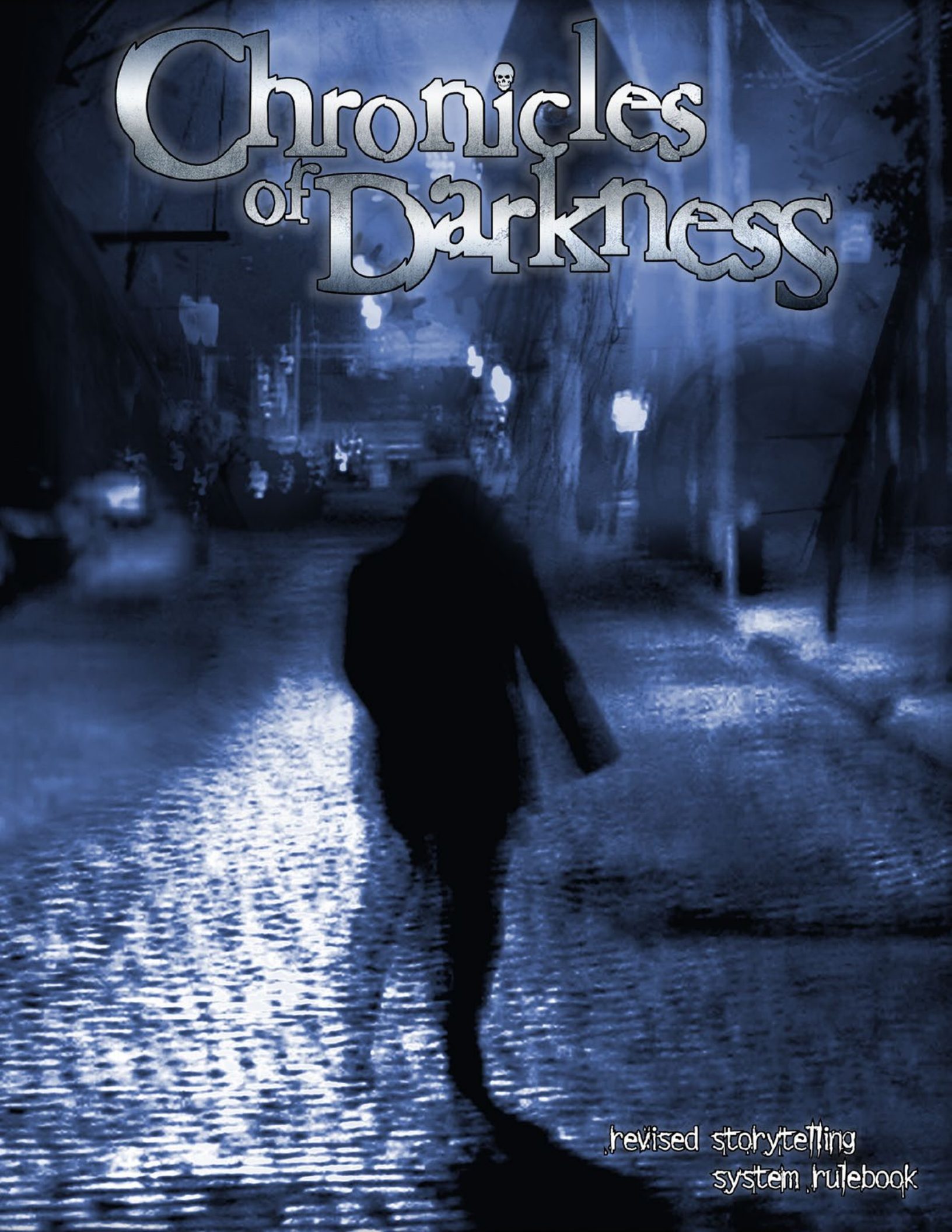
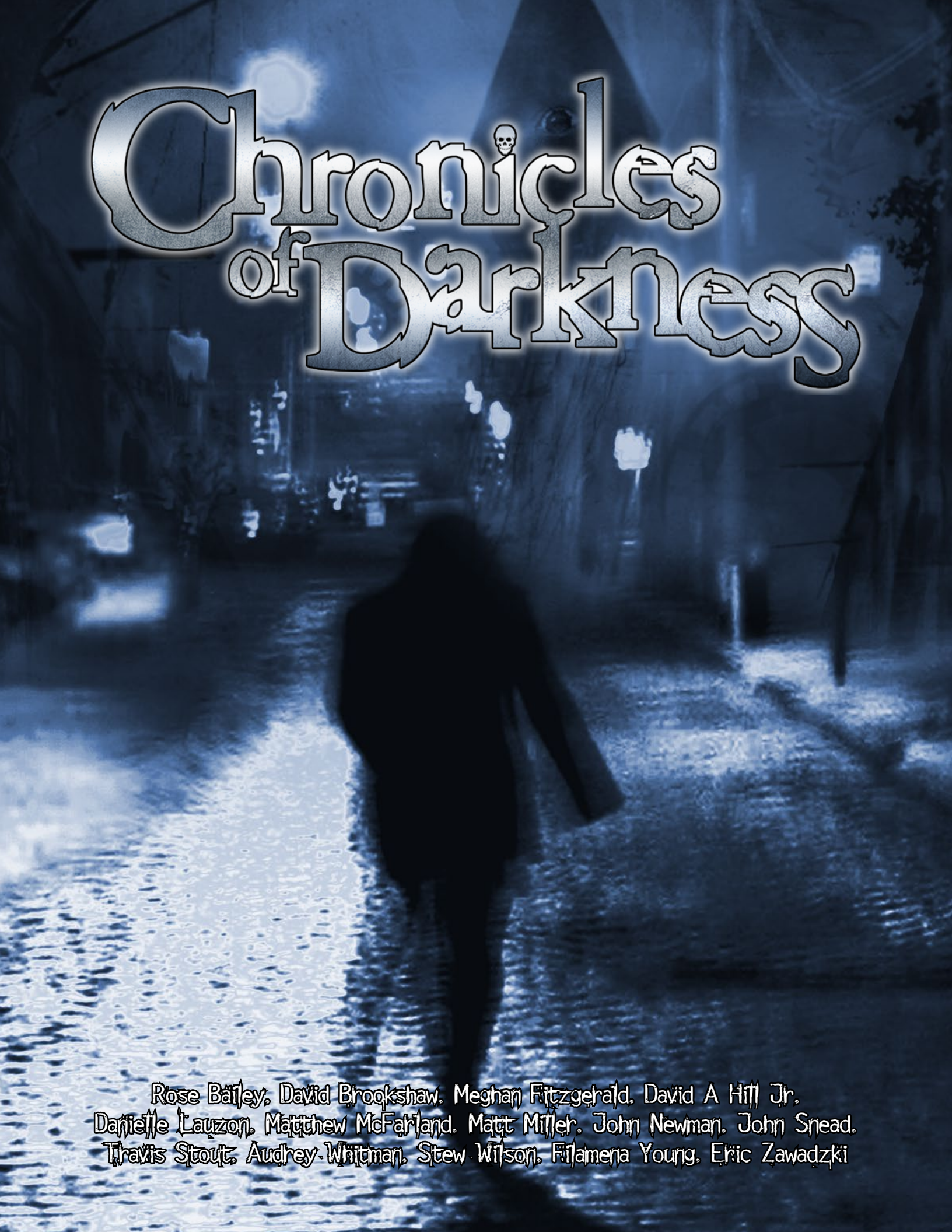

