteller's discretion, the drug barons may also be using mercenaries to protect their crop and their secrets.

THE BRASS RING

Discovering the truth behind pigment goes a *long* way in helping the characters figure out the larger and more mysterious agenda behind the pigment trade. Learning that Spectres are involved should make them worry. After all, what do Spectres have to gain from getting mortals addicted to a drug, especially a drug that lets them see ghosts? After completing this adventure, the *least* the characters should know is that Spectre ichor is necessary for the production of pigment, that pigment allows mortals to see across the Shroud and that pigment also keeps a spirit grounded in the physical world after death if the deceased died of an overdose or used the drug more than two or three times.

MISSION NAME: PIGMENT CULTS

BACKGROUND

Pigment is far more than just a recreational drug. It's also a means of letting the living connect with the world of the dead (not to mention a way of anchoring the souls of the dead to the physical world). These spiritual elements make it ripe for those who would use the mystical aspects of the drug for their personal gain.

On top of the standard psychotropic effects, pigment allows mortals to see into the world of the dead. Many strong religions have been built on far less.

These pigment cults, however, are just that: cults generated artificially for some purpose other than religious practice. They did not, for the most part, grow organically from the discovery of pigment's unusual abilities. On the contrary, someone with keen insight into both the nature of pigment and the underworld (not to mention the psychology of cults) engineered them.

The connection between these disparate elements is up to the characters to discover.

LOCATION

A Temple of the Mother of Vision headquarters (or temple) in the characters' city.

HOOKS

A close friend or younger sibling of one of the characters has fallen to the charms of a pigment cult. The characters, who should probably have some vague inkling of just what pigment does, not only need to rescue the individual, but need to remind him why he needs rescuing (i.e., he needs to be deprogrammed) and, possibly, wean him off of pigment.

(If the characters have recently made the news, Jason Hein might also target them for recruitment.)

While investigating the flow of pigment, the crucible (or someone close to the crucible) notices that a significant portion of pigment that comes into the United States isn't destined for sale on the street but for distribution to members of a cult. The crucible's mission then becomes making sense of why a strange new religious movement would be so integral to the pigment market.

INTEL

Lower-level cultists who have been with the movement for less than a few months won't even know that the Temple has any connection to pigment. If asked, cultists say something to the effect of "The Temple is about being open to primordial experiences as a means of coming to knowledge in our sterile modern culture. Some members may use pigment or other drugs, but it's not fundamental to the understanding of the true freeing message of the church. I'd be happy to show you a pamphlet about it."

THE OPPOSITION

The cults are not a high-profile, well-armed enemy. On the contrary, they're very loosely hung together, and the characters are unlikely to have any real problem taking them on. Where things get difficult, however, is when (or if) the characters follow the chain of command up and start noticing similarities between all of the pigments cults. These similarities may lead them to question if there might be more connecting them than sheer coincidence.

THE BRASS RING

Characters stand to discover some important facts if they look very closely at the pigment cults. For one thing, the cults seem to take a similar bent. All of them worship some vague, chthonic goddess whom they say is soon to return to the world. Even cults such as First Step, which has very little spiritualism in its rhetoric, mention this theme. Characters would be doing well to discover that all of the pigment cults, whatever their external appearances may be, leave trails to a Flatliner named Uriah Bishop. The connections are very shadowy and deliberately de-emphasized in the write up of the cults because the only one who's aware of the connection is the Flatliner organizing the cult. The characters may learn, further, that Bishop is involved with many other shadowy goings on. For now, all they need to know is that he's a key figure that they should be looking for.

MISSION NAME: FORMATION OF THE HIVES

BACKGROUND

While not visible to anyone but ghosts and projectors, cataclysmic events have begun to unfold in less savory



urban neighborhoods. Whole buildings are being contaminated by a strange growth of malignant-looking gauze. Mayfair Greens, as reported above, is one such building where the haunting comes with such a profound warping of the ambient emotional energy of the place that those in and around the building are subject to a constant horrible barrage of intensified negative emotion.

LOCATION: MAYFAIR GREENS

Not that anyone could ever tell it, but Mayfair Greens was once meant to be unusually comfortable housing for the poor. Now, it's a blasted and decrepit tower where only the truly hopeless remain — and only because they have absolutely no other options.

More recently, it's become a great deal more: It's a hive.

