

UNKNOWN  
ARMIES

# LAWYERS, GUNS, and MONEY

THE NEW INQUISITION SOURCEBOOK

BY  
GREG STOLZE

Hudson '99

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?  
IF NOT YOU, WHO?



ATLAS GAMES PRESENTS

UNKNOWN  
ARMIES

# LAWYERS, GUNS, and MONEY

THE NEW INQUISITION SOURCEBOOK  
BY GREG STOLZE

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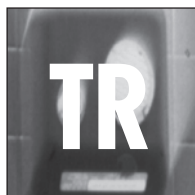
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**Have you ever been a part** of something larger than yourself? It happens all the time, but it's rare that we notice every instance of this phenomenon. There are the *larger* larger things to be a part of, of course: you're a part of the human race, the planet, the cosmos. You may also point to larger things such as the company you work for, a sports team you play on, an organization of some sort that you're involved in. Then, scaling down, we reach the *smaller* larger things: your circle of friends, your family, your relationship with a lover, perhaps even a chain of reincarnated lives of which your present life is but a subset.



All larger things have traits in common. They are defined by the dynamics of those they encompass. They strive for goals that the individual members may not otherwise have pursued. They have memories larger and longer-lasting than those of any single component. They exist both within you and without you. They need you, but they can need someone else if they must. They offer some benefit to the individual members. They ask something in return.



Think for a moment of the larger things you are a part of. I'm willing to bet that within your personal list of such allegiances, there is at least one you would be willing to kill for—or at least, having killed for it, you could find reasons to defend your actions, to yourself if to no one else. Would you kill someone for the sake of your children? For your mother? Your best friend? Your boss?



Murder is an extreme example. What about violating some social custom? If someone approached you and another member of your affiliation, and the presence of your fellow affiliate meant that you had to avoid making conversation with the person approaching you, would you? If, for example, the person was an ex of your present partner—would you ignore that person, even if you might otherwise find common ground? If your partner had told you terrible things about this person, would you be rude to him or her, even though it would never occur to you to do so under normal circumstances?



How much influence does it take to change your behavior? Envision, for a moment, that there is some baseline set of your reactions to ordinary situations. Now imagine how that set would change depending on which affiliation you filtered them through. If a friendly stranger suggested the two of you get some lunch, would you, if you were in a loving relationship with someone who might conceivably be jealous? If you had work to do at the office? If you needed an hour at the gym before the game tomorrow?



The stranger smiles, uncertain, as the outer expressions of conflicting thoughts cascade across your features. What do you do?

Our decisions are not our own. No choice we make is free of the pernicious, enveloping web of affiliations. We must type the report, we must buy flowers, we must send a card at Christmas, we must hold someone's hand while crossing the street, we must tuck someone in at night, we must fight to protect someone, we must do whatever we are compelled to do by the promises we have made, by the free will we have surrendered, by the obligations we feel we must fulfill.

By comparison, the demands of Alex Abel and his particular affiliation, the New Inquisition, seem quite mundane indeed. Turn the page, forsake your name, and enjoy the benefits TNI will grant you.

We promise you'll earn them. And that's our affiliation to you.

—John Tynes

# Roll Your Bones

## Neal sat on his couch, naked, with the

remote control and a bottle of hand lotion close by. He kept sucking the left corner of his mustache in between his lips, absentmindedly chewing it. He was watching a porno movie called *Bridal Whorehouse*—supposedly Her best. He'd seen it twice already, trying to figure out what was so special about Her. He hadn't seen a damn thing—just plenty of body hair and chemically tanned flesh.

Nothing to make you think you were watching a goddess.

Neal wasn't much of a skin-flick fan, but he'd caught himself thinking about it at work that afternoon—getting a little aroused, too.

*What the hell, he'd thought. I'll just use it the way they meant it. Maybe that'll do the trick.*

The best scene was next. She was in it, flushed and flustered, trysting with Her groom's closest friend.

He had to admit, She was even acting a little—biting Her nails, looking conflicted. Neal found himself liking it. Everything about the scene said that She was a woman who didn't *want* to do the wrong thing, but was *compelled*—carried away by Her own lusts. Sure there were tits and ass and dick, moaning and grunting and contorted faces, but it was the story that got to Neal. The transgression.

He also liked the fact that they hadn't made an obvious "best man" joke. Neal's hand moved faster and he stopped thinking about his facial expression, and then two men kicked in the door.

"Freeze! Or I'll—oh my God!" said the first one when he saw what Neal was doing. (That is, what Neal immediately stopped doing.) He even turned his head, squeezing his eyes shut.

The second man just started laughing—big belly laughs. Around his snickers, he finally managed to say, "Drop your weapon!"

Neal just froze, an icy sensation of shock running from his heart right down to his groin. Then he doubled over, trying to hide his genitals with his hands and body. Only after that did he notice the guns.

Both men were large—larger than Neal, anyhow. The first one was kind of portly, with straight dark hair and thick glasses. The second man was taller, more muscular, with dark ginger hair. He also had a beard, which was mostly covered by his surgical mask. The first man had an identical mask. Both wore rubber gloves and raincoats as well. Pistols with silencers completed the picture.

The dark-haired man walked into Neal's trailer, looking around in disdain. (It wasn't even a double-wide.) The larger man followed, closing the door behind him. Their movements were easy, but alert, and the two black barrels of their pistols never pointed away from Neal.

"Uh. . . you guys mind if I . . . ?" Neal nodded towards the bedclothes wadded at the end of the couch, opposite the pillows he'd been leaning against.

"Sure," the ginger man said, but the other shook his head sharply.

"No way."

"What? Why not?" Neal asked. A tiny part of him wondered if this was how a lot of people behaved at gunpoint.

"For all I know, you got a gun hidden under there."

"Oh, *come on!*" Neal cried. The taller man guffawed, earning him a dirty look from the dark one. Their body language said that the shorter one was in charge, but that they didn't get along. "How paranoid do you think I am?"

"Not enough," said the tall man, still snickering.

"Profile says you're one of them chaos freaks," said the boss. "Even if there isn't a gun there now, you could witch one up if I let you. I've seen your type

practically pull 'em out of thin air," he said, and raised his gun slightly to make his point.

"Well, shit, could you at least give me some underpants? Look, I'll . . ." He almost said he'd put his hands up, but he didn't really want to. "I'll keep my hands right here, you can give me some pants, and we'll just talk, okay?"

"C'mon, Bob. Give the poor bastard a break," said the tall one.

Bob just grunted, then nodded, while Neal desperately tried to figure out if they were going to kill him. If they were, why go to the trouble of covering their faces? But if they weren't, why would the tall one call the other by name? Was "Bob" some kind of *code name*? Or was the big one just careless?

"Top drawer in the dresser," Neal said gratefully.

"You get it for him," Bob said emphatically.

"Don't worry, I ain't 'fraid of no underpants," the tall man said. Neal couldn't see him grinning, but he could hear it in his voice.

The corners of Bob's mask crinkled, and when he spoke it sounded like he was smiling, too. "You haven't looked in a bachelor's drawer in a long time, have you?"

*If you want Chance for yourself, you gotta give*

*yourself to Chance.* No one had said it out loud; the phrase had just echoed through Neal's mind. *Risking your money or your reputation—that's powerful. But how much more powerful is it to risk your life?*

Neal had been taught that risk was the basis of Chaos Magick. That was why, when the tall man opened the drawer and tossed him a pair of boxers, Neal lunged across the couch, grabbing the bedclothes and flinging them behind him.

"Fuck!" Bob cried, and fired. The shot was no louder than a finger-snap, but when the bullet hit, Neal felt like he'd been struck in the ribs with a sledgehammer. He'd been diving towards an open window, covered with cheap blinds and a screen that gave way as he crashed against it. He hit the ground shoulder first. There was a nauseating pain as his brain crashed against the side of his skull, but it was overwhelmed by the torrent of sharp agony from his bullet wound, which took his breath away and left him gasping. But on another level, Neal could feel something completely different.

Power.

He'd had little tastes of it before, while gambling away his savings, riding roller coasters, playing "chicken" in a stolen car—but now he knew what it was,



JOHN TYNES





knew how to use it, knew how to use it to stretch and bend reality. It was the power of magick, the power of chaos, and through his gasps he muttered the words, "Police car."

"Little bastard!" Bob was standing in the window, pointing the gun at him. They both heard the sirens at the same time. Bob glanced up, then looked down at him and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

"*Fuck!*" Bob cried out in frustration, then turned from the window. His tall friend had already jumped out of the front door and was legging it towards a Lincoln Town Car. Neal started rolling under the trailer, hoping it would shield him from more bullets.

When he was well underneath, Neal looked back towards the front yard. He could see Bob's legs pumping as the short man bolted towards the car, and he grinned through his agony and said the word "Pain."

Calling up the cop car had taken a lot out of him—the power was weaker, and the agony in his side made it hard to concentrate. He could feel the tangled strands of chance, will, and magick snarl, resist his pull, and he let it go. No parting shot at Bob; but he was alive.

"What the hell?" he heard someone say, and he rolled his head around to see two pairs of blue-clad legs ending in comfy-looking black shoes. Cop shoes.

"Help," he tentatively said.

"Good lord! Lookit all that *blood!*"

*Aurora's finest*, Neal thought. Then he found himself thinking about his mother telling him to wear clean underwear in case he had to go to the hospital.

**"Well, *that* was a balls-up," Bob said in disgust, yanking off his mask and gloves. His partner—who was called Cage—just nodded. They drove without speaking for a moment, listening to a police band scanner.**

"Sounds like they don't have a good fix on our car, at least," Cage said.

"Yeah, with a description like that they'll never find us. Pull on the freeway here."

"Which way? East or west?"

"Less traffic to the west. We can turn around in DeKalb."

They were silent for a while, then Bob spoke again.

"Thought I had the little punk, but he must have put a whammy on my gun."

"A whammy, huh?"

"Yeah." Bob turned to Cage and glared. "What else?"

"I thought you told me you have to work the slide on these guns before they shoot again. That's why they're so quiet, right?"

"I *did* work the fucking slide!"

"Really? I didn't see you do it."

"Well, I did."

"If you say so."

They were silent for a little while. Then Bob spoke again.

"I didn't see *you* putting a cap in his ass at all."

"Didn't expect him to bolt."

"Why the hell not? That whole underpants thing was a ploy. I thought so from the first."

"Oh *Jesus*, Bob, are you serious?"

"Yes! I'm totally serious! I *knew* he was yanking our chains."

"Bob, the only thing he was yanking was his dick. We could not *possibly* have surprised him more than we did. Or was he tossing off in front of a porno movie in order to trick us, too?"

Bob relaxed a little. "What a jerk."

Cage started snickering again. "Come on, you have to admit it's kind of funny."

"Yeah, I guess."

"And those cops didn't follow us."

"We lucked out."

More silence, then Cage asked "So where's the brass?"

"What?"

"You know, the brass thing off the bullet you shot him with. The, uh, casing. If you worked the slide like you said, it should have been in your hand, right? I mean, you wouldn't leave *evidence* like that behind, would you?"

Bob was silent for a moment.

"Okay, maybe I didn't eject the fucking cartridge," he said at last. "Goddamn, what a balls-up."

**Miles away, in one of his Gold Coast** apartments, Alex Abel stared down into the stone of an emerald ring. It wasn't big or gaudy—no "Mr. T." jewelry for him. A classy ring, the way only expensive things are classy. Alex found it very calming to look down into its green, cool depth.

One of his operatives had spread the rumor that Abel's emerald ring was the Ring of Solomon, giving

him dominion over the Spirits of the Air, who would devour the liver and kidneys of anyone who dared to attack him. This was, of course, utter bullshit. The ring was just a ring.

The charm that would dissolve the liver and kidneys of an attacker was made of failed lottery tickets, sandwiched between pictures of Princess Di and James Dean, cemented together with toad's blood and the fat of a murdered man. He kept it in a sealed gold case, because the smell was not to be endured.

Alex Abel was not a man to keep waiting, but here he was, waiting—waiting for the report of a southern white-trash witch who predicted the future by reading the serial numbers off dollar bills.

Really, Abel didn't mind waiting—he didn't have a lot in the way of “down time” and he'd always found it strategically valuable to step back and reassess every once in a while. Running a multi-million-dollar multinational corporation with multiple accounts, multiple investments, and multiple projects took a lot out of you; add to that the distractions of masterminding a private occult conspiracy and you got a life almost too full to bear. Still, it beat working on a road crew.

The girl—really, she didn't look any older than twenty—glanced up at him apologetically. “Ah'm sorry, Mr. Abel. Ah'll try to hurry this up for ya.”

He smiled. “No hurry. I'm willing to wait for quality.” His voice was deep, clear, and possessed of absolutely perfect diction. He'd spent a lot on voice coaches. Although he'd only admitted it to his private psychologist a month before he terminated services—that is, right after he'd stumbled across the occult underground—he'd felt more than fully repaid when, after months of bargaining for Tower Construction over the phone, he'd finally gotten fed up, completed a hostile takeover, and only then met Dale Tower, III, in the flesh. Tower had never suspected that Abel was black, and the man's cleft chin had dropped like . . .

“Okay, ah'm getting something heah.” The witch had charts and books spread out on the table, along with bills from his wallet and a yellow legal pad for her notes. “On two of your bills, the second number is two, which reflects duality and conflict and corruption. Coupled with the foah in the first position, which indicates stability in the past . . .”

“Ms. McIntyre . . .”

She looked up at him, politely dismayed. “Oh, yew can call me Violet,” she said.

“Violet, then. I trust your methods. I'm only interested in the results.”

“Oh.” She began flipping through her notes again. Abel idly wondered if she'd go to bed with him. She was pretty, but not his type—he'd always felt a vague contempt for rich black men who pursued white women. (He'd read Frantz Fanon.) He also wondered if she found it weird to work for him. Probably not; people who could wrap their brains around magickal thinking were usually too abstract to get bogged down in social conventions. (Though there were exceptions. With magi, there were *always* exceptions.) He decided it would be nice if she wasn't bothered by working with a black man, but he'd also prefer it if she wouldn't go to bed with him. It wasn't a race thing; she just seemed like a nice girl, and Abel liked to believe there were a few nice girls left.

“All right. You remembered last tahm, when ah said your position of strength was threatened?”

“By a young man.”

“Uh huh, an initiate armed with the powers of chaos and destruction, but not yet their master.”

“I remember.” Abel had compared her predictions with those of his tarot reader, who had told him that his plans would soon cross with a young man, a magician, who would come into money—probably through a game of chance. The tarot reader had furthermore told him that this man might become his ally or his rival.

“Ah foresee conflict between you and this man. He's already overcome you—you or one of your plans. The big confrontation is yet to come.”

He leaned forward. This was new.

“There's also a woman—a powerful woman, standing between the two of you. He'll pick one of you.”

“Is the woman a magician?”

“Ah can't tell,” she said apologetically. “If ah had some of her money, maybe. These nines might lead one to think that she's a so'ceress, but it could be that she's deeply religious.”

“Or both.” Abel grated his lower jaw lightly against his upper teeth, like he was chewing a thought. “A young man with the power of chaos, who's thwarted my plans once and who's interested in a religious or powerful woman?”

“Uh huh. Does that sound familiar?”

“Maybe,” he said, thinking it was definitely Neal Brinker.

**When Neal woke up in the hospital, it took him a moment to remember everything that had happened. Then he hit the nurse button. A few moments**



passed before a uniformed woman entered.

"Oh, Mr. Brinker. So glad you're awake. How are you feeling?"

"Really sore, groggy, exhausted . . ."

"That's normal." She started paging through the clipboard at the foot of his bed. "The doctor said you were very lucky. Apparently the bullet didn't do much damage at all."

"I'd feel luckier if it hadn't done any."

She kind of laughed, then saw something in his chart and frowned. "About your insurance . . ."

"I don't have health insurance."

She went a little pale when Neal said that.

"Well, that's something of a problem . . ."

"Just bill me . . . I'll pay it however I can."

"Yes, well . . . we'll see what we can do. Are you feeling well enough to answer a few questions?"

"Huh?"

"There's a police officer here who'd like to talk to you."

"Please, not just yet."

Her expression softened. "Of course, Mr. Brinker." She waddled away.

Neal sat back and thought. A cop outside was good—for now. Good if those goons came back. (Thinking about the two men, he found himself blushing. He got mad at himself for being embarrassed at what two men who'd tried to kill him might think about his personal habits.) No way could he tell the cops the whole story, though, even if he knew it. First, they'd never believe his claims to be a "magician" and secondly, if he did persuade them, the rest of the occult underground would be on him like red on a baboon's butt. The one iron law followed by all schools of magical study was, "Snitches get stitches."

He sighed. Down inside, he knew who he had to call, but he didn't like it.

He reached for the phone.

## Bob Franklin and David "Cage" Kajinski

looked around the elevator they rode. It was the nicest one either had ever been in. Bob kept wiping his hands on his pants and Cage's lips kept pursing and relaxing, like he was rehearsing a facial expression.

They'd been called in to see the boss. It was the first time for each of them.

"Man, I'm going to be one pissed pilgrim if Abel thinks we dropped the ball," Cage finally said.

"Pipe down, fer Chrissakes. This elevator could

be bugged, for all we know."

"I ain't gonna pipe down. You are so fucking suspicious it's not even funny."

"I'm suspicious 'cause I've learned. Seen too many ox-eyed assholes ready to believe the best in people. They got cut down like you wouldn't believe."

"So you think Alex Abel has his elevator bugged? You think he's got nothin' better to do than spy on people in his elevator? Is that it?"

"It just pays to be careful."

"I'll show you careful. *Hey Abel! Only a fuckwit would have run when that guy ran!*"

"Shut up, you asshole!"

"Asshole, am I?" Cage put his hand on Bob's shoulder and shoved him.

"Knock it off!"

At that moment the elevator door opened, and a man was standing there facing them. The man's features were anonymous, plain, flat, immobile. He stood a little slumped, hands at his sides.

Bob's flash assessment was that this guy had at least two guns on him and probably a knife. The scars on his hands and wrists said "violence" and the crude tattoo peeking out of his shirt collar said "jail time."

Cage looked at him differently, noticing how his muscles were developed—big, but not well-cut—like a plumber or an old-time boxer. Someone who uses his body instead of building it. He stood relaxed, his weight on both feet, comfortable—and ready to move in any direction.

Mostly, though, both noticed the man's eyes. Bob had seen eyes like that over long rap sheets rife with phrases like "brutal" or "execution-style" or "chilling lack of remorse." As for Cage, this man's eyes reminded him of his dad. He didn't like it one bit.

"Gentlemen?" The man's voice was flat, empty of affect, just like his face. He gestured to his left. Warily, Bob and Cage got off the elevator and followed him towards a door.

"Mr. Abel? Robert Franklin and David Kajinski are here to see you." He held the door for them. The soul of courtesy, but each of them stepped through with a feeling that Abel's man was ready to slam the heavy oak door on his trailing ankle and then pound the hell out of him while he was limping.

"Thank you, gentlemen." Alex Abel looked shorter in real life, but he had that same nice telephone voice that made Cage feel like his shirt was untucked. "Allow me to introduce my associate, Eponymous." Bob and Cage glanced back at the man from the ele-



vator, who was standing in a prime position to backshoot the both of them.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, sir," Bob said. Cage just nodded.

"Thank you, Mr. Franklin. Now. Why don't you tell me about what happened with Neal Brinker?"

Bob cleared his throat, glanced at Cage, who raised his eyebrows and nodded back at him.

"Well, sir, as instructed we approached the subject—that is, the subject, from a position of strength. We were masked, gloved, wearing raincoats as requested and carrying the, uh, ordnance we were issued. So. We'd located his residence, watched him come home from work, waited about a half an hour to let him relax and unwind . . ."

"That's when most people are most off guard," Cage added. Bob glanced at him reproachfully.

"We'd surveyed the residence beforehand and knew the subject was alone. The curtains were drawn, so we decided to proceed with caution. We kicked the door open—I was on point—and then, we . . . uh . . . well . . ."

Alex Abel leaned in. "Yes . . . ?"

Bob swallowed. Then Cage's face began twitching.

"Mr. Kajinski, do you have something to add?"

Cage shook his head. His face was turning beet red.

"The subject was, uh, not . . . that is, he was naked."

"I thought you said he was alone."

Cage was still battling to keep down his giggles.

"He was alone, sir. He was masturbating."

At the word, the guffaws that had been tormenting Cage broke free at last.

"I'm sorry, sir, but *you should have seen the look on his face!*"

Bob put his hand over his eyes in disgust, until he heard Abel laughing, too.

"So you mean you kicked the door in expecting . . ."

"Anything! Black magick, a machinegun emplacement, him gone . . . anything but him in there, roughing up the suspect!"

Abel and Cage had a good laugh, which gradually wound down.

"So . . . how did he get away?" Abel said at last—and there was nothing amused in his voice any more.

Bob was tempted to blame the whole thing on Cage, but it just wasn't his style. "We were off guard, sir. As you can maybe appreciate. I mean, he didn't seem very threatening. We talked a little bit, and then he threw his bedclothes in the air and dove for the window."



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"You 'talked a little bit'? About what?"

"The usual kind of thing—'who are you guys, what are you doing in my trailer' . . ."

". . . 'Can I put on some pants' . . ." Cage added. Bob glared again.

". . . so while we were distracted, he jumped out the window. I opened fire when he jumped and hit him in the torso."

Abel nodded. "Left side, just above the floating rib."

Bob blinked. "Right . . . so I, uh, went to the window to finish the job, and there was a police car coming."

"Mr. Kajinski, where were you while this was happening?"

"I was out the door. I meant to chase him down, but I switched when I heard the sirens. I went to start our car instead."

"So you never fired?"

"No. Didn't have a good shot."

"I see. Bob, you only shot him once?"

Bob licked his lips.

"Well, I tried to shoot him a second time, but the gun jammed."

"I think the guy may have put some kind of whammy on it," Cage added.

A voice rumbled up from behind the pair, startling them briefly. "Did you work the slide?" Eponymous asked.

Bob swallowed, looking over his shoulder for a moment. "I'm not sure, sir." He looked back at Abel. "I'm sorry he got away. It won't happen again."

"I'm sure it won't." Alex Abel stood up. "Gentlemen, I sent out three other teams this morning with similar missions—approach known area chaos magicians with messages of intimidation and attention. Only Neal Brinker resisted, which indicates that we've smoked out the man we wanted to find."

"Why were you looking?" Cage asked. Bob winced.

"We have intelligence indicating a chaos mage may soon be in a position to . . . *compete* with us. I don't like competition."

"But you didn't know which one?"

"And now I do, thanks to you gentlemen. Eponymous will show you the door . . ."

"Excuse me, sir," Bob interjected. "But what do we do now?"

Alex Abel blinked, and in a dangerously neutral tone said, "'Do,' Mr. Franklin? You go home and wait for further orders."

"You must know where he is if you've got his hos-

pital records. Why not have us finish the job?"

Abel looked at Franklin long and hard. "Finish the job?"

"If this guy's a threat, he only knows me and Cage. Why expose other agents to trouble when we're the ones he knows? If he's as dangerous as you say, anyhow."

"Our predictions indicate that he may be in a position to ally with us or oppose. Do you think you can recruit him after putting a slug in his back?"

"Sure," Cage cut in. "Scared people do stupid things. You know he's going to be a big deal, right? Does *he* know? If you send in the marines, he's going to twig to that. If he sees the same two guys, he may knuckle under before he even realizes how important he is."

Able pursed his lips, ground his teeth a little. "Very well," he said. "But if you can't recruit him, kill him."

## "You know, I knew it was you the moment

I picked up the phone and heard, 'Dan, can you come down to the hospital and see me? And oh yeah, bring some pants.'"

Neal rolled his eyes. Dan had been his mentor, taught him everything about stealing cars and chaos magick, until he'd been sent to the state pen for five years. When Dan got out, he'd seemed a lot smaller to Neal. Maybe the old man had just lost his nerve (after all, magick based on risk was much tougher on an old body) or maybe the difference was Neal's five years of high rolling, big risks, and big setbacks. Now he couldn't look on his former idol without feeling a little let down.

"How's it going, Dan? Rolled yer bones lately?"

"Shaddap, ya lil' snapperhead." For a moment, it was just like old times. "Whatcha tell those cops?"

"I told 'em that these two guys came into my house and started yelling and shooting, so I jumped out the window."

Dan nodded. "Good to know you're that smart, at least."

"Yeah, the bad thing is they're thinking these guys may have had a case of mistaken identity, so now they don't want to watch me."

"Neal, that's a *good* thing."

"It ain't all good."

"Yeah, I suppose." The old man looked idly around the room, picked at a flake of his skin. "So, they got you on any good drugs?"

"Not too bad . . . you're not trying to score, are you?"

"No! I oughtta knock your block off for even suggesting! I'm just thinking money."

"Since when do you have to think about money?"

"Ah, you don't know nothin'. You get older, it's harder to build a charge. Harder to find a risk you can do that won't kill ya. Besides, I got some money now."

"Enough that you won't risk it all on a single toss, huh?"

"Yeah, that's it, smart guy. What, you think you'll never get that much? You think you'll always be willing to put your whole stake on a hand of cards, when you got a couple daughters and a mortgage, huh?"

"Man, did you ever get weighed down."

They were silent for a while.

"Dan . . . who are the Hit Squads?"

"You mean the guys who gotcha?"

"Who else would I mean? I been hearing rumors for months about armed goons in raincoats, face masks, and rubber gloves wiping out magicians. Not just chaos magicians either—clockworkers, boozehounds, a couple types of Satanist. I've heard they're some new school based on fear, that they're a secret government agency, that they're agents of the Vatican . . . and some goofier theories than that. What gives?"

Dan sighed. "I dunno who they are, but I know *what* they are: they're trouble. Listen, you remember Simon Linnbid?"

"The short guy? Tarot card guy? Had that, whatcha call it, the Magician card tattooed on his chest?"

"Guy had a handmade steel tarot deck—razor-blade edges. I saw him cut an orange in half with one from twenty paces. So not a guy to mess around with."

"Yeah? So?"

"So this cop named Bob Franklin whacked him."

"Same guy who put you in for your nickel?"

"Very same. Officer Bob had a thing about witchcraft. I don't blame him much—I heard Linnbid did something to his wife. Some Ten of Swords thing."

"Shit. So this Bob Franklin is some kind of badass?"

"No, the thing is he *ain't*. At least not when he put me away. I mean, he knew his ass from his elbow, but he couldn't have taken down a balls-out freak like Simon. Not without help."

Dan sat back and cleared his throat, looked around.

"So I get out of the can—and let me tell you, I did

hard time, someone *got* to that judge, 'cause he put me in fuckin' proctology school—I hear that Officer Bob is dead."

"So some kind of superior badass killed *him*?"

"I didn't know what to think—until I hear from this guy and that guy that Officer Bob is still around, only now he's enforcing the law 'unofficially.' I've seen it happen—guys go over the edge, lose what they love, and get a mission instead."

"So you think my 'Bob' is your Officer Bob?"

"Thick eyeglasses, you said? And dark hair? It could be. I think it is."

"But you still haven't told me who the Hit Squads are."

"I know they're called the New Inquisition. That doesn't make me feel too warm and fuzzy."

"So they're just kacking magicians?"

"You know as much as I do." Dan grimaced and looked at his watch. "Lissen, I gotta get Gracie from her ballet class or her mom's gonna squawk. I brought you some stuff."

Dan had arrived carrying a paper bag with the top rolled up. He glanced at the door, making sure it was closed, and opened it.

Inside, wrapped in a pair of cheap khaki pants and a t-shirt, was a chrome .38 special revolver, a box of hollow-point bullets, and a long, thin strip of metal—a car thief's "slim jim."

"The gun's numbers are filed off, so I could be in big shit if I got caught with it. I brought you the slim jim 'cause I figured you're gonna need some way to get fired up for a while. Some way that isn't gonna get you hurt."

"And the gun?"

Dan sighed.

"Look, you gambled your life once. You rolled for your bones and got a taste of the long juice. If *you decide* that's the path you wanna take—well, here's your tool."

Neal popped the cylinder on the revolver. Inside was a single bullet.

"If *you decide* you wanna play some Russian roulette, that's your thing. I just ask that you wait until I'm out of the hospital, all right?"

## Travelling on the elevator down from Neal's

floor, Dan kept looking at his watch. He thought of Neal as the son he never had, and he didn't like seeing the poor kid shot up and messing around with





things beyond his control. He'd almost cautioned Neal to play it safe, but some shred of pride had stopped him. He knew what Neal thought of him, and couldn't stand to bear out his student's most contemptuous suspicions.

"Not like he'd listen anyway," he muttered to himself.

He went into the hospital garage with his hand in his pocket, pulling out his keys. They snagged on a loose thread, and he yanked hard, then dropped them. With a muttered "Christ," he bent down to get them and that was how he happened to see Officer Bob and a big hairy guy come around the corner. Officer Bob was dressed in hospital scrubs and the other guy had on a leather jacket and steel-toed boots.

"I always drive because I'm the boss," Bob was saying. "Now would you shut up? Our source says he gets his drugs around this time. Once he's lit up, I go in and . . ."

". . . and I wait at the end of the hall, I know. Damn Bob, you act like I'm nine years old."

Dan quietly crept to the other side of a pillar.

"No, *you* act like you're nine years old. That's how come I got to keep repeating everything."

"At least I know how to work the slide on a gun."

"I worked the slide already!"

From somewhere nearby, a car sang out a cheery "bee-oop" as the alarm was activated. Bob and his tall friend immediately shut up and went into the hospital.

Dan's mind was whirling. He had to warn Neal—but then what? Neal was one gun, and no great shooter, plus he was injured. Dan would be in deep shit if he got involved in something shady, and he had to get Gracie . . .

A portly black man in a grey flannel suit came around the corner and Dan walked right into him.

"Oof," Dan said as he fell back on his ass.

"Oh my God! Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Here, let me help you up."

"Naw, I can get up on my own."

"You want to come inside? I'm a doctor, I can look you over . . ."

"No problem. It was my own damn fault."

"All right. I'm terribly sorry."

"Don't worry about it."

The doctor went into the hospital, thinking he was lucky the guy wasn't going to sue him.

Dan waited a few tense seconds, then pushed a

button on the doctor's key chain. In the garage, a car went "bee-oop."

## "Hello?"

"Neal, listen closely. Don't take your meds."

"Dan?"

"The Hit Squad is in the building now."

Neal felt a cold ripple of fear. It seemed to radiate from his bullet wound.

"Now? What the . . . what do I do, Dan?"

"Listen closely. First, load that damn gun up. Then after your pill guy comes, Officer Bob is going to enter your room. He's got a partner, tall guy. He'll be by the elevator."

"Shit."

"They don't know you expect them, and they don't know you have a gun, Neal. They're expecting you to be drugged. Is there a back door on your floor? Like a staircase?"

"I don't know."

"I'm calling from a black BMW. I'll be waiting out front with the motor running."

The door opened.

"Neal? You still there?"

"Yeah mom, I'm fine. Lissen ma, I gotta go. My pill guy is here."

"I can't wait too long in a stolen car."

"Yeah, ma, uh huh. I love you, too."

"Luck loves ya, baby."

Neal hung up, smiled at the male nurse.

"Mom. She worries a lot."

The nurse grinned. "Tell her how good we're taking care of you."

"You bet I will." As the nurse leaned in, Neal pulled the gun from under the covers and pointed it at his head.

"Scream and I'll kill you," he said quietly.

## Bob padded down the hall in his comfy cop

shoes and brand new doctor's coat. No one gave him a second glance—like he was invisible. He was always amazed by the power of a uniform and a clipboard. He saw the rolling table covered with pills and water glasses—were they supposed to leave those unattended? But really, none of his concern.

He stepped into Brinker's room and gently pulled the door shut behind him. There was a very short hallway into the room—about three feet long, as wide as a

closet. Pity there wasn't a lock on the door, but there was a bracket for his clipboard. The modified pistol—the silent “hush puppy” he'd shot Brinker with the first time—was in a holster under his belly, and the silencer was in his left pocket. His rubber gloves stretched and rolled as he reached for both. Eyes wide and ears straining, he pulled out both and screwed them together. Next came the surgical mask.

Oddly, he found his attention momentarily absorbed by a piece of roast beef stuck between two of his back molars. He worked it with his tongue while assembling his gun. Then he took a deep breath and stepped into the room.

“Brinker. Don't make me finish what I started.”

The room faced south and was filled with the harsh glare of late-afternoon sunlight. Under the bed's white and beige covers, a figure lay on its side, facing the window.

“Brinker. Wake up.”

Bob began to feel a prickling sensation in his scalp. Something was wrong here. He saw that the body in the bed was shaking.

“Nothing to be scared of if you make the right choices.” He took a step closer, reached out for the covers, pulled them down to reveal a stranger in a

nurse's uniform.

The door to the bathroom swung open and Brinker stepped out, leveling a gun at him. Bob's reflexes were faster than thought, and his own weapon swung up into Brinker's face.

“So what's the right choice . . . Bob?”

Now it was Bob's turn to be scared. How did Brinker know about him? Where had he gotten a gun?

“Put the gun down, first off.” He kept almost all the fear out of his voice.

Brinker took a step closer and smiled. He looked pale and more than a little crazy.

“Or what? You'll shoot me?”

“That's right.”

“Hear that hissing?”

“What hissing?”

“They have central oxygen piped in here. I wedged the port open with a paper clip and turned on the valve. One little spark and this room will go up like a Detroit tenement. So maybe *you* better put the gun down.”

“Oh *God!*” moaned the nurse in the bed.

“Shut up!” Bob and Neal both said it in unison.

For a moment, the room was silent except for the sobs of the nurse.



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"Okay. You don't want to put it down. Maybe I'll call the nurse," Neal said, reaching for the button.

"Touch it and you're a dead man!"

"Along with you, this asshole and the rooms on either side? Your conscience wanna carry that to heaven?"

"I don't hear any hissing."

"I could be bluffing. I'm willing to take risks. Are you?"

Bob thought about getting caught—people finding out he was still around, all the bad news that would involve. Would Abel leave him alive, a trail right to his door? Unlikely.

"Okay," Bob said in a calm voice. "I'll put it down. Here's how we'll do this thing, all right? I'll go to the other side of the bed, and you take a step away from the nurse button." Neal nodded, and like careful dancers they acted out Bob's words.

"You, in the bed. Lie flat on your belly."

"Oh God, don't kill me!"

"I ain't gonna," Bob said irritably. "Now move!"

The nurse complied. Neal watched with narrow eyes.

"Now I put the gun down on his back and let it go." Bob did so, but kept his eyes locked on Neal and his hand close to the gun.

"So far so good. Now *you* pop open the cylinder on your gun."

"Put your hands up first."

"I will when you open the cylinder."

"No!"

"Together then."

Slowly, Bob raised his hands as Neal worked the mechanism on the gun. When the cylinder fell out to the side, Bob put his hands all the way over his head.

Both men relaxed minutely.

"You ready to talk now, Brinker?"

"Hell, no," Neal said, and yanked the covers towards him. The nurse screamed, and Bob dove to the floor. Neal dodged towards the door, crouching, flicking the pistol closed with his right hand while picking up Bob's gun with his left hand.

Behind the bed, Bob yanked his backup gun—a .32 snubby—from its ankle holder and glanced up at the reflection in the blank TV screen. Neal was at the door, a gun in either hand. Bob scuttled to the foot of the bed and poked head and gun around the corner.

"Freeze!" he shouted.

Neal fired the silenced pistol. Bob ducked back as the glass window behind him shattered. He waited

half a moment for the explosion Neal had promised, but nothing happened.

"Fuck. He was bluffing," he muttered as he lunged to his feet.

Out in the hall, Neal yanked the pill cart in front of the door and sprinted towards the right. The elevators were to the left—along with the other gunman.

"Drop 'em, motherfucker!"

Neal looked back and there was the second gunman—only this time without gloves or mask. He was running towards Neal in a zig-zag pattern, holding a silenced gun with both hands.

Neal turned and grinned. "Come on then!" He pointed both guns and pulled the triggers simultaneously. The big man ducked behind the pill cart just as Bob stuck his head out the door and pulled it back in.

Nothing happened from the silenced gun—had the safety gone on somehow?—but there was a loud crash from Dan's .38, and a picture down at the end of the hall shattered. People started screaming, and Neal felt the rush of power come into him again. He'd dared the tall guy to shoot him, and he'd won, and now Fortune loved him. He turned and ran around the corner of the hall. Under his breath, he muttered the word "Distraction."

Cage angrily yanked the pill cart aside and lunged after Neal as Bob came out of the room.

"You chase, I'll cut him off!" Bob shouted. Cage made no reply but raced down the hall . . .

. . . just as a door opened right in front of him. He pulled up short of flying face-first into it, then shoved the door—and the frightened woman behind it—out of his way and kept running, but by that time Neal was around the corner.

Bob ran the other direction, towards the elevators. The hospital hallway was laid out like a square, with the elevators on one interior wall. Neal was on the opposite side of the square from the elevators, and there were stairways in two corners. They were on the eleventh floor.

He hit the button and waited for what seemed like hours—but he felt sure Neal would go for the ground floor. There were no other buildings around, so the roof would be a dead end, and eleven flights of stairs would exhaust even a man in good shape (which Neal probably was) who *hadn't* been shot (which Neal certainly had).

Neal sprinted through the door to the stairs just as Cage bobbed his head around the corner, then fol-



lowed. Neal slammed the door behind him, looked in vain for something to block it, then started down the stairs three at a time, glancing in terror over his shoulder.

Cage kicked the door open and stepped aside, expecting gunfire. He was thinking that Brinker had five bullets left in the revolver at most, and didn't seem to know how to work a hush puppy.

"That fuckin' slide, gets 'em every time," he muttered as he lunged into the staircase, eyes wide, gun in front of him. He grinned at the steel doors and cement walls of the stairway; now he could shoot without worrying about bystanders.

He heard Neal's footsteps and gasps beneath him and started running. He bobbed his head over the railing and saw Neal almost directly below. He put the gun down and fired—and immediately worked the slide. The pistol was silent, but the ricochet made a sound like an angry cat.

A floor below, Neal's body was in agony, but his spirit was still riding an ecstasy of probability. Calling an image in his mind, he said "Orderly." Just as he reached the next landing, the door opened and a slim young woman in hospital whites entered. Her jaw dropped as she saw him.

"Run down the stairs," he said, pointing the guns. She screamed—but complied. He darted through the door.

Cage arrived seconds later, just in time to see the door closing. He could hear footsteps beneath him. Was it a fakeout? Which way to go? He had only an instant to decide, and he continued down the stairs.

Entering the hallway, Neal stuck both guns under his shirt and walked quickly towards the elevators. He could still feel the surge and throb of possibility coursing through him, just waiting for him to nudge it this way or twist it that way . . .

"Elevator," he muttered, and the door to one opened. He didn't even have to push the button, because someone was getting out, wheeling a gurney. Neal stepped towards the elevator, and only saw Bob the instant Bob saw him.

Both men drew and dodged. Bob lunged towards the "door close" button—right next to the door was one of the few places to hide from a shooter outside the threshold. Neal fired, putting a hole in the back wall as the doors slid shut.

"Fuck! *Another* elevator," he said, pounding the button and staring as Bob's elevator sank towards the ground floor. When the door opened, he pointed the

guns inside and stood back. "Everyone out," he said. They hurried to obey.

## Cage caught the orderly two floors down;

she started crying when he wheeled her around by the shoulder.

"Where did he go?" he demanded.

"He got off on nine," she wailed.

"Damn!"

"Don't hurt me!"

"It's okay, I'm a cop," he effortlessly lied. "Look, stay right here and you'll be safe." He bit his lip and started racing down the stairs again, wondering if he could outrun the elevator. Probably he could if it made a few stops, but a chaos mage could maybe stop that . . . five bullets left . . .

## Bob figured hospital security would be

going crazy now that there were reports of gun-toting psychos on the elevators, so between floors he put his gun in the belly holster (an awkward fit), pulled off the mask, and put his gloves back in his pockets.

On the first floor, there were security guards pointing pistols at him. He put on a shocked, innocent face and asked what was wrong. They breathed a sigh of relief and waved him out.

He didn't even need his clipboard.

Stepping into the lobby, he looked around. Gawkers. That meant no shooting yet. There were three security types watching the elevators closely. Bob casually walked to a corner by the gift shop. He could see the front door, with minivans and BMWs idling outside, and he could see the elevators. When the elevator doors opened, he'd be in a position to fire—assuming a nervous security jock didn't do the job for him.

## Cage, gasping, pushed open the last door

and realized to his dismay that he was in the parking garage instead of the lobby. He turned towards the lobby and saw Bob watching the elevator. Something in his agitated, oxygen-deprived brain clicked; if Bob shot Neal, he'd want to get away fast. If Neal shot Bob, *he'd* want to get away fast. In either case, Cage would want to be present in a vehicle—to assist or prevent, as the case might be.

He switched his gun to his left hand and reached for his keys.



## Except for the muttering of the gaping

spectators—Bob's old police partner called them "bullet magnets"—the lobby was silent when a slight "ping" announced the arrival of the elevator. Bob slid his hand under his shirt, and the security guards licked their lips with nervous anticipation as the elevator door slid open, revealing . . .

. . . nothing.

The guards looked around in confusion. Had someone hit the button to call the elevator? No, no one had.

There were confused mutters for a moment, broken by a loud crash from above.

Bob spun around just in time to see a shower of broken glass fall outside the window, then the billowing collapse of the awning by the driveway.

He started running towards the front door just as the guards realized their quarry must have gotten off on the second floor and gone through the window.

"Police officer! Out of the way!" Bob shouted, brandishing his pistol. He fought his way through the crowd to the door, only to be confronted by flopping masses of fallen awning. He struggled through it just in time to see Neal limping around a black BMW. Bob fired. Neal looked up and fired back as Bob ducked behind the cover of the awning. Behind him, Bob heard someone scream. One of the bullet magnets.

He looked out and saw the BMW pulling away. With a shout of rage he pointed his gun at the speeding car . . . gave it a lead . . . let out an easy breath . . . and pulled the trigger.

The car sagged and swerved as the back tire blew out—but the driver regained control and fishtailed around a corner. Bob cursed, then heard a honking horn right behind him.

"Need a lift?" Cage yelled through the window.

## Dan kept a fever grip on the wheel. The

BMW was doing reasonably well with the blown tire, but he had to be careful. He took a glance at Neal in the passenger seat.

"You okay, son?"

"I think I hurt my leg, but I'm not shot."

"That was Officer Bob, I think. Damn good shot, too."

"Can you keep it going?"

"Sure—but right turns are gonna be kind of a bitch."

The old man glanced at him again and grinned.

"Guess Gracie's gonna have to wait, huh?"

"You crazy old bastard. I knew you wouldn't let me down."

"Shaddap. I shouldn't *have* to bail your punk ass out. I'm too old. Fuckin' snapperhead."

They both started laughing, and then the back windshield shattered.

"Damn! These guys just *don't give up!*" Neal yanked on the seat lever and reclined it as far as it could go, squirming around so he could fire backwards.

"C'mon, Dan, can't this German piece of shit outrun a fuckin' K-Car?"

"It's a Town Car, and remember we got only three tires. Lemme get on a straightaway where I can open 'er up . . ." Dan hit a button, and the windows all started to roll down.

"What are you doing?"

"The guy I stole this from seemed pretty nice—might as well spare his windows."

Behind them, in the Lincoln, Cage was driving with his right hand and trying to get a good shot with his left. The gun recoiled and sparks flew off the beamer's bumper. He pulled the trigger again, then pulled it back in the car.

"Stupid slide! What good is a goddamn two-handed gun?" He put his left hand on the wheel and reached inside his jacket for his regular gun.

In the back seat, Bob was sliding from the left side to the right, every once in a while firing, trying to get a good shot at their quarry.

"Who's he got driving?"

"I dunno, but he's *good*." Cage gritted his teeth, slammed down the accelerator and crunched into the black car's back bumper. It skidded, the side with the flat tire swinging wide, and for a moment the cars were perpendicular. Neal took a shot through the beamer's empty rear windshield and might have hit Bob if the ex-cop hadn't been flying forward to break his nose on the gearshift.

"Ow! You idiot!"

"Get down! I have a shot!"

In the BMW, Dan cursed, yanked the wheel, and gunned the engine.

"You hit him?"

"I missed!"

"We gotta get on the highway." Dan grinned, and he sounded a little crazy when he asked, "You ready to roll yer bones?"

Both men felt the prickly thrill of danger as Dan floored the crippled car through a red light. A chorus of car horns was their fanfare as they shot towards the highway. They were going far too fast to stop. With a blasted tire, anything but the slightest change of direction would put them in a skid—probably a roll. If there wasn't a gap in traffic, they were shit out of luck—no options.

That's what chaos mages mean when they say they're going to roll their bones.

Dan crowed as they muscled onto the highway. He felt a surge of power he hadn't known for years. He reached out and grabbed the patterns of traffic—an amalgam of random chance, driver choice, and the slight modifications of civil engineers—and cracked them like a nine-tail whip, rearranging them to open up for him, giving him a straight shot away.

"Dan? *They're still behind us!*"

"I don't believe it!"