Chronicles of Darkness
revised storytelling system rulebook


Chronicles of Darkness
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# APT. 3B

by Audrey Whitman

## NOW...

"This is all your fault," Dawn whispered.

They were running. Well, scrambling really, searching for the safety exit Ximena had been so certain was down this stretch of hallway.

"Well, you were the one who shined the flashlight in its eyes. You woke it up."

"You were the one who screamed when it looked at us."

"I wasn't expecting it to move! Besides, it didn't even have any ears."

"Maybe you just weren't looking closely enough. It probably had, like, a hundred ears. And it's chasing us because you screamed at it."

"Then why are we even whispering?" Mena huffed, "It's not like it matters. If it's got a hundred ears it can probably hear us everywhere. Dawn. . . .did it look like Mrs. Luz to you?"

"I hope not. If I just hit Mrs. Luz with a flashlight your mom is going to kill me. Even if it was your idea to come down here in the first place."

"Yeah, well, let's worry about how long we're going to get grounded once we're definitely sure we're going to live long enough to get grounded."

They skidded to a stop in front of a smooth metal door and Mena cursed.

"Swearing is vulgar," Dawn said, breathless and bitterly disappointed. They'd finally found a door. But there was no knob.

"You better run and go tell your mom, then. Don't worry about me, I'll just stay here and get eaten by something with a hundred ears while I'm waiting for you to stop being a baby."

Dawn crouched on the floor and peered through the hole where the doorknob ought to have been. "And I'll know when it's here eating you because you'll shut up for the first time in your life."

Mena rolled her eyes. "You'd miss me so much you'd die."

"Yeah, 'cause that thing would eat me next. My last few seconds of life would definitely be spent silently mourning you, though. Not wondering why I let you talk me into this."

"As long as we're clear on that." Mena picked up a screw from the ground next to Dawn. "Geeze, whoever broke these doors sure didn't know what they were doing. Can I have your flashlight?"

Dawn handed it over. "The lens is cracked, but the bulb still works. What do you mean?"

Mena gestured at the metal detritus around them. "I mean that they didn't just take the knob off, they wrecked it. These screws are stripped, and the wood's cracked where they must have....pulled it out? Dawn, what room is this?"

Dawn looked up. "It's pretty dark, so I'm not sure, but I think it's the compactor room. Why?"

"Who would want to break the door to the trash compactor? It's half off its hinges."

Dawn went pale. "Mena, what are we actually doing down here?"

"Well you heard my mom. When Jenna went missing, it was down here. So it's the best place to check. And the cops didn't even look for her. They probably missed lots of stuff down here."

"Like the creepy old woman chasing us?"

"Well if they'd seen her, wouldn't they have done something?"