For more information on Mayfair Greens and what the characters might find inside, see page 133.

HOOKS

The most probable hook to draw the characters to Mayfair Greens is for them to follow the Spectres carrying hues there from the pigment massacre. The sheer number of Spectres around the building on the night of the massacre makes out-and-out combat folly, but careful characters might be able to salvage a few individual souls.

The crucible may also be drawn to Mayfair Greens by a desperate summons from an old destitute relative or family friend. This same summons could be put out by a cop, EMT, social worker or probation officer who paid a visit to Mayfair and felt the emotional impact of the hive and was compelled to try to find *someone* to try to help alleviate the situation before it gets any worse. Alternatively, the characters could hear about the rash of suicides and murders at the place via the media and make a choice to find out what might be causing such mayhem. Less likely, but more visceral, the characters could get lost in the bad part of town and simply *wind up* at Mayfair Greens. If one of the members of the crucible has the Forebode Horror, the disturbance at Mayfair Greens might reveal the building as a gigantic anthill or beehive crawling with insects and disgusting, wriggling larvae.

INTEL

Until two weeks ago, Mayfair Greens was the site of plenty of real-life urban horrors, the kind of place that hope never quite made it to: Gangs fought wars there, dirty street drugs flowed like water, and prostitution was one of the few ways many of the locals could make money to support their drug habits. Violence was so common as to be ignored.

Then, things took a drastic turn for the worse. After the pigment massacre, the residents all seemed to go insane right around the same time. Most left their homes in Mayfair Greens and refused to go back. When pressed about why they would rather be homeless than to live in the government-subsidized housing, the residents all gave vague reasons that all added up to: "Something's

gone wrong with the place." Outsiders who have visited the building all concur with the former residents' accounts — off the record, anyway — but seem not to be able to give any better an explanation of what's wrong with the place.

People swear that the building isn't right — and it most certainly is not. Over the course of the next week, several of the remaining residents died by their own hand. Others were murdered in various macabre ways.

The police have been to the Mayfair Greens tower repeatedly in the last week, and even they're beginning to get tired of the place.

What the characters can learn:

A successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 6) allows the characters to feel the concentrated negative emotions emanating from the hive. One success is enough to detect the feelings from even three blocks away. If the players make this roll when their characters are just outside the building, the difficulty is 4. Inside the building, there's no need to make a roll because the feelings are so strong they're almost overwhelming.

Characters taking note of the building's exterior may note the tainted gauze that seems to be congealing along the building's minute cracks (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 9). Once inside, the difficulty of that roll drops to 4, as the weird tissue infusing the hive is nearly impossible to miss.

Characters whose players make a Wits + Alertness or Perception + Alertness roll against a difficulty of 9 may also notice odd lumps in the "tissue" that are potentially the size of a large dog. These are the Chitters, and since they're so potentially lethal, it's good to let the characters have at least some chance of detecting them.

THE OPPOSITION

There's no lack of danger in a hive. Hives are Spectre territory. Make sure you give ample warning as the characters get closer so they realize what they're getting into. If the characters storm their way inside, provide them with an out unless they're really dumb. The Chitters are particularly nasty, so you may want to be careful about giving the characters opportunities to escape (unless they're behaving foolishly).

In addition to the typical array of Spectres found near a hive, Mayfair Greens is now home to several Jasons squatting in various abandoned apartments. Luckily for the characters, the toxic emotional siren of the hive has driven away all the usual thugs, drug dealers and gangstas who typically call this place home. Still, a Storyteller who wants to make things difficult for the characters can have them run into such types on their way in to or, worse, out of Mayfair Greens.

THE BRASS RING

The payoff for this mission could take any of several forms. On a more humanitarian note, the crucible could wind up saving several people from the despair-induced



paralysis inflicted by the hive. This is the basic level of reward. If the characters do a thorough job of fumigating the hive (good luck!), they're likely to recover a potent relic from the Reaper. Whether it's simply his scythe or something more generally useful to the characters is up to the Storyteller. If the characters pursued hues to the hive, they should make the logical leap that the captured souls were instrumental in allowing the hive to appear. Witnessing future hives develop without that sort of aid should lead them to the conclusion that Mayfair Greens was special for some reason.

