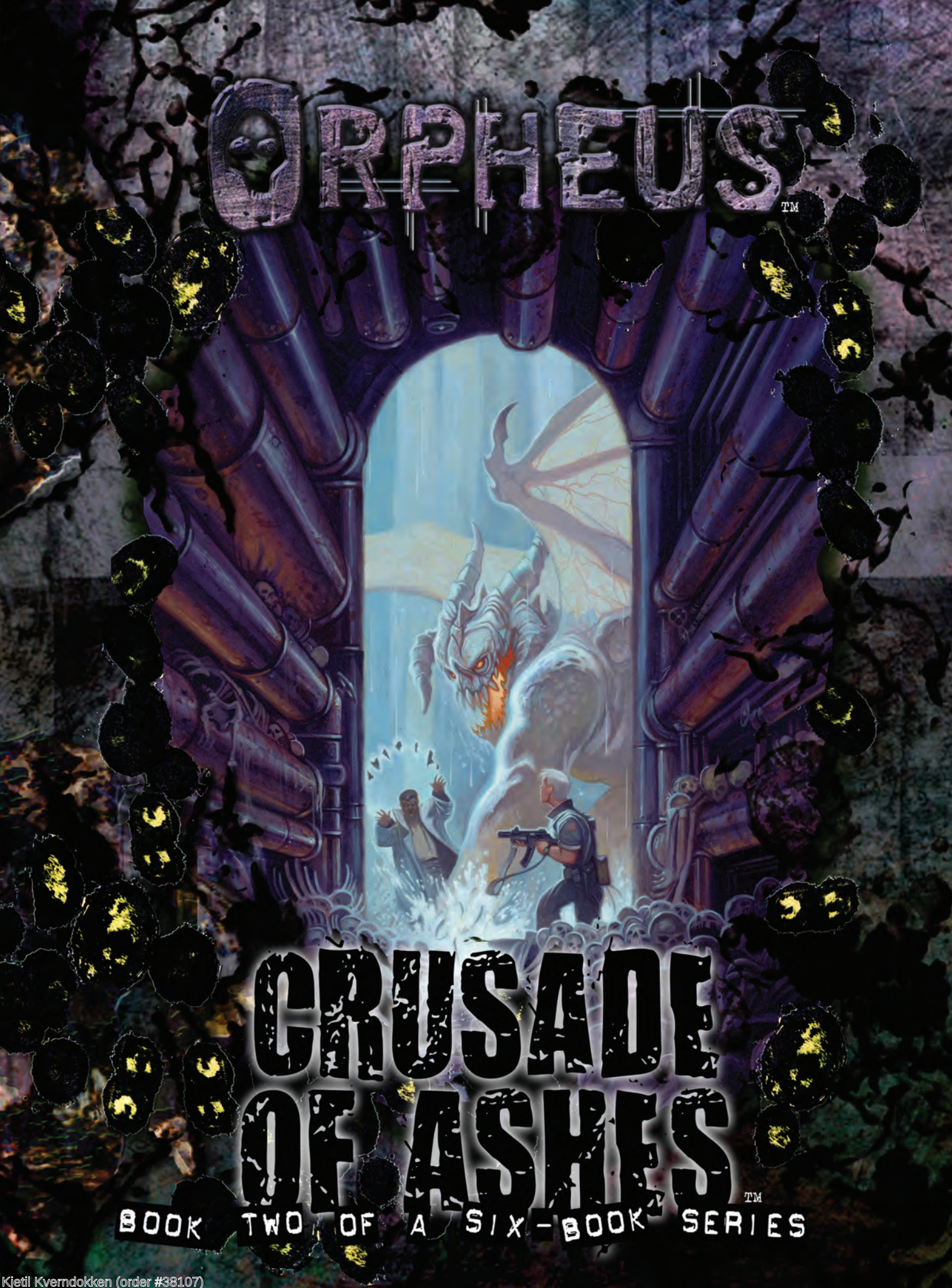


ORPHEUSTM

The book cover features a dark, atmospheric background with a large, ornate archway made of purple, metallic-looking pipes. Inside the archway, a bright, ethereal light emanates from a large, white, dragon-like creature with orange eyes and wings. Two characters are visible in the light: one in a white coat and another in a tactical suit holding a gun. The entire scene is framed by a border of dark, glowing, organic-looking shapes. The title 'ORPHEUS' is at the top in a metallic font, and 'CRUSADE OF ASHES' is at the bottom in a bold, distressed font. Below the title, it says 'BOOK TWO OF A SIX-BOOK SERIES'.

CRUSADE OF ASHESTM

BOOK TWO OF A SIX-BOOK SERIES

CRUSADE OF ASHESTM

By Kraig Blackwelder, Tim Dedopulos, Jacob Docherty, Leonard
Gentile III, Allen Rausch and Guy-François Vella
World of Darkness created by Mark Rein-Hagen.

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DEDICATION

I wonder where I would be in this world were it not for the patience and dedication of many professionals. To Jean Carrières for offering me my first gaming contracts and getting me started... I hope my success is thanks enough. To Ray Greer and Liz Danforth for being patient with the eager newbie. To Richard Dansky who helped me improve in all the right ways. To Justin Achilli for demanding more of me as a writer. To Ken Cliffe for being the most patient, forgiving and supportive developer I've worked with. And to all the Matt Forbecks and Michael Stackpoles out there for always being gracious and ready with the kind word.

—Lucien Soulban



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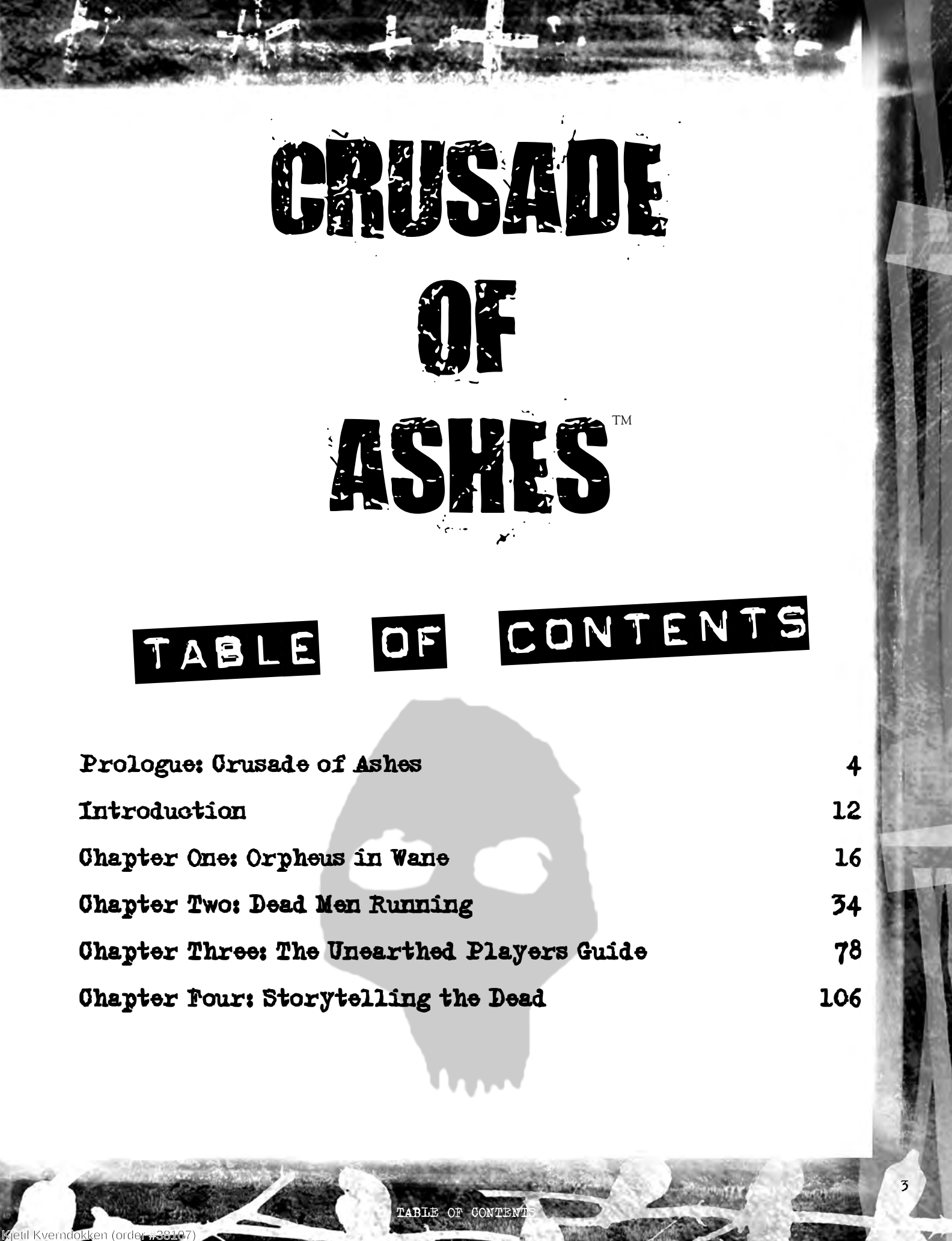
This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

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CRUSADE OF ASHESTM

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PROLOGUE: CRUSADE OF ASHES





They never warned him about the dreams. Sitting in the briefing room, the whole process sounded scientific, straightforward... clean. Sit in the pod, strap down, breathe in the anesthetic, and come 'round — projecting — five hours later. True, the part in between was all a bit Frankenstein. More than a bit, actually. Shooting him full of drugs, replacing his blood with some cocktail of embalming fluids, sticking sensor filaments through his skull, freezing him into a popsicle and all that flatline crap. Even so, they used reassuringly technical terms for everything, and the jargon made it sound like they actually knew what they were doing.

As if.

The worst part, of course, was that he never knew he was dreaming. Tom had no idea where that particular bit of information had vanished. He went under knowing what was about to happen, shit-scared, but somehow the process of slipping away peeled the thought from his mind, so that when it started, everything seemed real. Afterward, when he awoke screaming, starting out of his frozen body, the knowledge returned again. Only a dream...

"Only."

The dreams were always the same, and always different. They were built around confinement, torment, terror and, invariably, horrendous pain. The setting always changed, though. A South American torture cell. The cancer, back again and eating him in fast-forward. Solitary confinement. A car wreck. It didn't take a dream analyst to figure out that his subconscious really didn't much like what was happening. The techs just muttered vague reassurances when he awoke, and the project's psych team was no better, talking endlessly about subjective time and dream encapsulation. They never listening to a damn word he actually said.

Still, work was work, and if the projection process was horrendous, Orpheus offered some rather fantastic perks to make up for it. Remission, for one. The chance to find Jasmine before it was too late for her, too. Ironical, that. Tom shook off the last shreds of the dream — a particularly sadistic one, where his own children tied him down and ate him one filleted slice at a time — and fought down his resentment, trying to focus on the job at hand. He was supposed to be staking out a charity director, way down south somewhere, who was suspected

of some unpleasantly sordid things. The first stop was downtown, to meet up with the rest of the crew. There was a little time to nose around the files before then though, if the coast was clear.

Tom looked back at the cradle holding his body. He looked peaceful, as usual. Another irony. Everything appeared to be functioning normally, the techs busy with their routine, trying to finish up before heading off to the company party. He grimaced, trying not to let the state of his body occupy his thoughts.

A voice in his ear made him jump. "I thought you were too old to worry about your looks, Hayes."

Tom whipped around, forcing a smile and a light voice. "Good afternoon, Kate. How are you doing?"

"Have you seen Forest around today?" Kate asked. She fiddled with her gauze strands of hair.

"I'm fine," said Tom irritably. "Thanks for asking."

Kate's voice dripped with sarcasm. "I *am* sorry, Tom. Didn't mean to bruise your tender feelings. I

thought we knew each other well enough to dispense with the meaningless platitudes." She softened a little, and actually looked sympathetic. "I know exactly how you feel when you've just come out."

Tom sighed. "Sorry, Kate. It was a bad one. I haven't seen Craig anywhere today."

Her detachment wavered. "If you do, let him know I need to see him, will you?"

"Of course." Tom paused. "Not going to party?"

"No. Something's not right. Decided to keep my skin elsewhere."

"What's up?"

"Not sure. Just wanted to warn you, though. Keep your eyes open."

He looked at her, puzzled. "What for?"

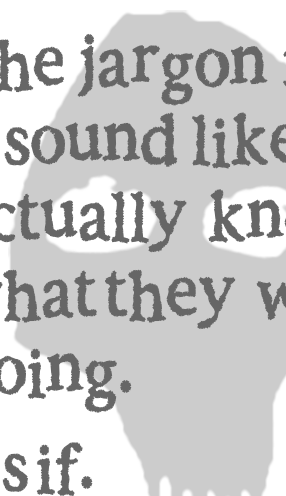
Kate shook her head. "There's a... No, don't worry about that. Look, I've got a bad feeling about tonight. A very bad feeling."

Tom nodded, a grim expression painting his face. Kate wasn't easily spooked when it came to vibes, and she had a rep for accurate hints about things to come. "Okay. Thanks."

"Look after yourself, Tom."

"You too, Kate."

She smiled, a mirthless grimace. "Rely on it."



The jargon made
it sound like they
actually knew
what they were
doing.
As if.



Tom waited impatiently until she'd left, then he made his way out of the operations section. The nursery was unusually busy. Two other sleeper pods were occupied — looked like Johansson was in one of them — and there were five skimmers stretched out on the couches in the other half of the room. Surprisingly, Kate wasn't among them. She must have projected in from somewhere else. She never did have much time for rules when they got in the way. He headed to the administrative section, deep in thought.

The door to Archives was locked. Tom looked up and down the corridor nervously, but no one was around. The techs had finished installing the Kirlian cameras, so they weren't around, but fortunately, the cameras weren't running yet either. Security had yet to replace their monitors. Tom stopped in front of the door, forcing himself to be aware of his whole body. He then centered his thoughts, clamping the flow of mental chatter shut, and letting his emotions drift aimlessly. He became a passive observer inside his own head. A mere second later, his body followed suit, lightening and scattering gauze like his thoughts. There was an unpleasant sensation of dissipation, and a moment's panic that he might just disintegrate totally... but his form held. Tom stood there, collecting his thoughts before pressing his hands against the door. They sank in and he inched forward, walking into the door. The reinforced wood scratched his insides as he passed through it, a peculiar sensation that stung his face and left his insides feeling... wrong.

Once inside, Tom ignored the shelves of paper files and went straight to the computer system, hoping they hadn't changed the password in the week since he'd stolen it. He thought about his kids, hysterical and clinging to Jas' cold corpse. He thought about the smug bastard doctors at his hospital bedside telling him how child services had taken his children into custody, and the rage it ignited within him. The memories boiled straight up his throat like acid, searing through him. He clutched at it and wrapped it around himself like a blanket, comforting in its scalding clarity.

The computer was a pathetic obstacle, and Tom was going to break through it this time and find out for certain whether or not Orpheus was responsible for his

misery. They claimed his wife's suicide and the growing depression pervading Tom's household was the result of a Spectre infestation. They eliminated the problem for Tom, and Tom went to work for them.

Unfortunately, Tom had been projecting once when he'd heard one researcher talking about deliberately creating near-death experiences through some new trick that emulated the symptoms of diseases and illnesses. With Tom's cancer in mysterious and, seemingly, miraculous remission, he found himself questioning all the events of these last few years. Was he an experiment? Had his family

been shattered so Orpheus could test its theories? He wasn't sure, but nothing was going to stop him from uncovering the truth.

Tom glared at the power button, furious that such an insignificant little bit of gray plastic stood between him and the information he needed. The resentment congealed into a spike of silver that punched out from his outstretched fingertips and smacked into the button, easily forcing it in. An electronic

hum started up, and the machine whirled to life.

A metallic creak grabbed Tom's attention. He looked across the table and realized that the flexible desk lamp was slowly turning to look at him. A chill ran down his spine. When the lamp pointed straight at his eyes, it flicked on, dazzling him a little. There was a ripple, then a shimmer in the air as a shape flowed up out of the lamp and took form behind it. Despite the light, Tom easily recognized the man... Hoyt Masterson, haunter extraordinaire. Tom hesitated, uncertain.

"Being naughty, Tommy?"

Tom bristled and bit back an angry reply. "No, of course not. I was... That is... Hey, what the hell are you doing in here, Hoyt? Why aren't you at the party?"

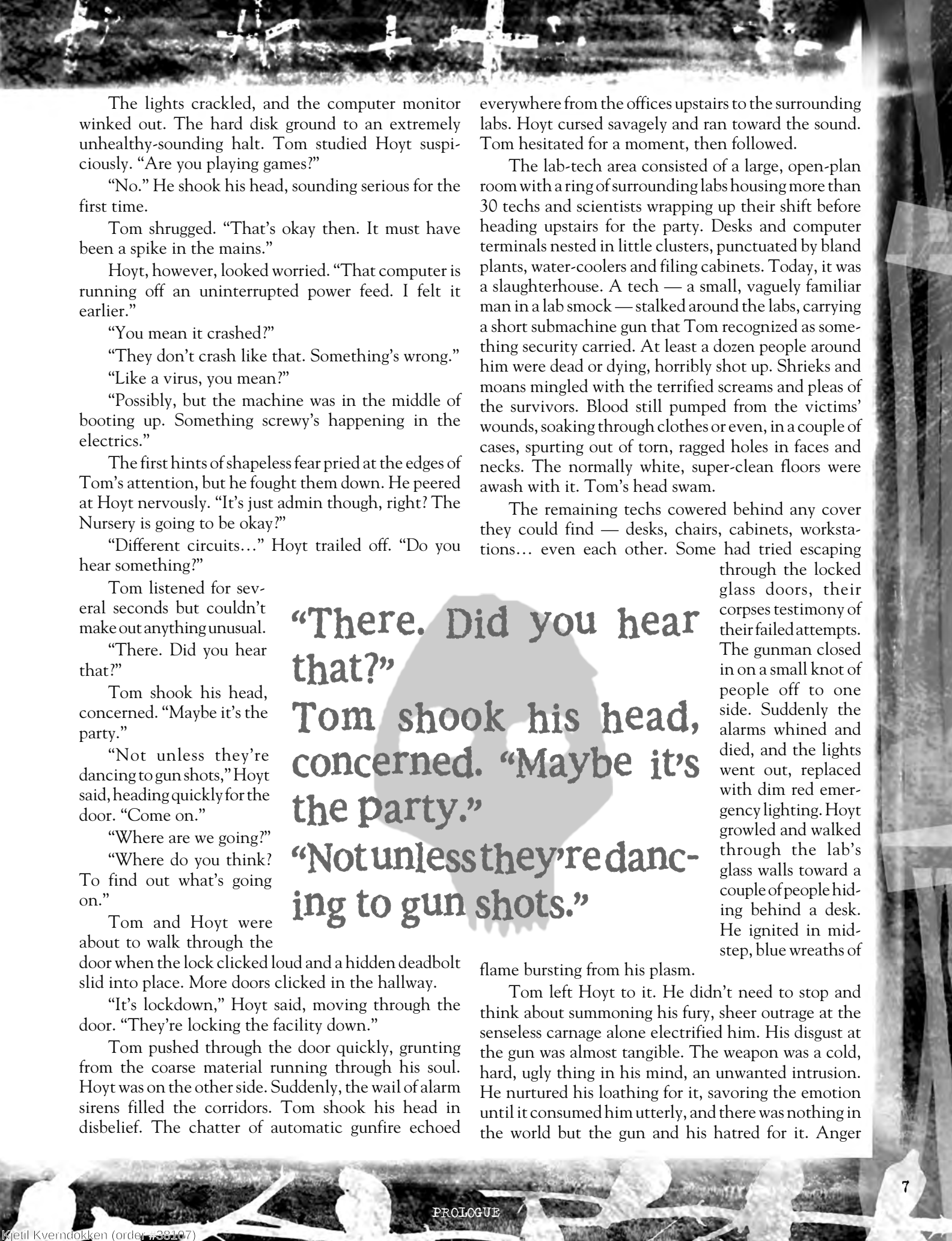
Hoyt grinned, instantly annoying Tom, and ignored the question. "Don't worry, I ain't telling Control you were in here."

"I'm not—"

"Ah, stow it," Hoyt said. "There's no point bothering with that computer, anyway. It's just got dull crap on it... form letters, templates, holiday notes and all that secretarial bullshit."

Tom sighed, the anger evaporating like mist. "Damn."

Was he an experiment? Had his family been shattered so Orpheus could test its theories?



The lights crackled, and the computer monitor winked out. The hard disk ground to an extremely unhealthy-sounding halt. Tom studied Hoyt suspiciously. "Are you playing games?"

"No." He shook his head, sounding serious for the first time.

Tom shrugged. "That's okay then. It must have been a spike in the mains."

Hoyt, however, looked worried. "That computer is running off an uninterrupted power feed. I felt it earlier."

"You mean it crashed?"

"They don't crash like that. Something's wrong."

"Like a virus, you mean?"

"Possibly, but the machine was in the middle of booting up. Something screwy's happening in the electrics."

The first hints of shapeless fear pried at the edges of Tom's attention, but he fought them down. He peered at Hoyt nervously. "It's just admin though, right? The Nursery is going to be okay?"

"Different circuits..." Hoyt trailed off. "Do you hear something?"

Tom listened for several seconds but couldn't make out anything unusual.

"There. Did you hear that?"

Tom shook his head, concerned. "Maybe it's the party."

"Not unless they're dancing to gun shots," Hoyt said, heading quickly for the door. "Come on."

"Where are we going?"

"Where do you think? To find out what's going on."

Tom and Hoyt were about to walk through the door when the lock clicked loud and a hidden deadbolt slid into place. More doors clicked in the hallway.

"It's lockdown," Hoyt said, moving through the door. "They're locking the facility down."

Tom pushed through the door quickly, grunting from the coarse material running through his soul. Hoyt was on the other side. Suddenly, the wail of alarm sirens filled the corridors. Tom shook his head in disbelief. The chatter of automatic gunfire echoed

everywhere from the offices upstairs to the surrounding labs. Hoyt cursed savagely and ran toward the sound. Tom hesitated for a moment, then followed.

The lab-tech area consisted of a large, open-plan room with a ring of surrounding labs housing more than 30 techs and scientists wrapping up their shift before heading upstairs for the party. Desks and computer terminals nested in little clusters, punctuated by bland plants, water-coolers and filing cabinets. Today, it was a slaughterhouse. A tech — a small, vaguely familiar man in a lab smock — stalked around the labs, carrying a short submachine gun that Tom recognized as something security carried. At least a dozen people around him were dead or dying, horribly shot up. Shrieks and moans mingled with the terrified screams and pleas of the survivors. Blood still pumped from the victims' wounds, soaking through clothes or even, in a couple of cases, spurting out of torn, ragged holes in faces and necks. The normally white, super-clean floors were awash with it. Tom's head swam.

The remaining techs cowered behind any cover they could find — desks, chairs, cabinets, workstations... even each other. Some had tried escaping

through the locked glass doors, their corpses testimony of their failed attempts. The gunman closed in on a small knot of people off to one side. Suddenly the alarms whined and died, and the lights went out, replaced with dim red emergency lighting. Hoyt growled and walked through the lab's glass walls toward a couple of people hiding behind a desk. He ignited in mid-step, blue wreaths of

"There. Did you hear that?"

Tom shook his head, concerned. "Maybe it's the party."

"Not unless they're dancing to gun shots."

flame bursting from his plasm.

Tom left Hoyt to it. He didn't need to stop and think about summoning his fury, sheer outrage at the senseless carnage alone electrified him. His disgust at the gun was almost tangible. The weapon was a cold, hard, ugly thing in his mind, an unwanted intrusion. He nurtured his loathing for it, savoring the emotion until it consumed him utterly, and there was nothing in the world but the gun and his hatred for it. Anger



surged in his breast, and the malice tore out from him in a twisting rope of silver shards that burst across the room and latched onto different parts of the machine gun. Tom pulled and bent it in different directions. There was a loud screech of metal, and the gun twisted into a useless heap of junk. The gunman barely reacted to the pain, the metal mangling his fingers and breaking one wrist when the gun twisted around his hands.

Tom staggered, drained by the intensity of his emotions. He fought to maintain his balance but crashed forward when a furious wall of noise smashed into him from behind, driving sound spikes into his back. The screech was concentrated insanity, a whirlwind of howling, snarling pain. It tore into him like it had fangs, shredding his essence. It was the dream again, Nate and Sarah carving bloody scraps off him to feed their brother in an impossible frenzy of cannibalistic gluttony.

Thought fled. Only the agony of the mad shriek bit into him. Tom felt his gauze eroding, mote by agonizing mote, blown away on the wailing storm, turning him into a handful of ash. He tried lashing out, to draw strength from his anger, but there was only pain — and, deep, deep down, a peculiar sense of relief.

The world flashed blue, and the wailing suddenly stopped, replaced by a hoarse — and harmless — scream. Tom was on all fours, fighting for breath he didn't need. There was another flash, and Tom realized it was the exact same color as Hoyt's blue flame. Time passed — seconds, minutes, days — then Hoyt knelt beside him.

"You okay there, buddy?" He sounded concerned.

Tom shook his head wearily. "Not really. I'll live, though. What happened?"

"There were two of them. I got the drop on the first one, but he fled his host. By that time the second one, some spook, had you. I blasted him while he was concentrating on you, but he split too."

Tom looked across the room. The furious techs restrained the gunman, pinning him down on the bloody floor, but he was screaming in pain now. They

weren't ripping him to shreds. Hoyt told them he'd been possessed. They were playing with the impromptu cuffs Tom made from the machine gun and, by the noises he made, it hurt... a lot. The dim red lighting and cordite smoke turned the environment into a scene from some modern hell.

"Thanks, Hoyt. You saved my ass."

"That's two you owe me then." He grinned.

Tom started to reply but pulled up short as a nasty thought hit him. "There's got to be more."

"I don't see anyone else popping out of the woodworks."

"Not here. In the rest of the compound. Look at the lights."

Hoyt flinched, startled. "We better check the Nursery... fast. Can you walk?"

Tom stood up carefully. After a momentary bout of clumsiness, the world felt slightly firmer again. "I think so."

"Good." There was a dull thump from somewhere

else in the building, a low, heavy sound that shook. Hoyt looked nervous, his gauze almost going pale. "Can you run?"

Tom eyed him, uncertain.

"That was an explosion," Hoyt said. Then he grunted in pain, grabbing his leg. "Oh shit... my body! Oh fuck that hurts!"

A freezing void opened in the pit of Tom's stomach. He swayed, suddenly dizzy. "Well what are we waiting for?"

Hoyt looked at Tom. "Sorry buddy, meet me there." Hoyt vanished in a blur, ripcording back to his body.

Tom dashed for a glass wall. He was wobbly, but the fury was back, hotter and harder than ever, and this time it was seasoned with a big pinch of pure fear. He sprinted through an office and down the corridor. Tom felt irritated at Hoyt's ability to go back to his body instantly. "It's okay for you," Tom said to himself in an imaginary conversation with Hoyt. "You can just pop back in. It's going to take them five hours to thaw me out."

The screech was concentrated insanity, a whirlwind of howling, snarling pain. It tore into him like it had fangs, shredding his essence.



Tom could practically hear Hoyt's reaction. "Yeah? I'm not the one whose body is shielded by several inches of reinforced steel. We're all in deep shit, Tommy." He would have been right too. At least, if the intruders were in the Nursery, they'd both be dead already, so there's still a chance. Tom had to make sure the cradles were properly defended.

Turning a corner as fast as his still-shaky legs allowed, Tom made a conscious effort to stiffen his resolve, thinking about how much he owed Jasmine. A fresh strength flooded into him as he pulled himself together. "Yeah," he said to himself, shoring up his own belief. Tom stopped dead. The corridor led to the Nursery, to the doors ten yards ahead — the doors, however, lay broken and twisted in the doorframe.

"I'm not dead yet," Tom said, repeating it like a mantra. Beyond the door, someone cried out in pain. Tom moved toward the ruined doors, trying to balance speed with stealth. He slowed down upon approaching the Nursery, walking close to the wall for extra concealment. Tom slipped in, sucking in a deep breath he didn't need, then sighed heavily and stepped into the room openly, shaking his head.

It was bad. Something, or rather someone (judging by the bits of human remains scattered about the room), had detonated in here. Tom stood in the blast's epicenter, judging by the scorching on the ground. Four skimmers would have nowhere to return to — gaping holes where their innards seeped out, shrapnel wounds cut to the bone, limbs scattered across the room. Hoyt was lucky, though his cries of pain would claim otherwise. The explosion was far enough away from him that it merely threw him against a wall. His neck bled and one leg was bent up sideways at a bad angle. Another skimmer lay untouched as well — Carruthers. The medical and security staff, however, were all dead, riddled with a generous helping of bullet holes.

"You stupid bastards," Craig Forest said, standing up from behind a chair. Even washed-out and pale, he looked angry, upset and dangerous. "Quiet never automatically means safe. *Never*. I could have had you both before you'd even known what had happened."

"What did happen, Craig?" Tom kept his voice patient and sympathetic.

"She'd already killed the support teams when I got here," he said, almost muttering in shock. "Took out Martinez, Jabewski, Foss... She was just about to slot you too, Hoyt. I managed to drag her off, but whoever was riding her jumped out. I dispersed just in time, but she... exploded... she was carrying explosives. By the time I'd got my bearings again, her rider was gone. At least I stopped her from killing you and Carruthers."

"Who?" asked Hoyt, his voice rough.

"Margoules."

Hoyt blinked, his pain almost forgotten... almost. "Sylvia Margoules? Ah!... From Security?"

Forest nodded.

"More passengers," Tom said.

Craig looked at him. "More?"

"A tech in the labs," Tom said. "He was one of them too."

Forest looked horrified. "Please God, don't tell me it's happening at the party too?"

Tom returned his question with an unhappy, miserable stare. "Sorry, Craig. I think they're everywhere."

"Holy shit. We've got to save..." He paused, in decision, uncertainty washing over his colorless face.

A floating ball of flickering light drifted through the walls. Craig and Tom sprang back warily while Hoyt held his breath, ready to project. "Blink"

Carruthers appeared.

Tom exhaled, pushing out all the fright of the moment. "Jesus, Blink. You scared the hell out of me."

Blink ignored the comment and looked at the three of them. "It's over. We have to leave now."

Tom narrowed his eyes, puzzled. "What's happening?"

"Orpheus is dead... the board is gone... security's totally destroyed. There are corpses everywhere. I'm telling you, it's over. We have to get out of here. They're all over the place."

Forest growled, something inhuman in his tone. Tom just stared at Blink in disbelief. "Who?"

**"I'm not dead yet,"
Tom said, repeating it like a mantra.
Beyond the door,
someone cried out
in pain.**



"You mean 'what,'" said Blink. "Specters. A whole heap of the fucking things. Reapers, Frighteners, Fetches... real ugly ones, made out of knotted bundles of slimy rope, with these horrible funnel mouths on the ends of long trunks. Claws everywhere. There's at least a dozen of them, dragging off any spirit they find or ripping them to shreds. We *have* to evac... we have to do it now."

"My body," said Tom, almost whimpering.

"Oh shit, Tom. I'm sorry. Maybe you'll get lucky. They might leave the cradles alone. If you stay here though... There are worse things than becoming discarnate. We have to get out now. I can wend you and Craig to the perimeter fence. You'll have a chance. Hoyt, you and I are walking out in the flesh." He looked at Hoyt's leg. "I can pull that straight, immobilize it or something. It'll hurt like hell, but it's your only shot at keeping intact, buddy. Or I can take you with Tom and Craig. Your call."

Hoyt's grimaced. "Get them out of here. Quick."

Tom's world rolled away, a Venetian blind opening onto glittering darkness. It was cold, and he felt a shiver erupt at the base of his spine. Then the world unfurled again, and they were outside, near the fence. It was late evening. He shuddered, chilled raw.

Blink didn't even pause. He ripcorded back to his body, pulled away with a jerk.

Craig shook himself like a dog. He opened his mouth to say something when a huge flying monstrosity crashed into him from above. It was a skinned dog, the largest fucking Fetch Tom had ever seen. It was a gigantic abomination glistening like an oil slick and seething internally as it moved.

It was the last straw for Tom. Disgust and hatred overwhelmed him, driving spikes into compassion's coffin. He seized the emotion and drunk from it greedily, feeling its sheer strength renew his energy and bitterness. His body convulsed painfully, a whirlwind of sensation that was over as quickly as it started. His arms

were suddenly twice their original length and tipped with ugly wood-like railroad spikes. Tom knew from past experience what he could do with them — and that his face would have stretched too, thinning and graying, his mouth filling with distorted fangs.

Tom leapt on the revolting Fetch wrapping its jaws around Craig's throat and tore at it like a wild animal. The Specter shrieked and tried twisting to face this new attacker. It brought a claw up, and Tom snapped it, feeling his teeth slice straight through it. It was the worst thing he had ever tasted, a mad jumble of decay and putrescence, but he grinned as the thing screamed again. Tom savored its pain.

The Fetch lashed out at him, driving a bony tail spike into the center of his back, and his whole body flared with agony. Tom reared up and howled, then seized the pain for himself, turning the movement into a savage bite downward. His teeth sank into the thing's disgusting head. Tom reached down quickly with both hands and grabbed the base of its tail, stabbing his spike-like fingers through the joint and twisting as hard as he could.

The creature moaned in pain, and Tom ripped the tail spike away with a wet squelch. It pushed at him with its limbs, and despite his best efforts to keep hold of it, it knocked him back. Then it was away, running into the darkness and keening miserably.

Craig looked at Tom, appraising him with new appreciation. "Way to go ape-shit on that thing. Thanks." He hesitated for a moment. "We'd better leave here before it comes back with friends."

Tom nodded and looked back at the battered and scorched Orpheus building. It shimmered, and then, suddenly, impossibly, a series of explosions wracked the building. It erupted in a huge gout of flame. A ball of fire rolled up out of the wreckage, wrapped in greasy black smoke.

"Fuck." Tom couldn't keep the awe or horror from his voice.

M o m e n t s later, a second explosion ripped through the torn building. Then...

...Tom felt like he was falling, but it was gone as soon he was aware of it. Something snapped, and then something hard, fast and invisible

smashed into Tom's forehead. He fell backward, suddenly icy-cold. A deadly sense of anger and hatred welled up further within him, threatening to flood his heart. The world swam, seemingly fading to background color and sound, and the freezing cold gradually

His arms were suddenly twice their original length and tipped with ugly wood-like railroad spikes.



grew peaceful. The pain and suffering and striving didn't seem to matter quite so much anymore. Maybe he wouldn't find Jas after all.

Oh no you fucking don't, he snarled, clutching stubbornly for the hate he knew was there. *You don't get me that fucking easily. I don't give up. Tom Hayes will not be beaten.* His iron-hard resolve caught at the tiniest hint of his resentment, and he felt it flicker and grow. *I want my own back first, you bastards. You're taking me away from my children.* Tom seized the bitterness, and suddenly it was there, washing over him. The world crashed back into full color.

Forest bent over him, clearly concerned.

Tom stood, feeling lighter somehow. "I'm dead, Craig. They got me."

"I'm sorry, Tom," Forest said, "but we have to go."

The pair hurried away from the burning wreckage behind them. "Do you think the other two made it out?"

"Who knows? Time will tell."

* * *

Elsewhere, Kate watched over John and Hoyt from the backseat. They'd reached the underground parking lot and driven out before the explosions brought everything down on their heads.

"We have to find the others," Kate said.

"No shit," Hoyt said.

"No shit," Kate replied, "because this is just the beginning. There's a whole storm of shit heading our way, and we're not ready..."

"None of us are."



INTRODUCTION



The nightmares are getting worse. I wish they'd stop, only...
I don't think they've even begun yet.

—Kate Dennison

It'll breed. You'll die.
Everyone in the fucking company will die.

—Alien: Resurrection



There are bad days ahead. We warned you that the world the characters knew and felt safe within was to be short-lived. We warned you that the first supplement would twist the world on its ears and set the movie into full swing. Here's where **Orpheus** keeps its promise by robbing the characters of their very foundations and giving the Storyteller new toys to use against the crucible.

Introductions are generally small previews of the book as a whole, and they tend to be quick and dirty. With **Orpheus**, however, the introduction is both a promise of things to come as well as a brief recap of events that were. In a limited series, this is crucial to bringing the reader up to speed and to offering some insights into the methodology that went into creating this new installment of the continuing story line.

Before beginning, however, it's important to note that in the **Orpheus** core book, the in-character artifacts mention dates and years. In **Crusade of Ashes** and subsequent sourcebooks, we make little effort to mention specific dates outside of saying "three years ago" or "five years ago." The reason is that dates tend to age a project and stating the dates outright turns it into canon. We encourage the readers to ascribe specific dates as appropriate to the chronicle's time-frame without worrying about someone citing game scripture. Additionally, some events may run contrary to the World of Darkness. This, however, enables Storytellers to set their chronicles in the indeterminate future without worrying about retrogaming events to suit the World of Darkness's continuity.

THEN AND NOW: AN OVERVIEW

IN THE BEFORE

In 1994, a firm called JDG Cryogenics became the Orpheus Group in an event that barely set ripples in the local market. Under any other circumstance, the Orpheus Group had a crackpot notion to chase the ravings of cryogenic patients who emerged from 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 many a Doubting Thomas still remains vocal about his 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 a pioneer 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 inclination 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? The questions remained unanswered... for now.

IN THE BETWEEN

In between **Orpheus** and **Crusade of Ashes**, the world continues changing. Orpheus Group's prime concern is the growing appearance of new projector firms, many of which are nothing more than garage operations. While these new businesses impact little on Orpheus' seemingly iron grip over the market, the Group is concerned that these new enterprises lack the technical understanding of the process to avoid tragedy. Some projector firms are offering sleeper tours through the hereafter, while others are out to make a quick buck robbing various establishments by walking through walls. In short, a disaster is pending, and Orpheus Group fears the potential backlash against the market as a whole and against it in particular.

As per normal, the government is woefully behind in trying to legislate this new enterprise. Police stations are ill equipped to handle the wave of projector-related crimes or distinguishing the crazies from the legitimate complaints. What makes the matter worse is that any evidence gathered through projecting, including the testimony of murdered victims who are now ghosts, is inadmissible in court. It doesn't matter how damning the evidence or testimony is, the court doesn't recognize post-life entities (as Orpheus Group is fond of calling spooks).

Given the current situation of the world, something has to change...

And it will.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Crusade of Ashes covers the current events of the world and the changes extant through four main chapters. The chapters are designed to offer relevant tidbits of information, with a split offered between player-related material and Storyteller-related data. More so, 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.

THE MOVIE MODEL

In *Aliens*, the audience is startled by Sigourney Weaver's character Ripley when she awakens from a sweat-drenched dream. She raises Burke on the vid-phone.

Ripley: Just tell me one thing, Burke. You're going out there to destroy them... right? Not to study them, not to bring back, but to wipe them out.

Burke: That's the plan. You have my word on it.

Ripley: Alright, I'm in.

Ripley tells the cat that he's staying behind, then the scene cuts... We see space, then the *Sulaco* drifts into view.

And that's it.

In those scant few minutes, the movie shifts direction, pivoting on a very low-key, emotionally intense exchange. The first plot twist kicks the movie into high gear and never lets up after that.

Crusade of Ashes is **Orpheus'** major plot twist, with the opening chapter launching the story-arc into an accelerated plummet. Most movies start with subtle, small plot changes. Not here. Because we aren't scripting the characters, we must script the action. Therefore, **Crusade of Ashes** provides that external stimulus to force adaptation in the characters. After that, the sourcebook offers supporting characters, locations and internal beats... little events to keep the discovery level high and the adrenaline rushing. These entries also provide the Storyteller with the basic framework to running the story, giving enough information for events to play toward certain conclusions.

THIS MOVIE SUCKS

It's a given that only a few great storytellers and dream-smiths can craft tales that seize everyone's fancy. **Orpheus** isn't about crafting the next seminal classic or giving the reader pause to consider the philosophical realities of existence. **Orpheus** is about telling a fun story that will undoubtedly please some readers with

the changes and leave others ambivalent. Nothing prevents Storyteller and troupe alike from ignoring the major changes suggested, however, and working their way around the events as though everything remained untouched. Throughout the series, the sourcebooks continually offer suggestions as to how to incorporate certain events without them altering the very dynamic of the world (as written). In fact, **Orpheus** encourages it, if only because it'll keep players guessing as to the game's course, including those who've already read the sourcebook.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Crusade of Ashes has four main chapters not including the fiction piece and introduction. Read what you will, but as players, consider the efforts of your Storyteller and try to avoid those sections meant for her eyes alone. It's more fun that way. Regardless, however, some information including the story unfolding in Chapter One, is mentioned in other chapters. It's almost impossible to read the book and not understand what's occurring. Therefore, we recommend that as players, you should wait for the Storyteller to run the opening event before reading any more sections... or at least ask his approval in the matter.

Chapter One: Orpheus in Wane is the major plot twist that changes the chronicle's potential direction. It is meant for Storytellers only, but it kicks the metaplot into action. Recounted in story format, this chapter allows the crucible to participate directly in the event or to watch as bystanders. Before running this story, however, Storytellers should discuss with the players the possibility of keeping the chronicle the same or introducing a major change to the game universe.

Chapter Two: Dead Men Running is a survival guide for players and Storytellers. The chapter is divided into two sections, with the player half discussing existence as fugitives and potential new ways to approach Ability use without conforming verbatim to the rules. It essentially expands every character's usefulness in any potential scene. The Storyteller section, meanwhile, mentions the state of affairs for the characters and the adversity facing them.

Chapter Three: The Unearthed Players Guide is for the players, and it includes a variety of crunchy material available in each supplement. For this sourcebook, the crunchy material includes a list of Merits and Flaws as well as rules for generating and using artifacts. As per **Orpheus'** intent to foster team play, this chapter also includes Crucible Merits and Flaws, enabling the group to purchase advantages and disadvantages that everyone shares.

Chapter Four: Storytelling the Dead is strictly for the Storyteller. It includes advice on playing **Crusade of Ashes**, techniques to involve new characters based on recent chronicle events and a new "Twisted Reflections" section to arm the Storyteller with a who's who of antagonists (as well as updating old material with entirely new



entries). This chapter wraps up with "Ghost Stories." Instead of simply stating the new revelations awaiting the characters, this offers ready-made stories where the truth unveils itself.

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 (or supplement). These metaplot events reach their climax in the final book of the series, with the progression as follows:

Supplement Two — Shades of Gray: "*This is <static>Free Death. You've <static> to stop all those <static> from dying. <static> just kids, and they're <static>much pain.*"

Supplement Three — Shadow Games: "*<static>miasma everywhere... blinding all spooks. <static> like a dust <static>. Emergency crews <static> everywhere, but they <static> see what you see.*"

Supplement Four — The Orphan-Grinders: "*There is shelter <static>. Find Lazarus <static> protect you before it's too late. Use Ecstatic <static> to draw others to safety.*"

Final Supplement — End Game: *<static>*

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

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

Below. A surprising flick not without its flaws. The movie involves a haunting aboard a WWII sub after the crew picks up survivors from a downed British medical frigate. *Below* uses a CGI ghost to decent effect for a ghost story, focusing more on character interaction than *boo* driven plots.

Deep Rising. Treat Williams and Famke Janssen play in this flick about hijacked luxury liner, missing passengers and nasty tentacle monsters that digest you whole. Fun dialogue and a flick that doesn't take itself seriously make for an enjoyable ride. Seems like a perfect scenario if you turn the monster into a Spectre.

Ghost Ship. A ship mysteriously resurfaces after years of being lost at sea and adrift. From the same director as *Thirteen Ghosts*, the visuals are interesting even if the story isn't. Still, the opening death scene on the dance-floor is good enough to show to players and springboard a new story.

Lost Souls. A ship mysteriously resurfaces after years of being lost... at... sea... and... adrift? Hmm. How Judd Nelson has fallen.

Virus. Not a great flick, but it rounds out the boat-related horror theme if you discount *Leviathan* and *Deepstar Six*. Turn the monster on board to a ghost with *Inhabit*, and voila you... still... have a bad horror movie. Now, can anyone figure out why boats are related to this dry-docked book?

THEME

Crusade of Ashes is essentially about surviving as fugitives and the illusion of control. The characters' world is now upside down, and whatever advantages they once enjoyed with Orpheus are now the rope by which society is trying to hang them. More specifically, loss of control is a pervasive theme. Orpheus Group and everybody else playing the ghost game believe themselves in control. It's the only way to foster a sense of security and not frighten operatives with the truth... that nothing about projecting is certain or understood. It's human nature to explain the unknown just to make it less frightening, but the fact is, Orpheus no more fathoms the nature of its activities than it does the driving force behind Spectres. Unfortunately, when you're about to flatline a person, effectively killing him so he can project, about the last thing you want to tell him is, "Wow, you're fucking brave. I mean, we have no clue what the hell is out there. Well, Godspeed."

That ignorance and eagerness to conquer new frontiers, however, is about to backfire. Humanity's hubris concerning technology and its need to playact as God has a price. This is the beginning of events to rob characters of that security. The belief of control is crucial to horror stories, where the characters go from a sense of comfort to being victimized by circumstance. Loss of control is inevitable. Otherwise, there is no risk, and without risk, there is no fear of loss. Everything is certain when everything is certainly not.

Another theme extending over the course of the game is that of telling ghost stories for ghosts. Each chapter unravels one mystery and replaces it with another. While many clues are already in place, allowing astute readers to figure out certain story shifts, important persona and upcoming events, much of the material is unknown territory. That's deliberate. In telling ghost stories for ghosts, the characters involved may never understand the nature or purpose of their opposition until the very end. Otherwise, the prospect of upcoming events is never truly frightening. Reveal the realities of the situation too early, and prospects are no longer scary.

We've provided a new and different setting, in essence to supply readers with the uncertainty of a new environment (loss of control and ghost stories for ghosts). After this, they won't take their surroundings for granted anymore. Nothing is what it seems, and understanding that means surviving longer.

CHAPTER ONE: ORPHEUS IN WANE



Bitch will pay... trust me. They all will.

—Ben Cotton

Damn! Back from the grave and out of ammunition!

—House

WHAT'S IN THIS CHAPTER

Note: This is a Storyteller-only chapter. Please feel free to read it if you're running *Orpheus* or if you're just picking up the book for the sake of a good read. If there's even a slight chance you'll be running through this adventure as a player, though, please skip this section so you don't ruin the surprise for yourself. Trust us... it's more fun this way.

This chapter details the attack on Orpheus that effectively obliterates the company from the face of the planet. It gives you the layout of the compound, write-ups for those involved, a timeline of the attack and a brief section on the aftermath. In other words... everything you need to tell a story and involve your players. If you'd rather use this section as back-story for your game and not as a player scenario, that's fine too. The material detailed herein is only a set of default events taking place in the absence of any character involvement. Characters may change any or all the incidents put forth here, although to change certain key occurrences would require information they are extremely unlikely to have without resorting to unsound methods (i.e., cheating). We strongly recommend that characters only experience a fraction of the full attack on the Orpheus compound (if any of it at all), because Orpheus' enemies are playing for keeps, and it would be a shame for the characters to expire so early in the mini-series.

Final Note: Yes, the opening fiction piece happens during the attack, but *it is not canon*. It doesn't take into account the characters' actions. It is merely a slice of fictional life to bring the events of the attack into crueled clarity and to progress the story revolving around the signature characters. The Storyteller may incorporate certain events into the assault timeline, but in the end, it's the players' characters who should make the difference in altering events.

THE ATTACK

To better understand the chapter, perhaps it's best to understand the nature of the upcoming events. In the simplest terms, someone (who we'll call mysterious antagonist #1) offers NextWorld a hefty sum of money in the seven digits to eliminate Orpheus and raze it to the ground. What's more, while the employer remains a mystery, he can supply NextWorld with Spectres to assist in the attack. NextWorld agrees, both thanks to the meaty check and out of curiosity as to how this mysterious employer can bring the Spectres under heel.

Before beginning, however, **A Word of Warning** to the Storyteller. The events described herein are beyond deadly. Whoever wants Orpheus eliminated is pulling out all the stops in the attack, and they have the numbers and the surprise on their side. Orpheus will fall. Someone's seen to that. If, after reading this, the Storyteller knows there's no way for the characters to survive the assault... then keep them out. Play this as a major background event.

BUT I LIKE ORPHEUS...

Orpheus' destruction follows a certain thematic element in horror movies, and that's the loss of control. The series, however, can continue playing out as intended, with Orpheus still intact. The Storyteller can just as easily rig the company's survival, with the characters at the forefront of combat... saving lives and eventually repulsing the attack. Doing so, however, hinges on many "what ifs" like: What if Forebode indicated an attack in no uncertain terms? What if the Kirlian cameras Orpheus Group recently purchased were already operational? What if the characters somehow discovered the possessed targets before they did too much damage?

It's actually best if the attack happens (regardless of whether Orpheus Group survives), since that precipitates a landslide of events. In the plotted sequence, Orpheus' destruction allows the FBI to step in and launch a crusade against projectors. The crux of the matter is, the feds want to regulate the technology pertaining to projecting, and with the market leader (and main patent holder) gone, they have a good chance of succeeding. The FBI turns the event into a media circus and popular inquisition. This event should send the characters running (more details are available in Chapter Two) with no less than two mysterious antagonists one their tails. With few support structures to help them, the characters must survive on wits and teamwork alone, as well as discovering new facts and truths about their surroundings. Through their status as fugitives, the characters can actually grow and thrive into something great and unique.

All that said, the failed assault against Orpheus can still produce some of the same results. The attacks occur, revealing the presence of powerful antagonists, but Orpheus survives. The FBI still uses this as an excuse to seize control of projector technology, with the Group fighting a media and legal battle against the government. The public is split on the matter, with Orpheus Group unable to pursue new contracts. So instead, management uses the characters to investigate the attack surreptitiously, while the crucible avoids the media, nosy FBI agents and mysterious antagonist #1 who is still out there, waiting to eliminate the characters.

ORPHEUS COMPOUND

Before delving into the unfolding action of this chapter, here is a description of the Orpheus compound. Orpheus is a wealthy company that planned on using this site as the crown jewel in an expanding empire. It is the first, but Orpheus planned on building others as the company accrued more resources. This attack ensures that will never happen.

From the outside, the Orpheus compound looks like a single building on a beautifully landscaped campus surrounded by a chain-link fence. Grassy knolls and two large well-maintained ponds (used as heat sinks for the HVAC system) surround the low, architecturally elegant concrete building that is the public face of Orpheus Group. To the side is a parking lot for

public parking and a softball field for employees to stretch their legs. Beyond the grassy hills are acres of woods. The nearest building to the compound, a mile to the north through surprisingly thick woods, is another industrial campus owned by the Pentex Corporation.

The compound has a sensible floor plan. The pleasant corporate mask of Orpheus Group, comprising its administrative offices and meeting rooms is on levels one and two, the ground floor and the first story (which are visible above ground). Sub-basement one is the underground garage for employees only. The facilities for those living in the compound are in sub-basement two. The “sensitive” areas including the Nursery are mostly located in sub-basement three and, finally, the crunchy infrastructural elements of the compound are in the dimly lit and rarely accessed sub-basement four.

The following description assumes the compound is a single, two-story building with four basements (level four being the lowest). If you wish to deviate from this plan, feel free to make the Orpheus compound an office tower with the levels going up rather than down. Or, this section of the compound can be four sub-basements beneath an office tower. Or these levels can constitute the top floors of a tall office building. As the Storyteller, you may choose how Orpheus Group arranges its key facility based on the nature of the chronicle and its host city/community. Is the chronicle urban and contemporary in its approach, using skyscrapers and industrial parks as potential locations? Or is it in a small town, much like Raccoon City in *Resident Evil*, where a giant facility lies hidden beneath the streets of Small Town, USA?

GROUND FLOOR AND FIRST STORY

Orpheus Group’s public face comprises two stories of a typical business office one would expect to find of a law firm. The colors are subdued without being drab, and oil paintings hang in corridors to offer visitors relaxing vistas to sooth a potentially nerve-wracking experience.

RECEPTION

Visitors to the Orpheus compound await their appointments in an elegantly decorated white and gray room that pipes in a medley of soft classical music. An arrangement of fresh lilies always sits on the receptionists’ desk, where Elizabeth Ellis and Brenda Robison both work answering the phones or interacting with the nervous clientele to distract them. Beyond reception is a hallway leading back to the business offices and meeting rooms.

KITCHEN AND DINING ROOMS

Situated on the main floor, the kitchen has its own loading dock so supply trucks can unload the daily selection of produce or supplies. There are three different dining rooms, with the largest serving as the facility’s general cafeteria. Here’s where most of the employees, technicians and Investigative Consultants eat. The other two dining rooms are for the research and science staff, and one for Orpheus executives (which appears more akin to a corner in a fancy restaurant). Where the other dining rooms use plastic and metal furnishings, the Executive Dining Room is predominantly wood and carpet and has two

waiters. It’s also where Orpheus entertains some clients for a meal or drink.

BUSINESS OFFICES

Orpheus’ day-to-day administrative work takes place in a wholly mundane array of meeting rooms and administrative offices.

Meeting Rooms

There are three meeting rooms on the main floor. The first is the phone room, which contains a large round table with video phones specializing in teleconferencing calls with Orpheus’ “embassies” and corporate clients in North America and Europe. The second meeting room contains a long wooden table and 20 comfortable rolling office chairs. The third is a small amphitheater featuring a computer and video projection system for giving presentations.

Administrative Offices

The first story comprises the heart of Orpheus’ operations where the employees handle the “mundane” business — accounts receivable, accounts payable, payroll, et cetera. The layout is simple with the closed offices for the department heads along the outside walls, and an open area in the middle for cubicle workspaces.

SUB-BASEMENT ONE: UNDERGROUND PARKING

Orpheus assigns its staff numbered parking places, in a secured garage that requires a key-card entry. The underground garage allows Orpheus to ensure the privacy of employees.

SUB-BASEMENT TWO: LIVING QUARTERS AND TRAINING FACILITIES

This level is actually an extra half-floor in height, to cut down on the facility’s potentially claustrophobic environment. With brightly lit rooms and white hallways, it’s essentially Orpheus’ boot camp for training and housing projectors.

RECREATION HALL

The recreation hall contains several comfortable chairs arranged around a high-end home-theater system, two billiard tables, a kitchenette, three video-game cabinets and several chairs and tables for playing cards or chess. Next to the kitchenette is a bank of assorted vending machines.

CLASSROOMS/TRAINING ROOMS

There are four classrooms and three training rooms on this level. Classrooms contain blackboards, chairs, desks and built-in audio-video equipment, while training rooms, used primarily for teaching yoga and assorted meditation and breathing techniques, contains stacks of foam pads, crash mats and a cabinet full of fresh folded towels.

GYMNASIUM

The Orpheus gym is a large, open room. Half the room contains a full-length basketball court. The other half houses state-of-the-art training equipment, an array of free weights and benches and several stair machines and treadmills.

Framing the edge of the room is an insulated running track. A large laundry room adjoins the gymnasium to the north.

LOCKER ROOMS

On either side of the gymnasium are men's and women's locker rooms with lockers, restrooms, sinks, a shower room, a steam room, a sauna and a Jacuzzi.

DORMITORIES

The dormitory facilities are for research staff and trainees only, and they compose their own wing. Support staff do not, as a rule, live here, though there are two rooms set aside for office workers working long weekends during year-end audits and inventories. The dorm rooms are simple and aren't intended for occupancy any longer than 18 weeks at a time.

Trainee's Dormitory

Each of the 10 trainee dorm rooms sleeps two trainees and contains two desks, two computers with T1 Internet access, two closets and a private bathroom.

Staff Dormitory

The seven staff dorm rooms, while simple in design, are larger and more comfortable than those provided for trainees. They also have more storage space and much better computers. Orpheus provides these facilities for trainers, who must remain on site for the first two weeks of a new training period. Afterward, they must spend four nights a week during the training period at headquarters (with Friday, Saturday and Sunday night theirs to spend at home).

SUB-BASEMENT THREE: THE NURSERY AND LABS

The main elevator does not go beyond sub-basement two. Only the freight elevator, which requires a magnetic key (in the possession of the trainers, techs, security guards and qualified projectors) can access this level. Only engineers and techs can access sub-basement four.

LABS

Only researchers and doctors can access this wing. This suite consists of seven labs where Orpheus conducts the vast bulk of its research into sleep, dreams, ghosts, parapharmacology, neurophysiology and other elements of experimental medicine and preternatural phenomena. The wing stocks all manner of research tools here, including monitored sleep bays (with arrays of sensors piled around a single bed), computer labs, chemistry labs — where researchers engineer pharmacologically active compounds — and an engineering lab where techs are designing and building the next generation of sleeper pods with the help of CAD/CAM machines.

THE NURSERY

The Nursery is where projectors come to project, be they sleepers or skimmers. A security booth recessed in the wall guards the Nursery's entry. Inside are actually two rooms, one area each for both projector types. The skimmer area is designed for comfort and tranquility, with low-lighting, relaxing music and comfortable couches for resting. The sleeper side, however, is less inviting, with steel and chrome-encased hardware, monitoring equipment, an emergency medical bay and two rows of 20 sleeper pods hooked into suspension-fluid processors. Most of these cradles are in use, though

some are empty or serving as an emergency backup system. The characters may turn off the sleeper pods, but it still takes five hours for the individual in the pod to emerge from cryogenic suspension. (Any 10 rolled on a simple Intelligence roll indicates the character turned the cradle off properly; any botches means the sleeper is still flatlined, and decomposing over the next five hours until the body is completely unrecoverable.)

A lot can happen in five hours.

After the Spectral attack, the Nursery is the setting of a particularly grisly tableau of butchered Orpheus employees, ripped frozen from their sleeper pods or torn apart on the couch, their remains the playthings of Fetches.

SECURITY ROOM

From this large (and very secure) room, on the far end of the level from the elevators, the security staff can monitor input from the enormous array of security cameras situated throughout the compound. Security room personnel can also take manual control of safety functions like alarms, sprinkler systems, elevator operations and security and fire doors. About half of Orpheus' security cams are on level three, with the remainder located in key corridors and above important doorways on levels one, two and four. The tragedy is that security had new Kirlian cameras installed throughout the facility, but they aren't on-line yet.

OFFICES

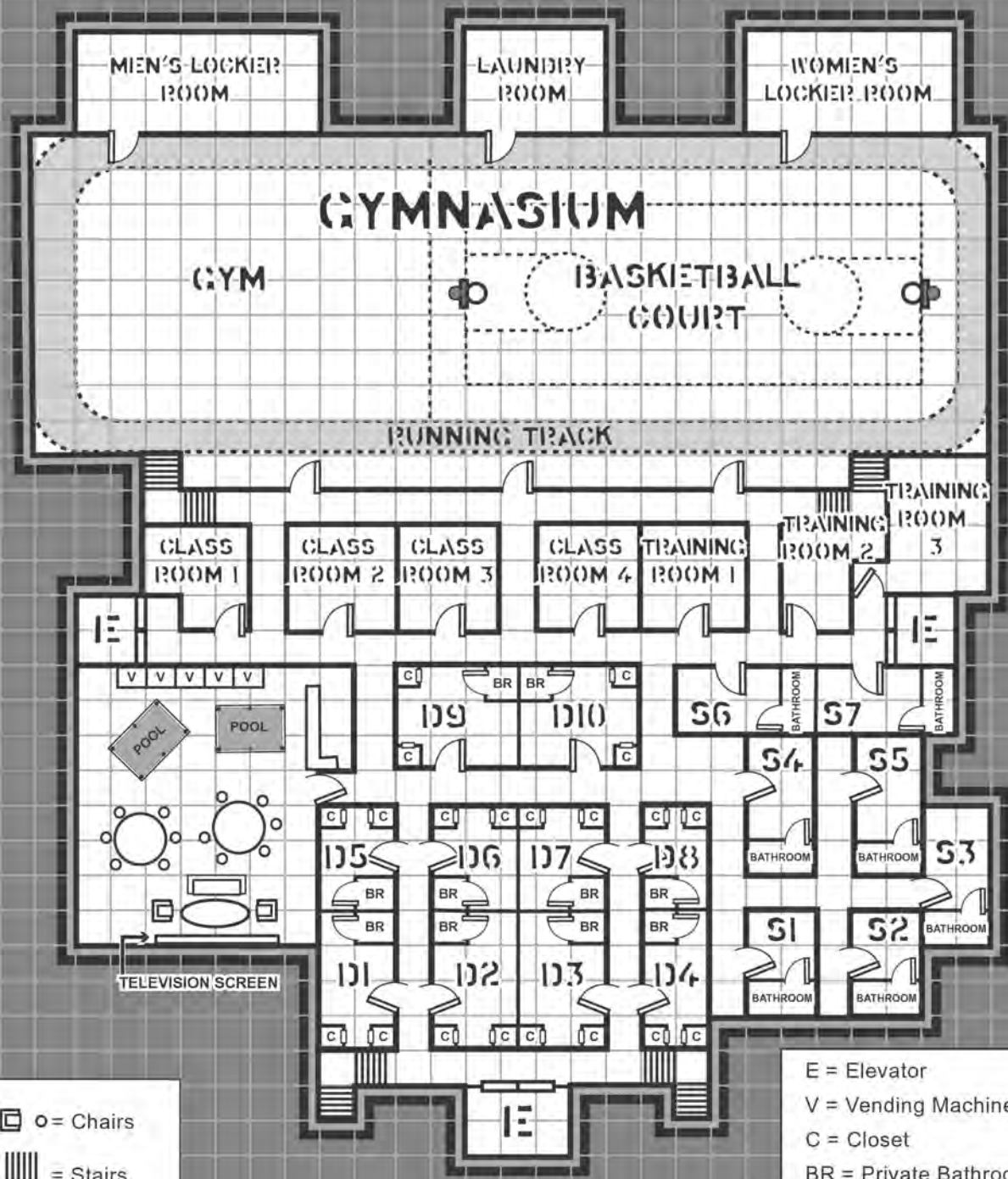
Key personnel have offices on this level. For the most part, such personnel include ranking researchers and doctors, though a few security-conscious Orpheus executives also maintain offices here.

LOCKDOWN

The Orpheus compound can lock down trouble spots from the security room only. Lockdown is never automatic for fear that it may trap personnel inside during a fire. Instead, security assesses the situation and activates the fire doors where necessary. The fire doors are scattered throughout the primary corridors, enabling the security team to contain or delay the blaze's spread by shutting down sectors. The sub-basement levels are relatively airtight, allowing security to shut circulation off to the secured sections.

The second type of lockdown involves electronically bolting all doors and windows during a potential emergency, like in the event of intruders. As with the fire doors, security can isolate the lockdown to one room or to all the rooms. Unfortunately, this safety measure costs many people their lives when NextWorld operatives seize control of the security room and electronically bolt every door and window. Travel is now only possible by breaking doors down. Busting through normal office doors (extended action Strength roll; five successes) is far easier than nailing the corridor security or fire doors, which requires Witch's Nimbus or Wail to topple. (Brute physical force won't work, but walking through them as spooks works quite well.)

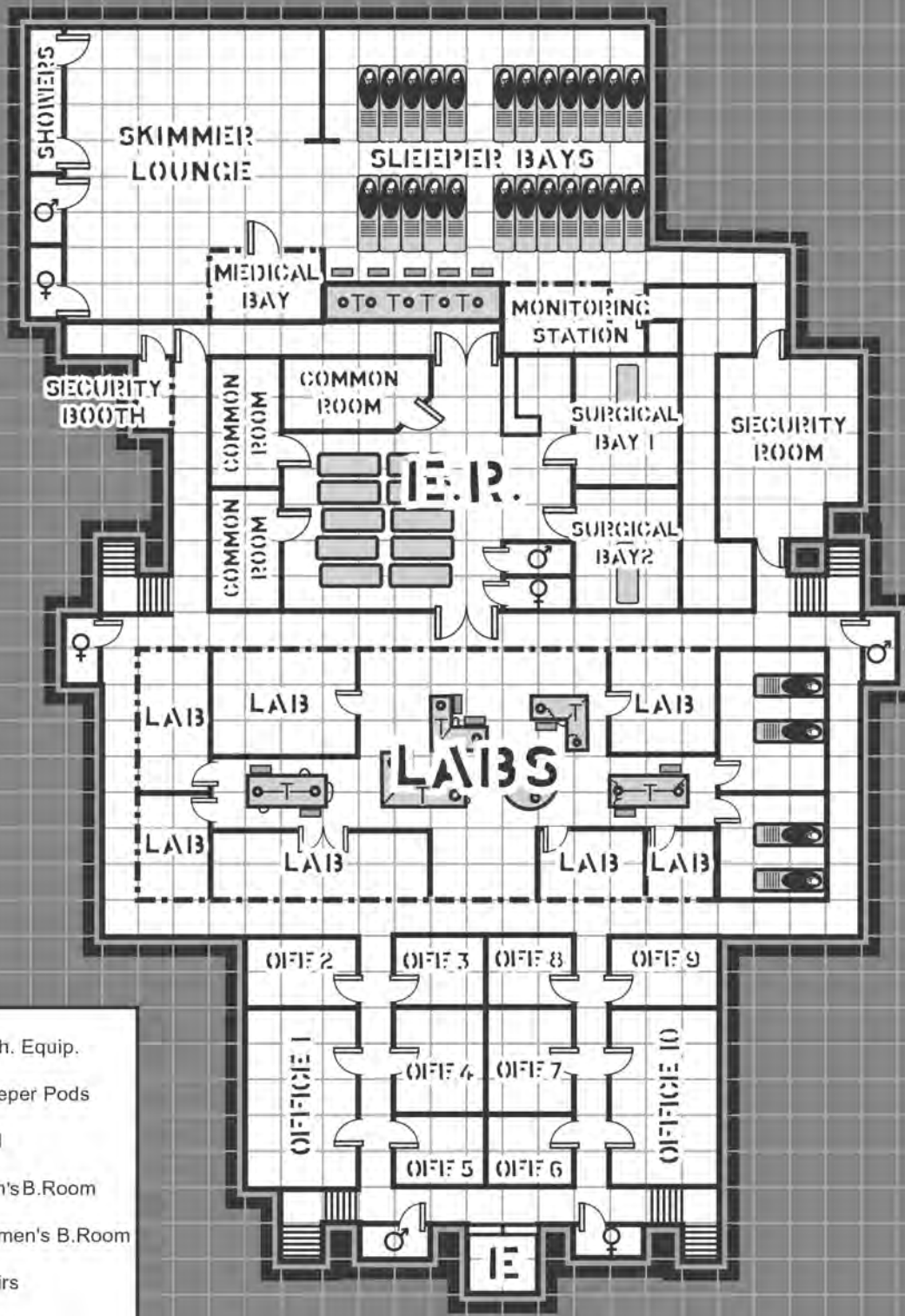
SUB-BASEMENT #2



- ○ = Chairs
- |||| = Stairs
- ⤵ = Door

- E = Elevator
- V = Vending Machine
- C = Closet
- BR = Private Bathrooms
- D# = Dorm Rooms
- S# = Staff Dorm Rooms

SUB-BASIMENT #3



-  = Tech. Equip.
-  = Sleeper Pods
-  = Bed
-  = Men's B. Room
-  = Women's B. Room
-  = Stairs
-  = Door

EMERGENCY MEDICAL BAYS

There is no substitute for real hospital care, but given the nature of Orpheus Group and the dangers in projecting, it's necessary to have emergency medical facilities on site. This area includes a hospital ward with 10 beds, two doctors' offices and a nurse station, a small common room and two emergency surgical bays. Mostly, the emergency medical facilities come into use if the doctors need to stabilize a patient's condition before loading and transporting him, for tending minor scrapes, wounds and ailments and to handle trauma that needs immediate care. Think of it as more akin to a well-equipped triage station.

SUB-BASEMENT FOUR: ENGINEERING COMPUTER MAINFRAME

Orpheus' computer hub is in a secure room, behind a small vault door requiring special access available only to techs and the department head. Several cameras monitor the connecting hallway, while personnel in the security room can drop metal fire doors in several different places to safeguard the computer. We encourage the Storyteller to determine just what "special access" entails, be it the mainframe door requiring three magnetic keys, a retina or fingerprint scan, a PIN, a keycard or some other, more complex means of entry. The room may also house an armed guard on duty inside the computer room, again, at the Storyteller's discretion. This assures that players who read this section will not have any advance knowledge of the security measures. This room remains secure and intact until the Death Merchants destroy it to cripple Orpheus. The strange fact of the matter, however, is that the memory files are all wiped out, down to the last byte, following the attack.

DATA VAULT

At the end of every day, technicians place a fresh backup of the mainframe in storage in the data vault. The data vault is a large safe located inside a small room the size of a broom closet. The data vault's door reads "Secondary Storage." The safe's walls are insulated steel-alloy and can protect the data within from anything normal intruders can throw at it (unless someone has Security 5 with a specialty in safecracking and access to the proper tools).

The Death Merchants, however, are expecting something exactly like this. They send in a couple of spooks to walk through the wreckage and rubble, and to fry the data vault interior using Witch's Nimbus.

EMERGENCY GENERATORS

The quiet, highly efficient backup generators on this level can provide enough power to maintain basic lighting and ventilation needs throughout the building for four days after the interruption of normal electricity.

HVAC

HVAC is an acronym for heating, ventilation and cooling. All the HVAC equipment is kept in sub-basement four, out of the way and safe from tampering. It is worth

noting that all air circulated through the Orpheus compound first runs through a sophisticated scrubber system to filter out particles as small as one micron, and subsequently subjected to sterilization processes that kill or neutralize all bacterial and viral agents. Elevated levels of any dangerous gas (ranging from carbon monoxide to phosgene or nerve agents) triggers an alarm and activates a massive venting of the facility.

STORAGE

Some of what the staff relegates to this vast room is junk: broken desks, Pentium II computers, boxes of obsolete text books, assorted quasi-medical equipment, extra bed frames and similarly worthless items. Other objects, however, are useful and even highly valuable: boxes of MREs (military food rations), blank CDs, security codes and software manuals, and extra material stores (soap, medical supplies, office supplies, etc.). By far, the most amazing items here are the extra sleeper pods, though it would take considerable work to remove even one, especially after the raid destroys the elevators. Understandably, the door to this room is locked.

THE CHARACTERS

You may want your characters to contend with some fraction of the Orpheus raid, but we advise you that they not suffer through it all. Even a large crucible of moderately experienced characters will meet its match in the 12 highly trained mercenaries and 20 Spectres sent in to annihilate the Orpheus Group.

We recommended, instead, that characters encounter the remnants of the attack, if that. Assuming they attend the big party at the Orpheus compound, and further assuming they intend to go, it might make sense if they arrive an hour or two late. A washed-out bridge, a flat tire or any other obstacle works fine. It's also possible the crucible is actually on assignment in another city during the party and thereby spared the wrath of NextWorld's mercs and their Spectral backup.

CHARACTER INVOLVEMENT

This section addresses what the Storyteller must know either to involve the characters in the Orpheus assault or keep them out of the direct action. Both situations are possible and both have their pros and cons; neither is inherently more preferable than the other. The Storyteller should look at both options and take the characters' experience into consideration before making a decision. In any case, this section provides Storytellers with sufficient information to run either.

IN ABSENTIA

If the characters aren't present during the raid, they hear about it through other means. While it's certainly possible the characters learn of the attack from the web or other similar media, the Storyteller should inform the characters of the attack through the most dramatic means possible. Highlight the fact that the world the characters thought they

knew is turned upside down. Many, and possibly most, of the characters' colleagues and friends in Orpheus are the victims of these brutal attacks and most, if not all, are dead (to one degree or another). Survivor guilt is almost unavoidable in such circumstances, but let that reality sink into the character's awareness on its own. It's a conclusion you can lead them to, not one you can make them accept.

The characters might learn of the attack in several ways:

- A bedridden coworker from Orpheus calls a character and tells him to turn on the news. A television crew is capturing the chaos of the explosions, the flames and, possibly, the collapse of the building's visible floors.

- A coworker, who's now a ghost, comes to the crucible for protection, with a Spectre or two hot on her heels. This gives the characters their first taste of the horrors to come.

- The characters could report to the compound just as the last explosion collapses a large chunk of the building. Characters who run in must contend not only with dead and dying colleagues, but with rampaging Spectres and the dangers of a burning building. If the characters return at a later time, they may encounter the Death Merchants who arrive to destroy Orpheus Group's data and records.

IN HARM'S WAY

The more dangerous approach to running the Orpheus compound assault is to place the characters in the building when the attack unfolds. It's dangerous because of the many obstacles present — e.g., explosions and swarms of Spectres. These are not threats that most characters can survive easily. It's also dangerous because it relies on the characters having enough sense to retreat from the compound before someone blows them up or the Spectres swarm them.

The Storyteller must consider several logistical elements if the characters are at the raid. For example, where are they situated, and how can the group be brought together? Do they have any way of communicating with each other outside of cell phones, which don't work in the compound's concrete and steel basements? Can they escape the compound, or is their best hope finding a deserted room and waiting out the destruction? Hint: Unless there is *absolutely* no sensible way for the characters to escape the compound, this is the worst plan. If the smoke, fire and explosions don't get them, the Spectres likely will. Death Merchants arrive within several hours after the attack and comb the compound in search of evidence (which they destroy) or survivors (whom they kill or abduct) as per the mission orders of their secret employer. The Storyteller should gently nudge characters with three or more dots of Intelligence or Wits, or one or more dots in Survival, to regroup on the surface with whatever survivors they can rescue. Once there, they should keep a low profile amid the trees ringing the charred remains of the Orpheus compound and hope the Spectres don't look for them.

The Storyteller should help bring the characters together relatively quickly after the attack begins. Not only does this maximize the characters' chances for survival, it also makes for a smoother gaming experience. While it's possible to run the action with the characters spread across the facility, doing so hampers the pacing for everyone



involved. That said, a good Storyteller can simply use this method to extend this extremely dramatic moment of the game, milking it for all it's worth. Taking that approach also gives each player an opportunity to show off her character's skills and ingenuity to the rest of the troupe. If you try this approach and the game bogs down, don't be afraid to change tactics. If your players are chatting, reading or otherwise slipping out of character, that's a sure sign you need to regroup the crucible and dive back into group-play mode.

While the Storyteller should give the players ample and intensifying indications that the situation is rapidly becoming untenable, characters who insist on staying in harm's way should be allowed to become ghosts (or even vanish from existence outright) if they don't take the hint.