Cage had been ready to say his prayers when he pulled off the road and rumbled across the gravel shoulder, then onto the highway going *the wrong way*. Bob couldn't see a thing—his eyes were covered with blood from his broken nose and dim with tears of pain—but Cage had seen every car, heard every

honk as he gunned it towards the median strip and then *over* it, praying they'd make it. If they got stuck they'd get it from both sides and there wouldn't be enough left to bury in a shoebox. He winced as the car grated and rasped across the concrete island, and his head had hit the ceiling as the tires bounced over, but they'd made it. They were still on the trail.

Neal sighted back at their pursuers and seized all the threads of potential he could grasp. He'd been taking chances but spending his luck almost as fast, and he had little left to burn. He put it all on one shot at the tall driver, focusing everything on improving his shot, on honing his luck. He pulled the trigger . . .

. . . and missed. The Lincoln's windshield shattered and the rearview mirror fell, dropping an air freshener on the dashboard, but neither of the Hit Squad was hit. He almost wept in frustration and pulled the trigger again and again, blindly, before he heard the click of the pin on spent cartridges through the screaming wind.

Bob saw Neal crouch forward and he said "He's reloading! If you can ram him, do it now!"

"I can't! They're too fast!"

Both men continued firing, and Cage put the pedal to the floor.



JOHN TYNES





"Neal." Dan said. He didn't yell, and his voice was flat and calm. It got Neal's attention more than any desperate shriek would have. "Only put in one bullet."

Neal thought he understood. He did as he was told and closed the gun. Spun the cylinder. Put the hot barrel to his head.

"No," Dan said, still calm and flat. "My head."

"Dan?"

"Final lesson, shithead. Risking your stuff is strong, and risking your life is stronger . . . risking the life of someone you love of a friend. That's the strongest. And you're upping the bet with your own life 'cuz I'm driving." He, too, had the pedal down and the German engine was roaring full. They'd come to an empty stretch—cars were getting out of the way right and left. Their flat tire had worn through and they were trailing sparks. Four tires rumbling, the Lincoln was gaining.

"Let's roll the bones," Neal said. He put the gun to his friend's head and pulled the trigger.

Cage first saw something fly and splatter out the driver's side window, like they'd dumped a bucket of paint. An instant later he saw the car turn left but keep going straight, and his foot hit the brake with a desperate gentleness—he couldn't afford a locked-brake, four-tire blowout at 120mph.

"Awesome shot, Bob!"

"I didn't do it!"

The BMW started to roll. The doors flew open as it crashed over the side, into the ditch, rolling and tumbling.

Cage gritted his teeth and gently slowed the car. Absurdly, automatically, he put on his turn signal as he pulled to the side. Then both men jumped out of the car and began pelting down the road towards the wreck, guns in hand.

The BMW had landed upside down, and they approached it with caution.

"No one could have lived through that," Cage said, but his voice wasn't certain.

Bob cautiously squatted, looked in the driver's side.

"The driver's pulp," he said evenly. "No sign of Brinker."

"No," said a voice from the rows of corn beside the road. "I was miraculously thrown free of the wreck."

Bob stood. Cage, wide-eyed, opened fire.

Neal was laughing as he limped right at them. Bullets raced through the corn on either side of him but somehow, every shot managed to miss him. The left

side of his beard was spattered with blood, and he crackled with power. Cage and Bob couldn't see it or smell it, but they could feel it in the way their flesh crawled and their hairs prickled.

Soon, their guns were clicking on empty, and Neal continued his slow limp forward.

"Out of bullets? Here, I think this is yours." He tossed Bob's silenced pistol high in the air. Somehow, coincidentally, the slide must have been worked during the wreck. Strangely, providentially, the gun went off when it hit the pavement. Oddly, randomly, the bullet's trajectory took it through the back of Bob Franklin's right thigh.

It could have been destiny, but it was Neal Brinker's will. Bob crumpled to the ground wailing.

"Give me your car keys," Neal said.

"Yeah, okay," Cage said, making no effort to keep the fear out of his voice. He held out the keys, hands shaking.

When Brinker was close enough, Cage took a swing—a lightning-fast barfighter's punch, not a tricky karate move or anything; just an attempt to shove his fist through Brinker's face. The fact that his fist was holding a heavy pistol was just icing on the cake.

The blow was halfway between them when Brinker reacted, and his reaction was the word "Pain."

He'd hurt people with magick before, but never with so much power to put behind it. All across Cage's body, the skin sundered and popped—on his hands, his chest, in his armpits and the rims of his ears, across his eyelids, and on the bottoms of his feet he felt shock and agony as the word "Pain" was inscribed through his flesh dozens of times. He reeled back and fell.

Neal picked up the keys. He could have made any key on his ring fit the Lincoln's ignition, but waste not, want not. In a daze of power and ecstasy he walked towards the car, a slight smile playing on his lips. He'd killed Dan, but he'd think about that later. Right now he felt *good*.

The two agents of the New Inquisition groaned behind him as he started the car and changed the blinker. He looked over his shoulder and pulled onto the highway. He'd need some luck to avoid the cops, but he had more luck than most families see in a lifetime.

"Money," he muttered—and his glance fell on something sticking in the crack of the seat, next to his seat-belt buckle.

A lottery ticket.

**"Pretty posh, huh?" Bob managed a thin**

smile at Cage from his wheelchair.

"Yeah. You seen that nurse?"

"The redhead?"

"That's the one. Wish I wasn't so wrecked. I'd ask her out."

"She can give me a sponge bath any time."

"I think she likes the bad-boy type." Cage's body was covered with stitches and butterfly bandages. The doctor had been puzzled by the injuries—not cuts or bruises, more like the burst flesh on boils. But there was no swelling to account for the breakage, let alone the fact that the word "Pain" was spelled out repeatedly. If all went well, there wouldn't be any scars—at least, not legible ones.

"Nah, chicks like that are suckers for authority figures," Bob said. The bullet had broken his leg, but not shattered it. He'd have a star-shaped scar and probably a limp.

"How you figure?"

"Elementary, my dear Datsun. Where do people go? Where they can get what they want. What is there in a hospital? Lots of doctors—meaning a lot of men in authority. Therefore it follows, as the day the night, that our sexy redhead nurse wants an authoritative man."

"Like a cop for example?"

"For example, yeah." Both men were grinning. Both knew they had a snowball's chance in hell with the nurse, but talking trash helped pass the time.

Cage glanced at the clock and reached for his

channel changer.

"Maybe she goes for rich guys," he said. "Private clinic like this, right?"

"Yeah, so? You wanna suck up to the boss by fixing her up? I had you pegged for a lot of things, but a suckup was never . . ."

"Hey, pipe down a minute!" Cage was staring, rapt, at the television. "Oh nine . . . eleven . . . sixty-seven . . ." Cage's eyes went huge. "Shit, man! Those are my numbers!"

"Huh? Come on Cage, the lottery's just a tax on suckers who can't do math."

"Oh yeah? Well I just *won*! I just hit the goddamn PowerBall! *I won twenty-three million dollars!*"

Bob's jaw dropped.

"You're shittin' me!" he cried, but he didn't think Cage was that much of an actor. The big man was sitting up, quivering with excitement, biting his lip.

"I won! I don't believe it!"

"Where's the ticket?"

"It's in my pants pocket, man! Get me my pants!"

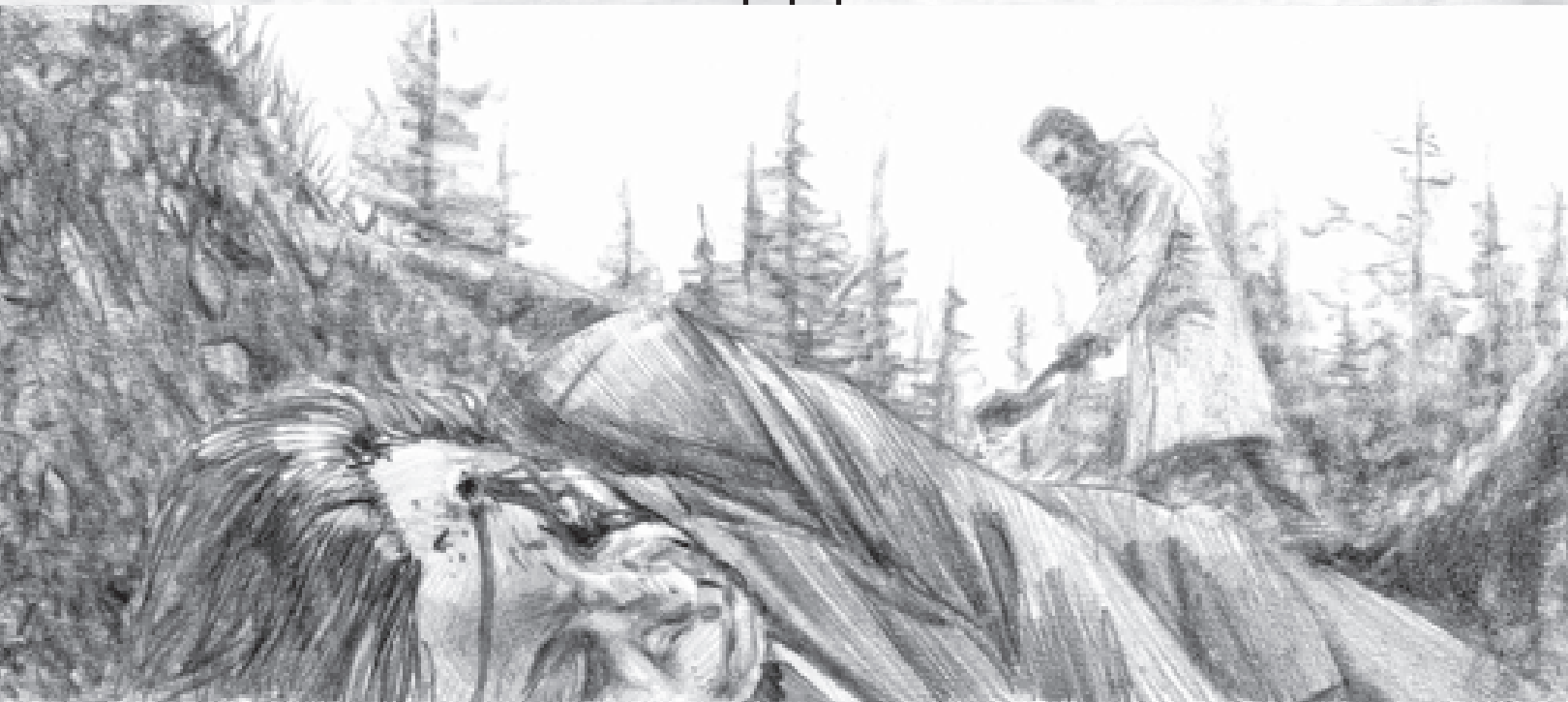
Bob wheeled over and flung Cage his jeans. The big man burrowed in the pockets clumsily, eagerly, like a kid on Christmas morning.

"I just bought it! Maybe my wallet . . . ? No, I put it in my front pocket!"

"Maybe it fell out in the closet," Bob said, turning, thinking briefly about asking the nurse to bend over and look for it. Then Cage was silent, and Bob looked over and saw on his face a look of mounting dread.

"No," Cage said slowly. "I think it fell out in the car."







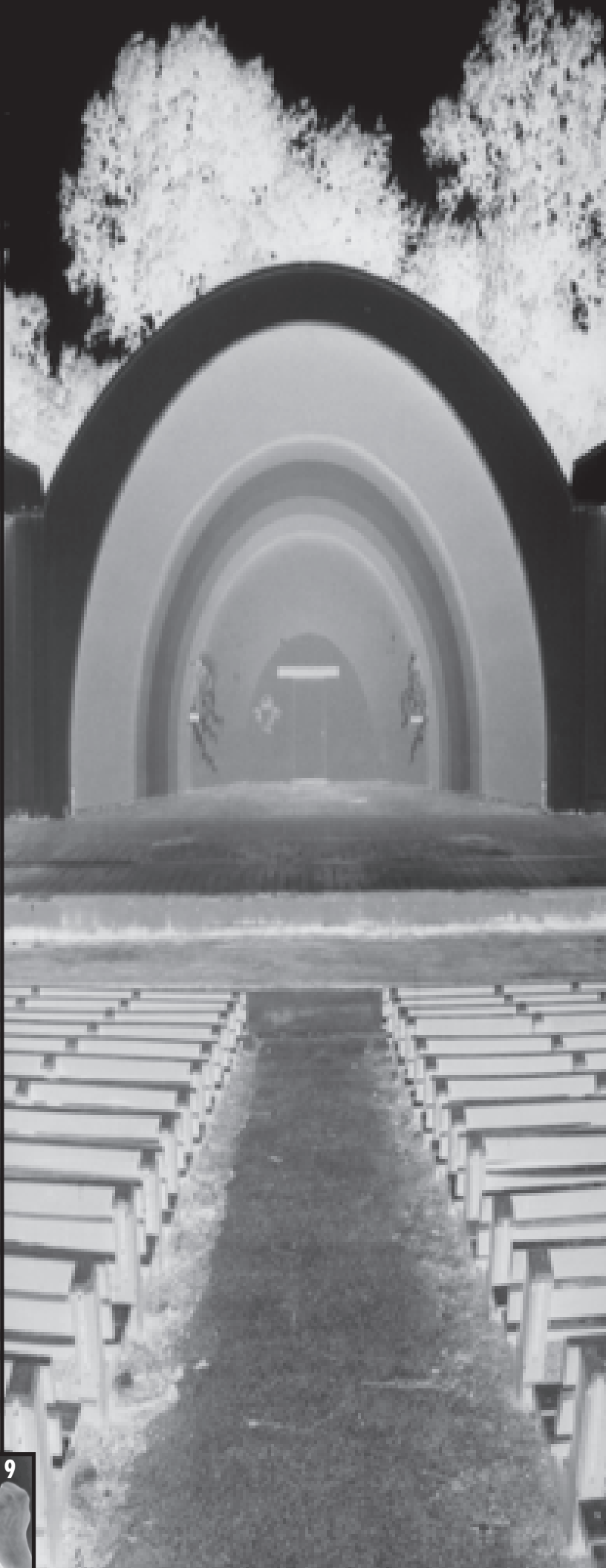
# CHAPTER ONE HISTORY

## UnKNOWn ARMIES



"MAKE MONEY AND THE WHOLE NATION WILL CONSPIRE  
TO CALL YOU A GENTLEMAN."  
—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

"WHAT'S PAST IS DEAD, FAR AS I'M CONCERNED. LET THE COBWEB  
FARMERS EAT THE CORPSE IF THEY WANT, IT'S GOT NOTHING FOR ME."  
—EPONYMOUS



## When did the New Inquisition begin?

Arguably it started in 1990, when Alex Abel put a shady private investigator named Stan “Grits” O’Malley on retainer to track down an occultist named Emil Dodustov in Seattle. After Grits died in a mysterious fashion—shot himself nine times in the head in a locked room—Abel started hiring more people, people with diverse talents. By 1999, he had over a hundred experts from all walks of life scouring libraries, reading tea leaves, breaking into homes and—occasionally—slitting throats. Perhaps that was the beginning.

But it inevitably leads to a question: why did Alex Abel hire Grits O’Malley in the first place? Obviously, the billionaire had developed an interest in the occult, but that’s not really an answer. The answer comes from the *source* of Abel’s interest in the supernatural, and the roots of that interest are deep.

Alex wasn’t very old when he learned that people who looked like him had once been bought and sold. Like most kids, he was confused and unhappy thinking about such scary injustice. He asked his dad to explain it, and Miles Abel looked down at him and said, “Son, even today everyone’s getting bought and sold all the time. The only difference is that in slave days, the whites didn’t feel like they needed to lie about it.”

Young Alex didn’t understand it at the time, but it made a deep impression. At that moment he decided that one day he wasn’t going to be bought. He was going to be the one buying.

So it started: delivering papers, shining shoes, running errands. When he got a little older, Alex discovered gambling. It didn’t take long for Alex to get on the football team—first so he could scout the team out for his odds-making buddies, and later so he could fix games himself. By the time he got to college, Alex was well on his way to being a rather cerebral criminal. His course was changed, however, and once again it was by the words of a father.

Alex turned nineteen in 1968. As an only child, he avoided the draft with a hardship deferment and went to Washington University, where he met Father Thomas Krebs. Krebs was involved in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and wanted Alex to join, too. “Alex, I can see you turning into a particularly small kind of bad man, and I don’t like it. You have the potential to be much more.” Alex scoffed at Krebs, at the SCLC, and everything they stood for. “Alex Abel matters,” he replied. “Why should I care about some lady on a bus? Where I’m going, I plan on having a car and a driver.”



JIM PAWELC

In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

Abel's guiding philosophy floundered. Here was a situation where money just didn't matter. No amount of pay was going to bring him back, and no mere dollars and cents could have made the same changes.

Like most in his generation, Abel was impressed by MLK. Like many, he was struck by King's greatness. But like a very few, he saw something more: King had reshaped the world. He struggled to reconcile King's influence with his own ideas about money, and he came to a surprising synthesis. He decided that economic law was inflexible, but that there was more than one kind of currency: that there were markets for morals and beliefs as well as for stock options and hog futures. Furthermore, he recognized the unique status of a black man in the American moral market. Standing at the juncture of guilt and terror, the black man was in a position to sell forgiveness—if the price was right.

Alex paid for his success. He paid by giving his validation to social cures that didn't cure, by giving up his more "controversial" friendships, by continuing to do business with men who wouldn't let him in their country club, by learning to talk, act, and think like a white man. He endured the scorn of his few peers and the odious nickname "Alex Oreo." Willfully and with knowledge beforehand, he threw in with the most ruthless and amoral investors of the 1980s, giving them a ready-made defense against racism accusations in exchange for investment tips and inside information.

It was at that time that Alex Abel began hiring killers. Not long after he'd made his fifth million, a business associate had a few bourbons too many and gave Abel a phone number. "If you ever know someone who really needs to die, call this number." Mute-ly, Alex took it, silently resolving to dissociate himself from that man. A lot of money could be made with underworld connections, certainly, but the risk from associating with a drunken blabbermouth was simply too great.

Nonetheless, he kept the phone number. Later that year, as a particularly successful business relationship was beginning and a particularly empty physical relationship was ending, Alex called the number. He had seen a report on the news about a child molester, caught in the act, who was found not guilty by reason of insanity. This offended Abel's sensibilities, and he decided to treat himself to some private-sector justice.

As the years passed, Abel prospered, and at the conclusion of each deal he allowed himself an exercise of remorseless power. He was scrupulous: he never killed for his own gain, and never for personal revenge. His targets were only those he judged to be poisonous to society as a whole.

Perhaps he felt, at some level, that his personal program of culling the culpable justified his business activities, which certainly weren't beyond reproach. The economy was at the height of Ronald Reagan's artificial prosperity, and Abel was in there with the dirtiest of them. He was accused of selling his soul, but no one could deny that he got top dollar in return. As the Reagan years waned, however, people started noticing something about Alex Abel: he wasn't collapsing on schedule. Donald Trump's divorce made him a national joke, but behind the scandalous headlines were bankruptcies and enormous debt. Michael Milken and his crew of corporate hyenas went to jail, but Abel named names, back-hacked his onetime partners, and oozed out of the S&L scandal with nothing worse than two dismissed charges and a \$10,000 fine.

The 1980s were winding down, and Alex Abel should have been on top of the world. His wealth had crossed that nebulous line between "tremendous" and "staggering." *People* magazine called him the third-most-eligible bachelor in the world, and the *Wall Street Journal* dubbed him "The New Face of Black America." He should have been another corpulent, satisfied, capitalist oppressor. Somehow, he was not.

In an effort to feel *something*, he arranged his most ambitious "cleanup" yet: the assassination of a European terrorist mastermind. The cost was staggering—almost a third of his yearly income—but he achieved what counterterrorist agencies like GSG-9 and GIGN could not. A man reputed to be untouchable, a man who had hopscotched across Europe evading their most elite police forces, had his brains blown out in Buenos Aires on Alex Abel's dime.

Somehow, it meant nothing.

Then, in January of 1990, Alex Abel underwent what his doctors called a "neurological event." They still can't say what happened to him—perhaps a miniature stroke, though he suffered no permanent loss of mental or physical ability. His driver found him lying on the bedroom floor in his Chicago penthouse, comatose. An EEG revealed a storm of neuroelectrical activity, but he remained unconscious for three days. When he emerged from his coma, he was dazedly





## The Fall of the Keys

Abel cannot escape the nagging, tormenting implication that the Invisible Clergy tested him, and that somehow he failed. As a child, Abel was powerless to escape the prison of his skin color; with the keys, he felt universal—not only connected to the universe, but of a whole with it, interspersed throughout it, universal as gravity or background radiation. As a student, Abel wanted answers; watching the keys spiral through the air, he *felt* the answers, *knew* the truth of the world, not in the intellectual way he knew that two plus two equals four, but in the way he knew it when his nose itched or his neck hurt. As a man, Abel yearned for the power to right wrongs and cure ills and prove, once and for all, that he was as fully human and wise and *right* as any one else, white or black; in those few moments before the keys hit the carpet, he had the power, the power to alter events with invisible subtlety, instant intensity, and global mastery.

For a span of moments, he had it all. He brushed his fingers against the roof of heaven. Then it was gone.

As Abel learns more and more about the Invisible Clergy, he wonders what archetype he *almost* embodied. One philosopher suggested that he nearly completed the archetype of the White Black Man, but that he couldn't quite assimilate. (Abel respects that woman's honesty, but hasn't spoken to her since.) Another advisor thought that Abel nearly replaced the Achiever—the Horatio Alger who rises above his humble beginnings. Abel liked the sound of that, but in his heart he knew that his advisor was giving in to the yes-man response, letting his desire to please the boss cloud his judgement. He nodded and smiled and privately vowed to never again consult the man about critical matters.

Alex Abel thinks that if he'd joined the Clergy—if he'd been just a touch more of *this* or a shade more of *that*—the Naked Goddess would still be mortal, chugging her way through forgettable skin flicks. It galls him, but he knows there's a connection between them. Both of them were despised even by those who admired them, envied and untouchable by those who looked down on them.

She was the Woman Everyone Can Have But You. Perhaps he almost made it as the Man Who Succeeded Where You Should Have. Black male money instead of white woman sex.

Is it too late? Is there room in the popular consciousness for both concepts? Should he start again from scratch, trying to ascend as something else? Or might it be possible to kick the Goddess out of heaven and take her place?

Alex Abel doesn't ask anyone's advice on these matters, not anymore. He knows that this is one dilemma he must resolve alone.

muttering about “the fall of the keys.” He told his doctors that he had dropped his keychain and that time had seemed to slow down as he watched them drop, spinning and tumbling—and that somehow, during that span of time when the keys were falling, he had experienced a sense of oneness with all of creation. He could describe his experience only in metaphors, saying, “It was like I could finally see a pattern, on which all reactions operated—everything from the collision of atoms to the turning of solar systems, all reflected in those damn dropping keys.” He also said the sensation was akin to being able to feel the individual gravitational tugs that every human being on the planet exerted on his body.

It certainly wasn't a standard “mystic vision,” but Abel took it as such, ignoring the explanations of his neurophysicians and psychochemists. To him, it seemed

unlikely that a random neurological event would create, by happenstance, a fraudulent sensation of cosmic awareness. The simpler explanation was that what he had felt was somehow objectively *real*.

That event spurred Abel's eventual interest in the occult. He started with standard religion but quickly became convinced that any connection between them and what he had seen was tangential at best—and at worst, only to be achieved through decades of prayer, meditation or purity. Abel didn't have the time. He experimented with scientifically controlled doses of psychoactive pharmaceuticals. The hallucinations he had only convinced him that his experience was no hallucination. Finally, his staff of researchers told him about a book called *The Invisible Clergy* that had been written by a man named Emil Dodustov in the late 1970s. Only a hundred copies

## What's in a Name?

The occult underground buzzes and hums with speculation about the name Alex Abel chose for his private mystic Tonton Macoute. Among the various avatars, adepts, and assorted oddballs who are savvy or lucky or important enough to have heard the phrase “New Inquisition,” several theories are discussed, debated and derided:

- The choice is a deliberate bit of sympathetic magick, used to symbolically link Abel's thugs with the Catholic Inquisition. By doing this, he hopes to partake of their success at killing sorcerers, their acceptance by the entrenched power structures, and their spectacular ability to intimidate.
- The word “inquisition” modifies “new” instead of vice versa. TNI doesn't mean “a new, updated version of a previous inquisition,” but rather “an inquisition into that which is new.” All the leg-breaking and bullying are only peripheral to TNI's *real* purpose, which is to track those trends in groupthink that could lead to another ascension. Abel's in a race to be the next one to go up, and since he can't run as fast as a “legitimate” occult scholar, he's hacking at their ankles with a tire iron as they pass him.
- Abel only *thinks* he chose the name. In actuality, the name “the New Inquisition” is an anagram of “When I Sit In No Quiet”—a veiled threat that is the footprint of someone in the Invisible Clergy. Just what that cryptic phrase means is open to plenty of debate. The lady who originated this theory holds that TNI is a tool for changing the balance between static order (implied by “I Sit”) and contingent chaos (alluded to by the use of “When” and “No Quiet”). Someone in the Clergy is subtly manipulating Abel in order to stir certain things up and smack other things down. When asked about the ultimate ends of this manipulation, the woman in question—Amy Fugate, who is one of the last survivors of the legendary “Blue People” of Appalachian Kentucky, and who always wears blue clothes and blue contact lenses—merely smiles a crooked, knowing smile.

had been privately printed and its impact on the zeitgeist was nil, but it seemed to describe and explain Abel's experience as an “aborted Ascension,” an attempt to gain cosmic awareness that somehow goes awry. After spending a great deal of money, Abel was able to acquire a damaged, partial copy of the book, which only whetted his appetite for more information. He hired Grits O'Malley to find the author, and was shocked at the outcome.

That bumbling probe was Abel's first real contact with the occult underground. In the years between then and now, he has become a major player.

The disparate threads of his life are finally coming together: his urge to change the world for the better has fused with his lead-pipe business acumen. His wealth and influence can wrap around and conceal his experience with hired death. His practical drive to improve and control the world has dovetailed with his mystic encounter.

Mysticism, pragmatism, money, and violence: this odd assortment of elements has been fused into Alex Abel's instrument of personal power and enlightenment.

That is the history of the New Inquisition.







# CHAPTER TWO OPERATIONS

## UnKNOWn ARMIES



"I WAS ONLY FOLLOWING ORDERS."  
—TRADITIONAL

"I HEARD THIS ONE DEUCE BITCHING ABOUT TNI'S RULES AND  
CLEARANCES AND ORDERS AND ALL THAT. HE GOES 'NO ONE  
TOLD ME I WAS GONNA GET BOSSED AROUND LIKE THE ARMY.'  
SO I GO, 'IF YOU THINK THIS IS GETTING BOSSED AROUND,  
THEN STAY OUTTA PRISON.'"  
—CAGE



## The New Inquisition is a highly organized

and regimented operation. This cohesion goes a long way towards explaining TNI's effectiveness in the occult underground, despite considerable ignorance of the milieu in which they operate.

The New Inquisition is broken into cells or teams, consisting of anywhere from one to eight individuals. Each cell has a name, a security level, and a mission profile. (The meaning of each is explained below.) The people in the New Inquisition also have individual security levels and mission profiles; a team's security level is equal to the lowest level of an individual member.

The team members choose a team's name. This started out as an organizational trick. Instead of designating operational teams by number (which could potentially disclose how many cells Abel had active), the teams were allowed to come up with a name they could remember. This also made it easier for Abel to keep track of which team was which. In the process, the psychological advantages of self-naming cells became apparent. Being part of a named team gave its members a sense of community and belonging—not a bad thing to share with people who are going to cover your back in a variety of hazardous situations. Plus, it's just cooler to be a member of "The Springheels" than "Team AC-627."

Security levels determine how trusted a particular cell or individual is. There are four levels, lettered A through D. A-Level clearance is highest; Alex Abel has A clearance, as do a very few of his closest and most trusted advisors.

- Level A gives you access to everything. You can requisition any piece of gear, design missions, and request any piece of information. If you can't find out what you want to know with A clearance, then the New Inquisition doesn't know it. You can give orders to anyone with B clearance, and to anyone else who recognizes you as having higher clearance.
- Level B gives you access to all information and equipment within a narrowly defined category. This usually depends on your mission profile; someone who specializes in assassinations can find out anything about Abel's assassination operations, but might not be able to learn about magickal research or surveillance operations. Alternately, some individuals and cells are wild cards who don't specialize. At B-Level, these cells and people can requisition all information or equipment germane to their physical location. For instance, a wild-card

cell in Seattle with B clearance would have access to all intelligence and planning concerning Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. People with B clearance are allowed to know the identity of everyone with Level A clearance. They can give orders to anyone they know with C or D clearance.

- Level C clearance gives you access to limited equipment and information. You're moderately trusted, but you still have to go through B or A level people with most requests. This is the level at which you're permitted to meet Abel in person, if necessary. Technically, you're not even supposed to know that Abel is behind the New Inquisition until you have C clearance, but it's such an open secret in the occult community that TNI rarely bothers to keep it concealed from their own recruits. If you have C clearance you can give orders to anyone with D clearance who recognizes you as having higher clearance. *Every* team has to have at least one member with C clearance.
- Level D is starting level. Pretty much anyone can order you around. If your recruiter (or someone else of higher clearance) hasn't identified an individual as a higher authority, you don't have to obey, but that can get you in trouble very quickly if you refuse an order from someone who turns out to have B or A clearance.

While the upper levels try to keep the distinctions clearly defined, there's quite a bit of information leakage at the lower levels, where people know that having the right piece of data can mean the difference between life and death. The levels are in place to keep the organization's secrets close to the vest, and it does an adequate job. The problem with any covert, secretive organization is a tradeoff between efficiency and secrecy. A conspiracy organized around total secrecy would give people code names, and each conspirator would *only* have contact information for the people directly above and below him. This is very secretive, since any given conspirator can only betray two people out of the whole network. However, this same insulation makes it difficult to organize and mobilize the conspiracy's forces on short notice. Someone with high level clearance has to send orders down through multiple levels of authority in order to get enough personnel to do anything significant—and each level of communication creates the risk of misunderstanding (not to mention treachery). On the other hand, an organization like an army, where officers wear their

ranks on their shoulders, is very efficient when it acts; but it pays for its efficiency by being obvious.

In any event, new recruits have D clearance and remain at that level until they've proven themselves by performing a few missions. Going from D to C usually takes a month or three, depending on how often the individual is used and how much risk the Inquisitor takes on behalf of Abel and TNI.

Going from C to B is considerably harder. You have to have been in TNI for at least a year, and have done something fairly impressive. It could mean pulling off a particularly dangerous or difficult mission, or it could mean taking the initiative to do something for the New Inquisition all on your own. A magus who

built a powerful artifact without being ordered might be bucking for a promotion from C to B.

A-Level is hard, hard, hard. There are rumors that you can only be kicked up to A if you've saved Abel's life. Of course, there are also rumors about contracts signed in blood, that you have to murder a member of your own family to prove your loyalty to TNI, *etc.* No one knows for sure but the people with A clearance, and they ain't talking.

## Salary

So, you want to get down to the real nitty-gritty and know how much Abel is paying for your services? The

## New Inquisition Slang

Almost any insular group performing specialized tasks develops a verbal shorthand. This can serve to make conversations more efficient, or to keep secrets, or to reinforce their status as group insiders. Most commonly, however, groups develop slang because it sounds cool.

**Ace:** An individual with A-Level clearance.

**Bed Shark:** Someone (usually a woman) who uses sexual favors for power or influence.

**Bee:** See "Drone"

**Boss:** Someone with B-Level clearance.

**Cabbage Roll:** Operating money. "I need another car; break out the cabbage roll."

**The Circus:** See "Flea Circus."

**Deuce:** Someone with D-Level clearance. This use is kinder than the insulting synonym "Dunce."

**Drone:** A lower level member of an occult organization; a follower or a cultist. Roughly analogous to "peon," but connoting a member of an organization that is specifically occult in focus. Chloe Greene (see UA p. 190) is a drone.

**Dunce:** Someone with D-Level clearance. This is used in a derogatory sense: "Throw together a team of expendable dunces and send them in to see what this guy's really got."

**Flea:** An insignificant independent operator; a nobody. Dr. Apoida (see UA p. 203) is a flea.

**The Flea Circus:** The occult underground. Sometimes shortened to just "the Circus."

**Flyswatter:** Anyone who specializes in killing adepts. Often applied to the Sleepers.

**Freakshow:** Used as an adjective to describe something particularly disturbing and unpleasant, usually within an unnatural context. "So then all this black ooze starts pouring out his body, and one of his eyeballs pops out with it. It was freakshow city, man."

**Hornet:** A dangerous individual. Eponymous and the Freak are hornets.

**King or Kingpin:** Someone with C-Level clearance.

**Queen Bee:** The leader of an occult organization; the person calling the shots. Daphnee Lee and Randy Douglas are Queen Bees.

**Spelling Bee:** Someone in an occult organization who isn't a leader but who has magick powers. Andrea Deutsch and Harvey Duopoulous (see UA pp. 189 and 196) are spelling bees.

**Stinger:** Something that makes someone dangerous. It could refer to anything from a handgun to a powerful magick artifact.

**Wand Waver:** A derogatory term for someone who has (or claims to have) magickal powers. Variants include "wand wiggler," "wand waggler," and even "wand fondler."



answer is: it depends. Different people negotiate for different salaries, depending on how much trouble they were in when Abel bailed them out and how much he supplies in the way of other perks. (For instance, some Inquisitors aren't hurting for money, but they want protection from people they've shafted in the past.)

If you came into TNI as an uncoerced volunteer, the D clearance starting salary is \$50,000 a year. If you came in running from the law, bad debts, or a mob hit, the starting salary is a living allowance and no more; constructing a false identity and shielding you from your past is no picnic, and if you don't like it, you can complain to whoever's chasing you.

Some people also join TNI after being given an offer they can't refuse—"join or die." Abel gives these unwilling volunteers a \$30,000 a year salary to soften the blow, but is slow to promote them for obvious reasons.

Adepts get special consideration, to the tune of about \$10,000 extra a year. If you practice a school Abel hasn't seen before, that can jump up to an extra \$20,000.

So, a beginning D-Level TNI operative is pulling down somewhere between \$0 and \$70,000 a year, depending on circumstances.

C-Level operatives get \$100,000 a year, flat rate, whatever and whoever you are. This goes to \$500,000 a year for B-Level. A-Level salaries are confidential, but have to be pretty damn huge.

In addition to the money, there are certain benefits associated with TNI. Abel pays 100% of any and all doctor bills, and you get a hefty suite of benefits—dental, mental, the works. Staff vehicles are handed out like candy and vacation time is generous, to say the least. (The operative with the highest cumulative vacation time given in a year got something like nine months, but she was a special case: she spent two of her on-duty months in a lightless cell being tortured and interrogated by suspicious officers of an African nation's secret police.)

As for retirement . . . well, that issue hasn't really come up much. Hardly anyone has dared to ask Abel about this directly, as his response when asked is unpleasantly ambiguous: "You'll be taken care of."

## What Teams Do

The short answer is that they do whatever Abel (or any other A clearance type) tells them. More specifically, the purpose of the New Inquisition is to moni-

tor, influence, and (eventually) control mystic practices of any and all types. This could mean keeping tabs on various sorcerers and cults, it could mean tracking down artifacts and rituals, it could mean recruiting someone from a specific school of magick (by whatever means necessary) and it could mean destroying someone who didn't want to play ball Abel's way.

This is where the "mission profiles" mentioned earlier come into play. Some New Inquisition teams are highly specific tools, designed to do one thing very well. Examples include (but aren't limited to):

- **Research.** The least glamorous job in TNI is going through endless stacks of books on the subject of magick, ranging from the banal to the bizarre. Some research cells also scan newspapers, magazines, and Internet forums for circumstances that might be indicators of mystic events. Another job for research teams is standard detective work: if you want the inside dope on an individual, a research team can eventually get you their social security number, a list of their credit card purchases, a rough psychological profile, and a detailed personal history.
- **Investigation.** While the research teams are in the library looking into what happened in the past, investigation teams are out in the field keeping track of what's happening *now*. The most dangerous investigation teams are those who specialize in infiltration. There's at least one cult in Australia that has an entire six-person cell of New Inquisitors as members—and no one suspects a thing. More commonly, investigation cells tap phones, shadow suspects, burglarize apartments, and dig through trash looking for relevant information.
- **Sabotage.** These teams specialize in making things fall apart. If Abel thinks a particular organization is too powerful, a sabotage group can be sent in to disable it. Usually this is done socially, by making members of the group suspect and distrust one another. It can also be done financially; in one case, Abel took care of a group of dangerous cultists simply by buying out the mortgages on their homes and foreclosing or evicting them; in the ensuing disorder, it was easy to pick them off. Finally, there are sabotage teams that specialize in psychological operations—playing head games with individuals until they can no longer function effectively.
- **Wild Cards.** This is the TNI designation for a team that has no specialty, but is capable of carry-



ing out a wide variety of operations. In actuality, about 80% of the TNI staff is in wild-card teams. While a specialist team is more effective in their area of interest, the logistics of putting a specialized cell where it's needed fast can make trouble, so most TNI cells are more well-rounded.

- **Experimentation.** Abel's manufacturing experience taught him the value of innovation, and he has some cells and individual sorcerers working on developing a unified theory of magick, along with new and unique effects to keep Abel's rivals guessing.
- **Assassination.** When sabotage and diplomacy fail, Abel will mobilize a set of killers to simply eliminate his rivals. These cells are usually followed quickly by . . .
- **Cleanup.** When you have a veritable army of thugs and sorcerers running around performing dangerous, varied, and unorthodox activities, they leave trails. The job of cleanup teams is to erase those trails. These are the guys who bury the bodies, pay off/intimidate/discredit the witnesses, provide the alibis, and generally stand between TNI and the Claws of the Tiger (see UA, p. 111).

## How They Do It

It's simple, really: an order comes down to a cell, and they carry out that order as well as they can. Usually the orders come from an A- or B-Level operative in their city, but sometimes Abel himself specifies which cell he wants involved. The specific details of the mission can vary widely. Sometimes the issuing Inquisitor gives the cell a great deal of freedom in deciding how to carry out the mission. Other times, strict guidelines are imposed (such as a timetable, instructions on who is to be posted where and when, what actions each individual is cleared to take and what they are not allowed to do, *etc.*). As a general rule of thumb, the higher a cell's clearance, the more leeway and discretion they're allowed. If you've done well in the past, the higher-ups are more likely to allow you to make your own rules. If you've dropped the ball and had to have another cell bail your punk ass out of trouble, you're more likely to be given very specific orders.

## Allies & Enemies

Naturally, any time you get a bossy billionaire messing around with a community, the groups already estab-



JIM PAVELEC



lished within that community develop a pretty definite opinion about the situation. What follows is a brief explanation of the relationships between TNI and other powerful factions inside the occult underground.

## The Naked Goddess Sect

The followers of Daphnee Lee and the Naked Goddess dislike Abel, the New Inquisition, their goals, and their methods with roughly equal fervor. They regard Abel as a domineering, power-mad incarnation of the worst aspects of the masculine yearning for command and control without regard for individuality or tolerance. They also believe the stormtrooper tactics of his gunslick minions are as likely to bring unwanted public attention as any magickal display.

For their part, TNI regards The Sect of the Naked Goddess as a disturbing anomaly. TNI doesn't like the rapid way the sect has gained in power and prestige. They don't like the idea of a group with a concrete, intimate tie to an ascended Archetype. They *really* don't like the fact that the only operative they managed to get inside the sect has been turned (see "Justine Anander" on p. 90). Finally, they think the sect's proselytizing is as likely to bring unwanted public attention as any indiscreet gunplay.

Alex Abel and Daphnee Lee had one face-to-face meeting in private, and it didn't go well. No one knows what was said, but Abel stormed out in a livid rage and the two groups very nearly came to violence in the middle of downtown Chicago. Since that time the Ace who operates the Chicago safe house has managed to pour some oil on the waters, but there is still a great deal of tension between the two factions. Abel has thick dossiers on everyone associated with the sect and keeps them under fairly tight surveillance when he can. Unfortunately, there are certain insurmountable problems with watching people whose movements are guided by synchronicity.

## Mak Attax

The New Inquisition isn't entirely sure what to make of Mak Attax. On one hand, they didn't have a hard time getting on the "secret" email list. On the other hand, a lot of the discussion they've read on it is the same half-baked bullshit that floats on the surface of the rest of the occult underground—the same rumors, suspicions and tall tales that crop up *anywhere* people start talking about "mysticism."

Abel placed three trusted agents on Mak Attax and they were all assigned jobs flipping burgers. He acquired the Ritual of Correspondence, which was a nice addition to the TNI arsenal, but all his fry-sizzling sleeper agents were asked to do was lay magick charges on random customers.

The top intelligence analysts in TNI are scratching their heads. It looks like Mak Attax is nothing more than what it claims to be: a rather chaotic and lackadaisical attempt at charting and disturbing the flow of magickal energy by grounding it into the lives of unsuspecting consumers. But there's this frustrated disbelief. "Surely that can't be *all there is*," is an oft-repeated phrase among the agents assigned to figure out Mak Attax' "true agenda." It's very hard for them to believe an operation of Mak Attax' scale could operate with all its cards on the table—as obvious and easy to read as a menu on one of their infiltrated fast food franchises.

Above the level of the analysts, Abel broods. His gut tells him that Mak Attax is a pack of do-gooders with their hearts on their sleeves. He respects an impulse to improve the world, but he's concerned that their Utopia may not be his. A world of proletarian magick is very far removed from his private fantasies of a magickal monopoly.

Abel respects Mak Attax, and pities them, and fears them, and likes them. He hopes their efforts are in vain, and he'd hate to destroy them. But if their experiment shows signs of bearing fruit, he may decide to take drastic action.

To that end, he pulled two of his infiltrated agents, leaving only one in place in a franchise. He has put several of his best hackers on the task of tracking down the leader of Mak Attax—the mysterious "Superconductor."

As for Mak Attax itself, individuals within the organization know that someone is poking around, but since they're getting probed from all directions, their best defense has been to maintain a firewall of ignorance between themselves and their fellows. They can carry out their missions no matter who knows about them, so they're content to be anonymous to each other.

## True Order of Saint Germain

Abel's familiarity with the TOSG predates the formation of the New Inquisition: he got a dossier on them back when he was still hiring hits on mundane scumbags. At that time he dismissed Randy Douglas as "small potatoes." Now he's kicking himself, because

he strongly suspects that it was Douglas (or psychopaths acting on his orders) who dynamited the Miami safe house.

Douglas and the TOSG are getting dug in. Douglas believes the End is truly Nigh, and he's not about to get assassinated before the real apocalypse begins. There have been three attempts on Douglas's life, only one of which originated with Abel. The first was a complete botch that did nothing but put the man on guard. The second was blatant as all hell—Abel suspects either Triads with a grudge or a rival (probably Christian) apocalypse sect. By the time Abel decided to stop dicking around and kack the bastard, it was too late: Douglas had turtled in his compound, surrounded by canned food, bodyguards, and enough armor plating to stop anything short of a blockbuster.

There are two deep-cover TNI agents currently posing as members of the True Order; neither knows the other even exists. Both have independently stated that an insider could take a shot at Douglas, but not with much chance of escaping alive. Any outside infiltration force would have a damn tough row to hoe, even with their inside information and assistance. A magickal attack could work—if a sorcerer could get close enough to work it and do it fast enough to not get torn to pieces by Douglas's rabid followers.

TNI has had to content itself with a program of observation, containment and harassment. Known TOSG compounds are monitored by remote video cameras, but the True Order is remarkably sophisticated about bugging technology and cleans itself regularly. If a known member of the True Order is seen moving about alone, TNI people from the Miami branch certainly aren't above pulling a snatch and grab for information and eventual revenge, but they're cautious. The TOSG has led them into a dangerous ambush once before, and they don't want to get stung again.

Abel's investors and accountants have been putting pressure on the TOSG on the financial front as well. Loans made to members are bought out and cancelled, creditors are tipped off about their location, and a series of well-executed frauds and robberies have depleted the TOSG's war chest—but Abel knows he's just clipping leaves, not hacking at the roots. Douglas owns the land his compound is on free and clear, and fiscal harassment only goes so far when you're dealing with people who grow their own food.

TNI's big advantage is that the True Order doesn't know much about them, and really doesn't know much about magick either. The TOSG is perhaps the only faction in the occult underground that's more ignorant about mystic reality than the New Inquisition.

## The Order of Saint Cecil

A group of well-armed, well-financed, well-trained true believers whose *raison d'être* is to destroy all monsters? Hell, what's not to like?

TNI keeps close tabs on the Order of Saint Cecil. After all, they're incredibly useful: why should Abel risk his own people against some possessed nutcase when he can call in these earnest exorcists and let them take the casualties? His only fear is that they could one day turn on a magus in his employ, but that's a controllable scenario.

The only thing Abel dislikes about the Order of Saint Cecil is their "slash and burn" policy when it comes to potentially valuable texts and artifacts. Not only does this unwillingness to confront the facts of magick make them ill-prepared to fight it, it results in the loss of information that could be helping Abel towards his goals.

Consequently, Abel only floats a tip to the Order if he's sure the target has no new information or useful equipment. Since he'd rather be safe than sorry, this really doesn't happen that often.