MISSION NAME: PIGMENT TATTOO PATCHES

BACKGROUND

The sudden rapid rise in deaths from spiked pigment brings rumors of a new form of pigment to the characters' ears. While it's not just this new form of the drug that appears to be lethal, there do seem to be rumors that there's something else special about this new way of taking pigment.

That's entirely true. The pigment tattoo patches (nicknamed "piggybacks") contain a slightly different kind of pigment. The new kind is made with ichor from willing Spectres who want to pass their ichor on to another. A bit of the Spectre's malevolence winds up in the patch. In most people, as stated earlier, this simply heightens the euphoria of the high and promotes promiscuity. In some folks, however, the Spectre's predilection for causing pain surfaces instead (not that sex and pain are mutually exclusive).

LOCATION: THE GROTTO

Among the finest dance clubs in the city, the Grotto is the chic place to be seen. It has the cutest clientele, the best music, the best lights and the best drugs. The dance floor is huge and always full. A dark and easily accessible catwalk looking over the dance floor is the place of choice for those who want to escape the busy dance floor briefly, for a quick bout of sex or to buy drugs. In the extensive shadows up there, any kind of pharmaceutical pleasure can be purchased.

HOOKS

The characters could get offered a piggyback by a pigment dealer. A younger family member of one of the crucible members could wind up in the hospital because of the pigment patch tattoos, either because he used the drug and became violent or because someone around him did. The characters could notice a young man getting violent in the night club and if/when they intervene, they notice that he's wearing a lot of oddly placed tattoos on his arms and shoulders. A new hue, dead from a spiked pigment patch, could approach the crucible and tell them about his last few moments and ask them to find out not only why he died, but why he was (and maybe still is) acting so bizarre

at the time of his demise. His gauze still sports the tattoos he was wearing at the time of his death... and they appear to be moving.

INTEL

With some research (in the form of an Intelligence + Streetwise roll, difficulty 7) the characters can learn the following facts:

One success: There's a new form of pigment on the street.

Two successes: This new form of pigment is in the form of a patch tattoo. It's especially popular with teenagers.

Three successes: Those who use these patch tattoos often show more erratic behavior than most pigment users, either growing violent or sexually aroused.

Four successes: Use of the patch tattoo form of pigment results in a great deal of negative and/or violent behavior on the part of the wearer.

A Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8) reveals that there's something in the tattoo that's spiritually tainted. They may not know that it's Spectre essence unless they've dealt with a number of Spectres already, but they will know that something is very wrong with the tattoos.

The crucible members could take a close look at someone who's currently on the pigment patch. With a success on a Perception + Awareness roll, someone could notice that there's something wrong, although it may take some time to discern what is wrong with the individual and to make sure he's not a Jason.

THE OPPOSITION

Drug dealers are not known for being particularly nice people. If the characters get pegged for being cops, violence could ensue. On the other end of the spectrum, if the characters are trying to obtain a sample of the pigment patch tattoo, they could run into trouble with the law for attempting to buy an illegal substance. This latter problem could be particularly problematic if the characters haven't managed to obtain valid ID yet or if they still have certain legal issues to wrap up following the events in **Crusade of Ashes**.

Due to the beings in control of the pigment trade, Spectres take an unusually active interest in the drug. If the characters start getting too close to the truth, one or more Spectres could start causing trouble for them. While it might not be enough to cause them any real pain, it might be enough to get them kicked out of the club and ruin their investigation.

THE BRASS RING

This mission reveals to the characters that the makers and distributors of pigment are a lot sneakier than they initially thought. This new form of pigment contains the ichor of a slightly more aware Spectre, one that might not be averse to nudging the pigment user's actions in a particularly antisocial direction when he's under the influence of the drug.



A crucible that realizes what the piggyback is could also prevent some club goers from being exposed to the drug — or even apprehend a dealer who could then lead the crucible back along the chain of distribution until the characters can get some of their *big* questions answered. Because of this drug's popularity with the underage crowd, law-enforcement personnel at all levels begin working diligently on apprehending those who sell piggybacks — as soon as they're made aware of the problem. Bringing the tattoo to the attention of the DEA or the FBI would be a good way to smooth the waters a bit.

ORPHEUS MISSIONS

The following missions are in-character hand-outs for Storytellers to give to players' characters. They are mission reports from Orpheus and can either serve for chronicles where the Orpheus Group survived or as material recovered following the company's annihilation.

MISSION #0783

Mission Type: Black Op

Frighten client's ex-wife into *not* terminating pregnancy.