SPLIT SCREEN

Even with the occasional convenient coincidence, characters' lives aren't necessarily less complicated than those of real people. Maybe half the crucible is in the Orpheus compound when the attack occurs, while the other half is off doing something else. While it's possible to run a "split-screen" game, toggling back and forth between each group is not advisable, for reasons touched on before.

Your best bet as Storyteller is to gently "nudge" circumstances that help keep the crucible together, whether inside the compound or elsewhere. While players have used truly inventive means to thwart the Storyteller's attempts to keep groups together (both inadvertently and otherwise), the Storyteller can typically overcome these circumstances creatively.

Some ways of dealing with such situations includes making sure the crucible must complete an assignment outside the Orpheus compound. Alternatively, one of the Puppetry victims from Orpheus might call the crucible in for an emergency meeting at the compound. This meeting, of course, is a ruse by NextWorld mercenaries staged to maximize the assault's impact. Since killing the characters isn't really the Storyteller's goal, the crucible may arrive late, at the very tail end of the raid. Everyone is dead, parts of the facility are in flames and horribly damaged, and the players' crucible is left to contend with the Spectres and NextWorld mercs trying to ambush any stragglers.

Ultimately, how the Storyteller brings the characters together is less important than simply seeing that it happens. Any kind of Storyteller chicanery can suffice in a pinch, if necessary.

Conversely, if keeping the characters together requires too much blatant Storyteller interference, you may allow the characters to split up (as they're wont to do) and run each splinter group's actions in discrete game sessions. Try running the group that *does not* go to Orpheus first, thereby saving the dramatic revelations for later (by reversing it, the characters not going to Orpheus will likelier find their game session disappointing and anticlimactic — a game killer if ever there was one).

THE FOES

The antagonists launching this brutal attack against Orpheus are extraordinarily lethal. Most, if not all, of

NextWorld's mercenaries participated in other operations not unlike this one. They are skilled, ruthless and deadly. While they may have specific mission objectives, they will not hesitate to "neutralize" characters against whom they bear a grudge or believe dangerous to NextWorld's larger objectives.

NextWorld's attack plan relies on four individuals dominated through Puppetry.

- **Jerome Larousse:** Larousse is known around the office for his easy-going manner and smile. As a desk jockey in Accounting, he is in charge of mission budgets and often interacts with characters when asking them about specific requests for a particular sortie. NextWorld agent Jamil Karabey grabbed Larousse outside his house via Puppetry, forcing him to detour and pick up the necessary weapons and explosives. Characters encountering him might pick up on his rather grave demeanor, unusual mannerisms or belligerent stares (Perception + Alertness or Wits + Empathy) since he is possessed by someone with a radically different Nature and Demeanor.

- **Tyler Ford:** The first of two members on Orpheus' security team targeted for skinriding is Tyler Ford. Ford is technically Director of Security, but he blends in seamlessly with his team and never pulls rank. The NextWorld mercenary skinriding Ford is Tyson White. Both men have similar builds and both grew up in like circumstances. Those similarities make it difficult to detect Ford's possession. Characters may try as with Jerome, but at a difficulty of 9.

- **Sylvia Margoules:** Sylvia is the second member of the security team taken by a NextWorld mercenary. NextWorld's field policy directs agents to skinride members of the same sex only, to prevent telltale gender-based mannerisms from betraying the mission. In this case, it's still a challenge. Margoules is a short, slightly plump Hispanic woman while Valerie Timborn, the skinrider, is, essentially, a svelte Nordic goddess. Timborn is a natural actress, however, and she mimics Margoules' gestures, mannerisms and nigh-imperceptible accent with absolute virtuosity.

- **Rob Largent:** A pleasant, if somewhat bland man in his late 40s, Largent is the lead facilities manager for the Orpheus grounds, meaning he oversees the day-to-day operations of the compound, including the maintenance of the building's infrastructure and the running of the kitchen. Marcus N'Kejeda, NextWorld's director of this assault, used Puppetry to grab Largent because he has keys to every door and elevator in the facility. While the group's other strategies *should* render those keys unnecessary, NextWorld's attack plan incorporates a high degree of redundancy to ensure the mission's success.

Please Note: The hosts are all wearing belts lined with mini-packets of plastic explosives. The trigger is the host's bioelectric activity, which changes when someone possesses the host. The devices in the belt-buckle are calibrated to that of the host with the accompanying Skinrider. If someone tries fighting the Skinrider for control and succeeds or the Skinrider abandons the host, the explosive immediately detonates from the measurable spike in bioelectric activity.

THE NEXTWORLD MERCES

NextWorld's mercenaries are experienced and lethal. While some may have even worked with Orpheus or Terrel & Squib, most trained with NextWorld, a mercenary firm specializing in ghostly operations. These mercenaries are bounty hunters or enforcers, many with extensive military training. Their preparation for assaults like this has been long and intense. Every member of all four teams has gone through the most severe tests NextWorld's hierarchy could develop. Not only are these men and women tough, but they are efficient and ruthless, every one of them transformed from lost soul to highly effective operative. All 12 NextWorld mercenaries underwent dozens of missions to learn and practice their various natural and supernatural abilities.

Each of the four teams has a particular task to perform in the Orpheus compound assault. Abel Team is in charge of A&E (access and exit), Baker Team is responsible for neutralizing personnel, Charlie Team handles creating as much chaos as possible to maximize the horror and panic of the attack, and Delta Team manages the systematic demolitions work that will destroy most of the compound and cover NextWorld's operations.

Any name with an asterisks (*) after it indicates the team's leader.

ABEL TEAM

Abel Team handles this mission's SEE (Strategic Entry/Exit) operations. Its job is to ensure that NextWorld's operatives effectively penetrate the Orpheus compound and get out once the job is done.

Marcus N'Kejeda*

Half black, half Native American, N'Kejeda grew up in Lawton, Oklahoma, the oldest of five kids. He joined the Marines upon graduating high school and went to Officer Training School within two years of enlisting. His



superiors, assuming N'Kejeda was a lifer, groomed him for a top leadership position. After reaching the rank of major at the young age of 27, N'Kejeda surprised his benefactors by resigning from the military and joining NextWorld. The leader of the mercenary teams, Marcus N'Kejeda is one of NextWorld's top three operatives.

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

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 3, Animal Ken 1, Athletics 4, Brawl (Shotokan Karate) 4, Computer 1, Drive 4, Empathy 1, Firearms 5, Intimidation 1, Investigation 1, Leadership 4, Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Melee (combat knife) 4, Occult 1, Security 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 5

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Skimmer (currently projecting)

Nature: Director

Willpower: 9

Vitality: 8

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Juggernaut, Puppetry, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose

Tactics: N'Kejeda is the leader of both Abel Team and the skinriders. As the ablest skinrider, N'Kejeda possesses the single most important individual to this mission — Rob Largent, the facilities manager — whose master keys grant NextWorld's operatives access to the entire compound should Ferraro and Czerner fail to inhabit the compound as planned. While skinriding Largent, N'Kejeda brings in several boxes full of very sophisticated and powerful explosives into the compound, claiming they are full of "special surprises for the party."

Klaus Czerner

Czerner was born in East Germany and worked as a hacker and spy for the Communists until the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. He went freelance shortly thereafter and has worked with NextWorld since immediately following its founding.

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

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Computer (Cracking) 5, Drive 2, Intimidation 2, Linguistics (German, Russian, English, French, C++, COBOL, FORTRAN, PERL, VISUAL BASIC) 5, Performance (Acting) 5, Security (Electronic) 5, Science 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 5

Shade: Haunter

Lament: Sleeper (currently projecting)

Nature: Conniver

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Inhabit, Witch's Nimbus

Tactics: Czerner is usually the mercs' hacker. For this assault, however, his job is to inhabit the Orpheus compound (to the best of his ability) and help minimize Orpheus' home-court advantage. Ultimately, Klaus will not be able to inhabit all of the compound. Instead he takes the bottom three floors (where the mainframe is) while Oscar Ferraro inhabits the upper three levels.

Oscar Ferraro

Ferraro is used to calling the shots in any situation in which he finds himself. In this case, he plays second fiddle to N'Kejeda, an experience he finds quite educational, though not to his liking.

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

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Drive 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 4, Leadership 4, Performance 2, Security 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Shade: Haunter

Lament: Sleeper (currently projecting)

Nature: Autocrat

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 8

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Inhabit, Puppetry, Unearthly Repose, Witch's Nimbus

Tactics: During the raid, Baker inhabits the upper three floors of the compound, turning the compound itself against Orpheus employees and granting his team members full access to the levels he controls.

BAKER TEAM

Baker Team is the threat-neutralization team, whose task it is to maximize the deaths of Orpheus personnel, which it accomplishes in a variety of ways.

Valerie Timborn*

Timborn grew up with three mean brothers, and she dominated all three of them. She is a ball-busting bitch and proud of it. She knows she's beautiful, and she uses her assets to manipulate men like marionettes. The only man she hasn't been able to wrap around her finger is Marcus N'Kejeda, who is gay and immune to her wiles.

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

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 3, Animal Ken 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Expression 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 2, Investigation 3, Performance 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 5

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Skimmer (currently projecting)

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Helter Skelter, Juggernaut, Puppetry, Unearthly Repose



Tactics: Timborn leads Baker Team. She is skilled in Puppetry and seduction. She possesses security monitor Sylvia Margoules and launches the attack in earnest by murdering the eight other security personnel present in the camera room (except for Ford, who Tyson White possesses). Once the security team is dead, Timborn guns down as many Orpheus operatives as she can before leaving her host body, thereby triggering the belt of explosives.

Tariq ibn Mustapha

Ibn Mustapha grew up in a traditional Islamic home in eastern Turkey but lost his faith while attending university in Germany. Now he serves whoever pays best.

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

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Drive 2, Empathy 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 2, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Politics 2, Security 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Sleeper (currently projecting)

Nature: Competitor

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 8

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Puppetry, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose

Tactics: Mustapha uses his three Horrors in tandem, teleporting from place to place throughout the compound, possessing leaders of small Orpheus groups that form in the chaos of the attack, and charming the others into following him into various traps (or just into situations where he or his teammates might gun them down).

Claude Colombo

A bully and thug from early childhood, Colombo was a mob enforcer who survived two murder attempts before dying on the third. He joined NextWorld relatively recently. He participates in this attack primarily as a balance to the strike team's more cerebral members.

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Computer 1, Drive 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Investigation 1, Law 1, Leadership 1, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 1

Shade: Poltergeist

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Bravo

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Helter Skelter, Wail

Tactics: Claude's primary task is to manifest and use his sniper skills to guard the stairs and elevator up to sub-basement one. He prevents Orpheus employees from escaping before the neutralization team can accomplish its job and the Spectres have their fill. Thanks to his skinriding teammates providing weaponry, Colombo has ample ammunition and a number of rifles and small arms from which to choose. Assuming he survives, Colombo is likely the last NextWorld operative out of the Orpheus compound.

CHARLIE TEAM

In this operation, Charlie Team acts as the diversion. Its primary function in this raid is to divide and distract Orpheus employees, thereby preventing them from responding in any sort of organized or orderly fashion.

Scott Frost

Frost is a slick, people person and a quick study. He masters mental tasks quickly and easily.



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

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Drive 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Leadership 4, Linguistics 4, Occult 1, Performance 2, Security 1, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 3

Shade: Haunter

Lament: Sleeper (currently projecting)

Nature: Conniver

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Helter Skelter, Inhabit, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose

Tactics: Frost leads Charlie team and, after N'Kejeda, is second-in-command of the entire mission. Frost uses Storm-Wending and Helter Skelter to flit around the complex wreaking havoc. He uses this tactic mostly on Orpheus office staff because those familiar with Horrors are less likely to be cowed or impressed by them.

Lorelei O'Reilly

O'Reilly is an accomplished liar and a sneak. She is intensely intuitive and frighteningly insightful.

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

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Drive 2, Empathy 5, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Performance 3, Security 1, Stealth 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 5

Shade: Wisp

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Visionary

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 8

Spite: 2

Offensive Abilities: Forebode, Unearthly Repose, Wail

Tactics: O'Reilly works closely with both her teammates. She uses Forebode to keep both apprised of any shifts in the upcoming timeline that might affect the compound assault. If threatened, she first uses her natural charm (heightened by Unearthly Repose) to disarm the situation. Failing that, she uses Wail.

Jamil Karabey*

In its earliest days, Karabey was one of Orpheus' shining stars. His brilliance and ability to devise new approaches to old problems made him popular with Orpheus' researchers. Orpheus terminated Karabey's employment, however, when he used some of his innovative techniques on his fellow skimmers, in ways they believed were "ethically unsound." NextWorld was only too happy to add Karabey to its growing stable of projectors, ethical peccadilloes notwithstanding. Karabey advanced quickly in NextWorld. Assuming he does well in this attack, the company will tap him as a leader on future missions.

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

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 4, Animal Ken 2, Athletics 3, Computer 1, Drive 3, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Investigation 3, Leadership 4, Melee 1, Performance 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Skimmer (currently projecting)

Nature: Survivor

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 8

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Juggernaut, Puppetry, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose

Tactics: Karabey skinrides the accountant Larousse, helping N'Kejeda transport the boxes of guns and explosives needed for the assault. Once the attack begins, Karabey (with reconnaissance backup from O'Reilly) is responsible for finding and killing the bodies of skimmers who might be projecting to fight NextWorld's operatives.

DELTA TEAM

Delta Team comprises the operation's demolitions experts. Delta Team's assignment is to wire the Orpheus compound with explosives for three reasons. First, it causes more deaths. While it's possible to hide from people with machine guns, it's harder to hide from the explosions, smoke and conflagration following in their wake. Secondly, it covers NextWorld's tracks and makes the exact sequence of events harder for investigators to piece together. Lastly, it serves as a glaring threat for other companies that may be inclined to follow in Orpheus' footsteps.

Lars Kull

Kull is a little rat of a man. He's quick and sneaky, but his self-destructive streak is much too flagrant for NextWorld to offer him any real responsibility.

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

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Computer 1, Demolitions 4, Drive 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Science 1, Security 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2

Shade: Poltergeist

Lament: Skimmer (currently projecting)

Nature: Martyr

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Helter Skelter

Tactics: Kull uses Helter Skelter to move explosives around. He waits for the others to create a diversion before employing his Horror to attach explosives to key support structures. These demolition charges are connected by radio to N'Kejeda's explosives belt. When his belt detonates, so too will these charges, imploding or drastically destabilizing the compound's structural integrity.

Bill Shenk

Shenk has a Masters in electrical engineering and telecommunications. For years he was a well-paid member of the Silicon Valley elite, but when the "Digital Revolution" tanked, he had to do something else. His brief training with Terrel & Squib and subsequent defection to NextWorld gave him an interesting alternative.

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

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Computer (System Architecture, Networks) 5, Drive 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Science (Electrical Engineering) 4, Security 4, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1, Survival 1

Shade: Banshee

Lament: Sleeper (currently projecting)

Nature: Conformist

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Forebode, Inhabit

Tactics: Shenk uses his knowledge of electrical engineering and computers in tandem with Forebode to identify Orpheus' major electrical, computer and telecommunications nodes. He knocks these systems out early in the assault using Inhabit on the computer network. This prevents Orpheus employees from calling police or other authorities for help. Once his initial job is done, he helps Kull wire the compound with explosives.

Tyson White*

White is a con man and a self-described adrenaline junkie who loves extreme sports. That passion led him to three near-death experiences and his preparation for employment at NextWorld.



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

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Computer 3, Drive 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 3, Performance 4, Security 2, Science 3 Stealth 4, Subterfuge 4

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Skimmer (currently projecting)

Nature: Thrill-Seeker

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 9

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Juggernaut, Puppetry, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose

Tactics: White is Delta Team's Puppetry expert. He possesses Tyler Ford, the compound's director of security. While Timborn neutralizes the other security personnel, White monitors the assault through Orpheus' own security cameras and ensures that Kull and Shenk can reach any

locale they need to undermine the compound's computer and telecommunications systems. After wrapping Ford's body with explosives, White uses the controls in the security room to close as many security and fire doors as possible to prevent Orpheus personnel from escaping. Once the attack is nearly complete and the explosives ready for detonation, White makes his way to the single largest group of Orpheus employees and steps out of Ford's body, triggering the explosives belt around his torso.

EQUIPMENT

Because NextWorld is not a military unit, and instead relies on mercs and ex-soldiers to fill its ranks, there is very little "standard" equipment. Everyone uses weapons or explosives they feel most comfortable with, though suggestions for the so-called party favors include:

- **H&K MP-5K:** This German-made submachine gun is a Special Forces mainstay across the Western Hemisphere. Easy to use, this model is also more easily concealed (raising difficulties to spotting it by two). The mercs use this mostly to hose open areas (cafeteria) or puncture thin walls (upstairs offices),

DETAILS BY TEAM

The following is a handy cheat sheet for Storytellers, providing a summary of each group's tactics during the attack on the Orpheus compound.

Strategic Entry/Exit - Abel Team: N'Kejeda, Czerner, Ferraro

N'Kejeda, with the help of Charlie Team member Karabey, brings in most of the weapons and explosives that they need to destroy the Orpheus compound. N'Kejeda uses the freight elevator to take the explosives down to sub-basement three for Delta Team to wire up. On sub-basement three, he wraps himself with his explosives belt then returns upstairs and scatters the party-goers with machine gun fire and smoke grenades. Meanwhile, Czerner and Ferraro inhabit the compound to maximize the tactical advantage. They control whatever building elements they require to maximize the chaos and the death of Orpheus personnel. When it's time for the assault force to withdraw, Czerner and Ferraro expedite the escape of the NextWorlders; next to Colombo, they are the last to leave.

Neutralization - Baker Team: Timborn, Mustapha, Colombo

All members of Baker Team begin on sub-basement four. After Timborn kills the security team, all three make their way up to sub-basement one. Timborn and Mustapha both use several Horrors to scatter, weaken and kill Orpheus personnel the whole time they're making their way to the top. They pay particular attention to the dormitories, where many people, realizing they can't escape, try hiding, waiting out the chaos or projecting. Once the Spectres arrive, Baker Team does what it can to herd Orpheus personnel into the areas with the worst infestation of Spectres. Timborn uses her puppet Margoules, like a Judas goat, leading scared and

disoriented Orpheus personnel right into the awaiting claws of Spectres.

Diversion - Charlie Team: Frost, O'Reilly, Karabey

Karabey (in the guise of the skinridden Jerome Larousse) brings in weapons and explosives with N'Kejeda. When the attack starts in earnest, Frost and O'Reilly use their Horrors to make a spectacular splash — like the initial break in billiards — to terrorize Orpheus employees and send them scampering for cover (the point being, of course, to keep them from acting with any rational thought). Once that's accomplished, Frost and Karabey, guided by O'Reilly, use their respective abilities to keep Orpheus personnel terrified and distracted, preventing them from generating a significant defense. Charlie Team, guided by O'Reilly's Forebode, seeks out any nascent opposition and deals with it before it can impede the NextWorlder's mission objectives.

Demolitions - Delta Team: Kull, Shenk, White

White kicks off the attack by taking over the security monitoring room with Baker Team's Timborn. Once in control of the security room, White backs up Kull and Shenk while they wire the facility with the powerful explosives that N'Kejeda brings down on the freight elevator. White keeps watch for the other two, warning them of approaching Orpheus personnel. He opens security and fire doors for them and points them toward key structural points visible through the security cameras. Upon completing the wiring, White storm-wends to Kull and Shenk, causing the body of Tyler Ford to explode, destroying the entire security room. The three mercs make their way up, using grenades and Horrors to destroy or disorient any clusters of Orpheus personnel. When N'Kejeda leaves the body he's skinriding, not only will the explosives wrapped around Largent detonate, but so will those planted by Delta Team.

• **Ithaca M37 or Fianchi Law 12:** Either shotgun is the weapon of choice to sweep corridors and blister small rooms.

• **SigSauer P220:** This reliable automatic is the weapon of choice for backup, and is useful in stairwell gunfights and run-and-gun combat.

• **Concussion Grenades:** This explosive is best for securing rooms with vital components (like the security room) or rooms containing armed defenders.

• **Shrapnel Grenades:** Another explosive best reserved for uprooting entrenched defenders or for clearing rooms when every bullet counts.

• **Explosives:** There are two types of explosives used during the attack, though rarely in combat. The first is the belts with plastique (designed to explode when the skinriding mercs leave their hosts), while Delta Team uses the second, more powerful groups of explosives to bring the building down.

THE SPECTRES

The incendiary attack by NextWorld's mercenaries alone will severely cripple Orpheus, but the company might survive. What follows the assault, however, is much worse than the attack itself and is designed specifically to eradicate Orpheus Group from the map.

Once the explosives detonate or if NextWorld can't get a handle on the situation, a rare and terrifying attack force of 20 old and battle-hardened Spectres arrives, seemingly from all directions, and stalks any remaining Orpheus personnel. Orpheus agents projecting from their flesh in the area when the Spectres arrive are in serious danger of losing their bodies to a possessing entity that proceeds to rampage in a bloody frenzy. (Possession, after all, is easier than manifesting, especially for Spectres. The characters serve as vehicles for Jasons if this happens.)

The Spectral force comprises four Reapers and eight teams consisting of one Frightener and one Fetch or Chupacabra (see Chapter Four, p. 130 for more information) apiece. See the **Orpheus** core book for sample Spectres of each type. Operating independent of this force are five E-Demons (see Chapter Four, p. 134 for more information), which arrive before the other Spectres and assume control of electronic devices. The E-Demons will not draw attention to themselves, and instead occupy the recording media for the security cameras (video cassettes). Their only purpose is to modify the images on any surviving tapes, making the survivors appear guilty of the carnage. Therefore, if the characters prove a hindrance, the E-Demons rework the images so any investigator examining the tapes sees the characters contributing to the massacre.

SPECTRAL POWERS

Not only are Spectres deeply malevolent, they have powers that characters may never have seen before. Those in the **Orpheus** core book are simply those that Orpheus Group agents encounter most often; they are by no means the only strange Thorns and Horrors that Spectres wield. The ones listed here are those most likely possessed by the force of Spectres sent to annihilate Orpheus: Manifest, Flicker, Immobilate, Hive-Mind, Claws, Maw, Tentacles and Carapace.

For more information on these hideous abilities, see the **Orpheus** core book, pp. 193-199.

Spectres assume a variety of disturbing and repulsive forms. Likewise they have a broad range of Horrors that are rarely, if ever, seen by those unaccustomed to witnessing Spectre swarm tactics. The presence of even one Spectre can warp the natural order of things. When several powerful Spectres appear at once, though, it may feel as though reality itself is being twisted out of shape as time, distance and natural laws warp and bend in the vicinity of these vile creatures.

Consume: The Spectre can drain the very Vitality from a character. The Spectre taps a point of Spite to siphon away a point of Vitality from any spook it touches on a one-for-one basis, provided it succeeds in a contested Willpower roll against the target.

Nihilistic Exhalation: A manifesting Spectre can breathe forth a cloud of pure black nothingness that damages the living and dead alike. The Spectre must inhale for one full turn and tap as many Spite points as it wants to empower the effect; it then exhales forth the inky mist. Quick action might allow a character to dodge this effect, but humans cannot soak against this Horror. Any character caught in the destructive black cloud takes one level of lethal damage for every Spite point the Spectre taps to fuel the cloud.

One thing to remember is that while manifest is rare among Spectres, the war party attacking Orpheus is by no means a random collection of twisted ghosts. Whoever gathered these Spectres specifically assembled (and instructed) them to kill as many Orpheus personnel as possible, whether ghost, projector or defenseless human. Their instructions guided them to start with the board of directors and upper management. Consequently, the Reapers and Frighteners participating in the attack force can manifest. The Fetches cannot.

The Spectres have several enormous advantages over Orpheus personnel and the characters as well. Surprise, for one thing, is entirely on their side. The NextWorld attack certainly takes a toll on Orpheus, but it, by itself, would not prevent Orpheus from eventually recovering. The Spectre attack eliminates that avenue utterly. The Spectres' bloody spree-killing results in the death of all but a handful of Orpheus personnel.

The Spectres use Flit to sweep in on the compound from all directions, including from above (but not below). The four Reapers immediately converge on the four largest groups of survivors and tear them apart. The eight Frightener/Fetch/Chupacabra teams back up the Reapers. In the unlikely event that something proves an obstacle to the Spectres, the creatures use Hive-Mind to alert more Spectres, who converge on anyone resisting the attack, annihilating them.

We cannot overstate the advantage of constant shared telepathic communication during combat. The Spectres do not enter the assault as 20 individuals, but as one exceedingly well-informed foe with 20 far-reaching limbs. Anything one Spectre senses, all Spectres in the assault force share. They know each other's whereabouts and combat status at all times. Should a party of Orpheus survivors manage to work together well enough to resist their Spectral assailants, Hive-



Mind allows the Spectres to flock quickly to that area and quash it.

The Spectres give special attention to any cradle pods not destroyed by NextWorld's bombs. Many Orpheus sleepers may watch helplessly as Spectres rip asunder their pods and demolish their cryogenically frozen bodies in a variety of sadistic ways.

Nothing survives in the Spectres' wake. All that remains is a blood-soaked trail of corpses, many of which are so mangled and desecrated that they are unrecognizable as human remains. In particular, whoever hired NextWorld and can control Spectres, marked Orpheus' administration and Board of Directors for death. The initial assault decimates this upper echelon, while the Spectres handle the remaining stragglers. This is both deliberate and strategic given the reasons behind the attack. The handful of Orpheus employees who survive both the explosive NextWorld assault and the subsequent swarm possess neither the corporate standing nor, in the wake of the hideous massacre, the mental faculties necessary to even consider putting Orpheus back together.

WHAT WAS THAT?

During the attack, the lights flicker and power seems to ebb a quick moment. Most folks are either too distressed by the situation to notice, or they blame the event on gunfights and potential explosions. In reality, something moved through the electrical systems, on its way to Orpheus Group's mainframe. The specifics of the situation remain a mystery for now, but whatever Radio Free Death uses to transmit his messages is not unique to himself. Someone or something

associated with the attack (but unknown to NextWorld) scours through the mainframe, deleting and stealing information before the entire power grid shuts down. Therefore, when Death Merchants later arrive to fry the data stores, the information's already been compromised. The mystery interloper sticks to the power grid, thus remaining invisible to ghosts much like someone using Puppetry on a host or Inhabit on an object.

TACTICS

Each of the four NextWorld teams has its own mission objectives during the assault. Over the course of the attack, most of the teams split up for various reasons stated in the Tactics entry of each supporting character. NextWorld expects each operative to work efficiently on her own or in concert with other mercs. The concept of "team" revolves around a shared mission objective, not necessarily working shoulder to shoulder (though some teams work in tandem quite often during the attack).

There are multiple redundancies built into the attack plan to help operatives meet any major mission objective. For example, complete control of the Orpheus compound itself is key to carrying out the mission. For that reason, NextWorld mercenaries have three different ways of assuring that they, not Orpheus personnel, seize strategic control of the compound. First, Marcus N'Kejeda skinrides Rob Largent, the facilities manager. Largent has all the keys to access the compound. Secondly, with the other two members of Abel

Team inhabiting the building, the NextWorlders have an even greater hold over the premises. Finally, with Tyson White (in the body of Tyler Ford) controlling the security room, anything the security cameras see is, in effect, seen by all salient NextWorld operatives. They can target regrouping clusters of Orpheus employees through either the neutralization team or the diversion team.

TIMELINE

The entire attack transpires over a single, horrifying, blood-drenched hour. In the original plan, NextWorld planned to launch the attack in the middle of the afternoon when people were feeling drowsy from lunch. A week before the assault, however, NextWorld learned that Orpheus had just secured its biggest contract to date and was throwing a huge party to celebrate such good fortune. After receiving news of the party, NextWorld promptly changed its plan. A party, the rationale went, would attract more Orpheus employees to the office than under normal circumstances, and security was likely to be more relaxed. Furthermore, a large portion of the revelers would likely be tipsy, if not drunk, handicapping them and rendering them easy targets. The strike would take place an hour after the party began, to allow people time to show up and start drinking in earnest.

Please Note: The following timeline transpires as is if the characters aren't present to contribute their typical monkey wrenching to the best laid plans of Storytellers and mice. If the crucible is present, then the Storyteller should use the following information as a guideline. Once the characters prove too great a nuisance, the teams change strategy to contend with the crucible.

19:30 — The party begins.

20:40 — Due to an interpersonal clash between N'Kejeda and Baker Team's leader, the attack begins 10 minutes late.

Two members of Abel Team work together to inhabit the entire compound.

N'Kejeda, in the body of facility manager Largent, uses the freight elevator (which only works for him or other members of the attack team, thanks to Abel Team inhabiting the building) to deliver more guns and explosives to other members of the attack squad.

The E-Demons arrive and tamper with the electronic recording devices.

20:40-20:45 — Valerie Timborn kills the staff in the security room, wraps her body with explosives and enters the fray.

Charlie Team attacks the recreation hall with a violent show of Horrors to terrify and scatter the assembled Orpheus personnel.

N'Kejeda returns upstairs to contribute to the chaos.

Tyson White, in the body of Tyler Ford, takes control of the strategic security room and locks the facility down to prevent personnel from escaping. He closes fire doors where appropriate and deactivates all elevators not being used by NextWorld mercenaries.

20:45-20:50 — Focusing on the key research areas and the Nursery in sub-basement three, Delta Team members Kull and Shenk wire the main load-bearing

structures of the compound to detonate when Marcus N'Kejeda's host body does.

20:50 — N'Kejeda leaves his host, triggering all the explosives set by NextWorld. Huge portions of the Orpheus compound, essentially all of sub-basement three, implode immediately. With their supports blown out, many areas above sub-basement three collapse. Others burn out of control. One or two minor sections of the compound missed in the quick-wiring process survive relatively unscathed. Sub-basement four does not collapse as expected, but NextWorld mercs have neither the inclination nor the ordnance to rectify the situation. While unlikely, some Orpheus staff may survive in sub-basement four, along with some equipment that characters can scavenge for later use.

20:52 — The horrific attack grows more terrible by orders of magnitude. A black swarm of 20 Spectres arrives and begins killing the living and reaping the souls of the dead. The arrival of Spectres undermines any lingering vestige of rational response on the part of the Orpheus employees. The survivors abandon any organized resistance, fleeing the chaos with all due haste — more often than not into the waiting arms of a Spectre or into the kill-zone of a booby-trap left by NextWorld mercenaries.

20:50-21:10 — NextWorld mercenaries make their way through the blasted facility. Some possess bodies, others use Storm-Wending to teleport anywhere in the compound they need to go.

21:10-21:20 — All NextWorld personnel, except Claude Colombo, escape the carcass of the Orpheus Group building. Flames rise 30 feet into the air above the ground floor, casting a lurid glow over the placid, landscaped grounds surrounding the main structure.

21:23 — After ensuring that no more Orpheus personnel are trying to escape, Claude Colombo leaves his host body. He triggers the last set of explosives, collapsing the stairwell and the primary elevator shaft.

21:25 — All surviving NextWorld personnel decamp.

02:25 — A new party enters the fray. Mysterious antagonist #2 hires a group of Death Merchants who are capable of projecting to target survivors, the data vault and the mainframe.

Upon arriving as projected entities, the Death Merchants encounter some lingering Spectres, slowing their progress to a crawl.

02:40 — The Death Merchants penetrate the data vault and use Witch's Nimbus to fry all the data to slag.

02:45 — The Death Merchants destroy the Orpheus mainframe.

02:55 — The Death Merchants decamp, eliminating all remaining Orpheus Group computer data, research logs and any surviving key personnel. They don't know why, however, nor the true identity of their employer.

In the days following the Orpheus compound assault, someone hires a variety of Death Merchants to eliminate surviving "rogue elements." This includes the characters.

THE AFTERMATH

Orpheus was a growing exploratory business interest. It possessed a mix of the odd and the interesting that fascinated many, from would-be investors to paranormal investigators to media moguls. Its decimation does not go unnoticed.

The next chapters deal with the characters as fugitives, with plenty of new escapades to bother and preoccupy their attentions. The transition point is vital, however, especially since the gap between Orpheus' presence and its disappearance happens in a couple of pages... at best. Therefore, it's important to understand that Orpheus' destruction leaves the characters in the cold. The FBI arrives and almost immediately assumes jurisdiction of the case, after pressuring the commissioner into submission. There are no Orpheus survivors, in the Bureau's eyes, there are only suspects. Even before the evidence is processed, the FBI immediately issues press releases saying "these individuals are wanted for questioning."

Before running the scenario, it might be best to familiarize yourself with the material in Chapters Two and Four. For a brief overview of what Storytellers can expect to find, however, the following sections mention some of the groups involved in the post-Orpheus fiasco, and their agendas.

THE MEDIA

Orpheus Group tried steering clear of public controversy as much as possible. Unfortunately for Orpheus Group, news agencies were conducting no fewer than three "investigative reports" on Orpheus at the time of the massacre. The violent assault against Orpheus and the bizarre and illogical accounts of the incident that appear in newspapers following the attack incite a media feeding frenzy. No longer capable of defending itself or mustering any kind of spin control, Orpheus is subject to the severest forms of media scrutiny. Orpheus' few remaining allies cut all ties to the now defunct Orpheus Group lest they, too, fall to the media circus and hysterical pillory.

THE FBI

Orchestrated destruction on this scale is never ignored, but in this case, it merely provides the FBI with the excuse it needed. The FBI immediately assumes jurisdiction of the case under the argument that the Orpheus assault was a terrorist attack. What's more, because E-Demons tampered with the evidence, the FBI suspects many survivors contributed to the massacre. It only does so, however, because it's convenient to its agenda.

This isn't the first time the feds encountered evidence of the supernatural, of course, but it's one of the more extreme and flagrant displays they've seen in some time. For that reason, the investigation is restricted. Local police are barred from entering the site. What's more, the FBI uses the Orpheus incident to try to argue for regulation of projecting technology, with itself as the regulating body. The investigation is its crusade to convince the public (and thus the politicians) to hand over jurisdiction

in all matters pertaining to projecting technology. The administration launches a manhunt for all the survivors, who are now suspects in the attack. As the investigation continues, though, it becomes obvious that the truth isn't really what matters. The FBI needs scapegoats, and the characters are the primary candidates. Therefore, it freezes the bank accounts of known survivors and flags all pertinent identification including Social Security Numbers and drivers' licenses.

ORPHEUS

Between the attack itself and its erstwhile supporters racing to distance themselves from the company, Orpheus Group is history. If, by some miracle, Orpheus avoids complete dissolution, it remains a crippled shadow of its former self and a target for whoever drew first blood against it. What's more, any company calling itself Orpheus after this incident falls under harsh government and private-sector scrutiny. Meanwhile all Orpheus' bank assets are frozen pending completion of the FBI's investigation.

THE DEATH MERCHANTS

Whoever hired the Death Merchants is interested in eliminating Orpheus Group's database or recovering certain files. At the very least, however, we can reveal that the person (or group) hiring the Death Merchants is not responsible for the initial attack. Still, he or they hire Death Merchants to eliminate all non-essential personnel or kidnap those individuals deemed "valuable." Unfortunately for the characters, they are of the expendable variety.

NEXTWORLD

This assault is the tipping point for NextWorld, which strong-arms its way up the Spectral food chain. NextWorld has proven itself a leader in its field (not to mention the most morally reprehensible). The company doubles its fees in the space of three months, and it eagerly solicits further contract work from its mysterious benefactor who supplied it with Spectres for that one raid. The contract on the characters is an open one, meaning anyone within NextWorld can claim it, if they find the crucible. NextWorld remains uncertain, however, as to who arranged for the raid.

DEAD FIRMS

Within hours after the Orpheus attack, Terrel & Squib as well as other projector firms are likewise hit by NextWorld. Most are decimated by the attacks, with survivors scattering to the winds or subject to the FBI's heavy-handed witch-hunt. Only Terrel & Squib survives the onslaught despite taking heavy losses (thanks to Kirlian cameras and ghostshot ammunition, used to good effect). Thus T&S's infrastructure survives the attack, enabling its lawyers and spin doctors to prevent the FBI from shutting it down (though there's little doubt that T&S called in some heavy favors from some clients to continue operating). For **Crusade of Ashes**, however, Terrel & Squib is out of the picture. It is rebuilding its assets, re-fortifying its defenses and keeping low.

CHAPTER TWO: DEAD MEN RUNNING



<static> keep moving, keep low. <static> don't have time to play games now, and the FBI... they're the least of your problems.

—Radio Free Death

Martin: I realize that you must have gone through hell.

Jones: Gone? Bitch, we still here!

—Leviathan



With Orpheus gone, the character's real woes begin. The FBI launches a full-scale investigation into the Orpheus assault, using the attack as a means of discrediting groups like Orpheus. The FBI is trying to bring projector technology under its jurisdiction, and it will blow Orpheus' operations out of proportions if it helps scare the American public into supporting its platform. (Concerned citizens bombard their congressman and state senators with their concerns, and the politicians, in turn, pressure the president to regulate projection technology.) The FBI understands the process isn't that cut-and-dry, but it is a start — one that demands the characters be sacrificed as scapegoats. So, the FBI immediately sets about finding the characters and bringing them in for "questioning." If there's any doubt the FBI isn't there to protect their interests, the characters should discover that fact through the Bureau's press conferences — in which it claims to possess evidence that Orpheus engaged in acts of corporate espionage, invasion of privacy, terrorism and any other crimes it can attribute to Orpheus' activities.

PLAYERS' SECTION

So now you're on the run. First things first... forget all the garbage Hollywood taught you about being a fugitive. Hiding from anyone who really wants to find you (and who has the knowledge and resources to look for you) is impossible. You can move interstate, successfully build a new identity, start a new life, become a law-abiding citizen and let the decades pass, but the government or organized crime groups can still find you. It might take years, but eventually they will get you. Naturally, if you try remaining active, then chances are it won't take years to apprehend you.

So how do you hide? You don't. You run. You never sleep in the same place for more than a week at most. You never trust anyone. You change identities as often as possible. Play it like someone's always following you, and be ready to flee at the first sign you've been spotted. Get the picture? The hunt is on and you're the quarry. Start acting like it, or you'll be some agent's or hired gun's trophy. Your first concern before going anywhere or doing anything, however, should be as follows: Does this make me more vulnerable?

The key word here is "thought." Surviving is more about mind games than physical actions. The hunters have all the aces — numbers, technology and the support of the very society where you exist. The only way to save your skin is to stay one step ahead of

the hunters, to misdirect their inquiries, to divert their resources into dead ends, to find yourself a niche beneath their notice. This is what this chapter is about, providing you with the tools to survive. What it isn't about is shootouts, machismo or your rights. These misconceptions will kill you, and when you're being hunted, winning is a matter of breathing through the right orifices at the end of the day and not making a statement or getting even.

LITTLE INCONVENIENCES

Running from the federal government is much like death: Everything constituting your life is gone. Forget about family, friends, your home, your favorite hangouts or anything that was relevant to you. Try holding onto your old life, and the feds will plant you face down on the pavement so fast you won't even have time to squeal. This can be emotionally crippling, and more than one fugitive has surrendered to the authorities from desperation. Think about it. Could you walk away from your life without a backward glance *right now*? Get up, go to the door without looking back... and *vanish*? The government understands this. It watches your friends and family like a hawk. And if the authorities are really desperate to catch you, they can up the ante by burning down your house, arrange for your friends to lose their jobs, arrest your parents on false charges... anything to push you to the breaking point.

The sections marked "Helpful Storyteller Hints" facilitate matters for the Storyteller, but players should read and understand them as well to better enjoy the game and the severity of the situation.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS #1: CAN I GO HOME NOW?

A Storyteller can emulate the pressures affecting a fugitive through judicious use of Willpower rolls. No matter what a player claims, surrounding circumstances *will* affect her character. If the player is not roleplaying the anger, frustration and fear normally inherent in her situation, Willpower rolls are an appropriate remedy. Ask the player for a roll when her character faces a situation that either drives home the difficulty of her circumstances or presents her with an opportunity to strike back. The roll's difficulty depends on the pressures afflicting the character and how much effort the player puts into roleplaying the situation. A failed roll should discomfort rather than harm the character since this is mental and emotional stress, and nothing deadly. Penalties for failure might include the character losing two Vitality points at the





beginning of each session or an increase of one to all difficulties for the duration of a scene.

The exact situations demanding Willpower rolls depend on the character's background. A player whose character has children may roll if his character sees and hears children playing in a park. A character with a social and outgoing nature may find himself emotionally ragged from isolation for days on end in a dank hideout. A character with a righteous and moral background may suffer guilt attacks for dealing with smarmy criminals. Just hearing about the abuse of friends and family should affect all but the hardest characters. In each case, the breaking point should be different. This also allows the crucible to bond, supporting each other through the hard times.

One very thematic option for stress-related problems is a haunting. If a character loses a loved one for any reason relating to her existence as a fugitive, the spirit of that loved one can haunt the character. The roleplaying potential behind such encounters is excellent. In stimulating appropriate responses to a character's fugitive existence, the pathos of a dead friend, lover or child confronting the character with the consequences of his actions is a perfect Storyteller tool.

NO ONE LOVES YOU NOW

For those characters harboring some misguided notion that they can still trust their friends and family, think again. They are a liability, not only because the feds watch them and eavesdrop on their conversations, but because your so-called loved ones may actively try turning you in. The feds visit everyone you know and spin whatever lies are most effective... then they'll leave a helpful business card. Many of your friends and family may even believe that turning you in is actually for your own good. After all, you're sick and need help... don't you?

Then, of course, there's always greed. The reward for turning you in could pay someone's mortgage or send a daughter to college. Finally, there are crimes that are so heinous that even an accusation turns your friends into enemies. Children must be protected from perverts like you, after all, and the authorities have the pictures to prove it... even if the pictures aren't real.

SYSTEM FAILURE

If the personal cost isn't enough, you're worse than dead in the "system." In this modern age we are all two distinct individuals. The first is the one your friends and family know (or know too well). The second is the electronic persona recorded in the system, in local, county, state, federal and corporate databases. This is the individual reflected on all those pieces of plastic and paper you keep in your wallet and filing cabinet. This is

the person who can drive, pay taxes, withdraw money, rent a hotel room, carry a gun or any other of the hundreds of mundane activities you take for granted. As a fugitive, you exist in the system, but now it's a spider's web. Touch the system and the feds know what you're doing and where you're trying to do it.

Abandoning your "official self" is as destructive as leaving your personal self — if not emotionally, then in terms of your ability to interact with society. The system is itself society, and if you can't prove your existence, you become *persona non grata*. Sure you can still drive or carry a gun, but as soon as someone catches you without the proper paperwork, he'll arrest you. He doesn't even need to recognize you as a fugitive. The fact the system no longer validates your reflection means you too are marked. The system is society's antibodies and immune system, filtering out the invading pathogens... you. The system reacts by eliminating you from "the host" called society, because when you are no longer accepted by the system, you lose everything.

Everything you own vanishes: your house, car and bank accounts. It strips you like a corpse, down to your very name. Once the system marks you a fugitive, you're little more than an animal hiding on the streets, and you'd better hope you can work your way up the food chain before the hunters find you.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS #2: BEING NOBODY'S FRIEND

Being a fugitive raises serious issues for many Backgrounds. A Storyteller is perfectly within her rights to tell players that any attempt to use Backgrounds will likely land their characters in jail if the circumstances make sense. (The feds won't freeze assets belonging to ghosts, for example, or have influence over someone's artifact.) This may seem harsh, and Storytellers can certainly ignore this avenue (no really, you can), but being a fugitive is not easy, and by stripping away Backgrounds linked to the character's old life, you drive this fact home. Don't get into arguments about whether or not the authorities know this contact or that item. By the time the feds launch their investigation into Orpheus, they find almost everything there is to know about the characters. Unless a player states during character creation, that his character lives a double life, or was deliberately secretive, the government knows a fair bit about him.

It is possible that a character's Backgrounds stem from criminal or anti-government individuals or groups. While such people won't care about the character's fugitive status, the authorities will watch known connections for potential contact with the characters. Again, the only exception is if the player kept her living



character's involvement completely secret, which only the Storyteller can adjudicate. Even in such cases, the character's ability to benefit from a Background is limited by what he can manage whilst staying hidden from those hunting him.

- **Allies:** Many allies may abandon the character publicly. Some may even do so privately, depending on the nature of the evidence against the crucible (or how much the ally stands to lose by being thrust into the public spotlight). Allies are also prime targets for harassment by federal agents. If the feds believe an ally helped the characters, they will detain and question the ally, charging him with aiding and abetting... whether or not they find evidence.

- **Arsenal:** This Background rests entirely in the hands of the Storyteller. If the character acquired Arsenal because he worked for Orpheus Group, then this Background is potentially lost... though the character may know with whom to speak to get more weapons. If the character acquired his arms the legal way, then he may have difficulty obtaining more firearms because of the permit requirements. (*Persona non grata*... remember?) If the character has Arsenal illegally, then this Background should remain relatively intact.

- **Artifact:** The feds can't touch this, unless deemed otherwise by the Storyteller.

- **Contacts:** Most contacts only maintain loose associations with a character, which means they'll more likely believe the negative stories they hear and are less likely to risk their necks. Those contacts of a mercenary nature might still deal with the characters, but their fee is now sky high. The authorities know less about a character's contacts than they do about his allies, due to the looser nature of the relationship. This means they may not watch certain contacts at all.

- **Destiny:** The higher powers don't fall under a federal mandate, for now, so this remains unaffected.

- **Detective License:** This Background is sooo revoked. The character can still use his credentials to worm his way into places, but he better hope nobody verifies his ID, because the FBI flagged it.

- **Health Insurance:** The policy is still in effect for about a year because Orpheus Group paid its dues up front. That said... the policy is red-flagged and the character can't use it for medical treatment or to collect money without the feds swooping in. The only time it pays off is if the character dies and his beneficiaries collect on the policy.

- **Influence:** The character's influence in any legitimate group ceases to exist. The best he can manage is using the residual effects to inveigle aid from specific individuals, but even that fades with time. The authorities watch any

groups with which the character associated, and there's a good chance that organization members will betray the character if the opportunity arises.

- **Memorial:** Feds can't touch this even if they knew about it. It makes for bad press. ("Hi there... we want to tear down the Children's Wing of the Hospital because it may be fueling a ghost's essence.")

- **Mentor:** Since they know a character well, mentors will not likely believe any stories concerning the character's newfound criminal status. The character-mentor relationship places the mentor at greater risk of harassment by the authorities than any ally might otherwise endure. Even if the character can't communicate with his mentor, the relationship is close enough that the mentor might help her pupil of her own volition. The degree of personal risk a mentor willingly undertakes very much depends on her nature. Someone with Nature: Visionary, for example, may very well pursue novel ways of helping the character ("thinking outside the box"). Someone with Nature: Curmudgeon, however, could see the character's plight as proof positive the system is flawed, and therefore use very illegal methods to rescue the character and "stick it to The Man," as it were.

- **Patron:** This is relatively the same as Mentor, Contacts and Allies, except that the patron may well see the crucible's flight from justice as a singular opportunity. Many patrons could have missions or requests they never dared ask the crucible until now... when the characters are in dire straits and less inclined to argue. This means some patrons may try to help the characters, without endangering themselves, if it means they can use the crucible to handle their more sordid affairs.

- **Personal Trainer:** Perhaps if the personal trainer were an underground contact, then the characters have a chance of maintaining one... maybe. Otherwise, most personal trainers train people for a living, which means they can't afford the bad publicity of being caught helping the characters. Some personal trainers, however, may willingly help the crucible as good friends or because it actually improves their business. ("Personal Self Defense Trainer to Federal Fugitives.") Otherwise, the Storyteller may allow the characters to change their personal trainer into a contact, patron, mentor or ally, thus transferring dots to those Backgrounds instead.

- **Reincarnate:** Feds can't touch this one. Wouldn't it be a scary world if they could?

- **Resources:** This Background is so red-flagged by the authorities. The best situation with this Background is that a character escapes with some liquid capital after the ax comes down on Orpheus. Any attempt to access other resources should land a

character directly into the authorities' hands. The only exception is if a player previously stated that his character hid resources under false names or stashed it away.

- **Status:** Those folks afforded respect fall furthest when someone accuses them of fraudulent behavior. This is the situation that characters with Status face. Unless their status is with a group outside mainstream society, characters may find themselves reviled by their former fans and admirers. Status also places the character at increased risk of identification due to widespread media attention. The crucible must now be extra careful to avoid being spotted publicly. In this case, each dot in Status can indicate how many times someone almost recognizes the character on the street during a game session. (Avoiding such recognition requires a Wits + Alertness roll against difficulty 6. The character realizes the person is about to recognize him and turns away at the right moment, et cetera.) Conversely, someone whose status relates to a subculture or underground movement actually enjoys a surge of popularity, enabling the player to transfer lost dots in other Backgrounds to Status, Allies (relating to the sub-cultural group), Contacts et cetera, pending Storyteller approval.

CALL ME MR. SMITH

The most obvious answer to having a flagged ID is buying fake ones. Luckily with the right contacts or skills, doing so isn't difficult. Organized crime engages in the thriving trade of fake plastic, mainly in credit cards, but also in Social Security Numbers as well as driver's and gun licenses. This isn't the solution it might first seem, however. Most illegal IDs are either stolen or forged, and someone will eventually realize your identification is a fake, endangering you further. Additionally, the forgeries look great but don't have corresponding records in the system. They'll only work until the point someone tries verifying your details. Fake IDs that hold up to investigation are expensive and hard to find.

Dealing with criminals as a fugitive is very much a two-edged sword. On one hand, they won't give a damn who you are as long as you have the cash. On the other hand, the authorities know this and have their informants searching you out. Additionally, because the FBI posted a reward for information that could lead to the characters' arrest, criminals may likely sell you your ID, and then inform the police of your new identity and whereabouts to claim the reward. Characters are also at the mercy of the criminal and his word concerning the quality of new ID. For all you know, the slip of plastic is already compro-

mised and the first time you use it, the authorities will come running.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS #3: IN THE GUTTER

When dealing with criminal elements, here are some useful Abilities to help in the negotiations. This list enables the entire crucible to participate, on some level, with a street deal or with criminals, instead of it remaining the strict purview of one character.

- **Alertness:** When meeting criminals, characters must remain vigilant. Storytellers can represent this wariness by asking players to roll their characters' Perception + Alertness, and then use the number of successes against a criminal's underhanded attempts. This is not the same as Awareness, which is a deliberate attempt to spot something. It represents an innate judgment and offers the character intuitive sense rather than specific information.

- **Firearms:** When dealing with criminals, showing them you are as heavily armed and capable of using guns as they are is sometimes necessary to establish equal footing. An Intelligence (or Wits) + Firearms roll allows the character to demonstrate his familiarity with weapons by how he carries it and how he "conceals" it just enough to show it off.

- **Intimidation:** Acting macho and fearless is important when dealing with crooks. If criminals sense a character's discomfort in dealing with them, they'll likely act treacherous and charge more for their services. Players can use a Charisma (or Strength) + Intimidation roll (difficulty is the crook's Willpower) to represent the character's "tough as nails" facade. The more successes the player rolls, the more impressed the criminal is with the character's toughness.

- **Intuition:** Being aware of the personal tensions and dynamics at a meeting with criminals is as vital as knowing the physical environment. Rather than Empathy, which represents emotional awareness, players can use Intuition to represent a character's awareness of the almost imperceptible clues given off by those around them. Perception + Intuition versus Manipulation + Subterfuge allows a character to detect subtle signs of betrayal, even if the criminals aren't actively lying.

- **Streetwise:** This key Ability represents a character's general knowledge of the "who," "where" and "what" of life's seamier side. As a result, Streetwise is useful for judging street values (Intelligence + Streetwise), pretending one has a criminal past (Charisma + Streetwise) or claiming criminal contacts you don't otherwise possess (Wits + Streetwise).

- **Subterfuge:** Lying and deception are obviously essential to dealing with criminals, but the characters



must also use duplicity if they want to hide their own identity from enterprising miscreants. Players keeping their character's identity hidden must make a Wits + Subterfuge roll to represent how they mask their origins, intentions and natures. A specific lie requires a specific roll, but for general impressions, this single roll suffices.

FOOLING THE SYSTEM

When forging a new identity, the first requirement is a birth certificate from someone born close enough to you that the age difference isn't obvious. The trick is, the birth certificate should be from someone who didn't survive into adulthood. Indeed, the younger he died, the better, since it's less likely the system noticed him. Fortunately, characters can easily search and obtain birth certificates from county registry offices for a small fee. Although some states require you possess at least two pieces of information concerning the person listed on the birth certificate, it's fairly easy to request someone's death certificate to retrieve the necessary information. After that, it's not illegal to order a dead child's birth certificate.

Once you have your new name and birth date, you must acquire a second source of common ID. The best bet is a driver's license. Fakes are cheap and easily obtained on the streets, though the new birth certificate allows you to apply for a new driver's license in some states. Regardless of whether the license is a forgery or not, it must look the part for some bored federal bureaucrat.

The next step is crucial — you need a Social Security Number.

The Social Security Administration knows criminals are very interested in identity theft, but, it is also a giant bureaucracy pumping out millions of new numbers a year. Law enforcement estimates that 100,000 SSNs find their way to fraudulent applicants every year, or about 2% of the total. While yearly, the authorities catch many people trying to acquire an SSN illegally, the number is small compared to the number of fraudulent applications. Of course, you must minimize the chances your application is found fraudulent, and an adult applying for a new SSN can rouse suspicion. That's why some applicants use one of several methods to accomplish this. One is to appear at the administration with a "sibling" who is obviously and severely mentally impaired. (Heck, a Skinrider can possess someone who fits the bill and act out the impairment.) Present yourself as the new guardian of this individual trying to get him on public assistance, but you're really stealing the SSN for yourself. Another method is to alter a teenager's vital information (through the birth certificate, for example), then use a teen accomplice to apply for the first teen's SSN. A temporary measure includes simply stealing someone's Social Security card or information (by rooting through their trash), and using it until the authorities flag the number you stole.

Other options include posing as a new immigrant, which requires a fake foreign passport and green card, or acting as an existing SSN holder applying for a new one. Obtaining fake documents to support your application requires dealing with criminals, but in this case, they aren't giving you new ID, just the paperwork



trabbsld



to get it. What's more, you may not need to use the nasty, unpleasant criminal underclass since the nation is host to many Third-World embassies whose staffs are notorious for providing passports for dollars. As for green cards, fake ones are not expensive to purchase, and the SSA doesn't actually check the cards' details against INS records. The Social Security Administration is also unable to keep its register of dead people up to date. Therefore, if you can find someone matching your age who died (use the records at a county office), you can then use the SSA's own death registry to determine if the Administration knows this person is pushing daisies. If not, you can apply for a new card using the deceased person's details and fake documents in their name.

There are also some simple steps to minimize the risk if your application is spotted as fraudulent. Fill in the forms wearing gloves, don't use an accurate photo for the documents you send in, and use a PO Box or abandoned building where you aren't living for your mailing address. Pick a location that's easy to observe without being spotted yourself. Once the post office delivers your new card, wait for a few days and ensure no one is waiting for you to pick it up. When you do collect it, ensure you have several planned escape routes and are wearing a simple disguise at the very least. If you are going to apply for an SSN, go for a couple simultaneously and multiple addresses. That way, you can walk away from one delivery spot you believe compromised and still have options. With a little luck you'll have a new identity and a second one to fall back on immediately.

Then off course, the ultimate method for forging documents is to spy on an organization using one's "ghostly" powers, documenting processes and passwords. Afterward, break in at night to enter new information into the system, or possess the right people and enter the required data during normal business hours using their own Abilities against them. Helter Skelter is also one useful way to retrieve mail after hours without anyone spotting you.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS #4: DEALING WITH THE MAN

So, how does one walk into an establishment and bluff his way to a new identity? Here are some friendly Abilities to render any member of the crucible a useful asset in these situations. As previously, these are potential applications of Abilities... Storyteller willing.

- **Academics:** A bureaucracy's archives, databases and records are huge and imposing repositories of information. Finding the exact data you need either requires you know the specific data source

intimately, like those who work with it, or that you have honed information-retrieval skills. This includes knowing which questions to ask to take advantage of the various "freedoms of information acts" available with various bureaucracies, understanding the structure of the knowledge you seek and long experience in uprooting pertinent facts from piles of useless data. Academics best represents this, with an Intelligence + Academics roll to locate the best source for any given type of data, Wits + Academics to access the general data and finally, Perception + Academics to find specific information.

- **Bureaucracy:** This is the quintessential skill when dealing with the government or big corporations. It represents general knowledge and an understanding of the complex jargon defining what is possible and what is not. You can use Bureaucracy to determine where to find information (Intelligence + Bureaucracy), find the right department within a government or corporate facility (Perception + Bureaucracy), choose which day or hour of the day is best for submitting forms or other paperwork (Wits + Bureaucracy), or impress a bureaucrat with your knowledge of the system (Charisma + Bureaucracy).

- **Etiquette:** Many bureaucrats are obsessive when it comes to addressing them and treating them as they believe befits their status. How much of an effect this has varies from bureaucrat to bureaucrat, but being polite never hurts. A Storyteller may allow a Charisma + Etiquette roll, but with the successes halved unless the character has a specialization in anything bureaucracy related.

- **Expression:** The workings of a bureaucracy are 90% committed to the written word. The better you express yourself, especially in bureaucratic jargon, the more likely you can get what you want. A player can improve the chances of a request being approved by rolling Wits + Expression, but with no more dice than a public servant has in Intelligence + Bureaucracy. (Don't want to talk over their heads, do you?) Figure between four to seven dice on average. A Storyteller should finesse the result of any successful roll according to the needs of her chronicle.

- **Law:** While Bureaucracy allows you to know the regulations, Law helps you understand the full ramifications of those regulations. Law is useful for bamboozling bureaucrats who often fear lawyers because of their ability to find loopholes and exceptions. A successful Wits + Law roll versus a bureaucrat's Intelligence + Bureaucracy roll allows a character with legal training to overcome a bureaucrat's natural reaction to say "no" to requests that might require extra effort or stepping slightly outside normal proce-



ture. If done via a written request, the appropriate roll would be Intelligence + Law.

• **Linguistics:** If you're pretending to be from somewhere other than the United States, you must be able to speak the language (Intelligence + Linguistics) and speak with an appropriate accent (Wits + Linguistics).

• **Politics:** Government and big business are ultimately run on a delicate balance of internal and external politics and policies. By knowing which policies are in vogue, a character can cast his interaction with a bureaucracy in the most favorable light. Bureaucrats are always aware of their superiors' views, and if they feel they can curry favor with a particular decision, they'll be far more helpful. To determine which approach works best, characters should make an Intelligence + Politics roll to undertake the necessary research, then a Wits + Politics roll to determine how to use this information. For each success on the first roll past the first die, the player decreases the second roll's difficulty by one.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

Once you have your new SSN, you can dispose of any fake documents and acquire legitimate ones including credit cards. Don't let having an SSN make you overconfident, however. Every time you apply for an official piece of paper, you increase the paper trail leading to you and open yourself to the possibility of being spotted. Despite your best efforts, you'll never be completely sure whether or not someone's uncovered your fake identity somewhere along the way. All it takes is a check with the INS or county registry and your new identity evaporates... just like your real one. New identity or not, it's better to work around the system where you can.

Throughout this chapter, you'll find details on acquiring accommodations and getting money and equipment, but there are many other incidentals you must take into consideration when trying to operate. Most important is avoiding all forms of official entanglement. While this might seem obvious — after all, as a fugitive, you hardly wish to speak to the police — it affects everything you do. You must avoid any activity that attracts official attention. For instance, how will you travel around town? Maybe you once had a car, but that vehicle now poses a risk. Even with a new car, all you need is for the police to pull you over once and your entire survival gambit is in jeopardy. As a fugitive, public transport is among the best options. Just lose your face in the crowd. If you need a car for a specific reason, steal it, use it and dump it. Risky of course, but you'll be on your guard and not caught by some traffic officer when you cruised the local pizzeria. Another excellent

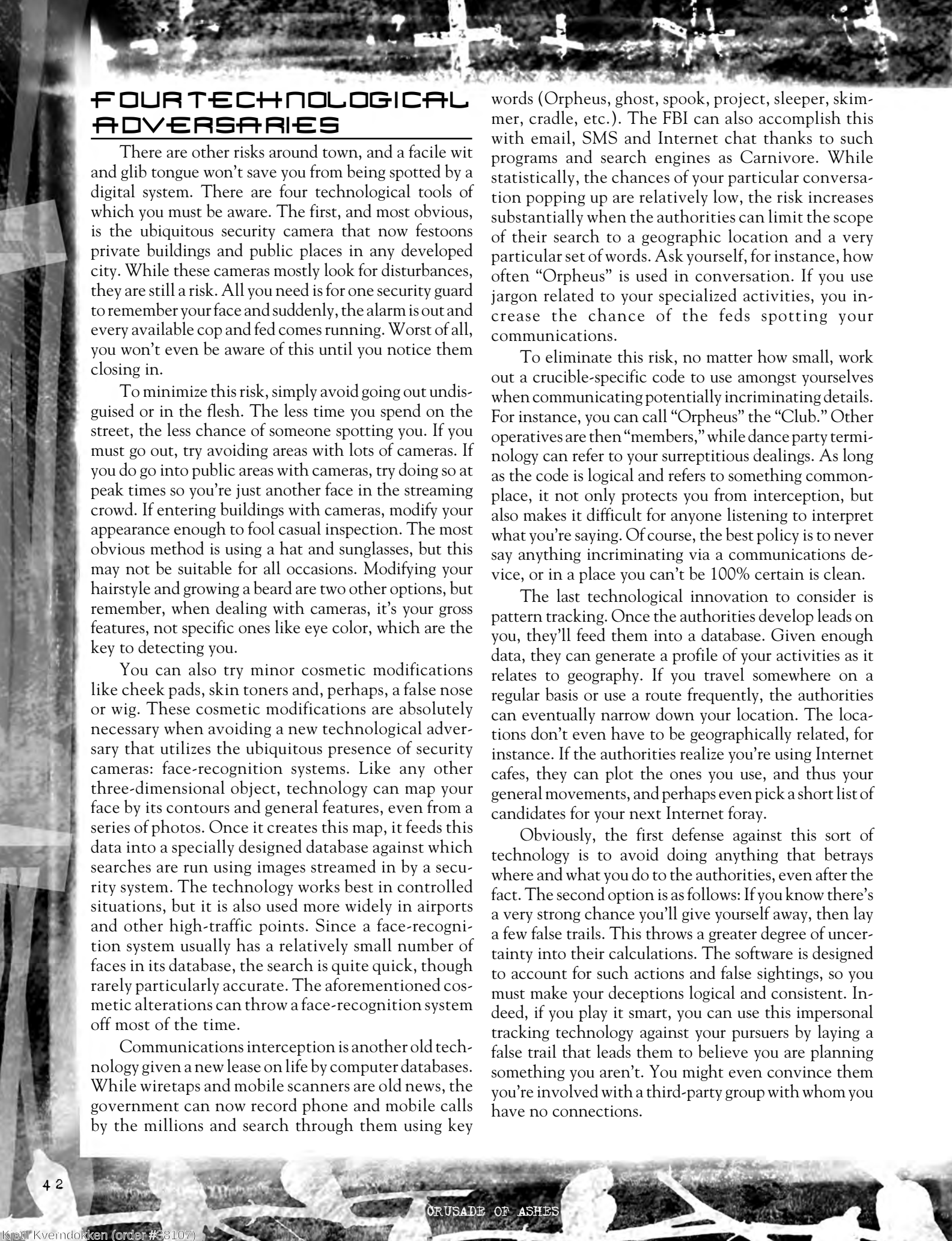
form of transport in the big city is a bicycle. Much faster than foot, requires no paperwork and, if you dress like courier, no one pays you much attention unless you draw attention to yourself. Evaluate your every action to this same consideration. Does it potentially bring me to official attention? If so, can I achieve the same ends in another manner that doesn't have the same risks? If not, is there some way I can minimize those risks?

You must project the air of an average citizen going about her honest business. Therefore, while trying to avoid scrutiny, you need to look like you aren't avoiding scrutiny. If you see a police patrol ahead, keep walking or stop to window shop, don't suddenly hurry across the street or duck down an alley. Avoid attracting notice through erratic behavior, and being asked for ID is not something you want happening too often. It isn't just the police you need be wary of — anyone is a potential risk since you don't know if your photo is on a wanted poster in the post office or in an organization's lunchroom. Your face might still be fresh in someone's mind from last night's news report.

If you need to do some research, like conducting death registry searches (as mentioned earlier) or looking for building plans, you must often pass beneath security cameras and produce ID. So hire someone else to do the work. Major universities always have employment offices with plenty of students willing to do some research for a visiting academic. For less intellectual tasks, like dropping off or picking up documents, there are numerous courier services. Remember, there is nothing legal that you can't hire someone else to do for you.

For those times you need a document but don't have them handy, have a valid excuse ready. A stolen wallet, a burned-out apartment, new in town... all are usable, but remember, officials have heard these all before. Whether the bureaucrat is government or corporate, he won't break the rules for you just because you spin him a sob story. Such excuses are useful only to offset questions while you head for the closest door. You don't want people remembering you, and you don't want people calling the police. Make your excuses, and cut and run in as calm and unsuspecting a manner as possible.

A steady eye and stern voice can also do wonders. If you act like you belong, like you have every right to be doing what you're doing, then people often leave you be. Even if questioned, a flash of some official-looking paperwork and a work-appropriate response will dull all but the most suspicious minds. Remember, the vast majority of folks lead everyday lives; they expect the same of you until you prove otherwise. If they don't find you suspicious, you can often get away without showing ID or anyone scrutinizing you. After all, honest citizens will expect you to have the proper paperwork.



FOUR TECHNOLOGICAL ADVERSARIES

There are other risks around town, and a facile wit and glib tongue won't save you from being spotted by a digital system. There are four technological tools of which you must be aware. The first, and most obvious, is the ubiquitous security camera that now festoons private buildings and public places in any developed city. While these cameras mostly look for disturbances, they are still a risk. All you need is for one security guard to remember your face and suddenly, the alarm is out and every available cop and fed comes running. Worst of all, you won't even be aware of this until you notice them closing in.

To minimize this risk, simply avoid going out undisguised or in the flesh. The less time you spend on the street, the less chance of someone spotting you. If you must go out, try avoiding areas with lots of cameras. If you do go into public areas with cameras, try doing so at peak times so you're just another face in the streaming crowd. If entering buildings with cameras, modify your appearance enough to fool casual inspection. The most obvious method is using a hat and sunglasses, but this may not be suitable for all occasions. Modifying your hairstyle and growing a beard are two other options, but remember, when dealing with cameras, it's your gross features, not specific ones like eye color, which are the key to detecting you.

You can also try minor cosmetic modifications like cheek pads, skin toners and, perhaps, a false nose or wig. These cosmetic modifications are absolutely necessary when avoiding a new technological adversary that utilizes the ubiquitous presence of security cameras: face-recognition systems. Like any other three-dimensional object, technology can map your face by its contours and general features, even from a series of photos. Once it creates this map, it feeds this data into a specially designed database against which searches are run using images streamed in by a security system. The technology works best in controlled situations, but it is also used more widely in airports and other high-traffic points. Since a face-recognition system usually has a relatively small number of faces in its database, the search is quite quick, though rarely particularly accurate. The aforementioned cosmetic alterations can throw a face-recognition system off most of the time.

Communications interception is another old technology given a new lease on life by computer databases. While wiretaps and mobile scanners are old news, the government can now record phone and mobile calls by the millions and search through them using key

words (Orpheus, ghost, spook, project, sleeper, skimmer, cradle, etc.). The FBI can also accomplish this with email, SMS and Internet chat thanks to such programs and search engines as Carnivore. While statistically, the chances of your particular conversation popping up are relatively low, the risk increases substantially when the authorities can limit the scope of their search to a geographic location and a very particular set of words. Ask yourself, for instance, how often "Orpheus" is used in conversation. If you use jargon related to your specialized activities, you increase the chance of the feds spotting your communications.

To eliminate this risk, no matter how small, work out a crucible-specific code to use amongst yourselves when communicating potentially incriminating details. For instance, you can call "Orpheus" the "Club." Other operatives are then "members," while dance party terminology can refer to your surreptitious dealings. As long as the code is logical and refers to something commonplace, it not only protects you from interception, but also makes it difficult for anyone listening to interpret what you're saying. Of course, the best policy is to never say anything incriminating via a communications device, or in a place you can't be 100% certain is clean.

The last technological innovation to consider is pattern tracking. Once the authorities develop leads on you, they'll feed them into a database. Given enough data, they can generate a profile of your activities as it relates to geography. If you travel somewhere on a regular basis or use a route frequently, the authorities can eventually narrow down your location. The locations don't even have to be geographically related, for instance. If the authorities realize you're using Internet cafes, they can plot the ones you use, and thus your general movements, and perhaps even pick a short list of candidates for your next Internet foray.

Obviously, the first defense against this sort of technology is to avoid doing anything that betrays where and what you do to the authorities, even after the fact. The second option is as follows: If you know there's a very strong chance you'll give yourself away, then lay a few false trails. This throws a greater degree of uncertainty into their calculations. The software is designed to account for such actions and false sightings, so you must make your deceptions logical and consistent. Indeed, if you play it smart, you can use this impersonal tracking technology against your pursuers by laying a false trail that leads them to believe you are planning something you aren't. You might even convince them you're involved with a third-party group with whom you have no connections.



WHAT PEOPLE SEE

Throughout this chapter, we continually mention appearances. Appearance drives human beings since sight is our major sensory tool, so fooling other people's eyes is key to surviving as a fugitive. While hiding from sight has its advantages, it also means you can't achieve much, but since you must let people see you, you should control what they see. By this, we don't mean disguises. Unless you're an accomplished make-up artist with the tools of your trade, disguises are hard to do well and can take hours to don. The easiest way to control what people see is to assume a front that leads them to presumptions. The mumbling guy in the reeking great coat and a bottle in the paper bag, staggering into that storm pipe, he's a bum, right? The woman in the power suit, with the briefcase and the expensive sunglasses striding with purpose along the street, she's a business-woman or lawyer, right? The two guys in the overalls walking in and out of a building with clipboards, boxes, equipment and purpose are workmen doing something, right?

Our eyes see hundreds of things when we're out on the street that our brain doesn't bother bringing to our attention. The subconscious mind categorizes matters... things that it says are commonplace are pretty much ignored. You might remember the two workmen or the bum, but would you recognize them next time you saw them? And what is true on the streets is almost as true in our own lives. If your new neighbor has a job, dresses well and likes watching baseball, how suspicious will you be of him, especially if he invites you over for a beer to watch the next game? We live in a fundamentally safe world and treat people at face value unless proven otherwise. Sure the news might mention something about dangerous wanted criminals at large, but as long as the people you see and meet tick all the mental boxes marked normal in your mind, you might not consider them the criminals. Indeed, society generally treats people who jump to such conclusions about others without solid evidence as a little insane.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS#S: KEEPING YOUR SKIN

Here are some helpful Abilities to surviving as a fugitive undetected. These allow everyone to have some skill in evading notice and surviving even though they are interpretations of the Ability's function.

- **Computer:** To use a computer, be it for email or research, without leaving clues as to your purpose or identity requires a Wits + Computer roll. Any investigator must use an Intelligence + Computer roll to counter this.

- **Empathy:** Understanding what people expect is paramount to presenting them with a facade that they'll accept without question. As such, expectations are mostly emotional, not rational, and a Perception + Empathy roll

allows a character to decide on the attitude most likely to not arouse suspicion in any given situation.

- **Expression:** A system of code-words need not be particularly extensive, but it should be easy to remember and logical. Use a Wits + Expression roll to create such ciphers, with the extra successes reducing the difficulty for remember the code under pressure or increasing the difficulty for cracking the cipher's meaning.

- **Intuition:** Knowing when to avoid a situation is key in avoiding detection. Intuition represents the innate ability to read the telltale clues indicating someone is suspicious of the character. A Perception + Intuition roll allows the player to determine if a supporting character might be suspicious of the character, and possibly how to overcome the other person's qualms.

- **Leadership:** Nudging people into thinking a particular way in a specific situation is an old con-artists' trick. Using a Manipulation + Leadership roll, a character can bluff his way through a situation by acting like someone conducting "official business." This can be anything from acting as a deliveryman to a federal agent. The more convincing the physical aids, like ID or uniforms, the lower the difficulty.

- **Meditation:** When a character is in a difficult situation and discovery seems likely, the hardest trick is to stay cool. In physical terms, Performance hides the obvious signs of anxiety. Empathy, however, examines the character more deeply and can potentially notice the emotional turmoil beneath someone's stolid exterior. Players can use Wits + Meditation to calm emotions and hide them from prying eyes.

- **Performance:** Acting as someone else requires imagination and discipline, an ability to submerge those most obvious aspects of self in the assumed persona. To create a believable identity is a Manipulation + Performance roll. To get people to like and trust that persona is a Charisma + Performance roll, while to develop an identity of great depth for long-term use is an Intelligence + Performance roll.

- **Security:** Understanding the latest in security technology requires an Intelligence + Security roll, using no more dice than you have in your Intelligence + Technology dice pool. Perception + Security, followed by Wits + Security, allows characters entering buildings or public places to avoid being videoed too closely. The first roll helps the character spot the devices, the second to avoid them without being obvious about it.

- **Subterfuge:** Whenever you lie, an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll allows you to create a plausible falsehood. The better the result, the lower the difficulty for your Wits + Subterfuge roll.

- **Technology:** To lay a false electronic trail for pattern tracking, an Intelligence + Technology roll



allows you to develop the necessary red herring without being obvious about it. The character then requires a Manipulation + Security roll to implement the ruse without him or it being discovered.

LAYING LOW

When on the run, the first thing you should find, and may need to find every few days, is a place to stay. Everybody needs to sleep, and staying out of the rain and cold is something you only really appreciate when you're robbed of those luxuries. You must also be able to stock up on supplies, stay out of sight safely and have a location to plan and meet. The available options break down into three loose categories, each with their benefits and dangers. These preclude living off the generosity of friends and family... a short-lived luxury at best.