As for the Order, they know Abel only as a generous benefactor who believes, as they do, in the menace posed by the paranormal. A few years ago he set up a non-profit foundation—The Christabel Society—to "further the enlightenment of human spirituality." It's just a paper entity, but he uses it as one of his many tax shelters and throws the money at the Order of Saint Cecil.

## The Sleepers

Alex is frustrated with his absolute inability to contact, interrogate, or even definitively identify one of the mysterious Sleepers. He'd almost dismiss them as a legend if they hadn't killed two of his more magickally flamboyant Inquisitors. He is deeply afraid of infiltration by a Sleeper or Sleepers, but suspects that it has already occurred.







# CHAPTER THREE RESOURCES & GEAR

## UnKNOWn ARMIES



"THE AMERICAN WAY IS TO SEDUCE A MAN BY BRIBERY  
AND MAKE A PROSTITUTE OF HIM."  
—HENRY MILLER

"BIG GUNS, BIG TRUCKS, TELESCOPES, THICK WALKIE-TALKIES WITH  
LONG ANTENNAE—AND THEY SAY WE HAVE ISSUES ABOUT SEXUALITY."  
—DAPHNEE LEE



## TNI agents do not live easy lives. But Alex

Abel is no fool; he doesn't just toss his people out there to sink or swim. He's got the buckage and the will to power that ensures his people get the tools they need to do the job. Whether it's money, a tricked-out car, or ammunition that contains the souls of the damned, TNI has the gear Inquisitors need to do the job with speed.

## Money

Every TNI operation is equipped with the fabled "cabbage roll"—a thick wad of untraceable cash, usually in \$100 bills. This money is entrusted to the team leader (that is, whoever has the highest clearance and the most experience) and its size and value vary depending on the type of mission. Generally there's \$100 for each member of the team, multiplied by the number of days the mission is expected to take—three is a good default. A four-person team doing a three-day job has a roll of \$1200 just for traveling expenses—gas money, hotels, meals, bullets, *etc.* On top of that is another \$2000–\$3000 as padding for unexpected problems—low-level graft, the purchase of specialized equipment on-site, short-notice medical expenses, renting helicopters and such. On top of *that* is another layer of bills based on the expected hazards of the mission—\$1000 for each known adept who might be encountered, \$1000 for each identified "hornet," additional money for working outside the U.S., *etc.* All in all, it yields something between \$4000 (for a small job) and \$15,000 (for an extended, dangerous mission).

Ironically, the lure of this cash has led some ill-advised dukes to attempt to mug members of the New Inquisition. This is rarely successful, and usually fatal.

## Identity

One of the New Inquisition's claims to fame is their ability to make people vanish. You sign on with TNI (the plug goes) and you get a new identity: a new name, new credit rating, new social security number, new passport, driver's license, new history, address, and phone number—even a new face, if you want it.

In the case of people who are running away from something mundane—bad debts, a psycho ex-spouse, minor crimes like embezzling or tax fraud—Abel's people just hack a social security number from someone dead, along with their name. Once you have an SSN, it's not too hard to get a driver's license, and from

there you're all set. Abel has part ownership of a credit-reporting company, and there's so much information sharing between his company and others that it's very hard to tell where a history report originated. Then it's just detail work—constructing a fake history that stands up to a cursory inspection, dummifying some photos of you "growing up," maybe breaking into a high school to put a file with your name on it in their records. If you're in any national fingerprint or DNA databases (perhaps from military service, federal employment, or criminal history), Abel can get your records expunged—though not from backups of those files, should someone go digging extra-deep. That's all there is to it.

People who are wanted by heavy hitters—people who ratted on the mob or are wanted for capital crimes—get a more intensive treatment. TNI is constantly on the prowl for mysterious disappearances—people who just disappear and are never heard from again. When a promising disappearance crops up in the news, TNI puts skilled detectives, not to mention oracles and soothsayers, on the job. If they find the vanished individual (dead, more often than not), they don't tell the cops. Instead, they prepare a cover story and remake their new recruit into that missing person. Plastic surgery, fingerprints (if necessary, though it's a pain in the ass to recreate someone else's prints), and intensive training so the new recruit can convincingly pass as the missing person. TNI tries to pick people with no close relatives and few friends; fortunately, most people who vanish tend to be loners or drifters anyhow. Still, there have been some miscalculations, requiring fast talking on the part of the impostor.

Just so you know—radical plastic surgery is disturbing and depersonalizing. Looking into a mirror and seeing a different face can be a rank-6 Self challenge. This usually doesn't happen the first time, when you're ready for it. More often, it catches you by surprise, when you aren't thinking about it and catch a glimpse of a stranger in a mirror by mistake . . .

## Safe Houses

The New Inquisition maintains "safe houses" throughout the United States (and the world), but personnel considerations keep TNI from establishing them anywhere but the most populous cities. These locations serve as debriefing centers, headquarters, and supply dumps for New Inquisitors. Generally, recruits with D clearance are required to live at the

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safe house until they prove themselves, though some exceptions are made.

Most safe houses are large buildings which can be approached discreetly. The Chicagoland safe house is inside a warehouse in a Schaumburg industrial park. A system of steam tunnels underlies the entire industrial complex, so an Inquisitor can enter pretty much any building and get to the safe house underground. Since many hundreds of people work at the factories and warehouses there, it's easy to sneak in or out during a shift change. While the warehouse looks pretty run-down and scuzzy on the outside, inside there's a gym, library, small movie theater, firing range, and a very well-stocked bar to help the Inquisitors unwind. All it lacks is a swimming pool. There are about twenty mid-sized bedrooms inside, along with communal bathrooms. (Hey, you can't have everything.)

Other safe houses are similarly appointed, though the Chicago house is one of the largest. In addition to that locale, TNI currently maintains the following safe houses in the U.S.:

- **New York.** Actually, the New York safe house is in New Jersey, but it's only a short ride into the city. This safe house is concealed inside a fully automated broom factory. In addition to entering from the factory floor, the Jersey complex can be accessed from the basement of a bakery two blocks away, and from a parking garage three blocks in the other direction. (The elevator in the parking garage has a concealed keyhole: when the right key is inserted, it drops beneath its normal "basement" and opens to a tunnel to the safe house.)
- **New Orleans.** The New Orleans safe house is a large estate outside the city. This is the nicest of the safe houses—there's an indoor Olympic-sized swimming pool and the house is furnished throughout with Victorian antiques. There are fourteen guest rooms, each with private bath.
- **Seattle.** Seattle is home to the largest and most audacious of Abel's hideouts. It's built into the basement of the shiny, brand new, aggressively avant-garde New Art Museum. The NAM (as it's called in the papers) is considered a fiasco by many; it's too mainstream for the art world and too puzzling and disconcerting for the proletariat. Coupled with a \$10 entry fee and a series of poorly lit and incomprehensible exhibits, it's been quite the failure as a museum. However, there are usually about twenty or thirty people of all de-

scriptions wandering around scratching their heads during the day, so it's fairly easy for TNI operatives to slip in and out unobserved. Like the New York and Chicago safe houses, there's an underground entrance as well—this time from a coffee house.

TNI once had a small safe house in Miami, but unknown assailants recently destroyed it. Whoever they were, they knew how to make a house burn down real good. None of the attackers were killed or captured, but almost all the Inquisitors got out alive.

In addition to the safe houses, Abel also owns literally *dozens* of apartments all around the world, most of which are available to New Inquisitors in time of need. In a pinch, his personal residences in New York, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Houston, and Miami are available to Inquisitors. He also owns apartments in the following cities: Mexico City, Mexico; São Paulo, Brazil; London, England; Munich, Germany; Rome, Italy; Paris, France; Accra, Ghana; Melbourne, Australia; Tokyo, Japan; Hong Kong, China; and Jerusalem, Israel. These dwellings are not equipped with anything illegal or unusual, but they do provide crash pads in buildings with doormen and security guards.

## Mundane Equipment

With the possible exception of the Sleepers, the New Inquisition is the best-equipped group in the occult underground. Any legally obtainable weapon or piece of gear can be had, pretty much for the asking, even for deuces. For instance, every New Inquisition safe house has at least one of each of the following available . . .

## Night Vision Goggles

Everyone's seen these in the movies, right? They're basically big, heavy lenses that go over your face and let you see at night by intensifying ambient light. Versions that instead display heat signatures are also available. In either case they let you act without penalty at night, and might even give bonuses in certain, narrow circumstances. Remember that these are either monochrome (if they're light intensifiers) or using color codes for heat signatures. In neither case can you read small text through these. They also give you tunnel vision: just like looking through binoculars, you can't see what's on either side of you.

## What You Get

Newcomers to the New Inquisition are given a box of standard equipment to use or ignore as they see fit. The equipment box contains . . .

- Two pairs of stainless-steel handcuffs. Instead of chain links between the cuffs, these have only a single hinge, and are nigh-impossible to break. These are custom-made by a metal shop and each set has a unique key.
- Four generic handcuff keys. (All mass-produced handcuffs use the same key; TNI personnel are advised to carry one or two keys on their person at all times to effect escape.)
- Twenty-five feet of black polymer rope, one-ton test strength.
- Switchblade knife with a six-inch, double-edged blade. The blade is blackened and retracts with the touch of the switch. (+6 damage)
- One impact-resistant flashlight with six D-cell batteries. (+3 damage)
- One high-quality halogen penlight with two AA-cell batteries.
- One unregistered, unmarked 9mm “hush puppy” pistol with detachable silencer.
- Two 9mm magazines, each holding fourteen bullets.
- 100 hollow-point bullets (9mm).
- 100 armor-piercing bullets (9mm).
- One Kevlar bulletproof vest, styled for concealment under a shirt and jacket.
- One Bernadelli 12-gauge pistol-grip shotgun. (Holds five rounds, maximum damage 120.)
- 50 12-gauge shotgun shells.
- One combination cigarette lighter/napalm defense device (see p. 41).
- One full-face gas mask.
- One canister capsaicin pepper spray (see below).
- One stun gun (see next page).

## Shotgun Microphones

A shotgun microphone does for your ears what binoculars do for your eyes: provide magnification and amplification to make what is distant perceptible as if it was nearby. Utilizing a shotgun microphone, you could listen in on a conversation held on the other side of an empty football field. They're roughly the size and shape of an umbrella, with wires running to headphones.

When using a shotgun microphone, you may still have to make Notice rolls to overhear a conversation, but they can give you a chance to make a roll when it would normally be impossible. Of course, if conditions are perfect you may not have to make a Notice roll—it's situational, so the GM decides if you need to roll or not.

## Pepper Spray

Capsaicin is the compound in jalapeño peppers that causes a burning sensation when you bite into one. In some states, it's legal to buy pressurized spray bottles full of the stuff, only it's heavily concentrated. Getting

a puff of this in your face feels like having your head set on fire: it results in teary eyes, blindness, disorientation, and pain, pain, pain.

Hitting someone with pepper spray takes a successful Struggle roll, which cannot be Dodged. The target must make a matched, successful Soul roll or lose their next three actions while clutching their face and howling. Someone in this state is not a sitting duck; rolls still have to be made to attack him, but the spray victim can't use the Dodge skill because he can't see what's coming. Failing the Soul roll is a rank-3 Helplessness stress check. Each cannister contains one charge of capsaicin.

The pepper spray used by the New Inquisition is the same high-grade stuff used by cops and prison guards. In some states (even ones where private ownership of regular pepper spray is legal) it is against the law to own this grade of pepper spray unless you're a law-enforcement official.

The less-concentrated commercial versions of pepper spray work pretty much the same, except they only incapacitate for two rounds instead of three.



- One box of 1,000 paper surgical facemasks.
- One box of 1,000 rubber surgical gloves.
- One portable police-band radio scanner.
- One portable cell-phone scanner (see next page).
- One cyanide capsule.

In addition, every vehicle owned by the New Inquisition usually carries the following gear:

- One spare tire, with jack.
- Five roadside flares.
- 1000 waterproof matches.
- One first-aid kit.
- One spade.
- One crowbar.
- One Bernadelli 12-gauge pistol-grip shotgun, in waterproof case.
- 50 12-gauge shotgun shells, also in the waterproof case.
- One CB radio/police band scanner.
- One high-powered, hand-held searchlight that plugs into the car lighter.
- One tube of industrial-grade polymer glue.
- One roll of duct tape.
- One down-filled sleeping bag.
- One utility knife.
- One U.S. atlas.
- One hand-held, battery-powered GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) unit that provides latitude and longitude down to about a hundred yards' accuracy.

## Stun Guns

A stun gun, or taser, is a small device with two exposed electrodes. When you hit someone with those electrodes, it sends a powerful electric shock coursing through their body. Basically, this is a cattle prod the size of a kitchen flashlight. Getting hit with one of these causes shock, pain, and dizziness. Often it can knock someone flat out.

If you're armed with a stun gun, it takes a successful Struggle roll to hit someone with the business end. The stun gun does no damage, but the target automatically loses their next two actions while jitterbugging around uncontrollably. The victim also has to make a Body roll, and failure means they pass out. A BOHICA means cardiac arrest. Targets with Body 30 or lower also go into arrest on a matched failure.

Stun-gun-induced unconsciousness usually lasts anywhere from 15 minutes to a couple hours, depending on the power of the jolt. Someone who has a heart attack will reach the point where CPR is required within half an hour.

Some stun guns actually have projectile electrodes, linked to the power source by wires. These are fired with any firearm skill, but they only have a range of about 15 feet. Once fired, it takes two actions to reel the electrodes back in.

The batteries in a stun gun are usually good for about a dozen zaps.

## Illegal Equipment

Naturally, for a man with Abel's resources and ethics, illegal weaponry or equipment is only marginally more difficult to obtain than the legit stuff. Members of the New Inquisition who request blatant weapons like plastique and hand grenades had better have a damn good (and specific) reason to want them, of course. Abel didn't get where he is by letting loose-cannon ex-cons run around baiting the BATF. Most of this stuff requires a security clearance, based on how dangerous it is. Anybody can request anything they want, but you're unlikely to get plastique if your clearance level is D. Even if you are cleared for an item listed, there's

no guarantee you can get it by snapping your fingers. Conversely, someone with superior clearance may get the equipment and give it to you; that's kosher. You just can't get it yourself.

## Cell-Phone Scanner

(Clearance: D) It's illegal to use one of these puppies, but you can make one with a bag full of crap from Radio Shack and plans off the internet. TNI buys professional units from offshore manufacturers; they're about the size and heft of a hardcover novel, with antenna leads that need to be held up or taped to something for good reception. Agents using a scanner in their car often tape the leads to the ceiling.

A cell-phone scanner lets you tune into the broadcast bands designated for use by cellular phones. By tweaking the frequency and adjusting the leads, you can listen in on cell-phone conversations within a mile or so of your location. You can't target a specific conversation visually—that is, you can't reliably point the antenna at your target and start listening. You need to scan around until you find the right conversation, by recognizing the voice or content.

Unfortunately, more and more cell phones are immune to this device. Any brand of cell phone that features digital sound or encryption will not produce any intelligible dialogue through a scanner. TNI is always looking to acquire more-sophisticated scanners, but the proliferation of different security protocols makes it hard to find one unit that will always do the job. If the Inquisitors can identify the make of cell-phone their target owns, TNI can get them a specialized unit within two days that *should* do the trick.

## Plastique

(Clearance: B) Plastique is the Cadillac of plastic explosives. (You can tell it's classy by the French name, right?) It's stable under most circumstances: you can hold a blowtorch to it, drop it, stick it in the oven at 350° for an hour and it will still sit there, looking like an unexciting lump of clay. However, if you set it off with a detonator, it makes a gratifying big boom.

A lump of plastique the size of a stick of gum is enough to blow a door latch off. A lump the size of your fist can make a three-foot hole in a brick wall. The more you use (of course) the bigger the boom.

GMs can play it by ear when determining damage from explosions. A rule of thumb is: roll four dice

and make the highest number from two of them if you're within ten feet of the center of a "standard" explosion (ball of plastique, gasoline pump, exploding gas main, *etc.*). If you're at ground zero, roll two more dice. For every ten feet away you go, roll one fewer die. Especially big explosions can add additional dice, while smaller explosions do fewer dice. (A four-die explosion that gave you 6, 8, 2, and 7 would do 87 points of damage.)

A caveat to GMs and PCs alike: plastic explosives are nasty and they get noticed. Using them just once is very likely to draw the attention of the BATF and the FBI. It also sends a definite message in the occult underground: no holds are barred. Sure, it's fun, but handle with care.

## Bugging Equipment

(Clearance: D) There are many, *many* ways to spy on people these days. There are black and white video cameras the size of a thimble. Everyone knows that phones can be bugged and that radios can be hidden in lampshades, but did you check your toilet pipes? A long pipe full of water makes a fine conductor for sound waves, and advanced computer software can go a long ways towards filtering out the sounds of your sink or shower running. Abel can also hand out laser bugging devices that gauge the vibrations of glass windows and recreate the sounds through a speaker. It doesn't matter how much noise is going on between you and your target: as long as you can get a straight shot with a beam smaller than your pinkie fingernail, it's like having your ear pressed right against the window. (Luckily this laser gadget *only* works on glass.)

## "Car Cards"

(Clearance: C, but a number have leaked down to discreet D-Level personnel.) Alex Abel has a lot of money invested in the "CarSMart" nationwide chain of one-price used-car superstores. He did this because it's a good deal, but also because it put him in a position to insert a glitch into their car-tracking computers.

Automotive resale superstores usually use identity cards to keep track of inventory and sales. A salesperson waves a card at the gate to get it to open, checks out cars for test-drives with the same card, changes their status from "for sale" to "sale pending" to "sold" with the same card. Thanks to some of Abel's hackers, TNI can hand out cards that identify their holder

as a nameless “superuser.” If you get one of these cards, you can walk into any franchised CarSMart lot at any time. (Night is preferred, when no one’s working.) Then you wave your card at the gate leading into the lot, find a car you like, run the card through the key strongbox (which is connected to the rear driver’s side window), get the key out and take ’er for a spin. These cars have no license plates, but it’s a lot easier to steal some license plates than to take a whole car. Besides, any one of Abel’s metal shops can turn out a thousand fake plates in one night’s illegal work.

## Hand Grenades

(**Clearance:** C.) Yes indeed, members of the New Inquisition can lay hands on the fabled pineapple grenade (if substantial need is demonstrated). Just in case anyone doesn’t know what a hand grenade is, it’s an explosive charge with a fragmenting steel case wrapped around it. It has a spring-loaded handle, which is initially held down by a pin. When the pin is out, the thrower usually holds the handle down manually. The grenade blows up a little while after the handle is released. When it blows up, little chunks of sharp metal are propelled in all directions.

Hand grenades usually have a delay of about seven seconds.\* That means that in one round you get the grenade out and pull the pin. You generally throw it the next round (assuming that some smartass hasn’t knocked it out of your hand or shot you or something), rolling your Throw or General Athletics skill to put it roughly where you want it. The turn after that it blows up at the same time that you take your action (meaning someone might be able to throw it back at you).

When a grenade blows up, the GM rolls 3 dice and assembles the numbers as desired to do damage to everyone within 10 feet of the impact point, depending on their cover, facing, how alert they are, *etc.* (With a 3, 1, 7 result, a PC gawking at the grenade at his feet might take 73; another PC standing behind a sedan might take 13.) The same happens with everyone within 20 feet, only it’s two dice. If you’re 30 feet from the blast, it’s only one die.

If someone deliberately jumps on a grenade, the GM can roll three dice and assemble two into a damage number for that individual, but no one else takes damage because the brave soldier’s body has muffled the blast.

\*Some nations have been known to manufacture grenades with *no* delay—they blow up as soon as the

handle goes up. These deadly traps are deliberately left for the enemy to take as “spoils.”

## “Hush Puppies”

(**Clearance:** D.) This is a magazine-loaded semi-automatic handgun with an illegal silencer and a modified chamber. Most semi-automatic pistols eject the spent casing after each pull of the trigger, loading a new bullet and preparing to fire. This is loud, because the explosive force of the shell blows the slide back and opens the propulsion chamber to the air a split-second after the bullet has left.

A hush-puppy pistol is different: there is no automatic ejection. The sound of the round going off is muffled by the slide mechanism and by the silencer, so firing one of these pistols is no louder than a finger snap. (A standard gun with a silencer is about as quiet as a very loud clap.)

This makes a hush puppy very nice for blowing someone away in a discreet fashion. Unfortunately, after each firing there’s a brass casing left in the chamber instead of a live round, which has to be cleared manually by working the pistol’s slide mechanism. Pulling the trigger again does no good until you work the action.

In game terms, a hush puppy works like any other gun, except that you have to work the slide after each shot. This is a single action, though someone with a skill like Do Two Things At Once might be able to do it faster. You can work the slide while using your Dodge skill.

A hush puppy is standard issue to every member of the New Inquisition. One of Abel’s munitions plants provides them unlicensed, unregistered, and without serial numbers. Abel actually likes for his minions to destroy their hush puppies after each use, to prevent the bullets from being traced by ballistics. Some people are better about this than others, of course.

Finicky agents like to carry the spent cartridges away with them, just in case they neglectfully left a fingerprint on them. Keep in mind that if such a casing is ejected into your hand right after firing, it will be extremely hot. Leather gloves take care of that problem, but a hot brass can scorch right through TNI’s standard-issue surgical gloves.

## Sodium Pentothal

(**Clearance:** D.) Also known as “babble juice,” this drug (and similar “truth serums”) are easily available, courte-

sy of one of Abel's medical investments. The phrase "truth serum" is something of a misnomer, however. It's true that someone who's been shot up with sodium pentothal isn't going to be able to spin out any kind of convincing lie, but that's because the target is so disoriented and loose-lipped that concentrating on anything is a good trick. What the individual tells you is likely to be true, but not necessarily relevant. More likely it's going to be a stream of consciousness drivél-bomb of free associations. Even relevant information is prone to be short of details. A drugged interrogation subject is likely to say "he took the thing to that restaurant" in one breath—and a few moments later, be unable to remember who "he" was, what "the thing" refers to, and which "restaurant" he's talking about. A skilled interrogator can make some headway, but this is hardly the skeleton key for information.

## High-Tech Goodies

These are even more expensive and tricky to obtain than illegal weapons and gear. Some of these are grotesquely expensive, or are still in the bug-ridden prototype stage, or are (worst of all) traceable to Abel's companies. Some of them (as should be obvious) are illegal to boot. Operatives are strongly encouraged to ditch these items (and if possible, destroy them) if capture seems imminent.

## Screen Stealers

(Clearance: C.) Cathode-ray tubes—meaning TVs and computer monitors—work by shooting electron rays at a phosphorus screen. The phosphor dots on the screen then emit light and form pictures. However, those rays keep going once they've hit the screen. This means that if you put a big enough detection surface behind the screen, you can reconstruct everything that appears on it by reading the rays as they spread out. No inspection of the computer can reveal the spy device, because it isn't attached to the machine.

The problem with the screen stealer is size: to capture a standard-sized computer screen, you need to set up a ten-foot-square detection surface twenty feet (or less) in front of it (that is, behind the back of the watcher). The farther away you go, the bigger your detector has to be—and the more likely it is to pick up foreign rays.

The best way to use a screen stealer is to install it in the wall facing the computer monitor, perhaps

disguised as a framed art print. Sometimes a truck with a mobile detector can be maneuvered into position on the far side of a window, but this is tricky to say the least. Finally, screen stealers don't work on flat LCD screens (such as on a laptop, or the slim studio displays popular with graphic designers and television series).

## Computer Bugs

(Clearance: D.) These are much cheaper and easier to install than a screen stealer, and they're more reliable to boot. Physically, they look like little white plastic cable adapters, about an inch thick. You sandwich one between the monitor cable and the main processing unit, and the other rides on the keyboard cable. (The nicer versions of these actually look like monitor and printer cables, but they can take a little longer to install.) These paired bugs broadcast all the input and output that passes between those devices to a remote unit ten feet away (it's about the size of a shoebox) which can then pump up the signal and broadcast it up to ten miles. You never have to change the batteries on the bug units: they leech power off the computer.

Abel uses these beauties a lot. The only drawbacks are that they don't work on laptops (unless the laptop is attached to an external monitor and/or keyboard) and that since they're tied into the computer, they can be detected by anyone who looks and knows what they're seeing. A fairly smart person who finds a bug can get rid of it, but a real slyboots will leave it in place and feed disinformation through it.

There is a software alternative to the computer bug. If an Inquisitor can get access to the computer's operating system, he can install a piece of software that will record every single keyboard stroke into a data file. If the computer has internet access, the software can secretly transmit the file at specified intervals to a TNI FTP site. This approach is more clandestine than the hardware bugs, and can only be detected if the computer's operator goes poking around with some reasonably sophisticated software. It has three drawbacks, however. First, it will only record what the user actually types; the hardware bugs get everything displayed on the monitor, including existing files, photographs, or what have you. Second, since it records keystrokes, much of it may be gibberish. A user working on a letter might jump around the document with the mouse



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or arrow keys, typing bits here and there, and if you just take those keystrokes without the document they modified, they won't make much sense. Third, it's not much use on computers operating on a sophisticated corporate network. Many such networks either prohibit alteration of the operating system files or they use a central set of files not accessible to the user's terminal.

## Napalm Lighters

(**Clearance:** D.) Another standard-issue item to New Inquisition members is a napalm lighter. It looks like a standard cigarette lighter and comes in a variety of styles, from cheapo plastic jobs to skull-and-crossbones steel collector's items. Most of the time it acts like a standard lighter. However, it has a secondary reservoir of fuel that is considerably stronger stuff—and stickier. If a secret switch is activated, the lighter behaves differently the next time its ignition button is depressed. A stream of concentrated fuel shoots out and, after a moment, ignites.

In combat, it takes one action to pull out the lighter and switch it to "napalm thrower" mode. If your target is a little ways away from you (five feet or

less) it's a Struggle roll to spray and ignite him. A miss means you set something on fire, but not him.

If the two of you are entangled (if you're in a choke or being pinned to the floor, for example) you have to make a successful Struggle roll to set him on fire. If you fail the roll, you and he are *both* on fire (unless it's a matched failure, in which case only you are burning).

When someone catches fire, roll one die for the damage. The next turn they take that damage again, minus one point. This continues until either they spend an action rolling on the floor, jumping into some water, or smothering the flames some other way, or until the napalm burns out (reaching 0 damage). For example, if you roll a 5 for damage, it does five points of damage right away. At the beginning of the next round, the victim takes 4 points of damage (unless the fire has been quenched). Next round it's 3, then 2, then 1, then nothing and the fire goes out.

Being set on fire is a rank-3 Violence stress challenge.

A napalm lighter is a last-ditch weapon. It can only be used as a weapon once before it needs to be recharged. (Though as a cigarette lighter it lasts a reasonably long time.)

## Bondwagons

(Clearance: C.) Everyone likes a fast, sexy car when it's time to flee a crime scene, but Ferraris and Jaguars are pretty damn noticeable—especially when you're staking out an adept who lives below the poverty level. The New Inquisition solution was to put the engine and suspension of a top-notch sports car in the rusty carcass of an old four-door Dodge Dart or Ford Escort.

The standard New Inquisition staff car is simply a high-performance vehicle that looks like a piece of crap—not a ragingly awful-looking piece of crap, but the kind of ordinary old crudmobile that no one looks twice at. Most are modified to run whisper-quiet, and have toggles so the interior light doesn't always go on when the door is opened (a nice feature for surveillance vehicles). They're nice cars but they don't specifically change the rules; GMs should use their judgement when considering how these cars cope with ordinary hazards in car chases (see p. 86).

A select few vehicles, however, have been outfitted with high-tech gadgetry. The effects of these doodads on the car chase rules are given in parentheses. These souped-up cars can include:

- **License plates** built on rollers that can turn to reveal a different plate, but that's too elementary to impress anyone . . .
- **Bulletproof** windows, windshields, and chassis. There may also be bulletproof panels installed in the doors and the seat backs. (To create a driving hazard, an enemy shooter now has to shoot out the tires—use the rules for head shooting in the *Unknown Armies* main book.)
- **Self-repairing tires.** Instead of being filled with compressed air, these tires have a polymer gel that becomes solid when exposed to air. When one of these tires gets punctured, the gel fills the hole and gets hard in moments. (Losing a tire is a hazard when it happens, but gives no future penalties.)
- **Cloud ejector.** This only works once before it has to be recharged. It creates a thick cloud of gas behind your car. This isn't just smoke, however; it's a sticky yellow goo that clings to any surface that passes through it. Wiper fluid might get it off the front windshield, but it still impairs vision until the car is really wiped down carefully. This device isn't very useful in rain or snow. (This gives a hazard to anyone who drives through it, and after that they have to make a hazard roll every turn

until they clean off or get rid of the front and back windshields.)

- **Radio jammers.** These create an impenetrable snarl of radio static for close to half a mile. Useful for evading the cops in the short term, though if you leave it on too long they may start looking for the area of interference.
- **On-board computer.** This is a commercially available system that provides dynamic road maps for getting around. They're useful for interstates, major highways, and large cities, but they won't offer much help if you're in East Jesus, Indiana.
- **Back-seat-driver be-gone.** For those rare and embarrassing occasions when some mook in the back seat has the drop on you, there's a little black switch on the steering column protected by a thumbable sliding cover so some deuce doesn't mistake it for the hazard lights. The switch discharges up to six .44 handguns mounted beneath the back seat, which fire straight up into the roof. (That's why the seat is so lumpy.) Throw it one way and the three guns behind the driver's seat go off. Throw it the other way and it's the rear passenger side that gets it. Press the switch straight in and all six fire. It's a pretty desperate maneuver—not to mention noisy—and you should wait until the mook's gun isn't pointed straight at you and yours—muscle spasms might set it off—but when you need it, brother, you'll be glad it's there. The rack that the handguns are mounted on is shielded with a box of bulletproof plexiglass to shield it from external gunfire.
- **Body stash.** Bondwagons assigned to kidnap or assassination teams usually have a modified trunk. The back seats are little more than empty shells, and the trunk has a false back. The hollow space in-between is big enough to hold a body, dead or alive. There's usually a zippered bodybag stashed inside the space, which Inquisitors use if their new trunk-ripened friend is going to leak during the drive. The walls of the body stash are reinforced to prevent live occupants from kicking or prying their way to freedom.
- **Holdouts.** Depending on what other options are installed, a Bondwagon can have numerous secret storage compartments. Usually there are two of these in the front dashboard, disguised from casual inspection and about the size of a shoebox. If there is neither a body stash nor a be-gone, the entire back seat bench can lift up to hold larger gear.

- **Car bomb.** With seventy-two hours' notice, TNI can deliver a standard Bondwagon packed solid with plastique wired to a detonator in the dashboard. The timer is set using the built-in clock on the cruddy aftermarket stereo, and can be set to go off up to twenty-four hours later. While the timer counts down, the clock just displays the normal time; the countdown can be accessed by pushing in the volume knob. The resulting explosion will wipe out the lobby of a building or reduce a household garage to cinders. Alternately, the detonator can be linked to a handheld radio trigger or to a cell phone for remote activation. In extreme cases, the bomb can be set off instantly by turning the hazard lights on and off three times, fast, but it means no escape for the driver.

There are rumors that Abel has a pirated Air Force electromagnetic gun that can burn out the electric system in a car from a thousand yards away, but if he's got it he hasn't let anyone use it yet.

## Gas Rings

(**Clearance:** C.) This is an ordinary-looking class ring, customized to whatever institution the Inquisitor requests. Turn the big stone on the front a hundred and eighty degrees and two small flanges pop out on the sides. Push the flanges back in and a spray of non-lethal gas whooshes out the front. It only has one charge, so use with care. Stand back after firing; the gas is a powerful emetic.

It takes one action to prep the ring. The next round it's a Struggle attack to spray this in someone's face. The Dodge skill cannot be used to avoid the gas cloud (which disperses after one round), though something like Hold Your Breath might work. Anyone who inhales the gas has to make a Body roll and get a matched success; otherwise, he's down for 1-5 rounds, puking his guts out. Anyone incapacitated by the gas can't attack or use the Dodge skill.

## Poison Pens

(**Clearance:** C.) On the outside, it looks like an unremarkable retractable ballpoint pen. However, when you push the button a four-inch spike pops out. This reinforced spike is hollow and has an aperture near the point. When the tip encounters resistance (such as

when it enters flesh) it sinks back into the housing for a quarter of an inch: the pressure created by this sinking pushes poison out the aperture and into the fresh wound. Each pen contains six doses of venom.

In game terms this is a small sharp object. When you hit someone with it during a hand-to-hand fight, it does +3 damage. The type of "poison" used varies. Some pens carry a knockout drug and others are just plain fatal. As a rule of thumb, it takes a matched success on a Body check to resist the effects of whatever the pen is loaded with.

## Plastique Credit Card

(**Clearance:** C.) This credit card actually works. Abel's technicians carefully shape a charge of plastic explosive in the form of a legitimate credit card and transfer the magnetic strip to it. As long as the card isn't reported stolen, no one's the wiser. The card is heat and impact safe; only a high-voltage charge will set it off. (The card is usually given out with a detonator disguised as a keychain flashlight; you spool out a twenty-foot wire with a metal clip at one end and attach the clip to the card.

When it blows up, it doesn't do a lot of damage. If it's actually touching someone, the GM should roll two dice and assemble the highest number—but customize the results to where the card is. Otherwise, it serves best as a distraction or an escape tool. The blast is strong enough to knock a fist-sized hole in a sturdy oak door—more usefully, it'll blow the lock mechanism right out. Two plastique cards could take out hinges.

## Pen Grenades

(**Clearance:** C.) Unlike the poison pen, you can actually write with this one. If you pull the top off and flick a hidden switch inside, you can also make it explode.

The pen grenade is not a great weapon. It works like a hand grenade, but it only does one die of damage. It can be used to open ordinary doors, disable a video camera or computer, or create a distraction, but it's not going to take down a building.

## The Brain Rinse

(**Clearance:** A.) The chemical called "Brain Rinse" is used only by the highest levels of organized crime, international terrorism, and government espionage. It's a biological agent, terribly expensive to produce, but worth it.



Every covert agency wants a fast, reliable way to erase memories. Brain Rinse isn't it, but it's the next best thing: it prevents perceptions from being transferred from short-term memory to long-term memory. You dose someone with BR and they don't remember anything that happens to them for the next half-hour. It just doesn't get written down in their brain cells.

The only problem with BR (in addition to the prohibitive cost) is the delivery. Brain Rinse has to be inhaled, and to make sure it works it has to go deep into the sinus cavity. If your mark has a bad cold, it's just a matter of getting it into his nasal spray. Otherwise, it's a grab operation where you force the stuff up his pipes. If you go that route, he may remember being grabbed.

## Unnatural Equipment

Naturally, a man with Abel's resources and his interest in the paranormal is going to be able to lay hands on some pretty freaky gear when he has need to. In between missions, New Inquisition enforcers have been known to speculate about what kind of unique badass ancient artifacts Abel has socked away in some vault, while their adept pals just smile and act like they know a secret. The fact is, no one but Abel knows exactly how extensive the New Inquisition's occult ammo dump is. What they do know is that some items can be had for the street-level troops to use. As with illegal and expensive equipment, you don't get these toys unless you persuasively demonstrate need and have the requisite clearance level. No one gets handed these for "just in case."

## Lock on the Door of the Law

(Clearance: B.) One of Abel's pet sorcerers knows a duke down in New Mexico who builds these gadgets. Seems this duke was a genuine bomb-throwing '60s radical who escaped from custody while awaiting trial for setting fire to a government office. He's been on the run ever since, and developed a gadget to keep John Law off his back.

These devices look like big, heavy padlocks, only the keyhole has been enlarged and lined with outward-pointing, sharp-edged teeth. To operate the Lock, you have to keep it with you around the clock, and once a day you have to cut yourself open with the teeth and feed the Lock on your blood. If you do this

every day, the Lock exerts subtle power to keep the cops off your case.

In game terms, you have to carry the Lock with you at all times—even keeping it in the same room when you sleep. Once per day you have to take a point of damage to power it up; this damage cannot be healed by anything but time or magick. (The people who use these describe an unpleasantly intimate sucking sensation when the Lock is feeding.)

Any time a law authority tries to bring formal charges against you, there's a flat 50% chance that something will prevent it—usually some kind of legal entanglement. You could be caught standing over a corpse with a smoking gun and the judge might throw the case out because you weren't read your rights. A District Attorney might lose your case, evidence might get misplaced, some nutjob might confess to your crime—the Lock operates by coincidence.

If you're up to no good, there's also a 50% chance that any law authorities in the area—even those specifically coming to check out your activity—will take a wrong turn, get distracted by a traffic accident, or what have you.

Note that this only works on members of law-enforcement who are on active duty. If you're ducking a rogue cop out for blood on his own time or trying to avoid a psycho duke, the Lock won't do jack.

## Metamorphosis Pill

(Clearance: C.) Well, it's not actually a "pill." It's a live cockroach, raised from an egg by an entomologist, voyeur, and Kafka fan who also happens to be an adept. This guy decided it would be fun to actually turn into a cockroach, and he tried it. It didn't work out exactly as planned, but he got halfway there.

If you swallow this mystic cockroach (live, remember), you don't turn into a bug—but everyone else *thinks* you did. You know you're a human walking on two legs, but anyone who sees you perceives you, at first, as a normal-sized cockroach. If they look, make a face, and look away, that's all well and good. But if they pay a lot of attention to you—for instance, if they stomp on your foot and you cry out, or they try to sweep up the "dead cockroach" they just crushed—then the spell is broken. So it's best to drop the bug, do your business quick, and get out.

Anyone who glances at a "transformed roach" in a cursory fashion has a chance to see through the illusion if their Soul score is 60 or above. A Soul roll is



made, and if it's a success of 60 or higher, the disguise is penetrated for that viewer only.

The duration of the spell is also somewhat unpredictable. When the user swallows the roach, the GM rolls two dice and assembles the smallest number possible. The spell lasts that many minutes. The user cannot will it to end earlier, and cannot tell what the duration will be, but is aware when the spell ends.

## Aura Film

(**Clearance:** C.) Many investigators into the paranormal have horsed around with Kirlian photography, which uses electric charges to create an impression on photographic film (instead of the more-common light sources). Some people still believe that Kirlian photography can reveal "life force" or "mystic auras." Not so—mostly what it shows is degrees of electrical conductivity. A Kirlian photo of your hand will show brighter areas where more weight is pressing the flesh into better contact with the plate. (Some people may try to bamboozle you by putting a leaf on the plate and cutting it in half, then taking the picture. Sure enough, the missing half of the leaf will show up as a ghostly impression on the plate, but not because there's a "residual life energy field" or any such thing; it's because the oils on the leaf veins got pushed into the plate when the cut was made.)

Kirlian photographs don't show auras, and even if they did they'd be of limited use to Abel's Inquisition—after all, you have to press your subject right up against a plate to get a Kirlian photograph. No, to get a snapshot of someone's aura, you need a compound made of lightning-bug eyes (anything in the *Lampyridae* family will do) and the encephalic fluid of a black cat. There's a woman up in the Pacific Northwest who divides her time between a photography studio and a touch-therapy medical-massage practice. She's also an adept, and she makes film that can capture auras at a distance. Naturally this encephalic-fluid-and-bug-eye-doped film is pretty different from your standard Kodak Gold, so it will only fit in a camera hand-built to hold it. (She builds these herself, but there's nothing magickal about them.) It should go without saying that she's the only one who can develop the stuff as well, so she can pretty much charge whatever she feels like for the stuff. Currently she's making enough selling Abel a dozen exposures a month

to pay her mortgage off years early and take a nice vacation each year, too. Abel doesn't mind. It's worth it to be able to scope out the emotional and physical states of his business enemies. The ability to tell if someone's an adept by taking a snapshot is just icing on the cake.

Unfortunately, aura film is not yet available in instamatic. To use it, you snap a picture of your surveillance target (usually not hard, since the "aura cameras" can attach telephoto lenses—and you don't even need good lighting) then send it off to the woman in Washington state. She develops it and gets it back to you ASAP, but that usually means overnight mail to Washington, then a day for her to develop it, then another overnight mail trip back. Three days, all told, during which some of the information on the photo may have changed.

However, the information on an aura photograph can be illuminating. Depending on how good the photography roll, an aura photograph can reveal any or all of the following:

- Whether the individual(s) in the photo is/are magickally active. Adepts in aura photographs have something that looks like a colored flame inside their heads. Particularly powerful adepts have brighter flames.
- The presence of ephemeral beings like demons, entropics, and astral parasites, which generally appear as smeary clouds enveloping the individual.
- The target's health. Healthy individuals will have bright lines of energy coursing along their nerve paths (which are also the chi paths of traditional Chinese acupuncture). Someone who is sick may have a dull gray or sepia brown cast around the affected organ. Injuries often show up as black streaks.
- The target's emotional state. Like a mood ring, different colors reveal different states of mind.
- Is the target even human? Clockworks will have the aura flame, though it will appear as a distended glow across the entirety of the critter; they have no health or emotion glows. Golems have the same distended adept flame as clockworks, but they also have unusual health glows that bear no resemblance to human physiology; they have no emotional glows.
- Interestingly, the aura of an avatar is no different from that of anyone else; they don't even have the adept flame.

## Psychic Bullets

(**Clearance:** B.) These are far and away the most popular mystic weapon in Abel's arsenal. Unfortunately, they're only issued for the most dangerous and important missions, leading to speculation that Abel only has a limited supply.

Psychic bullets are normal brass 9mm cartridges that appear to be loaded with a mixture of gunpowder and earwax. The cartridges are inscribed with fine, tiny lines that are almost too small for the eye to see but which still manage to be uncannily sharp. In fact, many Inquisitors have found themselves sucking blood off a nicked finger after loading one of these shells, despite the fact that an edge that shallow, no matter how sharp, shouldn't be able to get past the first layer of epidermis.

Still, rarity and bleeding thumbs aside, these are a hot item because they make adepts less scary. Someone who knew that using magick requires some sort of spiritual energy reservoir developed psychic bullets. These bullets shoot holes in that reservoir.

In game terms, shooting someone with a psychic bullet makes them spend a charge to no effect. It only does hand-to-hand damage, but still requires a successful roll with an appropriate firearms skill. If the target adept is holding no charges, nothing happens. If the adept has one or more minor charges, a minor charge is automatically lost. If the adept has no minor charges, a significant charge is lost. If the adept somehow only has a major charge (or charges), the major charge gets broken into ten significant charges, one of which is lost.

Rumor has it that Abel used to be a lot freer with these until he sent someone in to stop a major-charge ceremony. His team didn't have enough psychic bullets to drain the adept before he could lash out with his remaining significant charges and rip them apart, and the unfired psychic bullets were captured and later used on Abel's own people. Now he seems to be hoarding them.

## Damnation Rounds

(**Clearance:** C, but subject to availability.) It's really hard to get hold of these specially prepared .44 rounds. Some Inquisitors love 'em, other think they're more trouble than they're worth. The opinions generally depend on the results individuals have gotten with them, which vary wildly.

Each damnation round contains a demon (see UA, p. 147). When you hit someone with a damnation

round, that person takes normal .44 damage, and also goes into immediate soul-to-soul combat with the demon from the bullet. The victim makes a Soul roll, and if it fails, he's possessed. The smarter class of demon usually takes the body and runs, but a few have been known to attack the Inquisitors for whatever reason (or for no reason at all).

Even if the gunshot victim beats the demon in the possession roll, he only gains control of his body for a number of hours equal to the sum of his roll, making this even nastier than a standard demon possession. The demon can try to take control again after that time, and can continue to do so at each succeeding interval until the bullet (and all fragments thereof) is removed from the victim's body.

On the other hand, sometimes these bullets miss and strike an object, a wall, or whatever. When that happens, the demon is on the loose and can make *one* attempt to possess someone in the fight—but the demon always attacks the person with the lowest Soul stat, regardless of membership in TNI. So if you shoot with one of these and miss, it could be you (or your partner) that the demon comes after.

## Hatred Injections

(**Clearance:** B.) Rumor has it these were developed by a duke down in Rio who was looking for a safe, cheap substitute for heroin. Specifically, he was trying to find a way to make emotions transmissible in a chemical medium. Ideally he wanted to be able to siphon off his own happiness or feelings of well-being and sell them for cash. He succeeded, but the happiness injections were a bust: people were more interested in XTC than in run-of-the-mill contentment, and the act of drawing off the emotion left him feeling depressed and lethargic. He tried capturing orgasms, but it was just too difficult to do reliably.

So if he couldn't sell away his happiness, he decided to do the next best thing: get rid of his negative emotions. All his petty jealousies and angers were pulled off and stored in single doses of chemicals, many of which he simply threw away. After all, who would deliberately want to feel bad?

Abel came across him when he was investigating magickal avenues of health care. It was a year of particularly bad agent burnout, and Abel was looking for a quick-fix alternative to psychotherapy—ideally something that didn't require hiring a bunch of therapists to be potential security leaks. He never did find his

“sanity pill,” but he did recognize a use for the Brazilian adept’s emotional toxic-waste dump. It was Abel’s hope that artificial emotions could be used to steel the nerves of his operatives for the less-savory aspects of their jobs.

In practice, it was so: Inquisitors who loaded up on an injection of hatred before a firefight or interrogation session with unknown adversaries were more effective than those who did not. The effect of the injection was to make the activities feel personal—and therefore somehow justified.