RACHAEL MILFORD BACKGROUND

Rachael Milford (née Case) recently divorced her husband, Donald Milford, whom she claims was unfaithful and emotionally abusive. In Mr. Milford's interviews with Orpheus, he denied these claims. In any event, Ms. Milford is approximately two months pregnant and, according to Mr. Milford, threatened on the telephone recently to terminate the pregnancy. Our intel reports that she has, in fact, made an appointment at a local clinic though she has not undergone the procedure as of yet. Mr. Milford is hiring Orpheus to ensure that she carries the child to term.

While Ms. Milford is not (according to her ex-husband) particularly religious, she is extremely superstitious and believes in ghosts and spirits. Therefore, it should take minimal effort to convince her to continue the pregnancy. The problem, however, is she is only two months along and that means we will need to maintain periodic supervision until the child is born. Also, Mr. Milford reports his ex-wife drinks when stressed and emphasizes that this behavior is not acceptable. While frightening her every time she drinks is implausible, it should be possible to condition her away from alcohol.



MISSION PARAMETERS

This mission is a very delicate one and will only become more so as Ms. Milford's pregnancy progresses. Too great a scare may cause a miscarriage (we have no reason to suspect this to be a high-risk pregnancy, but this child is Ms. Milford's first). You must frighten her in such a way that the supernatural element is unmistakable and easily connected with the notion of having an abortion, but do not scare her so badly that she drinks herself into a stupor or miscarries. Mr. Milford offers some suggestions (see Intel).

INTEL

Ms. Milford currently lives with her brother (Michael Case, age 32; address attached). He is unmarried, normally lives alone and is frequently out of town. Mr. Milford reports that Ms. Milford is often unable to sleep and stays up watching old sitcoms or sometimes stares at her reflection in the bathroom mirror for long periods of time. He also says that while she would probably abort the baby to spite him, the prospect of surgery frightens her greatly.

THREAT TAG: MARK-CLASS GREEN

MISSION #0784

MISSION TYPE: INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Investigate disturbances on college campus.

MANSON COLLEGE

BACKGROUND

Manson College is a very small private college, located in the local suburb of Westenburg. The college enrolls slightly under 2,000 students and is known for its graduate programs in film editing and photography. The main building, Manson Hall, is a six-story structure encompassing classrooms, faculty and administrative offices and some storage. The college has not used the sixth floor, however, in several years. Apparently, in 1998, the faculty discovered two students engaging in "inappropriate activities" on this rarely used floor and expelled them both. The girl (Amanda Williams, then age 18) committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. The boy (Joseph Franklin, then age 18) left the school — his current whereabouts are unknown. The college used the sixth floor for adjunct faculty then, but now, only the custodians and the occasional intern or associate professor visits the floor.

Recently, however, stories of moans, shrieks and other odd sounds emanating from the sixth floor have circulated on campus. The college hired Orpheus to investigate this matter, though it remains undecided about what to do when we complete our investigation. Westenburg is a highly devout Christian community, and the fact that the sounds are reputedly sexual in nature is embarrassing the college to no end.

MISSION PARAMETERS

Conduct a comprehensive investigation. Very little intel on this mission exists, so you will be performing the interviews and standard "legwork." Discover the nature of the sixth floor disturbances and report back to Orpheus immediately. Manson College officials ask you make your presence as inconspicuous as possible — that means blending in with the natives (no ostentatious dress or attitudes) and not offending the faculty, staff or students. School is currently in session, and since Manson College refuses to allow us access after hours, you must either work during normal hours or investigate as ghosts (or both, which is the recommended course of action). Again, the college remains undecided as to what to do when the investigation is complete, so do not feel compelled to take action against any ghost(s) you might find.

INTEL

Joseph Franklin is reportedly alive, but his family no longer lives in Westenburg. Amanda Williams' parents and sister are still local, but they doggedly refuse to believe her suicide was a result of being caught in sexual congress. They also refuse to speak with the press on the matter, so another cover story is necessary. Thus far, the faculty reports only sounds and low-level manifestations (objects moving when no one is looking, lights, etc.). There is no indication that Amanda is hostile.