THE HOMELESS ROUTE

When you're down and out, living on the street may be your only option. Of course, living in a box or a dumpster is probably not something you want to do for more than a night or two when you're really desperate. Most sane transients, however, live in more protected spots like beneath underpasses, in railway tunnels, in ruined buildings or in sheltered park areas. Semi-permanent shelters established in these locations can provide reasonable long-term accommodations, and before you turn your nose up at the idea, remember you're a fugitive. Most of the time you can't afford to be fussy. There is a final option if you're lucky: charity-run shelters. There is much competition for spots in shelters, however, and don't count on finding a bed two nights in a row.

As unpleasant as this all sounds, it does have decided advantages. The authorities generally don't bother transients who don't cause problems, and no one really expects them to have ID. "Productive citizens" work hard to ignore you and, best of all, it doesn't cost you any of your limited funds. Of course, if the authorities suspect you're living among the homeless, they'll roust and displace the itinerant population across the city to find you, but the down-and-out aren't usually the best informants. Many are mentally unstable, addicts of some description or both. This said, if a transient thinks there's a free meal in it, she'd tell the police everything she knows.

There are other security threats as well. Knifing another homeless person for a dry place to sleep or for the few dollars she made panhandling is fairly common among the transient population. Nor is the threat exclusive to the itinerant, either. Many of those skirting the periphery of the street population, like street hoods, prey on the homeless, as much for fun as anything else.

Successfully hiding from the police only to be attacked while you're sleeping isn't what you need. The security of your possessions is another problem, especially since you need to rebuild your stores of equipment and supplies. Nor can you protect yourself to the best of your capacity. Being too competent makes you stand out, while too weak marks you as prey. To circumnavigate the drawbacks of the hobo-lifestyle you must display some imagination or ingenuity.

Most homeless "secure" their possessions by carrying them around with them all the time. It's doubtful, however, that becoming a bag lady or pushing around a shopping trolley either appeals to you or suits your plans. Fortunately, there are many places where you can leave equipment relatively secure, most notably pay lockers, storage companies or privately rented garages. To use such facilities, though, you must look reasonably respectable, which is also necessary when interacting with wider society. Thankfully, being respectable entails a shower and clean clothes... and that's about it.

While maintaining a clean wardrobe and a reasonable level of personal cleanliness might seem hard when you're homeless, it isn't if you have a couple of bucks to spare. All you need is a coin laundry and a public pool or gym with shower facilities and suddenly you have everything you need to look like a productive member of society. You jog up in your sweats, do a quick workout, have a shower, spruce yourself up, dress properly and head off "to the office." Nothing suspicious in that is there? And while you're dressed up, renting that storage space should be child's play. At the end of the day, all you need is a little privacy to dress down, hiding the decent clothes you've worn, and suddenly you're transient again.

SQUATTING IN STYLE

For those who can't stand the thought of living on the streets, or who feel their plans require more security, the next step up the housing ladder is squatting. At the bottom end of the scale, the difference between living in the ruined shell of an old factory like a transient and squatting in an abandoned office building seems marginal, but there are some very important differences... the most important of which is the way the authorities approach the matter. While someone living in the ruined building and another in the empty apartment are both trespassing, the owner of the apartment (or apartment building) likely cares enough to make an issue of it with the police. In other words, squatting offers better accommodations, but at greater risk.

Squats range from crack houses full of garbage to hippie households complete with gardens. For the crucible, the best option is to look for its own squat. Squatting with



others is a risk, since squatters are generally more rational than transients. They might be addicts or petty criminals, but they're mentally stable enough to secure a relatively weatherproof, reasonably decent place to live. This means they are both easier to live with and more likely to discover your identity. Moving into an existing squat allows you to maintain a low profile, but it is best avoided beyond a short-term duration since your day-to-day activities are likely of the sort to arouse suspicion.

There are hundreds of squats available in the big city, especially if your skills at breaking and entering are better than average. Potential locations fall into three categories: abandoned, empty and vacant.

ABANDONED

Abandoned buildings are those left completely unattended, either because they await demolition or because their owners are broke. This usually means they are in disrepair and are in less salubrious areas, like decaying industrial parks. They rarely have power or running water, and reestablishing such amenities usually requires more work than is feasible for temporary residents. On the positive side, the building's condition means few people pay attention to trespassers, so while you aren't that much better off than being homeless, your privacy from law enforcement is relatively secure.

EMPTY

Empty buildings are unused because their owners have no immediate need of them or because no client wishes to rent out the space. These include warehouses rented out for seasonal use, factories shutting down pending better economic circumstances, or apartment buildings awaiting renovation. The big difference between an empty and an abandoned building is that in the former's case, the owners still care. This means doors and windows are secured and security guards patrol occasionally. Since there isn't anything of value in these buildings, however, you can easily circumvent such security measures as long as you're careful. Since the owners might care for the building's condition, empty buildings are reasonably comfortable. The roofs rarely leak, windows aren't broken, water and power is easily reconnected, and the same security you evaded to break in helps keep out riffraff.

VACANT

Vacant buildings are generally only empty for the short-term. This includes buildings for sale, apartments whose owners are away for the winter, or even places like storerooms or other unused spaces in otherwise occupied buildings. While far more difficult to manage, squatting in vacant premises will allow you to maintain



a façade of almost complete normality. It is the most comfortable accommodation on the wrong side of the law, and you can live as a normal citizen as long as you can keep the illegality of your residence a secret. Keeping it a secret is of course the key, and in general squatting in vacant premises is something you can't keep up for longer than a few weeks before being caught out. Finding likely prospects is also more difficult. Inside knowledge is the best bet, especially contacts with real estate agents, janitorial staff and building supervisors.

DON'T GET CAUGHT

Security issues are the biggest drawbacks with squatting, especially in the better class of locations. In abandoned buildings the primary security risk are other street scum, but in empty structures, security guard patrols present the biggest worry. Security guards, however, are not known for either their intelligence or diligence. As long as you are discreet, hiding evidence of your occupancy or not using lights at night, you should be able to fool the run-of-the-mill guard patrol. One useful tip is to use a building's security against the security patrols. If a security guard trying to enter the premises discovers her keys won't open the front gate padlock, she will assume she has the wrong keys. If the alarm code doesn't work, she'll assume another guard changed it and didn't tell her. Remember, guards and owners won't expect anyone to be there if you've been discreet. While they try figuring out who changed the padlock or alarms codes, you have time to hide or escape.

In vacant buildings, the difficulty increases. Patrols are more common and thorough, and there's always a risk of the owner, prospective buyer or a legitimate visitor appearing. Again, discretion is key. You don't treat a squat like a home. You are a fugitive and you must leave no evidence of your presence. This makes it less likely they'll catch you squatting and means if the authorities do find out where you've been, you've left them little evidence to assist them in pattern tracking. The rules are simple. Always clean up after yourself: Wipe down sinks and bench tops after using them and dispose of garbage every day. Never leave anything lying around: Keep your gear packed at all times. This means it isn't lying around, accidentally waiting to be found, and if you need to run, it's ready to go. Never use the rooms on the outside of the building: It's harder for people to see you or notice your activities. Always use as few rooms as possible: The crucible should sleep in one room, use one bathroom and kitchen, and never keep anything that's safer in secure storage somewhere else.

GOING LEGIT

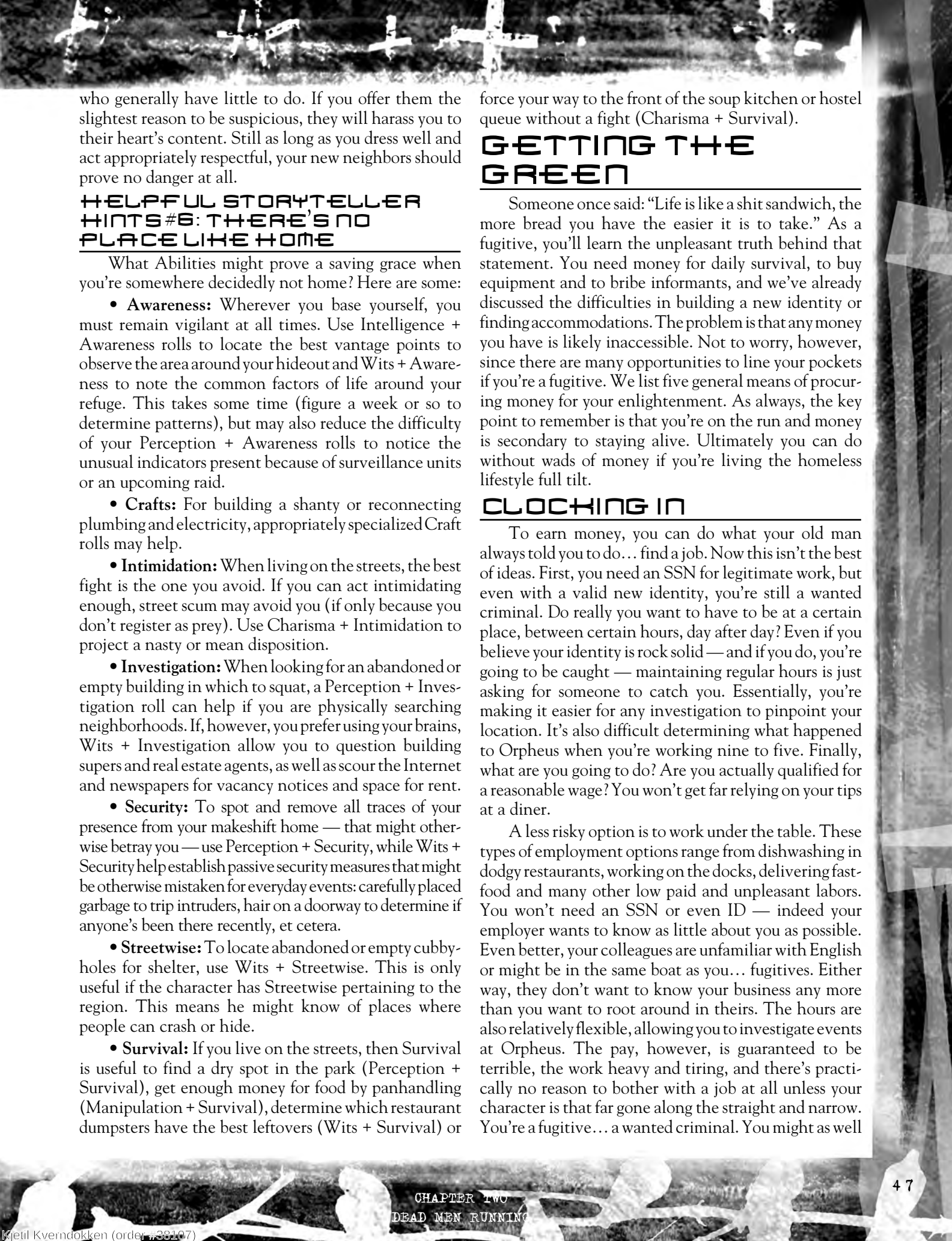
If living on the streets or squatting isn't to your liking, then you can try going "legit." If you have the

money and some good ID, the best living option is to rent legitimately, be it a long-term hotel or even an apartment. This option, however, has some major risks. First, it puts your identity into the system, so you better hope it holds up. Second, it costs money. Third, a whole lot of people may see your face, and they may recognize you if asked by a friendly federal agent. On the positive side, security and privacy are good. Indeed if you are renting space, you can make the location as secure as paranoia dictates. Yet, this degree of security is also misleading. After all, it's better you not have all your gear in the one place in case you need a fast retreat. And no matter what security precautions you set up, all it does is delay the assault team, and it won't affect spooks.

If you go the legit route, here are some things to remember. Don't stay in dives: They're the first place the authorities look. Go uptown and stay in a four-star hotel. Create a reasonable cover story and act the part: If you claim to be a business traveler, then dress well and keep regular hours. If you're pretending to be a tourist, seem interested in the major sights about town; if you act secretly or suspiciously, hotel staff will remember you or may even contact the authorities. If you rent a house or apartment, win over your neighbors, They'll be watching you, and if you act strangely, they'll be more likely to name you to the authorities if asked questions.

Going legit also hinders your freedom of movement since switching hotels or apartments frequently can alert someone to the fact you're deliberately trying to hide. Yet, remaining somewhere longer than a few weeks allows the authorities to narrow down your location and increases the chance someone might ask questions. Living in suburbia removes you from the hustle and potential risks of downtown but brings you into close proximity with neighbors... and suspicious soccer moms are almost as bad as special agents. If you want to pretend suburban bliss, you must play the part to perfection. This means the team can't live together openly and will likely need to play the heterosexual couple.

Finally, you can move right out of the city, find a little country town to lie low in and make the long commute into the city when necessary. With the right cover story, like being a writer or artist, the locals can accept a reasonable amount of eccentricity. Townsfolk can be fairly inquisitive, especially about newcomers. There are also the long trips to the city and back, which makes quick retreats difficult. At the same time, however, it's also less likely the authorities can follow you back to your hiding place. Of course, if you plan to lie low for a while, then escaping the city is the best option since it's cheap, private and secure. Vigilant locals are the main worry, however, especially county authorities,



who generally have little to do. If you offer them the slightest reason to be suspicious, they will harass you to their heart's content. Still as long as you dress well and act appropriately respectful, your new neighbors should prove no danger at all.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS #6: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

What Abilities might prove a saving grace when you're somewhere decidedly not home? Here are some:

- **Awareness:** Wherever you base yourself, you must remain vigilant at all times. Use Intelligence + Awareness rolls to locate the best vantage points to observe the area around your hideout and Wits + Awareness to note the common factors of life around your refuge. This takes some time (figure a week or so to determine patterns), but may also reduce the difficulty of your Perception + Awareness rolls to notice the unusual indicators present because of surveillance units or an upcoming raid.

- **Crafts:** For building a shanty or reconnecting plumbing and electricity, appropriately specialized Craft rolls may help.

- **Intimidation:** When living on the streets, the best fight is the one you avoid. If you can act intimidating enough, street scum may avoid you (if only because you don't register as prey). Use Charisma + Intimidation to project a nasty or mean disposition.

- **Investigation:** When looking for an abandoned or empty building in which to squat, a Perception + Investigation roll can help if you are physically searching neighborhoods. If, however, you prefer using your brains, Wits + Investigation allow you to question building supers and real estate agents, as well as scour the Internet and newspapers for vacancy notices and space for rent.

- **Security:** To spot and remove all traces of your presence from your makeshift home — that might otherwise betray you — use Perception + Security, while Wits + Security help establish passive security measures that might be otherwise mistaken for everyday events: carefully placed garbage to trip intruders, hair on a doorway to determine if anyone's been there recently, et cetera.

- **Streetwise:** To locate abandoned or empty cubbyholes for shelter, use Wits + Streetwise. This is only useful if the character has Streetwise pertaining to the region. This means he might know of places where people can crash or hide.

- **Survival:** If you live on the streets, then Survival is useful to find a dry spot in the park (Perception + Survival), get enough money for food by panhandling (Manipulation + Survival), determine which restaurant dumpsters have the best leftovers (Wits + Survival) or

force your way to the front of the soup kitchen or hostel queue without a fight (Charisma + Survival).

GETTING THE GREEN

Someone once said: "Life is like a shit sandwich, the more bread you have the easier it is to take." As a fugitive, you'll learn the unpleasant truth behind that statement. You need money for daily survival, to buy equipment and to bribe informants, and we've already discussed the difficulties in building a new identity or finding accommodations. The problem is that any money you have is likely inaccessible. Not to worry, however, since there are many opportunities to line your pockets if you're a fugitive. We list five general means of procuring money for your enlightenment. As always, the key point to remember is that you're on the run and money is secondary to staying alive. Ultimately you can do without wads of money if you're living the homeless lifestyle full tilt.

CLOCKING IN

To earn money, you can do what your old man always told you to do... find a job. Now this isn't the best of ideas. First, you need an SSN for legitimate work, but even with a valid new identity, you're still a wanted criminal. Do really you want to have to be at a certain place, between certain hours, day after day? Even if you believe your identity is rock solid — and if you do, you're going to be caught — maintaining regular hours is just asking for someone to catch you. Essentially, you're making it easier for any investigation to pinpoint your location. It's also difficult determining what happened to Orpheus when you're working nine to five. Finally, what are you going to do? Are you actually qualified for a reasonable wage? You won't get far relying on your tips at a diner.

A less risky option is to work under the table. These types of employment options range from dishwashing in dodgy restaurants, working on the docks, delivering fast-food and many other low paid and unpleasant labors. You won't need an SSN or even ID — indeed your employer wants to know as little about you as possible. Even better, your colleagues are unfamiliar with English or might be in the same boat as you... fugitives. Either way, they don't want to know your business any more than you want to root around in theirs. The hours are also relatively flexible, allowing you to investigate events at Orpheus. The pay, however, is guaranteed to be terrible, the work heavy and tiring, and there's practically no reason to bother with a job at all unless your character is that far gone along the straight and narrow. You're a fugitive... a wanted criminal. You might as well



steal a lot more money than you're ever going to earn delivering pizzas. (White Wolf would like to say that this is an option only for your characters. We are not advocating this for real.)

A LIFE OF CRIME

Crime's attraction has always been that it apparently provides a large payoff for relatively little work. The catch, however, is the risk of getting caught and spending several years being very friendly with your new husbands. As skilled professionals of a slightly dubious variety, you are likely far better equipped than most criminals for a life of crime, not least because you aren't stupid and ignorant. Still there are obvious functional differences between stealing someone's wallet and hijacking an armored car. In the end, however, how far along the criminal path you progress depends on your own morals, your desperation and your needs.

MINOR CRIMES

The risk of capture versus the potential payoff for minor crimes is not particularly good. This isn't to say your chances of getting caught are high, but rather, your returns will be low. This is especially true of theft since you must fence whatever goods you steal, and therefore run the risk of hitting a police sting operation. When fencing hot gear, expect to earn no more than 10% of the retail worth of your goods. Violent minor crimes, like muggings, also don't pay well. If the victim is carrying beaucoup cash, then they generally have the protection to bloody your nose in return. Still, few people carry much money in their wallets, and you can bet they'll take your description to the police. Additionally, the more violent the crime, the more time the police put into finding the perpetrator... and don't underestimate their ability, either.

"Soft" crimes like pick-pocketing, credit card fraud, purse snatching and rolling drunks don't pay any more than a theft or mugging, but the authorities consider them less urgent. They're also crimes where someone is less likely to identify you to the police in any detail. Indeed, if you're careful, the victim may never see you at all.

The best crimes are those with more than one payoff. If steal a wallet, for instance, you get the cash and the cards. Use the money and credit cards, and then sell the wallet's contents to criminals who specialize in identity theft. Presto: three payoffs. If you roll a drunk, search her for her watch, car keys, house keys and anything else that might lead you to a bigger payoff. If you do this, remember to check the wallet to see if your victim has a family... we don't want you whacking the significant other and kids now, do we? Even with multiple payoffs, minor crimes generally pay low and are only useful as a last resort when you need quick cash.

Before committing any crimes, remember to always take one person into account at all times — Murphy. It's hard to know who is what in the big city, and more than one criminal has discovered that the hard way. You might be picking the pocket of a trained security professional, rolling a drunken soldier whose mates are in the car across the street, or snatching an old lady's bag only to discover a martial arts fanatic under all that blue hair. No matter how simple the crime appears, don't become over-confident. Plan your locations, memorize a couple of escape routes, keep an eye out for anything unusual and, most importantly, work in a team. The best criminals work in groups because while one person concentrates on the mark, the others watch everyone and everything else. Just because you're committing a small-time crime doesn't mean you should act like a small-time hood.

MAJOR CRIMES

Armed holdups, kidnapping, large-scale or high-value theft, working for the mob, drug dealing, blackmail and fraud are the most common big-time crimes. If pursued correctly they all pay handsomely, enough so that you don't have to commit very many crimes to sustain yourself. It is important not to grow too ambitious, however. Pull too many jobs and you'll attract the police and even state and federal law enforcement.

• **Drugs:** In the interest of escaping the immediate attentions of federal authorities, steer clear of drugs. The government expends immense resources in its war on drugs, and your chances of getting caught are very high. Also, the big drug money goes to the major operators: the South American and Central American cartels, the Caribbean and North American gangs, and the Asian tongs and triads. These are nasty people best avoided. You have enough problems without becoming involved in some gang war or a personal vendetta with a drug lord. These organizations are also very wary, even at street level, with whom they deal. They're just as nervous about the cops or feds as you are, which means you need an "in" with them. Otherwise, be prepared to spend months creating one if you wish to work for them in a major way.

• **Kidnapping:** Kidnapping also falls into the "hardcore" basket best avoided on career day. Actually, snatching someone isn't difficult — a point to remember when it comes to learning about what happened to Orpheus. The problem is, once you abduct your victim, you must communicate your demands and collect the ransom without the authorities tracing or catching you. Forget what you see in the movies about switching trains, scuba divers in rivers or daring hide-speed chases. Kidnapping is a federal offense and the FBI is damn good



at solving for-profit abductions. They have the resources to counter most everything you throw at them unless you're silly enough to consider using Horrors to accomplish your deed (in which case, the stakes and rewards to find you just jumped considerably). Even if you retrieve the money, the authorities already scanned it, which means they have a record of every serial number on every note. They'll track you as you spend it. Those targets whose loved ones or organization won't go to the authorities may seem like good pickings, but do you really need anyone else hunting you?

• **Major Theft:** Major theft is relatively "impersonal" and pays well, but like petty theft, you need to fence the goods. This is particularly true with high value or rare goods like gemstones or artwork. There are more items worth stealing that might not be so sexy, however, but can be just as valuable... and far easier to dispose. Cigarettes and liquor, for instance, are a very popular. Hijack a loaded semi-trailer, and with decent legwork you can hawk the stolen goods 'round tobacconists and convenience stores in other states without too much complication. (Know your retailers first, however.) Other valuable bulk items — like firearms, pharmaceuticals, petrol, computer components and home electronics — are also popular acquisitions. Fencing these, however, requires contacts with organized crime.

The best commodity to steal is money and other forms of potentially liquid assets like gold or bearer bonds. Most affluent people have portable, untraceable wealth in their safes, but high-end housebreaking is risky because you can't guarantee a big payoff. After all, there's no point planning, researching and casing the target (not to mention taking the risk) just to discover a near empty safe. Two likelier options are bank safety deposit vaults and the safes of large accounting and legal firms. As commercial operations, such companies have good, but impersonal security. Best of all, safety deposit boxes and corporate safes are generally full of cash, gold, shares and bonds that are rarely traceable by their owners. In many cases, they contain wealth hidden from the IRS that owners won't be willing to admit they possessed. How does one go about robbing the aforementioned sites without months of planning? Go in as a spook, hang around the safe or safety-deposit box privacy booths, and then possess whoever's most convenient to commit the robbery. Or possess the safety deposit boxes or safe after hours, and crack them open with Inhabit. Better yet... raid the evidence lockers at the local police station. It's one-stop shopping for drugs (which you can resell), weapons and a variety of evidence that the big-time crooks will certainly pay to keep out of circulation. Mind you, this is the route best

reserved for characters with few morals. Please note that we aren't going to bother with "stealing a hot dog is a one-Spite-point crime," because mortal crimes are matters of cause and effect. If you go on a crime spree with your powers, you validate the manhunt against you and run the risk of losing any friends you had left (which means the Storyteller can dock you Background dots in Allies, Contacts, Mentor, etc.) for every crime the authorities can link to you through evidence.

Regardless, theft is also an excellent way of equipping yourself. Why go through the trouble of stealing the money to buy your equipment when you can simply steal the equipment directly? It's always best to hit wholesalers rather than retailers; there is more to steal and fewer people about. Again, do your research. Know where they store the goods you want, how they are packed, the rotation of staff and security guards and, of course, the nature of their security. Don't forget to remove identifying marks from stolen property before using it. The owner has serial numbers and other details recorded.

• **Robbery:** The old-fashioned stick-up may appeal to characters for the same reasons it appeals to so many criminals over the years: It's intimidating, it's direct, it's quick and it's simple. Very few armed robbers actually get away with it, however, and certainly not repeatedly. The law of averages will catch up you and you will rob the wrong mark. Those businesses with large quantities of cash use strong measures to protect their assets. Even businesses without large sums of cash, but that are readily accessible to the less discerning bandit like liquor and convenience stores, take extensive precautions. They arm employees with guns or have panic buttons, security cameras, emergency steel shutter doors and windows, and even, bulletproof teller glass. With family-owned businesses, the proprietors have an alarming tendency to be armed to the teeth and willing to use their weapons at risk of personal harm. There's a reason that convenience store cashiers are listed in the Top 10 of most dangerous jobs in North America. The cashiers know that, too, and protect themselves if given the opportunity. Small businesses also have little cash, so unless you're a drug user in need of a quick fix, they won't be much use to you.

If you decide to try your hand at armed robbery, pick somewhere big and research it thoroughly. Good targets are those carrying lots of small untraceable bills and a minimum of people involved. The more impersonal the crime, the better since it means fewer witnesses and less chance of something unexpected happening. Good targets include big retail or hospitality businesses dispatching the daily takes and money exchanges (read warehouses) used by banks.



Plan your operation to account for three central requirements: delaying a police response, crowd control and the getaway. Even with the best planning, armed robbery remains far riskier than major theft, not least because of the guns involved. Although the value of the goods you steal may be more than the value of the money you rob, people still protect their cash more vehemently because it inevitably attracts more thieves — since you don't have to fence it.

What if you could target someone who wouldn't go to the police, however — someone trying to avoid the authorities as much as you do? What if this target had copious sums of untraceable, small bills and dubious morals? We're talking, of course, of professional criminals and undertakings: drug dealers, organized-crime bagmen, illegal casinos and other dodgy operations. Sure these types arm themselves to the teeth and shoot at the slightest provocation, but they also don't expect someone to rob them. They top the criminal food chain and only the foolhardy dare defy them for fear of deadly reprisals. You, however, are already wanted by the government and supernatural headhunters, so what's left to fear?

Actually, a fair amount would be the correct answer, given the power and reach of organized crime on the streets. When robbing criminals, all the rules previ-

ously mentioned in regards to civilian targets apply, especially with research and planning. You must also be ready to use violence, however. Indeed, killing and disposing of the criminals is a good idea, but frankly, if you're planning to whack people and dispose of their corpses you may just consider working with organized crime rather than against it. While murder-for-hire is the most obvious option, you could simply provide less lethal muscle or specialized services like hacking or surveillance, or even more supernatural "talents." Providing hard-to-procure professional skills to criminal syndicates is likely far more lucrative than just pulling a trigger, certainly enough to fund your crucible in relative style. As we mentioned in relation to drug dealing, however, crime gangs are dangerous and untrustworthy, and working for them increases the chance that the authorities will find you. They do keep such groups under surveillance after all.

- **White-Collar Crimes:** The least risky capers, at least to your physical well being, are of the white-collar variety. The activities of con men, hackers and black-mailers can return very substantial results if done well. With white-collar crime, try targeting millionaires and large companies with cash to burn. Sure, you can bilk the elderly for a fortune in get-rich schemes and property frauds, but do you really want to target folks with more



to lose than a percentage dip in their profits? If you want to score big with a scam, then corporate fraud is the best option since it's a "victimless" crime. ("Victimless" is a sad excuse to alleviate one's guilt in the matter, though.) Indeed, many corporations avoid reporting a major fraud for fear of damaging their public reputation or financial standing. A company is also less likely to hire private heavies to deal with you than, say, rich individuals are. The most common way to structure a big sting is to arrange loans or investments for a fraudulent company. Setting such operations in motion requires significant time, patience and preparation, but since you aren't actually committing any major crimes until the moment you accept money, you don't face the risks until you pull it off.

Computer fraud isn't so different. Don't mislead yourself into believing hackers are fat, pimply social rejects sitting in dark rooms. Most successful computer fraud schemes require inside information, and many authentic hackers (not the plebeians who download online, user-friendly software to break encryptions) use no small mix of ingenuity and daring to coax information from insiders through seduction, small talk, et cetera. Sure you can compromise e-commerce systems and steal credit card details using decryption software, but to penetrate a big corporation, the information you need is not possible by web-crawling across your target's website and past his firewalls. To retrieve the necessary information, the most effective hacking technique is dumpster diving, which is why most corporations are so adamant about shredding documents. Still, significant reams of data end up in the garbage, hence why large corporations are equally careful about locking their dumpsters. If you can't find usernames, passwords or protocol and network configurations, not to mention security information, through the garbage, your next best option is searching the companies themselves. Breaking and entering without actually stealing anything may seem bizarre, but most computer-users leave important security information in or on their desks.

Now you're asking yourself, "If I'm a ghost or projector, then why don't I break into the office and just take the intel I need?" You can, except for that one time when you encounter an outfit that is either so paranoid (or has mysterious backing), that they employ anti-spook intrusion deterrents. A ritual to trap intruding spooks in a filing cabinet, a resident ghost security guard hired by Terrel & Squib or some independent contractor, Kirlian cameras and security guards armed with gauze-shredding rounds... All these are nasty options that Storytellers can use if the crucible grows too cocky with its "nyah-nyah, can't touch me" attitude.

Upon penetrating a company's mainframe, you can set about defrauding it. You can set up false accounts,

then create electronic deals involving those accounts and siphon off the money or goods involved. Trying to transfer money from bank accounts or goods to a warehouse of your choosing won't work. Computer systems have built-in mechanisms and watchdogs to prevent such transparent and clumsy attempts, as much to prevent human error as to stop fraud.

Blackmail requires less paperwork than corporate fraud, but it does use a lot of legwork. Indeed, without inside information, just picking a mark is nigh on impossible, and targeting wealthy people at random will never work. You must first find someone with a secret he's willing to pay to hide, and then you must catch him at it. Sure, you could follow him as a spook until you find him in the act, but without physical proof, he's not likely to pay. Catching someone on videotape is child's play with today's vast array of electronic gadgetry and a little deft B&E. Once you have the evidence, you must collect the money, and therein lies the risk. The victim may well decide to dispose of you or refuse to pay outright. Another option is to request payment in something other than money. Information on what happened to Orpheus is priceless, for instance.

With any type of fraud or blackmail, it is important you don't allow greed to rule you. Take one bite of the cherry, and then locate another target if you need more money. If you repeatedly bank on one victim, he may go to the authorities or send goons to find you. This of course makes it imperative that you pick your targets carefully, so you earn enough money to make the effort worthwhile. Don't limit yourself to just the money, however. Demanding equipment or very expensive technology is one option, especially if it entails procuring military grade and other restricted goods otherwise requiring complex paperwork to purchase legally.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS #7: BEING A SMOOTH CRIMINAL

Embarking on a life of crime? Well, here are some Abilities to help smooth your way to a successful career.

- **Computer:** Computer fraud requires significant computer skills; anyone with less than four dots shouldn't even consider it. Finding a suitable target requires a Perception + Computer roll, then another to determine the difficulty of the task. Finding a hole in a system's defenses is a Wits + Computer roll, while using that deficiency is an Intelligence + Computer roll. Upon penetrating the system, another Perception + Computer roll helps find the best route to swindle the system, an Intelligence + Computer roll to determine how to accomplish that goal and Manipulation + Computer to launch the actual fraud.

Again, the better the initial research, the lower the difficulty (pending Storyteller approval).

- **Crafts:** A skill in any craft at two dots is enough to find work in that field at standard pay (say \$5 over minimum wage), though it's up to the Storyteller to determine what that entails in game terms or if a job is available. Each additional dot increases that base hourly payment by \$5, while five dots in any craft means the character is good enough to set his own wages (within reason; Storyteller prerogative).

- **Empathy:** When committing a robbery, Perception + Empathy allows you to spot potential troublemakers, whilst Wits + Empathy reveals the most effective form of intimidation to keep help civilians kowtowed.

- **Finance:** Fraud requires an innate understanding of how money works in different systems. Use Intelligence + Finance to conduct the fundamental research to best accomplish the fraud, whilst Wits + Finance rolls allow you to forge the paperwork and company structures, thereby convincing people that you offer a legitimate service. To con people verbally, when it comes to Finance, roll Manipulation + Finance rather than Manipulation + Subterfuge. To carry off a financial fraud, we recommend you possess at least three dots in this Ability.

- **Investigation:** With corporate or computer fraud, much of your research is of the physical kind, especially dumpster diving and eavesdropping on conversations in bars. Perception + Investigation is appropriate in such cases, though if a character is trying to draw useful information from an unsuspecting target, then Manipulation + Investigation will suffice. During a theft, trying to find the vault's location or uncover other specific locations in a building requires Wits + Investigation if the characters are being systematic.

- **Security:** If casing a location to conduct a break-in or a robbery, roll Perception + Security to determine the nature of the anti-intrusion methods, then Wits + Security to devise a plan of attack. The Storyteller should reduce the difficulty of these rolls if the characters were intelligent and the reconnaissance was well thought out. Characters can also use Security to ensure there are clear escape corridors free of patrols or cameras (Perception + Security).

- **Streetwise:** Finding a fence requires a fair amount of legwork (Wits + Streetwise). Upon locating one, you must haggle (Charisma + Streetwise), as well as have some inkling of the true street value of your goods (Intelligence + Streetwise). Finally, if you must unload hot goods on someone other than a fence, you must be persuasive and know how to conduct transactions in dodgy business-speak (Manipulation + Streetwise).

- **Subterfuge:** When defrauding someone, a Charisma + Subterfuge roll allows you to exude an honest and upstanding persona, while if you want to appear as an expert in a subject you know only from research, use Intelligence + Subterfuge.

BUYING GEAR

So, you're still free, with a roof over your heads and money to burn. Now you need gear to help turn the tables on the folks who ruined your life. As fugitives, shopping is a risky business. As we've mentioned time and time again, anywhere with security guards and cameras is a risk. Thus, you must consider carefully where to shop, even for simple things like clothes, shoes and basic electronics. For unusual, semi-legal and outright illegal items you must be even more cautious since you're dealing with individuals of doubtful probity and in areas the authorities may well be watching. Finally, cheaper is better, since you're likely on a limited budget.

LEGAL

The sort of goods you can buy over the counter and with no identification required include clothes, computer gear, simple electronics, stationary, basic services and any other household or everyday item. To begin with, buy this stuff. Don't try stealing it or using a fraudulent credit card for purchases, unless you're truly desperate. For the tiny amount of money you'd save, it's simply not worth the extra risk of getting caught. You can also minimize your chances of someone randomly spotting you by ordering over the Internet and having goods delivered.

If you must shop, avoid going to the same location twice. The fewer times someone sees you, the less chance of them recognizing or remembering you. Remove all identifying marks from anything you buy. Cut the labels from clothes, file the serial numbers off equipment, ensure printer-shops don't mark anything they print for you and try buying shoes with generic soles. This makes tracking you by your possessions difficult, and denies your enemies any advantage. When purchasing services, like mobile phones or Internet connections, use prepaid contracts. This ensures nobody can follow you through a money trail, as well as allowing you to constantly swap providers.

SEMI-LEGAL

Semi-legal goods are those that most folks could buy legitimately with the proper paperwork, but which for you (as a fugitive) represent a serious risk to purchase since you'll need fraudulent ID or contacts on the gray market. (It's not the goods that are illegal, but your ability to purchase them, hence "gray.") In some cases, these goods



are only available from a limited number of sources since they have obvious paramilitary or paranormal purposes — hence, the authorities pursuing you may already have these channels under surveillance. Regardless, you must use illegal methods to purchase what any normal citizen could open. This includes firearms, surveillance gear, vehicles, medical equipment, military style communications equipment, pharmaceuticals and body armor. These goods are also relatively easy to track, and thus a very good reason why you should be circumspect in purchasing them, even with rock-solid ID.

A gray profiteer is a supposedly legitimate dealer who will to sell to people lacking the required paperwork. Use them for firearms and other paramilitary equipment. Often, a gray profiteer operates by rules that are legitimate in other states or may even espouse radical political views like anarchy or the overthrow of the government. These radicals are your best option since they won't cooperate with the authorities out of principle and forestall any attempt to track you through your purchases.

For equipment you can legitimately purchase, like surveillance and medical equipment, but which might arouse suspicion, be imaginative. Hire go-betweens to conduct the purchase, or buy the goods overseas. Finding second-hand dealers who are less fussy about their clientele is another option. This is especially true with medical and paramilitary equipment since there is a large resale market in both. Always try paying cash and see if you can haggle for a discount to make the transaction seem less suspicious (or desperate). You can also look for someone dealing otherwise legitimate equipment hot off the back of a truck since they'll be just as interested in maintaining secrecy as yourself.

Finding a dealer in semi-legal equipment is as easy as thumbing through the yellow pages, but you should be more discriminating. Trade press is the best place to find second-hand, mail order and small-time dealers. Otherwise, search through the classifieds in specialized magazines. Private dealers are great if you can find one. Once you establish some contacts, asking the right questions can lead you to less ethical dealers (whom you can uncover fairly easily with questions like "Who do I avoid?").

Please note that, while not currently illegal, projecting technology is under heavy surveillance. This means the FBI is watching the remaining projecting firms, as well as suppliers dealing in important equipment (like the materials necessary to create a cryonics chamber).

ILLEGAL

Illegal goods are essentially those forbidden by law, which includes favorites like military-grade firearms, explosives, drugs and high-tech encryption and intrusion equipment. Because such goods are illegal, finding dealers is more difficult (and it's possible the authorities have some under surveillance). At the very least, however, these

dealers will likely remain out of your private business, let alone ask questions why you need certain goods. The black market is fairly anonymous, with serial numbers and identifying marks already removed from items to protect their sources. Remember, however, that they are also criminals. You can't trust them, and you especially can't trust the quality of your purchases. You can't complain to the police, so check the quality of everything you buy before paying.

Finding underworld dealers is difficult, and proving yourself to them more difficult still. The only way to manage either task is to maintain contacts on the street to vouch for you and point you in the right direction. This may be problematic, especially since you run the risk of contacting those people the authorities are watching. Your only option is to make new contacts and win their confidence enough that they'll vouch for you. This process requires time and patience, however, and may bring you into closer orbit with the criminal underworld than you might find comfortable. A quicker option is using a middleman as your intermediary for a percentage off the top. Of course, you should be careful he won't screw you over and take the money and run. Even more importantly, you need to be sure your middleman is competent, but then that's the benefit of being a spook... spying on your lackeys unseen.

HELPFUL STORYTELLER HINTS #8: NO WARRANTY SALES

In a shopping mood? The following Abilities might be handy in play, and allow the crucible to participate in the fun together.

- **Empathy:** When negotiating with someone of dubious integrity you shouldn't push too hard. A Wits + Empathy roll allows you to determine if you're pushing your luck with your criminal contact.

- **Intimidation:** It's important for whoever is dealing with you to know that you're not someone to fuck with. Use Charisma + Intimidation to act like a player or bad mother. The more successes you roll, the less likely someone will mess with you. This is not an overt act of threatening someone, merely an obvious strength of will and purpose.

- **Streetwise:** Locating known purveyors of illegal or semi-legal equipment is best accomplished through careful, face-to-face exchanges in the more dubious bars, markets and pawn shops (Manipulation + Streetwise), or through thorough research online, in local papers and on local notice-boards for those ads subtly offering that extra something (Wits + Streetwise). Knowing the street value of items is also important. Offering too much makes you look like an easy mark, while Intelligence + Streetwise allows you to determine a good price range from which to work. You must also know the standard tricks of the trade: old goods made to look new, indelibly marked goods or items too obvious to be easily used (Perception + Streetwise).

STORYTELLER SECTION

Orpheus is dead and gone, and the characters' lives have gone to hell. As Storyteller, it's up to you to pick up the pieces of what's left of the crucible and a corporation that no longer exists. These individuals, left only with the bond of Vitality, are on their own, with no idea where to go and no way to get there. Add to and beyond this, they are somehow now the bad guys. The authorities turned the characters into wanted international criminals, shattering their families, freezing their funds and revoking their passports. When Orpheus falls, the government and media spin doctors further exacerbate its indignities by dragging its reputation through the mud. The question of who or what destroyed Orpheus still awaits answering, but the FBI seems less intent on solving this crime than vilifying the victim. At the same time, there are individual agencies intent on hunting down and destroying the characters for what they *may* know. What will you, as Storyteller, do to keep the game fun for your players, while holding true to the atmosphere?

The intent behind this chapter is to set your characters in flight without ending their lives or the chronicle's playability. Sound hard? Well, this chapter provides you, as Storyteller, avenues where you can take your characters, as well as fail-safes in case they somehow manage to destroy your vision. It answers some questions about the mysterious antagonist gunning for Orpheus and trying to eliminate the remaining loose threads. It offers possible routes that the FBI may pursue to spin the event in their favor, but it also gives potential story lines of crosses and double-crosses in the now hazardous post-Orpheus world. It places many facts in an easy-to-follow format for the casual reader, presenting all the enemies so the Storyteller knows their agendas if not, in most cases, their identities.

More importantly, this chapter offers advice on keeping the characters running without destroying them, building paranoia without crippling them with suspicion and, finally, offering them a new world in which to play. As Storyteller, you must chart this course for your players, and be flexible enough to accept what they give you in return. The only point to remember is that the story is for the players. You must accommodate that fact while maintaining your own vision and not allowing players to take advantage of your extended hand. After all, the best laid plans of mice and men...

CRUSADE OF ASHES SECRETS

Before diving into discussions about the opposition and the state of character affairs, it's important the

Storyteller understand the revelations he can inflict upon the crucible. These are the first of many that will snowball through the series.

PROJECT FLATLINE

In 1986, engineer Bob Jackson and physician Anne Del Greco formed JDG Cryogenics. The company specialized in freezing their clients until a time when science could cure their ailments. Unlike most of its competitors, however, JDG had one advantage in Dr. Eduardo Fernandez, a specialist in cryonics and among the only person to freeze and reanimate the human body. It was a feat, considering the greatest detriment to workable cryogenics, at that point, was the fact that portions of the human body possessed different tolerances to freezing. So while one process worked on one set of organs, it completely destroyed the adjoining tissue. Dr. Fernandez's process, however, relied on mummifying the body through a high-protein, cold-tolerant suspension fluid that saturated the cells, preventing ice crystals from forming and damaging tissue.

The process worked, eventually allowing JDG to revive its first patient, Jane Kennedy, in 1991. The rest is public history, with Kennedy becoming the mother of projectors and JDG becoming the Orpheus Group in 1994. That's the history everyone knows. Behind the scenes, however, a completely different sequence of events played out.

The newly dubbed Orpheus knew that projecting was possible, but experiments in the process generated haphazard results. Orpheus hired scientists of every caliber, looking to scientifically explain and replicate the process of projecting. When science failed to provide answers, Orpheus looked to other cultures for inspiration... among the Native American tribes that used peyote for their vision quests, among the Aborigines who believed in the Dreamtime, among practitioners of voodoo who served as *chevals* for their Loa, among the Buddhists who practiced transcendental meditation, among the fakirs of India who used pain to enter a euphoric, elevated state. All the ancient cultures spoke of existing outside the body.

Orpheus was losing money in the process, but its forays into projecting were producing quantifiable results. First it determined that the people likeliest to succeed in "projecting" were somehow those closest to death. Then it discovered that certain plants, even with their addictive qualities, facilitated the act of projecting. Finally, Dr. Amours Katilian, an Orpheus botanist exploring the remote jungles of South America, returned with a unique find... a plant with completely singular properties. The plant was addictive, but it facilitated projection quite easily. Katilian remained

territorial about his work and grew batches of the plant in an Orpheus warehouse. Orpheus tried replicating his work secretly, but its efforts to provide the exact, nurturing environment for the plants always failed.

Eventually, however, Orpheus managed to synthesize a drug to help people project, as long as they approached a state of near-death. Unfortunately, by this time, Orpheus was suffering. It was losing money and nearly folded the projecting endeavors when a mystery backer, whose identity remains known only to a select few, stepped in to subsidize the project. Then there was friction with Chief Executive Officer Bob Jackson, who felt very uncomfortable with both Orpheus' new partners and with its decision to test an addictive substance on human subjects. A perhaps too convenient heart attack, however, ended further dissent on the matter.

Project Flatline was Orpheus' first test run on deliberately creating projectors. It had determined that people who'd undergone multiple near-death experiences were the best test subjects, and all they needed now were 12 guinea pigs. The mysterious backers, however, provided them with a solution... death-row inmates with no appeals left, who had little to lose. The backers had enough connections with Marion Federal Penitentiary to use their facilities and inmates, with nobody the wiser. Orpheus selected 12 suitable candidates, believing that it could control the prisoners by controlling their dormant bodies.

They were wrong. While Orpheus banked on holding the prisoners' bodies hostage, the prisoners discovered that not only could they exist as ghosts, going wherever they pleased, but they could also manifest to the living, appearing normal and even interacting with mortals. The 12 prisoners fled once free of their bodies.

The ringleader for half the projectors was none other than the bogeyman himself, kingsnake con Uriah Bishop, a name Orpheus claimed never existed, but one that projectors learned to fear through word-of-mouth. Uriah is a demagogue convicted of poisoning parishioners of a Southern Baptist Church at a picnic. Forty people died. Following Uriah into the unknown were five prisoners, while the remaining six split for elsewhere, leaving their incarcerated bodies behind. Orpheus panicked. It now had a dozen patients in comas who couldn't be executed anymore. In fact, if people investigated the matter, all fingers would point back to Orpheus.

Within a day, a fire swept through the prison, killing over a dozen death-row inmates through burns or asphyxiation. Orpheus' secret benefactors helped sweep the incident under the rug, using it as an excuse to exert stronger control over Orpheus and become a stronger silent partner than ever before.

THE AFTERMATH

The aftermath of Project Flatline proved disastrous for Orpheus in many ways, but it was also a saving grace. Dr. Amours Katilian was found dead almost immediately following the Marion Pen fires, the circumstances of his demise a complete mystery even after the autopsy. Orpheus seized his research notes and warehouse full of South American plants but still couldn't grow any more batches. Orpheus froze most of the remaining supply and eventually succeeded in creating non-addictive strains while using less of Dr. Katilian's plant. Unfortunately, Orpheus' backers wanted results, so the group used a small portion of the plant to train the first batch of projectors, addicting their initial operatives in the process.

The sleeper method was now a necessity, as were extended tours of duty, since Orpheus had to justify using even minute samples of its precious plants. The Orpheus Group knew skimmers were now viable, but skimmers couldn't stay out of their bodies for long. Thus, they were an unnecessary drain on the company's plant stores. Furthermore, Orpheus could only cater to a select few customers who could afford their prices.

Unfortunately, Orpheus lost many agents through trial and error. The existing ghost population was strong and many, and they brooked little tolerance of the mortal interlopers among them. The ghosts displayed a fractured mosaic in loyalties and beliefs and spoke of forgotten empires across the Stormwall.

Orpheus found itself an outsider to this strange new society of the restless dead and was careful in its explorations.

THE SHADOW STORM

After a couple of years training and perfecting the projector process (as well as losing some agents to addiction and even insanity), Orpheus was approached by its mysterious backers, who demanded a return on their investment. That "return" was to claim the new projectors that Orpheus had taught and to bring them under their auspices for black-op missions. Unable to refuse, Orpheus lost its projectors in one fell swoop and was forced to retrain a new batch. The massive human resources shift was never made public, but because Orpheus was so secretive, it didn't have to worry about people noticing a missing generation of projectors. The new inductees believed they were the first batch.

It was during this interim training period that a strange event occurred — one entirely invisible to the living. Loathsome creatures only rarely seen before suddenly appeared from every dark hole and shadow-filled corner. They skittered and surged forward like army ants, overwhelming the ghosts and dragging them back into the shadows. It was a nightmare of Biblical stature, an enterprise of the mad. The malignant, evil

things called Spectres smashed through defenses, taking down powerful ghosts through sheer numbers and swarming over ghosts that clustered together for their last stand. And just like that... they were gone from the world... ghosts and Spectres alike... a world empty and silent save for the living. Certainly, a few ghosts survived by the slimmest of hairs, the most fantastic of luck or because they were somehow protected. These few, however, hid from the world like nobody's ever done before. Finding them is a rare occurrence, and often a portent for trouble.

Orpheus' mysterious backers, meanwhile, lost most of their projector team in the event and watched in horror as manifested ghosts were torn to shreds by an enemy nobody else saw. They decided to hold back on recruiting projectors themselves, and allow Orpheus to assume the risks given they were dealing with a completely unknown and mysterious adversary. Most of Orpheus' new projectors, meanwhile, were too untrained to see the event, and those who did, went mad from the experience or decided no amount of money was well worth being minced to bits by a swarm of enemies. Orpheus hushed the matter up among those who suspected what happened, and let its new recruits blissfully believe that their world didn't include the monsters that lurked out there.

IN CONCLUSION

Orpheus' mysterious backers never intended for them to go public with their projectors and talk of ghosts, but several matters changed that outlook. The first was a reason Orpheus cited, in that it could learn more about the hereafter and its denizens if people approached them with their problems — even offering them permission to investigate their domiciles and property holdings. This way, Orpheus could act as a clearing-house for information, including determining the potential secrets and agendas of powerful clients. Secondly, rumors were spreading that projector technology had somehow leaked into the open market, and was soon to become public knowledge. By trying to corner the market now, Orpheus could hedge out the competition from gaining too strong a foothold and take advantage of an inevitability.

The Flatliners all managed to survive the pogrom of the Spectres, seemingly because of their unique abilities. The Flatliners and projectors were unique from other ghosts, and they often survived by inhabiting objects, storm-wending away, manifesting with enough Vitality to remain unnoticed by the swarms, or pulling out some as-yet-unseen ability. Orpheus' other projectors who perished in the attack simply weren't practiced enough.

Finally, Orpheus had perfected the process of creating and training projectors, with skimmers only needing enough of the drug cocktail to project initially. After a while, they could do so voluntarily, without fearing addiction. Sleepers still needed more of the drug, and they drained Orpheus' plant stockpiles faster than anticipated, but they too were free of addiction. Then, pigment appeared on the streets, and Orpheus realized its plants and this new drug shared certain properties — except, pigment was far more addictive.

Orpheus always told its agents to collect samples of pigment for study, but the truth of the matter was that it was trying to eliminate the drug's harmful properties. And it succeeded. With their frozen plant stock almost completely gone, Orpheus substituted its projection formula with a chemically inert pigment. Fortunately, they had done so following a DEA investigation to determine whether Orpheus and pigment were somehow linked.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

No fugitive chronicle would be complete without some truly terrifying enemies from which to run. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on your point of view), the one thing that ex-Orpheus agents have no shortage of is colorful and determined enemies. With Orpheus' fall, its enemies can't wait to eliminate all the loose ends or settle old grudges. The characters are one such dangling string. To facilitate a story line, a Storyteller should understand the nature of the tools at his disposal, and the enemies presented herein are tools. Most are well-known organizations at this point, but this overview should help you place them in your developing story of paranoia.

Before delving into the meat of the matter, as it were, it's important to understand three major distinctions. There are currently three antagonist threads moving through the characters' existences. The first are overt and well known because they're making a concerted effort to turn the crucible into Public Enemy #1. (And for all you old-school rappers out there, we ain't talking about Flavor Flav.) This threat comes from the various authorities chasing after the characters... the FBI and police. The second undercurrent of antagonists hails from whoever was responsible for obliterating Orpheus and launching strikes against Terrel & Squib. This threat has access to mercenaries through NextWorld and Spectres, but neither of these avenues lead back to him (or her, or it... him is just easier). The third threat level is likewise enigmatic, using the Death Merchants as its cover. They seem to be more reactive, in some ways, like playing cleanup after the Orpheus mess, and specifically targeting Orpheus personnel and holdings.



The following lists the enemies that are currently hunting the characters, their current agendas, typical tactics and the types of forces they will deploy against the characters.

DEATH MERCHANTS

Death Merchants is the general name for a loose affiliation of mercenary hunters and assassins who work for those who would rather see the characters dead than in the hands of the FBI. They encompass a gamut of skills and experiences, whether as mortal mercenaries or ghosts-for-hire. They operate outside such organizational frameworks as Orpheus and NextWorld, using skills they learned on their own or by the very nature of their being. Their principle goal is to make money or make their lives (or existence) more comfortable. Collectively, these individuals are the Death Merchants, though their designation is the only thing they share in common. Whether as individuals or operating in tight cells, they hail from all lifestyles, and they serve the highest bidder. After Orpheus' fall, the Death Merchant trade is more attractive and in greater demand than it was before. Suddenly the super store of the dead trade is either out of business or reeling, and Death Merchants can operate freely without worrying about competitors trying to horn in on their territory.

With the gap in services provided by Orpheus and T&S, many would-be clients now turn to NextWorld and the Death Merchants for assignments. Perhaps more importantly, however, a mysterious someone also uses Death Merchants to mop up after Orpheus in the hopes of finding and eliminating the characters (among other things). The reasons Death Merchants enjoy this sudden boom in business are very simple. They are cheaper than NextWorld, they are "disposable" in the sense that they never know for whom they work, and you can hire any number of Death Merchants without ever compromising their "command structure" or "other units" — since they operate independently, without the benefits of an umbrella group. The major downfall to Death Merchants is the fact they aren't an organization. They don't benefit from pooled resources like intelligence and usually work individually or in small cells. In fact, one could argue that NextWorld represents the most organized Death Merchants in operation, but given their size and resource, earn separate mention. Being a Death Merchant is a mercenary business, and no good mercenary wants to share his profits.

Storytellers can use Death Merchants as either main antagonists or minor goons, depending on the nature, themes and needs of a specific story. As a primary adversary, a Death Merchant may not have powers equal to a crucible, but at the very least, he is cunning and trained with a soldier/hunter's savvy. He knows how to



lay traps and how to use a character's loved ones to draw him out in the open. If the Death Merchant is in fact a spook, then so much the deadlier, though nobody says that that's the only supernatural option available. Storytellers familiar with other World of Darkness denizens can incorporate other preternatural Death Merchants in suitable instances. Now, given the nature of the attack on Orpheus Group, the characters may realize they are no longer safe hiding among the dead, but the threat of other spooks hunting after the crucible adds to any game's paranoia. As goons, Death Merchants work equally well for the same reason. Most aren't smart enough to organize themselves, or maybe they're just plumb greedy. Using DMs as hired goons gives you thugs to throw at characters, enlivening action with minor sideline fights. Be careful, however. The party responsible for hiring DMs to clean up has enough information to know whom to hire. That means these mercs are rarely "mooks," unless hiring them is an attempt to simply harass and wear the crucible down. Most often, they are deadly and capable.

Finally, Death Merchants play a minor role in most of the core material if only because they have little influence over the metaplot's events. Someone hired them as soldiers, or worse... guns, which means they have little idea of why or who hired them. Instead, they point in one direction and shoot until hitting their target. It's entirely possible for the characters to hire other DMs for protection, for decoys or to attack NextWorld. This offers Storytellers the opportunity for back-stabbing and double-crossing, especially if the DM teams know one another or the DMs are in fact playing one side off another. One important note, however, is that the Death Merchants hired by mysterious adversary #2 (the one who sent them to mop up after Orpheus' fall) will not switch allegiances easily. Whoever is bankrolling their employment is paying them six-figure contracts for each Orpheus survivor they kill or capture. This possibly makes Death Merchants the most flexible enemies the crucible faces.

Death Merchant forces have complete dossiers on Orpheus, projector technology and sleepers and skim-mers. They are fully prepared to face off against either living humans or ghosts.

- **Agenda:** The near entirety of the Death Merchants' agenda is implicit in their name. They work for anyone who deposits the correct amount of money in a secure Swiss or Caribbean bank account. At the moment, the street scuttlebutt is that someone is offering an obscene amount of money to eliminate all traces of Orpheus and is using DMs for total deniability. In addition, these same rumors indicate that because of the toughness of these particular targets, the Death Mer-

chants' employer has anonymously put them in touch with suppliers of unusual equipment designed to inflict both physical and spiritual death.

- **Tactics:** Death Merchants ordinarily receive their assignments in a variety of ways. Most commonly it's through blind email addresses attached to servers that switch every few days. Upon delivery of payment, a Death Merchant takes one to three months studying a target in detail, noting strengths, weaknesses, habits of movement along with areas of vulnerability (like friends and family) where they can apply pressure to move the target into position for the kill.

Assassination techniques are as varied as the Merchants themselves, with most using a different method each time to avoid MO patterns that Interpol, the FBI, CIA or the police can trace. Note that a Death Merchant's employer, in this case, the second mysterious antagonist, is usually quite aware of his or her abilities. Those incapable of causing spiritual death usually receive a "capture" contract, rather than a "kill" order.

- **Forces:** Hired assassins usually work alone or in small teams to avoid detection or betrayal. Different teams don't work together just as Microsoft and Apple don't work in tandem even though they fall under the same appellation of "computer company." DMs usually only accept contracts to eliminate one target at a time, though contracting to eliminate a team (like the crucible) often means the Death Merchant must put a squad together (which adds to the cost and time). A single Death Merchant may instead stalk the group alone, eliminating members one by one.

SPECTRES

Spectres remain a principle threat in the game if only because they are so foreign and incomprehensible in their actions. The first Orpheus agents who tried dealing with Spectres as though they possessed something resembling a human perspective are now object lessons in pain. Put simply, Spectres are utterly alien, ghostly killing machines, equally hostile to the living and the dead (though far more capable of harming spooks). Despite being obviously intelligent, all attempts to communicate with Spectres fail, and those Spectres who can communicate with humans (a seemingly recent bunch), only do so to lie, deceive or lure someone into a trap.

- **Agenda:** Several Spectres participated in the assault on Orpheus. The attacks were so efficiently coordinated that it would seem obvious to the characters that whoever was responsible did so with Spectral participation in mind. A Spectre working with humans or ghosts in any capacity goes against every piece of information ever collected on them,

which is why it's more important than ever for the characters to uncover more about them.

Witnesses, and maybe the characters, saw one or two new varieties of Spectre during the attack and elsewhere afterward. Some appear to have been created from the tortured ghosts of humans, others seemingly exist as little more than creatures of malice and destruction, while still more are of a midwife or harvester variety, generating the conditions to create new Spectres.

At the moment, Spectres are increasing in number — Friendly Angels are only one of several species whose main purpose seems to be creating more Spectres. The existence of E-Demons demonstrates their determination to learn more about humanity, or at least those aspects of our psyche that make it easier to destroy us.

- **Tactics:** Despite the recent attack, Spectres do not actually work with NextWorld agents. Even during Orpheus' destruction, they never really coordinated or shared information between them. Instead, the antagonist responsible for bringing the two forces together provided the bridge of cooperation and a limited truce where the Spectres agreed not to attack NextWorld operatives during an operation, possibly for the promise of a rich harvest of souls. The rest of the time, a Spectre attacks a NextWorld agent as quickly as ex-Orpheus personnel, unless the mysterious antagonist arranges for another truce.

Early Spectres, like the Jasons and Frighteners were blunt weapons, doing their work through psychotic levels of violence and resistance to damage. The second wave appears subtler, using their growing knowledge of what scares humans and spooks to trick their targets into destroying themselves. It's working too. Where before, one Jason killed a few dozen teenagers or nine or 10 operatives before someone finally destroyed him, Friendly Angel body counts have reached three figures, without counting the Lost Boy packs flocking around them.

In addition, even old varieties of Spectre are more sophisticated, with far more species coordinating attacks to cause maximum damage. Besides the Friendly Angel/Lost Boys association, some spooks have seen Reapers directing "assault teams" of Spectres and at least one variety, the Chupacabra, seemingly serves as a tool or servant for more intelligent Spectres.

- **Forces:** The variety of Spectres cannot be underestimated, with spooks spotting new types almost daily. The good news is that Spectral forces are relatively small in number. Most Spectres continue operating alone, while the large groups to date average five or six individuals of different types (not counting specific events where something draws the Spectres together).

FBI

When the Federal Bureau of Investigation came about in 1908 as the Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Justice used it to research cases being prosecuted in courts around the country. The Bureau changed its name to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935, amid the Hoover years, growing in importance within the US government and gaining its own place and purpose. Recently, the USA Patriot Act and the new Department of Homeland Security has given the FBI's Critical Incidents Response Group (CIRG) a freedom almost unheard of in the Bureau. The harsh glare of the media spotlight also squashes the dissenting voices as potentially unpatriotic, forcing many to merely watch and wait. They're hoping the situation fades away without bringing too much attention to their activities.

In the wake of Orpheus' fall, there's been a deluge of information from surviving records, and the FBI is stepping in to collect the data and assimilate as much of it as possible. Those forces directly involved in the situation, like NextWorld and their employer, are content to let the FBI do the leg work and pick up the pieces when the feds find their quarry.

Across the nation, the FBI scrambles to gain as much information, not only on the firm's destruction, but on the organization itself. The Bureau is under pressure to compile and collate the flood of information coming into its possession, but it perseveres. It knows that if it doesn't lock this situation down, it could face a widespread problem of projecting and spook-related crimes in the near future. It needs all the information Orpheus possesses, but even more importantly, it needs the patents and ability to replicate Orpheus' technology and successes.

With all this in mind, the FBI plays an important role in any style chronicle following in the wake of Orpheus' destruction. The FBI is one organization with the abilities and means to deal with the aftermath of Orpheus. It can freeze bank accounts, track the use of ATM and credit cards, and even authorize the use of deadly force in apprehending the characters. As mentioned previously, the FBI's reasons are quite simple. It wants all matters pertaining to projection technology under its jurisdiction, and that includes monitoring or controlling projectors and their training process. The FBI sees this as a matter of national security that it is best equipped to handle.

Storytellers can use the FBI in many ways, however. One might be setting the FBI and the NSA at odds over matters of jurisdiction. Another would be if some FBI agents have misgivings over turning the characters into scapegoats. Can the crucible somehow use these rifts and save itself in the end? Such questions present new

and interesting avenues for characters looking to escape the realities of their situation.

Regardless, the metaplot plays the FBI as a shadowy background element, always threatening but never there. If a character uses his ATM card to buy gas, the message the cashier receives is to detain or delay the character without injury to self. That's under the most hopeful circumstances. In greater likelihood, the FBI has already frozen or tagged the character's IDs and personal accounts to force him to surrender. The characters are fugitives, pure and simple, and they have the FBI to thank for that.

- **Agenda:** The FBI is the only major group hunting the characters that doesn't want to kill them (though agents will protect themselves). Unfortunately, that doesn't really help, because being the object of a CIRG manhunt carries its own set of problems. When the government classified the "Orpheus Incident" as terrorist-related, the Bureau seized the opportunity, using "national security" to ensure only the information it released would reach the public.

The Critical Incidents Response Group has monitored the "projector firms" for years, trying to devise a way of bringing projector technology under federal supervision. Opinions on exactly what spooks are remains divided, with some feds believing there must be a "scientific" explanation for the phenomena. Agents in the field have seen too many unnatural things not to believe in spooks, particularly Jesse Osorio, the CIRG task force's field commander. Publicly, however, it dismisses any talk of the purely supernatural, instead supporting various scientific theories behind projectors and ghosts.

- **Tactics:** The FBI issued "armed and dangerous" information bulletins to every police force in the country. Although they specifically state they want the characters alive, such bulletins mean that any law-enforcement officers who recognize the crucible will not hesitate to draw a weapon.

The most dangerous aspect of the FBI's manhunt is that it is conducting it publicly, with the full cooperation of a sensation-hungry media. In the days following the Orpheus Incident, the FBI offers a \$5,000 reward through a national tips registry created to catch terrorists. It also doesn't hesitate to associate any crimes committed by other Orpheus refugees with the ones still at large. For example, if a janitor punches a fed trying to arrest him, rest assured the New York Post headline the next day will read "Orpheus Fugitives Assault FBI Agents!" with big pictures of the characters. The TIPS reward increases \$5,000 for every month the crucible remains at large.

Although previously stated, it continues bearing mention. Characters will have their lives turned upside



down. The FBI quickly places wiretaps on the phones of friends and family, as well as surveillance vans outside their homes. All bank accounts, credit cards, driver's licenses and passports have a "hold for questioning" tag placed on them. In addition, when the characters go underground to survive, any activities they pursue may draw the attention of other branches of the Bureau. Characters attempting to work a deal with a local gang may earn the notice of an FBI anti-gang unit, who quickly informs the CIRG.

- **Forces:** The FBI responded to the Orpheus attack by assigning agents from the Critical Incidents Response Group (CIRG) to contend with the mess. The FBI established the CIRG in 1994 to manage crisis situations, respond to terrorist activities, child abductions and other high-risk violent crimes. CIRG field agents report to a single supervisor who reports directly to the Executive Assistant Director for Counterterrorism. This means that requests for assistance or equipment are approved with minimal bureaucratic second-guessing.

Field Commander Jesse Osorio has a staff of six Special Agents who coordinate information for him (see Chapter Four, p. 126). There are also 30 other agents working on the case, though most of the time, the characters feel the FBI's presence via heat from local cops working with a CIRG agent (usually Sullivan or Chu). McDonald and Faurey are the most media friendly, and they spend much time dealing with news organizations and appearing on shows like *Nightline*, *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Larry King Live*.

DEA

The DEA, as an agency, has only one purpose: stopping illegal drugs. It really has no interest in projector technology, Orpheus' crimes or the characters in general. What it does want is to stop the pigment trade. While black heroin isn't too widespread yet, the agency wants to cut it off now since it's fast growing in popularity and attributed with a number of unusual side effects.

- **Agenda:** The DEA is currently baffled when it comes to pigment. Despite months of work and millions of dollars in high-tech labs, it can't identify the particular ingredient in an otherwise "normal drug" that gives it such bizarre properties. Since no one can figure out how it becomes pigment, the DEA is currently attacking the problem backward — following the trail before the drug is transformed. For this, the heroin route seems the likeliest candidate.

Heroin in the United States comes primarily from four foreign sources, South America (Colombia), Southeast Asia (principally Burma), Mexico and Southwest Asia. At the moment, South American heroin dominates most of Eastern United States' wholesale and retail markets. In the West, "black tar" and brown powdered heroin from Mexico is the predominant form.

In the Eastern US, Colombian and Southwest Asian heroin is wholesaled by Mexicans to Puerto Rican, Nigerian and white gangs (mostly Hell's Angels and other "motorcycle clubs") who sell it at street level. In the West, the situation is more volatile, with Mexicans handling both production and distribution — while constantly competing against both Dominican and white gangs. Based on samples the DEA seized, some 75% of pigment seems to stem from Mexican brown and "black tar," so the DEA is currently concentrating its attention on finding the distribution points where Mexican wholesalers sell cheap product to the gangs for conversion into pigment. It should also be noted, however, that some pigment shipments seem to use other drug frameworks, like that of crystal meth or even pot, though these often land in the hands of the recreational drug crowd (the pill poppers, the smokers and the inhalers). The hard-core drug crowd, however, seems addicted to the black smack.

- **Tactics:** The DEA dubbed the effort to eliminate pigment from the streets Operation: Black Ice. The biggest success to date was September 26th of last year when DEA agents with the Pigment Drug Enforcement Task Force (PDET) in Southern California and St. Louis, along with local law enforcement, culminated a seven month investigation with the arrest of 11 members of the Hell's Angels. The investigation revealed a violent, geographically diverse organization with interests in Mexico, LA, Fort Worth, Las Vegas, Portland and St. Louis.

The United States' War on Terrorism currently pushes the public's perception of drugs as a truly pressing problem to the back burner; therefore the agency has (somewhat fallaciously) attempted to link the drug trade to terrorist money to avoid losing funding. Although it has no interest in projecting firms initially, the DEA would love to link its campaign against pigment to a "terrorist attack" like the one on Orpheus. Catching the crucible would be a great PR coup, especially if the crucible is somehow involved in the pigment trade. Conversely, the DEA might actually assist the characters with money, equipment or semi-official cover if they can help track down the source of pigment.

- **Forces:** Pigment Drug Enforcement Task Force oversees Operation: Black Ice and works closely with the Customs Service, the Merchant Marines, the Border Patrol and the FAA. They usually consist of two-agent teams.

NSA

Although the National Security Agency or NSA does not play an overt role currently, that's not to say it isn't monitoring the situation or even hunting after the characters themselves. They just aren't being as obvious, as heavy-handed or as zealous about it as the FBI. The NSA formed in 1952 to secure the government's lines of communication as well as spy on those belonging to foreign powers. The NSA firmly believes in better

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Pigment Poison!

It's been a couple of years now since the first murmurs of a new menace rose from the dark streets where pushers and addicts ply their foul trade. They called it "pigment," a supposed heroin derivative — like crack is to cocaine — but thanks to various chemical additives is far more dangerous. Last week, however, the Drug Enforcement Administration testified before the Congressional Panel on Drug Abuse that pigment represents a greater danger than originally anticipated.

The DEA did not reveal the actual chemical composition of pigment, claiming it might encourage others to manufacture the drug, but did claim it was partially based on heroin and peyote. The peyote, along with sundry industrial chemicals, is responsible for the highly hallucinogenic properties of pigment use, according to the DEA's Pigment Drug Enforcement Task Force (PDET). Special Agent in Charge, Tom Cleary, also testified that habitual users who inject pigment "quickly suffer permanent mental damage or psychoses. The damage is similar to, but more severe than that suffered by LSD users. Because the drug is fat soluble, the victims experience flashbacks or suffer hallucinations even after kicking the habit. In some severe cases, users could not sleep without slipping into nightmares."

Independent sources, however, claim the drug seems to piggy-back its effects on other substances as well. It's appeared as a crystal meth and heroin derivative, and is even drunk in Mexico as part of a fermented cactus alcohol called "pulque."

Special Agent Tom Cleary also testified that "the hallucinations suffered by pigment users are of a distinctly dark nature." Many users report seeing ghosts or living nightmares walking about.

While the research is still in its infancy, the DEA states that the neurological damage inflicted by pigment is permanent. Eventually, hallucinations drive some addicts to suicide, but not before many of them engage in self-mutilation, fall into manic depressive states or other psychoses.

Special Agent Tom Cleary was evasive as to who was responsible for creating pigment, stating only that, "We can't jeopardize our ongoing investigation by revealing certain facts too early. But we do understand people's concerns, and will inform the general public of our findings as soon as possible."

One disturbing trend made known to the panel was the spread of pigment across all demographics and social classes. Because of its various forms, pigment appeals to the casual dabblers, to the party club circuit and the hardcore drug abusers. It remains to be seen if the DEA can nip this growing drug menace in the bud, or whether it'll overtake crack as a threat to American society.

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operations through better technology. They run the servers for most government organizations and their databases are huge. The NSA has never maintained public relations with Orpheus Group, a situation that confuses many people who believe projectors pose the exact same threat of which the NSA is concerned (a threat covered under its mandate of intelligence gathering and securing national secrets). Even now, with Orpheus' decimation, the NSA has barely made mention of the fact, though many within the media and government agencies believe that the NSA is actually

using the FBI to filter their information before studying the material itself. In this manner, it doesn't directly involve itself in any investigation and, hence, potential public backlash.

The NSA's foremost capabilities rest in its communications technology assets, while its principle capital is information. Therefore, while its chief interest in this matter might be the acquisition and use of projector-related technology through Orpheus, the NSA has made no overt attempts to confiscate said hardware and information. The reasons can be one of

several. Perhaps the NSA already has what it needs, or is using other agencies to conduct the legwork. After all, considering the FBI uses NSA technology to secure its own communications, it's likely the Puzzle Palace is fully aware of every iota of data reaching the FBI's hands. The other possibility is that the NSA either doesn't believe projector technology is viable (which seems admittedly short-sighted), or it already has everything it needs to know.

The best use for the NSA in any story is that of background shadows since it certainly won't send its own agents to deal directly with the characters or situation. It could be responsible for controlling the flow of information into the FBI, thereby influencing the Bureau's decisions. It may have downloaded data from Orpheus' servers before it collapsed (this information might prove a tempting morsel for characters searching for some of Orpheus' secrets). For the time being, however, the NSA will not approach the characters to operate on its behalf, simply because the crucible is too visible and too "hot" as a commodity.

NEXT WORLD

The mercenary outfit known for death and destruction, perhaps more so now that it destroyed Orpheus. When Orpheus was still active, NextWorld had a reputation for accepting a far-less-ethical pedigree of clientele. With Orpheus' fall, however, this reputation has only worsened. Whereas Orpheus tried hiring individuals possessed of some emotional stability (and even ensured their agents' mental well being through counseling, retreats, etc.), NextWorld hires individuals with ruthless and even monstrous streaks. These employees hail from the ranks of soldiers and law enforcement officers already hardened to the scarring realities of war. Upon joining NextWorld, they receive similar treatment to military life, with a demand on physical excellence and a drive to squelch any potential remorse or humanity. While this routine may prove comforting, it is also crude and utterly destructive to one's psyche. NextWorld agents are almost incapable of acclimating to civilian life. They understand subtlety and duplicity, but only in context of tactics and achieving one's goals. Where Orpheus agents would coax a computer code from a dead programmer, NextWorld agents resort to threats and even torture, eventually destroying that same programmer once done with him. Now that NextWorld has destroyed Orpheus, it has a potentially bright future ahead. NextWorld is the only organization still working the market (T&S is currently rebuilding), and it need only wait for clients to approach it. More so, its mysterious benefactor still has an open contract out on escaped Orpheus personnel, meaning NextWorld is most definitively the crucible's principle adversary currently.

For Storytellers, NextWorld is Orpheus' (and most crucibles') morally polar opposite. It also represents a principle danger since it is organized and fully capable of matching the characters... power to power. NextWorld agents understand tactics and are ruthless enough to use innocent people (a character's friends and family) as hostages to lure the crucible out of hiding. Even if characters attempt to negotiate with NextWorld, the bounty on their heads takes precedence. NextWorld has too much money to lose by allowing the characters to escape, both in a sense of the pending contract bounty and in letting a potential business competitor/future rival escape.

- **Agenda:** NextWorld's recent attack on Orpheus, though known only to those operatives involved in the incident, represents a shift in leadership and even direction. Under Sir Alfred Williams, NextWorld was seemingly pursuing a course of marginal legitimacy, even though it did cater to clients with a penchant for illegal activities. When Sir Williams died in a suspicious auto accident, however, Russian ex-general Alexis Derkov immediately took over, with Chief Financial Officer Sydney Riley supporting him. This coup was relatively bloody, with several mercs who supported the old regime meeting a quick, sticky end. The reason for the friction was in fact the Orpheus contract. Sir Williams, with the support of some mercs, refused the contract to eliminate Orpheus. Derkov stepped in by buying the support of several operatives and disposing of his "rival." Sidney Riley complied with the coup if only to survive the pogrom.