An agent who takes a hatred injection can gain a temporary Rage passion for the next ten minutes or so. The emotion has to be sculpted while the syringe plunger is being depressed, so the Rage is defined then. It can be something very simple: “I’m getting good and pissed off at those guys in that room there.” This temporary Rage passion can be used to flip-flop or re-roll a failed action in the next ten minutes. Even sociopaths or other people normally unable to use passions can use the temporary Rage of a hatred injection.

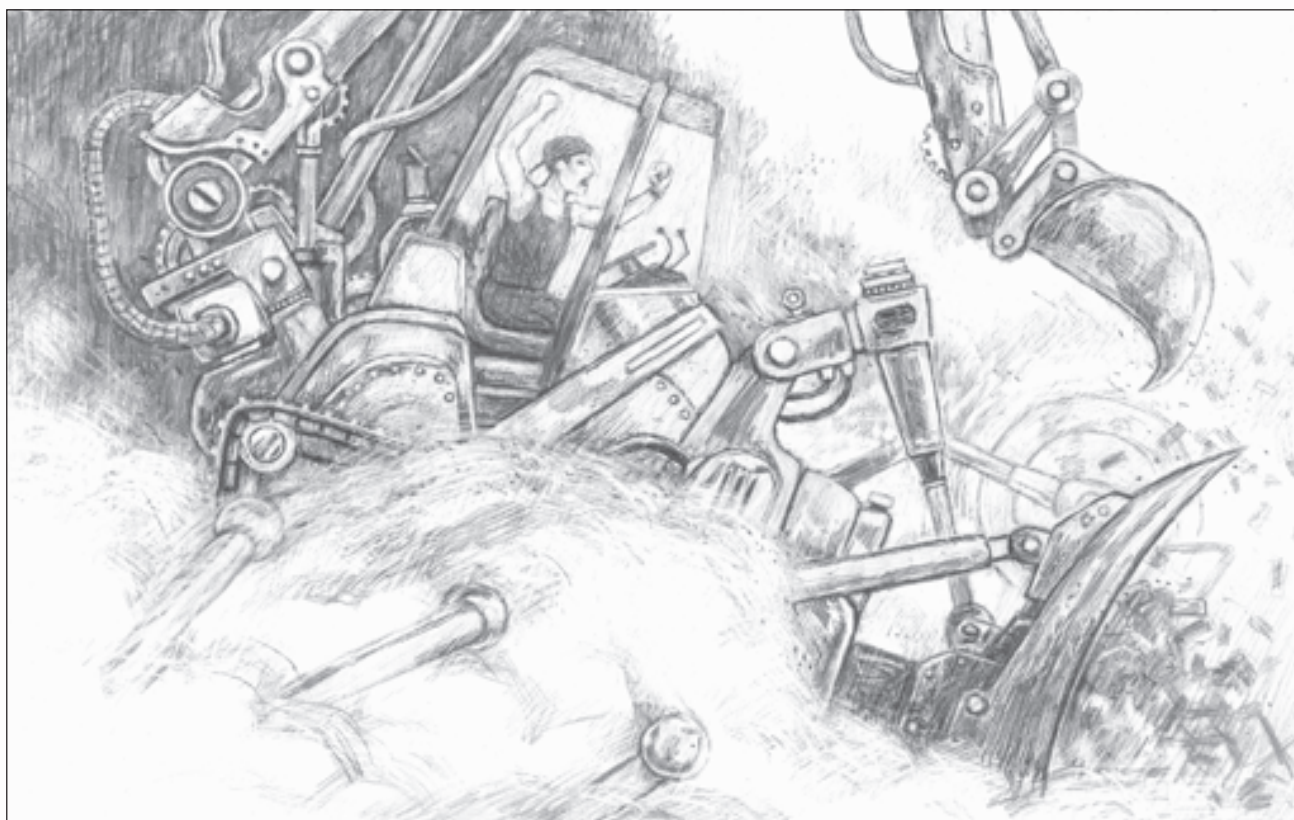
Use has its downside, however. Multiple injections while the first is working neither extend the duration nor allow for multiple temporary Rage passions; only the first has any effect. Furthermore,

people who use these injections more than once a month often demonstrate side effects such as emotional instability, irritability, or depression. For each injection past the first taken in a month, make a Body or Soul roll (GM picks which). Failure means you suffer from some kind of emotional feedback. It could be an irrational hatred of your best friend or some other loved one, it could be nightmares and shakes, it could be splitting migraine headaches, or anything else the GM feels is appropriate.

## Trouble Magnets

(Clearance: C.) A trouble magnet is made by taking an ordinary magnet (it has to be of the U-shaped variety) and immersing it in a mixture of wet hair and tears. The hair must be a mixture that comes from a black cat and a human being who died in a random accident. This wet, hairy magnet is then agitated until the hair forms a coating of felt over the magnet. Add a significant magick charge and it’s ready to go.

Now that you know how a trouble magnet is made and how it looks, you’re probably wondering what it *does*. That’s simple: it causes one misfortune or accident.



TONY MOSSELEY



Like so much magick, a trouble magnet works by coincidence. If you put one on somebody's car, it may cause a tire to blow out, or it may attract a thief. If you put one under somebody's doorstep, the house may get termites or be hit by lightning. If you bump into someone and slip one in their coat pocket, they may take a bad fall on some ice, catch a severe cold, get mugged, or get audited.

Trouble Magnets are handy because they're easy to make, easy to use, and hard to detect. The drawback is that they're unpredictable: you can never know what kind of trouble is going to befall your target. Finally, there's no way to predict when the magnet is going to go off. Since it only works once, you could get whammied while carrying it out to deliver. (One Inquisitor has compared trouble magnets to bombs with random timers.)

When an Inquisitor is given one of these devices to plant, the GM should roll two dice and add up the total to see how many hours the magnet has left before it takes effect. The curse of a trouble magnet rarely causes life-threatening injuries; one or two dice of damage is typical. It can also cause irritating and distracting problems, but rarely major, life-shattering events. An argument with your boyfriend is possible, but this thing probably won't get you divorced. A bad cold is within its power, but probably not leprosy or leukemia.

## Therapeutic Pillows

(**Clearance:** D.) The New Inquisition has three of these beauties—one in their Seattle safe house, one in New York, and one used by Abel himself. A therapeutic pillow magickally ensures a night of perfect, peaceful, uninterrupted sleep. No dreams about the life you left behind, no visions of murdered faces, no nightmares about clockworks or entropics or missions gone bad. Just pure, uninterrupted sleep. There's usually a month-long waiting list for a night with a therapeutic pillow, though in extreme cases the house controller can give someone immediate access.

## Arnold's Commission

(**Clearance:** B.) A clever Cliomancer who used to work for Alex Abel constructed this artifact. It was made from the documents commissioning Benedict Arnold as an officer in the British military after his betrayal of the revolutionary Americans. (The docu-

ment wasn't guarded with any great attention, and no one's noticed the forgery that replaced it. Really, it almost would have been simpler for Abel to *buy* the document, but he didn't want it attached to his name.)

Anyone who carries this amulet has a very specific blessing for treason. If you blatantly betray someone while carrying the commission, the commission casts the Cliomancer formula spell *Forget It* (see UA, p. 86) on that person and erases their knowledge of your treachery. If you stab your boss in the face while carrying Arnold's commission in your jacket pocket, he won't remember who attacked him (if he survives). The only limit is that it only targets one person: so while your boss won't know you're out to get him, any witnesses will remember the whole thing.

Naturally, Abel is pretty damn cautious with this item. Not only is it irreplaceable, he's well aware that it could work on him as well as the next guy.

There are rumors that Arnold's commission curses anyone who uses it too long, that the bearer tends to become mistrusted and despised (just as the British came to despise and mistrust Benedict Arnold). Case in point: the Cliomancer who built the thing hasn't been seen for a year and a half.

## The Wrecker

(**Clearance:** B.) No one's sure how Abel acquired this powerful clockwork. There are rumors that he killed its creator specifically to steal it, but most people think he simply commissioned it from a crazy old coot near Baraboo, Wisconsin. In any event, it's basically a cross between a backhoe and Mechagodzilla: twenty tons of blade, brawn, and bad attitude. It takes orders from a human pilot; if turned on and abandoned, it'll do what it wants.

The clockworker who built it started with a backhoe and a bulldozer—it's still got the big blade on the front and the scoop on the back. However, the rotors that turn the treads were ripped out and replaced with three legs on each side. These legs can tuck in and turn the treads as usual, or they can extend so that the Wrecker can actually walk (or brace itself for really hard shoves). The scoop on the back has been extended, so that it can reach over its main body and strike like a scorpion's sting. The front blade is intact. Additionally, a slender eighteen-foot triple-jointed black-metal arm has been put on the left side with a yard-wide sawblade attached. Not only can the blade cut through concrete



(and people), it serves as a grinder to keep the bulldozer blade and the prongs of the scoop razor-sharp. (The Wrecker is a self-sharpening unit.)

Rumor has it that Abel bought it with the TOSG compound in mind.

### The Wrecker (Significant)

Urban Nightmare

Body: 500

Speed: 70 (S) for saw blade, 40 (F) for other attacks

Mind: 5

Soul: 5

The Wrecker can attack three times per round. One attack is with the saw blade, one with the bulldozer blade, and one with the backhoe scoop. (Remember that the backhoe “tail” can strike even targets standing in front of it.) To fit this monstrosity into the rules, consider it to have the following skills.

- **Make Building Fall Down, 50%.** (This may be adjusted greatly: a large, well-built house is the standard. A flimsy mini-mart is going to go over easier. A skyscraper or a bank is going to take multiple successes.)
- **Smash With Bulldozer Blade, 50%.** The damage done is resolved like a firearms attack with no damage maximum, and then 20 points of damage are added.
- **Bash With Backhoe Scoop, 40%.** The damage done is resolved like a gunshot with no maximum damage, and then another 30 points of damage are added. Furthermore, any hit with the scoop is considered a Knock Down (see UA, p. 60).
- **Slice ‘n’ Dice With Saw Blade, 65%.** The damage is resolved like a gunshot with no maximum damage. Any result under 30 is raised to 30 points of damage.

While the Wrecker has powerful attacks, the special effects from them (the extra damage, minimum

damage, and Knock Down effect) are automatically negated for people who are using the Dodge skill. Even if the Dodge roll fails, those attacks are resolved simply as gun attacks with no maximum damage.

Firearms used against the Wrecker do hand-to-hand damage. Hand-to-hand attacks do only the lowest die of damage, due to its extremely hardy and robust construction. It’s invulnerable to fire, but really big kinetic attacks (like explosives) do damage normally. It is possible to shoot the pilot off the Wrecker, however; there’s no armored enclosure. Naturally, the guys who drive this thing tend to armor up pretty well.

The Wrecker has some limitations to go with its power. It has the intelligence of an animal, so it can be tricked, though the presence of a pilot will usually compensate for this.

It wants nothing more than to crush, kill, and destroy. It has to obey anyone who is in the driver’s seat, however. The steering wheel and levers control it as usual, but being controlled in this fashion actually causes it pain, so it will scream and howl (through its horn and whistle) if forced in this fashion. It will (grudgingly) obey someone who just sits and doesn’t touch anything, but if the seat is empty it goes berserk and attacks all and sundry. If the pilot is controlling it to do something destructive, it doesn’t get as surly.

Furthermore, the Wrecker can do nothing unless its key is in the ignition and it’s been turned on. Another key will not work, even one of the exact same material and shape. If someone can get up into the seat and turn the key off, the Wrecker stops in its tracks.

Finally, it has to be gassed up. It does not run on standard fuel, however: its tank holds about forty gallons of human blood—160 trips to the blood bank, if you’re wondering. A full tank powers it for about six hours of “work.”

(In case you’re wondering, the hydraulic technologies used in the Wrecker were all in use by the 1890s cut-off line for Clockworking. The Wrecker is just a very clever and very focused application of old tech and modern concepts, with a heavy dose of magick to make it all work.)



# CHAPTER FOUR PERSONNEL

UnKNOWn   
ARMIES



"WE CAN'T SPELL SUCCESS WITHOUT 'U'!"  
—CORPORATE SLOGAN

"YEAH, WELL YOU CAN'T SPELL 'THIS SUCKS SHIT' WITHOUT 'U' AND 'I'."  
—MAVRA PIAGETTI



## This chapter contains four sample teams from

the New Inquisition. They're available for use by GMs or players, depending on your needs. If your players just want to grab a set of pre-gen characters, some of these can be used. (If a character has an asterisk next to its name, then it's kosher as a starting character). If the GM is running TNI as an antagonistic force, here are a batch of GMCs you can throw at your players. Finally, if your characters are

members of TNI and find themselves needing back-up, these characters can provide it. In fact, this slew of backup characters gives you a quick out if a TNI character dies unexpectedly; that player can just grab a replacement and go to town.

This chapter also contains a number of TNI personnel who aren't statted up. These are generally consultants, specialists, and other plot devices who aren't going to spend much time on center stage.



**The Hit Squad: Adam Johanssen, Stanley "Tex" Chang, and Clarice Dominguez**

## The Hit Squad

Abel's primo assassination group has become so widely feared among the highest level of the occult underground that rumors about their prowess have leaked downward, and among ignorant dukes and peons "Hit Squad" has become a slang term for any team from TNI.

This group doesn't look into things. They don't threaten people or make them uncomfortable. They don't get involved in underground politics or intrigue. They don't break enchantments or figure out occult mysteries. They kill people, as quickly and efficiently as possible, and then they clean up their mess and go home. Usually they don't know much about their victims, and they really don't care.

## Stanley "Tex" Chang

(Clearance: C.) If there's a pop-culture image attached to "assassin," Stanley Chang is probably the biped farthest from it. He's a runty little forty-year-old Chinese man, prematurely bald and prematurely wrinkled. His epicanthic eyes are jarring, paired as they are with a Texas accent better suited to Cletus the Slack-Jawed Yokel.

Stanley was born and raised in rural Texas. The only child in his town's only non-white family, he worked hard at fitting in. When that didn't work, he worked hard at not being noticed. He's still extremely shy and self-conscious. He's happiest when he's by himself—he owns a ranch in Montana where he goes to relax and hunt when he's not otherwise engaged.

CHAPTER ILLU BY RICHARD PACE



Like Eponymous, Stanley was trained by the U.S. military. He's a certified Army sniper. At his ranch, he's got a big shelf of shooting trophies, but there are a lot of second and third place medals. In competition, Stan actually shoots worse than when he's drawing a bead on someone's jugular. Having people watch him makes him nervous.

Stan's nickname comes from his accent and his habitual clothes—cowboy hat and boots, jeans, and an old sheepskin coat. He tops this with sunglasses, and from more than five feet it's hard to tell that he's a wrinkled, permanently sunburned little Chinese man, instead of a wrinkled, permanently sunburned little Caucasian.

He does only one thing: he's a sniper. He doesn't like fighting people up close. Hell, he's not even much for *talking* to people up close. However, because he looks like a timid, shy little man—because he *is* a timid, shy little man—no one suspects him of being a killer.

**Personality:** A shy, stammering introvert who only occasionally shows flashes of intensity.

**Obsession:** The godlike feeling of being able to snuff someone out without them being aware of him.

**Wound Points:** 45

## Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** When his meticulous plans go awry. He'll move heaven and earth to get a job back on track.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Personal interaction. Some part of him knows that his love of murder is deeply sick, and every time he has to speak about personal matters with someone it makes him dearly uncomfortable.

**Noble Stimulus:** His word is his bond. If he says he'll do something, he'll do it or die trying.

## Stats

**Body:** 45 (Squat)  
**Speed:** 80 (S) (Never falters)  
**Mind:** 50 (Analytical)  
**Soul:** 40 (Emotionally stunted)

## Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 40%, Jujitsu 40%  
**Speed Skills:** Assassinate 70%, Dodge 30%, Drive 60%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Knowledge of Western Music, Novels, and Movies 25%, Notice 50%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 40%

**Assassinate:** This is Tex's regular combat skill, but he can only flip-flop attacks made on unsuspecting targets.

## Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
7 Hardened	3 Hardened	1 Hardened	3 Hardened	2 Hardened
4 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	2 Failed	4 Failed

## Notes

Abel's staff shrinks have realized that Tex is far from stable. Though he can function, his neuroses express themselves through a strangely situational claustrophobia. Specifically, Tex is claustrophobic if there's a stranger with him. An enclosed elevator wouldn't bother him if he was alone or with a friend, but if someone he didn't know was stuck in there with him he'd be trying to force the doors within ten minutes; if he was in there too long, rescuers might find him with a corpse.

## Equipment

Barrett Light Fifty M82A1 Sniper Rifle.

Glock 17, usually loaded with armor-piercing rounds. 9mm "Hush Puppy."

Swiss army knife.

## Clarice Dominguez

(**Clearance:** C.) Abel's *femme fatale* used to work for the mob, where she was considered the queen of the "hooker hit." Posing as a high-priced call girl, Clarice could get close to even the best-protected of men the one time that they willingly sent their bodyguards away. As far as she's concerned, killing men is easy: a lot of her targets were eager to lick poison off various parts of her body. The only hard part was escaping alive afterwards.

Her life took a downward turn when she was interrupted at work—not by a bodyguard, but by an irate wife. Clarice made it out the window and down the fire escape, but not before catching a slug in her leg and alerting her goombah victim to a rival's murderous intentions. She escaped the mob war that ensued, but both sides wanted her double-dead: one for trying to kill the boss, and the other for failing. TNI gave her a way out.

**Personality:** Ice-cold and businesslike. Off duty, she acts asexual and dresses as plainly as possible.

**Obsession:** Lust. Clarice was taught that lust is dirty, and she's sublimated all her own passion into turning the lust of others against them.

**Wound Points:** 60

## Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Leering men.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Women with guns.



**Noble Stimulus:** Clarice feels a sense of almost awed respect for people who live lustless lives—she’s not religious, but she respects priests and nuns for their vows of celibacy.

### Stats

**Body:** 60 (Firm)  
**Speed:** 65 (Quick)  
**Mind:** 50 (Unflappable)  
**Soul:** 55 (Smoky)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** Gen. Athletics 40%, Run 40%, Struggle 55%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Guns 35%, Stealth 50%

**Mind Skills:** Breaking and Entering 50%, General Education 20%, Notice 25%, Toxin Expert 40%

**Soul Skills:** Bedroom Eyes 55%, Lie 40%, Mistress of Disguise 40%

**Mistress of Disguise:** Clarice is highly skilled at altering her appearance and uses a wide variety of costumes and gimmicks to effect her escapes. On at least one occasion she’s had the people chasing her ask her if they’ve seen her go by.

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
7 Hardened	2 Hardened	2 Hardened	0 Hardened	4 Hardened
3 Failed	3 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	3 Failed

### Equipment

Walther PPK, usually loaded with safety slugs that won’t go through walls or furniture.

Concentrated tetrodotoxin in a perfume bottle. (If even a small amount is ingested, the target makes a Body roll. Failure means paralysis immediately and death in ten rounds. An unmatched success means the target is merely put into a coma for 12–24 hours. Of course, whenever Clarice sees the poison take effect, she generally breaks the neck just to make sure.)

Swiss army knife.

Ten feet of black silk rope (easily supports her weight).

## Adam Johanssen

(**Clearance:** B.) Adam Johanssen is the leader of the Hit Squad. It says a lot about Abel’s hired killers that their leader (picked on the basis of mental stability) is a man who killed his own father.

Arguably, Adam was provoked. He’d long suspected that his wife was being unfaithful, but when he learned that her partner in crime was his own dad, well—something snapped.

Back then his name was Bruce Smith, and his first thought was to just beat the old man to death. He was pretty confident that he could do it: as an orderly in an asylum, he had to be competent with restraining a struggling individual. But—and this was what made Adam different from the other patricides of 1992—he didn’t want to get caught. He knew well that black men fare poorly in American jurisprudence. So instead of doing it with satisfying viscerality, he did it with prudent sneakiness. It looked just like an accident—should have gotten those brakes checked!

He would have gotten away with it if he hadn’t told his wife. But that, of course, was the second phase of his plan. He told her, he threatened her, he tormented her and he never laid a hand on her.

Eventually she accused him, but there was no evidence—other than the proof (carefully leaked by Adam) that she’d been sleeping with her own father-in-law. Coupled with a studious program of sleep deprivation and more subtle psychological torture, Adam’s wife (who had never been 100% stable) went mad. He had her institutionalized, just as he’d planned.

The problem, sadly, is that Adam never thought about what was going to happen to him after his plan was completed. Sure, he’d gotten his revenge—but no one could talk to him without remembering that segment about his bizarre love triangle on “Hard Copy.”

He moved a couple times, but his reputation followed him. He found no peace until a mysterious stranger, who seemed to know all about him, offered him a chance at a new identity. All he had to do was keep doing murder. After all, he’d shown such flair . . .

**Personality:** (Capricorn) An unrelenting plotter.

**Obsession:** Control. Adam likes to be able to predict and manipulate the actions of those around him.

**Wound Points:** 65

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who betray him when he wasn’t expecting it.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Disorderly, unpredictable events and “acts of fate.”

**Noble Stimulus:** Leadership. Adam will risk his own life selflessly to protect those who are loyal to him.

**Stats**

Body: 65 (Beefy)  
 Speed: 50 (Average)  
 Mind: 70 (Cunning)  
 Soul: 40 (Icy)

**Skills**

Body Skills: Gen. Athletics 30%, Restrain & Disarm 55%  
 Speed Skills: Dodge 25%, Drive 15%, Guns 50%  
 Mind Skills: Medical Technician 45%, Notice 55%, Sabotage 45%, **Ultimate Plan** 55%  
 Soul Skills: Charm 15%, Lie 40%

**Ultimate Plan:** This lets Adam prepare himself to accomplish an action, usually an assassination. He has to use this skill at least twenty-four hours before he intends to do the action. If he rolls successfully, he recognizes potential trouble spots and opportunities in the environment he'll be in, or any problems or bonuses related to the people he's dealing with.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
7 Hardened	3 Hardened	3 Hardened	2 Hardened	5 Hardened
2 Failed	1 Failed	3 Failed	2 Failed	1 Failed

**Equipment**

9mm "Hush Puppy" pistol.

Small tool kit.

Sedative syringe. (It's a Restrain and Disarm roll for him to inject someone with this. If injected, it does no damage but the victim must roll Body. Failure means the victim is unconscious for a number of hours equal to the sum of the roll. A matched success means the toxin had no effect. If a regular success is rolled, there's no immediate effect, but the next turn the victim's Body temporarily drops by 10%. This happens again at the beginning of each successive turn until Body 0% is reached. At that point, the victim is unconscious. This reduction in Body does not cause the loss of hit points, but it does influence skills.)



**The Smart Patrol: Dale Chiswick and Mavra Piagetti**

**The Smart Patrol**

"The Smart Patrol" is the name Abel's best pair of snoops and investigators chose for themselves. (Their

leader, Mavra Piagetti, is a big Devo fan.) These operatives are rarely on the front lines, and invariably choose the better part of valor when confronted with violence.



Their job is to find out information, not to act on it. Their clearance levels are pretty low, and TNI has tried to insulate them from the organization's bigger secrets. This is, of course, easier said than done.

Dale Chiswick\*

(Clearance: D.) This British reporter did something few people live to brag about: he uncovered and publicized evidence of a TNI operation. Of course, the only reason he lived to tell was that the Ace involved was feeling merciful and recognized the value of a skilled investigator. Chiswick was offered a choice: join up, serve loyally, and learn the truth, or refuse and have every occultist on three continents warned about him. (No death threat was involved; Chiswick still doesn't know the lengths to which TNI sometimes goes.) Chiswick signed up and has been learning many interesting things ever since.

**Personality:** Dale is driven by curiosity  
**Obsession:** Knowledge is power. If anything catches his interest, Dale wants to understand it thoroughly: he's not content to just enjoy things.  
**Wound Points:** 50

Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who conceal the truth from him.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Guns. Coming from Britain, Dale thinks that American gun laws are absurdly lax.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Truth for truth's sake.

Stats

**Body:** 50 (Lean)  
**Speed:** 50 (Gangly)  
**Mind:** 60 (Curious)  
**Soul:** 60 (Affable)

Skills

**Body Skills:** Gen. Athletics 25%, Sprint 20%, Struggle 35%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 25%, Drive 15%, Stealth 40%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Investigative Reporter 55%, Occult Lore 10%  
**Soul Skills:** Charming British Manners 45%, Straight-faced Lie 45%

Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

\* CAN BE USED AS A STARTING PLAYER CHARACTER

Mavra Piagetti\*

(Clearance: C.) Mavra has been a hacker since before the age of home computers. Back when Susie Thunder was sneaking into military bases and Cap'n Crunch was getting free phone calls with his plastic cereal whistle, "Piggy" Piagetti was diverting her phone bills and running involved "credit washing" schemes.

Times have changed, and Piggy has kept up with them. Her credit card wrangling is a thing of legend: she rarely has to pay for anything that you can buy with plastic. She hasn't paid a phone bill since 1984, and her backdoor access to medical and even military personnel databases is notorious.

She still has no idea how TNI found her. While it chafes her free spirit to have to kowtow to the Bosses, the fiscal and (more importantly) computer access offered by Abel's corporations more than makes up for it.

Unlike many hackers, Mavra started out explicitly trying to make money, never trying to show off or prove anything. That's one reason she never got caught—unlike Cap'n Crunch and Kevin Mitnick. Now that her fiscal needs are more than met, she's moved to a "higher level" of hacking—delving just for the sheer love of the challenge. She doesn't really care about Abel's mission; she's just doing what she loves and getting well paid for it.

The most uncomfortable thing in her life right now is a killer crush on her underling, Dale Chiswick. Dale doesn't know a thing about it, because Mavra expresses her affection primarily by treating him like garbage.

**Personality:** A supremely self-absorbed woman, Mavra at least has the decency to not pretend to be anything else.  
**Obsession:** Information in the abstract. While specific pieces may interest her more than others, it's really the idea of knowing that fascinates her.  
**Wound Points:** 60

Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who mock her weight.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Making a gross mistake in face-to-face social situations.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Freedom. Mavra doesn't like to see anyone imprisoned, and she's an ardent member of the ACLU.

Stats

**Body:** 60 (Fat)  
**Speed:** 45 (Sluggish)  
**Mind:** 70 (Brilliant)  
**Soul:** 45 (Nervous)



## Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Go Past Her Limits 30%, Struggle 20%, Surprisingly Strong 25%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 25%, Snatch 35%

**Mind Skills:** Control Technology 55%, General Education 25%, Notice 15%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 15%, Play Dumb 45%

**Control Technology:** This skill primarily governs her use and mis-use of computers. But she's not

just a software hacker; she can scratch-build circuit boards, burn her own EPROMs, and, given time to do some research first, could confidently disable or alter most any circuit-driven system from sophisticated security alarms to car-building robots.

## Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed



**Team Teamwork: Pepper, Vanessa Rhames, and Jeremy Warren**

## Team Teamwork

Don't call them "con men." Team Teamwork hates that phrase. One of them isn't a man, and another has never been convicted of a crime. They consider themselves "social engineers." Abel uses them to disable and dismay his many enemies without said enemies ever realizing exactly what happened. Team Teamwork has other uses, of course. Sometimes a group of subtle, convincing imposters can be more effective than a gang of gun-toting thugs. Even when TNI goes with the "thugs" option, Team Teamwork can be called in later to clean up messes—or make things so messy that no one ever figures out what really happened.

## Jeremy Warren

(Clearance: C.) Jeremy is good-natured, open, friendly, patriotic, likeable . . . a real salt-of-the-earth type. Too bad he has no real moral foundation in his life.

Ever since he was a kid, Jeremy has liked to agree with people and has liked it when they agree with him. Is it *his* fault that his own agreeable nature sometimes leads people to misunderstand him? To trust him without him asking for their trust? To give him money for schemes that are patently fraudulent?

Actually, yes, it is. Jeremy's a terrific con man because he honestly wants people to feel good about themselves, and he sees his cons as a way to facilitate



that. At some deep level he realizes that it's wrong to take money in the name of starving orphans in Croatia and spend it on dice, hookers, and single-malt scotch—but he knows (or thinks he knows) the people he cons would never get suckered by a *real* charity. Real charities are so dreary and depressing, after all. He doesn't think of it as a con: he thinks of it as "selling happiness."

At least, that's how he thought about it until his American Fund to Fight Communism Abroad was uncovered as a fraud. His contributors (many of whom he deliberately recruited from white supremacist circles and KKK web sites) were more than distraught; they were enraged, and they hardly trusted the U.S. government to supply them with redress. That's how the fast-talking, fast-thinking, free-spirited Jeremy Warren (formerly known as Jon Gillis, Richard Patton, and Douglas Moore, to name a few) found himself working for TNI. He's become the leader of Team Teamwork because Abel can recognize leadership potential and motivational skill, even in the slimiest of men.

**Personality:** A glad-handing good ol' boy.

**Obsession:** Being liked, respected and listened to.

**Wound Points:** 50

## Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Being called a liar (regardless of whether he's lying or not).

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Gunshots, thanks to his militia pursuers.

**Noble Stimulus:** Jeremy never hurts anyone, either emotionally or physically, if he can possibly help it. He considers it a dirty con if the victim feels less than fabulous afterwards.

## Stats

**Body:** 50 (Trim)  
**Speed:** 60 (Quick)  
**Mind:** 50 (Average)  
**Soul:** 60 (Snappy)

## Skills

**Body Skills:** Flee Crime Scene 30%, General Athletics 25%, Struggle 25%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 45%, Drive 35%, Guns 10%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Money Laundering 25%, Notice 55%

**Soul Skills:** , Avatar: Demagogue 50%, Charm 55%, Lie 45%

**Avatar: Demagogue:** Jeremy is not aware that he's following the path of this archetype—and neither is Alex Abel. Should TNI discover that they have a guy on the road to ascension right in their midst, Jeremy may find himself with a promotion—or a bullet in his skull.

## Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	3 Hardened
1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

## Vanessa Rhames\*

(**Clearance:** D.) Whether you're running a short con or a long one, it never hurts to have a pretty girl in on it—as long as she's not *too* pretty. After all, a woman who's too pretty is intimidating, but one who's just pretty enough provides an extra layer of hope and pleasantness—and those two things are the con man's tools of the trade.

In a normal family, Vanessa might have been the "pretty daughter," but being the child of a fairly successful underwear model from the early 1970s, Vanessa was actually the plainest of three girls. Growing up, she became acutely aware of the importance of appearance.

Being envied by her peers while, at the same time, envying her older and younger sisters, Vanessa found herself in a psychological tangle. Everyone was identifying her by her looks—an area in which she could never compete with her siblings. It was her desire to stand out for her actions that led her to shoplifting and minor burglary.

All Vanessa's mom had to do was cross her legs several times while talking things over with the judge to get a suspended sentence, but by then the die was cast. Everyone heard she'd been arrested and jumped to the conclusion that she was therefore a round-heeled slut. This added cruelty made school unbearable, so she dropped out, ran away to Chicago, and was fortunate enough to fall in with a short-con expert named Skinny Vince rather than any of the Windy City's many, many pimps. She ran the Badger Game with Skinny Vince for a few years before getting busted, and when she got out of prison, Skinny Vince was dead. Rumors said he'd crossed some cult weirdo called "Father Freedom" and wound up shot to death during a jailbreak attempt. (See "Jailbreak" in the UA scenario anthology, *One Shots*.)

\* CAN BE USED AS A STARTING PLAYER CHARACTER

Vanessa's investigations of Father Freedom led her into the occult underground, and she quickly perceived which of the groups involved there was most likely to accept her—and offer her the kind of support she'd previously only dreamed of. Now she has the confidence she always lacked, and the respect and admiration of her peers she always desired.

**Personality:** (Aquarius.) Vanessa always asks people questions about themselves and listens carefully to the answers.

**Obsession:** Social roles. She's very aware of the differences in people's expectations for rich and poor, or women and men, or black and white, or pretty and plain.

**Wound Points:** 45

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who insult or underestimate her because of her gender and appearance.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Vanessa is terrified of being raped.

**Noble Stimulus:** Vanessa wants communication that's individual to individual—based on content, not on social roles. She respects anyone who treats her as an equal and tries to extend the same courtesy to those she respects.

### Stats

**Body:** 45 (Slender)  
**Speed:** 55 (Graceful)  
**Mind:** 60 (Articulate)  
**Soul:** 60 (Makes People Comfortable)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 20%, Pretty Young Thing 20%, Tae Kwon Do 35%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 20%, Drive 35%, Handguns 10%, Sprint 20%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 55%, Occult Lore 20%

**Soul Skills:** Lie 35%, Perceive and Manipulate Expectations 55%

**Perceive and Manipulate Expectations:** This is a variant of Charm that lets her figure out how people want (or expect) her to act. It can be used to contradict or to fulfill those expectations and desires.

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

## Pepper\*

(**Clearance:** D.) Pepper fancies himself a slick, smart con man. The fact that people almost always out-think him simply does not register in his mind. Neither does the fact that his cons almost always wind up being resolved by violence.

Ever since his childhood (which was as unhappy as that of most TNI recruits), Pepper has actively liked fighting people and getting the better of them. He probably could have been a state champion wrestler if he'd been able to resist his urges to gouge, knee, and fish-hook his opponents. Similarly, he might have been a good boxer, except for his habit of taking crotch shots and "accidentally" stepping on the feet of his opponents. He never had the patience or temperament for a formal school of the martial arts, though he studied many and picked up a number of tricks before dropping out. Sadly for him, by the time Ultimate Fighting championships and Toughman contests came along, he'd gotten it fixed in his head that he was going to be a con man.

Jeremy Warren recruited him into TNI after he got out of his last jail sentence. Jeremy knows he's taking a gamble, adding Pepper to his team. On one hand, the man's a genius with carnage and is good to have on your side when a deal goes sour. On the other hand, his social skills are bad enough that he makes that souring substantially more likely. But Jeremy is confident that he can keep Pepper under control, maximizing his talents while minimizing his limitations.

**Personality:** (Aries.) A brash, pushy, straightforward ass-kicker with an uncharacteristic (and ill-advised) attraction to subterfuge.

**Obsession:** Triumph. Pepper lives to overcome others.

**Wound Points:** 70

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who fail to fall for his ploys.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Pepper is afraid that he's stupid.

**Noble Stimulus:** Loyalty to his colleagues. Pepper is merciless with his enemies and "marks" but when it comes to his friends, he's loyal to a fault.

### Stats

**Body:** 70 (Dense and Ruddy)  
**Speed:** 60 (Jumpy)  
**Mind:** 50 (Intent)  
**Soul:** 40 (Loud)

\* CAN BE USED AS A STARTING PLAYER CHARACTER



## Skills

**Body Skills:** Beat People Up 55%, Gen. Athletics 45%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 25%, Drive 15%, Guns 50%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Hairy Eyeball 20%, Jailhouse Savvy 20%, Notice 25%

**Soul Skills:** Bully 20%, Charm 15%, Lie 35%

**Savvy, Hairy Eyeball, and Bully:** These are explained on pp. 84–85.

**Beat People Up:** All of Pepper's cherries for Beat People Up are Knock Downs (see UA, p. 60).

## Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
3 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed

## Equipment

9mm "Hush Puppy" pistol.

Brass knuckles.

Napalm lighter.

Six-inch switchblade (in ankle holster)



TOREN ATKINSON

### The Weather Channelers: Kim Naybors, Moonglow, Uriel Sterne

## The Weather Channelers

This group's name is a nod to the Weather Underground, the '60s radicals so loathed by the establishment of the day. The Channelers are TNI's primary operational group of adepts and magick types. Only one—Uriel Sterne—is an adept, actually, but his two companions have their own talents.

Alex Abel maintains only two field teams of all-occult individuals. There are other teams that boast one such person in their line-ups here and there, and there are numerous adepts and occultists who serve TNI as in-house consultants, but only two get-out-there-and-

do-stuff teams are stem-to-stern freakshow. One is the Weather Channelers. (The other is known as the Legion of Doom, but as they report directly to Abel and have never worked with another team, they're almost more legend than fact.)

## Kim Naybors

(**Clearance:** C.) Kim is a vegan, refuses to wear artificial fibers or anything that was made by exploiting an animal, drinks only freshly squeezed organic juice and non-fluoridated spring water, refuses to allow alcohol or cigarettes in her presence, keeps her head shaved



bald and abstains completely from all forms of sexuality. She claims (and believes) that these precautions keep her pure from the corruption and “psi static” that prevents most normal people from perceiving the tendrils of synchronic energy that connect all people, places, and events. She believes that everyone should be as precognitive and clairvoyant as she is, and that only the dissonance caused by meat, plastic, and sex cloud their senses.

In actual fact, Kim could probably use her abilities even if she was an alcoholic hooker subsisting entirely on Spam and toothpaste. Her powers are the result of a powerful spell invoked upon her during birth by her parents. The ritual was intended to open her “third eye” and make her a natural adept, ripe to be molded by the instruction of her mystically hip parents.

As it happened, though, there were complications with the delivery. This meant that her folks rushed through the ritual and then rushed to the hospital for a Caesarian birth. A nightmarish mixup at the hospital put Kim in the custody of the Naybors, two nice, square yuppies from the suburbs (who also delivered a baby that night with a traumatic C-section) while the Naybors’ daughter wound up in the hands of Kim’s biological parents.

This switch was only the first in a lifetime plagued by bizarre coincidences, mysterious mixups, and strange, random interludes. Chaotic forces have shaped Kim’s life far more than any plan or intention of her own.

Here’s why: the birth ritual enabled Kim to perceive the hidden order of the world in a way that most people can’t, but at the price of attracting the attention of chaos. Kim is a magnet for coincidence, weirdness, and destruction in a very real and concrete sense. Of course, she has no idea, except possibly on an unconscious level. After all (she believes) if she really *was* the focus of some kind of psychic snarl, she could perceive it with her mystic senses. She has not realized that Order is often unaware of the operations of Chaos.

Kim bopped in and out of the occult underground throughout her twenties. She brushed up against TNI a few times, but didn’t join them until she was, for the usual reasons, in the wrong place at the wrong time. She’d gone to visit a friend who, unknown to her, was running a meth lab in his basement. A series of pratfalls ensued that resulted in the lab exploding and her friend dying in flames. Kim fled the scene in the guy’s car, not knowing there was a suitcase with two hundred grand stashed in

the trunk, money from a well-connected drug distributor intended to finance more meth. Kim was charged with murder and grand theft auto, the mafia wanted their money and her head, and then she accidentally rammed Alex Abel’s limo in downtown Chicago and got herself a new career as a result. Abel finds Kim amusing, but never meets with her in person—just to be safe.

**Personality:** (Virgo.) Kim is something of a superior know-it-all.

**Obsession:** Predictability. In a life as random and weird as hers, she’s come to cling to predictable things.

**Wound Points:** 50

## Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** The unpredictable events that routinely screw up her life.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) The unpredictable events that routinely screw up her life.

**Noble Stimulus:** Because she believes in the interconnectedness of all things, Kim is reluctant to harm others.

## Stats

**Body:** 45 (Scrawny)  
**Speed:** 45 (Sluggish)  
**Mind:** 50 (Condescending)  
**Soul:** 80 (Painfully Aware)

## Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Hold Her Breath 25%, Struggle 15%, Yoga 25%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 45%, Drive 15%, Throw 30%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 35%, Notice 45%

**Soul Skills:** Chaos Touched 30%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%, **Precognition and Clairvoyance** 55%

**Precognition and Clairvoyance:** Kim can get hunches (see UA, p. 27) or blurred visions of other times, places, and people. If she gets a matched success, she can even pick who (or what) she sees. More often it’s something that is (or was, or will be) important to her or those she serves. Furthermore, even when she does tune in on the place or person she planned to scope out, it’s perfectly possible that she’ll get a glimpse of the future or past (usually something significant, if not necessarily useful to her). She can use this ability five times per day.

**Chaos Touched:** This is rolled once per day. If the roll is successful, something weird happens to



(or near) her. It's not implicitly helpful or harmful (though it can be either), it's just *weird*. If the roll is a matched success, it's something that definitely helps her. There are no penalties for matched failures, since this skill isn't really one that helps her all that often.

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	3 Hardened	4 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	2 Failed	2 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed

### Moonglow

(**Clearance:** C.) Moonglow looks like a hippie who's had a bad thirty years. Moon (as he's known to his associates) couldn't tell you if that perception is accurate or not—he doesn't remember anything for the years between 1969 and 1996. In 1969 he was telling fortunes at rock-and-roll shows and living out of a pickup with a camper top. In 1996 he woke up on a bus going from Chicago to Denver. He had \$827 in his wallet, thirty-six cents in his pocket, a dashiki, jeans, sandals, sunglasses, and four hits of blotter acid hidden in a tie-dyed headband. In his backpack he had three decks of tarot cards, a wax-sealed mason jar of what later turned out to be human blood (type O Negative, with vinegar added to prevent clotting), a thirteen-inch lead pipe, a wooden mask depicting a face with crustacean features, a bong, and the jawbone of a small dog. The jawbone had been boiled in paraffin to prevent spoiling.

No one met him at the Denver bus station, so he read the tarot cards to see what he should do. Under their guidance, he stayed in Denver and started doing readings for money. His business grew by word of mouth until he was able to afford a decent apartment, good weed, and a snowboard. After all, his predictions were always correct.

One day on the slopes, someone tried to kill him. Once again, he turned to the cards, and they led him to a TNI agent who had been monitoring him for a month and a half. Impressed by Moonglow's ability to find him out, the agent offered him membership in TNI. Fearing the return of the ski-slope assassin (whom he now suspects of being a Sleeper), Moonglow readily agreed.

**Personality:** (Libra.) Moon not only believes in instant karma, he believes in pre-karma. The connection between bad childhoods and bad behavior makes sense to Moonglow. He believes people's bad childhoods

are punishments for the vile deeds the suffering children later commit. He also believes that people who have rotten childhoods and fail to earn their punishment get karmic credit for it.

**Obsession:** Causality. Granted, his ability to predict the future gives him a much different take on it, but it's his obsession.

**Wound Points:** 60

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who complain even when they've got it good.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Being the victim of violence.

**Noble Stimulus:** Pacifism. Moon won't fight, even to defend himself.

### Stats

<b>Body:</b>	60	(Pudgy)
<b>Speed:</b>	50	(Good With His Hands)
<b>Mind:</b>	50	(Abstract Thinker)
<b>Soul:</b>	70	(Sensitive)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Shake Off Chemical Effects 30%, Struggle 15%, Surprisingly Strong 30%

**Speed Skills:** Card Tricks 20%, Dodge 25%, Drive 15%, Snowboarding 20%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Notice 25%, Occult Weirdness 30%

**Soul Skills:** Animals Like Him 25%, Charm 35%, Lie 15%, Read Tarot Cards 65%

**Read Tarot Cards:** When he reads the cards for someone who has asked that he do so, Moonglow can make foggy, abstract, but usually accurate predictions of the future. He can't name names or give concrete timelines, but he can pick out general things like hair color, personality traits, and the general tone of events.

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	8 Hardened	2 Hardened	1 Hardened	2 Hardened
0 Failed	3 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	3 Failed

### Uriel Sterne

(**Clearance:** C.) Uriel Sterne sees himself as a dark sorcerer, and he goes to great lengths to dress and act the

part. From his cowed black cloaks and medallions to his portentous speech and goatee, Uriel looks every inch the dark sorcerer. Luckily for him, he's so stereotypical that most people looking for *real* adepts dismiss him as a fake. He's not a fake, though. Not at all.

Ten years ago, Sterne was the typical Entropomancer—making powerful enemies just for the thrill (and charge) of it, going on crime sprees, stealing artifacts, and generally being a young hellcat. He had a great time until a fellow known simply as the Bad Man caught him snooping around and handcuffed him to the tracks of a subway train in New York City. Sterne managed to flatten himself against the wall before the train arrived, but that little adventure cost him his left hand and left him soured on risk taking just for risk's sake.

Now that's a pretty piss-poor attitude for an Entropomancer to have, but Uriel had an edge: specifically, he'd acquired the Ghost Blood Dagger (see the boxed text below). With that particular item in hand, dealing with the restless dead suddenly became a lot easier and less dangerous; it's only a minor charge for him to summon them, and the Dagger makes it easy (or easier, at any rate) to control them.

The demons Uriel controls are (of course) quite useful for espionage and surveillance, but he's also arranged something of a "win/win" exchange with a

number of them. A few souls, desperate for incarnation, serve willingly in exchange for an opportunity to be put into a damnation round (see p. 46).

**Personality:** Leo. He's an arrogant, bossy son of a bitch.

**Obsession:** Control of the supernatural, and the balancing lack of control over "fate" or "chance."

**Wound Points:** 60

## Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who challenge his power—especially if they say he's lost his nerve for real Entropomancy.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Unnatural) Uriel is terrified of being possessed by one of his demons.

**Noble Stimulus:** Since he knows better than many the risks associated with magick, Uriel can be very helpful to those with less experience than he has—if they're respectful.

## Stats

**Body:** 60 (Muscular)  
**Speed:** 40 (Deliberate)  
**Mind:** 55 (Intense)  
**Soul:** 75 (Magnetic)

## Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 45%, Struggle 45%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 35%, Drive 15%, Guns 20%

## New Artifact: The Ghost Blood Dagger (Major)

Ages ago there was a long, bloody war between the Greeks and the Trojans, which the Greeks won. This war, commemorated in the great epic poem *The Iliad*, has become a part of cultural currency—even people who don't know who Hecuba or Menelaus are recognize the phrases "Trojan Horse" and "Achilles' Heel."