THREAT TAG: BLIP-CLASS GHOST

MISSION #0799

MISSION TYPE: BLACK OP / FUMIGATION

WEST RIVER INDIAN RESERVATION

BACKGROUND

The local Native American tribe resides on the West River Reservation. It's a small area of land that most nearby residents don't even realize exists. The tribe is relatively quiet, interacting frequently with the outside world. It maintains a small gambling hall, the Wild Eagle, which, on a weekend, may have as many as 100 people in attendance.

A member of the tribe, David Smith, suffered an NDE after falling from a building during a construction job. Since his accident, he adopted the name Black Stone, claiming that he was a powerful spirit returned to bring pain and suffering. At first, the tribe assumed he was merely suffering some mental disturbance brought about by the accident. His family cared for him and hoped he would recover. They suggested moving him off the reservation to the West River Asylum, but he grew violent, beating his cousin and brother nearly to unconsciousness. After this attack, his family left him alone to recuperate and collect his worker's compensation.



In the next weeks, someone desecrated sacred burial sites on the reservation. Black Stone bragged that he had supernatural powers beyond anything the tribe's ancestors possessed. He told the local store owner that he would bring about the end of the world. When some of the tribesmen tried to shut him up, he demonstrated unusual strength, injuring four men and damaging the store's front door. The reservation authorities tried to keep matters quiet, so as not to scare the patrons of the Wild Eagle, by handling Black Stone's outbursts themselves. They apprehended him with backup from the local BIA agent and kept him in the reservation jail.

Black Stone killed himself that night through unknown means. His corpse was found lying in a pool of blood. While the authorities transported the corpse for an autopsy, Black Stone suddenly revived. He ripped open the side of the transport vehicle and escaped into the wilds of the reservation. The authorities have searched for him, but they cannot locate him.

Since his escape, strange events have occurred at the Wild Eagle. A beer mug unexpectedly shattered wounding a patron. Glowing lights have swarmed patrons in the parking lot at night. Blood occasionally seeps up through the floorboards. Four power outages in the last two weeks remain unexplainable by local utilities. The casino manager's car burst into flame.

MISSION PARAMETERS

The local tribal elders request we eliminate Black Stone before he causes more trouble. They believe David Smith is dead. Black Stone has supernatural abilities. He may be a projector or the victim of possession by a Spectre. If agents learn that Black Stone is not David Smith and they are able to return David Smith to his body, they should do so.

The tribe has offered to cooperate completely with us. It is essential agents maintain a good relationship with the tribe. Encounters with resentful or difficult tribe members should be resolved delicately. If any doubt arises about defiling a site or possibly insulting the tribe, agents must consult the tribal elders. Agents should listen to any information the tribe may impart about the nature of ghosts.

Joshua Graywolf is one of the tribal elders and heads the reservation police force (of three members). He is an older man, steeped in the traditions of his people. He will serve as the primary contact for agents.

INTEL

From all accounts, Black Stone has abilities rivaling those of trained agents. He has supernatural strength and may have other supernatural abilities. Black Stone may have allies in the form of Spectres or other hostile ghosts.

Agents may discover allies in ghosts who, according to the tribal elders, protect the reservation. Ancestor spirits supposedly roam the reservation, although, officially, no sightings have been reported. If traditional

spirits do protect the reservation, then agents should attempt to make contact.

The descriptions of events involving David Smith do not seem to fit with the traditions of the tribe. A fugitive named David Blackstone disappeared on the reservation almost a century ago. We believe that a definite connection exists between this man and David Smith. The record house containing information on David Blackstone was destroyed in a fire, so we have very little information to go on. Some older members of the tribe may provide assistance.

David Smith is an athletic man of 23 years, standing about 6'2" tall. His family refuses to discuss him and will not meet with us. The tribal elders ask that we respect their wishes.

**THREAT TAG: FOE/
POSSIBLE ENIGMA-CLASS
RED**

MISSION #0817

**MISSION TYPE: REMOVAL
HOLY GHOST CEMETERY
BACKGROUND**

The Holy Ghost Cemetery was one of the city's first graveyards. Over the years, it became the place to inter the elite, and it includes some beautiful examples of statuary and mausoleums. During the spring, art and film students flock to the graveyard for inspiration.

A recent thunderstorm dropped a large tree on the Reynolds mausoleum, severely damaging one of the old building's support columns. According to reports, the cemetery had planned restoration work on the Reynolds mausoleum for years due to slight crumbling and numerous cracks in the structure. During the initial repair work on the mausoleum, two ghosts attacked the workers. The ghosts have spooked workers during all subsequent attempts to repair the mausoleum. If the damage is not fixed soon, the mausoleum could collapse.