With the recent change in NextWorld's personnel and operating procedures, the organization is accepting far riskier and ethically dubious assignments. Assassinations and corporate espionage were always among the seven-figure charged services, but now kidnapping and even torture have become purchasable commodities. The prime motivating force behind this decision is money. As long as someone can pay the fee, NextWorld stands ready to carry out your wishes. Unfortunately, someone is offering open-ended contracts on Orpheus personnel, with the crucible fetching about a million per head. As long as NextWorld exists, it will plague the characters' existences.

- **Tactics:** NextWorld uses ghosts and projectors to monitor known FBI CIRG teams handling the Orpheus investigation. Eavesdropping is the extent of its passive surveillance, however. NextWorld prefers more proactive measures to finding the characters. In this regard, it's likelier to use Death Merchant tactics (threatening family and loved ones, or arranging for ambushes). NextWorld's primary advantage in this endeavor, however, is that its operatives travel in the same circles as the characters. Dead society is relatively small compared to

the living population, so it's far simpler to know where the characters have been and with whom they've been speaking. If the characters clear out a Spectre nest, for example, word travels of their action. If they save a ghost and someone finds out about it, NextWorld operatives are likely to capture and torture said ghost for more information. Dead society is small enough that if the characters interact with someone... they'll likely do so again in the near future. NextWorld knows this; in fact they bank on it to reach the characters before the feds or competing Death Merchants. And if someone threatens their bounty, NextWorld will not hesitate to eliminate them as well.

- **Forces:** The bulk of NextWorld's operatives participated in the raid (see Chapter One for more information), though there are more running around. (Essentially, it's the Storyteller's prerogative to determine NextWorld's size to better suit her chronicle and game agenda.) That said, there is a chance that characters might encounter friendly NextWorld operatives like Mathieu Kerekou (see Chapter Four, p. 130) who don't support NextWorld's newfound bloodlust or agree with the attack on Orpheus. These individuals may prove invaluable allies and moles, if the characters can ever trust them.

MEDIA

It's a sad fact when the news has become North America's principle source of entertainment. When Orpheus fell, it was instant headline news that fueled water cooler gossips around the country. "Who attacked the company?" was the question on everyone's lips. Was it terrorism, religious fanatics or maybe disgruntled employees? No one knows, but that didn't stop the wild speculation.

Unfortunately, the media is the kind of enemy everyone abhors, the one against which you can't strike back. Television, radio and newspapers all scramble to dredge up as much information as they can about Orpheus, from any source they can find. By now, the media has already tried interviewing at least two members of the crucibles' families, pumping them for all the information they know. Major and minor media corporations are still digging up data for in-depth reports on Orpheus, jockeying against one another so that they can somehow emerge on top. The worst by far, however, are the scab magazines, the tabloids, which search for any tidbit, whether it holds any truth or not, so they can twist the truth into any story that sells papers. In these circumstances, the more unscrupulous media will do almost anything for a story, and death and destruction are just spicy nouns to add to a hopefully successful recipe.

The Storyteller can also use the media in a multitude of ways since they are inevitably neutral in this mess (or at least not out to deliberately destroy anyone). This is also the media's downfall. Knowing how much public perception matters, Death Merchants and

NextWorld are capable of kidnapping a media figure and framing the crucible of the crime. This is a great way of ruining the characters' hopes of being treated fairly, but it may also allow the characters to rescue said media figure and improve their chances that the public will see them in a kinder, more heroic light.

For the Storyteller, the media can either serve as a source of vindication or frustration, depending on the Storyteller and the characters' actions. For the time being, they are neutral, though admittedly, a tool of the government. The FBI, mostly in person of Jennifer McDonald, plays the media for all it's worth and to the Bureau's advantage. In addition to helping track down Orpheus fugitives, each arrest and each show trial of an Orpheus "conspirator" helps burnish the public image of the Bureau. For the media, the attack on Orpheus has all the making of a juicy O. J. Simpson-like story that can garner ratings for months. There's violence, government and corporate corruption, Enron-like financial shenanigans, dangerous technology, conspiracy leanings and possible terrorist connections.

At least one trial of a low-level Orpheus crucible that escaped the attack is already underway on CourtTV, though ratings haven't been as spectacular as was expected. Every few days, the judge clears the court and shuts down the cameras for reasons of "national security." Characters can expect to see different aspects of the story every time they turn on the TV and their own faces (via Orpheus personnel files) appearing frequently.

- **Agenda:** The media presents a problem for characters that they can't solve with brute force. Not only are journalists innocent of any wrongdoing, any attempt to bully or intimidate them merely worsens the problem. The media, however, has an agenda that's fairly easy to predict and one that smart characters can turn to their advantage. Basically, the media looks for a "narrative," an easily understandable story it can deliver to its audience. Anything fitting the Orpheus narrative, as presented by the FBI (Orpheus agents are terrorists and criminals), earns major play; anything contradictory is buried on page 57 behind the obituaries.

The media's weakness, however, is that it deals with a fickle public. Without constant, sensational new developments, the jaded public moves on, as will the reporters. Characters eluding media pursuit long enough eventually deprive the FBI of the great weapon in their hunt. Characters with compelling evidence about NextWorld's complicity in Orpheus' destruction — and who can reach the right outlets — can potentially shift the media's narrative from the characters to the investigation of dead firms in general and their connection to Project Flatline. (See the Chapter Four story, "History Repeats Itself," for more details on Orpheus and Project Flatline; p. 152.) This will generate much heat for

NextWorld and may take some off the crucible. A smart crucible that manages to befriend a reporter looking for a Pulitzer may even gain an ally by supplying juicy tidbits of information.

- **Tactics:** Characters can expect the media to probe every aspect of their lives, using hidden cameras and tape recorders to talk to family and friends. Reporters will dig up police reports, high school yearbooks and old employment records, displaying every ugly incident of a character's past to the insatiable public.

Worse, the characters' enemies have access to all this information as well. NextWorld, Death Merchants, the FBI and the characters' other enemies also watch CNN and MSNBC, and will jump on any lead the media uncovers. With reporters combing the streets and not bound by the need for warrants, the crucible should realize that eventually, a camera crew will track them down. If the media discovers a crucible's hideout, characters should consider it lost because the police and FBI agents will swarm it in minutes, followed soon after by Death Merchants and NextWorld forces. The same applies to any contacts and information sources the media develops. Any press coverage at all renders Allies, Contacts, et cetera compromised and useless. This makes the media a great tool for Storytellers willing to throw a monkey wrench into the group's plans.

- **Forces:** Television is the crucible's biggest threat. Besides *America's Most Wanted* and similar programs, Jennifer McDonald and Alan Faurey continue making the rounds of TV talk shows, plastering the characters' faces and information about the reward in every living room in America. The media will likely uncover any associates the FBI or others somehow missed, and put them on camera, placing them in serious danger and forcing the crucible into making the choice of emerging from hiding or leaving their ally to her fate.

Newspapers are less of an immediate danger (they don't stick cameras in the characters' faces), but are a bigger long-term threat. Newspapers and news magazines generally have more credibility than television — the narrative they eventually follow will be the one branded as true in the public's mind. The good news is, they are slower to decide on a narrative than TV.

Internet journalists, especially ones who work for small sites, fringe media or solo operations called "weblogs" or "blogs" are actually the characters' best hope for altering the mainstream narrative. When weblogs carried coverage of Republican Majority Leader Trent Lott's racist remarks in 2002, it was picked up by newspapers and then television, eventually causing the senator to resign his position as Senate Republican leader. If the characters can earn a critical mass of solid information on the Internet, the mainstream media

might take notice. Best of all, they can maintain their relationship with such journalists anonymously, via email in Internet cafes.

BLASPHEMERS

What are the Blasphemers, you ask? The Blasphemers are new to the reader, but relatively old to Orpheus. In fact, the Blasphemers are a gang of street spooks with projectors and ghosts, and they're a small cog in the pigment trade. Now before you go trying to sic the characters on them, the Blasphemers might prove necessary allies to the characters down the road. See, not every member of Project Flatline decided to follow Uriah Bishop. Four of them went their own way and teamed up to pursue their separate (though complementary) agendas. In this book, we only mention two Flatliners, thus leaving the possibility of introducing two more later in the series. For the time being, however, the two remaining Blasphemers are probably out taking care of other business in other cities.

In pursuit of their agendas, the four Flatliners discovered several blips, the ghosts of gangbangers. Raising the Vitality of these ghosts, they acquired several loyal servants and connections to the mortal gangs, the nucleus of what they hope will become an army strong enough to achieve their individual, long-term objectives.

The characters may try learning about Project Flatline from the Blasphemers, or make enemies of them if they interfere with the pigment trade. The characters may also gain some unexpected help from Rose's "Granny Victoria" personality when dealing with Spectres (see the Blasphemers write-up in Chapter Four).

- **Agenda:** Stephen Moluxe and Jeffrey Rose (see p. 143) are the two Blasphemers who work together most closely. Both hire out the services of their living and dead companions to anybody willing to pay their fee. The jobs they accept, however, are limited by the abilities of their servants. Much of what they do involves brutal force rather than subtlety — robberies, guarding drug shipments, murder for hire — usually for low-class and organized criminal clients. This keeps them from competing directly with outfits like NextWorld and the Death Merchants, whose clients average a higher tax bracket with at least a veneer of legitimacy.

Moluxe, an avowed racist seeking political anarchy and the creation of "Aztlán en America Norte," only uses Latino gangbangers on jobs. Rose is a nihilist who exists for no other purpose than to kill. He's more selective in his recruitment, but he managed to accumulate several spirits and living followers who share his unique outlook. Both Blasphemers' short-term goal is accumulating money, solidifying control over the gang and expanding the number of living and dead who are loyal to them.

• **Tactics:** The majority of the Blasphemers' time is currently tied up in the pigment trade. They established a long-term deal with the Latin Kings, a Dominican street gang looking to push the (white) Hell's Angels out of the local heroin market. The Blasphemers already made horrifying "examples" out of several dealers encroaching on Kings' turf, and Jeffrey Rose is planning something big. A pigment user saw several of his spirits around some of the hangouts the Hell's Angels are known to frequent.

Moluxe fancies himself a military genius and a professional, and is trying to impart that attitude to his followers. Despite the shocking brutality in which they regularly engage, he insists on no intra-gang violence. He frowns upon bar brawls, random assaults on the public or anything that might attract police notice, punishing the perpetrators severely. This results in conflicts with Rose and his followers, who enjoy violence for its own sake.

• **Forces:** Stephen Moluxe, Jeffrey Rose, 12 gang spirits (various Shades and Laments) and two mortal "fixers" who act as contracting agents for the Blasphemers' services. They have extensive connections with several mortal gangs, and most of their spirit servants were gang members at one time.

RADIO FREE DEATH

Sometimes help appears when you least expect it. Unfortunately, while the crucible does have an ally in the strange nightly broadcasts called "Radio Free Death," the identity and agenda of the disembodied voice is just as mysterious as Orpheus' enemies. This should make the characters leary of trusting the disembodied voice's cryptic warnings, but Radio Free Death hasn't lied yet.

• **Agenda:** Radio Free Death seems more aware of what's happening than anybody should have a right to expect. Some broadcasts contain general information for all Orpheus refugees, trying to help them solve the mysteries surrounding the company's destruction. Other broadcasts target specific groups, with warnings like "Avoid the Lakeshore District. <static> are hunting there," making interpretation of the broadcasts difficult — since a crucible must sometimes determine if the voice is even speaking to them.

Since Orpheus' destruction, Radio Free Death spends much time aiming the survivors toward information concerning Project Flatline and the pigment trade. While the only connection between the matters seems to be the Blasphemers, some suspect a deeper connection.



• **Tactics:** The following are some of the more general broadcasts made by Radio Free Death that can help direct the crucible toward solutions:

ON THE BLASPHEMERS

Find the others <static> hate the <static> as much as they hate him! They were the first <static> should have been the last. There should never have been an Orpheus. <static> called 'em the crazy and the cracker... <laughter>

ON PIGMENT

<static> done some bad shit in my time, but this <static>. How can they? Do they even feel pain? <static> Just stop it man, stop the pigm<static>

ON FINDING GHOSTS OLDER THAN THREE YEARS

<static> Copying humans? They hate humans! <static> just to kill us. <static> Find the hacker, Sashsa<static>, help him back <static>. He's five years old. He might know.

OTHER BROADCASTS

Other recent broadcasts include the following. Storytellers may wish to include them to keep the broadcast mysterious since they may refer to other events in the limited series... or they might just be red herrings.

...used to love that movie with Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford <static>— the President's Men? "Follow the money"<static> always good advice.

...started to wonder what came before. <static> poked around <static>. Why would ghosts be afraid of a storm?

...Pappy always said love your country, hate your government <static> didn't know how right he was. <static> bastards don't know what they've <static>

SETTING THE RABBIT RUNNING

So now you have an inkling of the opposition facing the characters. The question now remains, how do you set them in motion? The problem is that you can't force the characters to run from a situation. You may have it all planned out, but players, via their characters, will always surprise you and arrive at a unique solution. That's a given. So how do you convince them that there's trouble brewing and that it's in their best interest to skedaddle?

• **Harried Like Rabbits:** When the attack against Orpheus finally ends, the characters are likely to stick around and either communicate with the authorities or try rescuing coworkers. They have no reason to fear the situation yet. The police are their friends... the police are here to help them. Well, not if the cops "attack" the characters. The last thing NextWorld needs is characters falling into police custody and potentially helping them with the investigation. NextWorld knows this and

planned for such contingencies. So if the crucible participates in the Chapter One event, any of NextWorld's surviving Skinriders can jump into a cop's body and attack the characters, screaming, "They've got a gun!" The Orpheus aftermath is already one of pandemonium, so it shouldn't be too difficult to add to the chaos. Otherwise, NextWorld mercs (in spook form), can attack the cops and rescue workers while making the characters look responsible. (People don't know enough about Horrors to understand who is actually wielding the powers and what their effects look like.) Essentially, frame the characters on-site so the cops consider them dangerous. Most characters will resist arrest or flee if they can. If they allow the cops to arrest them, then NextWorld can pursue more fun-filled activities in the squad car and police station, like possessing more cops or attacking the officers. Remember, though, all it takes to turn the characters into fugitives is one skinridden cop or detective to scream foul play.

• **Bearing False Witness:** Another NextWorld tactic (if the characters are present at the raid) is to possess an Orpheus survivor and approach the authorities as a witness to the event. Naturally, the "event" in question casts the characters as trigger-men. After the witness gives her account to police (which is far from the crucible's eyes), "unseen forces" kill her in front of witnesses. The unseen forces are NextWorld mercs. This effectively dooms the characters into becoming suspects.

Another avenue to this option is the presence of E-Demons during the attack. Several E-Demons were solely responsible for possessing tapes showing the attack footage and altering the events to NextWorld's favor. If the characters successfully fight the Spectres, the E-Demons will automatically show the crucible killing innocent office staff. The only way to drive an E-Demon from a tape, however, is to destroy the tape, which actually incriminates the characters further.

• **Portents:** Characters using Forebode to divine the future might realize it's simply better to run. If they stay, the FBI will offer them up as sacrificial lambs on the altar of public consumption. If they run, the media and authorities still vilify them, but at least the characters are out helping folks. Also, the Storyteller should emphasize that coming events demand the characters remain relatively independent. If they allow the authorities to arrest them, many innocent people will die somewhere down the road without the crucible to play savior.

• **After the Fact:** The easiest solution, of course, is if the characters were never at Orpheus when everything happened. That way, they are elsewhere on assignment, and after a particularly grueling night of ghost-work, they return to their hotel room for the

breaking news: Orpheus is gone and the FBI has issued a lightning-fast warrant for all surviving personnel. If folks wonder why the FBI moves so quickly, it's because it was already investigating Orpheus with Craig Forest's help. It has enough information to prosecute the company for illegal activities (including stolen files concerning some black ops... maybe one or two involving the crucible). It merely uses the event to launch its public investigation a little earlier than expected. What the characters do after this is up to them, but the fact is, the FBI has effectively issued a manhunt for Orpheus survivors. Characters calling loved ones may even be told to stay away... news crews and police are already swarming Orpheus' relatives and loved ones, and acting like the bloody Inquisition.

Whether the characters choose to turn themselves in afterward is up to them, but that makes them easier targets for NextWorld and Death Merchants.

VANISHING ASSETS

The FBI's chief weapons in the search against the characters include using the media to their advantage and depriving the characters of their assets, financial or otherwise. The authorities seize, freeze or monitor the characters' advantages, thus preventing them from using their own Backgrounds. Understandably, this could prove frustrating to players who bought the various traits for their character in good faith. Players do not take well to being deprived, and here *Crusade of Ashes* robbed their characters of their traits. While it is difficult to prevent this from happening, Storytellers can reimburse players' characters in other ways. The trick is keeping matters fair for the players while manufacturing that feeling of loss for the characters. Here are some suggestions:

SHUFFLING BACKGROUND DOTS

We've mentioned previously that characters may want to shuffle dots from one affected Background to another Background that's relatively untouched by events or improves because of the current situation. Instead of simply shuffling the dots about like some poor magic trick, the Storyteller can run a session where a Background improves through roleplaying first.

TRANSFERRING POINTS

Another method entails exchanging Background dots for experience points that the player can then spend for her character. Backgrounds are worth:

Background	Experience
•	Three experience points
••	Six experience points
•••	Nine experience points
••••	12 experience points
•••••	15 experience points

Another option for players is to convert the Background dots to freebie points and purchase Merits for their characters. Otherwise, the Storyteller can secretly purchase Crucible Merits for the entire group.

Background	Freebie Point
•	One freebie point
••	Two freebie points
•••	Three freebie points
••••	Four freebie points
•••••	Five freebie points

PATIENCE

Another possibility is the loss of dots with a promise of rewards later in the game. This should soften the feeling of loss for the players. Whatever route the Storyteller chooses, however, from complete to partial loss, she must remember that if it's not fun for the players, what's the point of playing?

STORYTELLING THE RAZOR'S EDGE

Well, with various groups harrying the characters, the question becomes, what ideas can Storytellers use to generate story arcs. Here are potential problems facing the characters based on the opposition facing them.

PLANS OF MYSTERIOUS ANTAGONIST #1

Few individuals are as heartless as the antagonist who hired NextWorld to eliminate Orpheus. He does anything to see his plan to fruition, by whatever means necessary. He orchestrated Orpheus' destruction for his own ends, and sees anyone even remotely attached to the organization as a threat to his goals. Beyond this, Orpheus' destruction belies the true depravity of his being... the deaths of its employees just the tip of the proverbial iceberg, a modicum of the terrors to come. At his worst, he does anything and everything to destroy what remains of Orpheus. No one is safe from the antagonist's onslaught of pain, death and destruction. Friends, family, associates... anyone remotely connected to Orpheus or its employees is fair game, and he deals with them in the harshest manner possible. This antagonist has NextWorld agents and Specters at his beck and call. With this force, he commands a dangerous horde in the flesh or in gauze, and the characters must contend with them to survive. In Orpheus, however, it's important to remember that death does not herald the game's end, and in this "game," the antagonist is only the beginning of terrible times ahead.

The antagonist hired NextWorld's agents for his own ends, but they do not constitute the bulk of his army. The Spectres are part and parcel of that force, but even they are part of a whole. The antagonist, in fact, has

more aces up his sleeve, aces to appear over the course of upcoming books. In addition to his army, however, lies the antagonist's willingness to use them. He has no qualms about taking the fight right to the edge and driving it over the cliff. In fact, because he remains independent of any government agency (yes, this is a clue), he cares little about hurting innocents or following codes of conduct. This freedom allows him complete and utter lateral movement, something few of the other organizations possess. He is willing and capable of doing whatever he wants, and does so if necessary. That is the greatest danger facing the characters... a villain unafraid of breaking laws and conventions, a villain capable of any action.

A Storyteller can involve a crucible in an antagonist-driven plot at any time, interweaving his machinations throughout any other story the Storyteller runs. In fact, **Crusade of Ashes** is geared toward the antagonist's machinations, from the events he set in motion that brought the FBI into play, to NextWorld's open contract against the survivors and the Spectres' unusual behavior. The antagonist's reach seems pervasive, waiting for the crucible's vulnerable moments. The mysterious antagonist can present the characters with a solid wall of enemies like the ones they faced at Orpheus' demise. For Storytellers who enjoy running games of intrigue, the mysterious antagonist can play chess equally well, manipulating pieces to move characters in a specific direction (possess family members to betray the characters, plant false information to lure them closer to the FBI's clutches, kill allies, etc.). The antagonist has few ethics, and will use his contacts to harm the crucible however he can. If this means kidnapping a crucible member's loved one and doping her on pigment before killing her, he'll do so. Unfortunately, the characters constantly face the antagonist's handiwork and minions, but not him (not yet). The players, when faced with a seemingly omnipresent threat, may blanch at the idea of confronting such an overwhelming presence. The Storyteller, however, shouldn't hesitate to let the characters amputate one of the adversary's resources or destroy someone who pretends to be the adversary (a brainwashed imposter). Better yet, the Storyteller can empower the characters with a sense of accomplishment by allowing them to conquer the small obstacles.

PLANS OF MYSTERIOUS ANTAGONIST #2

The second antagonist is actually less of a visible or pervasive threat, and relies on Death Merchants to accomplish its goals. While it doesn't have the number of operatives available to NextWorld or the Spectres, it does hire an indeterminate number of Death Merchants in a hydra-based operation. The characters can strike

telling blows against NextWorld because it is relatively centralized through its offices. Death Merchants are freelancers with virtually no connection between one another. The characters can sever one head, but it won't stop the other mercs from striking.

Fortunately, the second antagonist seems less eager to inflict collateral damage and uses the Death Merchants to hunt after the characters. While these independent mercenaries may endanger the crucible's friends and loved ones, they pose less of a risk to innocent bystanders. NextWorld and Spectres may occasionally rely on swarm tactics to overwhelm the characters, but Death Merchants are more capable of cat-and-mouse games given few can survive head-on confrontations with the crucible. This fits the style of mysterious antagonist #2, who actually offers greater rewards for a clean kill than for a sloppy hit. A clean kill is any wetwork that leaves behind few clues and is professional in nature. A sloppy kill is the saturation effect where the Death Merchant hoses the area with many bullets and hopes for the lucky hit, regardless of the collateral damage.

The reason mysterious antagonist #2 is more cautious than mysterious antagonist #1 is because it wants to avoid drawing an official investigation from the authorities, indicating it somehow has more to lose from being caught. In fact, if a Death Merchant becomes too sloppy in his assignment, torturing and murdering innocent civilians and leaving behind a trail of corpses, mysterious antagonist #2 hires another team to eliminate the offending mercenaries. It's that simple.

THE FBI

The FBI has kept tabs on Orpheus from the beginning and, in many ways, knew how to proceed against it. That's not to say that the FBI knew about the attack, because it didn't. Instead, several members of the FBI, including Osorio, knew exactly how to proceed with their investigations and what avenues to target. The fact that Orpheus fell only accelerated the timetable and spared the FBI fights with Orpheus' lawyers and spin doctors. In fact, for the FBI, this is potentially the best situation for which it could have hoped.

The FBI's principle ally in this endeavor isn't the police, but the media. The FBI is already trying and convicting the characters in the court of public opinion, and making it impossible for the characters to receive impartial treatment if the authorities ever apprehend them. The longer the characters remain free, however, the more public opinion waffles. And the more information the crucible gains concerning Orpheus and projector technology, the stronger its negotiating stance. So far, we've presented the FBI as the crucible's public enemy #1, but that belies and belittles the players' capacity to

monkey wrench events to their favor. What if the characters...

- **Surrender:** The characters appear at a local television talk show, news program or televised special event and agree to surrender on air or in public. Without issuing threats, the characters merely state that the FBI has misaligned the public's perception of the crucible, and that they agree to surrender and prove their innocence in open court. The characters have nothing to hide. This is possible, but dangerous. Certainly, public opinion about the crucible shifts, and any suspicion of misconduct falls on the FBI's head. In this case, the FBI may backtrack on previous statements not to lose public support for its campaign to regulate projector technology. The major problem now, however, stems from Spectres, Death Merchants and NextWorld agents targeting the prison to eliminate the characters. Any pandemonium, supernatural shenanigans and unusual events immediately casts suspicion on the crucible. Of course, the characters have one advantage, which also presents a unique opportunity for Storytellers, in that they can project or have ghost members/allies. While the courtroom or jail appears all quiet to the naked eye, spooks might be battling NextWorld projectors and Spectres to prevent them from incriminating the characters further. Characters can also venture outside prison walls as spooks (with an invisible ally or three guarding their bodies) to manifest and continue their investigation. Amusingly, the FBI knows the characters are capable of this exact thing, but there's little that can be done about it. If agents try sedating the characters to keep them unconscious or use constant stimuli to rob them of focus, attorneys immediately leap on this treatment as cruel and unusual punishment, and move to have all charges against the characters dropped.

- **Offer Their Services:** Agent Osorio can be single-minded in his pursuit, but there are others in the FBI who recognize an almost invaluable opportunity when they spot it. The characters can eliminate the FBI as a threat if they manage to reach the right people and offer their services as advisors or investigators. The FBI is more than happy to use a skilled crucible in a variety of roles, whether as field agents, technical advisors on recreating Orpheus technology or as instructors to train potential skimmers within the Bureau. The FBI's response in the matter, however, all depends on several circumstances. If the characters are actually guilty of flagrant wrongdoings and the authorities have all the necessary evidence for a conviction, then the FBI will press charges against the crucible (unless its worth outweighs the crime... murder and rape notwithstanding). Another reason it may not want the crucible's services is if the characters dragged out the manhunt against them, embarrassing the FBI enough that it needs

to save face before the media and public by capturing the characters and trying them in court. The final reason the FBI may not accept the character's help is if only a couple of characters surrender. The FBI will be too worried that these new agents are feeding information back to their "former colleagues."

That said, even if the characters offer their services to the FBI, and secretly work for the feds, both mysterious antagonists #1 and #2 have enough connections with the Bureau that they'll know about the characters' involvement. Mysterious antagonist #1 cares little for the FBI, and uses NextWorld or the Spectres to eliminate the characters. Mysterious antagonist #2 grows more cautious and uses Death Merchants with a very soft touch to minimize the ripples.

MEDIA HOUND

When the media sets its mind to a task, it pursues it mercilessly. Whether it's the newest Hollywood face or public enemy #1, the media considers it a solemn duty to see that face published in every newspaper, magazine, television show or internet article. In Orpheus' case, the crucible is in danger of being vilified or beatified before the spoon-fed jury of public opinion — which, incidentally can either serve as the characters' saving grace or downfall. With this in mind, the media can become the foundation of a story, elevating the characters to stardom with nose-bleed rapidity, or denouncing them as the worst criminals the planet has ever witnessed... at least in the eyes of the millions watching the news.

The media trumpeted Orpheus' fall across the airwaves and in print, promising an endless parade of updates in days, weeks and months to come. If the characters wish to cash in on this phenomenon, they must move quickly and decide on their course of action, the media personalities who serve them best and, finally, how they wish to present themselves. Approaching the matter in this manner can turn a chronicle into a roller coaster ride, with the characters trying to spin tragedy into triumph and the Storyteller trying to maintain some level of realism.

Unfortunately, the public eye is ever-watchful, ever-vigilant and ever-critical, but perceptions are hemmed in by the information the media eventually offers. The news hound, in this instance, can be a great hindrance as well. With Orpheus' fall, the media carefully switched the world's attention from the organization to the people involved, turning the crucible into the center of the attention. The question therefore becomes, is the media hound interested in the truth or in manipulating the facts enough to create a more interesting story? The media uses its Constitution-guaranteed liberty to great effect, be it as a scalpel or bludgeoning instrument. And the media has many ways of procuring information about



the crucible, even without the crucible's cooperation or complicity. Reporters aren't afraid of approaching a crucible's family members and pestering them about anything and everything that may or may not be pertinent to the situation at hand. They will search reams of public records on every member, be it for parking tickets, high school grades or music interests. All of it can be made to seem newsworthy.

As such, the crucible must decide whether to take the bull by the horns, or just go along for the ride, because once the media has its hooks in something, they aren't afraid of carrying it to the point of obscenity. Few things are more frightening than having an army of reporters camped out on one's lawn, peeking through every window, rooting through garbage, following people's every step... hoping to capture a glimpse of just one person... you.

Character involvement with news hounds can be positive or negative. Depending on the Storyteller's approach and how the characters handle the matter, the crucible can either enjoy a new world filled with money and prestige or be subjected to an inquisition at the hands of the American public. On the positive, the characters can capitalize on Orpheus' destruction, possibly creating their own company. This may open an entirely new world of roleplaying opportunities in the form of a high-prestige

chronicle (where the characters head a multinational billion-dollar business). Bear in mind, however, that the characters must still contend against those enemies out to destroy them as well as government authorities out to exact their pound of flesh. Having the media on your side, however, may go a long way in defraying the FBI's witch-hunt (which relies on the media spoon-feeding information to the public).

On the downside, the media can turn the characters into monsters, evil ghouls hell-bent on destroying American interests and way of life. In all likelihood (given the FBI has great spin doctors and fugitives make for good news), the characters will contend with the media in its most pure and harsh form, that of the merciless reporter searching for the "facts" and going to any extreme to get them. The crucible now has stalkers trying to lay their public lives bare. This can be quite tense, while at the same time perfect for roleplaying opportunities. How do characters accept one another when the media exposes every nasty and intimate detail of their existence to use against them? How do characters gain sympathy from allies or the public with some sordid affair or another coloring people's perceptions of them? Are some of the facts true? False? Blown out of proportion? In the end, it's up to the Storyteller to decide how the media uses the information it has and how it portrays the crucible.

As the characters are essentially the first publicly recognized “monsters,” they certainly won’t have an easy existence of it. The characters may feel lost, uncertain how to proceed. Some may ignore public perception and continue helping folks. Others may become criminals, acting the parts given them by the media and public opinion. The worst part, however, is that there is no right answer... only the frustrating reality that one is at the whim of capricious forces. Once the media descends upon a topic, the only way to be rid of it is to either provide all the information the reports will ever need or weather the storm and hope it passes when another event grabs everyone’s attention. Regardless, for the time being, the characters are celebrities of a sort. Whether this is good or bad depends on the Storyteller and the players.

HIGHEST BIDDER

Orpheus stored most of its information in the mainframe... the same mainframe wiped of memory and damaged during the attack. Unfortunately, people are prone to making copies of data, duplicating information on different media and printing material as required. The police salvaged as much as they could, but somewhere between the authorities arriving and the FBI assuming jurisdiction, reams of hard copies vanished into private collections. The information once contained in Orpheus’ hard files is now for sale. Personal data about the crucible members floods the black market and matters look truly rough for the characters when their enemies use this data to their advantage. The question troubling many, however, is where is this information coming from? Who is selling these secrets and why? The characters are already used and abused, with their family and friends threatened by profiteers.

Many tidbits in Orpheus’ mainframe are on sale, from cases never pursued to new antagonists to technical schematics to contracts with special clients. The characters may not consider this a priority concern, but they need to uncover who has the information and stop them before a friend or family member suffers for it. The answer, however, can be anyone the Storyteller decides. With the free-floating information, the Storyteller can introduce new facts down the road through completely viable sources. The “who” can be anyone, from an Orpheus defector to a cop nearing retirement to a rescue worker who needs the money to criminals who greased the right palms. Maybe the seller is a company hoping to make the crucible a “permanent” branch of his enterprise, keeping them under the table while raking in the money. All that the crucible needs to know for now is that someone escaped with the information and is being entirely mercenary about it.

Blocking or securing this flow of information is important, but the only solution may be stopping the source itself. In all likelihood, however, the mystery

seller will likely use intermediaries to negotiate for the information, and these mouthpieces are unwilling to betray their breadwinner. A potential option around this is if the crucible submerges itself into a world of crime and depravity to uncover the information broker.

Perhaps more important than the seller, here, is the buyer. With the characters fighting off so many enemies, can they afford someone gaining more of an advantage over them? Definitely not, but the seller is in equal jeopardy from Death Merchants eliminating certain information avenues and from NextWorld, which isn’t interested in negotiating for intel. Will the characters save their betrayers from the mercenaries, or are they so far beyond caring for anyone’s safety but their own?

Regardless, the Storyteller should keep the characters on edge by the information currently making the rounds. Orpheus wasn’t stupid, it maintained hefty files on each and every agent in its employ. This was as much for protection as for blackmail in case the characters threatened to reveal Orpheus’ more illicit operations. One way to set the group on edge is if the data seller is trying to engineer the crucible’s collapse from within, using individual secrets to its fullest advantage. After all, it’s easier to pick the group apart if the members are bickering. This tactic is entirely within the realms of enemies like NextWorld or the FBI, if they purchased the information. The Storyteller can reveal the fact that someone has personal information about one crucible member or another, something that jeopardizes his standing within the group. In fact, one interesting angle would be if the Storyteller asks the players who’d be willing to roleplay a character through such circumstances. That crucible member would thus be the center of an intra-crucible conflict for betraying the group’s ethics or secrets.

The solutions all depend on the chronicle’s directions and the crucible’s immediate concerns. It might be that the crucible doesn’t care if someone is spreading its personal information around. If that’s the case, the Storyteller may either consider this a dead-end or make the information germane to the crucible’s survival. Examples of the latter include data that jeopardizes someone’s loved ones or a fact that Orpheus uncovered about the character that the character himself knew nothing about.

SAVING YOUR FRIENDS

In the aftermath of the Orpheus assault, the characters discover that an ally or former co-worker was captured by the opposition. The information can come from witnesses (potentially including a crucible member who saw everything), or Radio Free Death or even from a captured sleeper who uses Burst Transmission (see Chapter Four, p. 116 for more information) to beseech the characters’ help. The characters should feel duty bound

to save the victim from his captors and bring him back home safely, though nothing prevents them from ignoring the victim's plight. Should they do that, however, then they will gain a Spite rating when the hostage dies, for callously ignoring someone in dire need.

This scenario can be fraught with potential complications, however, like if the hostage is a ghost who recently died, or if the hostage is actually possessed by a Spectre. And even if the characters rescue him, do they let him join the crucible even though he's normal, or, if he's a ghost, should they invest him with enough Vitality to ascend?

To answer any of these questions, the Storyteller must first decide upon the kidnapper's identity. Are the Spectres responsible? The Spectres don't slaughter everyone they capture, and instead, may keep a few hostages in their lair for later consumption or torture. Is NextWorld responsible? Unlikely, unless the hostage knows something the mercenaries consider important, like Orpheus' client roster or off-shore accounts hiding millions of dollars. Are the Death Merchants behind the kidnapping? It's possible. Mysterious antagonist #2 is interested in certain aspects of Orpheus' operations, and has instructed DM operatives to kidnap some survivors and await further instructions. The FBI doesn't kidnap, but it does have the mandate to arrest and detain suspects for up to two years — thanks to the broad sweeping powers given to the authorities recently. The FBI might be moving a captive from safe house to safe house across the US, forcing the characters into cat-and-mouse games.

Other options might be that the kidnapped "friend" shtick is a red herring... a trap to ensnare the entire crucible or ensure cooperation. (Follow my orders or the bunny rabbit dies.) From wealthy entrepreneurs to rogue DEA agents, these masterminds may use the hostage's safety to twist the crucible's arm just to get what they need. Someone can use the crucible to spy on a company, gain covert information, assassinate targets, locate items, defraud institutions, etc. The options are endless, and that means the hostage remains in captivity until the kidnapper is finally done with the characters. Of course, this might be an indefinite contract if the sole purpose of forcing the crucible to comply is to punish its members.

One way to immediately hook the characters into saving the hostage willingly is if the crucible already knows and likes the supporting character from previous sessions. A beloved supporting character may elicit an immediate reaction, like a need to charge in full sail and force a direct confrontation. The Storyteller can manipulate the situation to unfold a specific way through

the supporting character. A popular supporting character may engender a quick and vehement response to the event, while a virtual nobody may not even warrant secondary consideration from the crucible.

If the rescue goes well, then so much the better for the exiled heroes. If it goes badly, however, the hostage may die or disincorporate, the trap intended to capture the crucible actually works or it could end in the crucible's destruction. Heck, that may have been the original intention of the kidnapper. The important thing to remember is that it's easy to create deathtraps. The difficulty lies in not painting oneself into a corner and forcing the entire chronicle to suffer for that decision.

THE ZEN OF CHASING ASSETS

With Orpheus gone, equipment, money and friends are in scarce supply for the crucible. Characters who require sleeper cradles and cryo-preserving liquids to stave off necrosis while in stasis may believe themselves a liability to the group. Or the crucible is low on cash and doesn't have many options left. The entire situation with the FBI and NextWorld is enough to cripple a group's spirit, but not everything is bleak or dead roses in this sourcebook. Perhaps someone willingly offers the characters a safe haven; will they accept such unexpected generosity? Maybe, if the offer comes from an expatriated Orpheus survivor with hidden assets, a rich patron willing to fund the crucible for his private and relatively innocuous affairs or a signature character with a haven of his own. Unfortunately, we tend to look gift horses in the mouth, because few things in this world are that easy.

Of course, the offer doesn't have to be a trap for the prospect to remain exciting or fraught with danger. If the characters accept charity from their benefactor, then they might feel equally obligated to save their new savior from his enemies or crises. Is the crucible's patron a target of harassment? Does an old enemy capture him? Is he dying and hopes the crucible will ensure his ascension (as a ghost) to his final reward? Is he atoning for some deed through acts of compassion? Every event and twist should have its motivations, and in **Crusade of Ashes**, where the action focuses on the chase and on survival, it's easy to overlook the little stories that compose the human existence.

Key to many stories is conflict, and the simplest way to engineer conflict is to understand the nature of the characters, and then to define their goals. Conflict, then, is all the interceding obstacles preventing the characters from reaching that goal. In this case, the obstacles are embodied in the plethora of different enemies. In fact, each enemy has his own direction and

goal, while the characters themselves represent obstructions or points of conflict for these adversaries.

To add depth to the process, everyone has short-term goals and long-term goals, both of which are interconnected. Completing each short-term objective advances the character toward his long-term ambitions, even if indirectly. Understanding those immediate and extended aims all help create better stories. Thus:

- **FBI:** The Bureau's long-term goal is to regulate all projector technology under its auspices, essentially curtailing its usage. Its short-term goals, however, include capturing the characters to convince the public of the dangers threatening their liberties. Once the public believes, the politicians will follow suit to best cater to the voting demographics. Once the politicians lobby for action, the government will enact the necessary laws. All these are steps along the way to the eventual goal.

- **The Media:** The media's long-term goal is beyond the scope of the series, because it's a perpetual endeavor... to dominate the ratings. The short-term goal, however, is to break newsworthy events and keep the audience glued to the television. The immediate aim is to capture the characters on camera, at the very least.

- **NextWorld:** The mercenaries are more interested in long-term material gains. Fortunately, each fulfilled contract (or short-term goal), brings them one step closer to that dream (at least fiscally). Orpheus' destruction was one step; each felled survivor is another.

- **Mysterious Antagonist #1:** While his long-term goals are the fuel of at least one supplement, his short-term agendas include Orpheus' destruction. The next supplements may yet tell of his other machinations. For now, however, the death of the surviving projectors is enough.

- **Mysterious Antagonist #2:** It's no secret that while this long-range goal remains a mystery, this adversary seems interested in capturing or killing ex-Orpheus members only. Neither Terrel & Squib's nor NextWorld's projectors ever encounter the Death Merchants he contracts.

- **The Characters:** The characters' long-term goal is currently and likely one of survival, with each event geared toward that agenda. For the immediate future that includes procuring money, security or technology. Each step secures the long-term and may provide a small material reward as well.

ORPHEUS SURVIVES

As mentioned previously, Orpheus can survive. The attack occurs, but thanks to the crucible's valiant

efforts, the company is injured, but not dead. Life, however, doesn't continue as normal unless the Storyteller chooses to ignore the Orpheus story arc completely. With the former case, the Death Merchants are about as prevalent as they were before, appearing sporadically to fulfill this odd contract or that. The crucible still enjoys Orpheus' support, even though the spirit of the company changes, becoming more focused. Who attacked the compound is a paramount concern, though any investigation never leads beyond NextWorld, considering even they don't know their employer. NextWorld and Orpheus even engage in running battles, with the characters being sent on surgical strikes to eliminate this projector or that confederate.

Meanwhile, the FBI continues trying to discredit Orpheus Group, which has a strong legal and media presence, enough to squelch any potentially outrageous allegations leveled against it. The FBI is locked in a slow battle over constitutional freedoms, and Orpheus Group, as the victim, does have the public's sympathy.

NextWorld and mysterious antagonist #1 are not done — not by a long shot — but they must switch gears in their approach. A direct assault failed and is likelier more difficult now that Orpheus pursues more stringent measures to protect itself. In all likelihood, NextWorld focuses on a campaign of guerilla warfare, thinning the enemy forces through attrition. This includes ambushing crucibles, attacking employees at home, blackmailing personnel into switching sides and so forth. Unfortunately for NextWorld, Orpheus Group pays like in kind in a shadow war, and mysterious adversary #1 may eventually tire of the game. Another likely scenario is that mysterious adversary #2 appears, using Death Merchants as its proxy, and targets NextWorld... kidnapping personnel, assassinating agents and stealing relevant technology.

Finally, the ranks of both Orpheus and Terrel & Squib swell, with survivors from other firms, home-grown projectors and both Echo- and Mirage-class ghosts flocking to them. Both organizations grow, and spread internationally, with talk of Orpheus Europe opening in Rome, Italy due mostly to rumors of a strong ghost presence in the region.

As Storyteller, pursuing this is a major step in the metaplot, but it is still easily feasible to run the limited series with the Group intact. Orpheus' fall is a useful and necessary device, but it isn't critical compared to what's to come. In fact, by changing this event, you alter the potential expectations that players have for the game (especially for those sneaking a peek at Storyteller-only information).

The important thing to realize as Storyteller is that in shaping the world, all the enemies and tools are still there... just remember to modify them accordingly. The enemies remain, but the heroes, the players' characters, are stronger for Orpheus' support. Now, however, the stories and approaches change drastically. Consider:

- How do the characters react to Project Flatline? Even if Orpheus survives, its involvement in Project Flatline remains. This should keep the characters suspicious of their patrons and establish a conspiracy-style chronicle. Trust no one. If the characters are too vocal about their discoveries, someone may try eliminating them. A sabotaged cradle for sleepers, an air embolism for projecting skimmers (thanks to an injection in the artery through an empty syringe) or bad intelligence concerning a Spectre nest and the number of Spectres present (especially nasty in conjunction with "The Shape of Hell to Come" story in Chapter Four; see p. 159).

- What if someone infiltrates Orpheus Group? It's possible a NextWorld agent or a Death Merchant enters the organization as a new projector, causing problems from within and betraying company secrets. Maybe the infiltrator's been there all along, like one of the instructors.

- What if someone frames the crucible? Given the crucible's probable participation in saving Orpheus, someone may try framing the company's saviors. A murder in the building and a security camera videotape showing the characters pulling the trigger make for a fun evening of whodunit. It's especially more interesting if E-Demons are on the prowl, triggering deadly mischief and misinformation.

Another option is to simply push back Orpheus' destruction and hit the players when they least expect it. Sure they read this story in June, but will they remember the fine details come December? If your players are avid fans of **Orpheus**, the company's fall later is still every bit the major event, and should throw the crucible for a loop. It can be as large as you want, with all the accompanying bells and whistles of an FBI investigation and Death Merchants stalking the survivors there or not. Storytellers can break this event to the characters slowly, giving them hints that the enemy is gaining power and consolidating forces for a potential strike. Or, perhaps, Storytellers can pull out all the stops and be done with it quick and dirty, eliminating the crucible's livelihood and support in one stroke.

DUDE, YOUR KUNG FU SUCKS!

Sometimes the players can throw a game for a loop, and that's more than evident when the stories are scripted. Problem is that scripted events and

metaplot don't mean wrangling the story from the players' hands so events run as you like. If that's the case, what's the point? That said, this section presents potential problems that might crop up in an Orpheus game, particularly one following Orpheus Group's destruction, with some potential solutions.

"The characters don't suit the chronicle, but we don't want to change games."

There are several possibilities here, the first of which involves changing the story focus to suit the characters more. Maybe Orpheus' destruction provides the chronicle with that much-needed change, or perhaps the Storyteller should simply modify the prevalent themes. Sometimes the solution is as simple as changing one character (and thus the dynamic of the group) or inviting a new player. Regardless, perhaps it's time to dedicate one session to discussing the problem. Never be afraid to invite the players to participate in a dialogue before the frustration levels rise. Go to dinner as a group, relax and chat about the players' expectations versus the story content. It may not be necessary to start a game over, but the troupe may be open to backtracking the chronicle before a pivotal event ruined matters, or change a character's attitudes and even traits. It's important to distinguish players who grow bored easily and those who are simply and presently dissatisfied. Of the latter, don't be afraid to let them change certain aspects of themselves to better fit the environment.

"Without Orpheus, the game doesn't work anymore."

The first and most obvious answer is to keep Orpheus active. Otherwise, decide whether the characters need to adapt to the new situation, or if with each sourcebook the players should create new characters for each installment. In other words, the players remain the same, but the characters retire at the end of each supplement, becoming supporting characters, while the new characters take form from the events of the pivotal change. If you do adapt the characters, you may want to give the players a chance to switch gears. Progress the story by a few months (between books, for example) and provide the players with extra experience to flesh out their characters further. This allows for character development while preparing the crucible for the events in **Crusade of Ashes**.

"My players outsmarted me using [FBI ties, media savvy, an ally in NextWorld, etc.]. What can I do?"

First, good for the players. There is no player versus the Storyteller here unless someone in this formula is unnecessarily competitive. If that's the case, find a way to deal with it. As Storyteller, it's sometimes daunting when players unravel your agendas. By all means, however, let them succeed and craft a new story around it. Who knows, it

might actually be for the best. Besides, it won't really forestall the upcoming events, and may place the characters in a better position to contend with them.

"The characters are monumentally screwed, considering the opposition."

Assess the situation and don't be afraid to alter certain upcoming events that you know about (and of which the players likely know nothing). In fact, don't be afraid to call a break in the game and reconvene in five minutes or next week. That way, you'll have time to consider your options. If the characters are about to be overwhelmed by enemy forces, give them an escape route and the necessary distraction. If the characters are outnumbered, a third party looking to kill/capture the characters inadvertently enters the fray and distracts the opposition (Death Merchants louse up a NextWorld operation or NextWorld assassins interrupt an FBI raid). If the trap seems foolproof, then perhaps Forebode might provide a loophole or enough forewarning for the crucible to change its circumstances. Regardless, nothing is hopeless or overwhelming. The Storyteller controls both the circumstances and the situation, and changing plans is not the end of the world.

"I killed all the characters. Help!"

Well, death happens, but in Orpheus, the degree of death also matters. Did you kill their physical characters or kill them as in: I obliterated their soul? Now, the next question is, did you destroy one of them, or the entire crucible? Both happen in games, though players are likelier to be more frustrated with everyone perishing (unless they did it to themselves). If you destroyed one character, no biggie. Chapter Four contains more ways to introduce new characters into a chronicle. If you destroyed the entire crucible, this might present you with a great opportunity to try a new style of **Orpheus** chronicle. What happens if the characters begin after Orpheus' fall, training under a signature persona like Kate Dennison or Chet Mason? What if the chronicle continues the Orpheus saga with the organization intact? What if the characters are all ghosts? Playing a game where all the characters are spirits and hues is challenging, but fun nonetheless, and it allows for more esoteric roleplaying opportunities. What if one character died but still pretends to be alive around his family by manifesting? What if a character died to join and protect a child who is now a ghost? The opportunities are endless.

One small thing to remember is that physical death and spiritual destruction are options, just like anything else. While some people enjoy playing in games where their characters can die at any moment, others hate the random factor involved. Thus Storytellers can instigate



one of several rules. The first is that the character doesn't die until the player decides. That way, the Storyteller is now free to throw the characters into truly nasty and dire situations without worrying about killing them, but death/destruction is a movie moment prepared in advance (much like people's favorite series, where the character's demise is usually an act of heroism or poignant). Another option is to offset death/destruction. If a character happens to suffer a "killing" blow, the Storyteller can stave off the immediate destruction in favor of the character dying later, at a predetermined time. This way, death is still a factor, but the player and Storyteller can set up a relevant death scene instead of some random dice roll that eliminates a liked character.

"The characters destroyed Uriah. Is that bad?"

Well, since few people have actually seen Uriah, who says the crucible destroyed him and not a ghost double? Who says Uriah doesn't have enough tricks up his sleeve to fool the characters. Upcoming mechanics and rules may allow for loopholes for this exact circumstance. In fact, **Shades of Gray** provides a brand-spanking-new... wait... nah. That would be telling. Let's just say that in faking his destruction, Uriah simply lays low until the appropriate supplement comes out.

Remember, Orpheus is a continuing story and Uriah plays a significant role somewhere down the

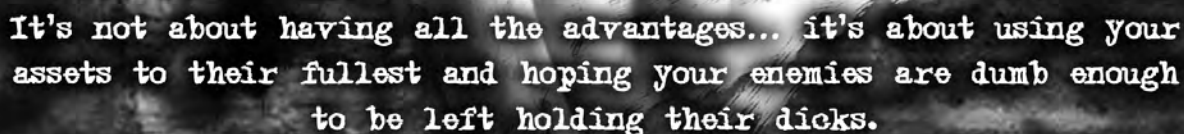
road. This doesn't mean Uriah can't be destroyed. He can be, but it remains the Storyteller's responsibility to find a suitable replacement for upcoming events should Uriah fall too early. Maybe another Flatliner takes his place? If the characters seemingly "destroy" Uriah in this supplement, however, it doesn't change the current situation. The Storyteller can leave Uriah's ultimate outcome undecided for now. If Uriah's fate affects any future developments, the Storyteller won't know about those until down the road anyway.

"No matter what I do, the players follow their own story lines."

Not a biggie. An old Islamic proverb states that if Muhammad won't go to the mountain, then the mountain will come to Muhammad. The players may ignore clues and facts when their characters stumble across them, but they certainly won't ignore personal attacks against their characters or their characters' friends. Prod the troupe into action by pissing them off. Let NextWorld or the Death Merchants attack and kill/destroy/damage what's important to the characters in an effort to destroy the crucible. Of course, this all means that the Storyteller may be facing a slight problem. Maybe the players are distracted because they aren't enjoying the game or certain stories. If that's the case, it may be time to retool the chronicle and ask the players what they're hoping to achieve.



CHAPTER THREE: THE UNEARTHED PLAYERS GUIDE



It's not about having all the advantages... it's about using your
assets to their fullest and hoping your enemies are dumb enough
to be left holding their dicks.

—Chet Mason

Cooper: We need a decoy... Something fast and loud.

[Everyone turns to Spoon, who wasn't listening.]

Spoon: What? You what?

—Dog Soldiers



INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains information to make **Orpheus** characters more coherent, interesting and playable. It begins with a series of questions intended to help you clarify your character's identity and what drives her in the wake of the mind-boggling destruction of the Orpheus Group. A lengthy catalog of advantages and disadvantages (in the form of Merits and Flaws) rounds out the chapter, along with rules for item creation and examples of such.

YOUR WORLD

There are leaders and there are followers. There are those folks who make things happen and those who wait for things to happen to them. A good player is the former. She inhabits her character fully, considers realistic decisions her character would make given the circumstances and pursues action accordingly. Players, naturally, expect Storytellers to get the ball rolling and provide the framework within which their characters move and interact, but players also have a responsibility to pursue their own agendas, pursue action and give the Storyteller something to work with. It is the interaction between the Storyteller and the players that makes roleplaying fun. Players who wait for spoon-fed plot developments slow down the game.

The following are some matters to consider in creating a proactive character and not a reactive one.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

The following questions help clarify why your character is doing what she's doing. Is she hanging with the others because there wouldn't be a game otherwise, or is she sticking with the crucible because it clearly serves her best interests?

With the right answers, a character's behavioral motives will make sense to both player and character. Players considering these questions further the gaming experience for all involved because then no one will make excuses for (by way of example) why a character stays with a group of individuals with whom she seemingly has so little in common.

WHO AM I?

The events in **Crusade of Ashes** pull the rug out from under the characters' feet. A character who defined himself as a company man no longer has a company. A character who thought of herself as a rebel must now find something, besides her employer, to rebel against.

Players should ask themselves some serious questions in light of Orpheus' fall.

Who is the character now that Orpheus is gone? Does this bring his whole life crashing down around his ears, or has he been hoping for something like this for months now?

In the light of recent events, what does the character find himself becoming? Was he a shrewd operator, now becoming a victim? Was he a bully, now playing the martyr's role? Was he the company whipping boy suddenly adapting to the new situation and even thriving in it?

Not even this grim event is likely to alter the character's Nature, but her Demeanor may well change in the face of the cataclysmic upheaval following Orpheus Group's destruction.

Players must then determine what compels their characters to seek out the truth. Given a blow like this and the fact that no lesser agencies than the FBI are looking for them, the characters might well be inclined to see their escape as a blessing and make the most of it by simply disappearing to the best of their ability. What drives them to further endanger themselves by investigating the corporation's demise? A quest for justice? The drive to avenge a dead friend? A need for answers and closure? Players must decide for themselves what drives their characters to assume such risks. It can be pretty much anything, and it never need be stated outright, but the player should at least know, to better provide his character with a consistent motivation for his behavior.

Orpheus is not a static game. The destruction of Orpheus Group is but the first in a series of developments with which the characters must contend. In dealing with these upcoming changes, the character will likely undergo a forced evolution and grow in response to her circumstances. Fate Herself hands the characters the same dictum under which all life forms struggle: adapt or die. How the characters then respond to that edict is the stuff that makes chronicles.

WHY ARE WE STILL TOGETHER?

Among the major questions players must consider is why their characters remain together. Their characters probably have family, friends or lovers they could run home to, and yet they persist in staying with their (former) co-workers and placing themselves in danger.

Why?

The Storyteller is normally the glue holding the disparate elements of the crucible together. In the **Orpheus** core book, that was a simple matter since Orpheus Group itself provided that link. Now with that element removed from the equation, the characters should determine for themselves why they stick around one another.

Here's the situation: The Storyteller can't stop a crucible from splitting up, no matter how many tricks she pulls. It is up to the players to sit down and decide why their characters like one another enough to remain together, putting themselves in clear danger, after Orpheus' fall. Maybe they developed a powerful connection to each other in response to the suffering they shared. Maybe the group's members all feel their chances for survival are best if they stay cohesive. Maybe deep feelings of admiration or love bind two or more characters, and the rest of crucible falls into place around that emotional core.

Any number of things — duty, fear, obligation, hatred, survival or any other reason, rational or irrational — might push the character to stay with the crucible. The player's task is to understand his character well enough that he knows exactly why, in the face of such terrifying potential consequences, his character makes such a choice.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

At this point, the characters can sit back and wait to be spoon-fed or take the initiative and seek out those responsible for Orpheus' fall. The latter requires the crucible to step in harm's way, but then again, so might the former if the Storyteller decides to lead his willing and inertial players into a trap.

If the players use strategy to plot their characters' actions — even if that means running — they take the initiative and allow the Storyteller to be creative with the results. That's when a game truly shines.

The question, then, is how do players become more active in guiding the story? The answer is to ask questions, then try to solve them or to track down the answers they want. Questions might include the following: Who gained the most from Orpheus' fall? Who was involved? What secrets did Orpheus keep from the characters? Why was Orpheus destroyed, and why is the crucible a target now? Do the characters know something they aren't supposed to, or are they a potential threat to somebody? The Storyteller can't answer these immediately, admittedly, but such questions do set the characters on the right path and lead to the revelation of some mysteries developing in **Crusade of Ashes**.

It ultimately comes down to this: Are the characters the masters of their own destiny, or are they content to meander anywhere the winds of fate dictate? The former makes for a dynamic game that challenges the players and gives the Storyteller a chance to be creative. The latter turns the game into another opportunity for passive entertainment and spoon-fed drivel. What you gain from your gaming experience, then, relies entirely on you.

Make your move.

MERITS AND FLAWS

Merits and Flaws are additional ways of personalizing your character. Merits are significant but minor advantages, while Flaws are disadvantages. Real individuals possess a wide range of strengths and weaknesses, and **Orpheus** strives to reflect that in character creation by providing a substantial catalog of Merits and Flaws for player use.

Some Storytellers ask their players only to buy Merits with points they obtain by purchasing Flaws, while others allow players to buy Merits through freebie points (and, by extension, add to their freebie points by taking Flaws). The Storyteller is the final arbiter of such things, but if the Storyteller allows for the latter variant, then he should not allow the characters to take more than seven points in Flaws.

Merits and Flaws fall into one of several categories: Physical, Mental, Social, Assets/Hindrances, Supernatural and Miscellaneous. In each category, the choices are alphabetical, but within the same point cost, starting with 1-pt. Merits and Flaws, up to 6-pt. Merits and Flaws.

Physical: As the word implies, this deals with anything pertaining to physical activity or the body's capabilities.

Mental: Any advantage/disadvantage dealing with cognitive abilities and acuity.

Social: These Merits and Flaws dictate how you interact with others or with society in general.

Assets/Hindrances: These are assets or, in the case of Flaws, hindrances that you possess that have more to do with your actions in life than with any innate capabilities or failings. Think of them as results of prior dealings.

Supernatural: Being a projector or ghost entails a different set of physics to existing in the world. These Merits and Flaws are extensions of that state.

Miscellaneous: Face it, some Merits and Flaws are simply too unusual or too nebulous to fall into a simple category.

Some Merits and Flaws are general enough for any World of Darkness character while others are available only to **Orpheus** characters. The latter category includes Crucible Merits and Flaws. As the name implies, Crucible Merits and Flaws are those bought, not by an individual, but by entire crucibles. The rules and costs for Crucible Merits and Flaws appear on p. 92.

MERITS

PHYSICAL

Acute Sense (1-pt. Merit)

One of your senses is extraordinarily acute. Perhaps you can see objects clearly at a distance or hear things other people don't. Whatever the case, it serves you well. The difficulties for all tasks associated with this particular sense decrease by two.

Ambidextrous (1-pt. Merit)

You are neither right-handed nor left-handed, but use both hands with equal proficiency. You may not even notice

that you accomplish things with one hand one time and the other hand the next. This Merit allows you to use either hand (or both simultaneously) with no penalty. Taking two actions in a turn still splits your dice pool, however (unless using the Juggernaut Horror).

Catlike Balance (1-pt. Merit)

You are inherently gifted with perfect balance. You can walk across tightropes or across a patch of ice with very little difficulty. All balance-related rolls (typically Dexterity + Athletics) enjoy a difficulty bonus of two.

Devastating Punch (1-pt. Merit)

Maybe you had a violent older brother, or maybe it was those boxing lessons your dad made you take in high school. For whatever reason, you have a punch that far exceeds what people expect from someone of your build. People have a habit of either keeling over or running away after you land a good one. Add two dice to your damage roll for any Brawl-based attack.

Robust Health (1-pt. Merit)

You have the constitution of an ox. You rarely, if ever, become sick, and even on those occasions when you do, your illness is both mild and brief. You laugh at colds, and not even bad flu or food poisoning impact you severely. You could eat raw chicken left in a warm room overnight and not feel nauseated. Even things like rat poison or snake venom have little effect on you. Reduce by two the difficulty of any roll to resist illness or poisoning.

Sprinter (1-pt. Merit)

Maybe you were a sprinter on the high school track team. Maybe you just have strong legs. Whatever the reason, you run

surprisingly fast if circumstances warrant it. For purposes of movement rates, your Dexterity counts as one point higher than it is actually.

Catnapper (2-pt. Merit)

You need the same seven to eight hours of sleep that anyone else does, you just don't need it all at once. Even if you only catch four two-hour naps in a day, you're fine and you function as normally as anyone else.

Enchanting Voice (2-pt. Merit; Storyteller may also rule this a Social Merit)

There is a timbre to your voice that has a powerful effect on others. When you order, others obey. When you fulminate, they cower. And when you flirt, the target of your affections falls easily into your arms. The difficulties of all die rolls involving the use of voice to persuade, intimidate, charm or command decrease by two. You can combine this Merit with the Unearthly Repose Horror with extraordinary results.

Night Vision (2-pt. Merit)

You don't understand why people think it's so hard to see just because of a little darkness. You see just fine at night so long as there's illumination equivalent to moderate starlight. Reduce by two the difficulty of Perception rolls made in low light.

Daredevil (3-pt. Merit; Storyteller may also rule this a Mental Merit)

You have either an adrenaline addiction or a death-wish — or both. You love taking risks. The greater the chances of dying, the more thrilling it is. Unlike most people, however, thanks to a combination of luck and skill, you're particularly





adept at surviving such experiences. When attempting highly risky physical actions (running along the top of a subway car, for example, or pretty much any stunt from an Indiana Jones movie) characters with this Merit add three dice to their pool *and* ignore any one botch from that roll. This Merit typically helps against actions with a difficulty of 8 or higher or those where there's a likelihood of inflicting three or more health levels of damage if the character fails.

Huge Size (4-pt. Merit)

This Merit reflects the kind of build usually only seen in linebackers and bouncers. Over 6' 10" and built solidly, you're a titan among pygmies. This Merit has several advantages. Others avoid fights with you, you gain an extra Bruised health level, and you can reach stuff at the very back of the top shelf. The Storyteller may allow other bonuses based on particular feats. On the downside, nobody built buildings for giants like you, and you must duck constantly or bump your head on doorjams.

MENTAL

Common Sense (1-pt. Merit)

Your down-to-earth sensibilities and plain old wisdom put matters in perspective and make obvious those things that others often miss. In game terms, the Storyteller informs the player if his character is about to do something contrary to common sense or with consequences that the player didn't consider. Think of this as a dialogue box popping up when your character is about to do something stupid. This is a good Merit for beginning players to help them adjust to the bumps and snags of the game.

Healthy Skepticism (1-pt. Merit)

Some people call you cynical, but your "cynicism" pays off on a pretty regular basis. You learned long ago that people say things to get what they want. Consequently, you rarely accept people at face value until verifying the facts yourself. This Merit allows you to reduce by two the difficulty of any roll pertaining to perceiving a lie. The benefits of this Merit are not automatic, however. You must still roleplay the conversation.

Keen Recognition (1-pt. Merit)

You remember people. Even if you met somebody once years ago, you can remember names, the circumstances and other salient bits of information. You also remember places, streets and similar bits of geographical data, even if you've been there only once. You're even good at remembering names and events from the media. The Storyteller tells you when someone or some place seems familiar to you.

Code of Honor (2-pt. Merit)

Whether stemming from spirituality, martial arts, enlightened parenting or just a strong sense of your own life philosophy, you follow a clear code of personal

ethics. Characters with this Merit gain two additional dice for all Willpower rolls when pursuing their code of honor or when fighting to avoid violating that code.

The player and the storyteller should sit down before the chronicle begins and discuss what exactly that code of honor entails. It should be clear and specific, and the character must adhere to his code of conduct. If he violates it frequently, the Storyteller may rescind this Merit.

Determined (2-pt. Merit)

Like a weasel with lockjaw, you're one tenacious bastard. Once you set your mind on a particular course of action, it's not likely anything short of God will dissuade you. Gain two additional dice for any resisted roll when someone tries persuading you to act against your wishes. This Merit also applies to resisting Horrors and other supernatural forms of mind control. On the downside, you're also likelier to possess the Flaw: Stubborn.

Eidetic Memory (2-pt. Merit)

With only minor effort, you recall things perfectly: a passage from a book, a conversation, a map, et cetera. This Merit is extremely helpful to projectors, who don't have access to some tools when projecting — such as Palm Pilots, maps, books, etc. — that many people rely upon.

Good Judge of Character (2-pt. Merit)

You can read people like road signs. You can pick the one good person from a pack of liars, psychos and bastards, or the one bad egg from a group of otherwise nice people. Reduce by two the difficulty of any Perception roll to assess another's character.

Intuitive Programmer (2-pt. Merit)

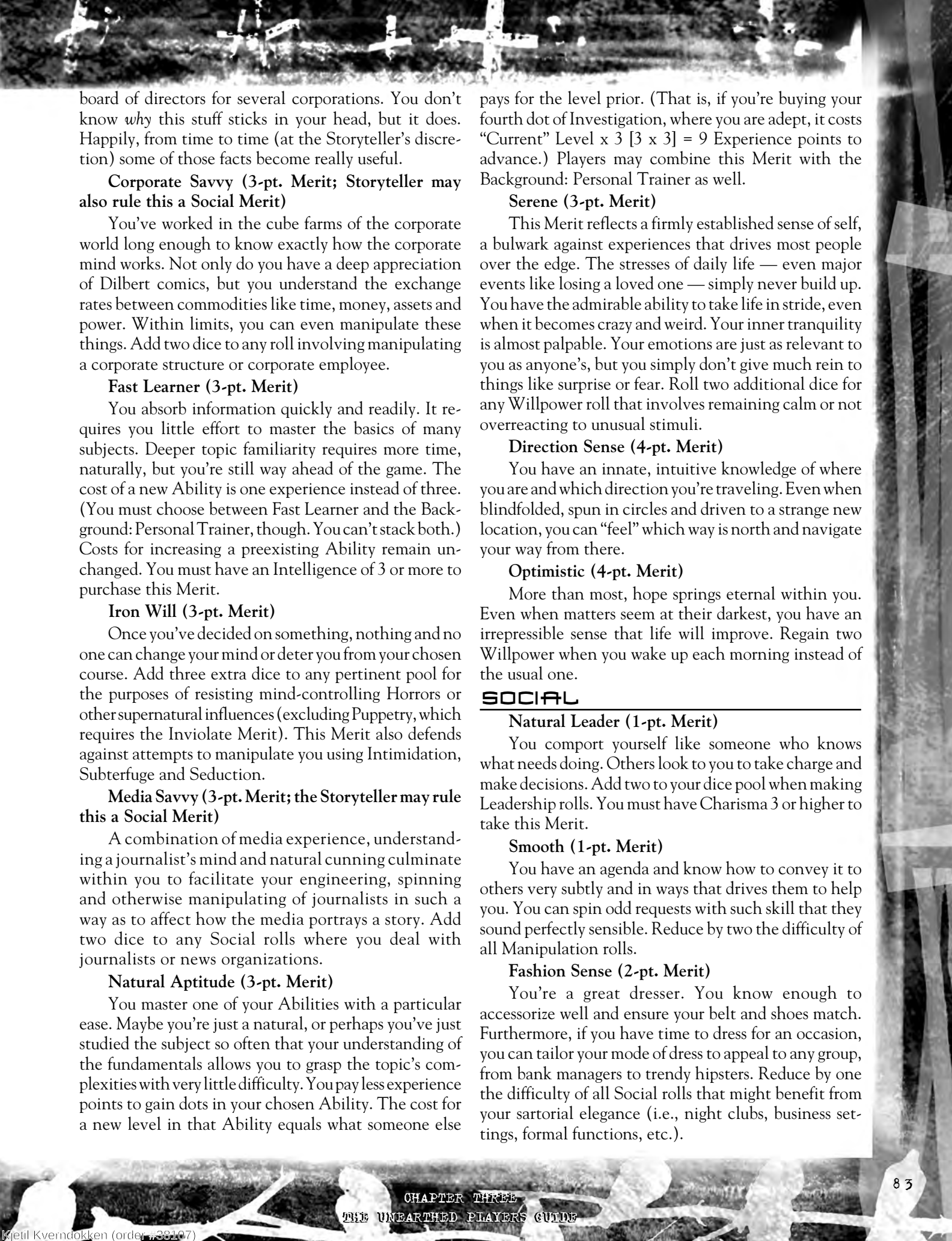
You've written so much code that you often think in 1s and 0s. Writing, understanding and debugging code is as easy for you as making a shopping list. This is like the Natural Linguist Merit, only for computer languages. Add three dice to any dice pool involving writing, comprehending or debugging computer code.

Natural Linguistics (2-pt. Merit)

You have a gift for languages. Add three dice to any dice pool involving written or spoken languages. This Merit does not apply to programming languages (see Intuitive Programmer).

Trivia Master (2-pt. Merit)

All manner of facts find their way into your head, and you can draw on them at will. You know the name of the architectural firm that designed the Sears Tower, the last words of Gertrude Stein, every movie directed by Alfred Hitchcock (with their stars and original release dates), the Latin names for several plant and animal species and the name of every member on the



board of directors for several corporations. You don't know *why* this stuff sticks in your head, but it does. Happily, from time to time (at the Storyteller's discretion) some of those facts become really useful.

Corporate Savvy (3-pt. Merit; Storyteller may also rule this a Social Merit)

You've worked in the cube farms of the corporate world long enough to know exactly how the corporate mind works. Not only do you have a deep appreciation of Dilbert comics, but you understand the exchange rates between commodities like time, money, assets and power. Within limits, you can even manipulate these things. Add two dice to any roll involving manipulating a corporate structure or corporate employee.

Fast Learner (3-pt. Merit)

You absorb information quickly and readily. It requires you little effort to master the basics of many subjects. Deeper topic familiarity requires more time, naturally, but you're still way ahead of the game. The cost of a new Ability is one experience instead of three. (You must choose between Fast Learner and the Background: Personal Trainer, though. You can't stack both.) Costs for increasing a preexisting Ability remain unchanged. You must have an Intelligence of 3 or more to purchase this Merit.

Iron Will (3-pt. Merit)

Once you've decided on something, nothing and no one can change your mind or deter you from your chosen course. Add three extra dice to any pertinent pool for the purposes of resisting mind-controlling Horrors or other supernatural influences (excluding Puppetry, which requires the Inviolate Merit). This Merit also defends against attempts to manipulate you using Intimidation, Subterfuge and Seduction.

Media Savvy (3-pt. Merit; the Storyteller may rule this a Social Merit)

A combination of media experience, understanding a journalist's mind and natural cunning culminate within you to facilitate your engineering, spinning and otherwise manipulating of journalists in such a way as to affect how the media portrays a story. Add two dice to any Social rolls where you deal with journalists or news organizations.

Natural Aptitude (3-pt. Merit)

You master one of your Abilities with a particular ease. Maybe you're just a natural, or perhaps you've just studied the subject so often that your understanding of the fundamentals allows you to grasp the topic's complexities with very little difficulty. You pay less experience points to gain dots in your chosen Ability. The cost for a new level in that Ability equals what someone else

pays for the level prior. (That is, if you're buying your fourth dot of Investigation, where you are adept, it costs "Current" Level x 3 [3 x 3] = 9 Experience points to advance.) Players may combine this Merit with the Background: Personal Trainer as well.

Serene (3-pt. Merit)

This Merit reflects a firmly established sense of self, a bulwark against experiences that drives most people over the edge. The stresses of daily life — even major events like losing a loved one — simply never build up. You have the admirable ability to take life in stride, even when it becomes crazy and weird. Your inner tranquility is almost palpable. Your emotions are just as relevant to you as anyone's, but you simply don't give much rein to things like surprise or fear. Roll two additional dice for any Willpower roll that involves remaining calm or not overreacting to unusual stimuli.

Direction Sense (4-pt. Merit)

You have an innate, intuitive knowledge of where you are and which direction you're traveling. Even when blindfolded, spun in circles and driven to a strange new location, you can "feel" which way is north and navigate your way from there.

Optimistic (4-pt. Merit)

More than most, hope springs eternal within you. Even when matters seem at their darkest, you have an irrepressible sense that life will improve. Regain two Willpower when you wake up each morning instead of the usual one.

SOCIAL

Natural Leader (1-pt. Merit)

You comport yourself like someone who knows what needs doing. Others look to you to take charge and make decisions. Add two to your dice pool when making Leadership rolls. You must have Charisma 3 or higher to take this Merit.

Smooth (1-pt. Merit)

You have an agenda and know how to convey it to others very subtly and in ways that drives them to help you. You can spin odd requests with such skill that they sound perfectly sensible. Reduce by two the difficulty of all Manipulation rolls.

Fashion Sense (2-pt. Merit)

You're a great dresser. You know enough to accessorize well and ensure your belt and shoes match. Furthermore, if you have time to dress for an occasion, you can tailor your mode of dress to appeal to any group, from bank managers to trendy hipsters. Reduce by one the difficulty of all Social rolls that might benefit from your sartorial elegance (i.e., night clubs, business settings, formal functions, etc.).

Flirt (2-pt. Merit)

A bright smile, a wink, a flip of your hair, an “accidental” innuendo — you are the master of all these flirtation techniques. You know how to use these subtle signals to engineer and build desire in another person, even those who might not normally be attracted to you. Add two dice to all Manipulation and Subterfuge rolls in such situations. You must have Appearance 3 or higher to take this Merit.

Forgettable (2-pt. Merit)

Nobody sees you. You have an average build and average looks. You dress like everybody else. You’re not thrilled that you’re this boring, but it has its advantages. People have trouble remembering your face and your name after meeting you — unless you somehow make yourself memorable to them — and they certainly can’t provide a useful description of you to anyone else if they’ve only met you briefly. You must have an Appearance and Charisma of 2 or lower to take this Merit. If either of those Attributes moves beyond this range, you lose this Merit after people suddenly adopt interest in you.

Great Liar (2-pt. Merit)

Lying comes as easily to you as breathing. You can tell a direct, unmitigated lie and smile brightly the whole time. Add two additional dice to all Subterfuge rolls associated with lying and deception.

People Person (2-pt. Merit)

You like other people. You like being in crowded, busy surroundings and interacting with others, and they like being around you. You have a warm, affable nature that other people take to instantly. Reduce by two the difficulty of any Social roll associated with making a good first impression. You may use this bonus in other circumstances as well, as determined by the Storyteller.

Sexy (2-pt. Merit)

You’re just *hot*. Whether it’s a look, your body or just the way you move, you exude a “let’s get naked and sweaty” vibe. Your sheer animal magnetism attracts people to you like bees to nectar. Not everybody will fall over themselves to hook up with you, but most of the opposite sex and a surprising number of folks sharing your gender want to, even if they can’t bring themselves to tell you. Reduce by two the difficulty of all Social rolls when dealing with someone who’s attracted to you. If you actively work to flirt with the person, reduce Social-related difficulties by three. Your Appearance and Charisma must add up to five or more dots for you to take this Merit.