The greatest hero of the Greeks was Achilles, who was killed by a lucky shot during the battle. Afterwards, the Greeks sacrificed a young girl on his grave. That girl was Polyxena, the daughter of the Trojan ruler Priam. Ever since that dark deed, the dagger used for the sacrifice has had power over the demons of the dead. It is now in the possession of Uriel Sterne.

Anyone who holds the Ghost Blood Dagger can attempt to control a demon that is close by, simply by coating the blade with fresh human blood. For the purposes of this check, *any* roll that's lower than the user's Soul is successful at compelling the demon, even if it's also lower than the demon's Soul. Note that this is only useful if the Dagger's owner is already host to a spirit, or is in the presence of one. The Dagger can also be used to compel demons who are already in possession of someone else's body, though in that instance it's necessary to stab or cut the body with the dagger before making the roll. (If the Dagger user attempts to control a demon and fails, he's subject to possession as usual. In such cases, the first thing the demon usually does is get rid of the Dagger.)

The dagger is a heavy knife of bronze, with a curved, eight-inch blade. An antiquarian could probably get up to \$500,000 for it, even without knowing its provenance. It's not in good shape (having been through some tough use in the last three thousand years) but it's still a fine example of workmanship from its era. If its historical importance could be proven, the price would be unguessable.



**Mind Skills:** General Education 50%, Notice 35%, Occult History 30%

**Soul Skills:** Act Impressively Mystical 40%, Charm 15%, Lie 25%, **Magick: Entropomancy 55%**

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
4 Hardened	7 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
3 Failed	2 Failed	2 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed

### Notes

Uriel is often a few wound points down from taking little risks to charge up his Entropomancy. He usually only holds 2–4 minor charges.

Uriel's left arm is missing, starting about an inch below the elbow. While he owns an expensive, state-of-the-art prosthesis, he actually prefers a large, sharp, chrome-plated hook engraved with mystic symbols. It has no magickal effects, but it's a +3 weapon. If he uses his mechanical prosthesis, that arm has Speed 20 and Body 20 for any relevant checks.

He carries the Ghost Blood Dagger with him at all times, and is also frequently armed with a Ruger Super Redhawk, loaded with at least one damnation round.

Uriel prepares the damnation rounds, but it's a headache because it's random magick and not a formula spell. It typically costs 6 minor charges, but has cost as many as 10.



THOMAS MANNING

### The Shrinks: Dr. Kaiyo Atsui and Bernard Walters

## Other Personnel

There are many people in TNI who aren't on a particular team. Some are in-house consultants who never go out in the field. Others are specialist agents who are assigned to assist teams on an as-needed basis, often without the team even knowing it. These folks are described in the following sections. No stats are provided, and these people should generally never get close to combat—at least, not in the presence of the

PCs. They're plot devices, ready to use when you need them, but never getting close enough to the PCs to upstage them.

## The Shrinks

The New Inquisition (like any endeavor that involves the paranormal) has far more than its statistical share of paranoids, phobics, and fantasy-prone personalities. Naturally, this impairs their efficiency: nothing clogs up



a covert op like an agent who curls up in a ball and whimpers every time he sees a dog. Loath to part with valued team members just because they happen to be crazy, Alex Abel quickly perceived the need to add some quality psychotherapy to the TNI infrastructure.

Easier said than done. Very few people join TNI because they're gung ho for the project. ("Oh boy! I get to put my life and sanity in danger so I can unhesitatingly obey an eccentric billionaire? And I can't ever quit? And I don't get any privacy or freedom? Sign me up!") Abel has more money than he can reasonably spend, but even the greediest psychiatrist would think twice before signing on to the terms that Abel demands. Generally TNI has operated by providing a last chance for people with no other option. But would you really want your agents being psychoanalyzed by someone that desperate? Abel sure didn't.

So he needed to find therapists who weren't crackpots, crooked or crazy themselves, but who could still be trusted to minister to his crazy, crooked conspiracy—and who were willing to do it.

He found two.

### Dr. Kaiyo Atsui

(**Clearance:** B.) Kaiyo was fourteen when the cops came to arrest her father. Up until that moment she had no idea that he'd been involved with the notorious tongs of New York's Chinatown. In addition to his job as *maitre d'* at a mid-range restaurant, he allegedly enforced the decrees of the Six Rabbit tong with almost surreal violence. No bail was set for him, creating an outcry in the Chinese community. He was in prison for eight days before he committed suicide. At least, that's the official story.

Was he a brutal enforcer, or just a patsy? Did he kill himself? Was he killed by the police? By other prisoners? Kaiyo has no answers. It was not until he died that she realized her father was a complete cipher to her. She could believe anything of him—any wisdom, any foolishness, any crime, any saintliness—because she knew nothing for sure.

She studied psychology to understand herself. She started working with the police to understand violence, and she started studying violence in order to understand humanity. She had an ideal sample in her work with police officers, but the more widely she publicized her radical views, the less popular she became.

Specifically, Dr. Atsui published a paper in which she asserted that in certain circumstances, violent be-

havior—even sadism or violent expressions of sexuality—were perfectly sane and normal. In fact, given the proper set of stimuli (she argued), it would be insane to refrain from violence. While this argument was scary enough when she was applying it to Nazi Germany or the Viet Cong, it enraged people when she calmly spoke (and wrote) about the culture of violence among U.S. citizens in general, and New York cops in particular. To her, the murderous teens of Brooklyn or Cabrini Green or Watts were not "sociopaths" or "super-predators." They were simply adapted to their circumstances.

She showed no surprise when she began to get harassed at work and at home—obscene phone calls, screeched by the familiar voices of co-workers and clients. Her car was repeatedly vandalized, her apartment windows were smashed out, her desk at work was trashed, but no one ever lifted a finger against her. Nonetheless, when Abel offered her an opportunity to move more fully into a world where violence was the coin of the realm, she accepted. Perhaps her co-workers frightened her. Perhaps the money enticed her. But most likely, she was just curious.

Now that she works for TNI, where there is heavy pressure to get fast results and no legal or procedural oversight, she has begun a series of experimental therapies involving a mix of hypnosis, psychoactive chemical treatment, and confrontation. When it works, it does indeed work fast. But there are some stone killers working for TNI who shudder when Kaiyo walks by.

### Bernard Walters

(**Clearance:** B.) Like Dr. Atsui, Bernard Walters was a professional pariah, lured into TNI by curiosity. In his case, he had to find out about the paranormal, and Abel offered to show him conclusive proof.

Bernard (never "Bernie") worked as a social worker, specializing in violent teenagers. The first time he heard stories about a man who could bite your eyes out if you met his gaze, he put it down as a particularly vivid confabulation used to explain a particularly gruesome injury.

Four years later, he heard the same story, from a different teenager, in a different state. He exhaustively tried to find a link between the two stories. He found nothing but the common details, and no link between the two teenagers. Urban legend? Psychological archetype? It didn't wash for him, and he began to think the unthinkable: maybe what they said wasn't a meta-

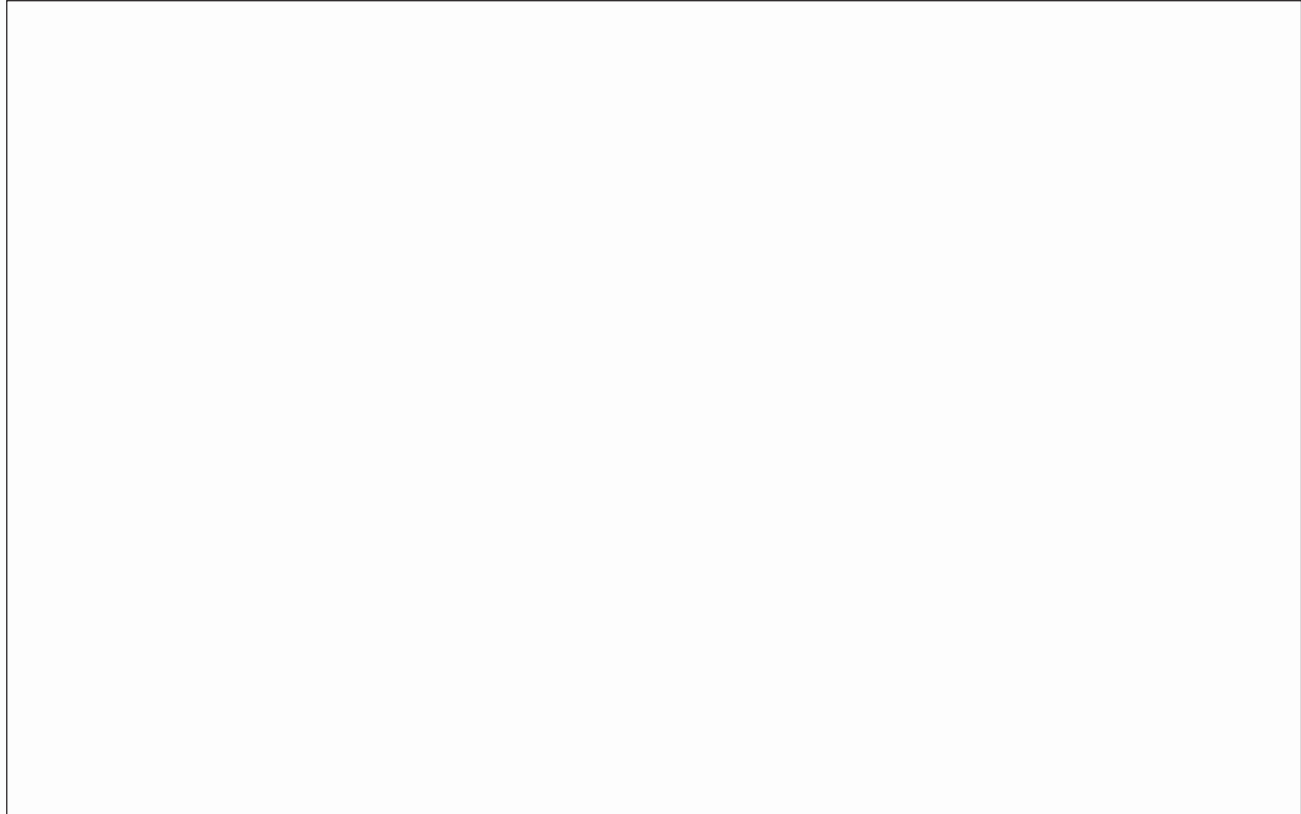


phor or an image or a delusion. Maybe it was just what happened.

Since joining TNI, Bernard has never managed to track down the Eye Biting Man, but has seen enough weirdness to convince him that it could be objectively real. He is still careful, however, to make sure his clients can distinguish between reality and fear. It gets harder every day.

Bernard is a very large, round man who prefers comforting fuzzy sweaters and wears a carefully groomed

beard. He's soft-spoken and kindly, and the few New Inquisitors who've gotten fed up and tried to take a poke at him have been surprised at just how strong and quick he is, for a fat guy. He believes in the "talking cure" (he's got a degree in social work instead of psychiatry, so he couldn't prescribe drugs when he was practicing). Though he'd never badmouth his colleague Dr. Atsui in front of someone that either one of them might potentially counsel, he believes her views and her therapeutic modality are both misguided and potentially dangerous.



THOMAS MANNING

### The Reservists: Cage, Sandy Metcalf, Officer Bob, Dr. Jennifer Koeb, and Ruth Fahi

#### The Reservists

These are specialist field agents, tasked with tricky assignments. Often they work alone. If they're assisting a team in some way, they may do so anonymously, behind the scenes. Occasionally a couple of Reservists will be thrown together into a temporary team—Cage and Officer Bob find themselves in this arrangement at times. Eponymous (see UA, p. 191) is the ultimate Reservist.

#### Cage

(**Clearance:** C.) Cage is a big, laid-back, muscle-bound oaf. He's got nothing to prove, nobody he's hiding

from, and no mind-crushing issues eroding his sanity. In other words, he's balanced—and in TNI that's a valuable commodity.

This isn't to say he's a tranquil zen monk: Cage doesn't take crap off anyone and he doesn't have much patience with whining, but he won't go out of his way to provoke people. He was working in Miami as a bodyguard for an importer of contraband delicacies when the cops picked him up on a rinky-dink weapons charge. They invited him to rat out his boss in return for clemency. He declined. They offered him an opportunity to go into the Witness Protection Program. He said no. Then they said they were going to frame him like the Mona Lisa, which they proceeded

to do. Cage still didn't roll over—not so much out of gangland loyalty as from a calm certainty that his boss could readily grease him in prison.

After breaking the local jail's bench-press record, Cage was approached by Sandy Metcalf. She offered to poke the state's case full of holes in return for his loyalty. Having been sold out by his old boss, Cage accepted and was sprung within 24 hours.

(For more on Cage, check out Chapter 4 of *Unknown Armies*.)

### Cage's Specialty

In addition to having a strong back for a fight, Cage has refined “roughing you up” to an art form. Some of TNI's personnel don't have the resolve it takes to really punish a helpless victim. Others have too much of what it takes, and instead of a warning, the target gets a shallow grave.

Cage, however, strikes a fine balance, leaving his victims cowed enough to be docile, but not so badly beaten that they feel hysterical and cornered. He can shake information out of someone without making a mortal enemy, and his finely honed pugilistic instincts instantly let him know when someone's had enough.

### Sandy Metcalf

(**Clearance:** Special) Sandy was always a workaholic. She came from a hard working family of twelve. Her dad worked double shifts at the factory to keep his family in dinners and diapers, while her mother had her hands full with a large brood for many years. Sandy just accepted that life was work and work, life.

She perceived the law profession as an endeavor that could eagerly consume any amount of work she could throw at it, and the drama of criminal law was particularly interesting to her. As things worked out, she was a talented defense attorney. After a few spectacular successes as a public defender she went into private practice, where she met a lot of very interesting people. Specifically, interesting men.

Maybe Sandy watched *The Godfather* a few too many times as a kid. Whatever the cause, she found that she had a keen taste for bad, bad men. It was a classic case of “Smart Woman, Potentially Lethal Choices.” If she'd kept her taste for slumming with zips and goombahs a little more limited—even keep-

ing it to one at a time—she might still be running a profitable law office in New Jersey. But two competitors for her affections were more familiar with car bombs and garrotes than impulse control or anger management, so they wound up trying to kill each other. Almost as an afterthought, both of them tried to kill her, too (seeing as they considered her, in the succinct words of one of her lover/assassins, “a cheating mattress-back whore”).

She appealed to the police for protection, but they were surprisingly unsympathetic towards a woman notorious for springing murderers, pimps, and hijackers from jail (and banging them afterwards). After a near-miss put her in the hospital, she was approached by a suave man who offered her a way out of her dilemma. Two days after she agreed to his rather restrictive terms of service, both of her would-be killers were dead—each apparently killed by the hand of the other. Her old mob contacts spit when they mention her name now, but she doesn't have time for them anyhow. She's too busy getting an entirely new group of dangerous types out of legal entanglements.

**Note:** Working as an attorney, she has to be comparatively open about who she is and where she's from. This makes her vulnerable. Furthermore, since she's the first contact many people have with TNI, her knowledge of the lower-level operatives makes her valuable. Abel is well aware that any cabal that grabbed her could learn a great deal about the people who've been recruited to TNI over the last couple years. While he's done his best to insulate her from the upper echelons, and to ensure (through Winston Kroll) that new recruits are difficult to identify as such, he's still well aware of the danger. That's why Sandy has a small, radio-monitored capsule of poison implanted in her abdomen. If she's ever compromised, Abel can turn her off by remote control. She's aware of this implant: it was one of the conditions she agreed to when she signed up. That's why she's a bit jumpy during thunderstorms and around electric towers. It's possible, though unlikely, that a powerful blow to her stomach might prematurely release the toxin.

### Sandy Metcalf's Specialty

Simply put, she gets scumbags out of jail. Abel has anonymously endowed a foundation that supposedly enables her to go around and combat the most egregious abuses of an over-eager justice system. She's got



a pretty good reputation, since few of the people she gets off ever get in trouble again.

### Officer Bob

(Clearance: B.) Picture a sturdy concrete wall. There's a tiny hammer and chisel, slowly chipping away at the wall. It cuts and knocks, weakening and defacing and undermining the wall—but the wall still stands strong. Then, suddenly, without warning, along comes a wrecking ball that goes through it with one brutal smash.

There. Now you have a pretty good idea of what happened to Officer Bob's life.

He got into law enforcement because his dad had done it and said there was a good retirement program. Officer Bob thought he was ready for just about anything, but two things gradually became apparent to him.

- Some criminals weren't just superstitious—they could actually *make things happen*. Not many, and not often, but he felt the proof was undeniable.
- Despite the proof, his fellow officers resolutely ignored it.

He was reticent about his suspicions—he knew how dangerous it could be for him to lose the confidence of his fellow officers—but he kept an eye out, and the more he looked, the more he found. He started getting a reputation as an odd officer, but a good one—his “hunches” (based on his occult suspicions) paid off often enough that the other cops forgave a little weirdness here and there. He also developed a reputation in that grey area where the occult and criminal underworlds overlap. He thought he could handle just about anything, until a certain Tarot-obsessed criminal called Simon Linnbid told him, “I'm going to kill your wife and walk away scott-free.”

Bob ignored it as jailhouse bravado—until he came home to find his wife dead, two swords shy of a dozen sticking through her body. No fingerprints, no sign of forced entry, no clues.

He knew who did it. He knew how, and he knew why, and he knew no court would ever convict the man.

That was when the old Bob crumbled. He went looking for Linnbid, gun in hand, not much of a plan besides, “kill him.” He found him, but the minor mo-

jos and street trash rituals he'd seen hadn't prepared him for what he faced. The Tarot master humiliated him, defeated him—and let him live.

That was when TNI approached him with a devil's deal. They asked him to surrender everything: his identity, his family, his loyalty to law and order. They asked him to go from cop to criminal, subverting the idea of justice for all by serving an eccentric billionaire. But they offered him one thing: revenge.

He said yes.

### Officer Bob's Specialty

Unlike many Inquisitors, Bob has long years of experience as a professional law-enforcement officer. He's competent, careful, courageous, and he can think like both a cop and a criminal. He's not a genius or an action hero—he's the cop on the corner, but he's moved two steps to the left of the mundane.

Bob's stolid reliability makes him a good troubleshooter and special-task operative, but he doesn't really play well with others. His past as a cop makes it hard for him to hide his distaste for the kinds of scum TNI often recruits, and he gets uncomfortable and defensive with a partner. Bob isn't so talented or specialized that he would normally be designated as a Reservist, but his brief tenures with a couple of teams went poorly, and Abel chose to move him out of the team structure as a result.

### Dr. Jennifer Koeb

(Clearance: B) Dr. Koeb is one of the few agents that Abel considers truly trustworthy. It's not due to any particular diligence on Koeb's part; Abel just knows she has no choice.

Koeb used to be a fairly successful E.R. surgeon in Los Angeles, until her husband (and an unwarranted malpractice suit) convinced her to move into something less exciting but just as lucrative. Specifically, she became a specialist in reconstructive surgery—not for faces, but for joints that had suffered gross trauma injuries.

She was doing all right, but she missed the excitement of the emergency room. She transferred back for a year, but her husband hated it—she was never home and he could never predict if she'd get back from the hospital elated by a success or morbidly depressed. She went back to rebuilding joints, but still felt that her life was missing some of its spice.



Then she went to a conference in Las Vegas. Her first day there she won \$5,000 playing blackjack. By the third day, she'd lost it all—along with \$61,000 of her own money.

She went into therapy, but it was no good. She was a gambling addict, and the call of the cards was too strong. She fought it for two years, and lost. She lost her husband, her practice, her car and house and savings.

Then she met a lady who simply called herself Fatima, and she started gambling for things of *real* value. She lost years off her life in one game, and won a master violinist's skills in another. Later she gambled away that ability trying for a pot containing a million dollars and a psychic's ability to read the future in the tracks of snakes in sand.

Fatima always tried to get Dr. Koeb to risk her skill at surgery, but that was the one thing Jennifer wouldn't gamble. Eventually though, she put up something even more precious: her free will. She lost it (on a bluff, no less) and became Fatima's servant. Fatima traded Koeb's free will to a New Yorker known simply as The Bad Man in exchange for six grand and six years of life. The Bad Man, in turn, sold her will to Alex Abel for \$30,000 and a fourth-generation copy of the Naked Goddess tape.

Now, Abel decides what she wants. Unsurprisingly, she wants to serve TNI.

### **Dr. Jennifer Koeb's Specialty**

Dr. Koeb is a capable trauma surgeon, and since she started working for TNI she's developed some unusual techniques for dealing with unusual injuries—especially the distortions she refers to as “freakmarks”.

### **Ruth Fahi**

(**Clearance:** C) Ruth Fahi grew up in Israel, where she was one member of a very, very small demographic. Though her father was racially Arab, his family had been Jewish for generations. He always taught his daughter that she would have to be twice as patriotic to be considered half as good as an ethnic Jew, and she worked at it hard. Her dream was to prove her “Israeli-ness” through glorious military success, so she joined the army as early as she could and trained as hard as she could and learned as much as she could. She was a quick study, and backed up her army hand-to-hand training by studying other martial arts off the base. There was only

one lesson she had a hard time learning: that Israeli army officers are suspicious of any Arab who is real eager to get into the army.

Despite her skills, she was shunted from meaningless job to meaningless job, until both her parents died in a PLO bomb blast. She begged her commanding officer for some kind of meaningful job, and after he refused, she quit. She was promptly recruited by MOSSAD, who had plenty of use for a deadly woman who looked Arab and was eager to get some payback on the PLO. She was so successful that several terrorist organizations put a price on her head. That didn't bother her until Israel cut her loose.

When Israel started making serious peace with Yassir Arafat, Ruth became a liability. Forced into early retirement, she was chased through Syria and Libya by enraged Arab hit squads who considered her a traitor to her race. When she realized that the price of Israel's protection would be for her to silently sit by and watch them cave in to the PLO, she became disgusted with the whole situation. She had no idea what she was going to do until a dead-eyed American walked up to her and said, “Call me Eponymous.”

Now she travels around TNI's safehouses, providing combat training to those of Abel's agents who lean towards the “skinny, wild-eyed mystic” end of the spectrum instead of the “bulky, steel-eyed bruiser” end. She's a great teacher—highly adept at pushing people past their imagined limits and up against their real limits. Just don't get her started on that poor, misunderstood Benjamin Netanyahu.

### **Ruth Fahi's Specialty**

Ruth is an excellent instructor of a variety of deadly abilities. She's a crack shot and has several black belts, but her real talent is for teaching. Even a student who's more dangerous in a knife fight than she is might pick a few new blade tricks and techniques out of her vast soupçon of skill. She's a jack of all trades (at least, all trades that deal with fucking people up) but really a master of none. However, anyone who spends a week of intensive training with her comes away with extra experience points that can only be spent on fighting skills. (The exact amount is up to the GM, depending on how she wants to pace character advancement—I recommend about ten.)





THOMAS MANNING

### The Brain Trust: Maureen Greeley, Dr. Xerxes Ineich, Dr. Winston Kroll, and Dr. Karla Schweitzer

#### The Brain Trust

These individuals are a part of TNI's core structure. They don't work in the field. They are administrators, researchers, adept consultants, and so forth. They don't call themselves "the Brain Trust"—that's just a nickname that field Inquisitors have stuck on them. Few would appreciate it.

#### Maureen Greeley

(**Clearance:** A.) Maureen Greeley is a perky, vivacious blonde woman in her early forties. People who meet her generally think she's an office manager for a bank or a college administrator. Few ever dream that she arranges assassinations, burglaries, and the occasional exorcism.

Unlike 90% of TNI, Maureen came up through Abel's legitimate business operations—she wasn't recruited from some criminal underground or occult demimonde. Abel had worked with Greeley and trusted her for years, even before TNI was founded. When he built his occult conspiracy, he decided to take a chance and include loyal Maureen in the structure.

So far, it's been a smart move. Her perspective as

a comparatively mundane person in a hierarchy of lifetime crooks and whacked-out spiritualists gives her insight into the best (or most subtle) ways to attain TNI's goals. She also possesses a good sense of how the "normal world" will interpret TNI's activities.

For all her normalcy, Maureen shows no hesitation to order dirty work done—if it needs doing. Unlike some criminals, violence and crime are likely to be her last recourses, rather than her first. She'd rather try bribery, blackmail, or legal harassment first, which may explain why the Chicago safehouse (which she runs) is one of the most successful.

#### Dr. Xerxes Ineich

(**Clearance:** A.) Like Maureen, Xerxes Ineich knew Abel before he founded TNI—even before Abel had begun his policy of hiring hits on those he deemed to be threats to society. Abel believes Xerxes could have been as rich as he is—possibly richer, since Ineich comes from a moneyed family. But Xerxes' interests lay elsewhere. While Abel reveled in the deceit and desperation of being an '80s business carnivore, Ineich was studying sociology and politics. He was learn-

ing what makes America tick, while Abel was learning what makes it go “ka-ching.” It took some persuasion to convince Xerxes that Abel’s claims about the paranormal had merit, but once he believed, he became fascinated by the political and sociological ramifications of the world’s scaly magick underbelly.

He’s resigned from his post at Stanford to work for TNI. His purpose is twofold: to forecast how people might react if the existence of magick was proved, and to plan contingencies to mold the several possible reactions in Alex Abel’s favor.

### Dr. Winston Kroll

(Clearance: Special) It’s been a long, hard fall for Dr. Winston Kroll. He used to be “Winnie” to his friends, but these days, he hasn’t got any.

Dr. Kroll was pulling down millions a year as the hottest plastic surgeon in Hollywood and Beverly Hills. He worked on aging actresses and aspiring singers who needed a little help going from “beautiful” to “*People Magazine’s* 50 Most Beautiful.” His practice grew by leaps and bounds, based mostly on referrals—and he deserved it. He was an artist with a knife, leaving his patients without the tiniest scar to reveal that nature had been improved upon. He had it all—wealth, respect, the envy of his peers, a hell of a good set of golf clubs—and then one snoopy orderly brought in a video camera and recorded what the skilled doctor was doing with (or, more accurately, in the presence of) his anaesthetized patients.

Lucky for “Winnie,” he hadn’t worked on any mobsters’ girlfriends, and it took all those actresses and singers a little while to track down hired muscle willing to make sure that Dr. Kroll didn’t do anything sexual—ever again.

TNI found him first, and made him an offer he couldn’t refuse.

Now Winston works his transformations on the hoods, thugs, and weirdos that his new bosses bring to him. He doesn’t even rate D clearance—he knows nothing about the occult—and there’s always a couple people standing guard when he’s working. He believes he’s working for the mob, but at least he has the consolation of his skills. He prefers to work on beautiful women, and when he gets the (rare) opportunity, his aesthetic gifts are still as thrilling as ever. More commonly, he’s asked to change people to conform to the appearance of some vanished drifter—it’s challenging, but there’s so rarely *beauty* there. Still, it beats the alternative.

Some Inquisitors complain after Kroll works on them. Not only is it very disturbing to see a different face in the mirror, but it almost seems that the ugliness inside Kroll is reflected in the faces he creates.

### Dr. Karla Schweitzer

(Clearance: A.) Dr. Schweitzer was a colleague of Xerxes Ineich, but while he studied sociology and political science, she was an expert in anthropology and history. The first time Abel showed him proof of real magick, Karla Schweitzer was the first expert Ineich brought in—and she promptly debunked Abel’s demonstration, revealing it as a con artist’s scam. It took repeated, controlled proofs to get her to join TNI, but Abel has found her an invaluable analyst of the occult. She’s hard to fool and has rooted out a number of frauds, quacks and grifters. More valuable, perhaps, is her ability to sniff out the subtle signs of occult events. Her historical knowledge allows her a higher perspective. She’s been more successful than any of Abel’s paranormal operatives at ferreting out the truth about avatars and Godwalkers. However, her ingrained skepticism and prejudice towards subtlety has (ironically) made her more likely to dismiss blatant paranormal events as hoaxes or mass hysteria.







# CHAPTER FIVE

## SECRETS

### UnKNOWn ARMIES



"IF YOU WOULD KNOW SECRETS, LOOK FOR THEM IN GRIEF OR PLEASURE."  
—PROVERB

"THE BIGGEST SECRET OF THEM ALL IS THAT THERE IS NO SECRET.  
THERE'S NO HIDDEN GOD, NO ULTIMATE PLAN, NO DESTINY.  
THE BIGGEST SECRET IS THAT IT'S US, AND WE DID IT ALL."  
—LILI MORGAN



## It should come as no surprise that Alex Abel

is a man of many secrets. TNI itself, of course, is quite a big secret. But even within TNI, there are further secrets still. This chapter takes a look at some of them.

### Tracking Implants

TNI employs a lot of shady, duplicitous, and downright unstable people. A perpetual concern for the Aces is the question of maintaining the loyalty of people who betray and assassinate for a living, and for whom TNI may be the last place they can turn. After all, in the French Foreign Legion you can just stick someone in a fortress in the middle of nowhere. TNI agents need a great deal more leeway—so how does one keep them on the leash?

One answer is fear. Someone who betrays TNI *really* has nowhere to turn, and as Abel's been known to say, "There's no revenge like *epic* revenge." While Abel probably wouldn't give the order to kidnap someone's family as a bargaining chip, there are a number of people in his employ who aren't nearly that squeamish. Tex Chang, for example, could happily grease someone's wife, then go out for ribs.

After a few such ugly incidents, the troops were staying in line. But Abel wanted a better solution. He found one.

Abel's solution is to surgically implant mystical tracking devices into his less-trustworthy agents. This is usually done when they're having cosmetic surgery to get a new identity. The tracking device consists of a small parchment and a tiny glass bead, encased in surgical-quality plastic. It can be inserted through an appendix scar or even put in a drilled tooth. That's the beacon.

It's tracked by a planchette whose lens was made from the same glass as the bead. (A planchette is a small wooden platform with a glass lens in the center and three or four rounded wooden legs. When placed on a smooth surface it can slide easily. It's used on ouija boards to pick out letters and numbers.) When Abel's adepts want to find someone who's running away, they pull out a world map and put the planchette on it, with their fingertips resting gently on it. The little table drifts until the lens is focussed over the map area that corresponds to the target's physical location. Then they repeat it with a smaller map—usually a country or state map. By "zooming in" in this fashion, they can pinpoint a person's address, or even the room he's hiding in if a blueprint can be found.

Only A-Level Inquisitors know about the implants—and the Aces don't volunteer the information unless they see a good reason.

### The Virgin Ein-Sof

The original golem Ein-Sof (see UA, p. 150) duplicated itself and continued on its way, unable to reproduce again. Its "offspring" also reproduced once, and only once. So it is for every golem—each iteration of the golem form can only create one copy, and after that it is permanently sterile.

Many sorcerers have recognized the utility of a powerful, unaging, unsleeping agent with no individual will, and these sorcerers have been on the lookout for any edition of Ein-Sof. However, at any time there can only be one golem in the world who has not yet completed his program of duplication. At any moment, there is only one virgin Ein-Sof.

Alex Abel has collected five golems so far, but he desperately wants the most recent "virgin" edition. After all, when he gets the virgin Ein-Sof, he'll be able to watch it until it creates the next virgin. Then the "old" Ein-Sof, no longer able to reproduce, can be put to use, and the new one protected until it reproduces, *ad infinitum*. Over time, he'll be able to build a large pool of powerful servants.

Of course, Abel isn't the only one who's realized that finding the virgin golem is the key to building a golem army. His fear is that the Sleepers realize that killing the virgin will prevent any future golems from being created. In fact, he worries that this may already have happened . . .

### Automata

Details about Automata (also known as "Automatics") will become available in the *Post-Modern Magick* sourcebook. Abel has acquired a few of them already.

### Senator Andrew Ginchman

Senator Andrew Ginchman (R-Washington) never really liked Alex Abel. He found him brash and pushy. He grudgingly made concessions to the man in return for support, but when the S&Ls went tits-up, Ginchman figured he had a chance to nail Abel to the wall. He was wrong.

After Abel paid his \$10,000 fine he put a note in his day-planner: "Find way to fuck w. Ginchman."

Backing Ginchman's rival was obvious, but a hassle: Ginchman was popular and powerful, and the only politician dumb enough to cross him was young, idealistic, and not too friendly to Abel's business style.

Then Ginchman's son got into a bad boat accident and wound up in a coma. The senator was devastated (though not too devastated to make a few points on the health-care issue with it). It was only a matter of time before the young man died—and when he did, one of Abel's employees was there, disguised as a custodian, to capture the fleeing soul. It was one week later that Abel had that selfsame soul-sucking minion call up Ginchman and tell him, in the voice of his dead son, that Alex Abel was running the show.

Abel isn't proud of what he's doing to Ginchman Jr., but he finds it comforting to believe that a ghost of a person isn't really that person any more than a photo is. He's promised Ginchman that after Abel's final plans come to fruition, the soul will go free. Of course, Abel's final plans are pretty grandiose. If he can Ascend, all well and good. But, just in case that doesn't happen, he has Ginchman drafting some interesting legislation concerning the paranormal . . .

## Luther Miles

Luther Miles is a fourteen-year-old black boy who is constantly monitored by very-well-paid private investigators. These detectives don't know who pays them, or why they're watching the kid, or why the kid is important. They just know that anyone who threatens the boy is to be dealt with—harshly.

These detectives aren't part of TNI, and even the people with A clearance don't know about Luther Miles. Abel does not want the boy to have anything to do with the occult underground. He especially doesn't want the flea circus finding out about the boy.

Luther Miles thinks his father died when he was just an infant. He's wrong. His father is alive, and watching him, but can never be near him or let the boy know about his existence. That's because Luther Miles' father is Alex Abel.

Luther's mom hates Alex, and they've both agreed it's best to simply pretend they never met. On a practical level, Abel doesn't want the hassles of parenthood and doesn't want his reputation stained by a bastard son, but that's the very least of it. He knows there are occultists who would kidnap and torture his son without a second thought to get to him, and he knows that some of them have the power to go

through any mundane bodyguards like a bullet through wet toilet paper. He's also well aware that his son, carrying his blood, can serve as a powerful symbolic link to Abel himself. That's a vulnerability he really doesn't need.

The most ruthless option would be to kill the kid, but Abel won't. First, because the idea is repugnant, but also because Luther stands for something. Watching his son grow up through surveillance photos and psychological dossiers, Abel has come to feel that Luther is his link with the normal world—a world that is arguably less “real” than the occult truths that Abel deals with daily, but one that is perhaps more important.

Finding Luther, or even finding out about him, is no easy trick. Abel had to shell out loads of cash to find two dukes who had skill at masking magicks, and who were personally vile enough that he wouldn't feel bad ordering their deaths when the work was done. He hired these dukes to permanently conceal his son from mystic spying and detection, as much as they could. Then he double-crossed them. One died, the other escaped. The survivor (a woman known as the None) hardly got away unscathed. She's permanently blind and paralyzed from the waist down, but her masking powers have kept her out of TNI's clutches. Abel has a plutomancer whose only job is to try to sling long distance blasts at the None, on top of keeping her down with Pluto's Curse. This has made the None's life a living hell, but the key word is still “living.”

Luther has stayed safe so far, but as the boy grows into a young man he's started to notice a few men who always seem to be around, in the background of his life . . .

## The Two Jocks

Reginald Vance—a.k.a. “Rod Steele”—did a lot of different things for a living. He danced and waited tables in a suburban dinner theater. One summer he worked as a housepainter, which he hated. The next year he had a job as a personal trainer, before he got fired for sexing up one of his clients on a weight bench—and on company time, too. He really wanted to be an actor, according to all his friends. He'd been doing plays ever since he was a kid, starting with the church nativity. Unfortunately, by all accounts, he wasn't very good.

Donald Crosby was from a small town in Illinois, and moving to Chicago was the best thing that ever happened to him. Clean faced and corn-fed, Don was a big hit in Chicago's gayest strip clubs by night. By



day, he did singing strip-o-grams, despite a noteworthy lack of musical talent. He went both ways, but seemed to like boys best. He turned some pretty good scratch, but being careless with money, he was always looking for more.

Two good-looking guys, both looking for some ready cash, both pretty sanguine about their sexuality. *Sorority Sexposé* was the first porn film for both of them—and it turned out to be the last time that either of them was seen. At least, the last time Alex Abel and his considerable resources have been able to ascertain.

*Sorority Sexposé*, you see, was the last and certainly most important work by a woman whose name has been blasted from every phone book, every internet directory, every diary entry, and every catalog in the world. Though it was never finished (due to a “fire” on the set), a second-generation copy of *Sorority Sexposé* was recently auctioned off for \$10,000, two imprisoned demons, and a length of gold chain that spells out words in an unknown language every new moon. *Sorority Sexposé* is, of course, better known as the Naked Goddess video tape (see UA, p. 183).

Don Crosby and “Rod Steele” had the unique fortune to be in the video’s last scene, co-starring with the Goddess herself. Watching the tape, you can see

them right up to the last moment, right before the Goddess-to-be unravels into scintillating golden light that gets brighter and brighter until the tape goes blankly white.

Some people think Crosby and Steele/Vance (known as “the two jocks” among a select group who’ve seen the film and are willing to discuss it) were simply vaporized by the force of Her ascent. Still others say they are alive and well and probably bleeding mystic potential with every step they take.

The Weather Channelers (see p. 60) are pretty sure the two jocks are alive, and Abel wants to find them. The pornomancers really bugged the shit out of him even before they turned one of his better agents. Even someone far dimmer than Alex can see that the two jocks could be real useful to the Naked Goddess sect. At very least, he’d like to keep the bed pirates from using them. At best, they could be a powerful bargaining chip—or the bait for an irresistible trap.

To his dismay and frustration, magick seems to be of limited use for finding them. Legwork hasn’t turned out much more—none of their friends, bosses, or associates saw them at any time after the filming. But Abel didn’t get where he is by giving up. Every time a TNI team runs out of steam looking for the



JIM PAIVLEC



two jocks, Abel yanks them off the case and rotates a new team in. He's confident that sooner or later, one of his squads will find those boys—if anyone can.

## Dion Isaacs

There's a C-clearance folder on a man named Dion Isaacs, but it doesn't have a lot of details. The name is almost certainly a psudonym, since there's no record of birth date or social security number.

Dion Isaacs himself is most frequently described as "a big, fat, drunk-ass redneck." He roams the nation in a beat-to-hell Airstream motor home that's reputed to have the nation's finest mobile moonshine still—possibly the finest still, period.

Some people like Dion a lot. His ivy-green Airstream is often seen surrounded by an honor guard of leather-clad bikers. These aren't your rich urbanites who take their BMW bikes out on weekends: Dion's buddies are serious, lifestyle bikers of the type who knifed the guy at Altamont.

The bikers come for the whiskey, but stay because Dion always seems to surround himself with sweet young ladies. Like Dion, they're always up for a good time. Usually, they're almost as drunk as him. (That's very drunk indeed—he's usually so smashed that he can't even remember their names and just refers to each of them as "Becky." Surprisingly, the women don't seem to mind.) Dion Isaacs and his crew might be regarded as nothing more than an interesting subculture or an urban legend, if it wasn't for the murders.

It doesn't happen a lot. Most of the time, Dion rolls into town, sells off enough of his wonderfully potent homebrew to float a barge, then blows the money on a giant barbecue. There might be a few fights, and a few town daddies have woken up hung over to find their daughters have run off with fatso . . . but usually it's just a little excitement and then out.

But at least twice in the last three years, something's gone wrong when Dion visits. No one knows what sends the party bad, because no one's survived to tell. The bikers might know something, because they're usually absent when the shit goes down. Much as there's a natural tendency to suspect the Hell's Angel's type when people get torn limb from limb or bitten to death through the jugular, the evidence all indicates that when things get out of hand, it's the Beckies who do the dirty deeds.

Initially, TNI's resident mystical eggheads just had Dion pegged as a pretentious boozehound, but the

more details they're able to pry out about the murderous rampages that follow him, the more they suspect that he might be something more—something older and more important and far more powerful.

Several police have tried to put out a warrant on Dion, but it somehow never seems to take. Abel's hackers tried to track paperwork on Dion through the FBI, but it just seemed to slip into the cracks—gone and forgotten like the Naked Goddess's name.

That trick alone, as much as anything else, has made the Aces eager to learn more.

## The Pattern

Dr. Karla Schweitzer's job is to take a look at the big picture and see if she can pick out signs of subtle, mystic impact. She's a skeptic by nature, which makes her hesitant to jump to conclusions, but the more she looks, the more she becomes convinced that there's something going on inside the world of big business.

There's a pattern that she keeps brushing up against, but it's so subtle, so ingrained in "the way we've always done it" that it's almost impossible to perceive directly. Individual events are meaningless; any specific piece of evidence can be dismissed and explained. But the movement of the whole is significant.

She keeps coming back to the thought that no individual molecule possesses the quality of temperament. Similarly, she has not found any individual person who seems to know the purpose or (more importantly) the organizing principle behind the shadowy grouping that she can almost, obliquely, perceive.

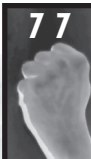
The people involved aren't decision-makers, aren't executives or members of the board. They all seem to be office managers and secretaries and executive assistants. It's subtle, but they all seem to be working together—even across the boundaries of individual companies or conglomerates, they cooperate. Somehow, they recognize one another. Unconsciously, they work together. They aid and facilitate—and not one of them seems to realize that they're part of a greater pattern.

Karla Schweitzer can almost see its movements, but she has no idea where it's going—or even what it is. But she suspects Maureen Greeley is an unwitting element.

Just like everyone else involved.

## Nights Templar

Alex Abel slept like a baby after ordering his first murder, but the cult of the Naked Goddess keeps him



awake at night. If you asked him why they're such a thorn in his side, he'd tell you that he'd be just as alarmed by any organization that was growing so fast—especially one with such an inarticulate agenda. Getting people into TNI is like pulling teeth. He's made his "occult Foreign Legion" offer to people who were in danger of being literally torn to pieces, and they still had to take a moment to think about it. The cult, on the other hand, can seemingly pick people up just by showing them thirty-three minutes of videotape. It doesn't help matters that they've defied him openly (well—openly by the standards of the occult underground, anyhow) and have even managed to subvert one of his agents into their employ.

Abel is pissed at the cult, and it's not hard to see why. But even beneath those very good reasons, there's a deeper reason, and that reason is envy. Abel is a self-made man—a man who went up against America's entrenched racism and class bigotry and kicked the shit out of them. He's achieved every business goal he ever set, and when the Invisible Clergy checked him out he didn't measure up. Instead, they picked an anonymous sex worker, a nobody from nowhere, and invited her into the most exclusive club of all time.

Alex Abel is jealous and bitter and he's not the type to swallow his feelings. He wants a weapon to use against the sect, and he's recruited Gunter Lorenz to try to forge it.

Gunter Lorenz was the creative force behind two of the Naked Goddess's films—*The Temptation of Father L.* and *Bridal Whorehouse*. He's an idiosyncratic "auteur," regarded by a small cadre of fans as a certifiable genius. Unfortunately, his chosen medium alienates most of the audience that would appreciate his symbolism, while most porn fans seem to prefer less esoteric fare.

(Abel initially wanted to get Carl Plogue, who directed the Goddess in four different movies, but the agents he sent to retrieve Plogue had competition, got spooked, screwed up, and wound up abandoning the porn director in a burning warehouse with a broken back. No one's seen that team since.)

Abel reasons that, since symbolism propelled the Goddess into her position in the Clergy, symbolism may be able to interfere with it. Accordingly, he's got a classics scholar, a cliomancer, and a tarot-powered duke helping Lorenz create *Nights Templar*—a porn flick, as far as Lorenz is concerned, but also meant to be a sort of anti-matter to the Naked Goddess tape. The adepts are there to ensure that the mystic symbolism is fully charged, and the classics scholar is on

hand to put as much historical potency behind the project as he can.

Ironically, *Nights Templar* may be the best-funded piece of hardcore ever. They don't have *carte blanche*, but Abel is providing enough money to film on location in Israel and France.

A large part of that money goes to hire security. Abel tried to keep the film secret, but Lorenz is hardly modest or reticent about his projects. There have been a couple of serious attacks made on the film, and it's hard to know who's responsible. The Naked Goddess sect is one suspect—they'd be delighted to get Lorenz on their side, since they've confirmed that he had an unrequited love for the Naked Goddess, perhaps being the first man who perceived her in her role as The Woman Everyone Can Get But You. That's in addition to grudge holders who'd like to fuck with Abel on general principles. Furthermore, there are a number of extremist groups who just don't like the idea of a skin flick being shot in Jerusalem—many of whom are gathering there and preparing for the millennium. Any one of them could be behind the attempted drive-by shooting that put a bullet through Lorenz's left foot. Abel has dispatched a team to the shoot to find out the truth.

## The Messenger

Something odd happened to Abel once. His limo had just glided to a stop in midtown Manhattan. He'd concluded a business deal with unexpected ease and had made an unscheduled visit to New York to visit Ramona Walker, his paramour of the moment.

As he sat in traffic, a man stepped off the sidewalk, calmly opened the door, and got in. (Looking back at it, Abel is certain that the door was locked.) The chauffeur, who doubled as Abel's bodyguard, pulled a gun on the stranger and dragged him out of the car, but not before he had a chance to succinctly tell Abel, "Pursuing Walker is a bad idea. She will destroy you and ruin your destiny."