Additionally, locals have heard that the cemetery is haunted. Four teenagers were caught in the cemetery after dark three nights ago, hoping to catch a glimpse of the ghosts. One of them, Tina Cleek, succeeded. Cemetery attendants found her in the cemetery, crying and curled into a fetal position. Her companions stated that she screamed and then collapsed. They didn't see anything. She is receiving psychiatric help at a local hospital.

The cemetery staff wishes to keep publicity to a minimum. The owners don't want more victims to be assaulted by the ghosts. They have concerns that, if the mausoleum collapses, the hauntings will intensify.



MISSION PARAMETERS

The client wants the cemetery to be safe even for after-hours trespassers. Mr. Hudson, the caretaker, cannot explain the supernatural happenings and will not risk more work on the mausoleum. Agents must contact the spirits of Agatha and William Reynolds and explain the attempts to save the mausoleum. Agents should expect hostility, especially from Agatha. Her family informed us that she was known for her irrational rages and fits in life. Do not neutralize the ghosts unless absolutely necessary, as per the client's request.

INTEL

Agatha and William Reynolds seem to be Echo- to Mirage-class spirits. We do not have intel to determine the exact nature of their abilities.

**THREAT TAG: ECHO- OR
MIRAGE-CLASS GREEN**

MISSION #0818

**MISSION TYPE:
INVESTIGATION/
FUMIGATION**

**CRESCENT STAR
PUBLISHING
BACKGROUND**

The Crescent Star was first published in 1937. Since then, it has grown and evolved from a small local newspaper to a weekly publication dealing with weird news and strange events. *The Crescent Star* controls a niche market with local college students and the intelligentsia. The paper aspires to nationwide distribution to rival competitors such as *The Enquirer*.

The Crescent Star claims a horde of poltergeists attacked its presses. It filed police reports and has photos of the damage, including wounds suffered by an employee. Jessica Thompson, the head of the paper, has not published reports of the incidents because these "are serious."

The Crescent Star Publishing Building is at the corner of two busy streets, 54th and Main. It is a five-story brick building with multiple offices. Four murders have occurred in the building over the years. To this point, however, there have been no actual cases of hauntings.

The Crescent Star will stop its presses for a full day and give all but "essential" staff leave for Orpheus to fumigate.

MISSION PARAMETERS

Agents should use this opportunity to investigate *The Crescent Star*. We wish to confirm whether these pressroom attacks are a hoax or not. If hostile ghosts exist, then agents should fumigate. Share as little information as possible with *The Crescent Star*.

INTEL

Agent Georgia Chambers, a sleeper, currently works at *The Crescent Star*. She reports circulation has suffered

in recent months. Jessica Thompson wants to uncover more about Orpheus. Ms. Thompson instructed her staff to interview Orpheus agents after the ghost removal, supposedly without our knowledge. Agent Chambers suspects, but cannot confirm, that the press incidents are a hoax and an attempt to humiliate or expose Orpheus. Be aware that the paper signed a non-disclosure agreement with Orpheus not to report on our activities in relation to its hauntings. *The Crescent Star*, however, has violated such contractual agreements before with other individuals. Ensure this is not the case through any means short of hurting anyone.

**THREAT TAG: POTENTIAL
BLIP- OR ECHO-CLASS
GREEN**

MISSION #0819

**MISSION TYPE:
INVESTIGATION/
FUMIGATION**

**THE JEFFERIES BUILDING
BACKGROUND**

The Jefferies Building remains incomplete after six years of construction. Although the building's façade is finished, work continues on the upper floors of this 30-story structure. Six months ago, an architect, Anthony O'Sullivan, fell from the incomplete 27th floor. With no other evidence, his death was judged accidental, although suicide wasn't ruled out. The building is over a year behind schedule and millions over budget. The buildings owners reported that poor designs from O'Sullivan have set the building's completion back 16 months.

Since O'Sullivan's death, accidents have plagued the site. An elevator cable snapped, plunging a group of construction workers to their deaths. A senior electrician suffered a heart attack while doing simple wiring. Many workers have reported near misses as well. A crane operator unexpectedly lost control and swung a beam into the 24th floor. Some welding supplies exploded starting a small fire on the upper floors. An unusually high number of minor safety incidents have also been logged.