Socially Aware (2-pt. Merit)

You’re a master of reading group dynamics through subtle cues. You can read furtive glances, body language

and conversations like a book with diagrams to determine exactly how the situation stands with any group of people. You recognize the whole gamut of interactions, the obvious as well as the subtle connections binding and sundering groups. Gain two dice on any Perception roll associated with understanding the interactions between groups of people.

ASSETS

Specialist Driver’s License (1-pt. Merit)

Anyone can drive a car. You, on the other hand, learned how to operate other kinds of vehicles, including semi-trucks, planes, motorcycles, boats or some other form of motorized transportation. Purchasing this Merit requires you to have the Drive Ability as well as a specialty relating to your skill with your unique mode of transportation.

Dual Nationality (2-pt. Merit)

Your parents hail from different countries, granting you citizenship in both. It’s possible you even have two passports. The advantage of this Merit is it allows you to function as a citizen in two different nations. If circumstances are heating up in one country of residence, you can take a trip abroad and lay low while things calm down. Remember, however, that if one country has a manhunt targeting you, reaching the other country is one problem, while staying there is another. (Most allied countries have extradition treaties with one another, though they may not hunt after you as vehemently.) This Merit only reflects the legal realities of dual citizenship. It does not confer any linguistic or cultural knowledge that you haven’t bought separately.

Firearms License (2-pt. Merit)

This Merit functions differently according to the character’s base of operations. In countries like the United States, it means the character has a concealed weapon permit and is legally entitled to carry a firearm on her person, possibly in a shoulder or hip holster. In countries where citizens may not possess firearms (the UK or Canada, for example) it means that, for whatever reason (to be discussed with the Storyteller) the character received special dispensation to own a gun.

SUPERNATURAL

Leech (1-pt. Merit)

Your gauze pulls Vitality from those ghosts or projected entities around you. For every hour you spend in the presence of another spook, he loses one Vitality while you gain one. Hues, in particular, dislike you and avoid your company.

Fast Charger (2-pt. Merit)

Projectors only. Just merging with your body for 20 minutes is enough to completely recharge your

Vitality. On the down side, depleting your body of its energy in this fashion inflicts one level of lethal damage that you cannot soak. In a pinch it can be worth it, however.

Hearing the Buzz (3-pt. Merit)

Normally, the hive-mind shared by Spectres remains inaccessible to either ghosts or projectors, but for unknown reasons (and much to your chagrin) you hear the warped, chattering network of Spectre thoughts. When Spectres are within 100 feet of you, you may roll Perception + Empathy to eavesdrop on the Spectral “conversations,” though the material is rarely heard as much as felt. You feel impressions of intent and sense actions and events rather than hearing Spectres converse. When these “transmissions” are really powerful (between Spectres of Spite rating 6+) or nearby, you must spend a Willpower point to keep the hive-mind from absorbing your thoughts. This means the Spectres are instantly aware of your presence and actively seek you out.

Long Sleeper (3-pt. Merit)

Your body endures well under the strain of cryogenic sleep. You can stay in a sleeper pod for twice the normal duration without incurring any unhealthy consequences.

Nexus (3- to 5-pt. Merit)

Only one character can normally help another with a Horror’s Benefits, but in your presence, several crucible members can stack their Benefits for one recipient. At three points, characters can stack two Benefits, at four points the characters can stack three Benefits, and at five points, the character stacks four characters’ Benefits. Please note that the character with Nexus cannot perform any other action when acting as Nexus, nor can he split the effect between different donors and recipients in that one turn. Instead, the Nexus acts as a focal point whereby two or more characters channel their Benefits through him, and he, in turn, channels the combined effect into the recipient. This Merit makes you very important to your crucible, but if the others grow too accustomed to your presence, they may rely on you far too heavily. Also, bear in mind that stacking two Benefits means four members of the crucible are now focused on one attack. Better make that attack count.

Out of Phase (3-pt. Merit)

Not only can the living not see you unless you’re manifesting, but neither can other spirits. While invisibility has its advantages, it’s a pain when you must expend the energy to manifest just to be seen by

your allies. A character can “reappear” to spooks for one scene and without manifesting, however, by expending one Vitality.

Dynamo (4-pt. Merit)

Skimmers only. Maybe you have a high spiritual metabolism. For whatever reason, upon returning to your flesh, your soul recuperates from its extra-corporeal jaunts very quickly. When in your body, you regain Vitality at four times the normal rate (i.e., four points an hour).

Inviolate (4-pt. Merit)

You have a natural resistance to possession of any sort. While alive, your body is immune to possession from ghosts, Spectres or any other supernatural entity, even if you’re not occupying it at the time. Characters without bodies, obviously, can’t take this Merit.

Bright Hue (5-pt. Merit)

Using pigment may have ruined (and ultimately, stolen) your life, but despite the odds it did not adversely affect you in the afterlife. Unlike other hues, your passions in life remained with you in death, infusing your gauze with the energy of the living. You do not suffer the Vitality cap that other hues do (meaning you can have up to a 9 starting Vitality) and can now reach 10 Vitality when infused.

Luminous (5-pt. Merit)

Your potential Vitality max is 15, not 10. That’s a huge boost for you, but it comes at a price. This supercharged state transforms you into a beacon for ghosts and Spectres alike, who realize something is amiss with you. You are brighter than a majority of humans. Anytime you possess Vitality 11+, spooks and Spectres within five city blocks sense you and may investigate (Storyteller prerogative), depending on the amount of Vitality being thrown around.

MISCELLANEOUS

Light Sleeper (1-pt. Merit)

At the slightest provocation, you quickly emerge from even the deepest sleep fully alert. The nightly noises to which you’re accustomed (traffic, planes, the upstairs neighbors) won’t wake you, but strange or alarming sounds — or lack of the usual clatter — awaken you instantly.

Lucky (3-pt. Merit)

Lady Luck is on your side almost all the time; things just turn out well for you. Three times per story you may ignore the results of the dice and roll again. You may re-roll any given roll only once.

True Love (4-pt. Merit)

Against all odds, you met your soulmate, your true love. He or she is at the very center of your existence. When you're not with your true love, you wish you were. The thought of your true love warms you and gives you the strength to persevere even when all hope seems gone. This Merit provides you with one automatic success on all Willpower rolls, which can be negated only by botching. True love is a rare and precious thing, but it can also be problematic since your paramour may occasionally need protection or rescuing. Worse, he or she wants time alone with you once in a while, without all those "weird people" hanging around you.

Nine Lives (6-pt. Merit)

It's only natural given the characters survived multiple near-death experiences that Nine-Lives would factor well as a Merit. You have the simple ability to thwart death. It'll catch up to you some day, but for now, you just laugh while other people marvel at your good fortune. When the outcome of a dice roll might result in your death, the Storyteller rolls the dice again. If the next roll succeeds, you live — using up one of your nine lives. If that subsequent roll fails, then the Storyteller continues re-rolling until either making a successful roll or using up your nine lives. It is the Storyteller's responsibility to keep track of the lives the character spent thus far.

FLAWS

PHYSICAL

Bad Sight (1-pt. or 3-pt. Flaw)

Your sight is defective. Raise by two the difficulty for all rolls involving the use of sight. As a one-point Flaw, you can ameliorate this condition with thick glasses. As a three-point Flaw, not even glasses help.

Hard of Hearing (1-pt. Flaw)

Your hearing is defective. Raise by two the difficulty for all rolls involving the use of hearing.

Nonswimmer (1-pt. Flaw)

You can't swim, though maybe you can dog paddle if your life absolutely depends on it and the water is calm. Increase by two the difficulty of any Athletics rolls involving swimming.

Short (1-pt. Flaw)

You're far shorter than average, no taller than four-and-a-half feet. In addition to not reaching items on shelves, your running speed is half that of a taller person. The Storyteller may also assign other disadvantages (setting a maximum of three dots on Strength, for example) as he sees fit.



Sickly (1-pt. Flaw)

You were a sickly child who caught every new germ that came along. That hasn't changed. When making any Stamina roll to avoid catching disease or some similar effect (relating to a power or Horror), increase the difficulty by two.

One Eye (2-pt. Flaw)

You lost an eye and have only one left. Raise by two the difficulty of all rolls involving eyesight. Increase the difficulty of rolls requiring depth perception (ranged combat, for example) by an additional one (for a total of three to the difficulty).

Poor Night Vision (2-pt. Flaw)

Your sight is seriously compromised in low-light conditions. Increase by two the difficulty of all Perception rolls made in dim light.

Addiction (3-pt. Flaw)

You are physically addicted to a particular substance that you must have lest you undergo severe withdrawals. This could be anything from nicotine to alcohol to heroin to pigment. The substance of your addiction is always harmful and impairs you in some way.

Deformity (3-pt. Flaw; Storyteller may also rule this a Social Flaw)

A deformity inhibits your physical abilities and your interactions with others. You may have a misshapen limb, a hunchback or a lame arm, for example. A hunchback, for instance, reduces a character's Dexterity by two dots and increases the difficulty of Social rolls by one. It is the Storyteller's responsibility to determine the specific effects of the chosen deformity.

Lame (3-pt. Flaw)

Some disease or accident rendered your legs permanently damaged. You walk only with the aid of leg braces or a cane, and you have a pronounced limp. Your walking speed is one-quarter that of a normal person, and you can't run.

Blind (6-pt. Flaw)

You can't see. You can move around only when guided or if you use a cane. Actions involving hand-eye coordination are very difficult to perform, especially under stressful conditions. Increase the difficulties of all Dexterity-based rolls by two.

MENTAL

Chronic Pessimist (1-pt. Flaw)

You always expect the worst from every situation. You predict failure and doom to folks every chance you have, alienating those around you. Raise by two the difficulty of all Leadership rolls.

Amnesia (2-pt. Flaw)

You don't remember anything about your life prior to a particular event or date. This affects none of your Abilities, but the specifics of your identity, your history and what happened to your memory are all complete mysteries waiting to be solved. Your origins and the circumstances behind your amnesia are for the Storyteller to determine, and she is encouraged to make both as interesting as possible.

Insomniac (2-pt. Flaw)

Sleep does not come easily, and even when you do fall asleep, you routinely awaken throughout the night. You are often groggy and slow as a result. Increase by two the difficulty of all Alertness, Awareness and Intuition rolls.

Low Pain Threshold (2-pt. Flaw)

You're not used to pain and even minor injuries seem excruciating. Increase wound penalties by an additional die.

Nightmares (2-pt. Flaw)

You suffer from terrible nightmares when asleep, and their memories haunt you into the waking hours. Every morning, you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or lose a die on all actions that night. A botched Willpower roll indicates that, even when awake, you still believe yourself caught in a nightmare.

Overconfident (2-pt. Flaw)

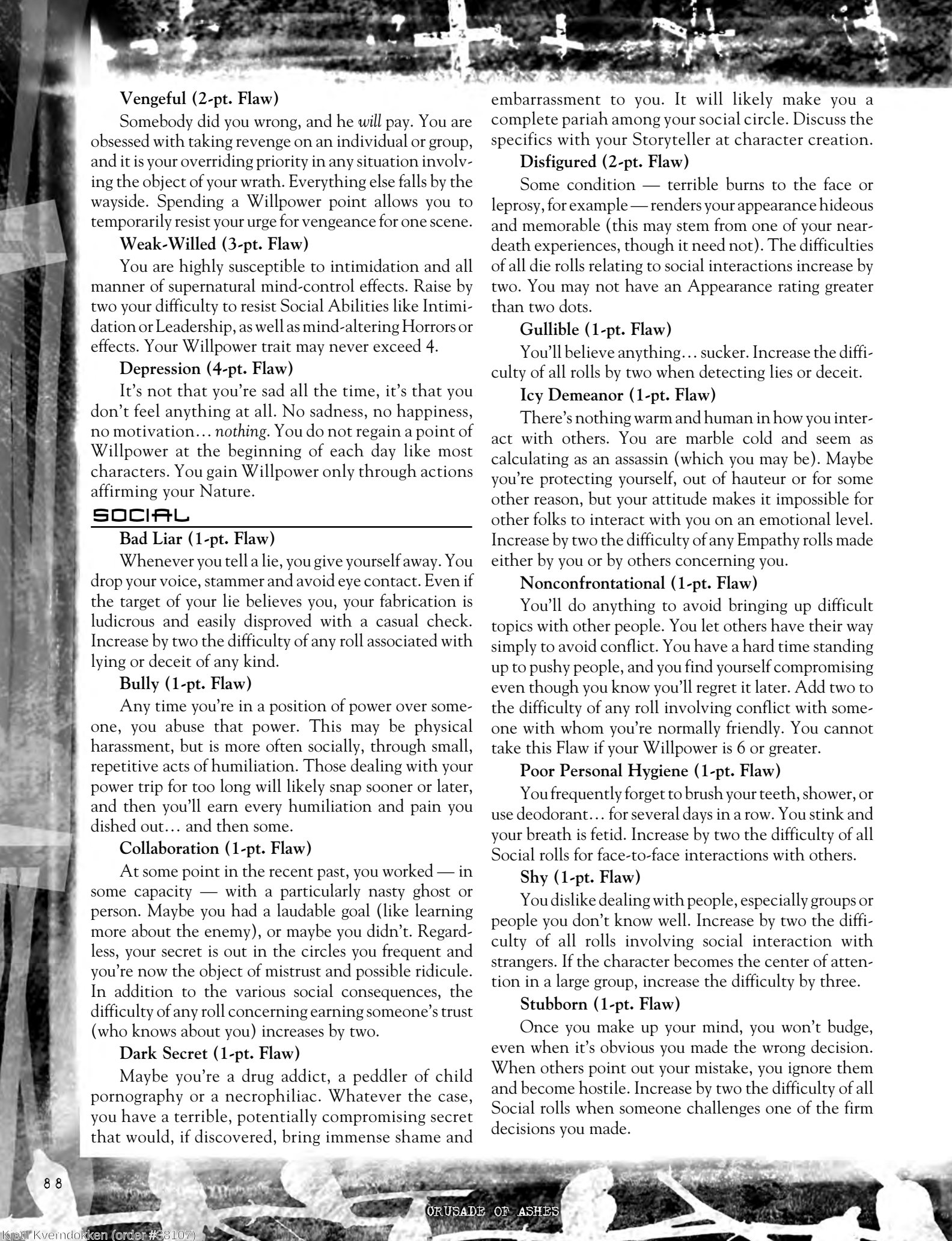
You routinely overestimate your own skill. Once per game session, the Storyteller will secretly increase the difficulty of a non-combat action you take by two. This increase represents your tendency to plunge headlong into activities beyond your capabilities.

Phobia (2-pt. Flaw)

You have an overwhelming fear of something. Common phobias include fear of snakes, spiders, crowds and open spaces. Upon encountering the object of your phobia, make a Willpower roll. The Storyteller determines the difficulty of the roll. If you fail, you must retreat from the object or situation at full speed.

Short Fuse (2-pt. Flaw)

It requires very little to piss you off. Your hair-trigger temper has the better of you, sending you into rages that often result in knock-down, drag-out fights. Those who know you walk softly around you or avoid you altogether. Anyone with a Willpower rating under 4 must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to disagree with you. If they fail, they acquiesce to your demands to avoid a conflict. Those with Willpower scores of 6 or higher, however, don't fear your tantrums at all. On the contrary, they consider you a jerk with a bad temper and will likely delight in pushing your buttons... just to watch you lose control.



Vengeful (2-pt. Flaw)

Somebody did you wrong, and he *will* pay. You are obsessed with taking revenge on an individual or group, and it is your overriding priority in any situation involving the object of your wrath. Everything else falls by the wayside. Spending a Willpower point allows you to temporarily resist your urge for vengeance for one scene.

Weak-Willed (3-pt. Flaw)

You are highly susceptible to intimidation and all manner of supernatural mind-control effects. Raise by two your difficulty to resist Social Abilities like Intimidation or Leadership, as well as mind-altering Horrors or effects. Your Willpower trait may never exceed 4.

Depression (4-pt. Flaw)

It's not that you're sad all the time, it's that you don't feel anything at all. No sadness, no happiness, no motivation... *nothing*. You do not regain a point of Willpower at the beginning of each day like most characters. You gain Willpower only through actions affirming your Nature.

SOCIAL

Bad Liar (1-pt. Flaw)

Whenever you tell a lie, you give yourself away. You drop your voice, stammer and avoid eye contact. Even if the target of your lie believes you, your fabrication is ludicrous and easily disproved with a casual check. Increase by two the difficulty of any roll associated with lying or deceit of any kind.

Bully (1-pt. Flaw)

Any time you're in a position of power over someone, you abuse that power. This may be physical harassment, but is more often socially, through small, repetitive acts of humiliation. Those dealing with your power trip for too long will likely snap sooner or later, and then you'll earn every humiliation and pain you dished out... and then some.

Collaboration (1-pt. Flaw)

At some point in the recent past, you worked — in some capacity — with a particularly nasty ghost or person. Maybe you had a laudable goal (like learning more about the enemy), or maybe you didn't. Regardless, your secret is out in the circles you frequent and you're now the object of mistrust and possible ridicule. In addition to the various social consequences, the difficulty of any roll concerning earning someone's trust (who knows about you) increases by two.

Dark Secret (1-pt. Flaw)

Maybe you're a drug addict, a peddler of child pornography or a necrophiliac. Whatever the case, you have a terrible, potentially compromising secret that would, if discovered, bring immense shame and

embarrassment to you. It will likely make you a complete pariah among your social circle. Discuss the specifics with your Storyteller at character creation.

Disfigured (2-pt. Flaw)

Some condition — terrible burns to the face or leprosy, for example — renders your appearance hideous and memorable (this may stem from one of your near-death experiences, though it need not). The difficulties of all die rolls relating to social interactions increase by two. You may not have an Appearance rating greater than two dots.

Gullible (1-pt. Flaw)

You'll believe anything... sucker. Increase the difficulty of all rolls by two when detecting lies or deceit.

Icy Demeanor (1-pt. Flaw)

There's nothing warm and human in how you interact with others. You are marble cold and seem as calculating as an assassin (which you may be). Maybe you're protecting yourself, out of hauteur or for some other reason, but your attitude makes it impossible for other folks to interact with you on an emotional level. Increase by two the difficulty of any Empathy rolls made either by you or by others concerning you.

Nonconfrontational (1-pt. Flaw)

You'll do anything to avoid bringing up difficult topics with other people. You let others have their way simply to avoid conflict. You have a hard time standing up to pushy people, and you find yourself compromising even though you know you'll regret it later. Add two to the difficulty of any roll involving conflict with someone with whom you're normally friendly. You cannot take this Flaw if your Willpower is 6 or greater.

Poor Personal Hygiene (1-pt. Flaw)

You frequently forget to brush your teeth, shower, or use deodorant... for several days in a row. You stink and your breath is fetid. Increase by two the difficulty of all Social rolls for face-to-face interactions with others.

Shy (1-pt. Flaw)

You dislike dealing with people, especially groups or people you don't know well. Increase by two the difficulty of all rolls involving social interaction with strangers. If the character becomes the center of attention in a large group, increase the difficulty by three.

Stubborn (1-pt. Flaw)

Once you make up your mind, you won't budge, even when it's obvious you made the wrong decision. When others point out your mistake, you ignore them and become hostile. Increase by two the difficulty of all Social rolls when someone challenges one of the firm decisions you made.



Superstitious (1-pt. Flaw)

Maybe you were a little superstitious before encountering ghosts, but now, the existence of ghosts is proof positive that every other superstition you've heard of is equally valid. You'd rather step into busy traffic than walk under a ladder (among other things). You are deeply and neurotically superstitious. You encountered many old wives' tales when growing up, and you still believe most, if not all, of them. Add two to the difficulty of any Social roll when dealing with people who know about your superstitious tendencies and frown upon them.

Trusting (1-pt. Flaw)

You so desperately want to believe the best in other people that you'd trust someone who betrayed you. You'll even unwittingly put yourself in danger this way (i.e., by accepting a ride home from a recent acquaintance). When faced with the choice of trusting someone or thinking poorly of them, you'll do the former every single time.

Weird Appearance (1- or 2-pt. Flaw)

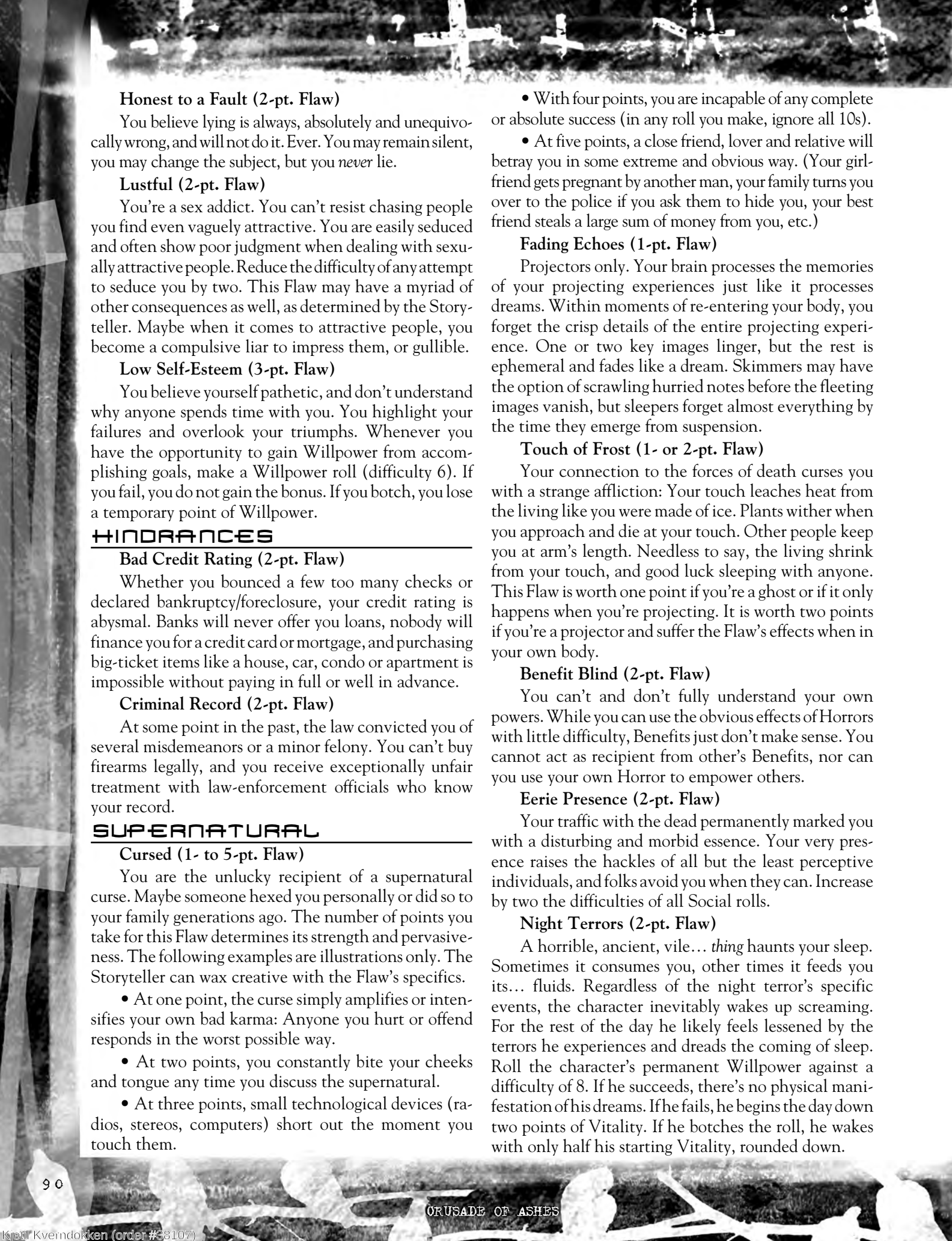
You insist on dressing like a freak. Do you wear underwear outside of pajama bottoms or have a row of safety pins through your lips, cheeks and ears? Maybe you've tattooed "FUCK YOU!" across your forehead. Regardless, you look strange (no matter what you're really like), and others treat you that way. When dealing with people not familiar with your particular subculture, increase the difficulty of all Social rolls by two. This Flaw is worth one point if you can somehow fit in (by changing clothes, for example) and two points if you can't (facial tattoos).

Compulsive Liar (2-pt. Flaw)

Truth is a little tedious. You like augmenting, changing or defacing the truth until it's unrecognizable. You don't necessarily do this out of malice, and you may even come to believe the lies you tell, but in time, others learn that if your lips are moving, you're probably lying. In times of urgent need, you can spend a Willpower point to tell the truth, but nothing less than that earns an honest answer from you.

Foreign (2-pt. Flaw)

You are not native to your current country of residence. You may understand the language and the basics of the culture, but details (like idioms, styles, etc.) are lost on you. You have an obvious accent and possibly some other characteristic that clearly segregates you from the local mainstream. Increase by two all Streetwise and Etiquette rolls, and any other Social roll where your alien status might play a part.



Honest to a Fault (2-pt. Flaw)

You believe lying is always, absolutely and unequivocally wrong, and will not do it. Ever. You may remain silent, you may change the subject, but you *never* lie.

Lustful (2-pt. Flaw)

You're a sex addict. You can't resist chasing people you find even vaguely attractive. You are easily seduced and often show poor judgment when dealing with sexually attractive people. Reduce the difficulty of any attempt to seduce you by two. This Flaw may have a myriad of other consequences as well, as determined by the Storyteller. Maybe when it comes to attractive people, you become a compulsive liar to impress them, or gullible.

Low Self-Esteem (3-pt. Flaw)

You believe yourself pathetic, and don't understand why anyone spends time with you. You highlight your failures and overlook your triumphs. Whenever you have the opportunity to gain Willpower from accomplishing goals, make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6). If you fail, you do not gain the bonus. If you botch, you lose a temporary point of Willpower.

HINDRANCES

Bad Credit Rating (2-pt. Flaw)

Whether you bounced a few too many checks or declared bankruptcy/foreclosure, your credit rating is abysmal. Banks will never offer you loans, nobody will finance you for a credit card or mortgage, and purchasing big-ticket items like a house, car, condo or apartment is impossible without paying in full or well in advance.

Criminal Record (2-pt. Flaw)

At some point in the past, the law convicted you of several misdemeanors or a minor felony. You can't buy firearms legally, and you receive exceptionally unfair treatment with law-enforcement officials who know your record.

SUPERNATURAL

Cursed (1- to 5-pt. Flaw)

You are the unlucky recipient of a supernatural curse. Maybe someone hexed you personally or did so to your family generations ago. The number of points you take for this Flaw determines its strength and pervasiveness. The following examples are illustrations only. The Storyteller can wax creative with the Flaw's specifics.

- At one point, the curse simply amplifies or intensifies your own bad karma: Anyone you hurt or offend responds in the worst possible way.

- At two points, you constantly bite your cheeks and tongue any time you discuss the supernatural.

- At three points, small technological devices (radios, stereos, computers) short out the moment you touch them.

- With four points, you are incapable of any complete or absolute success (in any roll you make, ignore all 10s).

- At five points, a close friend, lover and relative will betray you in some extreme and obvious way. (Your girlfriend gets pregnant by another man, your family turns you over to the police if you ask them to hide you, your best friend steals a large sum of money from you, etc.)

Fading Echoes (1-pt. Flaw)

Projectors only. Your brain processes the memories of your projecting experiences just like it processes dreams. Within moments of re-entering your body, you forget the crisp details of the entire projecting experience. One or two key images linger, but the rest is ephemeral and fades like a dream. Skimmers may have the option of scrawling hurried notes before the fleeting images vanish, but sleepers forget almost everything by the time they emerge from suspension.

Touch of Frost (1- or 2-pt. Flaw)

Your connection to the forces of death curses you with a strange affliction: Your touch leaches heat from the living like you were made of ice. Plants wither when you approach and die at your touch. Other people keep you at arm's length. Needless to say, the living shrink from your touch, and good luck sleeping with anyone. This Flaw is worth one point if you're a ghost or if it only happens when you're projecting. It is worth two points if you're a projector and suffer the Flaw's effects when in your own body.

Benefit Blind (2-pt. Flaw)

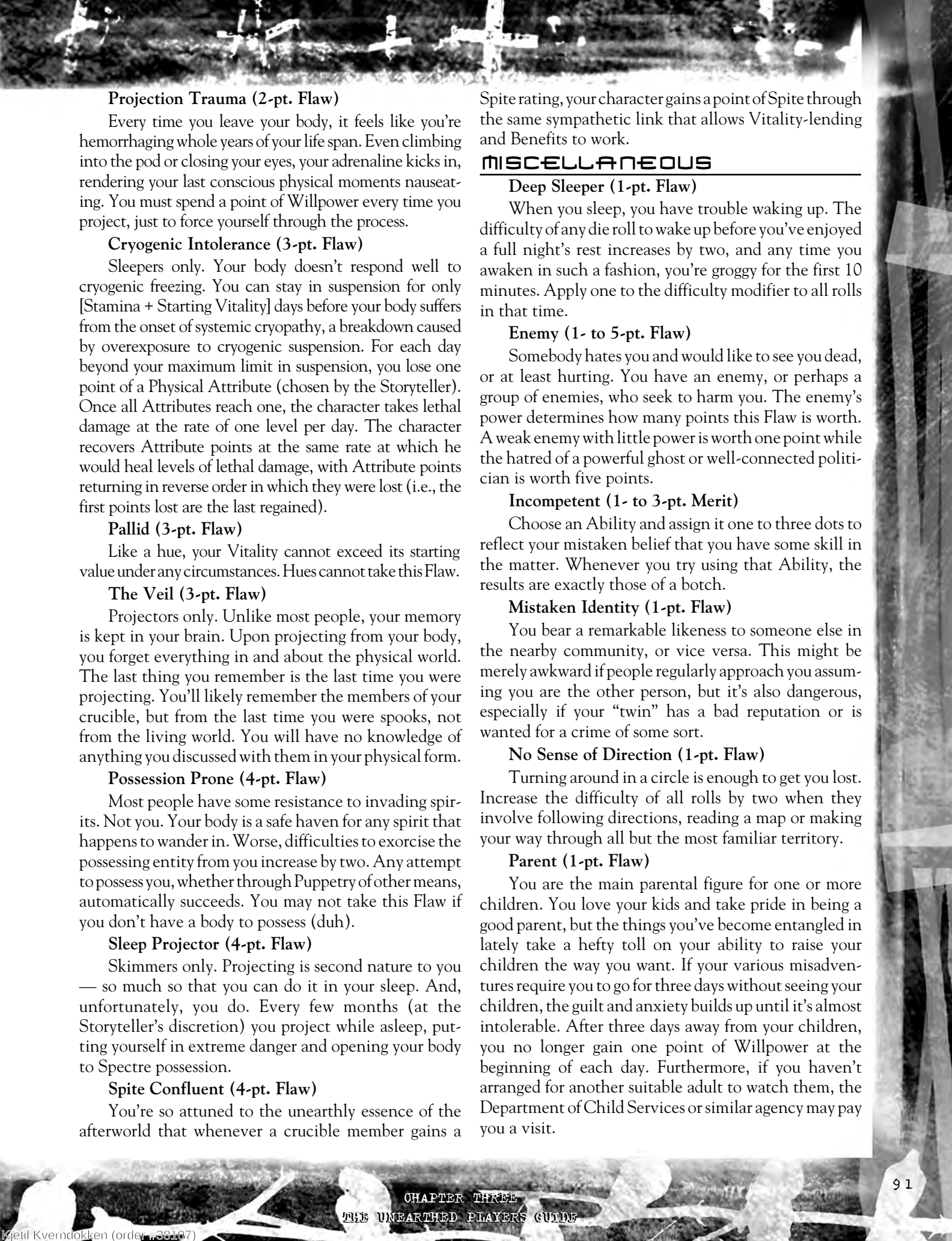
You can't and don't fully understand your own powers. While you can use the obvious effects of Horrors with little difficulty, Benefits just don't make sense. You cannot act as recipient from other's Benefits, nor can you use your own Horror to empower others.

Eerie Presence (2-pt. Flaw)

Your traffic with the dead permanently marked you with a disturbing and morbid essence. Your very presence raises the hackles of all but the least perceptive individuals, and folks avoid you when they can. Increase by two the difficulties of all Social rolls.

Night Terrors (2-pt. Flaw)

A horrible, ancient, vile... *thing* haunts your sleep. Sometimes it consumes you, other times it feeds you its... fluids. Regardless of the night terror's specific events, the character inevitably wakes up screaming. For the rest of the day he likely feels lessened by the terrors he experiences and dreads the coming of sleep. Roll the character's permanent Willpower against a difficulty of 8. If he succeeds, there's no physical manifestation of his dreams. If he fails, he begins the day down two points of Vitality. If he botches the roll, he wakes with only half his starting Vitality, rounded down.



Projection Trauma (2-pt. Flaw)

Every time you leave your body, it feels like you're hemorrhaging whole years of your life span. Even climbing into the pod or closing your eyes, your adrenaline kicks in, rendering your last conscious physical moments nauseating. You must spend a point of Willpower every time you project, just to force yourself through the process.

Cryogenic Intolerance (3-pt. Flaw)

Sleepers only. Your body doesn't respond well to cryogenic freezing. You can stay in suspension for only [Stamina + Starting Vitality] days before your body suffers from the onset of systemic cryopathy, a breakdown caused by overexposure to cryogenic suspension. For each day beyond your maximum limit in suspension, you lose one point of a Physical Attribute (chosen by the Storyteller). Once all Attributes reach one, the character takes lethal damage at the rate of one level per day. The character recovers Attribute points at the same rate at which he would heal levels of lethal damage, with Attribute points returning in reverse order in which they were lost (i.e., the first points lost are the last regained).

Pallid (3-pt. Flaw)

Like a hue, your Vitality cannot exceed its starting value under any circumstances. Hues cannot take this Flaw.

The Veil (3-pt. Flaw)

Projectors only. Unlike most people, your memory is kept in your brain. Upon projecting from your body, you forget everything in and about the physical world. The last thing you remember is the last time you were projecting. You'll likely remember the members of your crucible, but from the last time you were spooks, not from the living world. You will have no knowledge of anything you discussed with them in your physical form.

Possession Prone (4-pt. Flaw)

Most people have some resistance to invading spirits. Not you. Your body is a safe haven for any spirit that happens to wander in. Worse, difficulties to exorcise the possessing entity from you increase by two. Any attempt to possess you, whether through Puppetry or other means, automatically succeeds. You may not take this Flaw if you don't have a body to possess (duh).

Sleep Projector (4-pt. Flaw)

Skimmers only. Projecting is second nature to you — so much so that you can do it in your sleep. And, unfortunately, you do. Every few months (at the Storyteller's discretion) you project while asleep, putting yourself in extreme danger and opening your body to Spectre possession.

Spite Confluent (4-pt. Flaw)

You're so attuned to the unearthly essence of the afterworld that whenever a crucible member gains a

Spite rating, your character gains a point of Spite through the same sympathetic link that allows Vitality-lending and Benefits to work.

MISCELLANEOUS

Deep Sleeper (1-pt. Flaw)

When you sleep, you have trouble waking up. The difficulty of any die roll to wake up before you've enjoyed a full night's rest increases by two, and any time you awaken in such a fashion, you're groggy for the first 10 minutes. Apply one to the difficulty modifier to all rolls in that time.

Enemy (1- to 5-pt. Flaw)

Somebody hates you and would like to see you dead, or at least hurting. You have an enemy, or perhaps a group of enemies, who seek to harm you. The enemy's power determines how many points this Flaw is worth. A weak enemy with little power is worth one point while the hatred of a powerful ghost or well-connected politician is worth five points.

Incompetent (1- to 3-pt. Merit)

Choose an Ability and assign it one to three dots to reflect your mistaken belief that you have some skill in the matter. Whenever you try using that Ability, the results are exactly those of a botch.

Mistaken Identity (1-pt. Flaw)

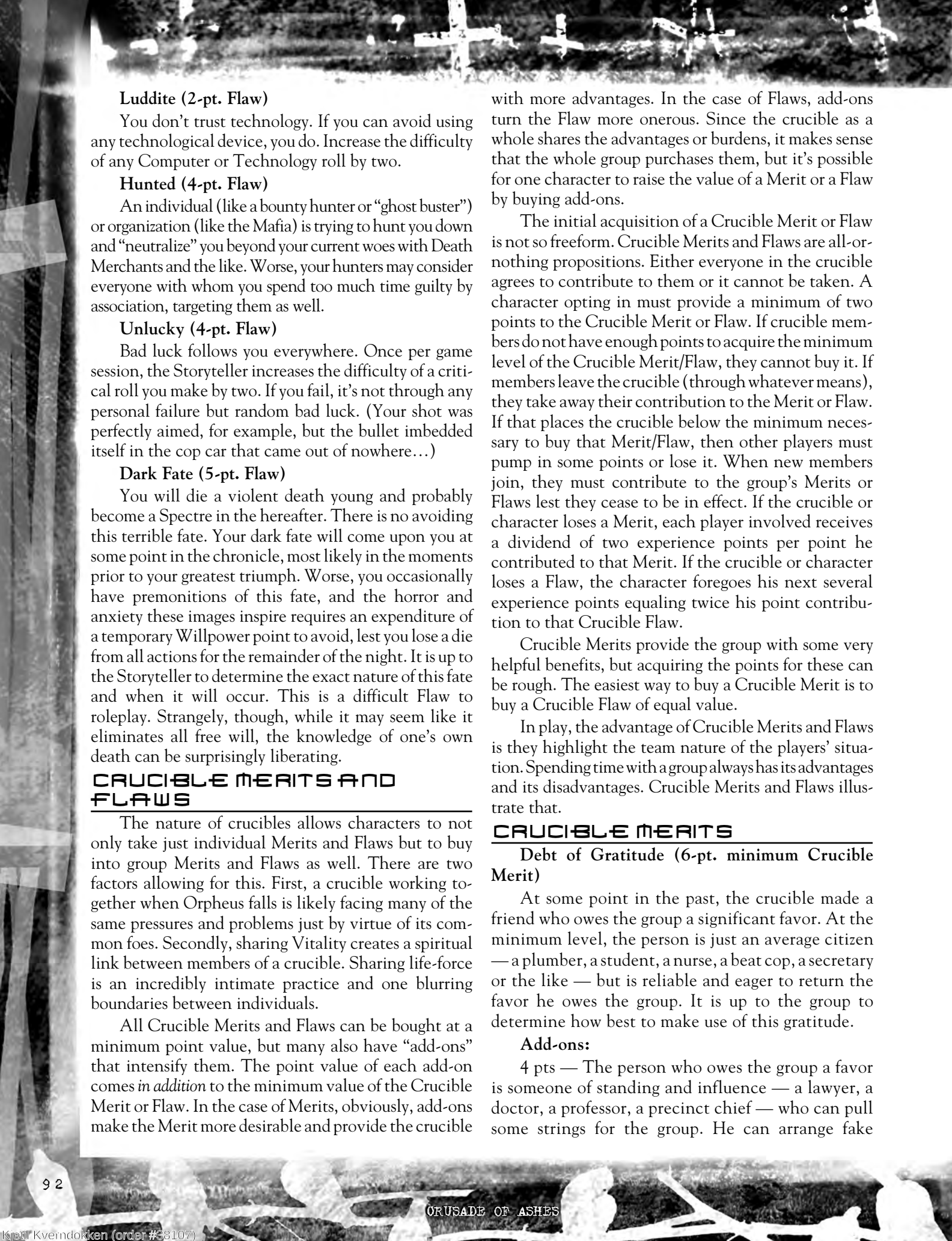
You bear a remarkable likeness to someone else in the nearby community, or vice versa. This might be merely awkward if people regularly approach you assuming you are the other person, but it's also dangerous, especially if your "twin" has a bad reputation or is wanted for a crime of some sort.

No Sense of Direction (1-pt. Flaw)

Turning around in a circle is enough to get you lost. Increase the difficulty of all rolls by two when they involve following directions, reading a map or making your way through all but the most familiar territory.

Parent (1-pt. Flaw)

You are the main parental figure for one or more children. You love your kids and take pride in being a good parent, but the things you've become entangled in lately take a hefty toll on your ability to raise your children the way you want. If your various misadventures require you to go for three days without seeing your children, the guilt and anxiety builds up until it's almost intolerable. After three days away from your children, you no longer gain one point of Willpower at the beginning of each day. Furthermore, if you haven't arranged for another suitable adult to watch them, the Department of Child Services or similar agency may pay you a visit.



Luddite (2-pt. Flaw)

You don't trust technology. If you can avoid using any technological device, you do. Increase the difficulty of any Computer or Technology roll by two.

Hunted (4-pt. Flaw)

An individual (like a bounty hunter or "ghost buster") or organization (like the Mafia) is trying to hunt you down and "neutralize" you beyond your current woes with Death Merchants and the like. Worse, your hunters may consider everyone with whom you spend too much time guilty by association, targeting them as well.

Unlucky (4-pt. Flaw)

Bad luck follows you everywhere. Once per game session, the Storyteller increases the difficulty of a critical roll you make by two. If you fail, it's not through any personal failure but random bad luck. (Your shot was perfectly aimed, for example, but the bullet imbedded itself in the cop car that came out of nowhere...)

Dark Fate (5-pt. Flaw)

You will die a violent death young and probably become a Spectre in the hereafter. There is no avoiding this terrible fate. Your dark fate will come upon you at some point in the chronicle, most likely in the moments prior to your greatest triumph. Worse, you occasionally have premonitions of this fate, and the horror and anxiety these images inspire requires an expenditure of a temporary Willpower point to avoid, lest you lose a die from all actions for the remainder of the night. It is up to the Storyteller to determine the exact nature of this fate and when it will occur. This is a difficult Flaw to roleplay. Strangely, though, while it may seem like it eliminates all free will, the knowledge of one's own death can be surprisingly liberating.

CRUCIBLE MERITS AND FLAWS

The nature of crucibles allows characters to not only take just individual Merits and Flaws but to buy into group Merits and Flaws as well. There are two factors allowing for this. First, a crucible working together when Orpheus falls is likely facing many of the same pressures and problems just by virtue of its common foes. Secondly, sharing Vitality creates a spiritual link between members of a crucible. Sharing life-force is an incredibly intimate practice and one blurring boundaries between individuals.

All Crucible Merits and Flaws can be bought at a minimum point value, but many also have "add-ons" that intensify them. The point value of each add-on comes *in addition* to the minimum value of the Crucible Merit or Flaw. In the case of Merits, obviously, add-ons make the Merit more desirable and provide the crucible

with more advantages. In the case of Flaws, add-ons turn the Flaw more onerous. Since the crucible as a whole shares the advantages or burdens, it makes sense that the whole group purchases them, but it's possible for one character to raise the value of a Merit or a Flaw by buying add-ons.

The initial acquisition of a Crucible Merit or Flaw is not so freeform. Crucible Merits and Flaws are all-or-nothing propositions. Either everyone in the crucible agrees to contribute to them or it cannot be taken. A character opting in must provide a minimum of two points to the Crucible Merit or Flaw. If crucible members do not have enough points to acquire the minimum level of the Crucible Merit/Flaw, they cannot buy it. If members leave the crucible (through whatever means), they take away their contribution to the Merit or Flaw. If that places the crucible below the minimum necessary to buy that Merit/Flaw, then other players must pump in some points or lose it. When new members join, they must contribute to the group's Merits or Flaws lest they cease to be in effect. If the crucible or character loses a Merit, each player involved receives a dividend of two experience points per point he contributed to that Merit. If the crucible or character loses a Flaw, the character foregoes his next several experience points equaling twice his point contribution to that Crucible Flaw.

Crucible Merits provide the group with some very helpful benefits, but acquiring the points for these can be rough. The easiest way to buy a Crucible Merit is to buy a Crucible Flaw of equal value.

In play, the advantage of Crucible Merits and Flaws is they highlight the team nature of the players' situation. Spending time with a group always has its advantages and its disadvantages. Crucible Merits and Flaws illustrate that.

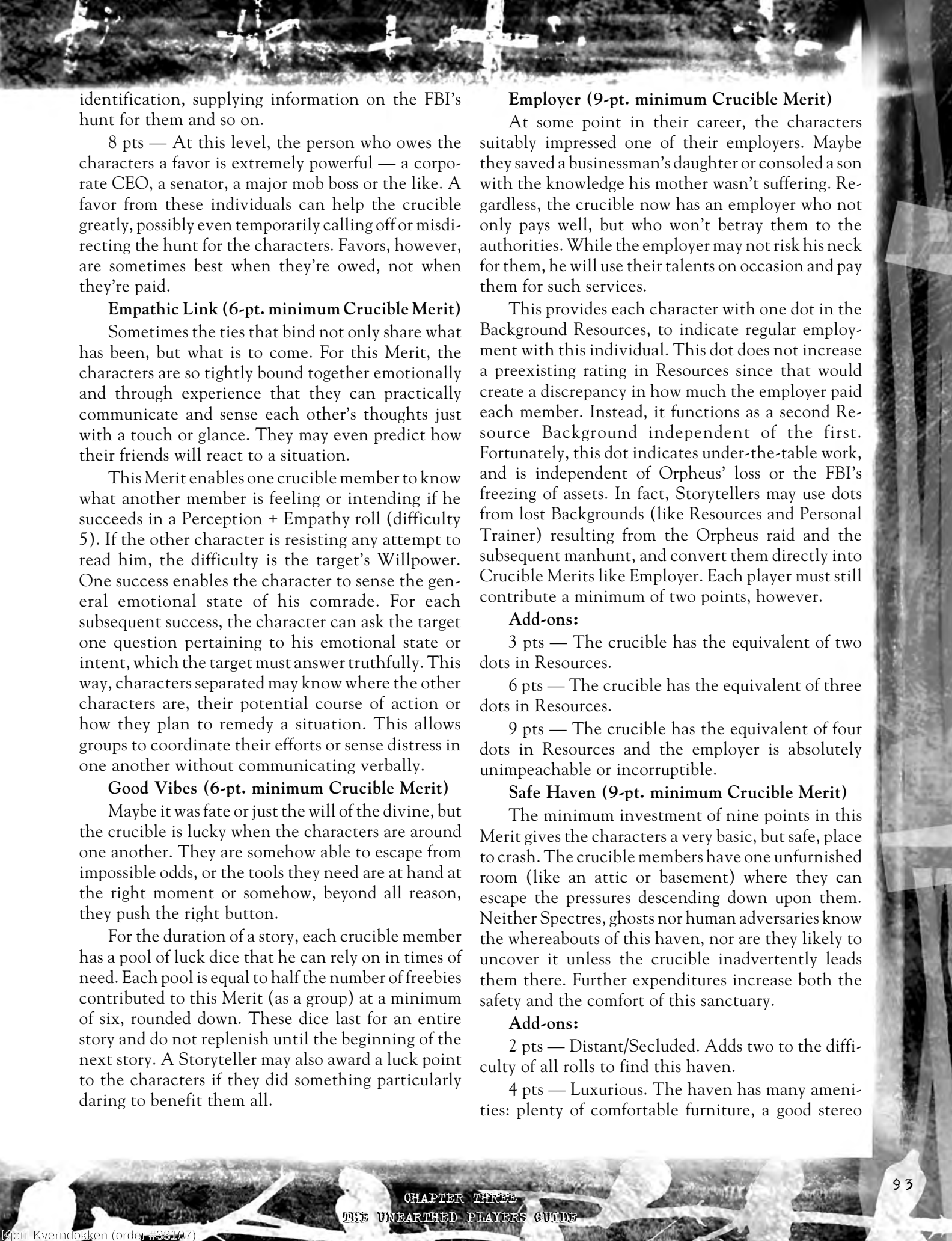
CRUCIBLE MERITS

Debt of Gratitude (6-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

At some point in the past, the crucible made a friend who owes the group a significant favor. At the minimum level, the person is just an average citizen — a plumber, a student, a nurse, a beat cop, a secretary or the like — but is reliable and eager to return the favor he owes the group. It is up to the group to determine how best to make use of this gratitude.

Add-ons:

4 pts — The person who owes the group a favor is someone of standing and influence — a lawyer, a doctor, a professor, a precinct chief — who can pull some strings for the group. He can arrange fake



identification, supplying information on the FBI's hunt for them and so on.

8 pts — At this level, the person who owes the characters a favor is extremely powerful — a corporate CEO, a senator, a major mob boss or the like. A favor from these individuals can help the crucible greatly, possibly even temporarily calling off or misdirecting the hunt for the characters. Favors, however, are sometimes best when they're owed, not when they're paid.

Empathic Link (6-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

Sometimes the ties that bind not only share what has been, but what is to come. For this Merit, the characters are so tightly bound together emotionally and through experience that they can practically communicate and sense each other's thoughts just with a touch or glance. They may even predict how their friends will react to a situation.

This Merit enables one crucible member to know what another member is feeling or intending if he succeeds in a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 5). If the other character is resisting any attempt to read him, the difficulty is the target's Willpower. One success enables the character to sense the general emotional state of his comrade. For each subsequent success, the character can ask the target one question pertaining to his emotional state or intent, which the target must answer truthfully. This way, characters separated may know where the other characters are, their potential course of action or how they plan to remedy a situation. This allows groups to coordinate their efforts or sense distress in one another without communicating verbally.

Good Vibes (6-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

Maybe it was fate or just the will of the divine, but the crucible is lucky when the characters are around one another. They are somehow able to escape from impossible odds, or the tools they need are at hand at the right moment or somehow, beyond all reason, they push the right button.

For the duration of a story, each crucible member has a pool of luck dice that he can rely on in times of need. Each pool is equal to half the number of freebies contributed to this Merit (as a group) at a minimum of six, rounded down. These dice last for an entire story and do not replenish until the beginning of the next story. A Storyteller may also award a luck point to the characters if they did something particularly daring to benefit them all.

Employer (9-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

At some point in their career, the characters suitably impressed one of their employers. Maybe they saved a businessman's daughter or consoled a son with the knowledge his mother wasn't suffering. Regardless, the crucible now has an employer who not only pays well, but who won't betray them to the authorities. While the employer may not risk his neck for them, he will use their talents on occasion and pay them for such services.

This provides each character with one dot in the Background Resources, to indicate regular employment with this individual. This dot does not increase a preexisting rating in Resources since that would create a discrepancy in how much the employer paid each member. Instead, it functions as a second Resource Background independent of the first. Fortunately, this dot indicates under-the-table work, and is independent of Orpheus' loss or the FBI's freezing of assets. In fact, Storytellers may use dots from lost Backgrounds (like Resources and Personal Trainer) resulting from the Orpheus raid and the subsequent manhunt, and convert them directly into Crucible Merits like Employer. Each player must still contribute a minimum of two points, however.

Add-ons:

3 pts — The crucible has the equivalent of two dots in Resources.

6 pts — The crucible has the equivalent of three dots in Resources.

9 pts — The crucible has the equivalent of four dots in Resources and the employer is absolutely unimpeachable or incorruptible.

Safe Haven (9-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

The minimum investment of nine points in this Merit gives the characters a very basic, but safe, place to crash. The crucible members have one unfurnished room (like an attic or basement) where they can escape the pressures descending down upon them. Neither Spectres, ghosts nor human adversaries know the whereabouts of this haven, nor are they likely to uncover it unless the crucible inadvertently leads them there. Further expenditures increase both the safety and the comfort of this sanctuary.

Add-ons:

2 pts — Distant/Secluded. Adds two to the difficulty of all rolls to find this haven.

4 pts — Luxurious. The haven has many amenities: plenty of comfortable furniture, a good stereo



system, high-speed internet connection, pool, ample space, etc.

8 pts — Safe Haven. At some point in its history, the location was “sanctified” somehow. Neither Spectres nor spooks can breach the perimeter, and they must use an open door or even an invitation, to enter.

10 pts — Sanctuary. No spook or Spectre can even breach this location through open doors and windows. In fact, the characters can only enter when in their *own* bodies, or if specifically invited in by someone living.

Lives Shared (10-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

Vitality is life. In the world of *Orpheus* it represents memories, emotions and feelings. Normally a crucible of spooks can share these things on a superficial level, just using them to fuel their normal abilities and enhance their Horrors. This crucible is closer than that, however. Through the anchors of Vitality, a crucible member can impart a portion of his life experiences with another crucible member, showing her how to accomplish something as though she’s actually skilled in the matter.

In effect, this Merit allows crucible member to share Abilities. For each Vitality point spent, a crucible member can share one dot in an Ability with another member. Someone with no experience in guns, for example, can

borrow a dot in Firearms from a fellow crucible character. This is temporary, lasting only for a scene before the spook forgets what he learned.

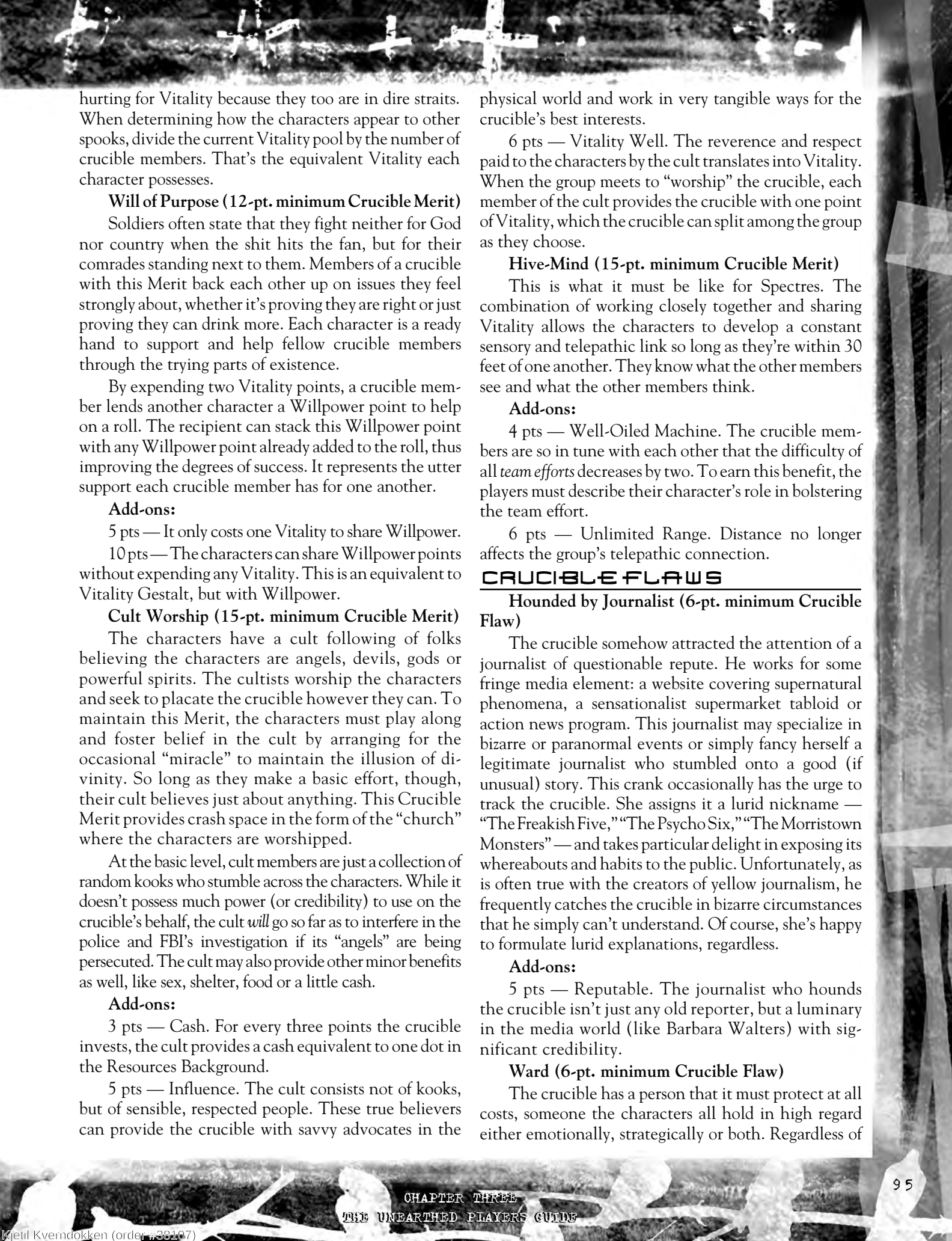
Add-ons:

5 pts — The crucible is more connected then before. Spending a point of Vitality allows a spook to impart two dots in one Ability to another crucible member for a scene.

10 pts — At this level, the spooks are so intertwined that they are reflections of one another. This allows them to share Attributes. For each point of Vitality spent, a character can impart an Attribute dot to another crucible member for a scene. The lender, however, loses those dots for the duration of the scene.

Vitality Gestalt (12-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

The Vitality boundaries of each crucible member are so open that individuals no longer have their own Vitality supply, but an equal fraction of a shared pool. If the crucible contains four individuals, they all pool their Vitality rating into a single reservoir and draw from it. Therefore, individual members (including hues) no longer have caps or a limit equivalent on health. The group shares in Vitality and the capacity for injury as well as in other benefits like the rewards for rescuing ghosts or inputting Willpower to recover Vitality. In this light, spooks are also fully aware when their comrades are



hurting for Vitality because they too are in dire straits. When determining how the characters appear to other spooks, divide the current Vitality pool by the number of crucible members. That's the equivalent Vitality each character possesses.

Will of Purpose (12-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

Soldiers often state that they fight neither for God nor country when the shit hits the fan, but for their comrades standing next to them. Members of a crucible with this Merit back each other up on issues they feel strongly about, whether it's proving they are right or just proving they can drink more. Each character is a ready hand to support and help fellow crucible members through the trying parts of existence.

By expending two Vitality points, a crucible member lends another character a Willpower point to help on a roll. The recipient can stack this Willpower point with any Willpower point already added to the roll, thus improving the degrees of success. It represents the utter support each crucible member has for one another.

Add-ons:

5 pts — It only costs one Vitality to share Willpower.

10 pts — The characters can share Willpower points without expending any Vitality. This is an equivalent to Vitality Gestalt, but with Willpower.

Cult Worship (15-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

The characters have a cult following of folks believing the characters are angels, devils, gods or powerful spirits. The cultists worship the characters and seek to placate the crucible however they can. To maintain this Merit, the characters must play along and foster belief in the cult by arranging for the occasional "miracle" to maintain the illusion of divinity. So long as they make a basic effort, though, their cult believes just about anything. This Crucible Merit provides crash space in the form of the "church" where the characters are worshipped.

At the basic level, cult members are just a collection of random kooks who stumble across the characters. While it doesn't possess much power (or credibility) to use on the crucible's behalf, the cult *will* go so far as to interfere in the police and FBI's investigation if its "angels" are being persecuted. The cult may also provide other minor benefits as well, like sex, shelter, food or a little cash.

Add-ons:

3 pts — Cash. For every three points the crucible invests, the cult provides a cash equivalent to one dot in the Resources Background.

5 pts — Influence. The cult consists not of kooks, but of sensible, respected people. These true believers can provide the crucible with savvy advocates in the

physical world and work in very tangible ways for the crucible's best interests.

6 pts — Vitality Well. The reverence and respect paid to the characters by the cult translates into Vitality. When the group meets to "worship" the crucible, each member of the cult provides the crucible with one point of Vitality, which the crucible can split among the group as they choose.

Hive-Mind (15-pt. minimum Crucible Merit)

This is what it must be like for Spectres. The combination of working closely together and sharing Vitality allows the characters to develop a constant sensory and telepathic link so long as they're within 30 feet of one another. They know what the other members see and what the other members think.

Add-ons:

4 pts — Well-Oiled Machine. The crucible members are so in tune with each other that the difficulty of all *team efforts* decreases by two. To earn this benefit, the players must describe their character's role in bolstering the team effort.

6 pts — Unlimited Range. Distance no longer affects the group's telepathic connection.

CRUCIBLE FLAWS

Hounded by Journalist (6-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

The crucible somehow attracted the attention of a journalist of questionable repute. He works for some fringe media element: a website covering supernatural phenomena, a sensationalist supermarket tabloid or action news program. This journalist may specialize in bizarre or paranormal events or simply fancy herself a legitimate journalist who stumbled onto a good (if unusual) story. This crank occasionally has the urge to track the crucible. She assigns it a lurid nickname — "The Freakish Five," "The Psycho Six," "The Morristown Monsters" — and takes particular delight in exposing its whereabouts and habits to the public. Unfortunately, as is often true with the creators of yellow journalism, he frequently catches the crucible in bizarre circumstances that he simply can't understand. Of course, she's happy to formulate lurid explanations, regardless.

Add-ons:

5 pts — Reputable. The journalist who hounds the crucible isn't just any old reporter, but a luminary in the media world (like Barbara Walters) with significant credibility.

Ward (6-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

The crucible has a person that it must protect at all costs, someone the characters all hold in high regard either emotionally, strategically or both. Regardless of



the circumstance, leaving this person behind is not an option. The ward may be a character's family member beloved by the crucible, a child found on the streets, a gang of rebellious teens or the living body of a sleeper who simply never returned.

Add-ons:

4 pts — The person cannot move easily on her own. Maybe it's someone's grandmother who can't leave her nursing home, a wheelchair-bound friend or the aforementioned ally stuck in the sleeper pod. Easy mobility is not an option, and moving this person requires some logistical preparation and time.

6 pts — The person is in fact a group of people, whether it's a group of children from an orphanage or patients in a hospital or an entire family. Defending these people is difficult, and they will not change locations easily.

Entanglements (9-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

During an Orpheus assignment, the characters were caught doing something illegal or immoral. Maybe they stole from the company contracting them, or they sold vital and proprietary information. Regardless, the victims in this case are quite upset with the crucible, and willing to use their evidence to blackmail the crucible into working for them.

The crucible is essentially on the bad side of a large corporation (or very influential person) that is willing to use any and all means to locate the crucible should the characters elude them. This adversary will happily sell the crucible down the river if it suits his purposes, but for now, finds more use for the characters as lackeys. The adversary may even "lend" the characters out to allies, forcing them to partake in dangerous raids or purely demeaning work. To prevent the characters from easily using their powers to end this threat, the blackmailer must be prepared to deal with the crucible as spooks. Maybe he is a spook, or he simply employs one. Maybe he operates through proxies and dozens of red herrings. Maybe the evidence is somewhere out there, floating around, waiting to fall into the wrong hands in case something happens to the employer.

Add-ons:

6 pts — The blackmailer not only has the crucible under his thumb, but many family members and friends as well — having invested some time and money in acquiring extra information.

Homeless (9-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

The Death Merchants and authorities know where the characters live, rendering them homeless. The characters must abandon children, spouses, family and friends

to keep them safe. Marriages will likely suffer, children grow alienated from parents, friendships end quietly, and lives shudder to a halt. The group must quickly find shelter and hope to end this imposed exile; otherwise, home is a four-letter word.

Inadvertent Haunting (9-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

When the crucible works together as a team, the strings of reality gum up a bit and weird, small phenomena manifest around you: radios go on the fritz, physical items fall over, the power fails, flames turn blue, et cetera. Not only does this add two to the difficulty of Stealth rolls for all members of your crucible, but it tends to capture the attention of those you'd rather not have poking around.

Add-on:

6 pts — Pyro. When the stress levels in your group increase (combat, group dissent, etc.), small, flammable items in your immediate vicinity have a tendency to catch fire with results ranging from distraction to arson charges.

Revoked Driver's License (9-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

Thanks to the FBI limiting the crucible's flight capabilities, the characters' drivers licenses are all revoked. While characters can still drive, if the police pull them over, they will attempt to arrest the characters, giving foes a chance to strike in a vulnerable moment. Storytellers should note that this Flaw exists because the FBI has revoked the characters' driver's licenses. That said, the Storyteller isn't obliged to grant the crucible this Flaw since obtaining a false license or new one under another name circumvents the issue.

Stalked (9-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

The crucible attracted the unhealthy attentions of someone. The individual may be physical or a ghost, but he stalks the group and may leave little clues to show he knows where the characters are and what they're doing. If provoked, he may pursue petty destructive actions against the crucible (slashing their car tires, breaking windows, informing the police of their whereabouts, etc.). The Storyteller generates the stalker's stats and determines what the stalker's motivations are (possibly linking it to a former case or client). On some occasions, when the crucible pursues action besides staying at home quietly, the Storyteller makes a Perception test on the characters' behalf (difficulty 6). With a failure or botch, the stalker successfully tails the crucible throughout the night and may even appear at an ill-opportune moment. The Storyteller should not use the stalker at every opportunity, because frustrated characters will eventually deal with him in the nastiest fashion possible.

Add-ons:

6 pts — Spectre. Your stalker is no mere obsessed individual, but a malice-maddened Spectre. Due to the Spectre's connection to the hive-mind, anything it witnesses, the local Spectres share. Worse, Spectral stalkers are *always* malicious and will do anything in their power to hurt or kill the crucible or loved ones.

Wanted by Law Enforcement (9-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

The authorities are looking for you, ostensibly in connection with your alleged role in the destruction of Orpheus or with one of many uncovered illegal cases. Again, this is Storyteller optional.

Add-ons:

4 pts — America's Most Wanted. The crucible members are defamed on national television with their pictures plastered across the screens of millions of televisions. Worse, the program treated the audience to bad actors portraying the crucible members destroying Orpheus headquarters or engaging in black ops.

5 pts — Public Enemy. The characters are *so* wanted that the Department of Justice placed them on the public enemies list. Their faces are displayed in post offices and police stations. If someone spots the characters, authorities will quickly flock to their location with snipers and SWAT teams in tow to apprehend or kill the crucible.

Bleed Over (10-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

Not all emotions are positive. In Orpheus, Vitality represents the positive flow of life. Spite, however, is that negative ebb that sometimes bleeds into people's everyday actions. For some reason the characters have a hard time sharing Vitality without sharing the more negative aspects of their existence... Spite. In the group, anger and resentment is a very tangible force between the members, thus Spite is not given — life isn't that easy — it just burdens.

For every two points of Vitality shared, whether cumulatively, in one shot or from multiple characters, the recipient must roll one die (difficulty 8). A success means the recipient character somehow earns a Spite point. This Spite point is not traded between characters, it is simply the result of resentment and anger building up within the group.

Add-ons:

5 pts — The difficulty to gain a Spite point decreases by two.

10 pts — Not only is the difficulty 6, but the characters must roll for each Vitality traded between members.

Internecine Fighting (12-pt. minimum Crucible Flaw)

The crucible is slowly cracking and the cracks are growing wider daily. Somewhere in their history, the characters had a problem that they can't resolve properly. They still fight to this day, and it is straining the crucible's bonds to the breaking point or weighing the characters down like heavy chains.

The players need to pick a matter of contention between their characters. This can be anything from a sexist/racist character to a decision the group was forced to make that never sat right with some members. Regardless, the incident or wedge should split the group. There must be two sides to the argument with half the group taking one side while the other half takes the other. Thus, members on one side of the argument can share Vitality freely with one another, as per normal, but sharing Vitality with a member of the opposition requires a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) in non-lethal circumstances. The donated Vitality will always be minimal as well (one or two points).

Add-ons:

6 pts — The argument is intense. The two factions no longer share Vitality between them regardless of the circumstances. The only reason the group is still together is because survival dictates it.

ARTIFACTS

Some objects in this world inspire feelings or sentiments that seemingly never fade. Maybe it's a teddy bear grandma gave you at birth. You never actually remember her handing it to you, but a feeling of security washes over you every time you see it. You care for and love objects like these over the years you possess them, passing them down to your children or nieces and nephews. Sometimes, however, the object contains not love or security, but pain or bitterness. Something about the object brought misery to several people, a despair so great that it radiates ill intent in every curve. Whether loved or hated, the object eventually falls along the way, utterly destroyed by an event or over time. You couldn't save the bear when the old house burned down, or the assassin's handgun was destroyed following a guns-for-toys exchange. You'd think that's the end of the object, its presence now relegated to imperfect memories.

Wrong.

Some objects are like ghosts, carrying such a potent emotional resonance that they persist after destruction, falling between life's grates and existing purely as gauze. The objects are akin to ghosts, merely blips, pale reflections of the material that they once were. They can be brought back to life, as it were, with a little boost to reinvigorate their purpose.



Artifacts are those objects that persist as gauze, looking like pale and faded shades of their former selves. They appear aged and broken, as though the march of time trod over them repeatedly. A beloved picture may be blurry and spotted and stained by age; a teddy bear, gray and threadbare, while still malleable, it isn't even soft; a gun appears rusted and pitted, the drum barely moving and the trigger unyielding. Spooks, however, can infuse these items with Vitality, bringing them back to working order and, sometimes, functioning with powers beyond that of their normal existence.

CONSTRUCTION

Building an artifact is an easy process from a rule's standpoint, allowing not only a Storyteller to add dimension about their chronicle, but enabling a character to possess equipment when out of body. As stated previously, an artifact is an item empowered by emotion during its physical life span. The object can be anything, as long as it meant a great something to its owner or sparked some tremendous emotional response in others. When the item is destroyed through whatever means, it leaves behind an echo, a gauze doppelganger whose matrix is held together by the emotional infusion. Eventually, without a consciousness sustaining it, the item bleeds gauze slowly, gradually fading over time. The only way to offset this is to infuse it with Vitality. Otherwise, it'll fade in a matter of minutes, hours, days, months or years. The stronger the emotional attachment, the longer the item lasts.

STEP ONE

The first step in creating an artifact is deciding the nature of the item. A artifact can be anything from a solitary piece of paper to a car. Just ask yourself, how does it serve me? As a player you should consider how this object will be useful to your character, what it means to her and, perhaps most importantly, why did the object maintain a cohesive echo after its physical destruction. The Storyteller must decide if the item helps in developing the story and evaluate the chance of the player abusing it. For this, the Storyteller may either create the item himself or allow the player to create it for his character after Storyteller and player discuss the particulars of the artifact. What does it do? Why does it exist? What is its significance? What are the potential abuses of the item's power? All these are important questions before the items even comes into play.

Once that's done, it's time to create the item. Possible artifacts include:

Melee: Swords, Daggers, Clubs, Knives, Pipes

Ranged Weapons: Bows, Firearms, Slings

Nostalgia: Photographs, Clothing, Mementos, Jewelry, Toys

Functional: Cars, Computers, Tools, Keys, Radios, Televisions

Pain: Scalpel, Flail, Duct Tape, Needles, Syringe, Pliers

STEP TWO

The second step involves creating the artifact's history. Where did the item come from? What made it so important? Why did it survive? What emotional significance did people attach to it? And why? Of all the steps, this is perhaps the most important, because it provides clues for both the artifact's power and the backdrop for its existence. This backdrop, in turn, serves as a potential story hook for adventures and story arcs. What if there's a Spectre searching for this artifact, or the item is actually someone's tether that must be destroyed to set him free? The Storyteller need not reveal the item's history (complete or in part) if it suits the story. Like any good mystery, the history should reveal itself in snippets and parts. Even if the Storyteller allows the player to create the item and its history independently, the item's background should remain incomplete enough that the Storyteller knows the true origins of the artifact.

STEP THREE

By giving an item a history of its own, you automatically lend it some significance for its continued presence. Step Three involves defining those qualities that sustained the artifact after its destruction. As creator of the item you must dictate which emotions sustained it past its material state. All artifacts are grounded in one or more emotions, even though one passion serves as the principle sentiment. This emotional impetus is the foundation of the item's continued existence, fueling its presence. A teddy bear may exist on love, a knife on hate or a set of keys on envy. Every artifact must have a driving emotion behind it.

Examples of potential emotions include:

Love: Those artifacts infused with love generally come in two forms; either they inspire it or they perpetuate it. Inspiration tends to leave more artifacts behind then perpetuation, if only because people keep them longer since they establish a marking point in someone's life. These artifacts can be almost anything, from a computer used to trade romantic emails to the first rose presented on the foundation of an affair that was later preserved. Most



items created with love maintain their meaning after their loss. They are generally non-violent and inspirational. To put it one way, love heals all wounds.

Joy: Energetic, invigorating and, often, infectious, artifacts based on joy inspired someone to the innocent happiness of life. They might be a tired old book that was dog-eared and re-read, a child's first set of blocks or a picture of a baby treasured by a mother. These objects tend to radiate that invigorating spirit once empowered again.

Selflessness: Usually believed the sole domain of the religious, these objects epitomize self-sacrifice and piety. They include things like a monk's treasured wooden rosary, an Orthodox icon of the Virgin Mary or a farewell letter of a dead war hero to his spouse. They inspire feelings of wonder and humility.

Hope: Strength, longing and faith are all the domain of hope. Objects inspiring hope in people may seem strange when they appear in gauze form, but they served someone's optimism. A bronzed set of baby shoes, a fireman's helmet or an author's personal copy of his first novel. These items typically accomplish the wondrous despite their practically mundane appearance.

Perseverance: The ability to survive despite the downfalls, the ability to go the distance and the sense of accomplishment after a string of failures all speak of perseverance. Items fueled by perseverance seem to be the tools of the working man. The tool set a struggling mechanic used all his life, a writer's typewriter and the baseball glove of an aspiring big leaguer all radiate a resolve somehow appropriate to their continued presence after their destruction.

Compassion: Forgiving, loving, encouraging and wishful... compassion comprises all these qualities. Whether a mother hen instinct demands you save others from hardship or a need to buoy your own flagging esteem by helping others compels you, both are measures of compassion. Items so infused are items of giving or helping (a ladle used for years in a soup kitchen, a collection plate from church or a jacket given to a freezing child...). Even after falling from the sight of the living they remain as items that bring comfort and inspiration to others, even if dead.

Pride: Whether born of satisfaction for a job well done or from arrogance in one's own ability, artifacts of pride are those treasured for a sense of earning or accomplishment. They can be things like the classic car built from scratch over several years, an old football trophy or a college's letter of acceptance. These objects express feelings of satisfaction and triumph.

Hate: The utter distaste or disdain for something or someone. When an artifact comes about through hate,

the acts responsible are usually violent. These objects express anger, distrust and wrath. Artifacts of hate might include a serial killer's knife, a swastika pendent or a club used to beat protestors. These items radiate pain and suffering, with the anger stemming from the owner or the object's victims.

Lust: Physical need, want, desires and base animal instincts are realms of lust, though the pivotal emotion is often power or control. Artifacts of this caliber are those used in the realization of one's lustful ambitions, but those that persist are those used in violence. A dominatrix trusted flail, a child-molester's roll of duct tape or the toy he used to lure children into his car. Pain, suffering, raw urge, anger, confusion and sadness all radiate from these artifacts.

Greed: Artifacts of greed are either those kept for long periods of time just to be spiteful or those stolen from others. They are either useless knickknacks important to someone else — kept just for the raw power of denying someone happiness — or items of true worth. Examples might include a notice of foreclosure, a valuable baseball card or a gold-plated timepiece.