Alex was tempted to dismiss the guy as a lone nut job, but it was curiously difficult to do. Not only did he know the woman's name, but the man was too well-dressed, too confident, too articulate . . . and there was something about him. He had an air of calculation and craft. A knowingness that said, "Even though you've got the money and the car and the bodyguard, you're ignorant." It was a superior look that Abel was no longer used to seeing.

Perhaps it was just stubbornness that made Abel decide to woo his then-amour with increased intensity, even to the point of pushing back a key merger.

It was three days after that meeting that Abel dropped his keys and came within a hairsbreadth of Ascension. Since his encounter on the street was the weirdest thing that had happened to him immediately before that, he put a good deal of effort into finding out about the man who accosted him.

His first prophets and psychics could only get the shape of the event. Specifically, they seemed to think that everything the man had told Abel was perfectly true. Whatever archetype Abel was approaching, it apparently didn't involve romance. Quite possibly, Abel's decision to spend more time with Ramona was the factor that ruined his chances of joining the Clergy.

Only recently has Abel acquired someone with enough with ouija mojo to shake out the letters that, singly or multiply, comprise the mystery man's name. Those letters are A, D, E, K, M, N, O, R, and T. He's got a police artist's sketch of a tall white man with dark hair and a serious demeanor, and a tentative ID as "Dermott Kane."

## The Woman in Red

The story about the Woman in Red is a sketchy one, even by the high standards of the occult underground. There are variations, like an urban legend, but the general outline goes like this.

- 1) An absolutely gorgeous woman in a red dress walks into a bar and catches the eye of just about every het man in the place.
- 2) She flirts outrageously for an hour or two.
- 3) She then picks up the least conspicuous man in the bar and leaves with him.
- 4) The nebbish get a one-night stand of mind-blowing proportions and never sees her again.
- 5) After that, her lucky victim is impotent unless he's in the presence of something paranormal. Some of these poor discards kill themselves, but more of them go out looking for *her*, desperate to somehow "win her back."
- 6) A very few of her targets get involved in the occult underground—after all, they've basically been turned into dowsing rods for all things magickal.

TNI would like to know if this urban legend is true. If it is, he'd like to get his hand on one of these unfortunate mystic bellwethers—or better yet, on the woman herself.

## Lost Schools

One of Abel's occult scholars (a cliomancer named Herman Meeks) is particularly interested in two powerful schools of magick that seem to have vanished suddenly.

The first was (or is?) phobomancy, a form of magick based on the control of fear. If the rumors are accurate, there were several phobomancers in the Nazi party. The more paranoid cabalists think "the boogeymen" were the power behind Hitler's rise. Others think they simply took advantage of a profitably terrifying situation. In any event, not one boogeyman has been seen since the end of the Second World War. Some people think that the phobomancers were so intimately tied to the Nazi party that its demise dragged them down with it. Others think that the general madness and bloodshed of WWII provided cover for a lot of occult score-settling. (Everyone agrees that phobomancers were real good at making enemies.)

Even more curious are the cryptomancers—sorcerers whose magicks seemed to be based on truth and lies and secrets, and all the blurry lines between. There are all kinds of contradicting rumors about the cryptomancers. Some say they're all gone. Some say they're everywhere, hidden, the most powerful cabal in the underground because they're buried the deepest. Some say they could only tell a lie in a ritual context, and were compelled to tell the truth at all other times. Others insist they were forbidden to *ever* tell the truth under *any* circumstances.

What's known (to the extent that anything can said to be "known" about the cryptomancers) is that there seemed to be a lot of them around in the late 1700s, and now they're nowhere to be found. Did the computer revolution catch them blindsided, providing such a torrent of information storage that their taboos were violated *en masse*? Or did they take to the internet age like fish to water, slipping through the currents of the web to disseminate their lies in ever-widening ripples?

Considering their nature, it's quite literally impossible to say for sure.







**APPENDICES**  
***NEW SKILLS***  
***DOSSIERS***  
***CAR CHASES***  
***MISSIONS***

UnKNOWn   
ARMIES



"THOSE WHO SET OUT TO SERVE BOTH GOD AND MAMMON  
SOON DISCOVER THAT THERE IS NO GOD."

—LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

"NO FATE BUT WHAT WE MAKE!  
NO GOD BUT WHAT WE TAKE!"

—"T. JOE" WALTERS



## Appendix A: New Skills

### Game designer Robin Laws calls them

“crunchy bits”—the morsels of cool new rules and play aids that encourage gamers to buy new sourcebooks. Want some? Sure, we all do! Crunchy bits are fun, they let us play around with our characters some more, they trigger new ideas, and they open new areas of endeavor for GMs. Without (much) further ado, then, here are a bunch of crunchy bits, starting with new skills for your characters. If you’ve already got your campaign up and going, GMs, you might consider letting your players juggle their skills around a bit if any of these new skills really seem like they should be used in place of ones already chosen. It’s just a game, after all, so have fun with it.

### Body Skills

**Bounce Back.** (Also known as: Fast Healer, Tough Guy, I’ll Be Back) You’re the guy (or gal) that everyone secretly hates to party with, because you’re always fresh as a daisy the next day when they’re hung over and heaving. Simply put, your body reacts to abuse quickly and efficiently.

You can roll Bounce Back to shrug off the effects of heavy drinking, overeating, and even minor (non-fatal) poisons. More importantly, you can use this skill to recuperate from more deliberate punishment, like black eyes and stab wounds. Here’s how that works: every day that you regain hit points normally (see UA, p. 63) you can remind the GM to roll your Bounce Back skill, which the GM does in secret. If the roll is successful, you regain one additional hit point.

Note for Boozehounds: Yes, you can use this skill much like Hold Your Liquor (see UA, p. 42) to negate penalties while you’re drinking. However, you cannot generate a charge from a drink that costs you no impairment. (This is a rules change introduced in the second printing of UA; see the Atlas web site for more errata.)

**Feat of Strength.** (Also known as: Weight Lifting, Enormous Pecs, Strongman, Totally Buffed Out) If you take this skill, you’ve trained your muscles in very specific ways to do particular (and impressive) things. This is the skill to take if you like to walk into the gym, pick the nautilus machine closest to the aerobics class, and rack every station for ten reps. You can also

roll this to tear phone books in half or bend iron bars. (Normally you can’t do Hercules-style stuff like that with just a straight Body roll, because they’re difficult tasks. You might be able to do it untrained with a penalty, at the GM’s discretion.)

This skill is handy because it gives you a chance to break handcuffs or snap ropes, even in stressful situations. Plus, you can wow the chicks (or the dudes, depending on gender and inclination). The downside is, these muscles are trained for slow, careful, sustained exertion, not fast, explosive movements. They don’t give you any advantage when it comes to punching or kicking. However, if you get someone in a choke, you can make a Feat of Strength roll to make them pass out and/or die one round sooner.

**Nondescript.** (Also known as: Nothingface, Plain Jane, Face In The Crowd, Mr. Nobody, Nebbish) If you take this skill, there is very, very little about your appearance that stands out. You complement your aggressively average features with an uninspiring personal style. You’re not particularly tall or short, not very thin or fat, your eyes are neither beady nor wide and you’re just basically bland.

The first couple times someone sees you, you make very little impression on them (unless you’re doing something noteworthy, like robbing their convenience store). If someone saw you only briefly, they have to roll over your Nondescript skill and beneath their Mind stat when trying to give a description or pick you out of a police lineup. If they fail, the cops (or whomever) gets a helpful description like “Well, he was white . . . no, not real tall. He was wearing a white shirt with a collar and blue jeans. His hair was kind of brown . . . no, didn’t notice his eyes . . . no, no scars or tattoos that I saw . . .”

It goes without saying that you can’t use this skill if you’re wearing a chicken suit, if you habitually dress like Liberace, or if you decide to decorate yourself with multiple nose and eyebrow piercings.

**Voluntary Regurgitation.** (Also known as: Sword Swallowing, You Hid It *Where?*) Most people don’t have a lot of control over their gag reflex: when it happens, it happens. You, on the other hand, can suppress it—or trigger it—at will.

Suppressing the gag reflex is the key to the old carnival trick of sword swallowing. If you make a Voluntary Regurgitation roll, you can safely lower six inches of blade (or broomstick or whatever) into your throat when you throw your head straight back. (This looks pretty impressive, especially since your cheeks

and jaws conceal another two inches of steel.) If your skill is 50% or higher, or if it's your obsession skill, you can even let go and leave the sword there, straight up and down. If you fail the roll when you're working with something sharp, you've nicked yourself for one point of damage; you also start gagging, which means you can't use your Dodge skill until you've taken whatever it is out of your throat.

Suppressing the gag reflex also allows you to completely swallow unusually large objects: the great illusionist Harry Houdini could reputedly swallow objects the size of a large egg or a small potato. Then, by triggering his gag reflex (the other half of this skill) he could bring them up again. Although the object in question is usually somewhat "yucky" when it emerges, it comes up on cue and intact. Houdini used it for handcuff keys and such, but the possibilities for a clever smuggler are boundless.

## Speed Skills

**Alertness.** (Also known as: Jumpy, Trauma Nerves) Normally, PCs roll for initiative and go when their number comes up. GMCs operate under a different set of rules: they always go on their Speed score, either as a failure or a success, depending on how cool that particular GMC is. If you buy the Alertness skill, you can take initiative a little more like a GMC.

Here's how it works. Every combat round, you can decide not to roll for initiative and just take your Alertness score as your initiative instead, and consider your "roll" to be a success. Doing this means you automatically go before everyone who failed. If you take the skill high enough, you may go first almost all the time. The drawback is that your Alertness skill is probably going to be lower than your Speed score, and unless you dump a whole *lot* of points into it, your Alertness success probably won't be as good as some of your rolls. On the other hand, some people are just unlucky rollers with no way around it; this skill is for them. It can also compensate for a lousy hunch (see UA, p. 27).

**Catch.** (Also known as: Mid-air Snag) Very much the converse of Throw, this is a Speed-based skill for special circumstances in which you want to catch an object or person who is thrown or falling. If you take this particular, narrow skill, it does allow you one snappy special effect. You can catch thrown objects *in combat*. Once per round, in addition to any

other action you do, you can catch or bat aside something that was thrown at you (probably a knife, vase, chair, *etc.*) You just have to make a successful roll during the throwing attack. This allows you to avoid damage even if your enemy's attacking throw roll was successful. You can't catch objects that were propelled artificially, like arrows, rocks from a slingshot, or (naturally) bullets. A thrown knife could be caught, but if you successfully roll higher than 30, your character caught it by the blade and took 3 points of damage to his fingers.

**Freakishly Limber.** (Also known as: Double Jointed, Yoga, Contortionist, Rubber Boy) This skill can also be taken under Body, but you can buy it with Speed because it's concerned with moving your body in a controlled, specific fashion. What Freakishly Limber lets you do is contort your body into or out of spaces that are too small for normal people. This lets you go through any aperture as wide as your hips. It's also good for eeling out of chokes, handcuffs, manacles, straitjackets, headlocks and similar hassles.

**Grace Under Pressure.** (Also known as: Steel Nerves, Combat Focus, Do It Now, One-Track Mind) People generally aren't at their best when the shit hits the fan. Once bullets start pinging or fists begin to thud into flesh, the natural human reaction is to be a bit flustered and distracted (to say the least). That's why, in the UA combat rules, it takes two rounds to do most non-combat actions during a fight. However, there are some individuals who can act quickly and decisively, even in a crisis. Sometimes this is due to tremendous composure and self-control; sometimes it's due to a hysterical denial of the danger. In either case, this skill lets you do something in one round that would normally take you two during combat. You just say you're going to do it and roll the skill. If you roll under your skill percentile, you do it in one round less than it would take a normal person. You cannot use this skill multiple times on the same action—you could reduce a three-round action to two rounds, but no further. Be warned: you have to declare your action before you roll, so if you fail the Grace Under Pressure check, you'll be stuck taking the normal amount of time. This skill cannot be used to speed up actions that only take one round—so you can't accelerate your attacks or draw a weapon and use it the same round.

**Throw.** (Also known as: Hurl Object) This is the skill of throwing objects at targets. It's equally useful



for putting a dart in the bullseye and for braining someone with a baseball. Normally, throwing things can be resolved with General Athletics, but if you want a skill based on Speed instead, you can take this one.

## Mind Skills

**Hairy Eyeball.** (Also known as: Sizing Up, The Once-Over) This skill lets you check out someone and get a rough idea of how threatening that person is. While the Notice skill can let you pick up vague impressions (“he looks like a tough fighter,” “his left arm has the awkward hang of someone who isn’t 100% comfortable with a shoulder holster”) this more specialized skill harnesses an instinctive ranking ability. For each successful Hairy Eyeball roll, you can find out if the person you’re looking at has a higher or lower Struggle, Dodge, or General Athletics skill than you, or a higher or lower Speed or Body stat. You can also look at two people and (with a successful roll) gauge which one of them is faster, stronger, or tougher. This skill can never tell how *much* better or worse someone is. It’s very vague, and your GM is making a mistake if she tells you someone’s skill or stat numbers anyhow. Nonetheless, this can be a very useful skill.

**Monkeywrench.** (Also known as: Sabotage) Anyone can wreck something, given enough time and the right tools. You, however, can wreck things very quickly, thoroughly, and (if need be) quietly. While an amateur sent to sabotage a car might slash the tires or bash the windows in, a monkeywrencher knows what common household substances can prevent the car from starting—and which ones completely wreck the engine when added to the gas tank. A successful monkeywrench roll could let you destroy a computer in complete silence, without even turning it on or opening the casing. With a few simple tools, this skill lets you blow fuses in buildings, ruin water pipes, and make pretty much any small electrical or mechanical gadget go haywire. (Its effectiveness against supernatural mechanisms like clockworks is up to the discretion of individual GMs.)

**Savvy.** (Also known as: Street Smarts, Office Etiquette, *etc.*, depending on the type of Savvy.) Savvy means you know how to behave in a certain milieu or social environment. When you take this skill, you have to pick a specific area of expertise. Examples might be: Pub Savvy, Office Savvy, Ship Savvy, Jailhouse Savvy, *etc.*

When you’re in that setting, you know the right way to act and how to get things done. For instance, someone with Pub Savvy would be a good pool player, know how to mix a decent martini, know how to identify a fake ID, or tell when a drunk is going to make trouble. Someone with Office Savvy would know how to find files quickly, fix the copy machine, and identify the office gossip. Someone with Jailhouse Savvy could pick out tough guards, tell you the consequences of a snitch jacket, figure out which big-house jobs are the best ones to get, and know how to make booze on the radiator.

A large part of Savvy is just talking the talk and knowing the etiquette, but it also covers a familiarity with the small skills and tasks needed in a particular place and circumstance.

## Soul Skills

**Acting.** (Also known as Thespianism, Roleplaying, Imposture) This skill can be taken instead of Lie, or in addition to it.

Acting is a form of lying, but it’s specialized: it means taking on a role, acting like a completely different person. The difference is a strong and peculiar form of make-believe that almost convinces the actor. There are fine actors out there who can’t lie when they’re “themselves” but who can tell impenetrable whoppers *when they’re in character*. The catch is, the whopper has to be something their character believes.

Take, as an example, an actor who also happens to be a staunch Democrat. This card-carrying member of the ACLU is going to have a hard time saying “those welfare mothers should be tossed out on the street” in a convincing manner when he’s dressed normally and with people who know him. But if he takes the time to psych himself up and get into character as a reactionary right-winger—possibly by dressing up in blue suit and power tie—he’ll be able to passionately argue that welfare should be gutted until the cows come home.

If you’re still confused about the difference between Acting and Lie, just remember this: lying is when *you* say something that isn’t true. Acting is when you pretend to be a whole different person.

**Bully.** (Also known as: Push You Around, Blowhard, Loudmouth) This is the skill of yelling at people until they cave in. It’s comprised of equal parts arrogance, insensitivity, and endurance. If you don’t care



what your victim thinks about you, it can be a good way to get people to do what you want.

Bullying is the other side of the Charm skill coin. Some people who can't be Charmed can be Bullied—usually petty tyrants who are used to knuckling under to abuse and sneering at people who try to be nice to them. On the other hand, some people (usually people in with genuine authority or people who are accustomed to violence) can't readily be bullied. To even attempt to use this skill on someone who's got 3-5 hardened points in the Violence gauge of the Madness Meter, you have to have a weapon in your hand. This skill simply doesn't work on anyone with six or more Violence hardened points.

**Common Sense.** (Also known as: Practical, Down to Earth) This is the skill of instinctively curbing yourself when you're about to do something stupid. The rules for this are a little odd: the player whose character has this skill never activates it; only his fellow players can do so. If another player in your group is about to do something stupid when your character isn't around, or is doing something that your character can't easily prevent, usually you have to suck it up and wince as they get pimplapped by bitter reality. However, if that foolish character had Common Sense, you'd at least have a chance of commenting on their foolhardiness.

If another player's character has Common Sense and is about to do something stupid, you can pass a note to the GM asking for a Common Sense check. The GM rolls it, and if it's successful, *then* you can tell the player why you think the character is doing something dumb. You can only do this after the player has stated that his character is *doing* the action: otherwise, seeing you pass the note might make him reconsider.

*Example:* The PCs' New Inquisition cell has been identified and targeted by two car bombs in the last six months. When one of the PCs gets into his car, another player might decide it would be Common Sense for him to check the car for explosives first, even if the character's player didn't think to do it. The player passes a note to the GM, who rolls the driver's Common Sense. If it succeeds, the other player can tell the driver's player, "You might want to look for any suspicious ticking bundles." Keep in mind that the player

may also choose to ignore your warning. It's not your character, after all.

Some gaming groups have a higher tolerance for table talk than others. If your group is habitually advising each other already, that's fine; you can opt not to use this skill, or the GM can do the rolling and advising when appropriate. In either case, some GMs may allow Common Sense to be used a limited number of times per session, just to keep things from being bogged down.

**Reputation.** (Also known as: Street Cred, or Notorious Hardcase, or Pillar of Virtue, depending on the type of Reputation you pick.) Reputation is a very specific skill in two ways. First off, you have to pick the type of reputation you have: are you known for being a gentle sweetheart, a ruthless businessman, or a vengeful psychotic? Secondly, you have to pick the subculture in which you have that reputation. It could be "the Hell's Angels," or "the suburb I grew up in," or "the Seattle occult underground" but it has to be pretty narrow. If you want your reputation to be mainstream nationwide, it costs *five times* as many points to buy this skill starting out; but a nationwide reputation among, say, ham-radio operators would cost the normal amount. As for developing it in play, you spend experience points as usual, but your national reputation will also depend on how you present yourself to the national media.

Note that it's possible to have more than one reputation. In your apartment building you may be The Helpful Neighbor, while your city's C&W bars all know you as The Surly Drunk.

When you meet someone from the appropriate subculture, roll your Reputation skill. If it's a success, they've heard of you. If you have more than one Reputation in the same subculture (even contradictory ones), roll both. If both succeed, the individual is leaning towards believing the Reputation on which you rolled higher.

Reputations can almost always cut both ways. While being known as A Hell of a Good Guy may be useful most of the time, some people are going to hear that and peg you as a sucker who's easy to push around.



## Appendix B: Car Chases

### Gunfights are a staple of the action-movie

genre, and they've become a core element of RPGs as well. There are countless systems for simulating gunfights, ranging from the meticulous to the hyperbolic. But what about that *other* basic element of action movies? How about some guidance for the action trope that puts the “move” back in “action movie”?

What about the car chase?

I have a theory: gaming evolved (as all students of the form are aware) from miniatures simulation rules. Minis rules for gun combat are solidly established, but (I daresay) car chases are less so. Sure, there was the classic *Car Wars*, but that was about it as far as I can recall. (Actually, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* had fairly extensive car-chase rules.) It's not easy to simulate all the things that can happen in a car chase, especially a cinematic car chase—which depends on the unexpected.

On the other hand, games don't *have* to be simulations. I think that's why car chases have been downplayed more than roleplayed: people had this pernicious notion that a car chase should be true to life. Instead, I say (for *Unknown Armies* at least) that it should be true to fiction.

That's why you *won't* find a complicated set of charts here describing how you can randomly determine which part of your car stopped working when you jumped a curb. What you get instead is a big list of ideas: ways you can make a car chase as exciting as a gunfight.

Now, there are all kinds of car chases depicted on TV and in movies, ranging from the slapstick (watch a Roger Moore Bond flick for examples) to the realistic (*Bullitt*) to the melodramatic (Jackie Chan's *Crime Story*). In keeping with UA's tone, we're going to lean towards the latter end of the scale.

### How To Run It

I'll try to keep the mechanics of the car chase simple: basically, the driver of each vehicle involved makes a Drive roll every round, starting with the lead vehicle and going backwards. Passengers in each vehicle can try to cast spells, shoot guns or do whatever—that's covered later. We'll start with the drivers.

### The Head Start

The lead car has a head start—pretty much by definition. It's up to the GM to determine just how far ahead the lead car is. I recommend two to three car-lengths if their head start was slender, up to eight if they have a big advantage. Any time a car is ten or more lengths behind the car it's following, that car has been shaken and can no longer pursue. (To put this in terms of distance, a length is about ten yards if you're in city traffic. On a highway or back road, it could be a lot longer, depending on the light, terrain, and weather conditions. Basically, a length is an abstraction, but when you've got ten of them between you and your pursuer, you've gotten away. Clear?)

As noted, you start each round with a Drive roll. Each round that you fail this initial roll, you drop back a length. You get one length closer to the people behind you, and one farther away from the people ahead of you.

### Hazards

You may have to make more than one Drive roll each round, however; after all, this isn't a nice clean track like the Indy 500. You could be driving through red lights, mud, deep water, parking meters, whatever. These things are all known as hazards. Your GM can throw one of these at you any time she thinks the car chase is getting boring. To be fair, she should also pitch them at your quarry (or your pursuers, if you're the ones being followed). Some GMs like to roll for the hazards faced by GMC drivers, others just decide to have them fail or succeed depending on the plot or what's dramatic at the moment. If you don't know what else to do, use the GMC driver's Speed stat modifier—if it's an (F), they blow the hazard; if it's an (S), they cruise through.

If your GM calls for a hazard roll and you fail it, you automatically drop back a length. If the hazard is particularly nasty, you may be out of the chase altogether. However (again, in the interest of fairness), hazards that can stop you in your tracks should be easier to avoid, unless you've done something completely stupid and the hazard is your own fault. (“I'll bet we can catch up if we take a shortcut down that alley!” “You mean the one that says ‘No Outlet?’”)

### Risks

One way to shorten the gap (obviously) is for the pursuer to succeed in the initial Drive roll the same

round that the lead car fails it. However, it's possible for the distance to increase or decrease even if both make their roll. (If both fail, the gap stays about the same.) One way to do this is to get an OACOWA or a matched success when your competitor only got a normal success. But how often is that going to happen? (Answer: about one success in ten.) No, the more reliable (?) way is to take chances.

Once per round, if you succeeded at your first Drive roll, you can go balls-out and take a chance. Once you succeed at the first roll, you tell the GM that you're going to go for it. *You must describe what risk you're taking in order to catch up.* It's no fair to just say, "I'm driving faster," and you can only use each maneuver one time per car chase. Some example maneuvers would include:

- "I'm running a red light."
- "I'm going to lunge into the oncoming lane for about ten feet to get past this truck."
- "I'm jumping my motorbike onto the sidewalk."
- "I'm going to sideswipe that Escort out of the right lane and shoot up there."
- "I'll drive my motorcycle *between* those two big semis, right up the lane marker."

Once you do that, you make a second Drive roll. If you succeed at this roll, you gain a length on your quarry. If you fail that drive roll, however, you not only don't gain, you lose the effect of your first success—meaning you drop back a length.

As a general rule, GMCs should only take this kind of risk if they're in real trouble or if the gap is at nine lengths and they want to go to ten.

## Insane Risks

If you're really far behind, or if you've just gotten some kind of magickal edge, you may want to take an insane risk. The rules for this are the same as for normal risks, but you have to come up with something really impressive (and certifiable) to gain ground, such as:

- "I'll jump my car over the barrier onto the highway, go the wrong way, and then get off ahead of him by driving the wrong way up the on-ramp."
- "I'm going to tilt my motorbike onto its side, slide *under* the tanker truck, and catch up lost ground while everyone else is cut off."
- "I take the turn at maximum speed so that my car

goes up on the two driver's-side wheels, then maneuver it onto the sidewalk and get the passenger wheels on the front of the building, so that I'm driving along the sidewalk at a 45 degree angle."

When you make this risk roll, you only use *one half* of your normal Drive skill, rounding down. Add any magick bonuses after you've split the skill, and you can still flip-flop if it's your obsession skill. If you fail this roll, you've wrecked your car, you're out of the race, and you're probably badly hurt as well. But if you succeed, you leap five lengths forward. (Taking insane risks may allow Entropomancers to charge up—if they're driving.)

## Ramming & Roadblocking

Once a pursuer catches up alongside (that is, the number of lengths is zero), it becomes a question of making the other car stop. There are basically two ways to do this: ramming and roadblocking.

A roadblock maneuver is one where you get ahead of the car you were chasing and position your car so that they have no choice but to either ram you or go off the road. If they opt to ram, they stop, and the people in both vehicles take damage as described in UA, p. 62. If they go off the road, the results depend on where you are. If you're on a highway or in the city, they probably just stop (and a gunfight or foot chase may begin). If you're on a bridge or a causeway, they may plummet to their doom. Either way, the car chase has ended. To execute a roadblock, you have to get a length *ahead* by using the normal chase rules; either succeed when they fail, or get a match, or take a risk.

If you're fed up with the racing rules, you can just try to ram. You can ram from behind or from either side. When you ram, you don't have to make an additional Drive roll, but your opponent does. If he fails, he drops back a length. If he makes it, you're still side-by-side. You can only ram your opponent once per round, and only if there are no lengths between you. You may ram on the same round that you narrow the gap to zero, however.

## Passengers

Since PCs tend to be social types who operate in groups, it's quite likely that there will be some passengers along for the ride. They'll probably want to try to influence the car chase, usually by shooting guns or casting spells.

If they go the magick route, just resolve things normally. Casting a spell in a car is little different from casting it in the middle of a fistfight.

Guns work a little different. In a car chase, you usually can't shoot directly at the people in the other car unless you're willing to reduce your Guns skill by 30% for the attempt or there are no lengths between your cars. (That is, you can shoot normally if you're alongside.)

Otherwise, you can only shoot at the car itself and hope for the best. To do this, just roll your Guns skill. If you get a matched roll, you got lucky and hit someone in the car, doing damage normally. If you get an OACOWA, you hit the driver and did maximum damage for your handgun. Nice shootin', Tex.

Most of the time, however, you're just going to be pinging bullets through the car. If you roll a 20 or under, your bullet just did cosmetic damage—blew out the windshield, knocked off a rearview mirror, hit the bumper, *etc.* If you rolled higher than a 20, your shot distracted the driver, creating an immediate hazard for the target car. The more hazards you create for him in a round, the more likely he is to flub one and drop back a length.

Then there are those great maneuvers from action movies where somebody jumps from one moving car to another. Unless you have a relevant skill (like Suicidal Stuntman, for example), you have to roll between 20 and your General Athletics skill. Failing at such a jump is bad news indeed, because you wind up as a long red smear on the pavement. Your GM should roll one die for every 10mph your car is traveling, and assemble the highest two-digit number she can. Good luck.

## How To Describe It

There you have the mechanics for how to drive, shoot, ram, and race. That's the bare bones of an interesting car chase. Here comes the meat.

The exciting element of car chases in movies is The Unexpected. It's crucial for GMs to come up with unexpected events, danger, and scenery for their car chases; otherwise, it just becomes an exercise in dice rolling. This is why PCs can only take risks to catch up if they think of a unique and clever maneuver to cut the distance.

Luckily for everyone concerned, car chases are unlikely to happen every game session, so that gives both the GM and the players some time to think up

hazards and maneuvers respectively. Just to make things simpler for the GM (who's outnumbered, after all), I'm including a list of twenty sample hazards to throw at players during car chases. You'll want to add your own, of course. Use your imagination, but keep it appropriate to the tone of your personal game. One hint: car chases don't take place in a vacuum. A standard car chase isn't likely to be as exciting as a car chase in a thunderstorm, a blizzard or a tornado . . .

1. **In the city:** The car chase suddenly runs over wooden sawhorses and into the middle of a neighborhood ethnic festival. Depending on the community, this festival could involve firecrackers, elaborate costumes (Mardi Gras outfits and those paper dragons the Chinese use to celebrate the New Year are particularly fun), tables of food, or floats. Failure just means you're slowed down and maybe have a decorative banner trailing from one of your rear wheels.
2. **In the city:** A phone crew or (better) a power crew is working on the high wires. If this hazard isn't avoided, the driver has rammed or side-swiped a cherry picker. A technician falls twenty feet and breaks his leg. (Could call for a Violence or Self check for the driver.)
3. **In the country:** A construction sign that says "One Lane Bridge. Expect Delays." Each car has to either make a hazard roll to jump over the creek or get stuck waiting for the other cars to drive over the bridge, meaning a fast braking maneuver and possibly a pile-up.
4. **In the winter:** An icy patch. If you fail your roll, you skid and drop back a length. If you roll over 90 and fail, you do a donut spin and lose two lengths turning your car all the way around.
5. **In the country:** A blank signpost that used to warn about a sharp turn. Failing the hazard roll drops you back a length as you go off the road into a muddy (but shallow) ditch, a cornfield, or whatever.
6. **Anywhere:** A Chicago-style bad driver who refuses to let anyone pass and who tries to cut you off. He also honks, yells, and gestures. Failing this hazard roll means you had to brake suddenly when he wedged himself into your lane.
7. **Anywhere:** An Iowa-style bad driver who has the cruise control set at the speed limit and is driving down the middle of two lanes. Failing this hazard means you've been stuck behind him briefly and dropped back a length.



8. **Anywhere:** A roadside accident complete with broken glass, ambulance, and police cars. Some of the cops may choose to give chase.
9. **In the city:** City park. If the lead car fails this hazard, the chase goes through the park. Nothing happens immediately, but for the next two or three rounds, everyone in the chase has at least one hazard per round dodging joggers, avoiding statues, and jumping over fountains.
10. **In the country:** A road through a densely wooded forest preserve. The road twists and turns with the contours of the hilly terrain, and a failed roll means swerving off the road and driving through a series of low, overhanging branches. Drop back a length.
11. **In the city:** An alley between two buildings suddenly narrows. Rolling successfully lets your car squeeze through, scraping up both sides in a shower of sparks, breaking off the door handles and mirrors, and leaving the doors crumpled shut. (You'll have to climb out the windows.) Failing leaves you just plain stuck, though a rear-end collision by the next car may pop you out.
12. **In the city:** You turn a corner to see a garbage truck dawdling along in front of you. If you don't make your roll, you slam on your brakes and rear-end it. The damage is negligible (one die, ignoring anything over five), but all future driving rolls are at -10% until you clean the sticky, oily dumpster gravy off your windshield or break the safety glass out entirely.
13. **Anywhere:** Gigantic pothole. If you avoid it, all well and good, but if you hit it, you drop a length as your car's undercarriage slams into the pavement and you make a slight skid. Everyone in the car bounces up and hits their head on the ceiling; all passengers lose their actions that round.
14. **In a rainstorm:** Lightning strikes nearby. All drivers make rolls, with those who fail dropping a length.
15. **In the country:** A deer darts out onto the road. Drivers get a +20% bonus to their skill when trying to dodge this hazard, but if you strike, the car definitely stops. A driver who fails this roll makes a rank-2 Violence stress check as the deer crashes into the windshield and sprays blood in its death throes.
16. **In the city:** Slow-moving pedestrian in the street—could be a senior citizen, someone in a wheelchair, or just someone gawking and motionless.

Drivers get a +30% bonus to their skill, but failure at this roll is a rank-4 Helplessness stress check and a rank-3 Violence check as the innocent bystander gets clobbered. I'll leave the legal consequences up to the GM—though having the police chasing the PC down on a manslaughter and reckless-driving charge can be an interesting sideline.

17. **In the city:** Congested traffic. The only way around is to go through a parking lot. A failed roll drops you a length as you sideswipe a dumpster or bottom out on a speed bump.
18. **Anywhere:** Railroad crossing with a train bearing down. If you're in the lead you can either make this into an insane risk—roll half of your Drive skill and try to gain five lengths—or you can take a normal hazard, make a hard turn, and start racing parallel to the tracks. If you can gain three lengths in your next two rounds, you can get ahead of the train and make a risk roll to cut across the tracks. If you succeed at all that (basically making four successful Drive rolls in the next two rounds, with no failures), you can get on the other side of the tracks with the train between you and your pursuer.
19. **In the country:** Tire blowout. Even if you succeed at this roll, you can no longer take risks to gain ground. You can still take insane risks, however.
20. **Cops:** After all, car chases are several kinds of illegal. These guys have radios, guns, helicopters, the advantage of numbers, and if they get your license plate you could be in all kinds of hell. Plus you may end up on *World's Scariest Police Chases*.

## Appendix C: Dossiers

### What follows is a bunch of files on people

the New Inquisition has monitored or interacted with in the past. These dossiers are all at D-Level clearance, so any TNI character can look at them. A blank form is also included at the back of the book so you can create your own files. Note that few dossiers mention where these individuals live, so you can locate them where you need them. If your PCs are not members of TNI, or are actively antagonistic, it can be an interesting experience to acquire your own file from your enemies . . .

DOSSIER ILLOS BY DENNIS DETWILLER

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z



**NAME:** Justine Anander

**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** Originally, Justine was named Jeanette Appleton. She has been known to go by the names Annette Stapleton and Brittany Stewart

**BIRTH DATE:** 2/2/65

**GENDER:** F

**WEIGHT:** 145 lbs.

**HEIGHT:** 5'11"

**HAIR:** Black, but frequently dyed red

**EYES:** Hazel

**RACE:** White

**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** "Born to Raise Hell" tattoo on left hip

**PROFESSION:** Cabalist; ex-TNI

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Justine Anander has no mystic powers.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** While her full psychological files are available upon request, a brief overview here can suffice for most purposes. Justine Anander has the appetites of a sybarite, wedded to a keen and intuitive mind. Her acting abilities are remarkable, especially when coupled with a powerful insight into the expectations and desires of those around her. She is easily able to reflect back what most people expect or want to hear. This mirroring ability masks an elitist contempt for the general run of humanity, whom she considers timid and unimaginative—little better than sheep. In one interview she said that most people "only live for 5% of their life." She is a driven and extreme personality. Despite her charming demeanor, she should not be underestimated.

In her tenure with TNI she was severely injured during an encounter with a being or mystic of unknown origin. As a consequence of this encounter, she has developed a minor phobia of shadows and darkness, preferring that her environs be brightly lit at all times. Therapy at the hands of Dr. Kaiyo Atsui alleviated this fear somewhat, so it is (unfortunately) no longer debilitating.

**HISTORY:** Justine Anander was the first female in her family to go to college; indeed, she was the first female in three generations to avoid teenage pregnancy. Once she obtained her law-enforcement degree in an accelerated two-year program (courtesy of ROTC money and a track scholarship), she entered the DEA, where she had a successful seven-year career culminating in two undercover operations. By happenstance it was discovered that she was on the payroll of a Colombian drug lord, who was using her to protect his own people and arrest his rivals. She was arrested and escaped while out on bail. TNI became her new employer in 1995.

In 1997 she was sent to infiltrate the Sect of the Naked Goddess. Initially she made a great deal of progress, and some of her early dossiers remain on file. She began expressing doubts about the validity of TNI's approach to other members of her team after five months in the Sect. Early in 1998 she informed her team leader that she was leaving TNI because she could no longer resolve the conflicts between her loyalty to the Naked Goddess and her employment by TNI. Her team leader tried to persuade her to remain with TNI, but she refused. She has served the Naked Goddess ever since. We do not know if she has revealed her former allegiance to her new masters.

**NOTES:** Her team leader has consistently argued that Justine was brainwashed by the Sect. He has advocated a kidnapping and deprogramming attempt, even to the point of volunteering his team for the assignment. The command structure is taking this notion under advisement. Personally, I feel the team leader in question is too emotionally attached to the subject and would be a liability in any such extraction attempt.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

**NAME:** Neal Brinker**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** None**BIRTH DATE:** 9/20/73**GENDER:** Male**WEIGHT:** 147 lbs.**HEIGHT:** 5'11"**HAIR:** Brown**EYES:** Brown**RACE:** White**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** Gunshot scar on left side, above the floating rib**PROFESSION:** Sales clerk/petty thief

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Neal Brinker is an adept of undetermined power level. He has achieved substantial mystic effects in the past, generally involving the manipulation of causality; when confronting him, expect him to be preposterously lucky, and expect everything to go wrong for you. In addition, he has shown the ability (and inclination) to do severe, direct damage with paranormal energies. He should only be approached with extreme caution. If located, do not approach before *immediately* informing your safe house of his location.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** Not a great deal is known about Brinker. Initially he seemed to be an unimportant, minor mystic figure, but recent events and divinations indicate that he may be in a position of substantial importance. He has shown himself resourceful, dangerous under fire, and remorseless in the pursuit of his goals.

**HISTORY:** Brinker appeared to be a classic underachiever—working as a sales clerk, barely got his high school diploma, in and out of trouble with the law for petty theft and joyriding. He studied entropomancy under Daniel McKay (deceased) and seemed to be of little importance until he reacted violently to a standard TNI investigation team. He was shot while fleeing, and later eluded the same team while escaping from a hospital. His current whereabouts are unknown.

**NOTES:** He is possibly in possession of a lottery ticket worth \$23 million. **It has not yet been redeemed.** He has also shown an interest in the Naked Goddess Sect in the past; an alliance between Brinker and the Sect is to be avoided at all costs.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**NAME:** Richard Dederer**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** None**BIRTH DATE:** 1/13/71**GENDER:** Male**WEIGHT:** 240 lbs.**HEIGHT:** 5'10"**HAIR:** Brown**EYES:** Green**RACE:** White**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** Strawberry birthmark on left shoulderblade**PROFESSION:** Laborer

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Richard Dederer appears to be a natural sensitive. In childhood he was diagnosed as a paranoid and fantasy-prone personality because of his many "imaginary" friends and enemies. It was not until adulthood that he learned to exercise some degree of control over these spirits.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** Richard is insecure, impractical, and detached from reality. His IQ is in the low 90s. His extreme psychic sensitivity resulted in early institutionalization. Later he was released with a heavy lithium prescription, which he no longer takes. At one point he was diagnosed as some kind of idiot savant, but this was clearly the result of spirit hosting. This goes for a onetime diagnosis of multiple personality disorder as well.

In short, Richard Dederer is a not-particularly-bright individual who sees mystic beings. These beings have an objective reality, but because others lacked his extraordinary senses, he was institutionalized and drugged for many years. His development is probably permanently arrested as a result.

**HISTORY:** Dederer was institutionalized at the age of 14 and released when he was 18. He's had a few scrapes with the law since his release (shoplifting in 1992, and a scuffle in a supermarket in 1994), but nothing serious.

**NOTES:** He's clearly unsuitable for recruitment to TNI, but we should keep an eye on him so that no one else takes advantage of his gifts.





**NAME:** Unknown

**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** The Freak

**BIRTH DATE:** Unknown

**GENDER:** Other

**WEIGHT:** Varies

**HEIGHT:** Varies

**HAIR:** Varies

**EYES:** Varies

**RACE:** Varies

**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** The Freak has a raspy voice.

**PROFESSION:** Unknown

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** The Freak clearly has a great deal of experience and power with the body-shaping discipline known as epideromancy. He/She/It routinely reshapes its entire body, and rarely shows signs of the injuries required to power such gross modifications. Its strength and reaction speed are well beyond human norms. It has used its magick to rip people to shreds.

We suspect that it possesses one (or more) powerful artifacts which are used to augment its already substantial power.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** Little can be said for sure, but one suspects that an individual driven to undertake frequent, painful metamorphoses is driven by some personal uncertainty or self-loathing. A tremendous willingness to inflict gruesome harm on others (which the Freak has demonstrated) is consistent with such self-loathing.

**HISTORY:** The Freak has been around since at least 1985. In 1996, it killed a six-person TNI team (The Silent Majority). Later that year it succeeded in getting into Alex Abel's presence and nearly killed him before it was driven off by his bodyguards. Since that time Maureen Greeley has brokered a "cease fire" between us and it; in fact, it has agreed to perform mercenary feats for us on occasion. Nonetheless, it should not be considered an ally.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

**NAME:** Daphnee Lee**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** Daphnee Cooper (her married name; Lee is her maiden name)**BIRTH DATE:** 8/8/67**GENDER:** F**WEIGHT:** 165 lbs.**HEIGHT:** 5'9"**HAIR:** Black**EYES:** Black**RACE:** Black**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** Appendectomy scar**PROFESSION:** Videographer and cabal leader

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Daphnee Lee is the first and (presumably) most powerful of the adepts known as pornomancers. While little is currently known about the abilities and limitations of this school, it is clear that they have a great deal of power for psychological effects. Like all of her followers, Daphnee Lee should only be approached in numbers. When approaching her, be aware of your allies, and of yourself; any unusual or inappropriate urges or impulses are almost certainly the result of pornomantic tampering.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** While it would be easy to dismiss Ms. Lee as a "man-hating feminazi," such stereotyping is dangerous and inaccurate. While the doctrines of her religion stress female images and empowerment, her bodyguard is male and men are welcome to work with her sect.

She was divorced in 1996, not long after her religious epiphany. She has had no contact with her husband since that time. People who knew her as Daphnee Cooper described her as "quiet" and "glum." This hardly sounds like the Daphnee Lee we know today; if she has undergone a major personality change, she may be erratic and unpredictable.

Many religious fanatics are exceptionally self-righteous and confident, and Lee is no exception. While this makes her difficult to deal with, a dangerous overconfidence could be played to our advantage. For now, however, a policy of waiting and observing has been adopted.

**HISTORY:** Born in '67, married in '86, divorced in '96. She has been a videographer in the adult-entertainment industry from 1988 to the present. Currently she runs a small distribution and production house called Pagan Video.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**NAME:** Alicia Millborough**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** Sister Alice, Alice Starbright**BIRTH DATE:** 5/6/71**GENDER:** F**WEIGHT:** 130 lbs.**HEIGHT:** 5'9"**HAIR:** Blonde**EYES:** Blue**RACE:** Caucasian**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** None known**PROFESSION:** Itinerant preacher

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Only recently have we acquired concrete knowledge about plutomancy, the discipline followed by Alicia Millborough. Ms. Millborough is definitely an experienced and powerful plutomancer. However, her own personal quirks prevent her from using her powers to their fullest extent, as explained in her psychological profile.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** Alicia Millborough is thoroughly dedicated (one is tempted to say "indoctrinated") to a Christian mindset. While one might be tempted to dismiss a plutomantic preacher as a fraud looking for quick bucks, in her case this would be a grave error. I do not doubt the depth of her faith, and I believe she considers her powers a gift of the holy spirit to be used in the pursuit of a Christ-like life. She really does give the money she receives to charitable causes—primarily famine relief. I find it interesting that she avoids more politically "hot" issues like abortion, sticking only to those which are not controversial.

Most people who meet her describe her as "saintly" or "otherworldly." Occasionally the word "naïve" is used, but I would strongly caution against underestimating this woman. Her ministry is popular, generating a cash flow that keeps her at the peak of her powers. There is anecdotal evidence about her harsh and, indeed, deadly dealings with "Satan's minions"—specifically, a coke-addicted and delusional epideromancer.

**HISTORY:** Little is known about Alicia's early life. One expert has definitely identified her accent as Georgian (that's the Georgia in the U.S., not the one in Russia), but her speech has been changed enough by her life on the road that a more exact identification was not possible.

If one believes the stories she tells during her revivals (which are consistent in their general outlines, if not their details) she was raised by a prestigious family whose waning fortune made her obsessed with money. She was willing to do *anything* to get her family back on its fiscal feet, including making a "deal with Satan." (At least, that's what she says.) The price of Satan's favor (according to her) was the life of her husband and baby daughter. Then she had a vision from Christ, who told her that money was the root of all evil, and that it could only be purified by donating it to the needy. Since that time she's traveled, raising money for the desperate and destitute.

**NOTES:** When approached by agents of TNI she was adamant in her refusal to become involved, and even threatened them with violence. The agents in question wisely backed off, judging her to be quite capable of doing harm to those who provoke her. It's deemed unlikely that she will align herself with any other faction. There has been discussion about attempting to direct her against the Sect of the Naked Goddess, but so far no action has been approved.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**NAME:** Dugan Nunn**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** Douglas Noon, David Norland**BIRTH DATE:** 1/14/52**GENDER:** Male**WEIGHT:** 200 lbs.**HEIGHT:** 5'11"**HAIR:** Blonde/Grey**EYES:** Blue**RACE:** Caucasian**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** Birthmark on left side of neck; appendectomy scar**PROFESSION:** Publisher**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Dugan Nunn has no known connection to the paranormal.**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** Dugan Nunn is a forceful and aggressive personality. He relishes the use of violence as an exercise of personal power, but is smart enough to restrain himself when it is in his best interests. He is intelligent and has a great deal of willpower. His early criminal record indicates a severe temper, but in recent years he seems to have brought it under control.**HISTORY:** Dugan Nunn was born in Florida and never lived anywhere else until he turned eighteen. By that time he already had a short rap sheet of petty crimes—shoplifting, underage drinking, vandalism—but at the age of eighteen he was arrested for assault after an altercation with a bar bouncer. The judge gave him a maximum sentence, but agreed to suspend it on the condition of Nunn's immediate enlistment into the armed services. Nunn agreed, joined the Navy, and was stationed on a battleship in the Tonkin Gulf.