Construction workers have reported several sightings. After the site is closed, an unknown man sometimes stands in the window on the 27th floor from which O'Sullivan fell. Pedestrians avoid the sidewalk where O'Sullivan landed, crossing the street to avoid the spot. Most people experience a noticeable chill if they stand on the spot where he landed.

MISSION PARAMETERS

Cliff Jefferies, the property owner, wants Orpheus to eliminate what he believes is Anthony O'Sullivan's ghost. He does not want an investigation of the incident. He does not want agents trying to determine the



reasons for the deaths. He wants the ghost exorcised so that he can finish his building.

Although Mr. Jefferies is our client, agents should keep an open mind about what they encounter on the mission. Be advised, however, not to take matters into your own hands. Orpheus does not want to be responsible for any accidents at the site.

INTEL

At the time of his death, Anthony O'Sullivan hated Cliff Jefferies. According to O'Sullivan's widow, Marie, Mr. Jefferies insisted he change the designs to suit his whims, regardless of safety or other concerns. Marie O'Sullivan claims Mr. Jefferies had his construction workers beat up O'Sullivan at the site one day "just to show him who was really in charge." On the day of his death, O'Sullivan told his wife that he was resigning.

We may have a Mirage- or Shadow-class Red situation. Based on the intel, O'Sullivan's spirit may attack the building until the project ends or he satisfies his desire for revenge against Mr. Jefferies.

**THREAT TAG: MIRAGE- OR
SHADOW-CLASS RED**

MISSION #0831

**MISSION TYPE:
INVESTIGATION**

**LOCATION NAME: SUNRISE
RIDGE FARM**

BACKGROUND

Sunrise Ridge Farm is a small family farm located 30 miles from the city. The locals are farmers and maintain several conservative institutions, including influential churches and social clubs. Crime rates in the county around Sunrise Ridge Farm are the lowest in the state. The farm itself is home to a family of four: John and Sara Smith, 40 and 37, and their sons, Michael, 15, and Kenneth, 10.

The Smiths recently discovered the torn remains of their daughter, Susan Smith, 6, on the property. Investigators also found a murder weapon, a scythe, on the property. The family reported last seeing her in her first-floor bedroom going to sleep. Investigators have not uncovered any leads. Currently, John Smith is a prime suspect, though police also suspect a local drifter, Adrian Miller, 19, who has a criminal history. Investigators found no evidence that Susan Smith was sexually assaulted. The younger brother, Kenneth, however, maintains the scarecrow killed her.

Since Susan's death, the family has reported supernatural occurrences. They claim they can hear the little girl crying in her parents' bedroom at night. Lights appear in the field, and farm implements are found scattered across the front porch.

The farm consists of a small ranch-style farmhouse, a large barn, a shed and a dilapidated stable. The barn

houses some livestock and the family tractor. The shed contains pesticides and farm tools. Cornfields cover the remainder of the property.

MISSION PARAMETERS

The Smiths hired Orpheus to investigate their daughter's murder and to put her soul to rest. Agents should expect to encounter a Blip- to Echo-class ghost, who may be consumed with dark emotions. Agents should approach Susan's ghost with care. They must question her to determine her murderer. This mission has several potential ramifications. If Orpheus can prove it can solve unsolved murder cases, it opens up numerous work possibilities.

INTEL

At this point, little is known about the case. Despite the younger brother's suggestion, we do not believe that a ghost manipulated the scarecrow into committing the murder. In all probability, the drifter is responsible. Empathic agents should reach out to the murdered girl and uncover the truth.

**THREAT TAG: BLIP- OR
ECHO-CLASS GREEN**

MISSION #1131

MISSION TYPE: RETRIEVAL

Help an accidental projector to return to her body, and ensure her safety for debriefing.

JOSEFA AMAGUIREZ

BACKGROUND

Josefa Amaguirer (21), an unemployed artist, has been in a coma for the last four days. During this period, witnesses saw her several times at the cafes and art studios where she often hangs out and claim she made predictions about the futures of people talking to her. One friend (Steve Markson, 24) says she warned him to be careful on the street and that a taxi nearly hit him. Most of those who met Ms. Amaguirer were unaware she was currently in a coma and that her body is on IV feeds at St. Luke's Hospital.