Envy: Envy is like lust and greed, in that it is all about coveting. What sets envy apart, however, is the desire to have someone or something not your own, while denying others the same item or success. Related artifacts are generally expensive or important, and in great, if not desperate, demand. They are also generally unique or hard to obtain. A mint-condition '69 Thunderbird, a diamond engagement ring and a crown for the beauty queen of the state pageant are all such examples. Desperate need always surrounds these objects. A feeling of paranoia may accompany this, with some anger and pain as well.

Anger: Out-and-out rage, blind animosity, destruction, blame, resentment and loss are all potential qualities of anger. Anger is a permeating force in the world, and many of its artifacts come to exist in gauze form. Artifacts of anger are violent and destructive in nature. A gun used in multiple homicides, a baseball bat used by gay-bashers and a belt used to beat children are all potential items.

Sloth: Inactivity, laziness, lassitude and simply sitting on one's ass... Sloth, while not a strong emotion, is much akin to water in that it eventually whittles everything away until nothing is left but a handful of concerns. Objects of sloth are those contributors one commonly finds throughout many homes in America. The reclining chair with a permanent imprint of dad, the computer where the user played on-line games for unwashed days at a time and a deck of cards used for nightly poker games are all related to sloth. These items usually emote a



feeling of idleness and sluggishness, but often have the shortest life span of artifacts in the hereafter.

Gluttony: The abuse of substances or objects for the purpose of self-gratification encompasses gluttony. The drug abuser, the alcoholic or the binge-eater are all examples of voracious individuals, and their items of choice are generally sickening in their uses. A needle circulated throughout a crack house, a bottle of cheap whiskey or someone's favorite chip bowl might propagate as artifacts. These items often radiate a sense of false satisfaction.

Regret: The lamenting of things long lost or avenues never explored. This emotion contains resentment, bitterness, blame and self-loathing, while its items of choice might include a high school yearbook to lament the glory days, little league trophies that never went big league and a pair of crutches following that crippling accident. Often times, if these items exist in the hereafter, it's equally likely a ghost remains tethered to them because the items are a constant reminder of a road lost or never ventured.

STEP FOUR

The fourth step is optional for players, but a must for Storytellers since it involves the duration of the artifact's survival as an echo. When players purchase the Artifact Background, it essentially halts the decay of the item, with the added bonus that it appears when a spook needs it. All other artifacts, however, have a limited existence and remain where the spook last dropped them. If not infused with Vitality the artifact slowly fades from reality, eventually dissipating as do all echoes. A Storyteller must dictate the duration an artifact lasts if the player doesn't purchase it as a Background. This can add a sense of urgency to a game if the artifact is pertinent to a story line and has an immediate shelf life.

It is thus important that the Storyteller provide the item with a duration based on infrequent use (less than twice a week) and another on the overall expiration date where the item fades regardless of the Vitality infused into it. Unfortunately, there are too many variables to dictate the exact length of time an object should survive in the hereafter. Who's to say which emotion holds greater strength or value over another? Who's to say pain lasts longer than joy or that joy is briefer than anger?

Regardless, we can offer a few helpful hints on deciding an item's duration:

Singular, Minor: If the item affected only one person in the course of a few years, it's unlikely to survive

outside one week without usage and one month with regular usage.

Singular, Important: If the item affected one person over the course of decades, or was part of a profound life change, then the item may last for one to three months without usage or three to six months at the outside.

Singular, Significant: Although the item affected only one person, if that person affected the lives of other people (though the item remained an indirect factor), then the item may last for six months to a year if neglected or up to three years with usage.

Multiple, Minor: A small item that touched more than one person for a few years apiece has a moderately increased life span. Each person who this minor item touched extends the item's life span by one week without usage or one month for continued use.

Multiple, Important: The item affected several people, each over the course of decades, or was a minor family heirloom. If neglected, the item's shelf-life increased by three months for each person or generation it affected. With regular usage, the item will expire after six months (per person or generation it touched).

Multiple, Significant: This item is a storytelling device, and expires when the Storyteller sees fit. Normally, it would last for decades, and thus commands importance in the afterlife, having already served more than one ghost.

Naturally, the following recommendations are just that. The Storyteller can decrease an item's shelf life, claiming the item had already suffered neglect when the characters found it, or that the emotions infusing it had waned in its twilight years. For every week the artifact was infused with less than two Vitality, it loses a week from its overall existence.

STEP FIVE

The final step is determining powers. For an artifact to function, even the basest item must receive an investment of one Vitality point (except for those purchased as a Background). A knife will not have an actual edge without the Vitality invested; a picture is just a pale gray blur, while a car sits there like so much rock. Some items require more than one Vitality point to be functional, for which they last the duration of a scene. Some artifacts also gain additional properties once invested with Vitality, or they may simply exhibit some of its original capabilities — an artifact computer may possibly connect to the Internet. Conversely, they may demonstrate powers completely

supernatural in nature, like bestowing the use of certain Horrors. A good rule of thumb to follow when creating an artifact is that for every die of effects an artifact elicits, it costs an extra Vitality to empower. The following is a sample chart to determine how much Vitality it costs to activate certain powers.

Vitality Suggested Functions

- 1 General functions involving non-electronic effects or +2 to Abilities
- 2 General electric functions, a base Vitality Horror or +3 to Abilities
- 3 Specialized electric functions (web-surfing), two Vitality point Horror effect, +4 to Abilities or +1 to Attributes
- 4 Intricate mechanic/electric operations (a car), three Vitality point Horror effect, +5 to Abilities or +2 to an Attribute
- 5 A four Vitality point Horror effect, +6 to Abilities or +3 to Attributes
- 6 A five Vitality point Horror effect or +4 to Attributes

BACKGROUND VS. ITEM

Because it's possible to find artifacts lying around, there must be an advantage to purchasing artifacts in Background form, and there are. Background artifacts have three distinct advantages to reflect their unique nature. 1) They possess no shelf life regardless of the Vitality expended. 2) They cost no Vitality to empower or use. 3) They appear and vanish only at the user's behest (meaning they can't be stolen, and can reappear wherever the character may project or venture).

Conversely, normal artifacts will eventually dissipate, they do require Vitality to extend their survival (and use), and they remain where they were last left. Essentially, the character can't summon the item when in spook form. Why the difference? Because with Background artifacts, something exists in their very nature that strikes a sympathetic cord with the character. It latches into him, becoming part of the character. Essentially, the item is part of the character and formed from his very gauze when he "summons" it. The item's duration, in this case, is that of the character's existence.

THE TOOL BOX

Following the description of each item are the artifact's stats. They are:

Powers: The item's capabilities.

Normal Duration: The length of time the artifact lasts without Vitality infusions before losing its cohesion. Does not apply if the artifact is purchased as Background: Artifact.

Expiration: The item's ultimate shelf life, even with weekly infusions of Vitality. Remember that for every week the item does not receive a minimum of two Vitality, it loses a week off its expiration. Does not apply if the artifact is purchased as Background: Artifact.

Emotional Resonance: The emotion responsible for maintaining the item's cohesion.

Vitality Cost: The Vitality required to reinvigorate the artifact, eliciting its effects. Some items have multiple uses, enabling the characters to infuse it partially for one effect or another. (All the Vitality costs are based on the chart mentioned in the previous section.) Does not apply if the artifact is purchased as Background: Artifact.

Equivalent Background: If purchased as a Background, the item's "level." Each Artifact Background dot represents only one item, though players can purchase the Background multiple times (with Storyteller approval) to reflect multiple items.

BABY BLOCKS

A collection of three blocks, with the paint rubbed off and the wood dull gray. They appear as though they've been submerged in water for a long time. When infused with Vitality, the paint shines to a high gloss, and the items radiate joy. They were the treasured toys of a child who wreaked havoc by throwing them around.

Powers: Helter Skelter (four Vitality point effect)

Normal Duration: Two months

Expiration: Six months

Emotional Resonance: Joy

Vitality Cost: 5

Equivalent Background: Three dots

BABY'S PICTURE

This artifact appears as nothing more than a horribly faded picture when first discovered. When infused with Vitality, however, it clearly shows a black-and-white photo of a smiling baby. The baby picture can belong to anyone necessary to a story arc, serving as a Storyteller clue or hook.

Powers: Empathic link that reveals an event like a murder or accident or someone's identity. Otherwise grants one Willpower point every session.

Normal Duration: One week

Expiration: One month

Emotional Resonance: Regret or Joy

Vitality Cost: 1

Equivalent Background: One dot if it grants a Willpower point, otherwise it's a prop.

BASEBALL BAT

A well-oiled piece of prime pine timber. This is a Louisville Slugger of decent heft. It has a few nicks and cuts but is most definitely serviceable. Sometimes, when used, it bears a faint sheen of blood. Used by a neo-Nazi to beat several members of visible minorities to death.

Powers: +2 dice to Melee, Juggernaut (one Vitality point effect)

Normal Duration: Three months

Expiration: Six months

Emotional Resonance: Hate

Vitality Cost: 3

Equivalent Background: Two dots

BERETTA 9MM

Looking like a cheap knockoff, the Beretta's dull and unattractive nature vanishes when someone invests it with Vitality. The gun, returned to pristine condition, is an exemplar of its make and radiates a terrible anger. This gun claimed many gang members during various turf wars.

Powers: Unending gauze bullets (Use Congeal's rules, but without Vitality costs.)

Normal Duration: One year

Expiration: Three years

Emotional Resonance: Anger

Vitality Cost: 3

Equivalent Background: Two dots

COMPUTER

A dusty old and outdated PC, but beggars can't be choosers. When invested with Vitality it glows a subdued yellow when the screen lights up and awaits commands. Somehow, it is capable of connecting to the Internet as well. Served as a young man's link to his distant family and eventually resulted in an on-line romance that led to marriage.

Powers: Standard computer capabilities including connecting to the Internet.

Normal Duration: Six months

Expiration: One year

Emotional Resonance: Love

Vitality Cost: 3

Equivalent Background: One dot

CRACK SPOON

This tarnished and bent spoon remains so even after infused with Vitality. In either state, the bottom of the spoon appears scorched with burn marks. Crippling need, paranoia and euphoria all radiate from this artifact, which is appropriate given its history as drug paraphernalia for a crack house. Because the spoon also has a negative effect, it costs less Vitality to use.

Powers: +2 dots to Stamina, -2 dots to Perception (to a minimum of one dot)

Normal Duration: One month

Expiration: Three months

Emotional Resonance: Gluttony

Vitality Cost: 2

Equivalent Background: One dot

DECK OF CARDS

Worn and abused, all the cards are present even though they're difficult to read. When invested with Vitality, they resume their original luster. A group of men who wasted their lives and money on gambling once played with this deck constantly.

Powers: Forebode (three Vitality point effect), +2 dice to Subterfuge

Normal Duration: Three months

Expiration: Six months

Emotional Resonance: Sloth

Vitality Cost: 5

Equivalent Background: Four dots

DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RING

Initially missing the diamonds and appearing battered, Vitality returns the gemstones and beauty to their original, store-bought state. This artifact was involved in a love triangle for one man's love. When one woman finally won out over the other, she paid for it with her life. The diamond ring remained with the jilted lover as a keepsake.

Powers: Wail (five Vitality point effect)

Normal Duration: One year

Expiration: Three years

Emotional Resonance: Envy

Vitality Cost: 6

Equivalent Background: Four dots

THE MONTGOMERY BEAR

A small, battered teddy bear. It appears well loved, if not worn. It's missing one button-eye, patches of its fur are thinning, and its sawdust innards slowly leak out one corner.



Powers: +2 dice to Empathy, Forebode (one Vitality point effect)

Normal Duration: One year

Expiration: Three years

Emotional Resonance: Joy

Vitality Cost: 3

Equivalent Background: Three dots

MURDERER'S KNIFE

A common bowie knife used in multiple homicides. It appears dull and gray normally, but when infused with Vitality, it radiates pain and suffering. Sometimes it appears covered in blood, while other times, a victim's face is etched in the wood.

Powers: Strength + 1, lethal

Normal Duration: One month

Expiration: Three months

Emotional Resonance: Anger

Vitality Cost: 1

Equivalent Background: One dot

PROM QUEEN'S TIARA

A diamond tiara passed down from prom queen to prom queen over the decades. Hailing as far back as the '60s, this diminutive crown has been the desire of many young ladies in town before the last Miss Runner-Up melted it down after losing.

Powers: Unearthly Repose (one Vitality point effect)

Normal Duration: Three months

Expiration: Six months

Emotional Resonance: Envy

Vitality Cost: 2

Equivalent Background: Two dots

RADIO

This small handheld radio plays love songs from the '60s when infused with Vitality. It was a pivotal fixture at the beach when a group of high school kids spent two romantic summers sunning, swimming and surfing. A sense of nostalgia and good times filters off the device, calming the most savage of souls.

Powers: Wail (two Vitality point effect; only positive, soothing emotions; won't work on Spectres who hate the beach with a notorious passion)

Normal Duration: Three months

Expiration: Nine months

Emotional Resonance: Love and Joy

Vitality Cost: 3

Equivalent Background: Two dots

trabhold



ROLL OF DUCT TAPE

Initially appears as nothing but a cardboard roll with a few scraps of tape left on it. When infused with Vitality, the roll fills up. The tape appears slimy, however, and using it elicits a nauseous sensation in the stomach. A serial rapist once used this particular roll to bind his victims.

Powers: Immobilize a target

Normal Duration: One week

Expiration: Two months

Emotional Resonance: Lust

Vitality Cost: 1

Equivalent Background: One dot

TOOL BOX

A beaten tool box filled with rusted wrenches and screwdrivers, it doesn't seem useful in the least. With Vitality, however, the tools shine with good maintenance and someone's love. They might serve as weapons in a pinch, but enterprising players and Storytellers might find other uses for them. They could extend the duration of other mechanical artifacts (a form of infusing them with Vitality) or serve to gum up the works of real-world devices like a Spectral monkey wrench.

Powers: As weapons, they serve as clubs; otherwise, when placed inside mechanical objects, they raise the difficulty to operate them by two.

Normal Duration: One month

Expiration: Three months

Emotional Resonance: Perseverance

Vitality Cost: 1 (as weapons), 2 (as bad luck charm)

Equivalent Background: One dot as weapons, two dots as bad luck charm.

'69 THUNDERBIRD

When first seen, it is old, rusted and ruined, most of it in various states of disrepair. When invested with Vitality, it shines with its original luster, practically glowing like it was brand new off the lot. It's painted bright cherry red, and you can hear the engine growl like a proud tiger. This artifact is the work of someone's life, the perseverance to build it and the pride of treasuring it until death.

Powers: Functioning car

Normal Duration: Six months

Expiration: Three years

Emotional Resonance: Pride or Perseverance

Vitality Cost: 4

Equivalent Background: Two dots

SCALPEL

Appearing rusty and dull with disuse, this tiny knife is tarnished and seems completely unusable — the stress would destroy it. Vitality brings it back to its original state, shiny, clean and incredibly sharp. It oozes a sickening combination of pain and lust. This scalpel was a part of a demented plastic surgeon's form of fun. He used it often on his victims — sometimes giving them the changes they wanted, sometimes not.

Powers: Helter Skelter (3 Vitality)

Normal Duration: Two weeks

Expiration: Three months

Emotional Resonance: Lust

Vitality Cost: 4

Equivalent Background: One dot

SMALL PORCELAIN PIG

A small pig made of broken, chipped porcelain, Vitality restores its shine and fixes its cracks. The artifact radiates a sense of security, along with the knowledge of its exact value. This pig is a collectable antique, made in China and owned by a greedy man who never understood the true beauty of his possessions, only their value.

Powers: +2 dice to Finance

Normal Duration: Six months

Expiration: Three years

Emotional Resonance: Greed

Vitality Cost: 1

Equivalent Background: Two dots

SOUP KITCHEN LADLE

A dented and abused steel ladle. Without Vitality, it is discolored and bent out of shape like useless junk. When the characters invest it with Vitality, it returns to its original form of solid stainless steel. A busy soup kitchen used this ladle for years. Here people devoted time to ensuring the homeless and destitute received a good meal.

Powers: +1 dot to Stamina

Normal Duration: One month

Expiration: Three months

Emotional Resonance: Compassion

Vitality Cost: 3

Equivalent Background: Two dots



WOODEN ROSARY

They initially look like a tangled nest of wooden beads on a string, their original purpose almost enigmatic. This artifact is a small, battered rosary, with cracks in the beads and the string nearly falling apart. When infused with Vitality, the beads adopt an inner glow, taking on a polished veneer. Once owned by a devout nun, she spent her life in prayer for the downtrodden.

Powers: Infuses a blip or drone with three Vitality (which empowers them beyond their normal Vitality cap) once per session.

Normal Duration: Three weeks

Expiration: Three months

Emotional Resonance: Selflessness

Vitality Cost: 2

Equivalent Background: One dot



CHAPTER FOUR: STORYTELLING THE DEAD



You're asking me what I fear? I fear the living. I fear the dead. I fear the things that are not dead. Fear has become my definition of reality.

—Kate Dennison, ex-Orpheus Banshee

Everyone will suffer.

—The Ring



Setting a chronicle in the terrifying world of **Orpheus** is a challenge for even veteran Storytellers. On one level, the task for Storytellers is the same as in any White Wolf game — create a believable world filled with dramatic atmosphere, a compelling story line and difficult challenges for players to overcome. As a limited series, however, **Orpheus** breaks the old storytelling paradigm by altering the relationship between the players, their characters and the circumstances in which they find themselves. Players are not the “center of the universe” in **Orpheus**. Rather, as noted in the Introduction and emphasized throughout the core book, the series follows a “movie model” in which the chronicle’s style changes dramatically as the overarching story line moves toward its conclusion.

KILLING THE COMFORT ZONE

To briefly recap the “movie model,” the **Orpheus** limited series emulates the pace and excitement of a Hollywood blockbuster (a good blockbuster, we hope). The first 20 minutes of the film establishes the setting, the characters’ current life situations and introduces the “rules” for the universe. In the core rulebook, players and Storytellers learn all about the **Orpheus** Group, life as an **Orpheus** agent, the different Shades and Laments available to them and the current state of life, death and undeath among the spooks of the World of Darkness. Although several mysteries loom on the horizon, the characters feel they have a secure base from which to explore these questions.

In **Crusade of Ashes**, characters discover just how wrong they are. As in a film, the second 20 minutes begins with a dramatic plot twist that turns the world upside down for the protagonists. In this case, the twist is **Orpheus**’ destruction, an event that removes the characters from their comfortable (albeit dangerous) lives as **Orpheus** agents. The loss of the company changes the characters from proactive movers and shakers into reactive fugitives on the run, desperately fleeing from powerful forces that want every loose end from the **Orpheus** Group eliminated. The characters, as ex-agents, qualify as enormous loose ends.

Crusade of Ashes treats characters as flotsam — blown about by bizarre circumstances and huge events that they are, by and large, powerless to change. This supplement is not about characters acting, it’s about them reacting. The basic themes are survival, identity and ignorance. The basic moods are paranoia and hostility.

IT’S A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Storytellers should note that using the information and concepts contained within **Crusade of Ashes** dramatically alters the style of their chronicle. This is by design. This supplement, however, and those following are guideposts to an important continuing story line in the World of Darkness, not a straightjacket for players. Troupes and Storytellers enjoying the parameters established by the core book can simply continue playing that way, perhaps picking and choosing which new information presented in this book best fits their developing chronicle.

The information within each supplement, however, furthers the **Orpheus** metaplot by opening new areas of information, new avenues of inquiry and creating new obstacles to overcome that may only make sense within a fugitive-style game. As an example, a Storyteller running a chronicle about the FBI investigating **Orpheus** secretly for evidence of illegal activity may wish to use FBI agent Jesse Osorio (p. 128). As an antagonist, however, Jesse is a tenacious rat terrier of a man devoted to bringing fugitives to justice and protecting the innocent. He’s also hyperactive and has an insane hatred of the supernatural. He’s temperamentally unsuited for chronicles involving intrigue, subtlety or deception, except, perhaps, as someone’s foil.

In the same way, the new Spectres appearing in this supplement fit the themes of survival, ignorance and identity. Storytellers who introduce them should realize that they almost certainly bring those elements into a game. If your chronicle revolves around different themes, you may alter some of the stats, personas or powers of these creatures. If, however, your troupe enjoys playing “agents on the run,” there’s nothing stopping you from using the game-play style of **Crusade of Ashes**, taking the game in your own direction even after the release of later supplements.

The most important thing a Storyteller must decide in advance is what type of chronicle she wants to run, and build the world to facilitate that. Bear in mind, however, that the best Storytellers also work with their players to develop a chronicle that everyone can enjoy — and not muscle them into it. Players are notoriously clever, often creating novel solutions that have Storytellers scratching their heads saying “Why didn’t I think of that?” As Storyteller, dealing with the unexpected or with player shenanigans is part and parcel of the job. Be open to your player’s ideas, and it will propel your story to places you might



never have imagined on your own. This type of collaboration, done well, is one of the most fun aspects of the game.

THEMES

Themes give the chronicle a cohesive feel even when the games are episodic. Themes work as suturing thread, cobbling together diverse story elements to eventually create a singular piece... a patch-worked whole. They also offer players a hook upon which to latch their characters, as well as both a goal and direction for future games. Here are the major themes binding **Crusade of Ashes** together.

SURVIVAL

The struggle for survival is one of the most powerful themes running through this sourcebook. The World of Darkness is a dangerous place no matter who you are. The common man marches to work under soul-squelching Gothic architecture and bleak skies scarred by pollution. Sinister forces, both mortal and supernatural, weave Byzantine plots in the halls of power and monsters, real monsters, stalk the streets and wilderness. Even the supernatural denizens of this world live in constant fear of backstabbing underlings, the plots of equals and the brutality of superiors.

For ex-Orpheus agents, however, the world is no longer even that comfortable. Expatriated agents face threats from every side, and they've lost the power base and support system that they used in fighting those threats. Survival, the day-to-day, minute-to-minute struggle to continue breathing (or, in the case of ghosts, existing) is the immediate priority for most agents.

While some Orpheus personnel escaped the attack on their headquarters, all of them remain targets. This presents exciting story opportunities that can continually impress upon characters the dire nature of their situation. Perhaps they stumble across information concerning the fate of another crucible on the run. They may attempt to ally themselves with another group, only for the enemy to capture their allies over a tiny mistake (or worse, betray the characters' crucible to save their own lives).

As Storyteller, you must consider the ramifications of these events on the individual circumstances of your chronicle. After Orpheus' destruction, agents who survived or were on beach are literally severed from society. Therefore, for most characters, the first priority is to somehow stabilize the situation. Assuming she is alive (a projector), an Orpheus agent

will have her driver's license and Social Security Number flagged by the FBI and other agencies. The same agencies cancel or tag their credit cards as well as freeze and possibly seize any bank account in their name. Every police precinct in the country receives photos of the agents. Virtually every official channel an ordinary citizen would turn to for help in a desperate situation is closed to them... and that's only the dangers posed by legitimate authorities. That doesn't cover the more sinister forces gunning for the crucible. Put simply, the agents must run — staying in the same place too long is a guaranteed death sentence.

This should come as a shock to characters used to life's many conveniences. Very few people realize just what a wired and electronic society we've become, and how an invisible web of connections ties us all down. Consider money. The acquisition of the long green can be the impetus for many powerful stories. How do you provide ways for your players to acquire money? Robbery and theft draw the attention of local law enforcement. Dealing with, or stealing from, the criminal underworld brings its own set of problems and enemies. There are always odd, under-the-table jobs, of course: dishwasher, janitor, temporary help and day labor. The antagonists are also watching the agents' families and friends, meaning that any meeting to transfer funds must be very covert and probably a one-time occurrence.

Even when the characters secure a source of funds, their problems aren't over. Spending the money is also problematic. While paying cash for food shouldn't present a problem, most hotels require some form of ID... and forget about paying for serious medical treatment in cash and then just slipping away. Storytellers should factor in the quality of materials available to a crucible — who can only pay in cash — when determining their impact. For example, a skimmer looks for a place to stash her body while projecting. Is the cheap motel room she uses infested with roaches or rats? What's the impact of a sudden rat attack? Perhaps the night manager comes in to fumigate, sees what he thinks is a dead body and calls the police. Does she let the man holding the vital information she needs go, just to rush back and protect her body?

The situation isn't much better for a spirit or hue and, in many ways, it's actually worse. While being dead means a character doesn't worry about things like food and clothing, he still needs rest. Unlike the living, however, NextWorld operatives, Death Mer-



chants and Spectres don't worry about secrecy or torturing people to draw information from them or about legal niceties like Miranda warnings and collateral damage. Slaughtering 10 innocents to find one agent works just fine for them.

The hunt for Orpheus personnel among the dead is continuous, ongoing and mostly invisible. The infamous rumor mill grinds the dead too, making the characters as outcast among ghosts as they are among the living. A self-willed ghost with a high-enough Vitality is also cognizant of the danger of associating with fugitives this hot. Nobody wants Spectres or NextWorld on their proverbial doorstep. Don't discount mortal agencies either. The FBI knows exactly what it's dealing with, and it's not above hiring projecting Death Merchants or dragooning a captured dead firm agent into service (see p. 147; a member of a destroyed firm like Orpheus). Even better, as ghosts, characters don't have any legal protection or standing in the eyes of the law. If the FBI messes with a spirit's family to ensure her cooperation, to whom can the ghost complain? Indeed, an astute Storyteller can derive plenty of mileage from a chronicle where a dead character tries asserting his legal rights under the Constitution in star-chamber courts presided over by the Justice Department or Homeland Security stooges.

All of these possibilities create opportunities for excellent chronicles. For example:

- Desperate for cash, the characters decide, just this once, to offer their services to the leader of a pigment-dealing street gang. What they don't know is the gang leader's sister is a compromised DEA agent, and he threatens to have his sister sic the DEA on the crucible unless the characters become his virtual slaves, agreeing to use their abilities to protect their pigment-smuggling operation.

- A Death Merchant team corners the crucible in an abandoned hotel, only to discover the place is haunted by a powerful Spectre. Can the two groups team up long enough to escape, or will the characters have to deal with a deadly Spectre and a group of assassins at the same time?

- A wealthy, but shady businessman hires the characters to gather damaging information on a rival. The client is so impressed by the characters' performance that he offers to hire them permanently. Do the characters accept the offer, hoping that the protection of a powerful, wealthy patron can offset the risks of staying in one place too long?

IDENTITY

When the characters worked for Orpheus, their position provided structure and shape to their world. They were people with names and jobs, and they worked with a crucible assigned to them by the corporation. All that ended with Orpheus' destruction. Who are the characters now? How does somebody deal with the loss of identity stemming from one's newly acquired status as hunted fugitive? More importantly, what is the crucible now, and why should it stick together?

The characters' quest for survival can lead to wonderful roleplaying opportunities with the players exploring the issue of identity. Who are you really? Is the kind of personality you exhibit in life when comfortable the same kind you display when the chips are down? Are you the same person alone as you are with a group? Storytellers can work with this theme by offering the players opportunities to explore their characters and create tensions within the group that test the bonds of their loyalty to one another.

Astute characters should quickly realize the value of the crucible as providing mutual defense against a hostile world and offering characters access to skill types necessary to investigating their situation. Storytellers should be familiar with the Horrors, personalities, skills and abilities of the players' characters, and design chronicles forcing them to work together to survive. Perhaps one particularly nasty but low-powered Spectre continually stalks the crucible. Too powerful for any one character, but not strong enough to eliminate the whole group, the creature continually attempts to separate the characters in the hopes of eliminating them one by one.

There are also intra-crucible tensions to contend with as well. Another aspect of identity is defining exactly what their crucible is and what they represent. Does one character want to sell the group's services as assassins while another voices moral objections to it? Great! That's the kind of dynamic that really brings a troupe to life. Perhaps the crucible's majority agrees to become assassins for hire but needs the particular skills of the objecting member to complete the assignment. How will the characters convince the reluctant member to play along? Can they trust her not to sabotage the whole operation out of subconscious guilt or deliberate monkey wrenching?

Another important aspect of the "identity" theme stems from the unknown forces arrayed against the characters. The attack and destruction of Orpheus had three aspects to it: the supernatural assault by NextWorld



operatives against the living, a group of Spectres claiming the spooks and Death Merchants playing clean up. This level of cooperation and coordination among their enemies should terrify the players, particularly the notion of Spectres working with NextWorld. Something out there wants the entire Orpheus organization burned to the ground and seems to have incredible resources with which to accomplish this. While the question of why someone targeted Orpheus is important, the more immediate problem confronting players is "Who?"

Who was behind the assault on Orpheus? What were the forces involved, and how did they come together? Which federal agencies are now partaking in the hunt for the characters and which specific personnel are assigned to the case? Why were Spectres working with humans? One of the major tasks facing a fugitive crucible is identifying its pursuers. Storytellers can design investigative chronicles where the characters attempt to learn more about the FBI agents tasking them. One example involves investigating NextWorld's corporate offices to determine who really pulls the strings of that organization.

Storytellers should play up the amorphous, faceless, yet powerful nature of the enemy hunting the characters. Information learned by NextWorld can somehow land in Spectre hands, leading to an assault against the crucible. Whoever hired the Death Merchants may infiltrate or subvert members of the FBI or DEA, using them to plant evidence of a crime against a crucible member's loved one and luring the characters into a trap. Storytellers should keep characters off balance with the sheer reach and power of their enemies, but this comes with a caveat. The series eventually reveals the nature and reach of specific enemies, and the characters will have their day of justice if they play it smart.

Even then, however, the conflicting agendas of the enemies they face can obscure the lines of who's who. Most times, Spectres attack NextWorld operatives as quickly as they attack ex-Orpheus agents. The FBI and DEA are both cracking down hard on pigment dealers, and there's considerable jockeying and inter-agency fighting between them. Some Blasphemers (a new group of spooks; see p. 143) are out for their own benefit, while at least one Blasphemer (Jeffrey Rose) is utterly insane and completely unpredictable.

IGNORANCE

At first glance, the theme of ignorance seems tangentially related to identity. After all, shouldn't discovering the identity of the forces arrayed against the characters work to alleviate the players' ignorance?





Actually, no. Rather, the theme of the second 20 minutes of our “movie structure” is what turns our protagonists completely upside down. **Crusade of Ashes** is where the characters not only discover their ignorance about the forces arrayed against them, but that everything they thought they knew is wrong. What seems to be rock-solid truth actually stands on foundations of sand, and every question they answer only leads to a dozen more enigmas. The following suggestions include ways to incorporate the theme of ignorance into your chronicle.

- **Ignorance of Orpheus:** What exactly was Orpheus? Never mind the brochures. At face value, a company like Orpheus doesn’t seem like it could possibly exist. On a purely practical level, Orpheus had a tremendous fiscal overhead given it paid agents’ and employees’ salaries, paid rent and utilities, produced and maintained sleeper cradles and other technological equipment, and it financed research. Where did all that money come from? Sure, the invested assets and portfolios from cryo-sleep patients were impressive, but were there really enough wealthy society matrons being haunted by dead husbands to generate the obscene amounts of cash needed to keep the company afloat?

Simply tracking the tangled web of Orpheus’ finances can create an exciting chronicle. Never mind what the company’s public accounts stated, much of Orpheus’ operating capital came from slush funds, secret contracts and black budgets administered by power brokers at all levels of society. Orpheus had the capacity to set policy in foreign governments and mega-corporations through its agents, and even with the characters handling some black bag assignments, they never saw the true nature of some contracts. Simply confirming the existence of these accounts will be tough enough. Following through on them can be life threatening, given some involve deception from powerful lobbyists and bureaucrats in Washington DC.

Orpheus pulled in serious revenue from illicit contracts, and it wasn’t picky with the seven- and eight-figure offers either. Forget finding grandma’s pearl necklace, Orpheus agents arranged for presidential candidates to find dead prostitutes in their hotel rooms. Some clients want to communicate with dead relatives to gain a sense of inner peace, but Orpheus turned serious coin torturing the spirits of murdered opposition leaders to break rebel movements against various African and Asian tyrants. Uncovering evidence of such activities can provide players with valuable information, contacts, money and much more. Imagine the characters discovering that a powerful CEO hired Orpheus to murder a rival. Then, imagine the fireworks after characters with

differing moral outlooks wrestle with each other over how best to use that information.

Agents can also approach the money angle from the other direction. Where and on what did Orpheus spend its money? Who supplied the cradle hardware to the company? Sure, Orpheus designed the sleeper pods, but it outsourced construction of the devices. Will these companies sell their components to the characters? Who did Orpheus bribe to keep its activities secret? A simple list of the real salaries of Orpheus’ officers can provide valuable information and seeds for chronicle episodes. Did the Vice President of Sales and Marketing make more money or receive better stock options than the CEO? Why? What did she know, and is she still alive? Did several Orpheus agents jump ship to NextWorld in the months before the assault on the company? We don’t indicate that in this sourcebook, but it could make an interesting angle for Storytellers. This leads to questions like why did they go and what vital information did they provide NextWorld?

- **Ignorance of Origins:** Key to moving **Crusade of Ashes** forward is the desperate quest to understand the origins of the crucible’s situation. The Orpheus Group began as a cryogenics firm that “miraculously” uncovered the secrets of life after death, along with the ability to create projectors. The company’s founders then decided to turn their discovery into a project that would benefit everyone in the world while simultaneously making them reams of money. The company epitomized the Capitalist Dream.

Of course, that origin story is the cover for a deep well of half-truths, deceptions and conspiracies. The truth, of course, is buried in a federal prison and with the spirits of 12 prisoners who partook in Project Flatline. The search for information on Project Flatline can involve a major portion of your **Crusade of Ashes** chronicle. Start with records. Do any still exist and where can the characters find them? Perhaps a retired agent keeps an “insurance policy” or a technician who was at the prison during the fire can provide some information.

This is where tracking down the Blasphemers enters the picture. Of the Flatliners who pursued their own agendas, the characters can find two through diligent effort, if the Storyteller is playing the chronicle in that fashion. One, Stephen Moluxe, is currently running his own gang of dead gang-bangers and another, Jeffrey Rose, is a multiple-personality serial killer working as Moluxe’s muscle. Even when the crucible finds them, the Blasphemers never provide all the answers the characters seek. This is either because they don’t want to reveal too much about themselves, lest they expose some vulnerability, or because



they don't care enough to know the answers. (They're only "keeping it real," "just making the bling bling," and all that other annoying jargon).

The Flatliners we detail in this book also view their participation in the project through the lenses of experience and prejudice. Moluxe is a staunch conspiracy theorist, even before his death, and he sees his existence as confirmation that the SECRET PLAN FOR WORLD DOMINATION being run by the Elders of Zion in conjunction with the Freemasons, the NAACP, the Democratic Party and the black helicopter organizations — possibly under the influence of aliens — is actually real. Any information he offers is mixed with plenty of tinfoil-hat rantings. Rose, on the other hand, never recounts the same story twice, depending on which personality is dominant that day.

Bear in mind that the two Blasphemers were guinea pigs for Project Flatline, and therefore not privy to much information about the purposes or motivations behind it. They can, however, provide the characters with leads as to the identity of the scientists who ran the project (many of whom went on to work for Orpheus, while the remainder vanished or died) and some facts that they've observed since their "corporeal liberation." The Blasphemers are among the oldest and most powerful ghosts the characters will likely meet. Their observations of the hereafter in the World of Darkness (admittedly tainted by agenda and perspective, and frustratingly incomplete) can be very valuable — especially when the characters probe the third level of the ignorance theme behind **Crusade of Ashes**:

- **Ignorance of Ghosts:** Among Orpheus' greatest achievements (though it didn't exactly see it that way) was hiding the fact that it really didn't understand the forces with which it played. The company managed to answer one of the great unsolved mysteries of humanity, revealing that there was, in fact, life after death. Unfortunately, this only raised more questions. Why did people become ghosts? How did the process work? What kinds of abilities could ghosts possess? Rumors persisted among the dead of some type of "Shadowland," where the dead were supposed to go. Was this "Shadowland" equivalent to "Heaven" or "Hell"? If this "Shadowland" did exist, why does some kind of mystical wall forcing spooks to cluster with the living block it off?

The company concocted reasonable explanations for all of these questions. Investigation into Orpheus, however, should reveal the company's ignorance of the affairs of the dead (or at least its claim of ignorance). For example, why is every ghost encountered thus far less

than three years old? Orpheus knows, but it ain't telling. Considering the richness of ghost lore in every culture around the world over thousands of years, it's inconceivable that the oldest ghosts are no more than three years old. Where are all the older ghosts? Clearly, something happened three years ago, but that "what" remained a mystery... until now. Clearly rumors of older ghosts should intrigue any crucible.

Orpheus liked quantifying the environment in which it operated. Placing ghosts into little boxes gave the company and its personnel a sense of control over a situation that sent most people into screaming fits. For example, it would define spooks based on their observed powers and tendencies — giving them names like "Haunters" or "Poltergeists." Yet, even this primitive classification system had holes in it. It never adequately identified Annie Harper, for example, a leading Orpheus investigator who, ironically enough, helped establish the current systems and definitions. There are simply spooks out there who defy all attempts at classification and ghosts who are developing new powers.

Chief among these mysterious beings are Spectres. Some of these creatures are degraded, spiteful and evil, yet still recognizable as the ghosts of dead human beings. Other Spectres, however, seem utterly alien despite their shared link with Spectres who were once ghosts. For every Spectre like Lost Boys and Frighteners that were human, others like the Chupacabras and Friendly Angels don't bear any visible relationship with human beings save that they manifest as humanity's worst fears.

One great way to generate fear and horror of Spectres is to drive home the fact that nobody in Orpheus knew what to make of them. The theories behind their creation were in fact "placebos" to stem the tide of panic among agents. The Spectres' many forms and bizarre powers defied categorization, making their participation in Orpheus' destruction even more mysterious. What are the Spectres protecting, and did Orpheus inadvertently uncover the truth without even realizing it?

Creating ignorance means that Storytellers can alter the rules as they see fit. Ideally, players won't have read any of these books, but there's the occasional spoilsport in the group who encounters a house bleeding walls and yanks out a rulebook saying, "Oh, it's a Haunter — here are its Abilities." The Storyteller can rule that Orpheus' information — and therefore the characters' — was woefully incomplete. If you want your Wisps to manipulate objects, invent a plausible reason and run with it. Again, Spectres are perfect vehicles for this. Even within individual Spectre species, individuals



employ varying powers and methods of operation. Generate your own Spectres when you need to throw a monkey wrench into your player's well-tuned plans.

Agents may also wish to investigate the origins of pigment, perhaps to stop the trade or establish its point of origin. Black heroin seems to allow people to project their spirits as would skimmers (albeit in a primitive and more dangerous/addictive fashion). What exactly is pigment, and is there any relationship between it and the non-addictive chemical Orpheus uses in training its skimmers? If so, where did Orpheus get it? Chemical analyses of the drug reveals few answers — pigment is merely a cocktail with an unidentifiable chemical added to it — which again leads to the question: What exactly is in pigment and what are its distributors hoping to gain? Fortunately, the Storyteller can forestall investigations since unraveling the pigment network requires much time and effort to unravel. On the streets, 95% of street dealers and distribution networks know as much about pigment as the characters do. The remaining 5% are well guarded, well hidden and keeping quiet.

TOPE

A tone is different than a theme. Whereas you can summarize a chronicle's theme as "What is this story about?" a story's tone is best described as "What is this story like?" Tone is the atmosphere the characters live in while working their way through the events of an story. Since **Crusade of Ashes** works from a "fugitive" style of storytelling, the tone of the chronicle should emphasize paranoia and hostility.

PARANOIA

It's not paranoia when they really are out to get you. One key element for Storytellers to emphasize is the depth of this conspiracy's roots. Everyone the agents meet, hear about or see on television has a hidden agenda (sometimes several) relating to the destruction of Orpheus, and all have plans for the characters.

The key element in creating paranoia rests in Fox Mulder's warning: Trust no one. The FBI seeks information on projector technology and victims for its next round of show trials. NextWorld must destroy them to fulfill the terms of its contract with the mysterious antagonist. Someone hired the Death Merchants on a policy of scorched earth for whatever reason. Virtually nobody is concerned with the crucible's welfare save the characters themselves.

Characters can potentially utilize these conflicting agendas to survive, but Storytellers shouldn't allow them to grow too comfortable with any aspect of their lives. Contacts can betray them or be betrayed and lost.

Enemies can compromise or kill family members and old friends. Enemy plans may shift without warning. The FBI could decide that the characters are too dangerous to capture alive and, instead, order its operatives to shoot on sight. NextWorld may suffer a falling out with its Spectre allies. A deal signed and sealed with one of Jeffrey Rose's personalities may suddenly become moot when another aspect temporarily rises to prominence. Done correctly, the characters should be suspicious of everyone and everything.

HOSTILITY

The crucible's current predicament renders its world hazardous. The characters remain stuck in a frantic race, running from one hiding place to another, never staying in one spot very long because anyone they meet or anything they do could give their enemies the key to their destruction. Characters are trying to find a way of surviving until they can determine what's happening.

Storytellers may find that this tone of chronic hostility is easy to create but difficult to maintain. It's easy to launch an overwhelming Spectre attack whenever the characters eat at a roadside diner, but if a Storyteller does this every time, it eventually becomes predictable and boring. The best way to make this work is to ensure the game's hostile tone contains unpredictability and variety.

- **Unpredictability:** As in the diner example, it's very easy to adopt a pattern when creating antagonists or challenges for your characters. "A small backwater town in East Texas? Of course the sheriff is possessed by a Skinrider and going to throw us in prison!" "A traveling revival meeting at the edge of town is looking for converts? All righty, boys, load up your anti-skinriding gear and get ready!" You can avoid that kind of trap by varying the frequency of assaults against characters and the type of those attacks. As for frequency, the forces arrayed against the characters are strong and powerful, but not omnipotent. They don't control everything or everyone. Allow the characters to find bolt-holes and help along the way; give the crucible a few victories or the chance to develop a semi-reliable source of information. That makes it more poignant or heart-wrenching when you eventually jerk it away from them.

As for type, assaults can be more than just physical attacks. Indeed, **Crusade of Ashes** is at its best when physical danger is the smallest threat the characters face. Great stories can be had using mental and spiritual threats as well. Challenge your characters with difficult ethical and moral choices. For example:

- 1) The characters finally track down a pigment-addicted senior Orpheus accountant who still has some



company records. He'll turn over the books if the crucible helps him escape his predicament by killing the dealer to whom he owes money.

2) Special Agent Osorio captures the characters but offers them freedom if they help nab another crucible using its abilities to protect a local street gang. When the characters agree, they discover that the gang is actually protecting the neighborhood from a Spectre nest.

• **Variety:** Imagine how boring life would be if all you ate was steak. The same thing happens to players when they face the same challenges continuously. That's not to say you shouldn't have recurring themes and characters. A great villain pursuing the fugitives episode after episode is a staple of the genre, but anything becomes boring from repetition and overuse. Switch gears on occasion. The characters come to a small town filled with suspicious locals? Ghostly figures conduct mysterious rituals in the woods at midnight? Imagine the crucible's surprise when the "mysterious cult" is the Ku Klux Klan and there isn't any supernatural presence in town at all! That's when the characters' attempts to help backfire, with the town rallying to fight these "demonic outsiders." Occasionally, someone will voluntarily assist the characters out of the goodness of his heart. The fun comes from interacting with someone who really isn't hiding anything. The characters simply assume everyone is hiding *something*, which in this case is untrue.

Another example: Spectres are very cool and very scary, but they're also not common, or at least, not as common as ghosts. If every NextWorld team the characters face has a pet Spectre in tow, they quickly descend from being utterly terrifying to becoming the monster of the week. When it comes to the supernatural, Spectres should be the last word in fear. Keep them mysterious, rare and horrifying.

CHANGES IN LAMENT

The fall of the Orpheus Group is a major upheaval, and it will cause all sorts of problems for your characters. Among the biggest one is the characters' ability to continue functioning as a working crucible. Orpheus provided a very strong support network for all Laments — although particularly for sleepers — and the characters are likely scared and bewildered when someone whips this safety blanket away. Laments are not necessarily permanent, however, as we've discussed in the core rulebook. The most obvious transition point is when the physical body dies and the character takes that one-way trip from projector to ghost. It is also perfectly feasible to move from sleeper to skimmer or vice-versa,

though, while hues can even learn to purify themselves and become normal spirits. A particularly adventurous character might even traverse across all four Laments over the course of the chronicle.

This section studies the different types of changes the characters are liable to undergo and offers guidelines and suggestions to help Storytellers keep a few steps ahead. It's important to ensure that all players feel they can still play a full part in the game. That doesn't mean Storytellers should just hand the crucible that black market sleeper pod it needs, but there should be routes by which the characters can stay useful and relevant to the action. With some effort, of course...

SKIMMERS

As part of the Orpheus fold, skimmers received a safety net via the complex range of available support functions, regulations and services. Projecting took place in a large, ambient-lit room designed for that very purpose, with carefully average temperature and no unpleasant odors or loud noises. Neutral potted plants and bland piped music supposedly provided a bit of a human touch. The long couches had a range of different medical monitors built into them, so the medical staff could maintain close tabs on the skimmer. Standby medical technicians treated any manifest injuries as soon as they happened, and a full surgical team was on standby 24-7. Psychologists and analysts were also available as and when required, to help skimmers through their experiences one way or another.

After the attack, characters must deal with the raw experience of projecting without anything to shield them from the reality of the risks. None of the trappings that Orpheus provided are necessary parts of skimming, but without them, characters may feel considerably less comfortable about the process — particularly if their bodies are exposed to danger or medical help is a luxury nobody can afford. The dangers to their bodies are great, meaning the chance of death is now increased.

Skimmers can move to any other Lament. Becoming a ghost is a no-brainer, obviously. Because projectors have so much experience with functioning outside their flesh, any projector character who dies can continue on without a body to call home. Skimmers who use pigment become hues, just like anyone else. Otherwise, they become spirits. Skimmers receive no particular benefit from pigment. They can already project and see the dead, after all. It is an extremely addictive drug, however, and a skimmer who indulges or has been slipped a couple of doses may find she is hooked.

Becoming a sleeper is slightly more complicated, even though there's no difficulty in making the



transition — anyone who can skim automatically projects when flatlined. Returning is far trickier, however. Skimming is a transcendental process. The unconscious mind allows the soul to disconnect and go voyaging, because the sheer number of near-death experiences the person survived helps establish a degree of trust in the process. Sleeper projection is completely different — it is painful, grueling and less “liberating” than skimming. The body technically dies, ejecting the soul. This is traumatic for the unconscious mind, particularly when the projector is used to projecting as a voluntary and almost spiritual experience. Undergoing sleeper-based techniques essentially destroys the bonds linking the skimmer to his “higher self,” the one that allowed him to skim in the first place. Skimming is a spiritual process while sleeping is science trying to emulate a natural function through force. Once a skimmer becomes a sleeper, he loses touch with that trained subconscious and must relearn everything. Just one experience as a sleeper is enough to convert the projector from a skimmer to a sleeper permanently, at no experience point cost. The character can always re-train himself as a skimmer later, of course, just like any other sleeper could.

That said, there are good reasons why a skimmer might take that step. Sleepers can stay out of their bodies for long periods of time, and a sensitive or distant mission might require that sacrifice. Some skimmers may possess high Spite ratings, and become sleepers to help manage their Spite intake more easily. Other skimmers might like the idea of not having damage transmitted back to their bodies, particularly if they continually contend with dangerous missions and risky situations. Ignorance can also play a part. If the skimmer doesn’t know that becoming a sleeper is a “one-way trip” — the topic was not one Orpheus covered in training, after all — then the skimmer may become a sleeper, believing he’s having his cake and eating it too.

SLEEPERS

After Orpheus’ fall, sleepers face a greater problem than any other Lament — namely, how to project at all. The Orpheus Group used a complicated system relying heavily on advanced technology, and the characters may at first feel that sleeper projection is outside their reach without all that technical support. When you break it down, however, the actual process is not particularly complicated. The sleeper receives an injection of a drug that emulates the positive functions of pigment without being addictive. He is then flatlined and put in stasis. The soul leaves the body at the point of death, as

normal, but the equipment keeps the projector’s flesh on the very edge of life, so the connection between body and soul is not entirely severed. With the help of the drug, which enables the still-living mind to properly function outside the body, the sleeper enters a projective state until someone revives the body. The process, however, still requires the subject have undergone multiple near-death experiences. People who have not had multiple NDEs are more tightly bound together. For them, the soul’s presence in the body is an either-or, and flatlining them enough for projection will either kill them or keep them in suspension (and without cryonics, the body will atrophy and decay).

Fortunately, characters can replicate the sleeper process without the resources Orpheus had at its disposal. Unfortunately, unless the sleeper has access to a supply of Orpheus’ drugs, she will need a dose of pigment. It will turn her into an addict, but there’s little other option save for “burst transmissions” (read on). Flatlining isn’t particularly hard either. A sufficient jolt of electricity will stop the heart, as will several medical drugs if administered (im)properly. It does require some medical knowledge to flatline someone with the option of resuscitating him [Perception + Medicine (difficulty 6)] of course, while a botched attempt kills the patient outright. Someone with no medical knowledge or training whatsoever will kill the patient if the roll fails.

The main problem, though, is preserving the tissue from necrosis. In the absence of Orpheus’ cryo-technology, it’s vital oxygenated blood be kept circulating through the sleeper’s body, or brain damage will ensue. (Essentially, after five + Stamina minutes of oxygen deprivation, the character loses one dot from a Mental Attribute for each subsequent minute. Once all Mental Attributes hit 0, the character is brain dead and unrecoverable.) There are medical devices that maintain functional and oxygenated blood-flow once the heart stops, a combination of iron lung and a blood pump. Surgeons typically use them during major heart surgery. One such device would maintain the sleeper for a while, and with a saline-glucose drip for energy, prolonged projection is feasible. The characters must ensure someone is on hand to revive the sleeper if the power fails, of course. Bringing a character back from this condition automatically incurs two levels of bashing dashing (no soak) to reflect the utterly exhausting nature of flatlining through this method.

The other option is maintaining CPR on the sleeper for the duration of the projection. It’s tiring though — the attendant must switch with a partner every 10



minutes, and both must be replaced every hour. There's another problem too. If the CPR is a little too vigorous, the heart re-starts — there's nothing wrong with it, after all — and the sleeper is immediately pulled back into her body. Each assistant should roll Perception + Medicine if medically trained (or just Intelligence if shown the procedure) against difficulty 5 at the start of each 10-minute slot. A failure results in the resuscitation of the projector, and a botch indicates medical complications (the person performing CPR pressed too hard on the rib cage, breaking bone and puncturing a vital organ).

There are other possibilities, however. If the sleeper is sufficiently determined, he can learn how to forcibly escape from his body for a brief period of time through burst transmission. He must still inject, taste or inhale a dose of pigment, but once it kicks in, he can try to eject his soul through a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). Botching the roll adds a point of Spite, because the unconscious mind perceives the act as a deliberate spiritual injury. These bursts cost three Vitality, due to the psychic effort involved in projecting, and they last for just one scene. When it's over, the soul slams back into the body, inflicting three levels of bashing damage. The sleeper can re-enter before then, but he still suffers the damage for forcing his way back in. Any sleeper who knows

about this trick can try it, but since Orpheus wasn't aware of the possibility, someone must tell the character how to accomplish this. The best option is a NextWorld team that left the organization during a purge in the hierarchy. The story "Vengeance is Yours" (p. 158) has information pertaining to the NextWorld defectors, while the NextWorld entry under "Twisted Reflections" (p. 128) has more information on the infighting at the mercenary outfit.

These are just a few of many options available. The Storyteller may allow the characters to scratch-build a pod if they have the necessary blueprints from Orpheus. Such an undertaking may require extended actions and upward of 100 cumulative successes using a combination of Computer, Technology and Craft: Mechanics to accomplish. Or the characters can pilfer a pod from Orpheus. (Sub-basement four has a junk room with spare sleeper pods that the attacks did not damage badly... it's just a matter of reaching and transporting them without the feds catching the crucible.) Otherwise, the characters can rob Terrel & Squib or find pods on the black market.

The safest long-term solution, however, is if the sleeper character learns how to become a skimmer. It isn't easy, but experience as a projector makes it possible.



An established sleeper can work closely with a skimmer, subjecting her to the same exercises that Orpheus used, and slowly building up unconscious trust in the process of projection. It takes a while, though — at least 30 hours of one-on-one training — and requires substantial determination on the part of the sleeper. She must invest 20 points of Willpower over the training period, and then spend six experience points to make the intuitive jump to skimmer. She can still project as a sleeper until spending the experience and establishing that mental connection. Afterward, though, the change of Lament is complete, and projecting as a sleeper again only wastes all that hard work.

An additional problem facing a sleeper might be a missing body. When Orpheus fell, some of the sleeper pods may have survived intact, and the same applies for the more primitive versions used by Terrel & Squib. The FBI arrived swiftly in both cases and impounded what it could (though T&S is still functional, and is thus fighting the FBI on a legal level, its operations are only temporarily suspended). Therefore, a sleeper projecting during the raid could feasibly return to base several days after the attack and find a charred ruin and no pod. It needn't be the FBI or Death Merchants, either — criminal groups, companies with good intel or even wealthy individuals may have acquired any given pod by greasing the right palms. Some sleepers simply vanish inexplicably as well, their bodies snatched off to who-knows-where, while others find Spectres inhabiting their flesh during their absence.

Despite the inconveniences of being stranded outside one's body, prolonged periods of projection do carry their own risk. There are mental issues involved, for starters. The psyche is not entirely capable of dealing with a half-and-half existence, and after a number of weeks equal to the character's starting Willpower, there is an increasing danger of mental damage. For each subsequent week, the player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6). If the roll fails, the character gains a derangement of the Storyteller's choice. If it succeeds, nothing happens. In either case, the player must re-roll for each following week, each time with the difficulty increasing by one to a maximum of 10).

There are physical dangers as well. In a state-of-the-art Orpheus sleeper pod, under constant technical and medical supervision, a sleeper's body remains well preserved. Even then, however, with the soul outside, the flesh slowly deteriorates over a period of months. In a garage flatline situation, the problem is much worse. The danger with this process is that because the body is not kept in an entirely necrosis-free state, the character's

muscles atrophy and weaken. For every week the character remains on "life-support," he loses one dot from a Physical Attribute. Smart characters can offset this loss every two weeks if they help exercise their friend's body daily, moving limbs and massaging muscles to keep them "supple." When any Attribute reaches 0, the body is irretrievably dead. Interestingly, sleepers whose bodies have genuinely vanished (as opposed to being impounded by the authorities, stolen, possessed or otherwise purloined) do not suffer physical deterioration.

SPIRITS

Death is a one-way trip. Once a character becomes a spirit, there's nowhere else to go; he can't return to life, and he can't become addicted as a hue. Ghosts working for Orpheus generally did so in return for a specially negotiated benefit, like helping their remaining family and friends, protection from a personal Spectre (or some other threat), a body to possess regularly or even assistance with some remaining real-world affairs — like tracking down and killing the character's murderer, perhaps. After the fall, that benefit is naturally no longer available, and things may well become more complicated as a result. There are no fundamental changes in the character's interaction with the world or the crucible, however.

Any player's living character has the option of becoming a ghost upon her death. For the character, it's a simple choice — either continue as a spirit or hue as appropriate, or create a new character for the chronicle. For the character, death is much less cut and dry than "Congratulations, you're dead, but you have five extra freebie points with which to play." The moment of death is disorientating, stunning and maybe even painful. After that, there is a natural progression toward the afterlife, and the character feels a powerful urge to proceed toward his ultimate reward. If he decides to remain on Earth, it is invariably because of his will to remain, for whatever reason. Fighting the compulsion to transcend, he gains understanding about the nature of his new, unfettered existence and may even feel he received some personal insight into the way the world works. This sudden revelation gives him a new comprehension of some of the barriers holding him back, and he suddenly knows how he can work past them, unleashing his capability. Most new ghosts find this extremely exhilarating.

HUES

Among the greatest burdens facing a hue is the permanent sense of being incomplete and unfulfilled. It's similar to living with a debilitating physical infir-



mity... a constant reminder that the ghost is not at her full potential, that others are luckier for not experiencing this existence and of her bad luck in being exposed to pigment. There is a way, however, to eliminate the spiritual blemish of black heroin and become complete, but only if the hue has sufficient will and drive — in other words, she is a player's character or former projector of some note. The process involves purifying the soul, using personal essential energies to scour the pigment blotches away.

It's a painful and emotionally draining task. The hue must face her own personal inadequacies and learn to accept herself, flaws and all. Like most psychological work, it requires time, dedication and courage to succeed. Each time she can afford the expenditure, the hue suffuses part of her spiritual blemishes with personal Vitality, literally searing it from her soul. This requires intense concentration for five minutes per point of Vitality expended, though she can rest during the process if required. (If the character expends five Vitality, she exposes herself to cruel pain for 25 minutes. She can only take a break between the points of Vitality, however, or at each five-minute interval. Otherwise, that particular attempt is unsuccessful.) It's similar to using laser-surgery to remove a tattoo. It hurts a lot, though the process deals no significant damage. Coming to terms with one's self is also a gradual process, and it happens in parallel with the literal cleansing, though it doesn't have to be simultaneous — and the experience points invested do not require any particular time. Letting go of old pain is instantaneous, when it finally happens.

Finding the necessary Vitality to invest can be a difficult and time-consuming process in its own right. The hue may prefer remaining morally upright and accumulate energy from charitable acts. There are alternatives, like drawing on personal strength of character by spending Willpower, or even taking the fast, but dangerous, route of stealing Vitality from other ghosts and risking Spite increases. Other crucible members may help as well.

When the character decides to begin the journey from hue to spirit, the Storyteller must determine the cost of the process in terms of experience points and Vitality. The first dose is by far the most damaging, but each extra pigment dose erodes the soul that much further. A character who only sampled the drug once must expend a minimum of seven experience points and 50 Vitality. A casual user who reserved weekend time for getting high must expend a minimum of 10 experience points and 75 Vitality. A heavy addict who indulged in pigment for months, if not years, will need a minimum of 15 experience points and 100 Vitality. If the person died because of an overdose, add five

experience points and 50 Vitality to the process. If the character stole to support his habit or committed violent crimes as a result, add an additional two experience points and 25 Vitality per noteworthy crime. Regardless of the final tally, keep the information secret. The player should not know how much work awaits her character on the path to redemption.

THE LATE AND UNLAMENTED

One way or another, the crucible will probably want to recruit new members at some point. That's fine if the prospective character is already a projector or ghost, but that requirement may prove a little restrictive for the story. Fortunately, people exposed to sufficient near-death experiences and who possess the right psychological make-up can be taught to project. In terms of the system, it's really just a case of *Fiat Lux*. If a player wants a character new to projecting, then the only requirement is a sufficient number of near-death experiences in her past. Similarly, if the group wants to teach a supporting character, then it's your choice. If it suits the Storyteller's plans then fine, he can learn, and if not, he cannot. If you must assign experience point costs to the learning process — i.e., if the crucible is training a supporting character — then it costs 12 points.

It actually requires more work than that within the game, however. A thorough interview determines whether the candidate experienced sufficient exposure to death to become a new projector — at least four to six close brushes. Psychologically, the candidate must feel comfortable with nearly dying, so that it is a familiar experience. Initial projection training then requires drugs, either pigment or Orpheus' "secret blend," and many hours of one-on-one coaching with an experienced projector. If the candidate is capable of skimming, the talent appears during training; if not, he becomes a sleeper. If in doubt, assume the character is a sleeper. Besides, it's always possible to progress from sleeper to skimmer later, anyway.

If the candidate lacks the requisite familiarity with death and is absolutely determined to learn projection, then the crucible must provide him with sufficiently close shaves. The difficulty in this is that the experience's intent must be to kill the character; thus "almost trying" to kill a character is not a close shave since the crucible will actually hold back from the *coup de grace*. Someone who drives toward you, then veers off is not trying to kill you. Someone gunning for you, however, will kill you if another situation doesn't intercede — the character leaps out of the way, just inches from the fender, for example. The attempt must be genuine and dangerous.



Trained medics can certainly devise ways to kill someone and then hopefully revive them — stopping the heart, for instance — or the characters can improvise. There are many ways to genuinely risk death, from two-round Russian roulette onward. The experience needs a significant chance of full, permanent death to count though, and the candidate will require six such close shaves notched on his belt, with at least a day between each. Naturally, such experimentation is often the stuff of Darwin Award legendry.

A more certain method, of course, is to give the candidate a dose of pigment and kill her, so that she immediately becomes a hue. Unfortunately, without the near-death-experiences to elevate the soul, the character may well become a drone or blip, requiring the group to solve her tethers and elevate her to the crucible's level. Regardless, the characters may find themselves technically guilty of murder if they are not careful.

A NEW BEGINNING

Change is inevitable, in existence and in chronicles. Eventually, one player will be a little too slow, roll a few unlucky dice or suffer from an opponent's exceedingly lucky streak, and Bang! You now have a characterless player who wants to create a new one. Or perhaps you

just added a new player to your troupe and need to add a new character to a crucible that's currently on the run and is doubtlessly paranoid beyond reason. How can new characters enter the crucible without Orpheus to assign them?

BEWARE OF COUSIN OLIVER!

There are several different ways to introduce a new character. The first decision rests in whether the player or Storyteller has the most say in designing the new character. Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages.

- **Player Choice:** This character-developing method is easier for the player. The player develops a persona normally, decides on traits and puts together a character sheet. It's up to the Storyteller to then work with the player to fit the character into the upcoming chronicle in a way that makes sense. This is much like introducing a new character into a long-running television series that writes off one of the main characters. It works so long as the new characters are as compelling as the originals and have a genuine reason to work alongside a crucible.

- **Storyteller Choice:** This method requires more work on the parts of both player and Storyteller, but can lead to very interesting opportunities for roleplaying. In





this type of prelude, the Storyteller considers the characters he plans on using for the upcoming story, and chooses one he thinks makes a good addition to the crucible. This may be a minor recurring persona, or (for a real challenge) perhaps a major one. The Storyteller then fleshes out the character with the player, before handing it over for play.

This also means the Storyteller must rearrange the plot to offer the new character a reason to permanently hook up with the players. Thus, the new character's prelude recaps his early life, including his previous interactions with the characters that will determine how he feels about the crucible.

This is much like promoting a guest star to the regular cast, and it will be challenging for the player. She must account for the way you, as the Storyteller, previously presented the character, and make that part of her portrayal. Many players won't want to lose this much control over their character's development, but some might relish the opportunity to portray a character known previously as an antagonist.

MOTIVATIONS

A thorny problem facing the Storyteller in introducing a new character to a fugitive-style crucible is in motivating him. What impacts a spook so significantly that he'd cast his lot with people fleeing for their lives? There are several possibilities available to the Storyteller.

DEAD FIRM AGENTS

This is perhaps the easiest method available to the Storyteller of introducing a new character. The characters aren't the only Orpheus (or other dead firm) agents who survived. Several agents on beach or away from their central offices managed to escape the assault. They're on the run as well, possibly the last survivors of their crucibles. It's only natural, therefore, that they would look for a new crew to connect with for the sake of mutual defense. Storyteller and player should carefully work out the new agent's background, however. How did the character manage to survive? How long has she been running? Does she have any former comrades, and what happened to them? Did she learn anything during her independent investigations that might benefit her new crucible? Most importantly, does she bring any new enemies with her in addition to those facing the crucible?

A good troupe of roleplayers shouldn't automatically accept a new character just because a player runs her. They may suspect the character of hidden motives or agendas, perhaps something buried in her past that may come back to bite them if they aren't careful. We encourage Storytellers to work this out with the player

and incorporate that information into their chronicles. For example:

- The characters add a new skimmer to their merry band. When they approach a regular contact for information (a local petty thief) he tells them he can't talk to them anymore because a local Mafia boss is hunting for the new character; she killed several of his men on an Orpheus mission. This costs them a valuable resource and nets them a new enemy.

- The new agent claims to be a spirit, but is in fact a sleeper desperately searching for his body. He may coerce his new crucible into undertaking a dangerous mission where the real intent is to trick the characters into rescuing his sleeper pod.

BYSTANDERS

In the course of their adventures, characters inevitably encounter people or ghosts in dire circumstances — people for whom associating with fugitives is actually a step up. Whether these people are living or dead, a simple act of kindness (or just not being overtly hostile) can trigger a bystander's desire to join the group or the group to include a bystander.

Note that the term "bystander" doesn't necessarily imply that the people in such circumstances are "innocent" or even "good." Rather it means that during their initial interactions, the crucible's goals and those of the person coincided somehow, making it worthwhile for the new person to join the group. Some examples of this type of prelude are:

- **Rescue:** The characters rescue someone from a horrifying situation. Perhaps they save a pigment addict from a gang attack or rescue a low-Vitality spirit from harvesting Spectres (in the process giving it enough Vitality to become self-willed). In such cases, the person they save may remain with them, not only from a sense of gratitude, but also from a desire to escape from tormentors. In the aforementioned examples, the gang or the Spectres may continue hunting for the bystander, necessitating association with the crucible until solving his dilemma.

- **Fresh Meat:** With Orpheus, Terrel & Squib and the other dead firms gone or nursing their wounds, NextWorld is the only game in town. As a result of potential losses from the assault along with ongoing casualties from the hunt for survivors, NextWorld's recruiting practices have become more... aggressive.

In this kind of prelude, the agents encounter someone (living or dead) who's been fighting NextWorld's heavy-handed recruitment process. The agents intercede just as NextWorld decides to write off the recruitment effort as a



lost cause... along with the recruit (no sense allowing someone else to recruit good material.) Adding a “Fresh Meat” character, means the crucible will now undertake the new character’s training.

- **Common Enemies:** In this type of prelude, the new character and the crucible discover they have a common enemy. For example, a spirit knows exactly how to resolve his tether, which unfortunately is currently stored in a NextWorld vault. The spirit may see the crucible as a way to eventually retrieve the item it requires. Or perhaps a fugitive on the run from the FBI for a non-Orpheus-related crime joins the crucible as a way of gaining protection and learning new skills.

NON-FUGITIVES

Some people may decide to work with the crucible even though they themselves aren’t on the run. An example could be a newspaper reporter investigating the Orpheus story who decides the characters are innocent. Such a character might decide to help the crucible to the best of her abilities (perhaps earning a Pulitzer on the way). Another example might be a private detective or the owner of a freelance security firm who works with the agents on assignments that come through his agency.

Non-fugitives bring many advantages with them, including a sense of stability and the ability to obtain equipment and cash semi-legitimately. There is a limit, of course. Eventually, the FBI will catch on when a reporter always seems to charge for hotel rooms in cities where the crucible has been. Characters must be careful that suspicion doesn’t fall on the non-fugitive members of the group.

SWITCHING SIDES

This is among the most difficult prelude to pull off, but it’s also one of the most satisfying when done well. Put simply, the new character joining the crucible served with one of the enemy groups hunting it. Obviously, any crucible can see the benefits of enticing a member of the enemy camp to change teams. He brings knowledge, skills and contacts that can be extremely useful to a crucible on the run. New characters added in this fashion should be fairly low-level and ignorant of their previous employer’s true nature. In addition, expatriated members of these groups must work diligently to convince the other members of the crucible that they’ve truly switched sides.

Examples of ways to introduce this type of character include:

- **NextWorld Agents:** Orpheus was the occasional snake pit where superiors might betray low-level agents for a promotion, a secret agenda or merely to preserve

“plausible deniability.” Compared to NextWorld, however, Orpheus was a day-care center. NextWorld is in bed with some of the worst monsters (human and otherwise) in the World of Darkness, and it accepts contracts that Orpheus wouldn’t touch.

Obviously, not many NextWorld agents want to throw their lot in with the very people they’ve been contracted to hunt. Sometimes, however, a NextWorld agent has an attack of conscience (not often, but it happens) or, more frequently these days, receives a “lead-jacketed retirement package” because someone deemed him expendable following the recent coup. Some destined for this fate may believe their only escape is to destroy or blackmail their former employers. The crucible offers these characters a mutual defense pact and a way to strike back at NextWorld.

In the crucible’s favor, it adds a character with intimate knowledge of NextWorld’s tactics and methods, along with access to certain NextWorld resources (ex-partners, contacts, suppliers). The drawback, however, is renewed aggression on NextWorld’s part. Where before the defector was a low-level threat, hooking up with the crucible certainly raises his profile, meaning NextWorld assigns more resources to his destruction.

- **Death Merchants:** There are two reasons why a Death Merchant might work with the crucible. First, Death Merchants work for the highest bidder or first customer. Characters with access to plenty of ready cash might hire a Death Merchant to protect them from the freelance assassins being sent after them. The second reason is that the Death Merchant is on the run himself, perhaps from a former employer or botched mission. He may join a crucible to place more bodies between him and his adversaries. A murdered Death Merchant returned as a spirit may join fugitives to avenge himself against his killers.

The upside of adding a Death Merchant to the crucible is obvious — access to a trained killer. The downside is that a Death Merchant is potentially loyal to his next paycheck or has his own agenda.

- **FBI Agents:** Having an FBI agent join the crucible might, at first glance, seem like the longest of long shots. The FBI, after all, knows firsthand just how much heat the characters will draw and the odds working against their favor. There are ways, however, in which it could happen:

- 1) **Framed:** Evidence found in Orpheus files reveals that the agent worked with or buried some of Orpheus’ crimes. There might be many reasons for this. Perhaps another government agency or the Bureau itself wants to rid itself of an agent who uncovered departmental



corruption, and thus plants the information. Maybe the agent was good friends with Orpheus operatives and gave them enough intel to keep them safe from arrest. Maybe the agent felt guilty for participating in Craig Forest's death and was making amends by supplying the Bureau's secrets.

2) **The Judas Initiative:** If the characters evade capture successfully and repeatedly, the FBI may actually consider them more useful as Judas goats than as prisoners. After all, the characters seem cunning in eluding the authorities and in uncovering information about Orpheus, other fugitives and projector technology. In this case, the FBI may try inserting an operative into the crucible. The Bureau may then keep tabs on the fugitives through information supplied by this mole, and decide how to apply said intel on a case-by-case basis.

The operative could try infiltrating the crucible, in which case the Storyteller and player should create a good cover story and detail how the character reports back to her superiors. Another method might be the FBI approaching the characters and offering them amnesty if they help the Bureau uncover other Orpheus survivors. If the characters agree, they must accept an FBI handler into their group to relay instructions from their new bosses.

ANATOMY OF ADVENTURE

Although Orpheus' destruction might seem like the end of the world for the characters, it does open many options. Orpheus can no longer tell the crucible what to do, and once the characters sort out their immediate logistical problems, they can choose their next course of action... well, in theory, anyway. In practice, there are likely many pressing issues on the characters' minds, like trying to uncover Orpheus' attackers, the motivation for the attack and what dangers still exist.

Earlier, we discussed ways in which characters can find themselves fleeing the FBI, the Death Merchants and NextWorld, dedicating their time to survival and investigation. When the heat lessens, they may need to locate an asset, rescue an ally, pursue revenge or even try continuing to help others.

There are other options, though. If NextWorld failed against Orpheus, the company is likely very nervous. It assigns the crucible to investigate the attack and the parties responsible, and even sanctions potential retaliatory strikes. There are the daily grinds as well, but these are low priorities. In fact, the crucible may find that its day-to-day existence changes less if Orpheus falls and the characters

enter the employ of a rich patron or company. In this instance, the crucible pursues the same types of operations as before the raid. Finally, the characters may start their own private operation, whether for mercenary ends — working as underground operatives and investigators — or for idealistic reasons. In the latter instance, the crucible can fight for causes ranging from liberating as many ghosts as they can, to finding and revealing the truth behind Orpheus, to establishing themselves as cult leaders. Idealism isn't necessarily positive.

SURVIVAL

Regardless of the underlying structure the chronicle adopts following the Orpheus attacks, the crucible's principle activities likely fall into one of several broad categories. Assuming some employer who can provide high security doesn't hire the characters, their most pressing concern will be survival. The characters may know about NextWorld, the FBI and the Death Merchants hunting for them but may not realize there are two mysterious hidden antagonists who are also proactively hostile. Between them, the two antagonists possess much influence and can cause all sorts of problems for the characters.

The primary antagonist, through NextWorld and the Spectres, wants the characters dead, no matter what. He monitors the FBI and news sources. If either the feds or the media receive a tip concerning the crucible, he alerts NextWorld and his stable of Spectres, who then arrive and launch attacks completely disproportionate to the situation. The primary antagonist can also occasionally possess officials through his proxies and pull strings to flush the characters out if at all possible. In other words, local police nationwide set up wanted posters offering generous rewards leading to the crucible's arrest. Newshounds and paparazzi are on the characters' trail, TV bulletins feature the ongoing manhunt, and private detectives are nosing around, so doing anything showy in public leads to a whole world of difficulties.

Just walking into a convenience store is risky if the television just ran a feature on the "cell." If the clerk recognizes the crucible, his nervous behavior may betray that fact. Beat cops and patrols might spot the characters, particularly if one or more of them have distinctive appearances. Security checks, radar speed traps, drunk-driving roadblocks and unintentional involvement in an incident can all lead to unwanted official attention, and once a character's name hits the databases, all hell breaks loose.

Even if the crucible avoids official attention, investigators of all brands pose a real threat. Tracking down the group might be tricky, but it's never impossible. If the characters neglect basic security measures (like changing travel routes and vehicles, avoiding all contact with family



and friends, minimizing public exposure, etc.), they'll leave a trail so wide that even a campus newspaper reporter could follow it. The only substitute for stealth is speed, so a complacent group may spend significant time fleeing each town one step ahead of FBI agents, private investigators, journalists or assassins. And if its escape is a carefully staged funnel trap, the crucible could be in serious trouble. Survival is never guaranteed.

INVESTIGATION

The best weapon the characters can use against opponents is accurate information. Intel is a critical part of any mission. Without a full briefing and detailed knowledge of what to expect, it's impossible to produce a proper strategy or accurately plan for possible contingencies. That's true even of something as basic as scoping out a haunted house, and it's doubly true when it comes to staying ahead of powerful enemies. With decent, comprehensive information on potential threats, the crucible has a chance of steering clear of the forces arrayed against it. If the characters have no clue about their adversaries or tactics, the characters will need much luck to compensate for all the blunders that they'll undoubtedly commit.