He served adequately in the Vietnam War, but was discharged dishonorably in 1976. The discharge resulted from his beating of a midshipman with a broom handle, but no criminal charges were pressed.

After his discharge from the Navy, he began working at a gas station, a job he kept for the next seven years. A member of the IAM Temple named Mack Gilbert owned the gas station, and he invited Nunn to join. It was there that he met Randy Douglas, and the three of them (Nunn, Douglas and Gilbert) split off to form the TOSG together. Nunn later married Gilbert's daughter Maude, and when Gilbert died in 1985, Dugan inherited the gas station. At that time an interstate was being built nearby, so he sold the gas station at a profit and started a business publishing TOSG propaganda. This business, True Order Enterprises, provides employment for himself and his wife. Both of them reside with Douglas at the TOSG compound near Miami.

**NOTES:** While in the Navy, Nunn received several marksmanship medals.**Addendum:** A little research turned up some interesting facts about the midshipman Nunn pounded. The kid was the son of a Navy captain who made a big stink, but it also turns out the kid was homosexual, which may explain why Dugan only got a slap on the wrist.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

**NAME:** Dr. Pete Putman**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** None**BIRTH DATE:** 9/5/57**GENDER:** Male**WEIGHT:** 209 lbs.**HEIGHT:** 6'1"**HAIR:** Black**EYES:** Brown**RACE:** Black**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** Scar under chin**PROFESSION:** Anthropology Professor

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** It's not entirely clear when, where, or how Dr. Putman acquired his ability to communicate with "spirits beyond," but he is clearly competent. In the past, he has demonstrated an ability to harass his rivals and enemies with a variety of immaterial beings.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** An intelligent, arrogant, and aggressive individual. He shows a marked tendency to intellectualize his experience and emotions, and takes great pride in his "rational behavior." His high intelligence makes it easy for him to rationalize actions that, when seen in another, Putman might consider petty and vindictive.

**HISTORY:** Putman came to our attention after he began using supernatural means to take revenge on colleagues who had refused him tenure at Washington University. His tenure committee censured him for losing his objectivity on anthropological research expeditions; they also suspected him of using peyote and ebene, even after returning to the U.S. Following his ejection, three people from his tenure committee began to complain about mysterious fatigue, and the other two took long leaves of absence citing "fatigue and mental stress." All five also reported uncanny phenomena such as strange cold spots in their homes, peculiar odors, unexplained wet patches, etc.

**NOTES:** Once we tracked the phenomena to Putman, we offered him a position with TNI. He refused in no uncertain terms and threatened to expose us if we ever bothered him again. We explained to him that we did not take kindly to his ill-considered threats, and once he got out of the hospital he agreed to behave in a respectful fashion. However, periodic surveillance reveals that he has become a handgun hobbyist since his encounter with our operatives. He should be considered armed and dangerous. He is currently teaching at a community college.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q **R** S T U V W X Y Z**NAME:** Coretta Rowlands**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** None**BIRTH DATE:** 11/15/67**GENDER:** F**WEIGHT:** 147 lbs.**HEIGHT:** 5'10"**HAIR:** Black**EYES:** Brown**RACE:** Black**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** Three-inch scar on left forearm.**PROFESSION:** Artist

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Coretta Rowlands grew up immersed in the voodoo culture of Louisiana, but was never fully initiated into its mysteries. For what it's worth, several area voodoo practitioners said that she was too arrogant and headstrong, and that the Loas did not like her.

Rejected by the tradition that had taught her magickal thinking, Coretta turned her attention to other systems of religious thought. She studied anthropology and art for two years at a Louisiana state college before dropping out due to poor grades. One of her professors still remembered her telling him that his statements of fact about New Guinea cargo cults were "wrong" and that if the cargo cultists were doing things the way he described "then they're wrong, too."

Returning to New Orleans, she opened a store in which she sold ritual items and ingredients, along with needlepointed objects she made herself—mostly cushions, dolls, and banners—which she claimed had mystic abilities. Our investigation of her indicates that she does indeed have paranormal powers. Her abilities are specifically keyed to perception and influence with subconscious or pre-conscious states of mind. People in New Orleans have spoken of her ability to "hypnotize" people just by showing them a certain piece of cloth.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** Extremely independent and free-spirited. When offered a position with TNI, she refused politely but stubbornly, insisting that we wouldn't want someone whose primary allegiance was only to herself. She could be considered an ally, but not a particularly valued or trusted one. She did create the magickal therapeutic pillows for TNI, at a considerable dollar cost.

**HISTORY:** See "Mystic Profile," above.

**NOTES:** Her magick seems specifically tied to her objects. It is strongly suspected that she is powerless without them. If a confrontation with her is ever required, the advantage of surprise could be critical. Nonetheless, it is my guarded evaluation that her powers are not overtly destructive or violent.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

**NAME:** Amy Walters  
**KNOWN ALIASES/NICKNAMES:** Water Angel  
**BIRTH DATE:** 2/21/72  
**GENDER:** F  
**WEIGHT:** 100 lbs.  
**HEIGHT:** 5'4"  
**HAIR:** Red  
**EYES:** Brown  
**RACE:** White  
**DISTINGUISHING MARKS:** None  
**PROFESSION:** Court stenographer

**MYSTIC PROFILE:** Amy Walters was one of the first followers of Brad Gerschwitz, aka "Reverend Gabriel Horn." Gerschwitz taught a doctrine of guidance by higher powers. He, and all of his followers, voluntarily allowed themselves to be controlled by these "higher powers" in exchange for "wisdom and guidance." When Gerschwitz was arrested for embezzlement, Amy Walters was arrested with him and charged with resisting arrest. The charges were dropped in return for her promise to get psychiatric counseling.

Other members of Gerschwitz' "flock" called Amy "enlightened" when asked and fingered her as one of Gerschwitz' most promising pupils. Since his arrest in 1996 she has shown no interest in the occult community, but there can be no doubt that Gerschwitz was in genuine communication with intangible entities. Walters may possess similar skills, to some undetermined extent.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE:** Inquisitors on the case described Walters as "nervous, high-strung, and strident." She was a true believer in Gerschwitz/Horn's teachings, which indicates a personality with a strong craving for leadership, possibly stemming from insecurity and a desire to abdicate personal freedom. Running counter to this tendency was a strong streak of stubbornness and suspicion. Once her trust has been won, Walters is likely to be quite loyal, but winning that trust is probably quite a feat.

Walters entered psychiatric care after Gerschwitz was arrested, but we have not made the effort to acquire her doctor's file. The doctor's name is Roberta Jones, and her address is available upon request.

**HISTORY:** Amy Walters was born in the upper peninsula of Michigan, but moved to Detroit with her parents when she was eleven. She didn't like Detroit and moved to her current address after graduating from trade school. She has been employed by her local court system as a stenographer since then. She has never married.

**NOTES:** One of her arresting officers was treated for a broken nose after her struggle, and police unofficially described her as a "hellcat."



# Mission One: Fresh

## Roscoe Hudson took a long, hard suck

on a bottle of Dixie Voodoo beer. He didn't usually buy fancy-ass premium beers, but at the liquor store he'd found himself wanting it—not a good sign.

"Voodoo, what's voodoo? People cuttin' up chickens and shit, dancin' around, getting all gone . . ." He sighed, starting to feel that pressure in his skull from a message coming in. Wouldn't do to force it, might as well just let it come in due time.

He flicked on the radio and winced. Some kind of jive-ass heavy metal crap was playing. Now who left his radio tuned to . . . ?

". . . WYXX, your home for hardcore headbangin' classics. That was Judas Priest singing 'Hell Bent for Leather' . . ."

A sign? Oh, you bet your ass. He twirled the dial, got static, turned it off, and clicked on the TV.

On the screen, Linda Blair blew a mighty gout of pea soup. *The Exorcist*. Roscoe shook his head, turned off the tube, dialed the phone.

"Hello? Yeah, it's Roscoe. I'm getting something. Yeah, I'm pretty damn sure. Got something with possession, maybe a priest involved too. Where? How would I know? Do I look like a road atlas? But whatever this is, it's pretty big. I'd put some people on it. Just shake up the local demon diddlers, see what's going on. Yeah. You too."

Roscoe sat down, sighing, started surfing the channels. "Biography" was doing Gilles de Rais. AMC was showing "Hellcats of the Navy." VH1 had the video of "Hell is for Children." On HBO it was "Angel Heart."

"Shit," he muttered. "We got demons."

## The Initial Problem

As far as the PCs are concerned, this adventure starts when they're handed a list of names. They're told to go check these folks out and see what they're doing. Along with each name is a photograph and a brief dossier. When the PCs ask what's going on (as they almost inevitably will), their boss tells them the following: "We've got some indications that there's trouble brewing with demons somewhere, so we're doing a little shakedown of known demon traffickers. The people on your list have pierced the veil in the past, so we want you to go check 'em out and see if they're doing anything suspicious." If necessary, their controller may also give them a hard look and remind them that they're not to just go in and whack these guys; violence is to be used only when deemed necessary by conservative judgement.

Hand the players the dossiers for Amy Walters, Dr. Pete Putman, and Richard Dederer, plus any other demon users you want to cook up yourself. Here's a GM hint, though: if you include your own dossiers, re-type Richard Dederer's file so that it looks like you made it up yourself. That just might trick your players into concentrating on Amy and Pete for a while.

This initial phase of the adventure, when your PCs are watching and investigating a variety of known demon users, can provide you a great opportunity to introduce them to future antagonists as well as a chance to hook them with plotlines of your own devising. They may even neglect Rick Dederer for a while because they become more interested in one of the other people. This is okay. You can either have Rick's kids be more powerful when the PCs do find them, or you can have the demons carry out their plan of ambushing



PAUL CARRICK



Rick. Then, instead of finding all the kids in one place, the PCs have to find them individually.

Here's what's going on with the people the PCs are asked to check out:

- Dr. Pete Putman is teaching anthropology at the local community college and is dating one of his eighteen-year-old first-year students. (She often sleeps over.) His BMW—from when he worked at the university—is in the shop a lot, and he's hurting for cash. However, other than that there's nothing unusual going on. If he's confronted, he responds with vague warnings and verbal abuse. If physically threatened, he goes for his gun.
- Amy Walters has shaved off all her hair. This includes eyebrows, legs, arms—she's even plucked out her eyelashes, giving her stare a weird lack of depth. Or maybe that's just her. She's sold almost all her furniture except for a futon; her apartment is empty, except for the futon, a desk, a few dishes, and a collection of plain, bland food in the 'fridge. She still dresses normally and wears a wig when she goes to work, but at home she dresses in undyed cotton robes without buttons, and no shoes. Inside her desk is normal paperwork—tax

files, checkbook—but she's cut off her phone service and cancelled her credit cards. If asked, she says that she's attempting to purify herself.

- Richard Dederer has moved out of his apartment in the city (close to the supermarket where he works) and has rented a large, rundown house forty-five minutes away, out in the country. His bank account shows small but frequent influxes of cash over the last eight months—that's how he's paying for the house. Furthermore (if his co-workers are queried or bank statements checked), his grocery purchases seem to have more than doubled during that same time. This despite three separate vacations of a week each over the last nine months. He's told his colleagues at the store that his aunt died and that he had to take care of business, but that she left him some money. Even cursory investigation reveals that this is a lie.

## Trouble Brewing

Hopefully the PCs fix on Richard as the most likely source of trouble, given any combination of not-very-subtle clues (the food, the money, and the new house). Here's what's been happening.



Richard has run afoul of adepts in the past, and one of his demon “friends” told him that magick’s easy to do—once you’re dead and you really know what’s going on. Richard asked, then demanded, that this demon teach him to do magick, but it wasn’t that easy. Even Richard’s weak mind has fallen into certain paths and patterns. He’s too settled in his worldview to understand a new magickal paradigm. What was needed (said his demon buddy) was a mind that was fresh and uncorrupted.

Would it surprise you at all to learn that this particular demon has a secret agenda?

Meet Juno Gill. When she was alive, Juno was a nice lady—kind, self-effacing, a little shy. Unfortunately for Juno, she would have been a lot happier and more effective if she’d been pushy, aggressive, and willing to tell people to get the hell out of her way. At some level she knew this, but she always denied it, ignored it, pushed it away . . . until she was dead, and that silenced voice of aggression leaped out and devoured the rest of her personality like a frog zapping a fly.

Juno wants a second shot—*needs* a second shot, and that’s only going to happen if she takes over a new body. But how to do it? The people most likely to contact a spirit at all were the very ones *least* likely to fall for the standard possession tricks. A nice, easy-to-dominate body would be ideal—but a will that weak would never break through the veil in the first place.

She thought Richard might be just the ticket when he was a young pup, but he got too powerful too soon, thanks largely to the ill-considered attacks of less-patient demons. So Juno went to plan B: cultivating Richard as a link to the living world. For years she’s been playing on his loneliness and feelings of weakness, trying to get him to give her a shot at his brain so she could teach him magick—giving him as much power over the living as he had over the dead. Eventually he agreed.

Richard was dismayed to find that Juno couldn’t teach him the magick he craved, and Juno was even more dismayed to find that Richard could kick her out of his head at will. On to plan C: get Richard to put her in a suitable young mind.

Plan C finally worked, but with a hitch: Richard figured that if teaching one child magick was good, teaching three would be better. Juno is not the only spirit in a human host; Richard has conjured up two other demons and put them into children as well. He may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but Richard knows how to play demons off against each other.

## Richard’s Kids

Richard has acquired three kids from various sources and convinced (or forced) them to let him put “spirits” in their bodies. He feels very protective of these kids (in a creepy, possessive way) and the spirits know he’ll yank them if they do anything too extreme. Two of them (the spirits in Clarice and Rusty) are planning to ambush Richard and kill him, then take over their hosts free and clear. Juno (who is hosted by Janey) will help them if it comes to that, but she’s also done her best to tip off the New Inquisition, hoping they’ll come along and do her dirty work for her.

The following format has been used for the possessed kids. Skills and stats in brackets [like this] belong to the demons and can only be used when the demons are in control.

### Clarice, Aged Four [Diana]

Even before being possessed, Clarice was a messed up little kid. She was removed from her drug-addicted mom’s home by the Department of Human Services, and placed with one of Richard’s co-workers. Richard made a deal with Clarice’s new foster parents: they’d get to keep the checks, he’d keep the kid and would “lend her back” whenever Clarice’s overworked social worker stopped by to check on her. (True fact: Some DHS social workers are responsible for *two hundred* kids or more. So if you think a social worker should notice bad foster care, you’d better hope the DHS in your state has adequate funding.)

On her own, Clarice cries a lot, wets the bed, throws tantrums, breaks things, runs away and hides whenever she can. She’s needy and clingy but also distrustful and suspicious. It’s a pity, because she’s a fairly bright kid—bright enough to understand how crazy the world around her is.

Clarice is playing host to Diana, who died on the Oregon trail during the settlement of the American West. Just as her family entered Colorado, Diana came down with Guillain-Barre syndrome, an illness whose primary symptom is paralysis. She spent over a week immobile, fighting to breathe, before a night in which her blanket fell off her. Unable to tell her family about it, she froze to death.

Diana has spent decades on the other side of the veil waiting for a body so that she can once more move. Now that she’s in Clarice, she’s delighted with her ability to once more interact with the physical world—even just running around and climbing and

## Richard Dederer, Master of Spirits

Richard has spent the majority of his life fighting a war that no one else could see. He has interacted with demons and other spirits ever since he was eight years old. He has been possessed at least a dozen times, and has fought off possession countless times more than that. The demons fear him now, because he understands as much about them as almost anyone on the life side of the veil.

Richard has paid for his knowledge and power, however. So much of his attention has been focused on the demons who menace him that he has about as much experience with the real world as a ten-year-old boy. Ironically, he's often commanded demons to come forth so that he can get their advice about mundane matters.

**Personality:** Sneaky, weak and self-centered.

**Obsession:** The world beyond the veil.

**Wound Points:** 40

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who call him stupid.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) The responsibilities of being a mature adult.

**Noble Stimulus:** Richard feels benevolent and protective towards his "spirit friends."

### Stats

**Body:** 40 (Fat)

**Speed:** 40 (F) (Hesitant)

**Mind:** 44 (Dim)

**Soul:** 90 (Extrasensory)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 30%, Work Long Hours 25%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Guns 25%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Say What Psychiatrists Want To Hear 44%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 15%, Perceive and Control Spirits 90%

**Perceive and Control Spirits:** The power of Richard's soul, unfettered by complicated preconceived notions, is able to actually compel demons to behave differently. Just as a normal possessed person's ideas about a demon may force the spirit to behave "diabolically," Richard's ideas about spirits can similarly shape their actions. The big difference is that Richard can control it through the exercise of will. Because he believes that some spirits are his "friends," they have no choice but to treat him in a friendly fashion. Similarly, when he fights his "enemy" spirits, his belief that he can harm them compels them to feel that they are being harmed.

### Madness Meter

Violence Unnatural Helplessness Isolation Self

0 Hardened 8 Hardened 2 Hardened 3 Hardened 3 Hardened

3 Failed 5 Failed 3 Failed 3 Failed 3 Failed

### Possessions

Richard has a Walther PPK ('cause it's a James Bond gun, after all) which he keeps in the glove compartment of his pickup truck when he's at work, and in his bedside table when he's at home. He only has one magazine (seven rounds).

crawling and touching things. Once she can kill off Clarice's bratty soul and take permanent residence, she'll be perfectly content. (Or so she thinks, anyhow.)

**Personality:** Clarice is a wailing mass of terror. Diana is canny, selfish, and sneaky.

**Obsession:** Clarice has no obsession. Diana is obsessed with remaining in control of Clarice.

**Wound Points:** 30

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Clarice is enraged by men with beards, due to some earlier trauma.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Clarice is terrified by yelling and loud sounds.

**Noble Stimulus:** Clarice is always kind to animals.

### Stats

**Body:** 30 (Small)  
**Speed:** 30 (F) (Toddles)  
**Mind:** 25 (Young) [50 (Crafty)]  
**Soul:** 60 (Pitiful) [50 (Pitiless)]

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 10%, Struggle 10%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, [Guns 25%], Hide 30%, Run Away 20%

**Mind Skills:** [1880s Frontier Savvy 50%], [General Education 10%], Notice 30%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 5%, [Epideromancy 45%], Lie 5%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2[5] Hard	2[10] Hard	3[8] Hard	3[3] Hard	0[7] Hard
3[1] Failed	4[0] Failed	3[4] Failed	4[1] Failed	0[1] Failed

### Notes

Diana has no charges, but the only thing stopping her from hurting Clarice to get them is fear of accidentally killing her host.

## Rusty, Aged Eight [Harlan]

Rusty is Richard's nephew. Richard and his sister were never close, since she's five years older than he is, but she got divorced two years ago and has had a devil of a time taking care of her kids ever since. When Richard offered to take Rusty off her hands for a summer, she was too grateful to think it over carefully.

At first, Rusty thought it was pretty cool at Uncle Rick's. He was allowed to eat whatever he wanted and

do whatever he felt like. He still complained all the time (it's about the only way he knows how to communicate), but he was content. Until the ghosts started talking to him, that is.

Now Rusty is scared shitless, and Richard uses that fear to keep the kid in line. Any time Rusty does something Richard doesn't like, Richard threatens to "put a haunt to him," and the kid straightens right up. Of course, he's started having screaming nightmares, but during the day he keeps out of Richard's hair.

Rusty is playing host to a man named Harlan Moake, whose obsession with gambling ruined his life but defined his afterlife. Harlan is pissed that once he takes over Rusty he's going to have to wait at least a decade before he can start gambling legally, but it's better than nothing.

**Personality:** Rusty is a whining, demanding, scared, and unsatisfied little kid. Harlan is much the same, only grown up and sly.

**Obsession:** Rusty has no obsession. Harlan is obsessed with gambling and chance.

**Wound Points:** 30

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Rusty is enraged whenever someone takes something that belongs to him.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Unnatural) Rusty is afraid of Richard's ghosts. He couldn't say which scares him more: Harlan or some of the really cruel ones Richard has used to torment him.

**Noble Stimulus:** Rusty knows that what's being done to him and the other kids is wrong, and he wants to stop Richard however he can—even if it means risking Richard's anger.

### Stats

**Body:** 30 (Scrawny)  
**Speed:** 50 (Hyperactive)  
**Mind:** 30 (Immature) [50 (Cunning)]  
**Soul:** 50 (Whiny) [60 (Manipulative)]

### Skills

**Body Skills:** Climb 30%, General Athletics 15%, Struggle 10%, [Struggle 30%]

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 50%, [Handgun 30%], Run 15%

**Mind Skills:** [Card Shark 30%], General Education 5% [General Education 20%], Notice 15%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 10%, [Entropomancy 50%], Lie 10%, [Straight-Faced Lie 25%], Whine Until He Gets His Way 50%



### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 [2] Hard	4 [10] Hard	3 [3] Hard	0 [0] Hard	0 [3] Hard
2 [1] Failed	4 [0] Failed	2 [3] Failed	0 [0] Failed	0 [1] Failed

### Notes

Harlan has ten minor charges.

## Janey, Aged 12 [Juno]

Janey is the oldest of the kids and (in some ways) is mature for her age. She was mature enough to run away from home in a fairly decisive and competent way (buying a bus ticket with her parents' credit card number), but she got sidetracked when she missed her bus and met Richard. (From watching TV, Richard knew that bus stations are a good place to hook up with confused, vulnerable runaways.)

Janey is pretty uncomfortable with having Juno in her head some of the time, but Juno is playing her carefully. Thanks to Juno, Janey believes that Rusty and Clarice are in danger from their spirits (which is true). Janey is unwilling to leave them until she feels they're safe, but she's not sure what she can do to help them—unless she learns enough magick to kick out Harlan and Diana. The only way to learn it (of course) is from Juno.

Janey is a sharp kid, but still a kid and still seeing the world through the eyes of a child. She tries to act tough, world-wise, and knowledgeable, but she can't quite carry it off. Juno, on the other hand, is sharper and tougher than Janey can even imagine being.

**Personality:** Janey is a know-it-all pre-teen with a smart mouth. Juno is an ice-water bitch and a past master at head games.

**Obsession:** Juno is obsessed with getting a second chance at life. Janey is obsessed with getting the power she needs to be free.

**Wound Points:** 40

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Janey is enraged by people who try to push her around because she's "just a kid."

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Janey is afraid of mice and other rodents.

**Noble Stimulus:** Janey wants to be her own boss and not need anyone to take care of her.

### Stats

**Body:** 40 (Pre-adolescent)  
**Speed:** 40 (Gangly)

**Mind:** 50 (Bright Kid) [65 (Scheming)]  
**Soul:** 60 (Loudmouth) [70 (Knows Your Weak Spots)]

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Run 20%, Struggle 25%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 20%, [Drive 25%]

**Mind Skills:** General Education 8%, [General Education 20%], Notice 25%, [Notice 50%]

**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Entropomancy 20%, [Entropomancy 50%], Lie 15%, [Tell You What You Want To Hear 50%]

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 [3] Hard	3 [10] Hard	2 [3] Hard	0 [2] Hard	0 [5] Hard
0 [1] Failed	2 [0] Failed	1 [2] Failed	0 [0] Failed	1 [3] Failed

### Notes

Juno has one significant charge and four minor charges. Janey has three significant charges (because she's started gambling her soul by letting Juno have control).

### Possessions

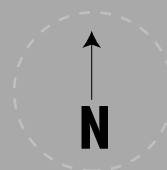
She's got a makeshift knife. One day she found a broken-off sickle blade in the fields. She's covered the broken end with duct tape to make a grip, and has tried to sharpen the point and the edge. It's about eight inches long, but it's only a +3 damage weapon because of its bluntness.

## Richard's Place

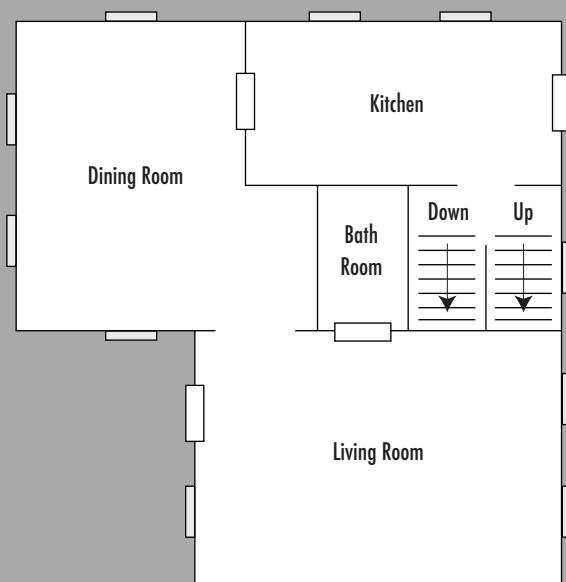
Here's how things are set up: Richard is renting a sprawling, badly run-down house away from the freeways, off a two-lane rural route. It used to be a farmhouse, before the farm went belly up. Richard is renting it while the bank sells off chunks of the farm to the neighbors—the nearest of whom is ten miles away. Trucks and tractors go by on occasion, but not very often.

Richard gets up in the morning, deals with the children as best he can, then sticks demons in them while he goes off to work. To the extent that he's able, he tries to put the demons and the kids' souls in balance so that neither can completely dominate the body. This is how he keeps them down on the farm after they've seen the big city, so to speak: the de-

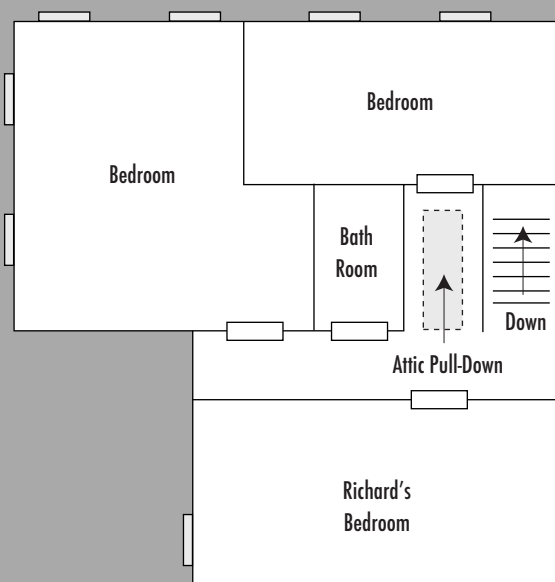
# Farmhouse of the Damned



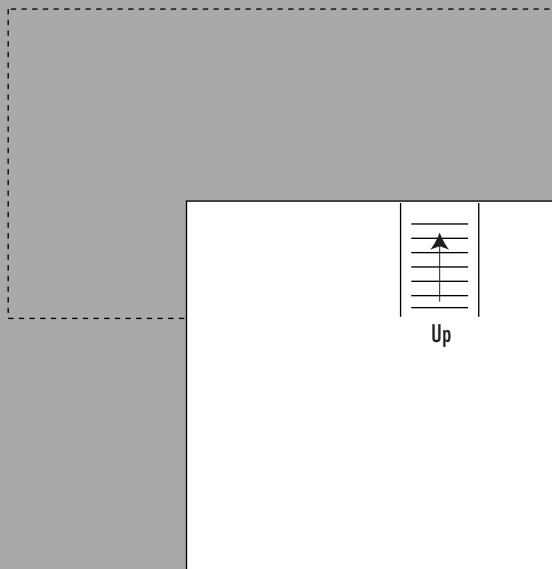
Five Feet



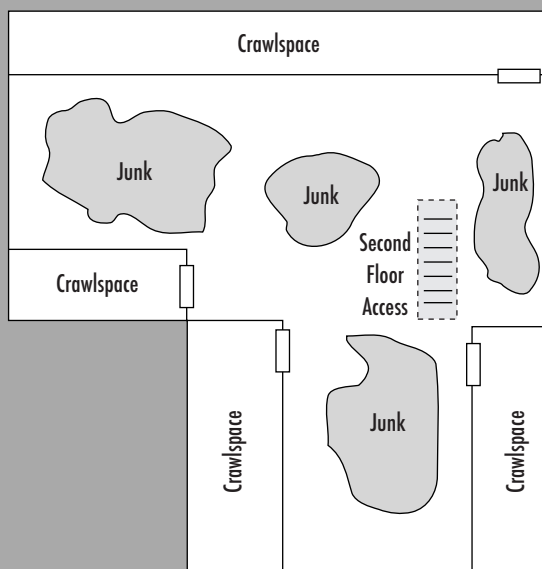
First Floor



Second Floor



Cellar



Attic

mons want to stick around until they get complete dominance, and the kids don't leave because Richard is their best hope for even temporary relief from the demons. When he comes home in the evening, Richard does his best to take care of the kids. At this point he usually puts a little squeeze on the demons to make them dormant for a while, but that depends on his mood and the children's behavior. He often promises them that when they've learned their lessons, the demons will be gone forever, and he tries to buy their affection with cheap toys and fatty snacks.

The farmhouse has no telephone, it's drafty, and it's a terrible mess. Dirty clothes and garbage are piled everywhere (especially junk food and candy wrappers) and the TV is usually on. There's a bed covered with sweat-stained sheets in the downstairs master bedroom, and there are three brightly colored nylon sleeping bags on the floor in front of the television. Toys, dolls, and crayons (most of them dirty, broken, or second-hand) are scattered throughout the house.

One noteworthy lack: there are no knives in the house, and certainly no guns. Richard has done his best to keep dangerous objects away from his charges.

During the day the kids are left to their own devices and generally run around the yard, climb trees, draw pictures, scribble on the walls, break things, watch TV, and try to find trouble.

## When the Cat's Away

If the PCs show up when Richard is at work, a Notice roll lets them see movement in the yard or behind the windows when they're driving up, but the children hide as soon as they see a car. (Richard has told them to do this if anyone shows up, and backed up his demand with potent threats.) Entering the house and calling out has no effect. The children can be found if the house is searched top to bottom, but it's no easy feat.

PCs who decide to search the house can be good for a few fun, creepy tropes. After all, you (the GM) know that the house only contains three kids. All the PCs know is that they saw movement in the home of a known demon trafficker. So ratchet up the tension, especially since there's all these broken toys and creepy drawings scattered throughout the house—but no sign of children.

Clarice has hidden herself under Richard's bed, way up by the headboard. Since Richard keeps a few boxes of crud under his bed, it's quite tricky to find

Clarice. Only give a PC a Notice roll if they specifically say they're looking under the bed—and then only tell them that they hear something breathing softly and that they maybe see the glint of eyes . . .

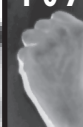
Rusty is hidden out in an old toolshed. The toolshed has a rickety second story requiring a Climb or General Athletics roll to reach. This second floor won't hold anyone who weighs more than 130 pounds; it's already weighed down with all kinds of disused, rust-covered tools and machine parts. (Does everybody have a tetanus shot?) It's a Notice roll to spot Rusty hidden up there, if the PCs check in the toolshed. Again, describe it only as, "You see something up there staring down at you. It's hard to see clearly because there are all these gears, hooks, blades, and other mechanical things in the way . . ."

Finally, there's Janey, who's hidden herself up in a crawlspace in the attic. The stairway up to the attic is the type that pulls down from the ceiling. (Janey likes it up there because neither of the other kids can reach the chain.) Anyone who goes upstairs can make a Notice roll to perceive that the chain is still gently swinging. If the stairs are pulled down and climbed, it's another Notice roll to spot faint footprints in the dust leading to the door of the crawlspace. An exhaustive search of the attic might turn Janey up eventually—or she might watch through a knothole and make a run for the staircase when the PCs are occupied with trunks, boxes, or other crawlspace doors.

Kids who are discovered have about a 50% chance of being actively possessed (that is, the demon is in charge). If Rusty and Clarice are in their right minds, they act like kids—probably screaming, running, bawling, hiding, *etc.* If the PCs treat Janey respectfully, she tells them the straight-up truth about Richard—as she understands it, that is. PCs who talk down to her can expect lots of backchat and sulking, however. If the demons are in charge, they play it by ear but look for a chance to get the drop on the PCs.

Harlan may wait until a PC is halfway up into the second floor, then try to shove a threshing assembly on the PC. This counts as a Struggle attack that cannot be actively dodged, and Rusty gets a +10% bonus to his skill. If the assembly connects, it does +9 damage. He follows up with Blast spells.

A possessed Diana plays it a little more coy: she begs to be picked up by any PC with a gun. If the PC takes her in his arms, she drapes on him (or her) for a



while until the PC is off-guard. Then she tries to take the gun away and shoot the PC with it. When she makes her move, have the PC roll Speed; a failure means Diana has the piece.

Juno is coyest of all. She tells them a highly tainted version of the truth, while waiting for a moment when she can either get the drop on the PCs with a Blast spell, or grab their car keys and take off.

On the other hand, the demons may decide to just play it by ear and see what the PCs do.

## Direct Confrontation

It's also possible that the PCs show up when Richard is taking his leisure at home. If the PCs just drive up to his front door, Richard opens the door a crack to watch them drive up. (You can't really sneak up a mile-long frontage road, unless you drive at night with your lights off.) He has his gun in the waistband of his pants, under his shirt. He tells the kids to go hide, which they do.

If the Inquisitors confront him directly, he's defensive and evasive and insists that he's done nothing. He's reluctant to even let them in the front door, and threatens to call the police. (This is a hollow threat—no phone, remember?) A good shove from someone with Body 60 or above can knock him back from the door, or the PCs may threaten him with guns. Either approach gets them in. If asked about the toys and sleeping bags, he claims they're his. If they continue to push him, he draws on them.

Richard is no match for the average group of Inquisitors, and it's quite likely that he'll die or be subdued. If he survives the fight or is disarmed, he tells them everything—just in time for them to hear his car start up as the kids get away.

That's right: while the PCs are interrogating Richard, Janey sneaks down the stairs and gets his keys from the kitchen. Then she gets Rusty from the tool shed and Clarice from Richard's bedroom. Pausing only to puncture the PCs' tires with her homemade knife, the three of them get into Richard's car and drive away.

All this assumes that the PCs are in a mass group dealing with Richard. If someone guards the car, the kids approach that person and beg him or her to help them “get away from the bad man.” Then, when the PC is off-guard, they open up with the Blast spells. They can also be discovered if someone's searching the house while Richard is being guarded. (Knowing

that someone's looking through his house while he's being watched makes Richard a lot more likely to snap.) This can turn into a scramble for keys, kids, and cars, or possible a car chase.

Something to keep in mind whenever the PCs are in conflict with the kids is that they're *children*. Even a tough crimey bastard is going to have a hard time blowing away a five-year-old little girl. Every attempt to seriously harm the children is a rank-6 Violence challenge. (Attempts to restrain them don't count; attempts to shoot them certainly do.) Furthermore, being attacked by magick from the children is a rank-6 Unnatural challenge (instead of the usual rank-5).

## Sneaking Up

It's possible that the PCs can sneak up on the house. Not easy, but possible. They have to park a mile away along the road and basically crawl a mile through the tall grass around the house, but if they go to that much trouble, they can surround the house and take Richard and the kids completely by surprise.

If they just charge in, guns drawn, Richard goes for his piece while the kids scatter. If the PCs chase the children down, the demons (or possibly Janey) will hit 'em with Blast spells. Janey goes for Richard's keys (which are on a hook in the kitchen) and then for the car, but she doesn't stop to puncture their tires. Richard goes for his gun right away and opens fire.

## Won't Someone Think of the Children?

The previous section probably ended one of two ways: Richard either died or got captured by the PCs, and the kids either got captured (or killed) or they got away.

If Richard survived and is uninjured, the PCs have a perfect way to get rid of the demons: put a gun to his head and say “Get your ass exorcisin', fat boy.” If the kids are also in captivity, the PCs were extremely efficient and can wrap things up right away.

If Richard died, the PCs need to find themselves an exorcist. Father Jose Carillo (see UA, p. 201) might be able to do it—or might not. If you're sadistic, and the PCs just dump the kids with Fr. Carillo, he might *think* he's exorcised them when the demons are still intact. You can then give the PCs a nasty shock later on when one (or more) of the kids shows up again—or just as likely, vanishes.

More reliable bets for exorcism are Amy Walters and Pete Putman. However, neither of them feels par-



ticularly warm and fuzzy towards the New Inquisition. Walters might do it out of sympathy for the kids and a promise of future favors from TNI (including leaving her alone, but not limited to that). Dr. Putman is going to make them eat plenty of crow before he even agrees to try it. He also wants \$10,000 per kid.

All this assumes that the children are in the PCs' custody. However, this is not necessarily a safe assumption. Their best bet for finding the kids is to do so within the first twenty-four hours. If they have cell phones, they can call the police from Richard's house to report his car stolen, but if the cops get the kids they just turn them over to their parents.

If they try to find the kids themselves (probably with divination of some sort) they can find the kids at the bus station—Janey's old haunt. The three kids have gone there to try and figure out what to do. If the PCs show up there and try to nab them, it's going to be a loud and ugly scene—probably involving prompt police response. If they find them there and watch what they do, the kids eventually split up—Rusty and Clarice going to a local church looking for an exorcist (good luck—the church closest to the bus station is Unitarian) while Janey calls her parents.

If the PCs don't grab them quickly, the kids split up. Janey goes back to her folks. She's not crazy about

it, but at least she's got Entropomancy now to try to tilt events in her favor. Clarice's shitty foster parents are indicted and she goes on to a series of foster homes. (If the PCs think of it, they can probably pull strings through one of Abel's many lawyers to get Clarice placed with someone trustworthy.) Rusty goes back to his mom.

None of the kids have gotten exorcised at this point, unless the PCs have done it. The ghosts (Harlan, Juno, and Diana) are laying low for now until things settle down, but they're not gone. They're still waiting for a chance to take over the kids. Besides, if the kids act a little funny back at home—talking differently, forgetting people, behaving weirdly—it's easy to attribute it to kidnapping trauma.

If the PCs let the kids slip away from them, it's the GM's cue to build future scenarios. Clarice can be particularly tricky, since her placement would be confidential, and Diana would do whatever she could to mask the kid from magickal scrying. Rusty might get devoured completely (sensitivity does run in his family), leaving the ruthless Harlan to fake his way through a second childhood. As for Janey, she's the character with the best chance of kicking out her spirit—and also the most likely to use her newly acquired Chaos magick destructively.



# Mission Two Exhausted

## Free Denman was having dinner

when he heard. It was Earl who told him—both of them were on the team, but Earl had higher clearance.

“Bad news, Free. Remember Janice?”

Free, who had been decorated by the CIA for his hazardous covert work in Libya, shuddered. He remembered Janice. He had nightmares about Janice, about having to kill her. It had been ugly, and sloppy, and scary.

“Yeah,” he said, nodding. “I sure do.”

“Bitch won’t stay buried. Come on, you gotta watch this.”

“This” turned out to be a videotape of a news report. It showed police technicians out in Madeline’s Fen, where Earl and Free had planted Janice’s bullet-ridden body.

“Earl, how’d they find her?”

“Just wait.”

On the TV, a reporter was saying something about how the police had been led to the body by a woman who claimed she’d seen it in a dream. “Police have released Gina Briggs, saying that she is not a suspect in the death of Janice Taormino. Mrs. Briggs has been gracious enough to join us.”

Gina Briggs was a chubby gal—a forty-something, hausfrau-looking woman. The news cameras washed out her sallow complexion and she plucked nervously at her flowered dress from Target.

“Well, I just had these dreams, you know? Actually, the same dream. In the dream, I’m pointing a gun at this woman—I guess it’s Janice Tormido, or whatever they say her name is. The gun, it’s got, like, a tube

on the front? I’m saying something to her, yelling at her, and then suddenly my hands are covered with blood, and there’s blood running into my eyes, and it hurts. I—that is, the me in my dream—pull the trigger. There’s another man there too, a short guy with red hair. He’s wearing a mask, like a doctor. He’s got a gun too. He shoots her, and I shoot her too, and the two of us just keep shooting until she’s dead.

“The dream gets foggy for a little, then we’re driving. I saw a sign that said ‘Madeline’s Fen Nature Preserve’ then looked down at my arms. This is still all in the dream, now. And my arms are covered with tiny cuts, all in the same kind of shape. Like someone had attacked my arm with a cookie cutter? And another thing—this is kind of weird—in the dream, I’m a man, and I’m black. So I’m wrapping my arms in bandages, and I get out of the car with the red-haired man. He’s not wearing his mask now, but it’s dark and hard to see him. We open the trunk of the car . . . and the woman jumps out at us, screaming and clawing at me. So then I grabbed her by the throat. I mean, the me in the dream did. And I was holding her down by the neck and she’s clawing all over me. Then the redhead comes, and puts the gun right in her face—so, like, right between my face and hers, where I’m holding her down—and he pulls the trigger.

“Then I wake up.”

Free didn’t hear a word that the reporter said next. His mind was blank, stunned. He turned to his partner. Earl had a hand up, scratching at his thick red hair.

“That’s my nightmare, Earl. That woman had my nightmare.”

PAUL CARRICK



## Warning

Don't send your PCs on this adventure until they're familiar with Therapeutic Pillows (described on p. 48). If they haven't been having nightmares already, it's no great trick to brew up a couple. Only when they've used one of the pillows do they have a chance of recognizing the similar pillow owned by Gina Briggs.

## Pillow Talk

It's late summer when the PCs are assigned to find out just what the hell is going on with Gina Briggs after she leads the police straight to a body dumped by TNI. Their initial orders are to observe her and see if she has any history of psychic powers or occult interest. If she's a potential asset, they should look into recruiting her. If she's aligned against TNI, she's to be interrogated to see who she's loyal to. In the worst case, they're to kill her.

What the PCs discover is that Gina Briggs on her own is about as psychic as a potato peel. She had Free's dream because she happened to buy a decorative pillow from the same woman who made the therapeutic pillows for TNI.

See, you can't just flush a bad dream away and be rid of it. It has to go somewhere. The pillows the duke (whose name is Coretta Rowlands—her dossier

appears earlier in this book) sold Abel are like one end of a siphon—and a siphon won't work without somewhere to deposit what it's siphoning. Consequently, some of Coretta's other pillows act as a faucet for the drained-away nightmares. One of them happened to drain into Gina Briggs' brain.

The PCs won't know this initially. They're just told to go check out Gina Briggs, who lives close to their home town.

Gina teaches music at the local junior high school. She has two children, Steve and Edie, away at college. Her husband, Dan, is a freight foreman at a nearby cereal factory. She sings with the church choir (Methodist), she plays coronet, guitar, and piano, she enjoys needlepoint and jazz (especially Dixieland), and she has never shown any inkling of being psychic.



Of course, PCs who show up claiming to be reporters get all kinds of stories about her foreseeing the future. One co-worker describes how Gina found her lost ring (which had fallen down into her pants cuff while she was doing dishes). Someone from church says that she's never seen Gina without an umbrella when it's going to rain. As for her students—well, they tell all kinds of outlandish stories that any adult can see through in about twenty seconds. Use your imagination.

None of these stories really pan out, however. She's never won the staff football pool at her office. When a forklift drove over her husband's foot, she was as surprised as anyone else. Finding the ring was a fluke, and PCs who shadow her will soon realize that she carries an umbrella *everywhere*.

When the PCs ask around about Gina, they hear a few comments about "all you reporters." Alternately, if they stake out her house, they can watch as a skinny guy with buck teeth rings her doorbell. Anyone who tracks the skinny guy's car (through the license plate or the Vehicle Identification Number) learns that he's Ralph Hendricks, a reporter for a large urban newspaper of the GM's choosing.

Regardless of how they deal with Ralph (whack him, avoid him, lie to him) there's still the matter of Gina to attend to. Sooner or later, your PCs are likely to either break into her house or talk to her directly. (Or most likely, first one and then the other.)

Breaking in is no great trick. Her house doesn't have any kind of fancy security (on a teacher's salary? Get real.), but it does have the one thing that every house-breaker dreads more than anything else: a dog.

Fluffy is a large golden retriever with a loud, piercing bark. Her stats are Body 30, Speed 50 (S), and a Bite Legs skill of 50%. It does damage like a martial arts attack, with +3 damage because her teeth are pointy (not to mention rife with the germs that cause dog breath). When anyone enters the house, Fluffy runs up to them and spends a turn barking at the top of her doggy voice. Next turn, unless the character has made some sort of Befriend Animal roll (or drugged the pooch, or injured it) Fluffy attacks. If injured, Fluffy runs away to the basement and continues to bark at the top of her lungs.

Inside the house, it's no big trick to find the pillow: Gina has it sitting on a loveseat in their den. Anyone who sees it and has seen a Therapeutic Pillow should notice a similarity in size, style, materials, and pattern *immediately*. Don't even make 'em roll,

because if they miss this clue the whole adventure is derailed.

Of course, if the PCs don't go to the TV room immediately, they might find a few other things, depending on where they look.

- **Bedroom desk:** Checkbook and file of bills. If someone goes over Gina & Dan's taxes with a fine-tooth comb, they can find a little fudging, but nothing felonious. Their credit card shows that they were in New Orleans last month.
- **Bedroom dresser:** Some opal jewelry, but it's small-time stuff—\$20, \$30 from a fence at most.
- **Living room:** There's a gun cabinet with a 12g shotgun and a .30-06 hunting rifle. The cabinet is locked, and the key is on the ring of Gina's husband Dan. Ammo is in the drawer under the cabinet, also locked.
- **Kitchen:** Big knives, if you want one for some reason.
- **Steve's bedroom:** Behind a loose panel behind the dresser, there's an almost empty bag of dried-out, low-grade weed. (The kid stashed it there and forgot about it.)
- **Dining room:** The good silver isn't that good, but there's \$100 in twenties hidden in the gravy boat.