Ms. Amaguirer was brought to the hospital already unconscious, having taken a cocktail of several drugs after being dumped by her boyfriend (Damien Loupe, born David Lupins, 25, sculptor) and before being found semiconscious by her housemate, June King (art student, 22). Ms. King was uncertain as to what drugs her housemate took, but says "she didn't take stuff regularly, but, like, she used to buy stuff on the street sometimes, you know."

MISSION PARAMETERS

Ms. Amaguirer appears to be an accidental projector and is currently displaying prediction-type powers. She doesn't seem to be aware that she has separated from her body or that it is in a coma and near death. We want her found, returned to her body



and debriefed. We would particularly like to know what drugs she took, whether she was a habitual user and what other circumstances may have combined to cause this result.

INTEL

We are uncertain whether Ms. Amaguires is genuinely predicting the future or simply hallucinating and having her words misinterpreted by those around her. If she is actually envisioning the future, then her predictions may be accurate — caution is advised. We have no clear client in this case and are operating in the public interest.

THREAT TAG: MARK-CLASS GREEN

MISSION # 1233

MISSION TYPE: FUMIGATION

Eliminate troublesome ghosts.

CELLAR OF FUCHIKO MUSIC BACKGROUND

Fuchiko Music (a small shop in the old part of the city, specializing in Oriental music, both classical and pop) recently opened up its basement for storage. In doing so, workers broke down the connecting walls to two cellars dating back to the late 19th century, which also connect to the city sewers. Since then, the store has had near-constant breakages of stock, and the staff has reported hearing noises like children crying in the corners of the basement.

Mr. Ichirai (the owner, 35) is eager to resolve the matter. He doesn't believe in the supernatural, and thinks the whole thing may be a "natural gas leakage from the sewers." He's our client in this case. Janet Mills (shop worker, 22) is convinced the place is haunted and believes the cellars must have been the scene of secret rites by cultists (useful source for gossip, less so for reliable research.)

MISSION PARAMETERS

Investigate. There's a possibility that they're building up for some sort of insurance fraud, given that the owner's in financial trouble. We have no record of anything supernatural or violent occurring at this location (except q.v. below). If the ghosts present are those of babies, they'd be some of the youngest ghosts yet manifested. Unfortunately, builders cleaned out the cellars while they were being renovated, so we don't have any physical evidence or clues.

INTEL

The owner of the house in the 1890s, Mrs. Johanna Snead, was arrested and prosecuted for practicing as an abortionist. Period police reportedly found bodies in the cellars beneath the house, which they subsequently

bricked up. If this is genuine, it might explain the haunting, which sounds like the result of a poltergeist-type spirit.

THREAT TAG: BLIP-CLASS GREEN

MISSION # 1294

MISSION TYPE: INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Investigate Mrs. King's recent move into radical politics.

JEAN KING

BACKGROUND

Mrs. Jean King (43, widow, part-time worker in the local library) has recently (within the last two months) begun attending meetings of the Flat Earth Society, traveling to give talks to distant branches and advocating changes in the law to correspond with the "evident truths established through common sense and rational thinking." She has also publicly stated that the FBI, the CIA and the NSA are after her in order to silence her for publicizing the "truth."

Her son, Matthew King (25, financial lawyer) says she began acting this way after buying the laptop computer of a deceased neighbor (Steve Lem, also a Flat Earth enthusiast) in an auction of his belongings. Mr. King is our client, and he wants his mother committed and her financial affairs handed over to him. She has apparently told him in private that she's having hysterical fugues and believes she is possessed. While he doesn't believe this, he wants the matter investigated.

MISSION PARAMETER

Investigate Mrs. King and establish whether she is insane, haunted or both. If she is haunted, recruit or extirpate the ghost in question. She may require hospitalization in any case, if Mr. Lem has been controlling her for several months. Our client states her physical safety is paramount in any investigation.

INTEL

Mr. Lem was an ardent Flat Earth enthusiast, and there are definite similarities between his speeches and Mrs. King's current orations. His neighbors describe him variously as "a bit weird" and "totally nuts." He died intestate and with no known relations, devoted to the Flat Earth cause. Mrs. King's behavior suggests the possibility he is possessing her (see file notes on similar control cases) and may be able to possess other victims too. Pursue with caution.

THREAT TAG: BLIP-CLASS GREEN

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