The FBI poses the most obvious threat. Its manhunt for Orpheus survivors is open and public, and its agents frequently operate in plain sight. Special Agent Jesse Osorio, the agent responsible for the investigation, will make

frequent appearances on television and in the papers. The characters may not realize that their two mysterious antagonists have the means to monitor the FBI, various law-enforcement departments and the media, so any botched surveillance attempts on behalf of the crucible will result in a confrontation. NextWorld and the Death Merchants are also both obvious threats, though the forces employing them are far more secretive. While the FBI is monitoring the mercenary groups for potential supernatural activity, the Bureau devotes far fewer resources to them than hunting after Orpheus' survivors. This enables a resourceful crucible to use NextWorld and the Death Merchants to uncover useful information without potentially compromising its own safety. Unfortunately, it also means these mercenaries are less curtailed in their personal freedoms and ability to hunt after the characters.

There are several avenues open to characters in the pursuit of knowledge. The most obvious is using their abilities. They can infiltrate buildings, follow suspicious targets and control people in charge of potentially useful records, but, if they don't realize their opposition is similarly talented, they'll invite in disaster. Sometimes, pursuing something in the flesh is actually less dangerous than doing so in the spirit. A character donning a wig and walking into a public library is less conspicuous to a NextWorld spook than a projector would be. More traditional methods of



CRAZED CANNIBAL DEATH CULTISTS -LIVING IN MIDDLE AMERICA!



They look like an ordinary couple... Mr. and Mrs. Middle-Class America. He's a lawyer and she's a school nurse, but behind the successful business, well-kept suburban home and backyard garden, Bob and Marcia Jones live in terror!

It all began when the Jones invited their new neighbors, the Claringtons, over for dinner. A fast friendship bloomed, but the Jones could not know that their newest friends hid a terrible secret. Like hundreds of other middle-class Americans, the Claringtons followed a deranged and perverted pigment cult! Calling themselves the Children of the Blossoming Age, the cult's worshippers met every month to practice their secret ceremonies. The Claringtons introduced the Jones into this debauched world, first by encouraging them to smoke pigment. Bob and Marcia say they fell to the cult's influence after attending a downtown swingers' party. Such parties are often fronts for the cult, along with roleplaying societies and pagan groups. Victims are then slowly initiated into the cult's warped beliefs.

Initially, Bob and Marcia Jones were seduced by the hedonistic pursuits of the cult. They attended services naked, smoked pigment, participated in orgies and prayed, they claimed, to alien beings. But soon, the cult's practices turned violent. Bob and Marcia were forced to participate in human sacrifices and ingest pigment-laced foods to better commune with the "aliens." The cult even encouraged Marcia to recruit children, your children, from the high school where she worked.

What attracts good, upright people to such debauched practices you ask? Sex and drugs are the lure, with the cultists dabbling in many different substances like ecstasy, cocaine, pigment and heroin. They indulge in wife-swapping, orgies and other sexual practices otherwise shunned by society. Bob and Marcia only agreed to share their story if we promised not to use their real names and occupation... but their plight is real. It's too late for them, they say, but they want to save others from their fate. The cult's leaders claim to be in contact with alien beings who demand the cultists commit numerous deranged acts. Bob claims to have participated in five murder-sacrifices, committed at the "spirits" request. It's only a matter of time before Marcia succumbs to these maniacal cultists and dupes teens from her school into joining the cult.

The cult claims that this world is merely a shadow of another dimension, which is home to superhuman aliens. The cult believes its ceremonies allow followers to eventually gain such abilities as well... perhaps to even join their false gods.



**DO THESE PEOPLE
look like members of
a sex and drug cult?
-YOU BET!-**

remote information gathering are likely safer, if slower — web searches, public records, newspaper archives and libraries all offer good search potentials. Subtle questioning, blackmail, extortion and social engineering can all occur at a remote distance, thanks to telephones and email. Even stealthy, physical surveillance — trailing, photography, bugging, etc. — is considerably less conspicuous than brazenly projecting into enemy territory. The best results are those incorporating traditional investigative techniques with appropriate Horrors and a healthy dose of paranoia, but the characters may not consider that at first.

ACQUISITION

After Orpheus' fall, the crucible will certainly have a long list of materials and assets that it really needs. Some are likely urgent priorities for the group, right or wrong — like sleeper pods, crash space, disposable income and false identification. The characters might decide they need to track down anything beneficial to the crucible, from specific files and supplies of Orpheus' projection drug to particular individuals and big guns.

Many items taken from the Orpheus Group compound found their way into FBI custody, but admittedly, some equipment and files subsequently vanished, much to the Bureau's chagrin. Local law enforcement, looters and even some Death Merchants removed and kept some objects before the FBI swung complete jurisdiction over the case. Various criminal organizations then used physical intimidation, subtle coercion and bribery to ensure some items landed in their hands, in the hopes they could replicate Orpheus' projecting drugs, sleeper pods and intelligence. Interesting knickknacks can surface in the most unexpected of places. Anything the Storyteller needs for the characters to find could have survived Orpheus' destruction and entered general underground circulation or private collections.

When it comes to finding and obtaining an item, good contacts are invaluable. Regardless of a character's proficiency at primary investigation, a skilled fence or dealer in hard-to-obtain materials has private sources that keep her updated on many a valued bauble. People specialize in



different areas of gray- and black-market commerce, so a dodgy weapons dealer is useless when it comes to finding a particular document. If the characters don't have appropriate personal contacts, and the object they're trying to find is not openly available, then they'll need to track down a specialist first.

Naturally, location is another obstacle to one's goal. Obtaining an item that's currently not for sale might require threats, theft or mental manipulation, depending on the objective's location and its current owner. If the acquisition is unwieldy (like a pod) or resisting (like a person or ghost), then transportation poses its own set of challenges. Don't forget that any group breaking into a building, stealing something and possibly carting it off in a stolen flat-bed truck will attract a whole slew of police attention — which may raise red flags with the crucible's enemies if the item is Orpheus-related.

RESCUE

Similar to acquisition, rescue missions involve the characters locating someone valuable to them, and retrieving them unharmed. One rescue mission likely to motivate almost every crucible is retrieving characters' bodies. Missing sleeper bodies should be a primary objective for most crucibles. If the FBI "impounded" the character's flesh, chances are that sooner or later, they will try awakening him to face interrogation. This can be exceedingly dangerous (and a perfect opportunity for a unique story) since the FBI doesn't understand the process fully and could kill the character. All it has is half-complete notes and no practical experience. Getting to the body and rescuing it in one piece will be tough. Another possibility is that a Spectre took control of the body and simply walked off in it. This can happen to any projector careless enough to leave herself vulnerable. Once something shanghai's the character's body, the best chance for finding it will be for the characters to watch local news reports for the trail of mayhem and devastation, and then track the missing body from there.

There are several situations where the group might decide that a rescue mission is appropriate, like when a loved one is taken hostage or, more unpleasantly, given pigment, murdered and her soul kidnapped. Likewise, Spectres dragged off many people killed during the Orpheus assault when their souls left their bodies, turning them into viable rescue options. Projectors working for other groups victimized by NextWorld may also warrant assistance. There is no shortage of people in need of assistance. It could all well be a trap, however, particularly if the crucible uncovers information about the hostage's location a little too easily. The group must be tougher, smarter or luckier than the kidnappers expect.

REVENGE

Chances are, the characters are seriously peeved at Orpheus' destruction, especially sleepers and anyone harmed or killed during the raid. It's likely that the opportunity for vengeance will prove an irresistible lure for characters. The crucible is unlikely to seek revenge against the FBI, regardless of the inconveniences posed by the feds, but NextWorld and the Death Merchants are very viable and relatively visible targets. It's also possible that some third party like the Blasphemers might annoy the characters sufficiently to provoke them into action.

The mercenary outfits are the most obvious targets for retribution, because they are militant and the easiest to track down. They are fully aware of this, however, and may even play on it. NextWorld might dangle a prominent merc from the raid in front of the characters as bait for a trap. Death Merchants may present themselves as "someone in the know."

The FBI likewise expects retributive strikes. It is wary of assault but more worried about spirit spies and Skinriders. Thus, it might not be completely unexpected if it turns to capable Death Merchants or captured Orpheus spooks to operate on its behalf and help protect its personnel and sites. The media is relatively naive in believing itself above local events or retaliation. Most reporters are genuinely surprised to find themselves under attack, regardless of the content of their recent (and unflattering report). A chain of unexplained deaths among such "soft targets," however, will certainly attract attention from primary antagonists. Revenge may be satisfying, but it does carry risks.

TWISTED REFLECTIONS

Readers may be surprised to find that the layout for the "Twisted Reflections" section is virtually unchanged from those entries in the Orpheus core book. The primary reason for this is it presents a unified feel throughout the series so each book isn't too alien to readers. Some in-character entries, however, mention Orpheus' fall (like the Dead Firms one), but nothing prevents Orpheus survivors from using the old classification system. It's a familiar procedure to identify and categorize problems when everything else is in turmoil. This is especially true of the signature characters, who could be trying to organize the survivors by supplying them with necessary intel. In other cases, the files predating Orpheus' fall may be data recovered by the characters as reward for a particularly grueling story arc.

Maintaining the old formatting also allows some Storytellers to continue their chronicles with Orpheus



intact. Thus, some in-character entries mention the attack on Orpheus, but not its destruction, allowing Storytellers to run Orpheus-centered chronicles (with the various crucibles repelling the attack) and still have artifacts for characters to read that make sense.

THREAT TAGS

To facilitate the understanding of the following groups, we've included the threat tag system from the core book. Orpheus Group developed a system for organizing its opposition by the potential threat they represent to Orpheus agents, allowing for a quick assessment of potential dangers in the field. While Orpheus is potentially no more, we've continued using the same design strategy for both familiarity and to encourage those chronicles still running Orpheus Group-style games.

Spooks are subcategorized as follows:

Drone-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 1

Blip-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 2 or 3

Echo-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 4 or 5

Mirage-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 6 or higher

Shadow-class — Spectres

Enigma-class — Unknown or new species

Non-ghostly threats are subdivided as follows:

Contender — Rival company or its personnel

Nemesis — Actively hostile person or agency

Confederate — Allied individual not affiliated with another group

Collaborator — Allied individual within another group's infrastructure

Foe — Hostile target with no agenda toward Orpheus Group

Mark — Nonhostile target marked by an assignment

Threats are then categorized into the following ranks:

Blue — Friendly

Gray — Neutral

Green — Uncertain

Red — Hostile

Thus, a ghost going through its daily routine at the office where it worked in life, would be a Blip-class Gray (which Orpheus projectors might approach and interact with freely). A Reaper, however, who single-handedly eliminated an entire Orpheus crucible would be termed a Shadow-class Red threat... to be avoided at all costs.

THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (FBI)

Since Orpheus' destruction, the FBI considers projector-related threats more seriously. In addition to tracking down remnants of the company, as well as

investigating Terrel & Squib, it is watching NextWorld, though it lacks enough evidence to move against either. It also suspects NextWorld had something to do with the attacks on the other firms. At the moment, the best the Bureau has managed is to wiretap a few phones and garner three search warrants for NextWorld HQ that turned up nothing.

The highest profile public event at the moment is the Court TV trial of the first Orpheus crucible, captured by the FBI in Monmouth County, Virginia. The trial is a carnival, the verdict already decided. Other Orpheus agents who surrender or are captured by the FBI fall to secret courts and star-chamber justice. Those who refuse to help the FBI or who are convicted of crimes against the United States, find themselves at a POW camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba where special laboratories are being set up to interrogate Orpheus agents, study projector technology and eventually duplicate the techniques and capabilities of Orpheus agents.

CURRENT STATUS

Unlike most enemies the crucible faces, the FBI's goals and ambitions are pretty straightforward and in the open. After the attack, Osorio was quick to convince the FBI of the need to regulate projector technology and that he should head the investigation. The feds currently offer a standing \$5,000 reward for tips leading to the capture of Orpheus employees, with commensurately higher bounties for certain personnel.

Osorio's CIRG team has six members, three of whom generally stay in the background, quietly plugging away at their tasks. They are:

• **Sanjee Prohaska, Computer Cybertracking Specialist:** Prohaska is an Indian immigrant who became a US citizen in 1993. Tremendously patriotic, he graduated from MIT in 1994 and joined the FBI soon after; his specialty is Computer Crime and Information Systems. The characters can thank Prohaska for his efforts in stemming their use of their credit cards, driver's licenses or passports. Prohaska spends most of his time sorting through reams of computerized data, trying to spot suspicious electronic footprints pertaining to money or equipment movement that might lead the FBI to another Orpheus survivor. He also tries piecing together what he can of Orpheus' information network from backups and restored hard disks, though the attack destroyed much of it.

• **Melanie Seal, Forensic Accountant:** Melanie Seal graduated with an MBA in accounting from the University at Albany business school in 1988, and has since worked for the FBI. A whiz with figures, she spends significant hours poring over Orpheus' books, trying to figure out where its revenue came from and where it was

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

Threat Tag: Nemesis Red

Background

Much of the FBI's information concerning Orpheus and projector technology comes from Craig Forest's reports. Forest, a former undercover operative for the Bureau, was killed during a failed hostage retrieval attempt when the FBI tried "rescuing" him from Orpheus. Apparently, the agency's interest in the matter revolves around a single source, Forest's former "handler," Special Agent Jesse Osorio.

Osorio claims the FBI only became interested in Orpheus following the attack. According to Forest, Osorio was investigating the company almost from the day its doors opened. Initially dismissed, Osorio later presented Orpheus as a potential threat to national security. He saw the potential for abuse of projector technology and was determined to bring it under federal control. Undoubtedly, Osorio is merely a mouthpiece for factions within the Bureau who wish to remain anonymous. Craig Forest's extraction, in turn, was the disastrous first stage in an operation to eventually shut down the company and seize its assets.

Since the attack, the FBI has gone on the offensive. Labeling the Orpheus Incident a terrorist attack, the FBI's CIRG (Critical Incidents Response Group) operates under auspices of the USA Patriot Act and the blessings of the Department of Homeland Security. That means it doesn't strictly observe legal niceties like the need for search warrants and the right to an attorney.

The most frightening aspect of the FBI's crusade against Orpheus is that the Bureau's conducted it in complete view of the public. Not only does it announce its intention to investigate every last Orpheus employee to the evening news, it continues using the media to fire up an all-too-enthusiastic public into acting as spies and informants.

Relevant Personnel

Special Agent Osorio's CIRG Team consists of six members who coordinate information and execute his strategies. The three with the highest public profiles are:

- **Alan P. Faurey, Profiler:** Faurey, a tall, burly man with a shock of blazing red hair, graduated from Yale Medical School with a Criminal Psychology degree in 1981. Since then, he's become one of the FBI's most celebrated profilers. He courted controversy and professional censure after shifting from profiling individual serial killers to attempting to profile whole organizations, but he remains convinced that he can psychologically profile a criminal enterprise, predicting its reactions to certain conditions and how best to stop it. His work impressed Osorio enough that he offered Faurey a position within CIRG. Although Faurey has yet to complete his work-up on Orpheus as a whole, his profiles helped capture several individual Orpheus fugitives.

- **Jennifer McDonald, Media Relations:** McDonald, a tall, striking black woman, has a warm, outgoing personality and dazzling smile that makes her a natural for PR work. She spent several years in the FBI Press Office, even acting as the Director's Press Secretary for a six-month stint while her boss was on maternity leave. She transferred to the CIRG when she saw how poor handling of the press during a hostage situation resulted in a hostage's death. She now excels at crisis management, manipulating the media with practiced ease, while the public most commonly associates her face with the FBI's Orpheus investigation first and foremost. The characters frequently catch her on television with a graphic of their faces over her shoulder.

- **Keith Sullivan, Law Enforcement Liaison:** Sullivan and partner Sandra Chu hold unofficial titles. "Liaison" is merely recognition for the fact they hold field jobs, coordinating with local law enforcement when their assistance is required. Sullivan, a good looking, 6' 3" mass of muscle, is the more outspoken and politic half of the team. He does the most talking, eases the ruffled feathers of local cops and basically ensures any operation goes smoothly. Chu makes sure that local law-enforcement personnel obey procedure for gathering evidence and that convictions eventually follow arrests. Although both Sullivan and Chu are tough customers, capable of defending themselves, they prefer to emulate their boss Osorio and outthink rather than outfight their opponents.

Status: Avoid

SPECIAL AGENT JESSE OSORIO

Special Agent Jesse Osorio is a highly decorated agent with 10 years in the Bureau. Over the years, he served with the Violent Crime Division and worked undercover on Organized Crime operations. He is currently the field agent in charge of the Critical Incidents Response Group assigned to investigating the destruction of Orpheus and bringing projector technology under federal control.

Osorio maintains several agendas he's pursuing in relation to the Orpheus investigation, some official, some private. He despises projector technology and vacillates between considering it nothing more than a massive grift perpetrated against the American public, and considering it real enough to be dangerous. He is also engaged in a private feud with Craig Forest. As Forest's undercover "handler," Osorio was humiliated by the sniper's defection to Orpheus.

Fellow agents often describe Osorio as a "rat terrier." Single-minded to the point of obsessive, he never stops pursuing the characters. Charming, funny, quick-witted and manipulative, his picked squad of agents is fanatically loyal (or so he thinks). He's also very perceptive and highly intelligent, preferring to outwit and trap opponents, avoiding violence if possible.

Osorio is a physically small (about 5' 6") Mexican-American. He's wiry and physically agile, but not very strong. Only a passable shot with firearms, he prefers to "lead from the rear," directing and planning strategy for his squad of agents.

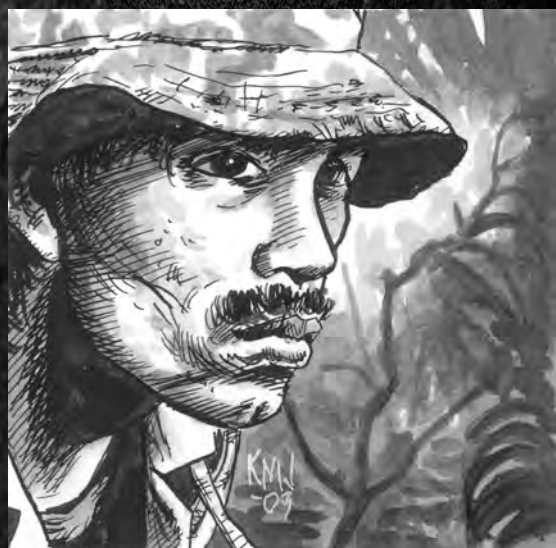
Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 4, Drive 3, Firearms 3, Law 4, Politics 4

Nature: Fanatic

Willpower: 7

Equipment: cell phone, shades, Kevlar vest, Glock 9mm



going. At the moment she's stuck given that whoever cooked Orpheus' books was a master. It is the most incomplete and deliberately obscure accounting data she's ever encountered. Although she continues working on the project, at the moment all she can determine is that Orpheus didn't make its money from the fees it charged. In fact, the company lost money every year, yet managed to post a consistent profit.

• **Sandra Chu, Law Enforcement Liaison:** People might easily dismiss Chu, a tiny (5' 3") woman of Chinese descent, as harmless and meek. She's very quiet and usually lets Sullivan do most of the talking. When the action starts, there are few deadlier than Chu. She is adept at unarmed combat and has among the highest shooting range scores of any cadet in FBI history. Once Sullivan marshals the forces for an operation, it is Chu who assumes tactical command. Although Sullivan and Chu have only been partners for three years, they work well together and both like and respect one another.

NEXTWORLD

NextWorld has always been willing to break American law as long as the price was right; it's simply been very subtle about it. That subtlety is possible through the way NextWorld compartmentalizes information within the company. Many of NextWorld's mercenary projectors have little desire to become fugitives in the United States or Europe, thus Derkov, and now Dupree, carefully kept the company's illegal activities secret beyond the operating team. Specifically, this is why Dupree recruits Third-World operatives, since many have no qualms concerning international law. The divide between the old hands and these new recruits remains a festering sore within the company.

The Orpheus Group assault was the largest and bloodiest NextWorld operation to date, and it would have been impossible to keep secret. Sir Alfred Williams refused the contract, but Derkov saw it as an opportunity to establish NextWorld's market dominance. It also provided the perfect excuse to winnow the old guard from NextWorld, allowing Derkov to seize control of the company. Using Dupree as his hatchet man, Derkov orchestrated a coup using special teams of new operatives to eliminate almost all the old hands who supported Sir Alfred Williams' decision. Only a half-dozen or so of the old guard escaped the slaughter, vanishing underground with pre-arranged covers. A few remained hidden in NextWorld, working for the company and looking for a way to use their positions for the better.

Currently, NextWorld has several key operatives, including Daniel Ngbee, a Congolese national recruit. Daniel was an active mercenary in his

NextWorld

Threat Tag: Foe Green

Background

NextWorld is the Orpheus Group's closest competitor. It does not, however, acknowledge any of the limits under which Orpheus operates. Reliable intel indicates a recent "coup" in the leadership, following a car accident that claimed the life of Sir Alfred Williams. Russian ex-general Alexis Derkov seems to be running the show now, with Chief Financial Officer, Sydney Riley, quietly complying. Derkov, meanwhile, turned over position of Chief Executive Officer to one Jean Dupree, an experienced Canadian mercenary who is one of NextWorld's first successful projectors.

In the years since its founding NextWorld has operated internationally, specializing in wetworks, jobs that require killing. It has been more careful recently, however, limiting assignments within the US to those of gray-intent rather than outright illegal. NextWorld also demonstrates little regard for its agents, most of whom are sleepers. Its loss rates are extremely high, but its ranks are well staffed by high pay rates and a willingness to recruit people with mental profiles otherwise unacceptable to Orpheus or most military/paramilitary organizations.

While the core management group remains Western-born, NextWorld's most active agents are Third-World recruits. This appears to be a relatively recent practice. The relative technical ignorance of these recruits, along with their acculturated tendency to view their occupation through a superstitious lens, benefits the mercenary outfit. NextWorld's scientific resources are third rate, having changed little from those techniques and drugs originally stolen from the Orpheus Group. This is one reason why NextWorld uses sleepers from Third-World countries. It allows a wide recruitment pool and a reasonably disposable agent base.

Whatever NextWorld lacks in technical expertise, it compensates with tactical and operational acumen. NextWorld perfected the use of projectors for military operations and has extensive experience from activities in Africa, South America and Asia. It is well capable of assassinations, commercial and political espionage and even acts of terrorism, though it's taken more care to hide its activities in the United States and the Western Hemisphere.

Relevant Personnel

- **Jean Dupree, Chief Executive Officer:** Jean Dupree has been with NextWorld since its founding. A hardened killer, he no longer handles field assignments, but maintains a close eye on the training of new agents. Dupree handles all business negotiations with prospective clients and may indeed know the identities of most NextWorld's clients and the Swiss bank accounts that the company uses for holding its funds. This protects Dupree from an unsavory fate. It's not likely he'll suffer the common fate of mercenary leaders, a bullet in the back from an ambitious underling.

- **Yevgeny Molochov, NextWorld Field Manager:** As Field Manager, Yevgeny Molochov is responsible for the actual conduct of operations. A former soldier and protégé of Alexis Derkov from his days in the Russian military, there is still no information to suggest Molochov was part of a secret GRU projector project. Molochov still has a direct hand in field operations and has a reputation as a violent, almost sociopathic killer.

- **Marcus N'Kejeda, Senior Team Leader:** Among the most talented NextWorld projectors currently in operation is Marcus N'Kejeda, an American national with military training and Marine experience. Many want to see him in the Field Manager's position, but as long as Molochov has Alexis Derkov's support, N'Kejeda doesn't stand a chance of being promoted. This may prove a coup if we can convince N'Kejeda to defect.

Status: Gather Intel



homeland's interminable civil wars for six years. A remorseless killer, he adapted well to projection thanks to his religious faith, juju, which is better known as voodoo in the West. Daniel is a marabous, or priest, and he helps keep the Central and West African projectors in line (since they make up the bulk of NextWorld's projectors). Many were only nominal believers before working for NextWorld, but their experiences as projectors made them believers. Dupree and his Western cohorts (most of whom participated in the Orpheus raid) are aware of Daniel's significant influence, but concede they need his help in keeping their operatives in line.

CURRENT STATUS

Derkov and Dupree carefully follow the word of their client's open-ended contract to hunt down and destroy what's left of the Orpheus Group. The assignment rakes in considerable money, and it amuses both men to crush the "arrogant snots" Orpheus comprises. Their greed, however, works against the interest of their client (mysterious antagonist #1). Derkov waffles on eliminating the remnants of Orpheus since the client pays NextWorld by the week; Derkov doesn't want his gravy train to end too quickly.

Unbeknownst to Derkov and Dupree, mysterious antagonist #1 has an insurance policy within NextWorld: Daniel Ngbee. Daniel may not know for whom he works, but the antagonist pads his offshore account to report on Derkov and Dupree. The antagonist also has the indirect allegiance of NextWorld's African operatives and the professed loyalty of Daniel. The antagonist has yet to call on this ace in the hole, but he does encourage Daniel and his followers to chase after Orpheus Group employees, promising them great rewards. As a result, some NextWorld operatives go about their anti-Orpheus operations with an almost maniacal intensity and brutality.

SPECTRE BREEDS

CHUPACABRA

These Spectres were never human and usually serve their stronger, more intelligent brethren. It is also possible, however, that mysterious antagonist #1 uses them as personal enforcers or assigns them to certain NextWorld operatives like Daniel Ngbee. In this role, Chupacabras serve as bodyguards, enforcers, trackers and executioners. The death or destruction of a Chupacabra's "master" sends the beast on an insane rampage until someone destroys it.

MATHEU KEREKOU

NextWorld recruited this Liberian native after his long period of service in his home country's elite rangers unit. Long experienced to seeing and dealing with death and misery up close, Kerekou was an ideal recruit and soon proved an adept projector. With the kind of professional military background that appeals to NextWorld, Kerekou became a member of the old guard faction within NextWorld. Experienced in the bloody factionalism of Liberia, Kerekou recognized the growing friction between Williams and Derkov, and prepared himself a hideout and new identity for the day that the situation at NextWorld came to a head. Among the handful of survivors, Kerekou speaks with the spirits of his escaped, dead comrades and distributes information on NextWorld via the Internet and through ghost informants in the hope it eventually brings Dupree and Derkov down.

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 1, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms 4, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Linguistics 2, Melee 3, Security 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2, Survival 4

Shade: Banshee

Lament: Skimmer

Nature: Traditionalist

Willpower: 6

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Forebode, Inhabit, Wail





A Chupacabra can possess several animals, up to 100 pounds per point of Willpower expended. When controlling more than one creature, the Chupacabra sees through and controls any member of the swarm but possesses only one creature (usually the biggest, nastiest member) called a “Mother Beast.” Only the death of the “Mother Beast” drives a Chupacabra from the swarm, ending its control.

FRIENDLY ANGELS

Friendly Angels act as procurers and harvesters. Conduits for a twisted, Spectral love, Friendly Angels transmit that affection to those Spectres whose desperate need for love turned them into Spectres in the first place — Lost Boys. Each Friendly Angel develops its own hunting territory, usually a small town of less than 100,000 people or a placid suburb of a major city. Full infestation consists of the Angel establishing a lair in an inaccessible location (sewers, garbage dumps, etc.) and observing the emotional makeup of the area’s residents unseen. The Angel uses its shape-shifting powers to comfort vulnerable children, winning their confidence and eventually leading them to gruesome deaths that turn them into Lost Boys.

Once a Friendly Angel develops a pack of 15 to 20 Lost Boys, it targets the region’s adults. It sows fear and discord in the town, manifesting as a monster — usually a childhood fear or sometimes as a loved one, confirming the subject’s worst terrors. It fosters illusions of horrible things to unsettle and frighten people. Over the course of a few months, a Friendly Angel turns a nice, friendly town inside out. Buildings burn and paranoid people slaughter each other, creating spirits harvested by the Lost Boys.

This Spectre’s true appearance is a faceless, lumpy humanoid figure with flesh that melts and shifts like wax. Its power of illusion only allows it to tap into a person’s thoughts and bring forth the victim’s terror and fears. Most often, these images are of what frightened the target as a child, and the illusion reinvigorates that child-like dread. Roll the Spectre’s Manipulation + Empathy against the target’s Willpower as the difficulty. Each success drains away a point of Willpower; the horrors inflicted by the illusions are the legacy of nightmares. Once the target’s Willpower hits 0, he gains a derangement. The Spectre usually lets the victim recoup some Willpower before attacking again and afflicting him with another, then another, derangement. Thus begins the community’s spiral into madness.

JAGUAR, THE CHUPACABRA

Surviving reports indicate that Jaguar may have been the “mascot” of a destroyed pigment cult in Guadalajara, Mexico. Its original masters gone, Jaguar now has no purpose other than randomly destroying and terrorizing any living thing it encounters. It may have guided a swarm of rats to kill three American tourists in Acapulco. Reputed possessions also include a pack of feral dogs in Tijuana and a hive of “killer bees” that plagued San Diego for a month.

Its current whereabouts are unknown, but the media reports a string of bizarre animal attacks across Arizona, New Mexico and west Texas. Jaguar resembles its namesake, a powerful black cat with matted, fungus-encrusted fur that falls out in patches. Jaguar’s mismatched teeth prevent it from closing its jaws properly and cause its mouth to constantly drip a vile black blood. Its tail resembles that of a scorpion and is tipped with a wicked stinger.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 6, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Brawl 2, Stealth 4, Survival 4

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 6

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Carapace, Claws, Hive-Mind, Maw, Possession (functions as Puppetry, but only affects animals). When embodied: Juggernaut.



SPECTRES

THREAT TAG: SHADOW-CLASS RED

BACKGROUND

THE LEGIONS OF SPECTRES CONTINUE GROWING, WITH SPOOKS ENCOUNTERING NEW BREEDS ALMOST DAILY. ALTHOUGH WITNESSES SAW NEW VARIETIES DURING THE ORPHEUS AND T&S ASSAULTS, THE RESULTANT PANDEMONIUM MEANS MANY OF THE UNIDENTIFIED SPECTRE TYPES REMAIN NOTHING MORE THAN RUMORS. THE FOLLOWING THREE BREEDS, HOWEVER, ARE COMMON ENOUGH THAT MOST AGENTS ENCOUNTERED OR HEARD ABOUT THEM. SOME FILES ARE CUT-AND-PASTED FROM PREVIOUS REPORTS.

CHUPACABRA

BACKGROUND: ACCORDING TO SPOOKS WHO MET THESE CREATURES AND SURVIVED, CHUPACABRAS RESEMBLE DEFORMED AND MUTATED PREDATORY ANIMALS. VARIOUS DESCRIPTIONS INCLUDE BLOATED TIGERS WITH TANGLED, SCABROUS FUR, LEPROUS BEARS WITH PATCHY, DISEASED SKIN AND EVEN A BLACK, HAIRLESS UNICORN WITH MAGGOT-FILLED EYES AND FLAMING HOOVES. ALL DESCRIPTIONS, HOWEVER, SHARE CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS: AN ENORMOUS MOUTH FILLED WITH MISMATCHED TEETH (AS THOUGH EACH TOOTH ORIGINATED FROM A DIFFERENT ANIMAL), AN EXTREMELY TOUGH HIDE AND NATURAL WEAPONRY (CLAWS, HORNS, STINGERS).

A CHUPACABRA'S DESTRUCTIVE POWERS AREN'T LIMITED TO ASSAULTS ON GHOSTS, THOUGH. THESE SPECTRES SEEM CAPABLE OF POSSESSING ORDINARY ANIMALS, EITHER SWELLING SINGLE CREATURES TO MONSTROUS SIZE OR CONTROLLING PACKS/SWARMS OF SMALLER ANIMALS. RECENT CASES OF CHUPACABRA POSSESSION INCLUDE A GREAT WHITE SHARK THAT TERRORIZED A LONG ISLAND RESORT TOWN, A FLOCK OF BIRDS THAT KILLED 37 PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON STATE AND A 35-FOOT-LONG ALLIGATOR IN THE SEWERS OF MIAMI.

ALTHOUGH CLEVER, CHUPACABRAS SEEMINGLY POSSESS AN ANIMAL INTELLIGENCE. THEY'RE VERY SKILLED, HUNTERS, HOWEVER, AND DO TRACK THEIR PREY FOR DAYS. ANIMALS POSSESSED BY CHUPACABRAS BECOME VERY RESISTANT TO DAMAGE AND OFTEN DO THINGS NORMAL ANIMALS COULD NEVER DO (SHARKS SWIMMING BACKWARD TO AVOID NETS, DOGS NOSING OPEN A DOOR, ETC.).

STATUS: FUMIGATE

FRIENDLY ANGEL

BACKGROUND: FOUR-YEAR OLD KIMBERLY DAVIS COINED THIS HIDEOUS CREATURE'S NAME WHEN SHE TOLD POLICE THAT A "FRIENDLY ANGEL" LURED HER NINE-YEAR-OLD SISTER, LENORE, INTO A STORM DRAIN THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED. OVER A TWO-MONTH PERIOD, 60 PEOPLE OF VARIOUS AGES VANISHED IN THE TINY TOWN OF BURKINGS, VERMONT; ORPHEUS AGENTS DISCOVERED THE TOWN SWARMING WITH LOST BOYS. WHILE CLEANING OUT THE NEST, THE AGENTS INVOLVED EXPERIENCED BIZARRE HALLUCINATIONS INCLUDING SEEING DEAD LOVED ONES WHO TRIED CHASING THEM FROM TOWN OR ATTEMPTED TO LURE THEM INTO THE SEWERS. THEY ALSO CLAIM PICTURES CAME TO LIFE AND DISPLAYED OBSCENE IMAGES, WHILE FEARFUL POP CULTURE ICONS LIKE COUNT DRACULA, FREDDY KRUEGER AND THE BLOB STALKED THEM. CONFLICTING REPORTS ALSO DESCRIBE A "LUMINOUS BEING OF LIGHT" THAT RADIATED LOVE AND WARMTH.

ORPHEUS ANALYSTS BELIEVE ALL THESE CREATURES WERE ONE MONSTER MANIFESTING TO EVOKE LOVE OR FEAR, TO BETTER LURE AGENTS INTO TRAPS AND LOST BOY AMBUSHES. IT IS CURRENTLY UNKNOWN WHAT THE "FRIENDLY ANGEL" ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE, NOR WHETHER IT HAS ANY POWERS OR ABILITIES BEYOND CREATING ILLUSIONS. THE ACTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRIENDLY ANGELS AND LOST BOYS IS ALSO UNDER INVESTIGATION, THOUGH CURRENT THEORY HOLDS THAT FRIENDLY ANGELS MAY ENGINEER CIRCUMSTANCES RESULTING IN THE CREATION OF LOST BOYS. ASSUME THAT THE APPEARANCE OF A FRIENDLY ANGEL MEANS THERE ARE AS MANY AS 10 TO 20 LOST BOYS IN THE VICINITY.

STATUS: GATHER INFORMATION, CAPTURE IF POSSIBLE.

E-DEMONS

BACKGROUND: E-DEMONS FIRST CAME TO ORPHEUS' ATTENTION WHILE INVESTIGATING THE CARMINE RUSSO CASE, A SCHOOL SHOOTER IN CHICAGO. POLICE CAPTURED RUSSO, WHO THEN TOLD INVESTIGATORS THAT A VIDEOTAPE HE HAD WATCHED INSPIRED HIS RAMPAGE. ACCORDING TO THE INTERVIEW, THE TAPE CONTAINED GROTESQUE IMAGES PREDICTING RUSSO'S DEATH AND THAT OF HIS ENTIRE FAMILY IF HE DIDN'T EXECUTE HIS ENTIRE GRADUATING CLASS. ORPHEUS INVESTIGATORS EXAMINED THE TAPE AND FOUND NOTHING EXCEPT FOR A COPY OF *GIRLS GONE WILD III*.

A MONTH LATER, THE CASE'S INVESTIGATING AGENT, GRACE DIBNEY, SHOT THREE FELLOW ORPHEUS EMPLOYEES IN THE CAFETERIA. AFTER BEING SUBDUED, DIBNEY CLAIMED HER PDA HAD SHOWN HER THE TRUTH... THAT ALIENS CONTROLLED THE ENTIRE COMPANY, AND THAT THEY WANTED TO VIOLATE HER BODY AND DISSECT HER BRAIN. AN EXAMINATION OF THE PDA LED TO THE DISCOVERY OF A NEW FORM OF SPECTRE — THE E-DEMON.

E-DEMONS INHABIT ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT, PDAS, TELEVISIONS, COMPUTERS, VIDEO CAMERAS, ET CETERA. ONCE INSIDE, THEY ALTER THE DEVICE'S OPERATION, TWISTING ITS OUTPUT TO DRIVE THE OWNER INTO ACTS OF DESPERATION AND VIOLENCE. DEPENDING ON THE PSYCHE OF ITS OWNER, THIS MANIPULATION CAN BE AS OVERT AS TELEVISION SITCOM CHARACTERS TELLING A VICTIM TO KILL HIS FAMILY, OR AS SUBTLE AS ALTERING EMAILS TO FOSTER NOTIONS OF PARANOIA AND CONSPIRACY.

ORPHEUS CONSIDERS THE E-DEMONS THREAT-LEVEL FAIRLY LOW. THEY INFLICT THE MOST DAMAGE AGAINST THOSE WHO REMAIN UNAWARE OF THEIR EXISTENCE. SHOULD YOU SUSPECT AN E-DEMON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR A PROBLEM, SIMPLY DESTROY THE ITEM AND FORCE THE SPECTRE TO VACATE WHATEVER PIECE OF TECHNOLOGY IT CURRENTLY INHABITS. BE CAREFUL, HOWEVER. IN EITHER FORM, THE E-DEMON IS CAPABLE OF GENERATING A NASTY ELECTRICAL CHARGE, BUT THIS SEEMS PRIMARILY DEFENSIVE IN NATURE. IN COMBAT, OUTSIDE AN OBJECT, MOST E-DEMONS PREFER FLIGHT OVER FIGHT.

STATUS: ELIMINATE



MR. FOX, FRIENDLY ANGEL

This Friendly Angel, attracted to the despair generated by another Spectre in the area, infested the small suburb of Oak Park. In an unusual situation, the "other" Spectre proved to be Sasha Velikov, a ghost trying to redeem his previous actions. (See "The Siege of Oak Park," p. 155 for more information.) Mr. Fox derives his current form from a children's book called *Fantastic Mr. Fox* by Roald Dahl, which several classes of a local elementary school were reading when the Spectre arrived. In the six months since, seven children in the town have vanished.

Mr. Fox remains in Oak Park, but is curiously inactive. No children have disappeared for several weeks and the level of ghost-related phenomena usually reported by the populace has decreased. It usually appears as a four-foot tall anthropomorphic fox wearing a blue topcoat and yellow checked waistcoat with a large gold watch. Mr. Fox is usually smiling, but it can alter its fox appearance to be suitably horrible when the need arises.

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Empathy 5, Intrigue 4, Stealth 4

Nature: Deviant

Willpower: 6

Spite: 6

Offensive Abilities: Illusions, Manifest, Shape-Shift (this allows the Spectre to change its appearance; treat each new offensive/defensive ability as a Stain; Mr. Fox can use this while manifesting), Unearthly Repose



E-DEMONS

Orpheus was wrong concerning the E-Demon threat. While it's true E-Demons are a poor match against characters in combat, combat is not their primary purpose. E-Demons are Spectral information-gatherers. They help the Spectres gain a better understanding of human psychology and human fears through the hive-mind. Each report from an E-Demon helps create stronger and more effective Spectres when dealing with the human element. All an E-Demon need do to a crucible is lie quiescent in a piece of equipment while broadcasting its location, or even observations, to any Spectres nearby. The characters may be harboring an E-Demon without their knowledge.

DEATH MERCHANTS

Orpheus is correct in its assertions. The Death Merchants are not a collective, and merely share a name in common as a means of capitalizing on some previous prestige. They normally work in groups of one to three individuals, and they rarely know one another directly. Each group recruits and maintains its own members, and many groups even fight over territory or contracts. In many ways, the Death Merchants are the template for the modern terrorist cell, where each cell has no knowledge of the others.

With very few exceptions, Death Merchants are American in nationality. Surprisingly, the cells draft few recruits straight from the armed forces. Most have military experience, but very few were active soldiers when they became Death Merchants. The rumors that many Death Merchants stem from strong neo-Nazi movements in the Central Plains is true, but many also hail from the violence-rich environment of most major inner-city slums and the extreme right-wing, paramilitary groups in the South.

CURRENT STATUS

Various Death Merchants are actively pursuing the crucible, having been hired to eliminate all surviving personnel from raids on projector firms. A few others, aware that these contracts are floating around, may try kidnapping crucible members and hold them ransom for a kill contract. (Think of it as proactive assassination.)

OMEGA SQUAD

Omega Squad is the name of three brothers — Matt, John and Paul, listed from oldest to youngest — who



STAR-STALKER, E-DEMON

The E-Demon known as Star-Stalker came to Orpheus' attention through the nightmarish "American Pop Stars" case. Tragedy marred *American Pop Stars*, a talent show filmed in Los Angeles, when three of the top 10 contestants were murdered by a stalker named Rufus Donalds, an unemployed factory worker. Donalds, a fan of contest front runner Kelly Ingalls, claimed that after each song the singer spoke to him through the television screen. Donalds developed a relationship with Ingalls' image and swung into action when she asked him to eliminate her rivals for the top spot. Donalds is now serving multiple life sentences in a California prison.

Star-Stalker's whereabouts are unknown, but presumably still in Los Angeles. Prior to Orpheus' destruction, several major Hollywood studios hired an Orpheus team for "extended," open-ended contracts to protect the major movie and television lots. The crucible's first major case was to track down and destroy Star-Stalker. The team itself vanished.

This Spectre is usually incorporeal and prefers traveling about by jumping from one device to another. When forced to manifest outside a technological item, Star-Stalker, like all E-Demons, appears like a hideously burned humanoid figure, with charred black skin and a lumpy, misshapen head. Currents of electricity arc up and down its body, and a strong smell of ozone emanates from its form.

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

Abilities: Awareness 4, Empathy 3, Intrigue 4, Security 5, Stealth 3, Technology 5

Nature: Conniver

Willpower: 6

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Immolate (purely electrical), Inhabit (on electronic devices)



were part of a neo-Nazi camp in Illinois. Matt and John served in the Marines, and both received dishonorable discharges for behavior unbecoming. Matt assaulted a superior officer and John was drunk during sentry duty. Paul was too young to serve in the military, at 17 years old, but not too young to join his brothers.

All three brothers are sloppy and undisciplined. Nevertheless, they are all adept at violence and quite cunning. Nobody hired them to eliminate the characters, but they take it upon themselves after eliminating another Death Merchant with a contract for the crucible. The brothers hope to kidnap the characters and "ransom" their deaths. They will invade the home of a crucible member's loved one, set an ambush and wait. Unfortunately, the first attempt to do so fails because the FBI is monitoring associates and family members of the characters and will in fact drive the brothers off.

Afterward, the brothers grow more desperate, resorting to kidnapping a character's family member and murdering the stakeout team and its replacements. This becomes particularly nasty if the event unfolds as the character is trying to visit his family.

Given the nature of their opponents, the three brothers smoke pigment after kidnapping or home-invading a target. This way they can see spooks who may try manifesting to their family.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Melee 1, Security 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2

Nature: Thrill-Seeker

Willpower: 5

Death Merchants

Threat Tag: Nemesis Red

Background

Among conspiracy theorists, the name Death Merchants is known only to the most paranoid and best researched individuals. The name finds mention in some free or radical press circles when someone assassinates a politician or activist. There are a few other instances when the name arises, but all revolve around either political figures who challenge the status quo or in relation to important captains and lieutenants of pivotal industries (telecommunications, defense contractors, etc.). Because of these targets, theorists assume that Death Merchants are, in fact, government agents. The favorite potential employers are the CIA for those Death Merchant activities abroad, or the FBI for wetworks that occur on American soil. Others, still, believe the Death Merchants a loose-knit assassination bureau who hire their services out to the highest bidder. We think, however, that Death Merchant is nothing more than a title used by independent and autonomous assassins and hatchet men who are generally unaware of one another. It is a job description shared by many, much like butcher or computer analyst, because it nets the Death Merchant more contracts and respect.

Our suspicions of this assertion stem from several observations. Death Merchants lack a coherent central authority. Most organizations have a single contact point where you can phone or email them, or perhaps an office to meet people in person; at the very least, there should be a handler or central switchboard. Not so with Death Merchants. There is never mention of someone in charge to issue orders and oversee the organization. Additionally, hiring a Death Merchant entails one of too many approaches, from answering ads in a mercenary magazine or website to being referred to them. Contact in all recorded cases is maintained through many different email addresses and telephone numbers. One rumor claims you can identify a Death Merchant through a Grim Reaper tattoo on the inside of his lower-left eyelid. We have yet to confirm this allegation.

An important distinction to note is in categorizing Death Merchants. Most mention of them is in their role as assassins. This is not, strictly speaking, true. Death Merchants are mercenaries who operate in all manner of black bag operations, including kidnapping, espionage (governmental and industrial), et cetera. Those cases where their names appear the most, however, involve assassinations, so wetworks does seem to be their specialty.

It should be noted that only the most hardcore conspiracy theorists actually have much to say about the Death Merchants.

Relevant Personnel

Unknown. So little is fact when concerning their organization that we must regard any information about its personnel as spurious. Rumors are consistent about the Death Merchants as an American-based operation, which recruits from many different paramilitary groups within the US. Currently, most rumors agree that Death Merchants consist of operatives from active white-supremacy groups in the Midwestern states. This, however, may simply be a matter of imitation, where one member of a closely knit group follows the lead of an associate in naming himself a Death Merchant.

Status: Fumigate



MICHAEL THREEOAKS

Michael Threeoaks lied about his age when he enlisted in the Marines to serve in Vietnam (he was 15 at the time). Following his discharge, he returned to his home on the reservation, but it was a bitter and disillusioning experience. Threeoaks quickly joined AIM (American Indian Movement) to drive the white man from the little land left to his people and to fight against the wild injustices perpetrated by them. AIM kicked him out almost as quickly. Threeoaks' methods were entirely too violent, and no one wanted anything to do with the psychopath who butchered two FBI agents and brought the full wrath of the feds on the reservation. From there, Nigel Tamayans, an old comrade in arms, approached Threeoaks and spoke to him about striking back at the oppressive empire crushing both their people. (Tamayans was involved with some of the more violent members of the Black Panthers.) Threeoaks did not require much convincing.

Recently, someone hired Threeoaks to eliminate the characters' crucible. He does not know who his employer is, nor does he care. Nearing 45 years of age, Threeoaks abandoned almost all of his political affiliations years ago. All that remains now is a remorseless killer. His favorite tactic with groups is to tail and then isolate one person, torture that person for any information about the other targets, then dispose of the body — chopping it into small pieces and burying it in a remote location. Using this technique, he intends to kill the characters one by one, beginning with a family member or loved one. He has very limited skills with modern technology, but his brutality and patience have yet to fail him.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Security 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Survival 2

Nature: Loner

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Remington M-700, Sig P-220, hunting knife



HERBERT MOL

Mol is the ultimate, buttoned-down accountant stereotype. He's lived his entire life in Georgia, and is a quiet Southern Democrat. He is respectable and polite. He goes to church every Sunday and serves as a deacon. Then, about six years ago, Mol's company sent him and several other employees to a retreat involving paintball, among other things. Mol loved it... so much so that he grew fascinated with all things military. He joined a gun club and slowly met members of an ultra-right-wing paramilitary group — the kind that thought Reagan was too soft. The group taught Mol how to use real weapons, and he in turn, participated in weekend survival courses and militia meetings.

Mol showed a real flair for his new interests. After a couple of years, a friend told him about the Death Merchants, and Mol believed it a legitimate organization. He's been trying to join ever since, and he accepts freelance assignments as a means of proving himself to the DM hierarchy. He's even gone so far as having their supposed insignia tattooed underneath his left eyelid. This assignment is Mol's fifth, and he believes it a test from the real Death Merchants. So he will approach it cautiously and carefully. He has a knack for explosives and favors car bombs and booby traps. He is also an accomplished marksman, but lacks the physical courage required for face-to-face confrontations. Therefore, he tries avoiding situations where he must face the crucible.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Bureaucracy 2, Computer 2, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Investigation 1, Medicine 1, Melee 1, Science 1, Security 2, Stealth 1

Nature: Perfectionist

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Remington M-700, explosives



The Media

Threat Tag: Foe Gray

Background

The media has leapt all over this story following the Orpheus attack. Examining the details, it's easy to understand why. There's death, violence, terrorism, corporate corruption, interesting personalities and fugitives at large. The last, in particular, is a godsend for various media outlets, since they can now trumpet "Could an Orpheus Killer be in YOUR Town?" across the page.

As they say, the best news is local.

Television is the enemy. Steer clear of cameras and reporters. Even if a trusted "friend" claims a reporter wants to help you clear your name, stay away. You'll certainly find FBI agents waiting for you when you appear for your "secret interview." Even if you don't, you'd be amazed what FBI profilers can accomplish by examining the flimsiest evidence. They can potentially determine general locations, your state of mind and your course of action. Forget sending tapes or evidence to television stations as well. The media outlets will either suppress the material or edit it to support the "killer fugitives" story that's garnering the most ratings.

Your best shot at getting your story released is probably through the Internet. Web logs (called "blogs") have been all over the mainstream media in recent weeks. A few anonymous emails sent in the right direction just might make your story newsworthy. Don't count on it, though.

Relevant Personnel

Too many to list. I'd advise you learn how to recognize the better reporters in town. They're not always followed by camera crews.

Status: Avoid



Equipment: automatic rifles, automatic pistols, grenades, pigment and ghostshot ammo (stolen from T&S agents)

THE MEDIA

The Orpheus story is currently the largest in the country and characters can expect significant notoriety from the coverage. The media plasters their pictures across shows like *America at Large* and *Fugitive Hunt*. The FBI also manipulates this story through the efforts of Jennifer McDonald and Alan Faurey.

It isn't all bad, however; the news serves as a source of information for the crucible as well. Talk and opinion shows may suggest avenues of investigation that the characters missed. A television newsshow that discovers another fugitive's location might allow the crucible to rescue him. Fringe media may pick up on facts the characters know to be true, allowing them to work it to their advantage; they can also watch the broadcast trials and disposition of interviewed Orpheus refugees, gauging what's happening

with the FBI. Even business news can prove useful, with some reports dealing with Terrel & Squib's legal fight against the FBI.

CURRENT STATUS

- **Madame Cassandra:** Leading the charge against the dead firms and Orpheus refugees is a new show on PAX TV called *Arms of Light*. The program is a mixture of *Crossing Over* type shows and a television ministry. The host, the so-called "medium" Madame Cassandra, claims she can send spirits to their final reward ("In the arms of the Holy Mother!") and says that the dead firms have been torturing and damning them. Character investigation, however, reveals the truth. The so-called "Hounds of the Lord" that whisk away spirits are in fact, Fetches and Chupacabras.

DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

Currently, the DEA's forensic tests show that all pigment is being made through multiple laboratories, but using one process. The Pigment Drug Enforcement

MADAME CASSANDRA, HOST OF ARMS OF LIGHT

Cassandra Wilton was once a charlatan. Skilled at cold reading, she turned her "fortune-telling" abilities into a mini-empire of sham mediums and psychics that bilked the gullible out of vast amounts of money. Then, close to two years ago, a city bus struck her. Hovering on the edge of death for weeks, she awoke with a true ability to see and speak with ghosts.

Taking a cue from the dead firms, she parlayed that ability into a modestly successful television show where she did on the air for regular people what companies like Orpheus did for the rich. Unfortunately for her, her efforts drew the attention of both the antagonist responsible for felling Orpheus, and the Spectres. The antagonist co-opted the show, offering her enormous wealth and power if she would simply continue doing what she was doing, but take her marching orders from him.

Wilton agreed, albeit reluctantly. While she's unaware of the true nature of Spectres and the antagonist, she suspects they aren't quite as benevolent as they claim. She also fears her little poodle, Fluffy. It's become the "Mother Beast" for a Chupacabra sent by the antagonist to guard and keep watch over her.

When not in her studio, Madame Cassandra spends considerable time in a luxurious loft apartment or helping one of several charitable organizations. She is a short (5' 4"), dark-skinned woman and a bit heavy. She prefers wearing long, flowing flower-print dresses.

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

Abilities: Crafts 2, Empathy 3, Enigmas 3, Expression 3, Occult 3, Performance 4

Nature: Hedonist

Willpower: 4

Equipment: none



Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)

Threat Tag: Foe Green

Background

The DEA formed in 1973 to bring all of the federal government's narcotics enforcement and research into one organization. A direct descendant of the Bureau of Prohibition, the DEA's task is to enforce the US's controlled-substances laws and regulations, and to arrest those organizations and individuals involved with growing, manufacturing or distributing illegal substances. It also supports non-enforcement programs aimed at reducing the availability of controlled substances, and it coordinates intelligence concerning the illicit trade in drugs between local, state, federal and international policing organizations.

Over the last few decades, it has become one of the largest and best equipped paramilitary-intelligence agencies in the world, with relatively free reign in and outside the American borders. The Administration has a budget nearing two billion dollars a year and employs 10,000 staff, of whom half are special agents. The DEA's personnel consist of 20 divisions that cover every major urban center in the United States, as well as dozens of overseas offices. They further fall into several teams and task forces on both a geographic and task-orientated basis. The Orpheus Group's interaction with the DEA is due to the newly established Pigment Drug Enforcement Task Force (PDET), which expended significant efforts in investigating the company and our employees.

The PDET's interest in the Orpheus Group stemmed from a belief that pigment was somehow related to a cryogenic drug, Canopictrum™; Orpheus used the now discontinued drug for easing a client's transition into a cryo-state. Canopictrum™ is also the ancestor of the projector drugs we use today. At some point during the turmoil that led to Orpheus Group's founding, an ex-employee sold Canopictrum™'s formula to undisclosed parties. We believe this precipitated the transition of competitors Terrel & Squib and NextWorld into the projection business. Despite repeated investigations that show no link between Orpheus Group's Canopictrum™ and the drug pigment, the DEA's interest remains.

We advise all crucibles to cooperate with any DEA special agent who approaches them. If this occurs, however, the crucible should suspend investigation of their current assignment and report back to head office immediately. Under no circumstance should we entangle our clients with a DEA investigation; it would prove highly embarrassing should it become public. The same is true of any information the crucible may unearth concerning the production and sale of pigment. The Orpheus Group has no interest in illicit drugs, and it is to our collective benefit to discover who divulged the formula for Canopictrum™ and who is presently manufacturing pigment.

Relevant Personnel

- **Tony Cleary, Special Agent in Charge of the PDET:** Special Agent in Charge, Tony Cleary, is an ex-LAPD narcotics squad detective who heads the PDET. A 30-year veteran of the war on drugs, he leads the task force with great determination. A staunch Catholic, he exhibits a distinct antipathy to pigment dealers but has grown less critical of Orpheus. He is less certain of Orpheus' potential involvement in the pigment matter, but still harbors an innate suspicion of our activities.

- **Special Agent Sonya Stewart:** The DEA recruited Sonya Stewart from the Security and Exchange Commission, and over the last five years, she has led innumerable investigations into companies involved in drug dealing and laundering of drug money. A skilled lawyer, she is a constant thorn in Orpheus' side. Her document searches, not to mention wholesale interviews of researchers and company accountants, reveals only legitimate medical research and accounting practices, but she keeps looking.

- **Special Agent Peter Bladschke:** Orpheus' most determined and vocal opponent within the PDET is Special Agent Peter Bladschke. Recruited 10 years ago from the US Navy Judge Advocate General Corps, he bears a near-pathological disdain for Orpheus for reasons we cannot fathom. Certainly our modus operandi appears dubious to external critics, but Bladschke goes beyond suspicion and does everything in his power to interfere with crucible operations, even when it doesn't pertain to pigment.

Status: Avoid



Task Force is the DEA's attempt to prevent another crack cocaine-style epidemic, but it may already be too late. DEA laboratory testing shows that pigment contains some complex biological substance that is probably plant-based. The Administration's scientists presently hypothesize that pigment's central element is a genetically modified plant with super-hallucinogen properties. For this reason, they realize it is not being manufactured in some backyard lab, hence the attention they are paying to the Orpheus Group and Terrel & Squib.

The Orpheus Group's fear of the PDET is mostly unwarranted, however. Special Agents Tony Cleary and Sonya Stewart have enough data to believe that Orpheus Group's present management and the majority of the staff have no involvement with manufacturing pigment, though they haven't made any final or official conclusions yet. What worries some Orpheus techs, however, is that Canopictrum™ was one of several formulas stolen (a fact Orpheus never reported to the DEA), and that in a cocktail of combined drugs might lie the answer to pigment. This means they remain uncertain of whether someone within the Orpheus Group is not involved. After all, someone did steal Canopictrum™'s formula along with several others. Even they don't know, however, of the plants Orpheus one had stored in their freezers.

The task force's main lines of investigation have turned to unearthing pigment's major distribution networks, as well as investigating Terrel & Squib, but this is slow going.

CURRENT STATUS

The assault on Orpheus and the FBI's current investigation has taken the PDET by surprise, but Tony Cleary recognizes the potential benefits of it. From the task force's investigations, Cleary is aware that much of what Orpheus did was quite dubious, but he finds the allegations being voiced in the media unlikely. However dubious, the Orpheus Group was a business and nothing more. Still, with its surviving personnel now fugitives, Cleary and his team is looking for potential new operatives to penetrate the pigment network... desperate individuals willing to do a deal with the DEA to escape the FBI.

The PDET has a problem, however. Special Agent Peter Bladschke is working for shadowy pigment cartel. During an investigation of a pigment cult, Bladschke attended a séance, and to his lasting horror, the mystic channeled his dead wife. Eager to hear more, Bladschke went back again and again, hiding the cult's involvement in the pigment trade (justifying it as the cult being a minor player in the distribution network). Eventually the pigment cartel determined Bladschke's identity and determined that it had a PDET agent right where it

AGENT PETER BLADSCHE

At no time in his 10 years with the DEA has Peter Bladschke ever been tempted to betray his nation's trust. Even now he tells himself he isn't really betraying his country and that he's using the pigment cult instead of the other way around. Besides, the cult hasn't even asked for his protection, simply that he focus his attentions on the Orpheus Group. So it goes in Peter Bladschke's mind, with him convincing himself into growing abuses of his powers if just to hear his dead wife's voice for a few minutes. Very soon his insanity will consume him completely, and once Bladschke's mind cracks, his soul will be an easy target, leaving his body open for possession.

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

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Empathy 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Law 2, Leadership 1, Melee 2, Occult 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1

Nature: Follower

Willpower: 4

Equipment: Kevlar vest, 9mm pistol, cell phone



The Blasphemers

Threat Tag: Collaborator Green

Background

We've recently uncovered evidence of one group partially involved with the pigment trade that calls itself the Blasphemers. A small street gang, the group compensates for its size by employing projectors and ghosts, though how it accomplishes this remains unknown.

Apparently, Orpheus knew about the Blasphemers but steered clear of them. It wasn't until after the attack on Orpheus that we procured several interesting documents. The Blasphemers constitute at least two prisoners used in the Project Flatline experiment. When the prisoners escaped, most followed Uriah Bishop, while five or six went their separate ways. The two within the Blasphemers recently made noise in the supernatural community and warrant further investigation. Though both are rather odd, their small organization has grown in force since they became ghosts.

Stephen Moluxe was a Latino anarchist in the '60s who led a violent organization called *Los Manos de Aztlan*. Jeffrey Rose was among America's most prolific and bizarre serial killers. Diagnosed with multiple personalities, Rose manifested at least seven to court psychiatrists, each of which was a completely different serial killer. Since Project Flatline freed them of their physical bodies, the two have "re-entered" society as crime lords of sorts.

According to intelligence-gathering missions, Moluxe recruits two spirits and six hues of varying degrees of power (all originally Latino), while Rose associates with four spirits who share his unusual views on life and death. They also appear nominally allied with the Latin Kings, a large Dominican gang growing in prominence over the last several years. The Kings provide the living muscle to back the Blasphemer's ghostly minions. Together, with two living "facilitators" or managers, the Blasphemers hire out their services to anyone willing to pay their fee. Why ghosts would require cash is made obvious in a moment. To date, the Blasphemers have been responsible for several bank robberies, several bizarre murders of prominent industrialists and a riot that paralyzed the downtown core during an international monetary policy conference.

Moluxe's and Rose's long-term goals remain unknown currently, though it seems likely Moluxe wishes to continue his pre-1968 crusade. Namely, he wishes to overthrow the American government and merge California, Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico and southern Nevada into "Aztlan," a nation for what he calls "the Golden People" or Hispanics. To that end, he aggressively pursues contracts for his cabal, trying to raise as much cash as possible. He also refuses jobs that might result in Hispanic deaths or injuries. Investigating Orpheus agents believed that the Latin Kings' recent shift in behavior (they now protect poor Hispanic neighborhoods from other gangs) may be the result of Moluxe's influence. Rose's motives and long-term plans, as always, remain unknown.

Relevant Personnel

Please be aware that the Blasphemers may include two more Flatliners in their midst. We've heard rumors of powerful spooks trying to pull together dead Afro-American gangsters, much in the same style as the Blasphemers.

- **Stephen Moluxe, Blasphemer:** Moluxe is the leader of the organization, he sets agenda and policy, and he provides strategic planning. In his quest for Aztlan, it's possible he may be trying to exert control over Hispanic community leaders and politicians.

- **Jeffrey Rose, Blasphemer:** Rose, likely in the form of his Jared Blackstone personality, and his killer spirits provide the gang's muscle.

- **Carlita Manas & Juan Porrico, Fixers:** Ex-gang members who now negotiate the deals for their organization's services.

- **Six spirits & six hues (potential):** Various Laments and powers.

Status: Avoid



wanted him. Not only could it tempt him with his dead wife's spirit, it also had clear evidence that he withheld information from his superiors concerning the cult.

The pigment cartel is completely uninterested in the DEA's investigation. After all, the PDET can hardly locate them or their drug labs. So, instead of using Bladschke to subvert the PDET's investigation, the cartel uses him to target Orpheus. Even though the Orpheus Group crumbled, the cartel keeps Bladschke at it, hounding the surviving crucibles, often with falsified evidence of pigment trade involvement or some other manufactured criminal activity. The body count also increases with Bladschke's involvement. He deliberately provoked two encounters with fugitive Orpheus personnel that forced the crucibles to pull weapons, thus justifying his agents' use of lethal force in return. Bladschke's activities have not gone unnoticed by Cleary

and DEA internal affairs, however, prompting a quiet investigation of the special agent.

THE BLASPHEMERS

Stephen Moluxe is indeed pursuing his agenda from the 1960s, but unlike before, he now has the power to wreak havoc if he so chooses. The lines between power, delusions of grandeur and insanity are nonexistent in Moluxe. He envisions overthrowing the United States and re-establishing a modern Aztec Empire across portions of the continent. To that end, he and his fellow spirits recruit not just allies, but followers. The first step is turning the Latin Kings into his own personal army. Therefore, he assists them in wresting the drug trade away from the Hells' Angels who currently dominate statewide distribution of heroin. He also encourages more impressionable Kings to perform hideous human sac-

STEPHEN MOLUXE

Stephen Moluxe was a radical activist in Los Angeles during the 1960s and the founder of *Los Manos de Aztlan*, which dedicated itself to "bettering the lives of The Golden People." Unfortunately, Aztlan accomplished this noble goal through civil unrest and terror. Police linked the group to several bombings in Southern California between 1960 and 1967, as well as to several murders.

Police finally caught Moluxe in 1968, during a robbery of a defense contractor where he killed a police officer. In the years following his capture, Moluxe's obsessions grew into a full-fledged conspiracy mania. He's convinced a secret cabal of Jews, Freemasons and vampires pulls the US government's strings. He believes this conspiracy is behind everything from Martin Luther King's assassination to the faked moon landings.

Moluxe moves about constantly, trying to avoid enemies both real and imagined even though he's a ghost. He's normally found, however, at a heroin processing facility run by the Kings in a hangar on a decommissioned Air Force base outside the city. The facility also deals in pigment, though the pigment is already processed and dropped off by a low-flying airplane. Payment for each shipment is accomplished through electronic money transfers and false company fronts. Moluxe also frequents the city's "Bohemian" districts, trying to recapture some of the spirit of the '60s.

Moluxe appears almost exactly as he did when he died. He's a 5' 9" Hispanic man of moderate build, and approximately 50 to 55 years old.

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

Abilities: Brawl 4, Enigmas 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Melee 3, Politics 3, Streetwise 4, Survival 4

Shade: Wisp

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Fanatic

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Helter Skelter, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose





rifices using diluted pigment as a sacramental drug. Without even realizing it, the Latin Kings are becoming his personal slaves.

Crucibles on the run might believe the Blasphemers to be natural allies — “the enemy of my enemy” and all that. Moluxe, however, offers any assistance on a strictly quid pro quo basis, and the longer a crucible associates with him, the more he tries pulling them into his fold. If the characters resist or defy him, both Blasphemers eventually turn on them. That said, the Blasphemers can make good starting allies, and provide some of the new facts

listed in this sourcebook (like information about Project Flatline). What they won’t reveal is information concerning Uriah Bishop or any of the other Flatliners. Moluxe and Rose fear Bishop but also know little of his escapades since escaping prison. They prefer maintaining their personal ignorance.

CURRENT STATUS

Moluxe and Rose still work on contract for anyone who pays their fee, but as time goes on, more and more of the statewide heroin trade comes under their control, freeing them for the next step in Moluxe’s plans... fomenting civil unrest. The Blasphemers have

JEFFREY ROSE

Jeffrey Rose ranks among history’s most extraordinary serial killers because Rose isn’t one killer, he’s seven. Born in 1969 in South Carolina, he shuttled between abusive foster homes for years. Tormented relentlessly, his psyche eventually shattered and Rose became the Magnolia Killer who murdered 15 student nurses from 1989 to 1991.

The Magnolia Killer then vanished for four years, resurfacing in 1995 after killing another student nurse. The authorities captured him, upon which he was convicted and sentenced to death. Then, when prison psychiatrists examined Rose more thoroughly, they uncovered his whereabouts from 1991 and 1995. Rose suffered from true multiple personality disorder. He has at least seven personas, each of which is a serial killer. Their choice of targets differed, based on their personalities (Lawrence Cabrini, for example, was a black man who murdered prostitutes), and together they killed well over 150 people. Unfortunately, while Rose’s condition demanded treatment, the state had already scheduled him for execution, and was reticent to release him. So Rose remained in a maximum security facility until Project Flatline. Rose’s entry into the program was based solely on scientific interest and whether all seven personalities could learn to project.

Rose usually hovers around Moluxe, but since his death, he has developed an eighth personality called “Granny Victoria.” This old woman has an insane hatred of Spectres (whom she calls “her wayward children”) and Rose does vanish for days on end while hunting Spectres. If a crucible finds Granny Victoria, and promises to help kill Spectres, Rose’s eighth facet may help them without strings.

As a ghost, Rose is a 5’ 10” white man, painfully thin with poorly cut black hair and thick glasses. He tries spending as much time as possible possessing a body that matches his current personality (e.g. Lawrence Cabrini possesses a black man, Granny Victoria an old woman, Jacob Blackstone a white, blond man over 250 pounds, etc.).

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

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Empathy 3, Etiquette 3, Investigation 4, Law 2, Stealth 3 (some personalities may have additional Abilities as appropriate)

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Director

Willpower: 9

Vitality: 7

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Juggernaut, Puppetry, Unearthly Repose, Wail



Dead Firms

Threat Tag: Confederate Green

Background

Like ourselves, these agents served with Orpheus or the likes of Terrel & Squib. Now, following the Orpheus attack, a startling fact has come to light. Many firms dealing in ghosts and projectors are gone or badly hurt as well, including Terrel & Squib. The Orpheus raid was not only well coordinated between all attackers, but it also coincided with raids on the other major projector firms as well. This indicates excellent organizational skills, an abundance of resources and top-line training. It also means that if you can discover what happened in the other raids, you might uncover details relevant to the attack on Orpheus. So parallel investigations are not only possible, but useful as well and potentially necessary.

The attacks didn't spare the smaller firms. Within a week of the Orpheus and Terrel & Squib strikes, most projector firms in the country employing more than seven agents were neutralized, no exceptions. Every attack was professional and thorough. Since the attackers used deadly, brutal force, no new firms have opened for business. Not surprising since the attacks also precipitated the FBI's witch-hunt. Recent events have shut down many projector firms for the foreseeable future.

It is reasonable to assume that a single aggressor is responsible for the strikes. This adversary may be using multiple agencies to accomplish this task, but still, ultimately, you are most likely looking for one enemy or one agency. This single foe is likely either extremely powerful in the private sector or a government agency of some sort. We cannot determine which yet.

Relevant Personnel

Since some Orpheus personnel survived the attack, it is reasonable to assume others have as well. At least one Orpheus agent was not present in the raid on Orpheus... Derrick Hanson. He was having an affair with a Terrel & Squib agent by the name of Kelly Escobar. Most Orpheus field agents knew about this affair and secretly wished the pair good luck. Hanson is an extremely affable young man and widely liked by everybody in the firm. Hanson and Escobar left on vacation a couple of days before the raid and were due back eight days after the raid. They haven't reappeared since. We are assuming Hanson and Escobar weren't silenced while on vacation — the two went backpacking at the nearby national park — and are currently in hiding because of all the news exposure.

Another potential survivor is Miles Gardner. He worked for a tiny projector firm called Future Life, which only employed two agents. Gardner was a lousy agent, but a talented survivor. If anybody else survived the Future Life assault, it would be him. In the past, he helped Orpheus crucibles on limited terms, but his help was always more of a hindrance.

Status: Gather Intel



DERRICK HANSON

As the only black kid in an all white neighborhood, Hanson grew up painfully aware of the differences between him and the other kids. It didn't help that Hanson was also adopted. His foster parents were white, and try as they might to help their son adjust, it never really worked out well. So Hanson grew up in a loving, if ever-so-slightly uncomfortable, environment. His defense mechanism was being one of the most thoroughly likeable people imaginable. He excelled in sports, but was only a mediocre student, as was expected from jocks. Mainly, he was outgoing and affable, always joking and laughing, always kind and supportive.

The beginning of Hanson's life read like a case study in good fortune. He nearly drowned at summer camp, he fell from a ladder and cracked his skull open and he narrowly missed a city bus while crossing the street. Finally, late one Friday night while cruising around with his buddies, Hanson's car struck another car that had run a red light. All his friends died, and Hanson slipped into a coma. When he emerged, Orpheus approached him and subsequently recruited him. Hanson has since helped three of his dead buddies to move on to their final reward.

Hanson's current girlfriend, Kelly Escobar, works for Terrel & Squib. They met at a camping supply store and didn't realize they worked for rival firms until later. That didn't negatively impact their relationship. In fact, with recent events and the fight for survival, Hanson and Escobar are closer than ever.

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

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Computer 1, Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Medicine 1, Performance 2, Politics 1, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Shade: Hunter

Lament: Skimmer

Nature: Socialite

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Inhabit, Witch's Nimbus



HELLY ESCOBAR

Kelly Escobar hails from the classic large Mexican family. Her mother was a nurse, prompting Kelly to follow in her mother's footsteps. Her training and bilingual ability brought her to the ER. It was this constant exposure to death and disease that brought her to Terrel & Squib's attention.

Escobar did not meet her future lover, and a projector like her, on the job. Escobar and Hanson shared a passion for the outdoors and met in a shop where they were both buying supplies for an upcoming hike. It wasn't until their second date that they realized they worked for competing firms, and they both quickly agreed not to let their personal lives and work interfere with one another. Currently, however, the FBI's witch-hunt has driven the two lovers deep underground.

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

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Bureaucracy 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Empathy 3, Intuition 1, Investigation 2, Linguistics 1, Medicine 3, Science 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1, Survival 2

Shade: Banshee

Lament: Skimmer

Nature: Caregiver

Willpower: 4

Vitality: 9

Spite: 2

Offensive Abilities: Forebode, Wail





MILES GARDNER

Life was rarely kind to Miles Gardner. His early childhood consisted of surviving the poorest part of town and outliving his drug-addled father. The physical abuse Gardner, his mother and two sisters endured is heart-wrenching indeed, given that one younger brother did not survive. Inevitably, Gardner's father died after asphyxiating on his own bile while unconscious. There was no funeral and no mourning. Next to die was his youngest sister, an accidental victim of a drive-by shooting. His mother and remaining sister both died of a particularly virulent flu strain, which nearly killed Gardner as well, because the family couldn't afford proper medication.

Gardner's decision to deal drugs was a matter of survival and not due to a lacking moral center. After escaping halfway homes and intermittent periods in juvie hall, Gardner finally hit 18 while in prison for possession with intent to sell. The parole board released him after he showed tremendous progress in rehab. T&S recruited him as a possible projector, but quickly fired him because of his violent disrespect for authority. Eventually, he found employment at Future Life, a tiny projector firm that overlooked the negatives of his psych evaluation. Miles has no real discipline or dedication, which makes him a lousy agent, but given his background, no one is better at surviving than he.

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Intimidation 1, Law 1, Linguistics 1, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1

Shade: Poltergeist

Lament: Skimmer

Nature: Survivor

Willpower: 9

Vitality: 8

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Helter Skelter, Inhabit



not yet reached the point where they'll turn down contracts based on their employer's race. While Moluxe obviously favors assignments through which he can strike back at conventional society or the US government (particularly the FBI, INS or DEA), he still accepts work from anyone. Rose, thus far, seems content for Moluxe to set the agenda so long as it assures him a chance to kill.

DEAD FIRMS

In the previous months, the number of projector firms soared on the same inflated expectations of dot-com enterprises. All they needed was an ex-Orpheus, Terrel & Squib or NextWorld tech to sell his secrets to an entrepreneur, and voila, a new basement-business sprang into operation. Some, like Future Life and Osiris Inc., were above-board and well-managed enterprises catering to middle-class clients. Others used dangerous, homegrown pigment

cocktails and jury-rigged sleeper pods to flatline those customers with voyeuristic fetishes.