In other words, nothing too incriminating—except for the pillow.

The PCs may also (or instead) choose to take the talking route. There's two ways they're likely to do this: the hard way and the soft way. The hard way is to barge in with masks and guns to terrify the poor woman half to death. If they go at it the hard way, she tells them everything she knows (which is nothing) and everything she thinks they want to hear. The pillow is not going to cross her mind for a minute, unless they find it and start interrogating her about it.

If they take the soft way (most likely pretending to be reporters, but a Charm roll is all it takes to make her fall for a reasonable-sounding pretext) Gina is very helpful, polite, offers them iced tea, and tells them everything she knows—which is still nothing. Soft-way visitors are kept in the living room, so they have no chance to see the pillow. (If they ask her about any unusual pillows—for instance, if your players are really sharp and made the connection when they first heard that someone else had Free's nightmare—then she goes to get it, with a puzzled expression.) Visitors who skulk off to look around (on the pretext



## Ralph Hendricks

Hendricks can be trouble for the Inquisitors, because he unwittingly represents the Claws of the Tiger (see UA, p. 111). They don't want to alert him that there's more going on than he suspects. On the other hand, they can't just whack a reporter without attracting even *more* media attention.

Hendricks is a crime reporter, a big fan of Dirk Allen's writing, and something of an occult dabbler. He doesn't believe in magick, but he knows that people who *do* believe sometimes do some weird (*i.e.* news-worthy) stuff. PCs who try to scare him off are just going to whet his appetite: he either figures them for rivals trying to scoop him, or (even better) secretive mystic weirdos.

His function in this adventure is to keep the PCs honest. He's a test of their ability to handle nosy people without resorting to violence. If they kill him, make sure that Gina Briggs' town is swamped with reporters the very next day—and if the PCs spoke with anyone, police sketches are soon floating around. It doesn't take the cops and reporters long to hit on the angle that whoever killed Hendricks probably killed Janice, too.

On the other hand, if they don't kill Hendricks, he follows them around trying to figure out what they're doing. Clever characters who pretend to be reporters from another paper can send him off on *one* wild goose chase, but they won't fool him a second time—and he'll find out that they aren't from the paper they claimed.

Ralph is about 5'11" and 140 pounds. He has unkempt brown hair, freckles, and buck teeth. His voice is deep, soothing, and well controlled, with a cultured manner to it.

**Personality:** Despite his cultured façade, Ralph is a pushy know-it-all.

**Obsession:** Success. Ralph wants that Pulitzer, damnit.

**Wound Points:** 45

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Anyone who tries to control or censor the news, be it the government or a big newspaper advertiser.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Strangulation and drowning. If he's choked or smothering, his panic actually re-

of going to the bathroom, for instance) can make a Notice roll to spot the pillow as they casually walk past the den. (The den is right next to the bathroom, near the living room.)

Once the PCs make the connection between her pillow and TNI's Therapeutic Pillows, it's just a question of finding out where she got it. The answer is, she bought it in New Orleans last month. If she's being interrogated the hard way, that's all she remembers, but a look at her credit card bill would jog her memory. (Or they can just take the bill and check on the various music stores, boutiques and restaurants until they find Coretta Rowlands' Needlepoint.) If they take the soft way, she remembers that she bought the pillow in New Orleans from "a nice black man named Gary something. Here, let me get my credit card bill, it's probably on there!"

One last thing: characters who try rough stuff on Gina find her to be a total creampuff. One punch and she curls up sobbing hysterically. If her husband is home, however, he's not so easily intimidated. Dale has Body 60, Speed 40 (S), Struggle 35% and Guns

35%. That's in addition to Fluffy, who attacks viciously if her mistress is hurt.

Regardless, the trail from Gina leads to Coretta Rowlands' Needlepoint in New Orleans.

## Loose Ends and Dead Ends

You'd think a guy as loaded as Abel would spring for first-class tickets to New Orleans, right? But no, it's coach all the way.

If the PCs have the basic good sense to report their findings to their supervisor (and there's no reason for TNI to send them to New Orleans unless they did so), he or she can provide them with some interesting information. Interesting fact #1: Coretta Rowlands made the Therapeutic Pillows used by TNI. Interesting fact #2: TNI owns three Therapeutic Pillows, which means there may well be two more exhaust pillows out there somewhere.

Once their bosses find out that exhaust pillows exist, they give the PCs new orders. The first order of business is to track down the exhaust pillows. Re-



duces the time it takes to knock him out by one round.

**Noble Stimulus:** Bring the truth to the benighted masses. He looks down on the benighted masses, but still wants them to know the truth and be less benighted.

### Stats

**Body:** 45 (Wiry)  
**Speed:** 45 (S) (In Shape)  
**Mind:** 65 (Educated)  
**Soul:** 65 (Cultured)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** Chase 30%, General Athletics 15%, Struggle 30%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, Drive 25%, Guns 20%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Occult/New Age Lore 15%, **Reporter 55%**

**Soul Skills:** Charm 45%, Lie 50%

**Reporter:** In addition to being used for Notice checks, this skill allows him to dig up dirt on people, follow leads, interview neighbors, and do all the other stuff reporters do.

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

### Possessions

Ralph is unarmed. He carries a camera, a cell phone, and a microcassette recorder at all times, though.

trieval of the pillows is preferred, destruction of them is acceptable. The Therapeutic Pillows won't be used until the exhaust pillows are secured, one way or another.

More importantly, the people who own the exhaust pillows must be located. As it turns out, Alex Abel secured a pillow for his personal use: it's critical to determine who (if anyone) has been spying on Abel's dreams and nightmares. If there seems to be a danger of an information leak, use of lethal force is authorized. ("Just be discreet, okay?")

## New Orleans

The New Orleans trail starts at Coretta Rowlands' Needlepoint. Unfortunately, it's closed.

Asking around about Coretta Rowlands gets knowing glances from the locals. Coretta had a reputation as a voodoo priestess (though her actual practices were much more idiosyncratic) and the local folk are used to furtive weirdos from out of town surreptitiously asking about her.

Coretta walked a fine border between the genuine occult underground of TNI, and the safe occult façade of New Orleans tourism. She had just enough real magick power to be respected by the underground, but her dealings with the unwashed masses were stereotypical enough to keep her clear of the Sleepers. She hid in plain sight, and her policy of never using real magick on rubes and tourists actually served the Sleepers' agenda. After all, if you want to convince people that magick doesn't work, it makes sense to support people who know the truth but still act like it's all a fake, right?

Coretta's problem was her boyfriend, Gary Neville. They got along well for a lot of years, until this year, when Coretta's needlepoint creations started to make some serious money. At first her ersatz voodoo embroidery was popular with tourists, but in recent years it had come to the notice of a higher class of collector. Soon she was being exhibited in folk-art galleries in L.A. and Seattle. This summer, one of her pieces sold at auction for more than she'd made in all of 1993. She bought a house, closed up her storefront

shop in New Orleans, and moved it to a boutique neighborhood, hiring Gary as the manager.

Now, there can be no doubt that Gary was jealous. Even though Coretta tried to keep him involved in her life, everything she did started to look like a handout to him. He felt emasculated by her success, and that was when the yelling and fights started.

This all came to a head while the store was being moved—right at the time that Gina and Dale were visiting New Orleans. They happened to stop by the new store during the craziness of moving and reorganization, right after a fight between Coretta and Gary which ended with her storming out and leaving him there. That was how they happened to get the pillow. Coretta had packed it (along with all her genuinely magickal works) in a box marked “DISPLAY ONLY,” but there was a mixup. Maybe at some level Gary wanted to punish her for the fight, or maybe it was an honest mistake. In any event, he sold the pillow, and that was the final straw. He and Coretta broke up for good, and no one’s seen her in the three weeks since. The store still sits, incomplete and not open for business.

PCs are going to have to do some sniffing around before they learn this, of course. Some people gossip about the pair just for the fun of it. Others want to be bribed. Former employees from the store (now working for Marie LaVeau’s House of Voodoo) can give a clear impression of the fights between Gary and Coretta. If asked, they can tell the PCs that she was very attached to some of her works and had specifically told them to *never* sell them, but no one made a connection between Gary selling one and Coretta turning him out for good. They’re not surprised if the PCs suggest it, though. One of the ex-employees (an attractive young lady named Marcella) can give them Gary’s current address—if they pay her off and promise not to tell Gary how they found him.

## Gary Neville

Gary is a handsome man who clearly used to be a real cool stud. His stomach is bulging a little and his hair’s starting to fade back a bit, but he’s still got the easy confidence of a ladies’ man. His new digs aren’t exactly luxurious—the walls are bare and he’s living on a second-hand futon. He’s still got a killer wardrobe though, and will greet any attractive women with charm and wit. Guys get a more guarded reception.

For what it’s worth, Gary has Body 50, Speed 45 (F), and the skills Charm 55%, Struggle 25%, and

Guns 30%. He owns a Colt Viper revolver (kept loaded in a kitchen cabinet) but his first instinct is always to talk, not fight.

A soft approach works well with Gary, especially if the PCs pretend to be people who want to collect money from Coretta or otherwise make her unhappy. Gary’s decent enough that he wouldn’t willingly rat her out to people who obviously wish her ill, but he’ll talk trash to “collection agents” or “tax men” for hours. The two of them were living in a house, and she kicked him out the same day she fired him. His main complaint is that she took a lot of the stuff they’d bought together. “If I’d let her, bitch would have kept everything but the toilet plunger!” He hasn’t seen her since the breakup and doesn’t want to, either. If handled right, he can give PCs her unlisted phone number and address.

A hard approach puts his back up. He doesn’t crack under threats, but gives in after he’s actually taken five or six points of rough-up damage. As soon as the PCs leave, though, he tries to call Coretta. Getting no answer, he calls the cops and gives them the PCs’ descriptions and tells them they’re going to Coretta’s house.

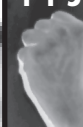
Anyone who breaks in to Gary’s apartment when he isn’t there can find the pistol (which is unregistered) but nothing else incriminating. He’s got Coretta’s old address and phone number in his little black book, next to five stars, and her new address and phone number is pencilled in under that. But he keeps his black book on his person at all times.

## Coretta’s House

Coretta just got herself a nice house in a spacious old neighborhood with wrought-iron fences, big lawns, and lovely gardens in the back. Her new home is a bit of a fixer-upper: the trees are overhung with Spanish moss and the garden has run riot. Still, there’s a rotted old grandeur about the place. Plus, it looks *exactly* like the house a voodoo priestess would own if she could.

Watching her house yields nothing. No one goes in, no one comes out. No lights, no movement. Ringing the doorbell or calling the phone results in nothing. It’s not hard to break in, though: the back door has already been forced.

PCs who enter the house are greeted by a powerful stench. Following their noses takes them to the basement, and there’s Coretta. She’s absolutely cov-



ered with flies and maggots—looks like she's been dead since about two days before they arrived in town, which is not at all pleasant in a muggy New Orleans summer. She's tied to a chair and there's a plastic bag over her head. Sitting on a small worktable nearby are two small objects, encrusted with dried blood: two of her fingernails. Someone tied her up, pulled out two of her fingernails, then smothered her with a plastic bag. (At the GM's discretion, being confronted with this gruesome sight could be a rank-1 Violence challenge. Alternately, the stench could require Body or Soul checks to prevent vomiting.)

Coretta's corpse isn't the only clue in the house, only the most obvious. Her workshop has obviously been tossed, and in her bedroom there's a roughly square hollow in the wall right under a picture hanger. The picture (a colorful piece of Haitian folk art) has been flung on the bed. It looks like something was pulled out of the wall there—something about the size of a small wall safe.

There are a lot of messages on her answering machine. Interspersed between hangups and calls from friends telling her, "Don't be so upset over Gary, he's an asshole," there's a message from a woman who says the following: "Ms. Rowlands, I think you're underestimating the danger you're in. Haven't you seen from their nightmares what they're capable of? We appreciate your offer to us, but I'm willing to extend our protection to you. This doesn't have to just be a financial transaction: the Goddess can protect you from those who would do you harm. Please consider coming to Chicago, where we can talk with greater freedom."

The real jackpot is in her office. It hasn't been unpacked from the move, so there are still boxes around. One is labeled "Old Bills" and it includes her credit card bills, bank statements and phone bills.

PCs who spend an hour or longer poking through that box (or who simply haul it away and look it over at their leisure) don't find out specifically who got the last two pillows, but they get two good (and disturbing) clues.

**Clue #1:** In the checkbook, there are a number of deposits from "True Order Enterprises." Anyone at all familiar with the True Order of Saint-Germain recognizes that as the name of their mail-order book catalogue and corporate front. If cross-checked against her phone bills, these deposits usually came about a week or so after she made calls to a number in Miami's area code. If they can look up who owns

that number (or if they pass the request on to someone in TNI who can), it's paid for by True Order Enterprises.

**Clue #2:** In her address book there are only two Chicago entries—that is, entries that might be tied to the message on her answering machine. One is for Davis Rowlands, and it's near the top of the "R" section, indicating that it's an old entry. The other Chicago entry is for Andrea Deutsch (see UA, p. 189) and next to her name it says "(NG)". There's a big deposit in her check account, drawn against "Pagan Video"—a Chicago distributor of Naked Goddess video tapes.

## Rare-Bit Fiends

So it looks like the two remaining pillows might be in the hands of the TOSG and the Sect of the Naked Goddess. When the PCs report this tidbit to their controller(s), they're simply asked, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

## Chicago

Chicago is the stomping grounds of the Naked Goddess Sect, and however the PCs get there, they run into Monica Renfrew and her roommate, Doris Broder. Monica is in the sect, and uses the spell Synchronicity periodically, just to keep current on things. In this case, Synchronicity wants her to notice the PCs. This means, of course, that they have a good chance of noticing her.

So, if the PCs fly into Chicago, Monica is at the same gate; the baggage handlers have just found a carry-on bag she lost last month. If the PCs drive, Monica is fueling her Honda at the same gas station. If they take a bus (for some reason), she's at the bus station picking someone up, *etc.* In fact, if it's at all plausible, she physically bumps into one of the PCs. At the airport, she might get bumped by a carelessly steered baggage cart and go careening into one of them. At the gas station, someone forgets to put on their emergency brake and their car slowly rolls into the PCs' front bumper, jostling the gas nozzle out of their car and spilling gas all over Monica. These accidents shouldn't look planned in any way—in fact, it's best if they're the kind of thing that's impossible to plan. The PC just has some minor, irritating accident involving a slender young woman with frizzy hair. They might or might not notice that she's there with a friend (Doris), hovering nearby.



## Monica Renfrew

Monica was a cautious and careful woman for most of her life. She's lived in Chicago for ten years, working as a commercial illustrator for an advertising firm. About a year ago her husband divorced her for a younger and "more exciting" woman. She met Daphnee Lee through a mutual acquaintance who was in Monica's therapy group. Daphnee impressed Monica with her confidence and charisma, and once Monica saw the Naked Goddess tape, she decided to join the sect. After all, they were clearly on to *something*.

Monica has shown a surprising propensity for magick, which she's used to wreck her ex-husband's new relationship. (She honestly believes she was just speeding an inevitable process that would otherwise have been painful and slow.)

She now finds herself in a bind: she could easily make her husband want her again, but if she did so, she'd soon wind up having sex with a man she loves—and the Goddess doesn't accept competition. On one hand, she really loves the guy. On the other hand, she's afraid that without magick, she couldn't keep his love—and bringing him back would cost her the power of the Goddess.

She cast Synchronicity hoping it would lead her to some answers, but apparently the universe had other plans.

**Personality:** (Virgo.) Whatever she does, she wants to do well, so if she doesn't feel like she can master something, she rarely attempts it.

**Obsession:** The power and paradoxes of desire.

**Wound Points:** 45

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who callously use others and then discard them.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Not being good enough.

**Noble Stimulus:** Doing her best.

### Stats

<b>Body:</b>	45	(Skinny)
<b>Speed:</b>	50	(F) (A Jogger)
<b>Mind:</b>	60	(Intelligent)
<b>Soul:</b>	70	(Insightful)

At the moment they bump into each other, have the PC make a Notice roll. If it's successful, the PC notices that a radio somewhere nearby just started playing the song "Secret Agent Man." Monica sure hears it, and there's a brief moment when she looks up at the PC with her eyes wide. Then she apologizes and backs off.

Make sure this happens in a public place; otherwise, trigger-happy PCs may be tempted to just grab her. All that's really happened is that Monica has gotten a good look at the PCs and knows they're important somehow. They've had the same opportunity, but if you play it right they shouldn't know that; this can be a creepy, paranoia-inducing scene, especially if you include some doubt. ("Hey, maybe it was just an accident. These things happen every day, right?")

On the off chance that the PCs try grabbing Monica, she's got two significant charges. Furthermore,

Doris is no pushover: she teaches a women's self-defense class.

After their encounter with Monica, the PCs presumably go check in with the Chicago safe house. (Assuming they haven't managed to get arrested already, that is.) If their clearance is high enough, they can personally meet with the safe house's supervisor, Maureen Greeley. Otherwise, they talk to one of the locals with appropriate clearance, who passes on Maureen's dicta.

Specifically, Maureen doesn't want to see the current ill-will between TNI and the Sect inflamed. On the other hand, she doesn't want the Sect to get the idea that it can kick the New Inquisition around without being punished for it. Therefore, she wants the PCs to meet with representatives of the Sect and demand that they hand the pillow over right away.



## Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 20%, Kind of Pretty 15%, Struggle 25%, Swim 15%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Run 40%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Illustration 30%, Invisible Clergy Lore 20%, Notice 25%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 15%, Pornomancy 50%, Read People 20%

## Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

## Possessions

Monica is unarmed except for a canister of pepper spray.

## Doris Broder

Doris doesn't need as much explanation as Monica, since she's only likely to be around during their first encounter, or if they go to her apartment for some reason. She works for a health club as an aerobics instructor, personal trainer, and women's self-defense coach. Monica met her at the health club a couple years ago, and it was happenstance (or synchronicity) that Doris's old roommate got married just as Monica's marriage fell apart. Monica moved in, and they're getting along okay.

Doris is not a member of the Sect. She knows that Monica is involved in some kind of spiritual group activity, but she doesn't know much more than that. Monica would like to get Doris involved, but suspects (rightly) that Doris would not be inclined to give the Sect a fair hearing if she knew exactly what was involved in membership.

Doris has 65 Wound points, a Body score of 65, Speed of 65 (S), General Athletics 45%, and an obsession skill of Thai Boxing 50%. (All her Martial Arts cherries are More Hurt.) To top it all off, she has a Dodge skill at 25%. She's armed with a telescoping baton (+3 damage) and a canister of pepper spray.

They're to be threatening, but the PCs are not to actually initiate violence. However, if the cultists start something, the PCs are expected to finish it as they see fit. She'll arrange the meeting, which could take a while. In the meantime, the PCs are invited to relax and enjoy Chicago, courtesy of Alex Abel.

This is your chance to build up the PC paranoia factor. They're off the leash downtown with an expense account burning a hole in their pocket: What do they do? Go bar-hopping? Catch a Cubs game? ("The Cubs are *due*, man!") Visit the aquarium? Whatever they do, go along with it, but throw in a few things to make them nervous. At dinner, their waiter keeps glancing over at their table—if confronted, he denies it, or makes some lame excuse ("there's a clock over your booth"). Maybe their rental car gets stolen, and when they call for a cab, it's late showing up, giving them plenty of time to fret over an ambush. You can demand a few Notice rolls, then just shake your

head sadly if they fail. (If they roll really well, you can pass a note to a player that says "your character's fly is open.") For a summer night, there seem to be an awful lot of people running around in dark trench coats, giving the PCs suspicious glances. Then the capper: as they're heading home, Monica pulls up next to them in her car at a stop light.

At this point, the PCs may seriously freak, jump out in traffic and grab her. Monica is just as surprised to see them as they are to see her. She didn't use magick to catch up with them or anything. This is an honest-to-Goddess coincidence. (Or, if you prefer, "act of Chaos.")

There's a couple ways this can go. If the PCs do nothing, she floors it and tries to ditch them when the light turns. They can give pursuit or not, as they wish. If they knock her off the road or otherwise make her stop, they have five combat rounds to subdue her and make off with her before the cops show up. You can reduce this to three if the car chase went long.

Another option they have is to simply jump out of their car and try to carjack her. Her doors are all locked and she tries to run down anyone who stands in front of the car, but a gun pointed at her head persuades her to surrender.

If captured, Monica pretty much tells them the truth: she's in the Sect, but she doesn't really know who the PCs are or what they're doing. She knows they're important because magick guided her to them, but other than that, she's in the dark. She hasn't heard anything about any pillows.

Now, the obvious recourse is to use Monica as a bargaining chip to get the pillow back. This can work, but it all depends on how the meeting with the other cultists goes—and if Monica has been grabbed, the sect is unwilling to meet until either she's released or TNI sends them a hostage. Any PC would make a fine hostage; the Sect recognizes them all from Monica's sketches.

If neither of these things happens, the PCs get a lecture for jumping the gun and screwing things up with the Sect. They're sent home in disgrace, and they never find out what happened to the last pillow. (Eventually TNI trades Monica for the pillow and destroys it, but not before there's a lot of grief and unpleasantness between them and the Sect.)

## Playing Hostage

A PC who volunteers to be a hostage to the Sect is given a phone number to call on a cell phone. The voice on the other end of the line instructs the PC to get on a specific elevated train, tells him which stop to get off at, then which train to switch to. Eventually the PC is told to leave the station and go to the third floor of a nearby parking garage. A tan Ford escort hatchback has the key to the trunk under the left rear tire: the PC is instructed to get into the trunk when no one's looking, and shut the lid.

After about ten minutes, someone comes to the car, checks to make sure the lid is securely closed, then gets in the Ford and drives off. The PC is in constant phone contact with the Sect throughout, and they keep him talking to make sure he doesn't contact anyone else. The car makes an uncomfortable drive (many twists, turns and bumps, along with a big patch of static on the cell phone) before the trunk is opened, revealing four guys with shotguns and Mexican-style wrestling masks. They tell the PC to get out of the trunk ("Slowly now . . .") and put on a hood

with no eye holes. Before he's hoodwinked, the PC can get a glimpse of a nondescript, industrial-looking gray building. With a successful Notice roll, the PC can catch a glimpse of huge electrical towers over to the left, out of the corner of his eye.

If the PC tries to lunge out of the trunk and run, give him a fair chance at it, but the goons will open fire. Their Guns skills are all at 35%, but since the PC is in a bad situation (coming out of a trunk at point-blank range) they *all* get a +10% bonus to their skill. Assume they have Speed 40 (S). (Besides, even if the PC gets away, all he's done is queer the deal.)

Inside the building is the set of *Dominance and Discipline IV*. The PC is instructed to take off everything except the hood. ("Don't worry, we've seen it all before.") Once naked, the PC is directed to take three steps to the left, then one back. A cold metal chair can be felt there. The PC is told to sit down and press his legs against the front chair legs while gripping the arms of the chair with both hands. If he obeys, two people quickly step forward and cuff him, arms and legs, to the chair.

At any point, the PC can resist this rough treatment, but there are four goons with at least a 40% Struggle skill, and the PC is blindfolded. Two of the goons have stun guns, and the other two will strike with their shotgun butts (+3 damage). They all have Struggle 45%. Also present is Justine Anander, with 50 Wound Points, Speed 55 (S), Struggle 45%, and Handguns 50%. During the chain-down she's holding one of the guard's shotguns in her left hand, and has a stun gun in her right.

When he's secured, the hood is removed and the PC can see the same four guys, still wearing masks. Also accompanying them (unmasked) is Justine Anander—a very attractive woman in jeans and a black tank top. She smiles gently at the restrained PC. "Sorry about all this, but I insisted. I know exactly how dangerous TNI operatives can be. But if you've read my file, you know I used to be one."

The setting is not one to inspire confidence. In addition to being naked and manacled to a chair, the PC can also readily see that the chair is bolted to the floor. A table nearby holds a jumble of dominance gear—whips, chains, masks, blindfolds, ball gags—mixed in with stage makeup, a couple of wigs and some other porno props. An industrial-sized box of rubber gloves serves as a centerpiece.

Looking around this low-rent soundstage, the captive can spot other pieces of the set—fake dun-



geon walls made of plastic rocks on wooden flats, a big bed with manacles and silk sheets, and right in front of the PC, the glaring eye of a high-end digital video camera.

Justine has orders that the PC is not to be injured, but that doesn't mean she isn't going to have a little fun and make him sweat. You can play out an innuendo-ridden interrogation scene if you want; Justine doesn't really want any information, she just wants to make the PC uncomfortable so that he'll be at a psychological disadvantage during the switch. She asks about the pillow, how the PCs tracked it to the sect, what happened to Coretta—and anything else you think she might have even a passing interest in. PCs who refuse to answer get a secretive smile. Anyone who's rude to her gets a large pistol barrel shoved in his face. If the bravado continues, she pulls the trigger—on an empty chamber. Play this scene for all it's worth; the four goons make a good tool, because they don't know the gun isn't loaded. One of them may try to talk her out of it, with the others chiming in. She screams at them and puts the gun to the PC's head, telling them to put their guns down and step back. Ashen-faced, they do. "I'll show you how the Goddess does business!" she shrieks—then click.

This mock execution is a rank-4 Helplessness challenge. If the PC freaks out, she lets him thrash or scream with a satisfied look on her face. If the PC makes the test, she gives him a kiss on the cheek. Either way, she smiles brightly afterwards and says. "Wasn't that fun? And we've got another eight hours together!"

Any captive PC may try some fancy maneuvers to get an advantage, but Justine is ready for just about anything. PCs who request a bathroom break have recourse to a bedpan. Requests for food and water are met, but Justine spoonfeeds the character or holds a squeeze bottle to his mouth.

The manacles attached to the chair are about six inches long, and they can be broken if the PC has a skill like Feat of Strength. They can also be broken on a successful Body check that's higher than 30 (20 for the leg irons).

Justine and the goons are there all night, but all four goons eventually fall asleep, while Justine sits, watching the PC with inexorable patience. An escape attempt is tricky, but if the PC can slip his bonds, he has three turns before the goons wake up enough to fight or pursue. A PC escape will (again) ruin any chances of talking turkey about the pillow. However,



after a few hours of Justine, the PC may consider it worth it just to take a shot at her. (Incidentally, if a PC *does* manage to get free, kill Justine and escape, the Aces commend him for taking her out. He gets a mild reprimand for being headstrong, but all in all comes out ahead.)

## The Meeting

Eventually a meeting is set between the Sect and TNI. Here's how it works: the two sides agree on a set of coordinates out on Lake Michigan that are far enough from shore that neither side can interfere. Both arrange boats. Then TNI picks the longitude coordinate and the Sect picks latitude. At a pre-arranged time, the Sect calls in their coordinate, TNI gives theirs and both groups set out for the location. (This way neither can mine the area or pull some magickal stunt.) One small boat per faction is allowed, with no more than three people (or four counting hostages, if hostages are involved).

The coordinates settled upon are fairly far out on the lake. It's a hot day—a good one for a boat trip, so there are plenty of people in binocular range.

The three representatives of the Sect are: Andrea Deutsch, Lucius Zarcia (both are in UA, p. 189), and Justine Anander. Andrea is loaded with five significant charges and is present to prevent any magickal tinkering. Lucius is there to watch for any tricks, and Justine is present as firepower. Andrea does the talking. They don't bring the pillow with them.

The TNI team is likely to consist of the PCs; Maureen wanted to go but was countermanded by Abel himself. Their orders are very specific that they aren't to initiate a fight, but that they are to finish one if the cultists start it. The PCs can take the "broadcast" pillow with them if they wish, but only after Maureen makes it clear that they'll be held responsible if it's lost.

The Sect shows up in a rented dinghy with a twenty-horsepower motor: it's perfectly serviceable, but the TNI people get a cigarette boat that can run circles around it. If push comes to shove and the pilot of the TNI boat decides to cut out, the PCs can escape in three rounds—two if the Goddess followers decide not to pursue. It's a calm, stable day, so if people start shooting and fighting and so forth, give no modifiers—just describe the shifting surface of the boats beneath them, the glare of the harsh summer sun reflecting off the water, and the smell of water and fear in the fight's atmosphere.

Jumping from one boat to the other takes a Body or Speed roll if they're close together and neither is moving. If they're farther apart or moving slowly, it could be a General Athletics roll or some similar skill. If it gets more complicated, the GM can just use her own judgement.

Assuming there's no fight, discussing matters with Andrea Deutsch should require more than a successful Charm roll. She's no dummy and she knows the receiver pillow is much more valuable to TNI than it is to her; after all, it's useless as long as TNI refuses to use the corresponding broadcast pillow. She won't claim to have the pillow with her, either. As far as she's concerned, she's just there to arrange a trade-off.

This is a time for diplomacy, so don't shortchange the roleplaying aspect of this. If you want to make things a little tenser, be sure to emphasize the shotguns in the hands of the NG followers. Furthermore, anyone with Aura Sight or a high Soul stat can tell that Andrea is packed with some fairly substantial juice. While the PCs watch, a school of fish swims between their boats and briefly forms the sentence "Praise Her Unknowable Name." A radio on the PCs' boat might spontaneously start playing the song "Venus" (either the original version or the '80s remix—GM's pick). They're in Goddess country.

Some arguments the PCs might try (and Andrea's likely responses are listed below).

- **Gimme the gadget or I'll kack the bitch.** "We don't want a war, and you shouldn't either. If you do kill her, you know which Archetype will despise you; can you name me one that will love you for it?"
- **You're in big trouble for trying to spy on Alex Abel!** "I'm trembling."
- **Look, the receiver does you no good without the broadcaster. Let us have the pillow back and we'll overlook your spying.** "What do we get in return? Surely your mercenary boss doesn't expect us to simply give him something he wants. When was the last time he gave anything away?"
- **No reason to fight. We can make you an attractive deal for the pillow.** "We might be able to let it go for \$100,000."
- **\$100,000? Hell, if you think it's that valuable, we'll sell you the broadcaster for that much and you can have the pair.** "A lousy hundred grand should have a lot less value to Alex Abel than a

powerful link to the subconscious minds of a large number of his minions. No one from our organization has been psychically compromised in such a fashion. Perhaps none of us are afraid of our nightmares.”

Andrea can be talked down to \$70,000 even with a failed skill roll, down to \$40,000 with a successful Charm or Haggle roll, and maybe as low as \$25,000 with an OACOWA or a matched success. Other than that, GMs can play it by ear.

This exchange can have a long-term impact on how the cult and TNI see each other. If the PCs cave in too easily, the cultists perceive them as paper tigers and continue to provoke them. On the other hand, PCs who come on too strong are likely to reinforce the sect’s impression of TNI as “bad boys with big toys.” Only someone who’s respectful and conciliatory without groveling or showing weakness can get a satisfactory resolution. Andrea will actually be most impressed by someone who pays the 100K without blinking.

On the other hand, it’s perfectly possible that TNI and the cult could go head-to-head in an open war as a result of that stupid pillow. If this happens, the fight won’t be one-sided. In fact, it won’t even be two-sided.

### Let’s Have A War!

On one side, a bunch of hardcases with big guns and deep pockets. On the other, a bunch of normal folks who have a lot of video equipment. Doesn’t sound like much of a contest, does it?

The most important factor isn’t the combatants, though: it’s the audience. There are a lot of people that Abel has pushed around, and if TNI gets involved with putting down the NG sect, these dukes, hornets, and even legitimate businessmen are going take advantage of Abel’s distraction. The TOSG would consider it open season. Mak Attax would stay out of it. The Sleepers would try to wipe out both sides as soon as possible. Plus, there are a lot of other two-bit cabals who will want to *prolong* the fight, figuring that the more energy TNI and the Sect expend beating on each other, the easier it will eventually be to displace the weakened winner.

On top of that, don’t forget the Claws of the Tiger.

## Florida

PCs who go down to Florida have a tough row to hoe: they have the name of a company (and it’s small—only about ten employees) but no way of knowing which of the people working there was dealing with Coretta. Furthermore, there’s no way of knowing if Coretta’s contact still has the pillow, or even got it in the first place. Finally, everyone who works for True Order Enterprises is a hardcore member of the TOSG, and several of them without criminal records have licenses to carry concealed weapons.

True Order Enterprises is located in a lonely, windowless commercial business park way out in the middle of nowhere, sandwiched between a web-page-design firm and a mortgage-refinance business. They don’t own their own press, so mostly they take orders there and run the day-to-day details. The offices of True Order also serve as an ammo dump for the TOSG; they don’t keep any illegal ordnance there, but there are about twenty shotguns, an equal number of pistols, and crates of ammo.

PCs who barge in with guns drawn during business hours are in for a nasty shock. They may get the drop on the receptionist or the office manager, but all the employees carry very loud self-defense sirens. It’s one action to start up a very loud noise, which alerts everyone else in the office. They’ve *practiced* for this: everyone makes an attempt to get to the warehouse and take cover behind crates of books, preparing to return fire against any attacker.

If your characters are dumb enough to beard the lion in its den, give them everything you’ve got. The TOSG first takes cover, then opens fire. If you want to get fancy (having some of the TOSG people lay down covering fire or whatever), go ahead. As an added bonus, about three squad cars show up after ten rounds. (The cops keep an eye on all things True Order.)

PCs who stroll in with a slick line of talk don’t get too far. True Order gets very few walk-ins. The receptionist sticks by the PC(s) like glue, and soon the office manager (that’s Dugan Nunn) is talking with them, too. They can get a look around the reception area and the manager’s office, as well as glimpses into the areas where a couple operators are taking phone orders—but they aren’t allowed anywhere else. However, during this brief daylight tour they can spot a small combination motion detector/surveillance camera pointed at the front door. With

a Notice roll, they can spot the one in Dugan's office as well.

## Breaking In

It's far more likely that the PCs try to break in after business hours. This is easier, but not a cakewalk. There's a security keypad on both the front door and the back cargo loading area. Both are good ones, not the kind that can be circumvented just by cutting the phone line. It takes a Breaking and Entering roll (or some similar skill) to get past the alarm system. The GM should make this roll, so that the PCs don't know if they've succeeded or not. Either way, they still have to get past a strong door and lock—neither door can be broken down with Body rolls.

Inside the offices there are three surveillance cameras—the two previously mentioned, and a third point-

ing at the loading dock door. It's a Notice roll to spot these at night, and to find the one in the manager's office it takes a Notice roll higher than 20. Unless these are tampered with somehow *before the characters enter* they turn themselves on when they detect movement and trigger an alarm at the TOSG compound. When this happens, the PCs have about fifteen minutes to ransack the office before a dozen TOSG soldiers show up, armed to the teeth—with full-auto weapons this time. (Randy prefers to handle this problem without police involvement—hell, for all he knows, the PCs *are* the police.)

The pillow isn't there, but there are valuable things to be found all the same:

- There's the stockpile of guns out in the cargo area.
- In the operator's area, there's a list of people who've ordered True Order literature, along

## True Order Employees

Most of these aren't fleshed out in much detail; fill in personality as needed. Also, if your characters are tougher (or less tough) than the average TNI team, feel free to raise or lower the employees' skills to make them an adequate challenge. They should be slightly inferior to the PCs—an obstacle, but not one that can't be overcome directly.

You don't get hired by True Order unless you've put your time in and are well-trusted, so these people are pretty resistant to threats. Plus, they're paranoid as hell, and accordingly harder to trick—unless you play to their paranoia and suspicion, of course.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Body:** 50

**Speed:** 50 (F)

**Skills:** Okinawan Karate 35%, Guns 35%, Drive 25%

While these soldiers of Saint Germain don't need to be fleshed out with obsessions and passions, assume that each one of them can flip-flop or redo one roll during any conflict with the PCs. After all, they've been told again and again that their enemies will come to get them some day. They're ready.

## Dugan Nunn, True Order Manager

Dugan has been with the TOSG since its inception. He's very tight with Randy Douglas, so he's allowed to slack a little on the physical training. He's still a crack shot, however, and his dedication to the cause is unquestioned.

**Obsession:** Destroy all enemies of the TOSG.

**Wound Points:** 45

**Body:** 45 (Sloppy)

**Speed:** 55 (S) (Steady Hands)

**Skills:** Struggle 30%, **Guns** 55%, Dodge 45%, Drive 40%

with lists of what they ordered. While the FBI or ATF couldn't officially act on information that was stolen and legally none of their business anyway, both agencies would unofficially love to get copies of these lists. PCs who are bright enough to take these and pass them on to John Law are rewarded six months later by a string of busts targeting covert members of the TOSG. This brings public attention to the TOSG, which makes it much harder for them to act unobserved.

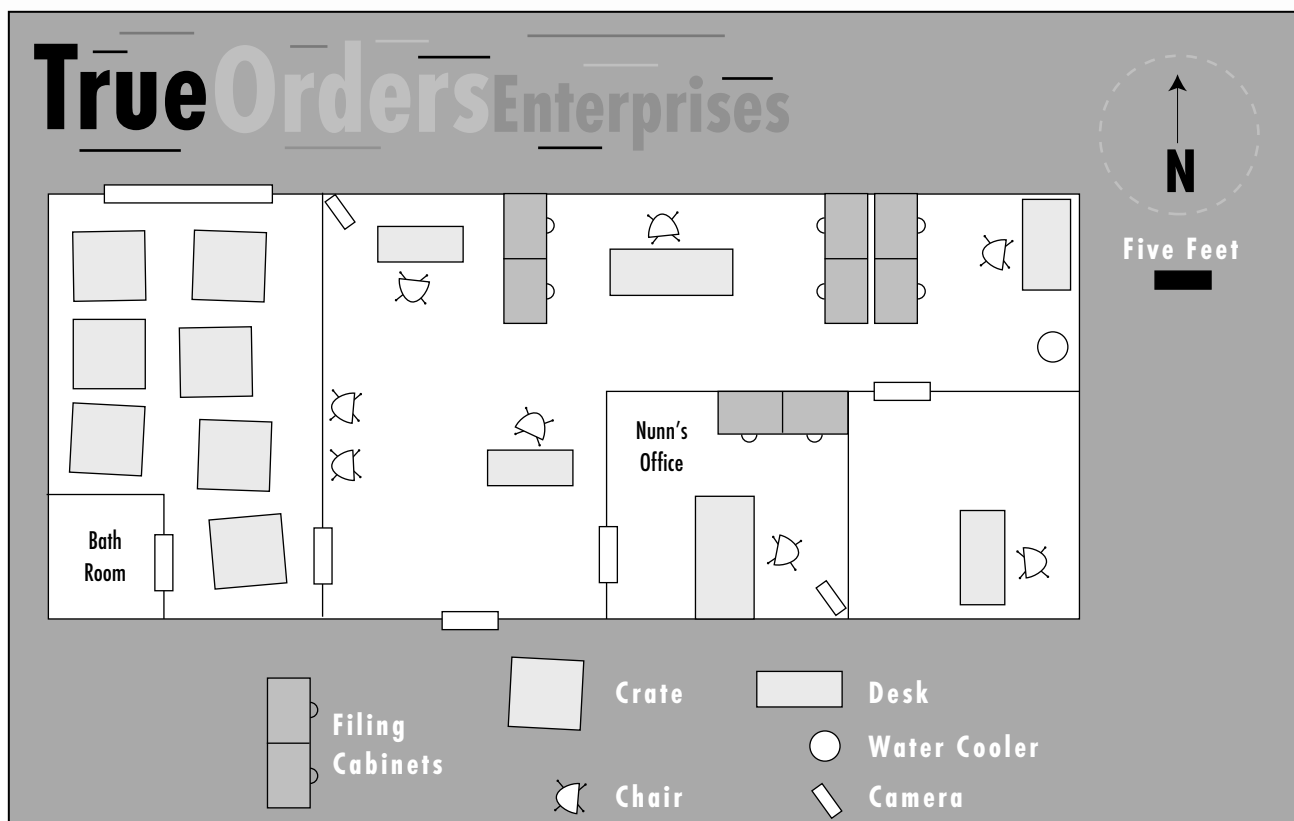
- In the manager's office, there's a strongbox with the company checkbook. True Order has about \$30,000 in its coffers at the moment, and the checks to Coretta Rowlands were signed by the manager, Dugan Nunn. There's also a recent check made out to a Florida-area travel agency, and a check to Avis Rent-a-Car in New Orleans dated at just the right time to put Nunn in town when Coretta was killed.

Confronted with this evidence, it shouldn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Dugan knew Coretta and that he was probably the strangler who took the pillow.

## Surveillance

Another option is surveillance. PCs can rent an office in the area (the turnover is pretty high) and get plenty of information on all ten employees. Make up names and addresses as needed. It should interest the PCs to learn that Dugan Nunn's listed residence is the TOSG compound, and that the truck he drives is licensed to True Order Enterprises. He's also listed as the president/general manager of True Order on its documents of incorporation. (A file on Dugan Nunn appears in the dossiers appendix.) Finally, one of the employees is his wife, Maude. Other employees have listed residences elsewhere, but checking into those apartments and trailers shows thick coverings of dust and nothing much of value (except some guns and ammo). It's clear that their listed residences are just bolt-holes; ever since TNI started doing snatch & grabs on TOSG members, they do their sleeping and living on the TOSG compound.

The employees of True Order usually show up around 10:00 A.M. and stay until 6:00 P.M., except for a few evening operators who stay until 8:00 P.M. Dugan and Maude show up together and leave together, usually working 10:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. or later. The employees seem careful to leave the building





in pairs and threesomes, even car-pooling together. Occasionally a member goes out alone, but usually not for long.

### Snatch-a-Cracker

One obvious way to get some information is to snatch an employee. Improvise this as you need to. They're all armed and dangerous, but it shouldn't be much trouble for a good TNI team to run one off the road or grab them from an apartment or trailer. (Individually, they're not so dangerous.) The employees are sullenly unwilling to talk until they've taken ten points of damage or have been subjected to a successful roll from something like Torture. (Remember that torturing a helpless victim is a rank-6 Violence challenge.) Alternately, if a PC has a skill like Interrogation, a roll from that works—but only if they use sodium penothal or some similar “babble juice.”

In any event, they have little to say about the pillows; they've overheard Dugan saying something about a woman in New Orleans, and they know he took a trip not too long ago on “Order business.” Basically, though, all they can do is point the PCs in Dugan's direction.

Dugan (of course) becomes paranoid as hell if one of his employees vanishes; he and the other eight employees start coming to work in two carpools, armed to the teeth. He does not call the cops.

### Snatching Dugan

Grabbing an unsuspecting Dugan can be an interesting car chase. He's got a CB in his truck, and he has a cell phone; once he realizes someone is trying to nab him, he calls for reinforcements. (One car with two TOSG gunmen shows up in ten rounds. Use the True Order employee template and assume they only have handguns. A pickup with five TOSG soldiers also gets dispatched, but gets into a headline-grabbing firefight with the police before it ever reaches the PCs' car chase.) He and his wife both fight like hellcats. Both of them have cyanide capsules, but only Dugan has the guts to take it—and then only if he's got his hands free, isn't in the middle of a fight, and is sure it's not the cops grabbing him.

Either Dugan or Maude can tell the PCs what happened to the pillow, though it takes some persuasion. (The same tactics described earlier can work. So can threatening one in front of the other.)

Here's what they know. A TOSG operative watching TNI people in New Orleans saw them talking to Coretta Rowlands. They approached her and bribed her to monitor the dreams of TNI operatives for them. They wanted to buy the pillow outright, but Coretta refused to sell and said she'd make it stop working for good if they tried to pressure her. They agreed, and she provided them with a lot of good information. However, she recently tried to break it off with them. She said one of the pillows had shown up in the news, and that she didn't want TNI to trace it to her. Dugan tried to talk her around, but when that failed he flew to New Orleans, tortured her until she told him where the receiver to Alex Abel's personal Therapeutic Pillow was (a safe in her bedroom), then killed her. He forced the safe and took the pillow back to the TOSG compound, where it is now.

That's about it. The PCs' bosses are going to absolutely forbid any suicidal assault on the TOSG compound. Unless the PCs have a better idea, it's time to destroy Abel's broadcast pillow and move on. (For one example of a better idea, see the next section.)

### Bait the Trap Well

Here's a cherry idea that may (or may not) occur to the PCs: why bother tracking down the pillow owner, when the pillow owner can be brought to them? All they have to do is put together a persuasive “nightmare” (not hard for a hypnotherapist or anyone with an appropriate magick skill) and have someone broadcast it through the Therapeutic Pillow that's been compromised. For instance, if the PCs have killed Dugan Nunn, hypnosis could be used to implant a jumbled image of Dugan being questioned about how the TOSG found the old Miami safehouse. The nightmare continues with Dugan being sadistically murdered when he nobly refuses to submit. A few clues provide the location of a “new” TNI safehouse, along with information about a big meeting with Abel visiting.

A dream like that is the bait. When Douglas tries to blow up this “new safehouse” with Abel inside, the PCs are ready for him and Abel is nowhere near—of course.

A similar dream could rope in the Sect of the Naked Goddess, only then you've got an even better bait—the master copy of the ascension video tape.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

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