The mercenaries hit every medium and major projector firm, excluding NextWorld, naturally. If the firm was public knowledge, NextWorld targeted it and took it down. While individuals survived, only Terrel & Squib pulled through... barely. One repercussion of the attacks is that sleeper cradles have all but vanished almost overnight. Every major assault used a mixture of NextWorld mercs and Spectres. The object of the raid was the complete destruction of facilities and records.

The primary target was Orpheus, then Terrel & Squib, then any other projector firm offering its services. Because of the fluid nature of the projector business, it's likely several agents for these firms were out on assignment or somehow survived the assault. This means potential allies or a way of introducing new characters to the crucible since everyone is in the same boat. One-time rivals may now become the closest friends... if you can find them.

Six Deuce Gangsters

Threat Tag: Nemesis Red

Background

The Six Deuce Gangsters are perhaps the city's most feared street gang. Their neighborhood encompasses a five-block radius in the city's poorest section. With very few exceptions they recruit every young male within that subdivision into the gang by the age of 12. The police never patrol this neighborhood alone. When riots break out across the city, the Six Deuce Gangsters are always at the center of the conflagration.

Ordinarily, the Six Deuce Gangsters have little interest in the world outside their hood. They sell drugs to support their lifestyles, with all their surplus cash going to guns and cars. They sell marijuana, LSD and cocaine primarily, but recently, they started slinging pigment. Although most dealers sell pigment to upscale club patrons, it requires a street vendor to play middleman between the chemist and club-goer. We believe the Six Deuce Gangsters fulfill this function.

The Six Deuce Gangsters also actively hunt and kill any projector they can find. The preferred targets seem to be Terrel & Squib employees, but they are by no means the sole targets. So far, Six-D have killed two Orpheus employees and six from Terrel & Squib. Both our companies have united in this front and are trying to convince the police to stage active raids on the Six Deuce Gangsters, but we've met with no success so far. The police are too afraid of the neighborhood to risk staging a raid inside it. In all likelihood, we may need to join forces with Terrel & Squib to eliminate the threat if the authorities don't intercede.

What inspired this sudden animosity remains a mystery. It began only two months earlier. Eight confirmed kills within a brief period show the ruthlessness of the Six Deuce Gangsters. They move with greater focus and unity than is normal for street gangs. Word on the street says a new leader replaced the recently deceased Ezekiel Williams and is providing the group with much-needed cohesion.

Relevant Personnel

Until recently, a clever street thug named Ezekiel Williams led the Six Deuce Gangsters through a dangerous combination of brutality and cunning. Under his authority, the Six Deuce Gangsters expanded their drug dealing to include pigment — which, because it sold to a more affluent clientele, dramatically increased their income. Around the neighborhood, Ezekiel played like a king holding court. While he gave cash to help some families in the neighborhood buy groceries and medicine, he also took what he wanted... including people's lives.

A couple of months ago, Ezekiel died. The details concerning his death remain unclear, but street contacts all believe that an outsider killed Ezekiel... potentially the same person who seized control of the Six-Ds. This mystery leader promptly declared war on Terrel & Squib, claiming a T&S agent was responsible for Ezekiel's death. We have no data concerning this mystery leader, however, or why he/she fomented this sudden surge of activity in the Six Deuce Gangsters.

Status: Fumigate



CURRENT STATUS

Hiding. Very simple — it's about survival. Any survivor does her level best to keep her head down, so finding survivors is tricky. Additionally, while the crucible searches for survivors, so to does the FBI, the media and society at large. There are also merc teams still roaming the streets, looking to silence all dead firm remnants. Think of it as the deadliest game of tag ever played.

SIX DEUCE GANGSTERS

Ezekiel Williams knew folks in the pigment drug-manufacturing business and further realized that cops were afraid of entering Six-D territory. So, he opened a pigment-manufacturing lab in the heart of the city's ghetto, with pickup of pigment raw materials moved to a new location each time. (Ezekiel received the call after the shipment was already waiting.)

Ezekiel's operation ran smoothly until a young woman overdosed on pigment. This alone was not unusual, but this time, the victim's brother worked for Terrel & Squib. Enraged by his sister's death, agent Henry Beckford investigated privately and uncovered Ezekiel's name. In true vigilante-style brutality, Beckford projected into gang territory and beat Ezekiel to death using Helter Skelter. Beckford thought nobody saw him.

Unfortunately, some of the area's pigment users spotted the agent, and informed the Six Deuce Gangsters. Word trickled back to Ezekiel's brother Clarence, or "Football" as folks called him, about a particularly bright ghost. Clarence was a different creature than Ezekiel. Clarence was educated through personal struggle and drive, despite emerging from the same street background as his brother. Clarence loved his brother intensely, and upon discovering his death, set aside his dreams of academic pursuit and returned home to avenge his brother and care for his family.

Ezekiel was so well liked and respected that the Six-Ds had little problem following Clarence's plan of vengeance. So far they have killed 10 projectors, not eight, and several bystanders as well. The hits are always public, up close and personal, with automatic rifles.

Over time, the gang will eventually tire of vengeance and move on, but for now Clarence's intense focus keeps them on track. Without Clarence, however, the Six-Ds would return to business as normal since their sale of pigment is suffering. With Ezekiel's death, the pigment shipments continue, but Clarence obliges them to hunt for his brother's killer. So, right now, a king's ransom in pigment is piling up at the manufacturing plant.

CURRENT STATUS

The Orpheus raid and FBI's witch-hunt convinced Clarence that his goal is just. At least three times a week, he leads many Six Deuce Gangsters in hunts for renegade projectors. This means most of the operations

CLARENCE "FOOTBALL" WILLIAMS

Clarence "Football" Williams was Ezekiel's younger brother, though Clarence never intended to join the gang. He loved watching football, hence his nickname, and planned on graduating college with a business degree. When Henry Beckford murdered Ezekiel, however, Clarence dropped out of school to avenge his brother.

Clarence is different from the other gangbangers. The others are street thugs and act accordingly. Clarence is educated and a fanatic, however. Life on the street robs people of any vestige of idealism, but Clarence enjoyed Ezekiel's protection and support. With Clarence leading a gang of killers in the name of his brother, the Six-Ds are now both dangerous and directed.

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

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 3, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Melee 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 4

Nature: Fanatic

Willpower: 8

Equipment: Uzi 9mm, Colt Anaconda





inside the neighborhood are left unguarded or, at best, manned by a skeleton crew.

Clarence is savvy in regard to his opponents. He knows that some projectors on the run need specialized equipment, so he called in several favors, asking to be informed if anybody sells or trades in projector-related equipment (nitrogen freezers, biological suspension fluid, heavy-duty generators, life-support gear, etc.). Should characters buy any of this equipment, they may find themselves facing a heavily armed force of Six Deuce Gangsters. Unfortunately, the Six-Ds are growing tired of being treated like foot soldiers by someone who considers himself above them. While they won't harm Clarence out of respect for Ezekiel's memory, they may eventually cast him adrift and return to business. With pigment manufacturing slowing down, they need to reestablish their presence on the local market.

GANGBANGERS

These generic thugs constitute the Six-Ds. Some of are functionally illiterate — having dropped out from grade school — but none are stupid. Ezekiel winnowed that trait from the organization. Many Six-Ds are fairly sharp individuals now adept at surviving. Their actual martial skills are lousy, but their fearless enthusiasm makes them more dangerous than most professionals. Also, thanks to their drug dealing ventures, they are armed with the best guns money can buy. Without "Football" pushing them on, the Six Deuce Gangsters will quickly drop their vendetta.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 3, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Law 1, Linguistics 1, Melee 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3

Nature: Follower

Willpower: 4

Equipment: assorted automatic rifles and pistols (Uzis, .38 specials and Mac-10s)

DORMANT PHOENIX OF CRYOGENICS

Orpheus' view of Eduardo Fernandez is dim indeed, and heavily biased. He was a leading researcher in cryonics for nearly two decades before working for JDG Cryogenics, and he was responsible for the first breakthroughs in resuscitating frozen clients. Dr. Fernandez's staunch medical ethics generated friction with management, which had developed a haphazard approach to such issues. While Dr. Fernandez knew little of Project Flatline, he realized JDG (now Orpheus) was patenting many of his discoveries in the field of cryogenic suspension, for purposes outside protocol. His growing

objections and suspicions culminated with the termination of Project Flatline, when Orpheus released him from its service. The only reason he didn't suffer a foul fate was because he knew nothing of Flatline itself. So, it was a surprise when Orpheus tried pinning the project's failure on his shoulders, citing Dr. Fernandez's research and equipment as faulty (though no one ever explained how or why Orpheus used his research and equipment).

Orpheus never took Dr. Fernandez to court over the matter because the recriminations were private...

EDUARDO FERNANDEZ

Quite and reserved with a bookish appearance, Eduardo appears the clichéd medical researcher. Outside of work, however, he is fond of dancing, is happily married with six children and supports a much younger mistress on the side. He is a consummate professional and acts as such, keeping his exuberant and passionate nature under strict control. The shocks to come, however, will test him to their limits, especially if he discovers the true nature of projection. That said, Dr. Fernandez is currently safe from NextWorld and the FBI since, technically, he runs a cryogenics service. He may prove an invaluable ally to the crucible, however, capable of supplying them with a sleeper pod second only to Orpheus tech.

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

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Computer 3, Firearms 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine 4, Science 4, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 5

Equipment: .38 special (for protection only)



DORMANT PHOENIX CRYOGENICS

THREAT TAG: MARK GRAY

BACKGROUND

Somewhat of a scandal since its inception two years ago, Dormant Phoenix came to the Orpheus Group's attention several weeks ago when one of our crucibles investigated a haunting at a private residence in New Jersey. The spook in question met our agents with a cacophony of pleas and insane antics. More disturbing, the spook exhibited characteristics more akin to a projecting sleeper than a ghost. On further investigation, the crucible discovered that the house's previous inhabitant underwent cryostasis before his lung cancer could kill him. The company responsible was Dormant Phoenix.

Founded by Dr. Eduardo Fernandez, a Uruguayan doctor of dubious credentials, DP Cryogenics claims to offer full-service cryogenic storage at prices the average citizen can afford. Orpheus' investigation determined, instead, that Dr. Fernandez runs a shoddy operation using numerous procedures of his own devising. The dangers of these short cuts however, have been the involuntary projections of some clients. The exact percentage of DP Cryogenics' clients who suffer from this unforeseen complication is unknown, but various crucibles have encountered 15 separate cases. This average is greater than Orpheus' Phase One sleeper experiments.

Currently, we are gathering further intel on DP Cryogenics' client base. Many suffer from serious mental trauma from long-term projection, while others advance to Spectrehood with such rapidity that their inert bodies may be currently unrecoverable. So far, investigating crucibles are to observe these spooks and avoid all contact; we've already classified several such projecting sleepers as too dangerous. The difficulty of the situation rests on whether the state considers these entities alive or dead, and whether we have sanction to eliminate them. We know some of their bodies are still alive and capable of recovery save for their medical condition. Unfortunately, we don't know who we can save or who is unrecoverable.

We are considering recruiting the more sane involuntary projectors, though there is currently a question of proprietorship in regards to their frozen bodies. Dormant Phoenix has full custody of the bodies by law... the same law that does not recognize ghosts as reliable witnesses or capable of delivering admissible testimony.

RELEVANT PERSONNEL

- **Dr. Eduardo Fernandez:** Fernandez retains his medical license through some brilliant legal maneuvering, despite repeated complaints and dismissals from various clinics. Fernandez was accused of conducting illegal research into new cryogenics methods on paying customers. The prosecution could never substantiate enough evidence in court, however, and subsequent legal action against Fernandez's former employers concerning his "unfair" dismissal was settled out of court for a significant sum. Fernandez founded Dormant Phoenix Cryogenics through these settlements and used his notoriety to launch a series of successful late-night advertising slots.

Using his own techniques, Fernandez managed to turn a profit while charging far lower prices than his competitors, despite his high failure rates. Fernandez is shrewd and knows that nobody can currently disprove his practice in a court of law. To prove his techniques a failure, one must attempt to revive his clients, who underwent cryo-freezing at death's door. If the client doesn't revive, his death is attributable to any number of complications, including his own health. Few investigators, still, are even willing to contemplate the prospect of causing someone's death, regardless of how remote. What's more, the courts do not recognize any testimony relating to projecting or speaking with spirits. Fernandez himself has no interest in anything beyond his company's profitability. He already instigated legal action against The Scrutinizer for its accusations concerning his practices.

- **Pytor Petrenko:** Petrenko is the manager for DP Cryogenics' warehousing facility. He is a fully trained engineer with some medical training, but one crucible did discover Petrenko's gambling problem and that he somehow manages to pay off his debts within days, regardless of how deep he's mired. While no crucible has managed to prove it as yet, we believe Petrenko may be organ-harvesting clients. This enables us to potentially discredit DP Cryogenics at some point in the future, if it becomes necessary to shut down their operations.

STATUS: GATHER INTEL



nobody knew anything about Project Flatline. Management at Orpheus Group tried discrediting the good doctor at his new job, however, paying clients to level false accusations of malpractice. Dr. Fernandez, however, discovered Orpheus Group's hand in the matter, and forced it to settle the matters out of court. Because the litigation involved Dr. Fernandez and his current employer, Trenton Labs, Orpheus Group's name was never mentioned in any documents. Orpheus Group's settlement enabled Dr. Fernandez to open his own company without abandoning any of his principles.

Dormant Phoenix's cryogenic process is both safe and cheap. Dr. Fernandez's facility is clean, well run, impeccably managed and equipped with the best money can buy. He even rolls his substantial profits back into the company and maintains a research division second only to the Orpheus Group in the area of cryogenics. In fact, Dr. Fernandez now advises other companies on cryogenics and is partially responsible for the boom in projector firms. Unbeknownst to the doctor, when he left JDG with his own material, his research was already modified to create projectors. Dr. Fernandez merely assumed that Orpheus' techs had helped modify and improve his own designs, and since they'd stolen his patents, he had full right to their modifications.

Neither is DP Cryogenics running an organ-harvesting operation. Petrenko is merely a shrewd gambler who rarely bets more than he can manage to pay off with his existing assets.

CURRENT STATUS

While Dr. Fernandez initially discounted projecting as feasible, he realizes something unusual is happening with his clients. In the past few months, several families visited his offices, claiming their frozen loved ones were haunting them. While his scientific mind discounts such displays of hysteria, Dr. Fernandez has become the object of a haunting as well. Late at night, while he's working in the lab, he deals with whispers, moving objects and haunting dreams. Dr. Fernandez has finally decided to thaw out the patient whose name continually appears on his pad.

While this is highly illegal, Dr. Fernandez is troubled that he may be injuring his clients instead of helping them. The disturbances have also reminded him of all the rumors pertaining to Orpheus and "Project Flatline." When he finally thaws out the patient haunting him, Dr. Fernandez will be shocked to discover his fears come true or, worse, that the patient is now host to a rampaging Spectre.

GHOST STORIES

Unlike the stories listed in the Orpheus core book, these stories are not designed as character artifacts. They are straightforward to facilitate the Storyteller's job, but more importantly, they help further the Orpheus story line. Why bother mentioning such facts as Project Flatline if there isn't a venue through which a Storyteller can unveil the information? And why bother including a plot-advancing hook if we don't explain how the material actually works or what rewards crucibles may gain as a result? Thus, some of the stories not only lay the facts out for Storytellers, but give them the vehicle to include the crucible in the process. So, some examples include:

- **History Repeats Itself & The Good, the Bad and the Ugly:** Both stories reveal the previously unsubstantiated "Project Flatline" and a piece of Orpheus history.

- **Nature of the Beast:** This reveals pigment's nasty side effect... that *all* users become hues upon death.

- **The Siege of Oak Park:** Another major revelation of sorts awaits the crucible here... the existence of a ghost older than three years old and what happened to all the other ghosts three years ago.

- **Vengeance is Yours:** This reveals the events at NextWorld that preceded the raid, while potentially helping sleepers learn to burst transmit in emergencies.

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

BACKGROUND

It's public fact that Orpheus began as JDG Cryogenics, which discovered the possibility of projecting after several revived clients related their experiences. Curiosity about these common threads shared by these isolated individuals gave birth to Orpheus Group and the notions of projectors. This is all true... except for some conveniently overlooked steps.

That missing step is Project Flatline, the rumored event that gave rise to the first deliberately created projectors. With limited backing and some governmental connections, JDG (now Orpheus) recruited 12 death-row inmates from Marion Federal Penitentiary who, because of their environment and the constant, pervasive threat of death hanging over their heads, proved ideal subjects. Orpheus used the sleeper process and held the inmates' bodies, believing that ample leverage would force the inmates' return. This did not prove to be the case. Intoxicated with their new freedom and power, a side effect Orpheus never anticipated, the inmates all vanished into the world, leaving Orpheus



with a room full of corpsesicles and much explaining to do. That next night, a “mysterious” fire erupted in the ward. Although the prison managed to evacuate that section, a dozen prisoners “died” in the conflagration.

With help from its government contacts, Orpheus erased traces of its involvement with the Marion Federal Penitentiary fire and evidence of its experiment. Unfortunately, it remained indebted to its saviors into the next project... Project Echo. Meanwhile, the 12 original prisoners escaped, though their fates differ.

Many fell under the leadership of a charismatic sociopath named Uriah Bishop, at least two joined forces to create the Blasphemers, while one or two pursued their own individual agendas. Amongst this latter group is Theodore Albert Walters, a man convicted on six counts of rape and two counts of murder. Walters uses his freedom and his power as a Skinrider to terrorize the city’s female population, and he was targeted by Orpheus and Terrel & Squib before the attacks.

In addition to his vile assaults, Walters tracks down women whom he holds a grudge against (from life). Using his skinriding ability, he possesses a very close male friend of the woman before raping and beating her. Fortunately, the local Special Victims Unit noticed a similar MO in all the attacks and approached both major projector firms. Orpheus and Terrel & Squib both agreed to investigate the matter on their own dime as a matter of community service.

LOCATIONS

There are seven known crime scenes to investigate that the cops know about, four of which are houses. (Walters avoided apartments due to the noise; he didn’t anyone disturbing his fun.) In the case of the last three possession rapes, however, Walters was not fussy about location and took the women where he could. For investigative purposes, the women Walters raped at home were those he knew. He wanted to take his time and didn’t want to be disturbed. For those Walters simply raped for the pleasure of power, he possessed the victim and brought her to a quiet spot before manifesting and attacking. All assaults (three reported, a half-dozen never reported) somewhere near or around the business district. Walters *likes* businesswomen.

Walters’ lair is an abandoned building in the business district, where he brings those possessed victims he plans to murder. During the possession, Walters relinquishes enough control so the victim is aware of her own suffering, before he forces her to torture and rape herself with a variety of implements. There are nine additional corpses stuffed into various nooks and crannies around the building. Another place the crucible might find

itself is at the house of Daniel Tremont, a retired prison guard who remembers the night of the fire. He was assigned to guard the comatose bodies when the fire erupted nearby. The fire spread so quickly, he never had a chance to save anyone.

HOOKS

The first way to draw the characters into the story is if they simply find an Orpheus file pertaining to the police request and the nature of the rapes. One notation that might draw their attention is: “Project Flatline... Theodore Albert Walters?” Orpheus agreed to investigate the matter privately because it recognized Walters’ MO from its dossiers.

Another possibility is that the crucible knows a friendly cop, or encounters one while on the run. In the latter case, the cop isn’t interested in apprehending the characters as fugitives, and instead needs their help in the Walters rape cases. A friend of his was one of the victims. If the characters agree to help, he’ll become a useful contact for the future.

The third avenue for crucible involvement is through Radio Free Death and its cryptic clues. The broadcaster can drop hints as to how Walters is operating, and even mention that Walters’ claim to fame is Marion Federal Penitentiary and Uriah Bishop.

INTEL

If the characters still maintain police contacts, then they’ll discover that the Special Victims Unit already suspects Walters, who uses the same techniques as he did prior to his incarceration. The detective in charge of the investigation is aware of the similarities, which is why he approached Orpheus and T&S privately. The MOs include his actions during the rape (anal penetration followed by fellatio) and his words (which rarely vary in Walters’ case). The police are treating the three rapes of the businesswomen the same as the home rapes because of the MO, and because the attacker or victim often reports... “I couldn’t control myself.”

Walters’ old police files indicate he spent time searching for victims, using a van as his lair and hiding in business district car parks. A clever crucible, however, might realize that Walters, with no real physical needs to consider, may have a lair somewhere within the business district. Local low-ebb ghosts may also mention the presence of a powerful and frightening spook that established itself in the downtown area.

THE OPPOSITION: THEODORE ALBERT WALTERS

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



Abilities: Alertness 2, Computer 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Finance 2, Firearms 4, Investigation 1, Law 1, Medicine 2, Science 2, Security 4, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 3

Shade: Skinrider

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Autocrat

Willpower: 3

Vitality: 9

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Helter Skelter, Jugernaut, Puppetry, Unearthly Repose

THE BRASS RING

If the characters help end the rapes, they will enjoy the gratitude both the victims and the police. For a crucible on the run, this is very useful, especially if the Storyteller dictates these individuals can constitute allies or contacts to replace those lost. There is also the potential benefit of uncovering information on Project Flatline and the confirmation of Uriah Bishop's existence. Additionally, Walters may provide the characters with a link with or hook into the Blasphemers.

NATURE OF THE BEAST

BACKGROUND

This story furthers the mystery behind pigment and the revelation that pigment *automatically* creates hues. Orpheus operated under the assumption that only those addicts who survived multiple near-death experiences became hues. Not true. The drug, once ingested, automatically pins the soul to the hereafter, creating a hue that cannot proceed to its final reward. The reason nobody noticed this before is because many hues under 5 Vitality (Drone-, Blip- and Echo-class) are virtually indistinguishable from other low-ebb spirits. In other instances, many agents mistook 4- or 5-Vitality hues for Drone- or Blip-class spirits because they appeared weak. Hues of Mirage-class, however, are more faded than their spirit counterparts; thus they appear frail. Finally, prolonged drug-use is so dangerous that many scientists simply assumed that pursuing such a life-style would supply the necessary NDEs to create a Mirage-class hue. The truth is, all black heroin users become hues; the smokers and pill-poppers after five tries, the injectors after one. The reason remains a mystery, but the characters can discover this new fact and eliminate both a manufacturing plant and a large cache of pigment in the process... that of the Six Deuce Gangsters.

LOCATION

The story's main setting is a factory where the Six Deuce Gangsters manufacture pigment. From the exterior, it's a large, one-story house, typical in the dereliction and decay afflicting it, except for the heavily barred windows and extra-thick, reinforced steel doors. Inside seems typical for a clubhouse catering to the neighborhood's delinquent youth, complete with empty pizza boxes, dirty clothes and ammunition for the arsenal of weapons leaning against the various walls at the ready.

The manufacturing facility is in the basement, and the only access to it is a narrow and steep stairway, hidden in the closet in the master bedroom. The garage, however, also has a fake drain that allows the Six-Ds to drop the pigment shipment down into the basement or pass the packaged product up to a waiting van. The basement is meticulously neat, with walls and floor consisting of reinforced concrete. Ventilation requires a large, noisy unit whose exhaust pipes run through the house's other bedroom. The lab operates during daylight hours so regular street traffic covers the noise of the ventilation units. Since Clarence's little war, however, the lab operates 24-7 to clear the growing backlog of pigment shipments.

Unbeknownst to anyone, a family of hue cats haunts the location. Another hue, Jacob Bernier, takes care of the cats. Jacob only smoked pigment once, but otherwise lived a healthy, NDE-free life. He knows his state is the result of that one puff and believes pigment traps many people's souls. Unfortunately, he has little power to affect the living, but he can supply information on the Six-Ds. The Storyteller can use Bernier as she wishes, otherwise.

HOOKS

The characters may notice a high concentration of ghosts in the area, and further discover that many are in fact hues. An interesting idea might be if the crucible witnesses an accidental overdose. This means the characters see the dead man become a ghost. To be effective the victim should be young and relatively innocent. The characters can discover the fact that any pigment user who dies becomes a hue, by helping the local ghosts eliminate their tethers (chief among them, their use of pigment). They might also realize that the kid they saw die was a first-time user with no previous NDEs.

There's also the Radio Free Death route or old case files from Orpheus remarking on the gang. Additionally, Clarence Williams actively hunts any and all projectors he can find. All his resources are mundane, but Clarence is clever, well read and up to date on current events. His gang and he generally arrive at the scene of any reported



Spectral phenomenon and try locating suspected projectors (people who watch empty space intently and reply to thin air, etc.). Several gangbangers also use pigment, so they can tell if there's an actual ghost present (thus making a human talking to the ghost a projector and hopefully not a drug addict). If Clarence and gang attack the crucible, the characters may uncover the Six-Ds by trying to investigate their assailants.

INTEL

Pigment's origins remain unknown. There are many theories and precious few facts. Some big questions include: Who developed the formula? Do they realize the drug's side effects? If they know pigment traps dead users as hues, why mass produce low-ebb ghosts? It remains a mystery, but the answers seem to be on the verge of revelation. Meanwhile, some questions concerning pigment lead to the Six Deuce Gangsters and their factory.

Police and media contacts supposedly suspect the factory's location, but the authorities will not raid the site because it's too well defended — and a firefight could kill many innocent locals. Police never patrol the neighborhood in groups fewer than four, nor will fire trucks and engines enter the neighborhood without police backup. The few strangers who wander through are either robbed or worse. So the cops probably know exactly where the pigment is being made, but it's safer to claim ignorance. Fortunately, while the crucible can operate beyond mortal sight, the neighborhood has many pigment users and many hues. The hues are still fiercely loyal to the notion of their "hood," and they report spooks to the pigment users. The users, in turn, report that information to the Six Deuce Gangsters in exchange for a little pigment reward.

Inside the hood, nobody talks. Outside the hood, the word on the street is that the Six-Ds are on the warpath, and everybody is keeping their heads down. Folks know the gangbangers run a pigment factory, but its exact location is known to a select few for a couple of c-notes. The good news is, Six-D territory is not well protected these days, but that's different from being unprotected. The gang has many automatic rifles lying around, and guns are deadly, even in the hands of 12 year-olds. So, unless the crucible wants a firefight where pre-teens will die, the characters should use stealth and cunning to gain access.

THE OPPOSITION

Six Deuce Gangsters (see p. 149)

THE BRASS RING

If the characters stage a successful raid on the manufacturing site, they stand to gain a sizeable quantity of

money and pigment. The latter is very useful in scoring brownie points with the DEA and the PDET, while the former is just a godsend for financially destitute crucibles. If the crucible gives the money to locals with no thought of keeping any, the Storyteller can award Willpower or full Vitality, or even remove some Spite points. Whether Clarence Williams dies or not, the gang elects a new leadership and goes about rebuilding lost assets. For a few months, there's a pigment shortage on the streets, though the Six Deuce factory is one of many. So, even if a raid proves successful, it doesn't eliminate pigment from the street.

THE SIEGE OF OAK PARK

BACKGROUND

This story should run two to three (game) months following Orpheus' destruction. By now, the characters have been running for a while and are settling into a "normal" routine. Maybe they have a patron or a steady income, but they've already uncovered disturbing information concerning Orpheus and Project Flatline. They also learned some truths behind pigment and encountered new Spectres. This story should kick off the next phase of the **Orpheus** story line... the discovery of a ghost older than three years.

One key mystery facing characters is that throughout their experiences, every ghost they encountered was under three years old. Something happened three or four years ago that had a catastrophic effect on the world's unquiet dead. It was like every ghost in the world just *vanished*.

Well... almost every ghost.

Sasha Velikov was a computer consultant who worked from his home five years ago. When police arrested him for stalking, raping and murdering local co-ed and occasional girlfriend, Allison Cohen, insufficient evidence sealed his release. Cohen's father and brothers enlisted the help of a sympathetic police officer and broke into Velikov's house. There, they tortured him using a blowtorch and baseball bat. It took Velikov nine hours to die and his house much less time to burn. Unfortunately, while Velikov was a stalker, he wasn't the one who hurt Allison Cohen.

Velikov returned as a ghost and repaid his murderers in brutal, bloody kind. After exacting vengeance, however, Velikov's rage remained unquenched. He decided to make the community pay. Velikov's computer was now an artifact in the basement where he died. Consumed by his anger, he spent two years in his basement, working on his ghostly computer, inflicting various tortures on the locals. He tampered with bank accounts, fooled with the power grid, revealed intimate secrets



and stalked town citizens through vicious emails. He turned off power to homes, emptied bank accounts and delivered thousands of dollars of pornography to one woman's office after charging her credit cards. At least 12 people died when Velikov changed their medication instructions in their computerized records. As a result, people steadily left town, depressing the local economy and sending property values dropping through the floor; local police seemed helpless to stop it. They investigated, of course, but after two years, they never found Velikov. Then, three years ago, the Week of Nightmares erupted. The skies turned black and a rain of Spectres flooded the world, swarming virtually every ghost on the planet. Many ghosts tried fighting back, escaping, hiding, but in the end, all the ghosts were gone, dragged off somewhere. The Spectres who swept through Oak Park and dragged away its resident ghosts saw Velikov, a spirit nearly consumed with Spite and malice; he had done so much damage to Oak Park suburbs that they believed him consigned to their fate. They left him on the verge of becoming a Spectre.

This wake-up call shocked Velikov and nearly destroyed his mind. He slowly climbed back from the siren lure of the Spectres' hive thoughts and slowly redeemed himself over the three years. Velikov would not suffer the fate believed of him.

Six months ago, a Friendly Angel moved into Oak Park and began murdering its children, turning them into Lost Boys. Velikov has tried helping the community, but unfortunately, the Friendly Angel and Lost Boys still infest the suburb, and are now determined to destroy Velikov. If the characters manage to fend off the Spectres besieging Sasha's suburb, they have access to an incredible prize — a ghost older than three years.

LOCATION

Oak Park is a suburb (Storytellers may change the name to a prominent suburb in the chronicle's city) of 156,000 people, who are otherwise indistinguishable from the millions of other bedroom communities across America. Oak Park is different, however, in that the entire town is under siege. In the last six months, seven children were found murdered, their mutilated bodies found scattered in public places or in impossible-to-reach locations (atop flagpoles or inside supermarket freezers). With the suburb under siege by the Lost Boys, Velikov is pulling out all the stops to defend himself — possessing buildings to hide, tricking Lost Boys with corridors that lead nowhere or back on themselves, et cetera. Unfortunately, Velikov is running out of places to hide, and he grows wearier with each encounter.

HOOKS

Storytellers have several ways of introducing the characters to Oak Park. Maybe Radio Free Death sends them a message, or a signature character like Kate Dennison wants the crucible to investigate the news reports of murdered children. Perhaps the characters are merely "in the area" when they witness a running battle between Velikov and the Lost Boys.

INTEL

Characters can find information in a variety of ways — library or Internet searches, contacting information brokers or through supernatural means. All such avenues reveal the same strange facts: Something resembling an E-Demon haunted this suburb three years ago; the recent child killings are believed a resurgence of the area's cursed status. That, in itself, should send up flares for the characters. Questioning local spooks brings about mention of a ghost hacker who keeps to himself and stays well hidden; he often looks burnt. The crucible may also discover newspaper accounts of Allison Cohen's and Sasha Velikov's murders, along with the bizarre deaths of Harvey, Fred and Jacob Cohen, as well as Sergeant Richard Pettyjohn, a local cop, five years ago.

THE OPPOSITION

- **The FBI:** Although local and state police are all over this case, six months of failure and dead children has brought in a CIRG team at request of the local sheriff. Keith Sullivan or Sandra Chu may not be heading the investigation, but any CIRG agent is bad news for the characters. Although CIRG isn't looking for them specifically, it's almost lock that the agents will recognize the crucible. Should they characters deal with the police, they must ensure the cops are local and avoid the FBI entirely.

- **Lost Boys:** There are currently seven Lost Boys assaulting the community, trying to find Velikov. Mr. Fox created them in the last few months. As the story advances, the Lost Boys may harass the characters, but their primary target is Velikov.

- **Mr. Fox, the Friendly Angel:** The Friendly Angel infesting Oak Park for about six months, appears to local children as "Fantastic Mr. Fox," a character from a popular children's book. It is trying to eliminate Velikov because it senses him as a threat.

THE BRASS RING

Velikov is an Echo-class ghost who has difficulty interacting with others normally, but he is improving. He remembers little from his existence when he nearly became a Spectre, but what he remembers, he will share with the crucible. He recalls there were many, many



ghosts five years ago, most of them refugees from a terrible storm afflicting some place called the Shadowlands. He ignored most of them in his quest for vengeance, until the day the Spectres came. Of that day, he says: "They took them all! All over the world! The Spectres picked them up, tore them to pieces and dragged them back into their lairs! Oh, God, the pieces were still screaming as they went into the dark places and vanished! All the ghosts... gone. I think a couple survived, but the Spectres were everywhere... like locusts."

Velikov needs time to rediscover himself and continue eliminating his spiritual stains. The characters, however, may have a new friend who can offer assistance in the future since Velikov is a strong Echo-class spook, mostly thanks to his experiences. That said, even though Velikov finally leaves Oak Park, his computer stays behind. It cannot function outside of Velikov's basement, but is otherwise permanent (a very rare thing among artifacts). See Chapter Three, p. 102 for information on a computer artifact. How the characters use this device is up to them. The intel to be found is up to the Storyteller.

WHAT'S MINE IS MINE BACKGROUND

After the Orpheus raid, when the characters are fugitives, there are two groups actively hunting them with the intent to kill — NextWorld mercenaries and the Death Merchants. There are other forces *chasing* the crucible, like the FBI and police, but NextWorld and the Death Merchants intend to draw copious amounts of blood.

Both groups know to attack the characters via their loved ones, but NextWorld abandoned that idea for two reasons. First, it draws the unwarranted attentions of the authorities, and second, there is still some dissension amongst its ranks. Thus, NextWorld is setting its ambush around a group of its defectors (see "Vengeance is Yours"). The Death Merchants still plan to use the crucible's families to locate, then eliminate, the characters.

Specifically, there are two different efforts to entrap the crucible. One involves invading a family member's or loved one's house before waiting for the crucible to arrive. This ill-conceived trap is the work of the Omega Squad (see Death Merchants, p. 134), three neo-Nazi brothers. Their initial foray into this arena fails, forcing the brothers to consider their next steps more carefully. Regardless, if they somehow succeed, the brothers will not kill the family because they make better bargaining chips alive, but they will beat family members senseless to make them more passive.

The other trap, which is better thought out and is the subject of this story, is set by Herbert Mol (see Death Merchants, p. 137). He will kidnap the youngest family

member or loved one (the preferred age being six to eight), and leave a ransom note with the family demanding the crucible appear at a farmhouse located on the outskirts of town. It's an obvious trap, but if the characters hope to rescue the kidnap victim, they'll have to investigate. Once the crucible enters the farmhouse, Mol believes he has it where he wants it.

Mol chose the farmhouse because he believes he knows, from his research, that ghosts don't have any means of fast transport. He doesn't know about Storm-Wending, however. Mol's plan is to bring the characters into an isolated area, forcing them to project from nearby (probably within binocular range of the farm). Regardless of whether the characters are projecting, they need bodies to drive a vehicle out to his location and to bring the hostage back.

LOCATION

The farmhouse is 20 minutes outside town in a spread-out rural community. The property has claymores scattered about, rigged to tripwires every 10 feet. Claymores are shaped plastique charges laced with steel balls that can shred cars or personnel. They explode forward, inflicting little or no damage on anything behind the explosive. Claymores deliver 20 damage dice, but half that damage is shredding, the other half explosive. The damage decrease for range applies to the explosive damage first, followed by the buckshot. All the doors and window are similarly rigged with claymores inside the house. Simply ducking below the window offers an equivalent to Armor rating 3 against the explosion.

Hidden throughout the house are wireless Kirlian cameras, enabling Mol to see spooks. If one of the cameras goes on the fritz, Mol considers it an intruder situation. Regardless, once he spots more than one person in the house, or the camera watching the victim goes on the fritz, Mol activates the timer vest on the victim, counting down from five minutes. The victim is in an empty room on the second floor, and is strapped to a chair with her mouth gagged and eyes covered. A Kirlian camera stands watch in plain sight, with a note attached saying "Touch this and [he/she] dies." The victim wears an impressive-looking vest covered in plastique and is rigged for movement, but it's a decoy. The real trap is under the floor. The vest acts as a lure for people and for encouraging ghosts to manifest to help the victim. Mol will wait to see how many people he can draw in before activating the explosives hidden under the floor. The explosives deliver 30 dice of lethal damage (more than enough to kill the victim and hopefully disincorporate the projecting entity).



Whether the ploy works or not, Mol then uses his sniper rifle to pick off anyone suspicious he can see around the farm or neighboring property. He hides in a nearby water tower (about a quarter of a mile away) with a commanding view of the area. He fires for three or four turns before making his escape.

The trap is dangerous, but Storytellers have several avenues available to them to help the crucible realize the situation:

1) Using Inhabit on the cameras allows the character to freeze the signal so Mol never realizes someone's in the room. He may notice the completely static picture after a few minutes of switching through the various views (he has a hand-held display with one screen only), but that may be enough time for the characters to save the victim and escape.

2) Forebode can forewarn the characters of the actual trap. The characters may see the floor exploding instead of the vest, or Mol in the water tower, or the explosions occurring when the vest timer is still at three and four minutes, etc.

3) The victim inadvertently reveals the vest as a decoy. He moves and jostles the movement sensors, but nothing happens, or she knows about the explosives in the floor and tries relating that clue to her rescuers by pointing a free finger to the floor.

HOOHS

Once Mol chooses and kidnaps his target, he sends a ransom demand to the remaining family, confident it will reach the crucible. The Omega Squad, however, may likely draw the characters' attention by the botched home-invasion or simply catch them off-guard by successfully hiding in a family member's home.

INTEL

The key to surviving Mol is caution, attention to detail and imagination. When the characters learn of the kidnapping and ransom, it should be obvious beyond any shadow of a doubt that this is a trap — thus, they shouldn't simply drive up the driveway. They should survey the area first. The claymores lining the property are easily disarmed (though spotting one or its tripwire requires a Perception + Alertness roll [difficulty 7]), and the crucible should have little difficulty claiming one for later investigation. A cautious approach to the house and a keen eye on the surroundings should enable the crucible to dodge the greatest dangers.

THE OPPOSITION

Omega Squad (see p. 134) and Herbert Mol (see p. 137)

THE BRASS RING

This story's reward is simply keeping a loved one safe and well. It is an emotional payoff and roleplaying opportunity, though enterprising characters may profit from the Kirlian cameras, claymore mines or ghostshot ammunition.

VENGEANCE IS YOURS BACKGROUND

NextWorld, in conjunction with Spectres, attacked Orpheus in compliance with a contract that split the mercenary outfit down the middle. Several dissenters who survived the subsequent pogrom broke ties with NextWorld and hid underground; they are now the target of assassinations. To dig them out, Jean Dupree and Yevgeny Molochov (NextWorld's Field Manager), devised a plan to kill two birds with one stone. They've located one group of defectors and have leaked their location to street sources in the hopes that projector firm survivors might come seeking a little revenge. Only NextWorld knows its wayward operatives defected and that they're not working for the mercenary firm anymore. Then, once one group emerges victorious from the inevitable conflict between NextWorld defectors and Orpheus survivors, a NextWorld team will mop up what remains.

Meanwhile, the expatriated NextWorld team being used as bait is at its wits' end. The group's leader, Virgil Lincoln, is a native of the city and is holed up with his team in his brother's house. The ex-NextWorlders are debating whether to simply vanish into the night and never look back, or to approach the FBI with the truth about NextWorld's involvement in the raids.

LOCATION

The ex-NextWorlders have booby-trapped their home with all the savvy of ex-military know-how. They installed motion detectors at one foot and five feet off the ground. The sensors pointing outside have a range to seven feet beyond the house. All access points into the house (doors and windows) are rigged with breach wires, so entering the house sets off the alarm. The backyard likewise has tripwires. Spotting any of these modifications requires a Perception + Security roll (difficulty 6) or Perception + Survival (difficulty 7) or Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8).

The defectors live out of the kitchen and living room, which faces the back yard. They've covered the doors and windows so no one can peek inside, and they've placed sandbags (filled from the backyard) against the windows and glass sliding doors to minimize the



damage from bullet fire and lobbed explosives. They only communicate with the outside world through cell phones; they prepare all their food in-house and order no take-out since it's an easy way for the opposition to poison or drug their food.

HOOKS

It shouldn't take long for word on the street to reach the crucible about the NextWorld team. Now whether the characters demand satisfaction for the assault on Orpheus and the attacks against their families, or they're simply curious why the NextWorld team is holed up somewhere, the intel to locate them is easy enough to find. If the Storyteller wants to shake matters up a bit, word may reach them that another small crucible is going after the mercs for the dead firm assaults. This places a timetable on the matter.

INTEL

Most of what the crucible knows rests in the in-character artifact for NextWorld (see p. 129). The specifics depend on how well the crucible investigates the situation. Physical or spook reconnaissance of the house might find the bait, but not NextWorld's ambush team, hidden in an abandoned building nearby. Still, everyone involved here sees spooks, so the characters can't simply waltz into the situation with impunity. The bait is already high-strung and nervous, and the characters appearing unannounced will shake matters up. Characters with Streetwise, however, can interview some locals and learn more that way. Folks know that a group of men is hunkered down at a nearby house and acting like it's ready to fight off an army. Characters familiar with military or police strategies might wonder why mercs have dug in like this. Why are they entrenched and waiting to defend themselves? Perhaps the crucible questions someone who spotted the assault team hiding in a nearby building. A little investigation can reveal a great many things.

THE OPPOSITION

This depends on how much the characters learn and what they decide to do with that information. Either way, they may face as many as two NextWorld merc units in a potential crossfire, but both forces have their strengths and weaknesses. The bait mercs are tired, scared and jumpy, but they have a defensible position, and they understand the layout of their environment intimately. If the characters attack the bait, they face two sleepers who can burst transmit (see the Sleepers section in this chapter, p. 116), two skimmers and one civilian (Virgil Lincoln's brother, Poet). Everyone is heavily armed.

Regardless of whether the crucible fights the bait, the ambush team will attack the survivors at the best opportune moment. NextWorld's team consists of four sleepers (currently projecting) and eight heavily armed regular mercs; they have first-rate surveillance watching the house. When the characters appear, the ambush party breaks into multiple teams, each consisting of a projecting sleeper and two regular mercenaries. The four teams spread out to encircle the house, then attack once they believe the fighting has died down.

If the Storyteller wishes, he may use some of the NextWorld sleepers involved in the Orpheus raid against the characters.

THE BRASS RING

If the characters help the renegade NextWorld mercenaries, they not only ally themselves with talented projectors, but they also gain a valuable street contact in Poet Lincoln. He can help the crucible locate necessary assets. Virgil Lincoln and his team can also offer valuable insight into the entire NextWorld coup, as well as teach sleeper characters how to use burst transmission. Plus, there's the visceral satisfaction of hurting those responsible for the attacks.

THE SHAPE OF HELL TO COME

BACKGROUND

Burgoyne Preparatory Academy is an elite military school outside the city. Everything looks normal on the surface, though the administration locked the auditorium a few months ago after an electrical fire. More in-depth investigation into the matter, however, reveals the school suffers from a high dropout and "accident" rate, and, despite a supposed electrical fire in the auditorium, the school never asked anyone to fix the problem. The auditorium simply remains locked.

Burgoyne Prep is completely infested with Spectres — 34 of them in fact. They are turning the students into a cult-like army, as well as transforming the school into a breeding facility. A Friendly Angel masquerading as the ghost of the academy's founder, Lesley Burgoyne, convinced the students that their parents and administrators were going to shut down their school. They've come to believe that murder is justified in saving their precious institution.

The auditorium is, of course, where the Spectres reveal themselves in their full glory to students. Center-stage is a ghoulish pile where the broken bodies of 36 students and eight faculty members lie in fetid decomposition. More horrifying to those who can see ghosts, some gauze-like material covers the stage and surrounding



proscenium, holding fast through hardened strands and web anchors, a floating hive-like ball in its center. The material is in fact soul plasm from the human victims, as well as some Spectre corpus.

Assuming the characters can hide and watch a worship rite in progress, they see students sacrificing fellow classmates to the Spectres, before the Spectres seize the victim's soul and add it to the corpus hive sitting in the middle of the stage.

LOCATION

General Lesley Burgoyne founded Burgoyne Preparatory Academy in 1788. Designed as a military school for the children of the local elite, it retains a reputation for cultivating America's best, brightest and richest sons. It's located in a small rural county about 50 miles from the city and is several miles from the nearest small town.

The academy's grounds cover 190 beautifully landscaped acres, surrounded by high brick walls topped with black metal spikes or deeply wooded areas. On the grounds are shooting ranges, soccer and football fields, stables and a riding track. The academy itself consists of Gothic-style buildings containing classes, lecture halls, athletic facilities, a cafeteria, auditorium and dormitories for the 300-350 students (grades 7-12). It also includes a well-stocked armory.

HOOKS

Burgoyne Academy is an example of what happens when Spectres become entrenched in a location. Cleaning it out might become an extended story arc, but the characters must be stronger to tackle the current opposition. Storytellers can use Burgoyne Academy as a safe house for fleeing, injured Spectres and as an ongoing thorn throughout the chronicle. Discovering the secret of the academy can unfold in one of several ways. The easiest route, though potentially overused, is that of Radio Free Death. Otherwise, a concerned patron, ally, contact or mentor may ask the characters to investigate the location (a friend's son vanished after supposedly running away; a psychic friend has nightmares about the place, etc.), or perhaps, the characters are chasing after a wounded Spectre who flees to this location for sanctuary.

INTEL

Characters investigating the school can, of course, uncover its public history and its reputation as an elite academy. They may also discover some unsavory facts about Burgoyne himself, who once burned an entire church full of Tory sympathizers sheltering a British officer and a man known to crucify his Indian opponents. Currently, the school has the local sheriff

in its back pocket. Given the importance of the school on the local economy and its reputation, the sheriff rarely investigates claims against the Academy unless forced into complying.

THE OPPOSITION

The opposition at Burgoyne Academy is extremely heavy and is capable of easily destroying the crucible in a full-on confrontation.

- **General Lesley Burgoyne, Friendly Angel:** This Friendly Angel manifests as the ghost of the school's founder. It lairs in the school's auditorium and the Lost Boys and the living students will fight to the death to defend it. (See p. 131 for more information about Friendly Angels.)

- **Lost Boys:** Formerly Burgoyne Prep students, these 27 Lost Boys act as the school's shock or swarm troops.

- **Lt. Col. Marvin Zawick (Dean of Students), Prof. Carol Matumbo, Prof. Irwin Tyler, Prof. Josephine Pennybaker, Jasons:** Student proctors and the only surviving teachers at the school. They are far more restrained than other Jasons and seem able to ape human behavior. Still, they don't teach classes.

- **Sgt. York. Chupacabra:** Originally Col. Zawick's pet Doberman, Sgt. York is now the "Mother Beast" for a Chupacabra possessing the pack of Dobermans that patrol the grounds. In a pinch, Sgt. York can possess the thousands of pigeons and other birds nesting on the school's roof. In Spectral form, Sgt. York resembles a huge, skinless white bat with glowing eyes

- **Senauch, Reaper:** Senauch the Reaper currently rules the other Spectres, but it remains hidden and allows the Friendly Angel to act as its mouthpiece in controlling the students.

- **Burgoyne Prep Students:** There are 300 students at the academy. Many are currently in thrall to General Burgoyne, though some are simply terrified enough to follow the herd and stay alive. Those students who refuse to submit are gradually winnowed out through tragic training accidents or becoming "runaways." In truth, they often end up as sacrifices in building the hive. It is the 12th-grade students who teach their classmates, since their surviving teachers are currently involved in "important work."

THE BRASS RING

While characters might be unable to clean out Burgoyne Prep immediately, its eventual destruction can save many lives in the long-run. The longer the academy remains active, the more Spectres it draws. Eventually, the Spectres would cull everyone to build



their hive before spreading to the neighboring towns. Destroying the hive-like sphere seems to do nothing, however, except enrage the Spectres. When it grows large enough, many might nest within its walls, but currently, it is too small to serve any obvious purpose. The Storyteller may offer Willpower, Vitality or Spite point decreases for clearing destroying the Spectres.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

BACKGROUND

Storytellers can run this mission at almost any point following Orpheus' destruction. How, when and why the characters approach the Blasphemers depends on how much the characters know about pigment and Project Flatline. This story assumes they've made contact and are fishing for information or help.

The Blasphemers consist of those Flatliners who did not follow Uriah Bishop. Since then, four Flatliners, including Stephen Moluxe and Jeffrey Rose, have teamed up and become involved with local gangs and the pigment trade. Moluxe and Rose currently work with the Latin Kings, a Dominican street gang looking to steal the heroin and pigment market away from the local chapter of the Hell's Angels.

After several inconclusive clashes, Rose and Moluxe have an idea. Once a year, the presidents of various Hell's Angels chapters from across the state meet in a three-day-long "motorcycle rally" where they drink, party, get rowdy and settle issues between rival chapters. The location is always a secret until two days before the event when State Boss Butch Crawford decides where to hold it. If the Blasphemers can learn of the rally's location at least four days in advance, they can bomb the gathering, killing many Hell's Angels in the process, before sending in the Latin Kings to eliminate any survivors.

That's where the characters come in. The Blasphemers want the crucible to uncover the rally's location, then plant the bombs and join in the final assault. That's if the characters want to get in tight with the Blasphemers.

LOCATION

Butch decided on Canandaga Woods for the rally this year. Canandaga Woods is a reservation casino a few miles from the chronicle's city. The casino is relatively small, with enough slot machines, gaming tables, motel rooms and food service alcoves to service 500 people at any one time. The week of the rally is a slow one for the casino. In addition to the 60 bikers present, there are an additional 75 patrons and 50 staff members on site.

HOOKS

How the characters involve themselves with the Blasphemers depends on the avenue of investigation they're pursuing. If they already know about Project Flatline, they may wish to speak to the Blasphemers concerning some details or simply to garner more allies. Otherwise, Radio Free Death may direct them to the Blasphemers by telling them to search for Orpheus' predecessors. If the characters are following the pigment trail, they will eventually discover the current war between the Angels and the Kings.

Any discussion with the Hell's Angels reveals the whole club is scared because of the Latin Kings' recent acquisitions in the last few months thanks to their supernatural allies. This means the Hell's Angels might also serve as good allies and contacts for the crucible, even though they can only offer money and goods in exchange for services; the Hell's Angels can easily supply new identities and false IDs, however. The Blasphemers, however, may not consider helping the crucible if they don't assist them in their plans to eliminate the local Angels.

Note that the characters don't have to follow this plan, necessarily. If they can propose an alternate solution that nets them the same result, the Blasphemers are just as happy not risking some of their own assets. One solution might be to help the Blasphemers expand into Six-D territory and to take their manufacturing plant. This would certainly prove a coup.

INTEL

Finding the rally's location won't be easy. Crawford is a pigment user and doesn't scare easily. He also carries ghostshot ammo from a supplier in Terrel & Squib. He's very tough physically, skilled at brawling and adept with firearms. The characters must avoid doing anything to cause him to either cancel the rally or change its location.

The crucible's best course of action might be mundane in nature — checking Crawford's phone or credit card records, or the last email sites he checked out. Crawford made several calls to various bars and casinos in the area before deciding on Canandaga Woods. He reserved a block of 50 rooms at the Canandaga Inn and placed a \$7,500 order for ribs and beer in the banquet room for the last night of the rally.

THE OPPOSITION

- **Butch Crawford:** The State Boss for the Hell's Angels is smart and tough. Since he took over the bike gang, the club has doubled its heroin production and distribution operations. He's also weaseled out of two drug prosecutions, three RICO cases and a murder



charge. He's also a serious pigment user, shooting or smoking when he has a chance.

- **Hell's Angels:** The 60 chapter presidents meet every year to discuss current gang business and iron out any intra-gang disputes.

- **Tribal Security:** Joseph Galladro is the club's security director, and he supervises a staff of 10. The characters must avoid them and the well-positioned security cameras if and when they decide to plant the bombs.

THE BRASS RING

Assuming the characters manage to engineer this to the Blasphemers' satisfaction, the Flatliners will happily share what they know about Project Flatline. Moluxe does the talking since Rose buried the memory of the incident inside one of his personalities. Note that Moluxe can't give the characters everything since his experiences were filtered through his own assumptions, meaning he'll offer much speculation about the instigators as being a Jewish/alien/Republican conspiracy. The characters should understand enough to fill in some blanks. Moluxe can relate these factual tidbits in between the alien genetic tampering and Nazi gold tangents:

- 1) The experiment took place at Marion Federal Penitentiary, in an isolated wing.
- 2) The prisoners were all on death row and were offered a chance for a reprieve if they participated.
- 3) The doctors belonged to some outfit, which later turned out to be Orpheus.
- 4) Some Men in Black also appeared from time to time, supervising everything quietly.
- 5) When the experiment worked, the ghosts realized nobody could see or touch them. They fled, despite all attempts at torturing their unfeeling bodies into affecting them. Only later did groups like Orpheus realize sleepers had a tenuous connection to their bodies.
- 6) Some of the ghost convicts saw Orpheus techs setting the facility on fire.
- 7) About half the test subjects followed Uriah Bishop, the nastiest of the lot.
- 8) Everybody else went their separate ways. Moluxe doesn't remember anyone else's name... he is lying, of course.

Should the characters succeed in earning the Blasphemers' partial trust, they have gained temporary, if failing, allies. The Blasphemers continue operating on a quid pro quo basis, asking the crucible to participate in illegal activities in return for help. Regardless, Moluxe never trusts any crucible member who isn't Latino in origin. Second, if nothing else, the Blasphemers will betray the characters if it somehow advances their goals or puts a few extra Gs in their pockets.

STALKING MADAME CASSANDRA

BACKGROUND

This story can unfold at any time, but it works best about a month following the Orpheus attack. If the characters don't understand just how grave a problem the media poses in their lives, "Stalking Madame Cassandra" should ingrain that message. The story concerns Madame Cassandra (see p. 139), the host of the popular television show, *Arms of Light*. *Arms of Light* is a fusion between *Crossing Over* and *The PTL Club*, where Madame Cassandra, who claims to communicate with the dead, helps members of her audience contend with their hauntings. She helps spirits be "embraced by the Holy Mother."

Madame Cassandra has railed against the projector firms for some time, calling them "abominations" and claiming they disturb and destroy the spirits of the dead, rather than bringing them true peace. Her latest rant pegs Orpheus' destruction as vengeance for all the spirits they destroyed. She seizes upon any Orpheus-related incident and talks about it on the show.

The story begins the day after she profiles the characters live on television, using information she claims to have received from dead spirits who were brutalized by them. During her next show, a bomb explodes in the studio, live on the air, killing 19 audience members and injuring Madame Cassandra. When she returns to the air a few weeks later, she claims that the spirits of the dead audience members told her the crucible was responsible for setting the bomb.

Madame Cassandra dwells on the event for every day for months, and the attack on her shifts the media's attention. Where before, all of Orpheus was the story, now every national media outlet talks about the characters, wondering if this wasn't retaliation for Orpheus' destruction. Only the independent media blames Madame Cassandra, calling the explosion a publicity ploy gone wrong. The characters, however, are unable to turn on the television without seeing their faces plastered across the screen. The heat on the crucible specifically intensifies after the police and feds receive media and public pressure to find these foul villains.

LOCATION

One specific location is Sundown Studios, where *Arms of Light* is shot. The small soundstage is in a run-down section of the city, and is guarded by human and electronic security (alarms, passcards and ID badges required). Four Fetches also haunt the location. These are Cassandra's "Hounds of the Lord," who drag off any dead spirit accompanying his loved ones into the studio.



HOOKS

Once the story begins, the characters can ignore the directed publicity, though they may feel they have no choice but to become involved. As long as Madame Cassandra continues lying or remains misinformed, she'll escalate her attacks on the crucible. The characters should eventually deal with this considering the police now want them for questioning about the explosion. The crucible can either try proving their innocence by finding the real bomber or deal with Madame Cassandra more directly. Cassandra is not without resources, however. In addition to the Fetches in her television studio, her watchdog Chupacabra, "Fluffy," accompanies her everywhere.

INTEL

Investigation into the bombing eventually reveals the real bomber was a petty criminal named Larry "Itchy" Braxton. Madame Cassandra herself hired Braxton at the behest of mysterious antagonist #1. After the bombing, Braxton received payment in the form of a bullet to the back of the head. His spirit, however, is still floating around, having escaped the Fetches sent to destroy him. If the characters can find Braxton before the Fetches do, he can prove them innocent by telling them where to find the necessary clues. Characters may also discover that the *Arms of Light* show is a scam, luring spirits to their destruction.

THE OPPOSITION

- **Madame Cassandra:** See p. 139.
- **Hounds of the Lord, Fetches:** These creatures haunt the Sundown Studios and slaughter any ghost who enters.
- **Fluffy, Chupacabra:** Madame Cassandra's personal bodyguard and controller. In Spectral form it looks like an emaciated bull mastiff.

THE BRASS RING

Aside from proving their innocence in at least one matter, this event may actually improve the characters' reputation among some media groups. The FBI has done such a hatchet job on the crucible's reputation that anyone who tries defending the characters to the public is lambasted for his opinions. By proving Madame Cassandra guilty of the bomb that killed some of her own audience members, the characters make it safe for their supporters to be more vocal in their condemnation of the FBI's witch-hunt.

THE HUNT FOR CLARA ZUCKERMAN

BACKGROUND

Sometimes, the smallest things can assume enormous importance. Clara Zuckerman doesn't have any



powers, nor did anyone notice her when she was an accountant at the Orpheus Group. A trip to visit her sick sister the day of the Orpheus attack is the only reason she survived, and her relatively minor role in the company means that many overlooked her in favor of the crucibles.

Now, however, the FBI compared Orpheus' personnel reports with casualty lists and realized they didn't match. Clara Zuckerman is the last member of Orpheus' Accounting department still alive, and she must be found. When the FBI discovered this, however, NextWorld and the Death Merchants both learned about Miss Zuckerman within a couple of hours. Mysterious antagonist #2 has now hired Death Merchants to capture Miss Zuckerman, find out what she knows about Orpheus' accounts and then eliminate her. Mysterious antagonist #1, however, cares little for the accountant and ignores her survival.

LOCATION

Miss Zuckerman hides in the home of her off-and-on-again boyfriend Travis Wheaton. It's a small, run-down house in a poor neighborhood, where everyone minds his own business.

HOOKS

Perhaps a police contact relates Miss Zuckerman's plight, or she can approach the characters through a slipped note to their family, claiming she needs their help. Miss Zuckerman offers any information she possesses if the characters can help Travis and her escape someplace safe (like Canada or Mexico).

INTEL

Characters with any financial skills should realize that Miss Zuckerman's job entailed processing important bits of information. She may not have a photographic memory, but she remembers number sequences flawlessly, and thus memorized bank account numbers and passcodes to many of Orpheus' accounts. She also has hard copies of Orpheus' financial data, which she printed up to work on while visiting her sister. That information can lead the crucible to many politicians and industrialists who did business with Orpheus secretly. The documents may not indicate the nature of the cases, but many of these individuals would prefer their private lives remain as such.

THE OPPOSITION

- **Death Merchants:** Initially, mysterious antagonist #2 sends only one Death Merchant, a woman named Renee Davis, after Miss Zuckerman. If Davis encounters the crucible, she'll call for backup from a couple of friends.

THE BRASS RING

Hidden among Miss Zuckerman's accounts is an explosive piece of information. Someone supplied the bulk of Orpheus' operating capital through regular transfers, all on the same day of the week and all for the same amount. A year-long tally runs to 40 million dollars that was moved through Orpheus Group to various unnumbered off-shore accounts, each time with a substantial percentage being siphoned away as operating costs... as though someone was running an open contract. The corporation itself was never actually profitable. The sponsor's information is not included with Miss Zuckerman's information, but at least the crucible knows it's out there. Additionally, the FBI and IRS don't know about these assets because the mainframe was wiped; Miss Zuckerman has the only existing records of these transcripts so far. Certain offshore accounts still exist, but without the numbers, the characters can't access them.

THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

BACKGROUND

Once upon a time, there was a man named Jack Klatch. He had talent for convincing people of his lies. Jack found his way into theatre, where his predilection for lying garnered him high praise, but Jack hated hard work of any kind. He preferred having things done for him, so he went for the easy money. Jack became a toy... a pet, and again he excelled. He became the terror of children and beneficiaries of older, rich women everywhere.

Jack's activities brought him close to death many times when the beneficiaries and he clashed over inheritance. In between wealthy widows, Jack considered this problem while having a little fun with pigment; he projected for the first time. It took him a while to understand what he'd done and a little longer to figure out how to control it, but Jack was quite driven to succeed.

Not being a fool, and not wanting to become an addict to achieve his goals, Jack spent the nest egg he gifted from his ex-lovers. First, he bought an enormous house in an affluent neighborhood. Next, he purchased two sleeper cradles to help him project (one as a backup for the other) and placed these prized acquisitions in a specially built bunker in the basement of the mansion.

Finally ready with his plan, Jack changed professions and became a thief. As a high-society butterfly, he continues to attend all the right parties and charming every woman he meets. He no longer seduces them, however. Now, he simply learns their secrets and their



prized acquisitions, and once he's satisfied that he knows all he needs to know, he pays their homes a visit while they are away as a projecting entity.

His latest victim is Eleanor Harper, a surgically preserved woman of 50. Eleanor suspects ghosts were somehow involved in the theft given she has secret security cameras that show someone manifesting in the house. She believes Jack is somehow responsible, but she needs proof so she can publicly denounce him. She is willing to spend a considerable fortune hunting down the characters to recruit them for work. She needs proof Jack is guilty, even if it is manufactured evidence, and she needs someone who can contend with ghosts.

LOCATION

Jack's house is a modest mansion... three stories tall, big windows, big rooms, enormous stairs, but no staff. Cleaning ladies come twice a month to primp and dust, but otherwise, Jack lives quite alone to protect his special basement.

Jack designed the basement along the lines of a classic bunker, complete with its own generator, modern appliances and adequate bathroom facilities. The sleeper cradles are in a separate room together with an impressive safe where Jack stores his loot until he can fence it.

HOOKS

Eleanor Harper is the hook here. She hired smart, capable detectives to track down the crucible, spending outrageous sums of money in the process. Maybe the detectives help the characters when they find themselves outnumbered or in grave peril. The detectives only ask that the crucible come speak to Miss Harper. Otherwise, they'll find other projectors to help... and earn a tidy profit.

INTEL

Everybody knows where Jack lives. His house is something of a scandal amongst the social elite, who know and speak often of Jack's dalliances. Jack is also a familiar face from the society page. Much of his life is available to anyone with a modicum of social connections. A clever group could locate the architect or blueprints for the mansion, which reveal the special basement, but not what is inside. There is no criminal record or street knowledge to be had about Jack, who moves strictly in the highest social circles.

THE OPPOSITION

Jack Klatch

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Firearms 1, Intimidation 3, Leadership 1, Linguistics 2, Medicine 1, Melee 1, Performance 3

Shade: Haunter

Lament: Sleeper

Nature: Rake

Willpower: 5

Vitality: 7

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose

THE BRASS RING

Either Jack becomes an ally or he falls. Either way, a clever group should be able to take possession of the house. Because Jack deliberately maintained a level of secrecy and isolation in regard to the mansion, no one notices if new masters take up residency — the cleaning staff can be fired and replaced. If he becomes an ally, then Jack can also help the crucible with its finances. Currently, Jack has a little under half a million dollars scattered in various bank accounts and in bonds. (Think Resources of five dots.)

ORPHEUS MISSIONS

The following missions are in-character handouts 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 #0843

MISSION TYPE:

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Investigate vandalism and theft.

LOCATION NAME: CUPPS MANUFACTURING

BACKGROUND

One or more ghost-type entities have been in residence on the assembly line floor of this small, single-plant manufacturer for several years. According to plant manager Tyrone Slusser, employees noticed the ghost(s) approximately three years ago. They moved small objects and threw levers and switches, but only between shifts, when machinery was powered down and the plant floor empty. Although plant management (and many employees) was initially skeptical as to the cause of these irregularities, they eventually established that employee error was not the cause. (Management teams checked the shutdown procedures immediately after completion,



and checked again just prior to the new shift.) Some employees eventually claimed to feel the unearthly presence, and the ghost became a company mascot of sorts.

Ghost activity in the plant has increased steadily for two months. Actual damage is being done while the floor is closed, and materials, office supplies and petty cash have gone missing. Neither plant management nor the employees want the ghost or ghosts removed if possible — they claim a fondness for it or them — but the destruction and theft are causing unacceptable losses and must stop. Employees know management is looking into the problem, but only the owner, Kurt Denault and Mr. Slusser know that Orpheus is investigating.

MISSION PARAMETERS

Observe operations at the plant over a period of one week. Arrange cover story ahead of time with management; employees are to be kept ignorant. Ascertain presence of ghosts and their numbers. Observe ghosts, if possible, without being noticed. Watch for triggers for violent behavior, particular items or places of attachment and patterns of action. Prepare a report for plant management.

INTEL

The number of ghosts is unknown, but may range as high as three. The strength of their manifestation is difficult to gauge, but from reports, it may be increasing. The targets are not expected to be hostile. We have no reports of an attack or threatening gesture against a living person. They may treat other spooks with hostility, however.

**THREAT TAG: DRONE TO
ECHO-CLASS GREEN**

MISSION #0844

MISSION TYPE: REMOVAL

Removal of ghost causing traffic accidents and other disturbances.

**TARGET NAME:
CHRISTOPHER ALLEN**

BACKGROUND

The intersection at Cheltenham and Orchard streets has been under city investigation as a high-risk area for the past few months. On average, a person dies or is critically injured there every month. Cheltenham Street sits on a blind curve. The speed limit up to the curve is 45 mph, but it drops to 25 mph as the curve begins. Most motorists, however, do not bother slowing down. The street comes abruptly to a stop light directly after the curve (at Orchard Street). The timing on the light keeps

the light green for oncoming Orchard Street traffic much longer than for Cheltenham Street; the result is that people whip around the curve to find a red light. Most people stop short; some run the light inadvertently. Three months ago, the city sent a young city electrician named Christopher Allen to examine the wiring on the traffic light. As he stood at the light box, a car rounded the curve at an estimated speed of 55 mph, skidded out of control and slammed Allen's body against the light box. The car then sped off. The only witness described it as a "black Jeep or small sport-ute." Allen died instantly. Following his death, the frequency of car accidents at the intersection jumped dramatically (to an average of one every two or three days since). Mercifully, none were fatal (although serious injuries have resulted). Most of the accidents happened because of timing on the stoplight. In several instances, all motorists involved reported having the green light. Last weekend, the city removed the stoplights, replacing them with a four-way stop sign. All was quiet for roughly 48 hours before the disturbances in local homes began.

Cheltenham and Orchard sits at the beginning of a residential section, and the houses in the immediate area are experiencing electrical disruptions. Thus far, the activity includes devices switching on and off randomly, stereos increasing in volume, lights flickering fast enough to induce seizure in epileptics (only one instance of this), threatening messages appearing on television screens, and kitchen appliances operating without being plugged in. While no fatalities or injuries have occurred as of yet, our intel indicates this threat is growing worse instead of better. The neighborhood association hired Orpheus to stop these hauntings and lay Christopher Allen's soul to rest.

MISSION PARAMETERS

Find Christopher Allen's ghost. If possible, the clients request we bring him peace as opposed to destroying him, but in the end, they simply wish to end the disturbances. The neighborhood association agreed to billet agents and provide whatever other reasonable assistance we require, but not all residents affected by the disturbance acknowledge the supernatural. You may find yourselves in contact with the city's electricians or local electric company employees. Stay out of their way as much as possible, or obtain whatever information they can provide.

INTEL

Christopher Allen was 26 when he died. He was not married and had recently undergone a breakup with his girlfriend. (Elizabeth Neary, age 25 — contact information attached.) He had a few close friends in the city, but his only surviving family is his brother Montgomery



Allen (age 23), employed as manager of a local restaurant. Allen's friends indicate he was shy and a "decent guy" but had a bitter streak. In particular, he resented being passed over for a recent promotion. His friends also say Allen's main hobbies were electronics, ham radio and throwing darts. (Allen also evidently competed in local cricket tournaments.)

While Allen has not manifested directly to any witnesses that Orpheus has spoken to, it seems fairly clear that he is causing the disturbances. What isn't clear, however, is whether he is intentionally trying to hurt or frighten people or whether he thinks he is still doing his job. No photograph currently available. Allen hated having his picture taken.

**THREAT TAG: BLIP- OR
SHADOW-CLASS GHOST
GREEN**

All available evidence indicates Christopher Allen has impressive influence over electronics. He has not exhibited any power over vehicles as of yet, nor has he appeared to the living, which indicates he is a blip rather than a shadow. Our techs think he may be using "In-habit," though they can't be certain.

MISSION #0845

MISSION TYPE: FUMIGATION

Eliminate troublesome animal ghosts.

**LOCATION NAME: CITY
ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS**

BACKGROUND

Several months ago, a strange infection called APD (Acute Pulmonary Distress), killed some 30 animals at the city zoo, many of them in a new "Experience Africa" exhibit. Among the dead animals were two full-grown lions, an African elephant, several impalas and a rhinoceros. A tourist who had recently arrived from Europe evidently spread the disease to the animals (the bacteria is long-lived and is evidently transmitted through insect bites), but the outbreak was contained. Unfortunately, the animals have not rested easily, and sightings of Spectral creatures roaming the zoo at night prompted the city to hire Orpheus to investigate the matter. Thus far, the animals appear only at night and have attacked no one, though a keeper (Judith Elton, age 35) reports being chased by a "glowing, white lion" that vanished when she ducked into a building.

The zoo has contained these reports thus far, and does not wish to publicize the incidents; it has already lost tremendous support because of the animals' deaths. You are to maintain complete discretion on this assignment.

MISSION PARAMETERS

The city arranged to close the zoo starting this Monday until Wednesday morning at 7:00 AM. You have until then to find and eliminate all the animal ghosts. (A checklist of the animals that died of the disease is attached, but understand that not all of them necessarily became ghosts.) If any of the animal ghosts remain after that time, you must report this to Orpheus. We will then assess if the remaining animals are enough of a threat to request the zoo remain closed an additional night.

INTEL

Maps of the zoo are forthcoming, but we suggest each of you take the time on Monday to familiarize yourself with the zoo's layout by exploring it. Ms. Elton (the keeper who witnessed the glowing lion) agreed to accompany you and answer questions. Also, assume each ghost has the same capabilities as it did when living, and probably a good measure of cunning besides.

**THREAT TAG: ENIGMA-
CLASS GREEN (ANIMAL
GHOSTS)**

MISSION #0855

MISSION TYPE: REMOVAL

Removal of ghost from lakefront property.

**LOCATION NAME: 1766
STONEGATE HIGHWAY**

BACKGROUND

Overlooking Lake Pine, 1766 Stonegate Highway is a two-level structure. Until recently, Miss Celeste Meyer used the building as a home and antique shop. She died at the age of 58. The investigating pathologist ruled the death accidental. She was walking on the deck overlooking the lake, slipped, fell in and drowned. Since Meyer was unmarried and had no next of kin, the property went up for sale and was quickly bought by our client, a major coffee shop chain. While renovating the shop and installing the necessary accoutrements, however, the disturbances began. At first, workers simply reported odd lights coming from the lake after sunset. Then, one of the workers wandered down on the deck for a cigarette, and like Miss Meyer, fell into the water and drowned. The worker in question was a fit man in his early 20s.

Since that death, the strange lights (probably Wisp in origin) have grown brighter and more frequent, and many of the workers either quit or refuse to work in the "window room" (which has large bay windows overlooking the lake, from which the deck is clearly visible). They report seeing their co-worker's bloated body in the



water, despite the fact his family buried him several days following his death. The client retained our services to remove the ghost from the premises.

MISSION PARAMETERS

The client halted construction on the coffee shop, so you should be undisturbed. Search the area for any sign that Celeste Meyer or the worker (Brad Seager) remain as ghosts, and remove them from the area by any means necessary. There is no evidence to suggest they are working in tandem. Seager is likely responsible for the images of his floating corpse, while Meyer seems to be behind the lights. While neither of them are necessarily hostile, either or both might become so at a moment's notice.

INTEL

The building is a two-story house, built into the side of a hill. (The hill slopes away from Stonegate Highway, down to the lake.) The top floor was Meyer's antique shop (and the parking lot leads to the "window room's" door), while the bottom floor was her living quarters. A door from the living quarters leads out onto the deck.

**THREAT TAG: ENIGMA-
CLASS GREEN, POSSIBLY
RED**

MISSION #0896

MISSION TYPE: INVESTIGATION

Investigate a professional medium at her own request, to demonstrate her abilities are genuine.

**TARGET NAME: MADAM
SASOSTRIS (ELIZABETH
HUNTER)**

BACKGROUND

Madam Sasostris is a medium whose customers have dwindled lately because she lacks "flamboyance" when

contacting their dead relatives or loved ones. She is our client, and she requests that a team of Orpheus investigators be present at a séance to investigate her usual place of work and to find any "malign influence" which may be "blocking the celestial paths."

Madam Sasostris' real name is Elizabeth Hunter, and she is 48 years old, having worked in a succession of clerical jobs until she discovered her "talents" at the age of 32. She has a good reputation as a provider of comforting reassurance from the Other Side, but her trade has fallen off with the appearance of projector firms like Orpheus. She says her spirit guide, Red Otter, advised her to call in Orpheus to prove her abilities. Her next séance will involve half a dozen of her most influential and expensive clientele, and she wants Orpheus operatives there as well.

MISSION PARAMETERS

Attend at least one of Madam Sasostris' séances, and observe any paranormal events. Do not interfere with the séance itself, and control any urges to "give her clients something interesting to see." If "malign influences" are actually causing her difficulties, investigate and either fumigate or capture the spooks involved.

INTEL

We have no reason to believe Madam Sasostris has any real connection with the occult, or that she has any genuine supernatural powers, even if she believes she's a talented medium. She is paying for our services, however, so look sincere and don't let her think she's wasting her money. If she is a genuine article, please observe her methodology and report your findings back to your team leader. Orpheus Group may consider hiring her services for those assignments not requiring projectors or for those clients of low incomes.

THREAT TAG: MARK BLUE

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