Dawn shot Ximena an irritated look. "Yeah, they would have shot her and then we all would have gotten arrested for making the place look untidy. Use your dang head, Mena. They didn't look because they didn't want to find anything."

"Maybe they knew there was something down here? I saw the cop who handcuffed your dad talking to the lawyer who's been hassling papi to sell this place."

Dawn shuddered. "Ew, the one with the milky eyes? He gives me the creeps. Why didn't you tell me you thought there might be someone down here?"

"I didn't think they would still be here! Or that you were going to blind the first thing we saw before cracking it in the face with your flashlight."

"At least I'm taking initiative." She paused for half a breath. "Don't you live here? How do you not know where the emergency exits are?"

"Not all of us were born thirty years old, Dawn. There's a map on the door in my apartment, okay? I didn't think I'd need to memorize it."

Dawn digested that for a moment, looking thoughtful. "But, if you had to guess? The next door? The one after that? Mena, we've got to have run at least a mile by now and we haven't even turned a corner. The building isn't this big."

"Look!" Mena grabbed Dawn's shoulder and they careened toward a door fitted so close to the wall that they had almost run past it. "See, I told you the fire door was this way."

"Mena...are you sure this is the right door?" The door was damp and hot to the touch, its surface so soft that Dawn's hand left fingerprints where she touched it. She quickly pulled her hand away.

"Ew! Mena, the door was feeling my hand. It was, like, touching me back."

"3B? I didn't know there were apartments down here." The number looked like it had been carved into the door with a knife, exposing some red-brown interior wood. Mena raised a hand to touch it.

"No." Dawn grabbed Mena's hand and started pulling her away. "No, this door is weird and it's not the right one anyway. Let's go already."

"Dawn, it's just a door. It couldn't be touching you back." She stepped back toward the door. "Aren't you the one who's always saying we should, you know, examine our world? I'm going to test your hypothesis that this ordinary door is covertly feeling the hands of teenagers."

Its surface seemed to ripple slightly, smoothing into something that almost looked like wood grain.

"Look! It moved! Didn't you see it move? Ximena Luisa Salazar, there is something made of skin and old clothes that is chasing us. It seems like a bad time for you to demonstrate a sudden interest in skepticism!" Dawn started dragging Mena back away from the door.

As she did, a tiny tendril of something wood-colored stretched off the surface of the door toward Mena's hand. Dawn shrieked and pulled Mena so hard they both fell over.

Mena staggered up and helped Dawn to her feet. "Okay, I'm going to tentatively confirm your hypothesis that this is a totally weird door and we should run."

"Thank you."

"Little rats, little rats, what are you doing in my basement?" The voice seemed to come from the walls themselves, dry as old paper and matte quiet, without even an echo to point to where the old woman might already be standing.

They spun, waving the flashlight around them.

"Oh, shit," Dawn whispered.

For all her shaking, Mena spoke up first. "It's our basement too, you know. We live here. We've got just as much of a right to be here as you."

## TEN MINUTES AGO...

Dawn swung her flashlight around the room once more. "Mena, I don't think there's anything down here. Just a bunch of spiders and broken furniture. Why hasn't your dad cleaned this out yet? There's practically a whole new unit."

A voice from the hallway called, "Too close to the laundry room outtake, it kept getting mildewy and no one wanted to stay there." She poked her head through the doorway. "Gross, it even smells mildewy in there."

"What am I looking for again?"

"Anything of Jenna's. I dunno, earrings or a school book or her stupid pony pen case."

There was a clink and a roll and Dawn's flashlight skidded to a halt. "Butterflies?"

"What?" Ximena started walking into the room.

"Did she like butterflies?"

"Yeah, I think she collected them or something. Why?"

Dawn gestured down to the jar of butterfly wings rocking against the concrete. They took reflexive

steps toward one another, and Dawn slowly panned the flashlight up. The pile of old clothes crammed between the two halves of a broken couch rippled as the light moved, settling onto a perfectly still face under the pale yellow light.

"Dawn," Mena whispered, "can you make it any brighter?"

"I think so."

The flashlight clicked twice, deepening the shadows in the still, wrinkly face. Within those depths, one eye opened. Then the next. It lunged, clumsy and covered in piles of fabric and clattering everywhere with little bits of children's jewelry. Mena screamed; Dawn swung the flashlight wildly and heard it crack. The light flickered and something howled.

And they ran.

## AND THEN...

A figure peeled away from the shadows, close enough for Dawn to feel its breath, cold and rotten smelling, on her neck. From far away she had looked impossibly old. Yesterday, half a hallway away, Mrs. Luz had been a picture of decrepit old age, with furrows of loose skin bunched along her face and arms, crowding her faint features; squeezed into a baggy dress and dull support hose. Today, and this close, the resemblance to a person somewhat faltered. The skin seemed to shape her face, rather than the other way around, forming the impression of eyes and mouth out of shadow and flesh. The hose melted into the color of dry skin as she rippled rapidly toward them. Her hand flowed towards Dawn like water, skin crashing onto skin, lightly stretching to engulf her outflung arm.

Dawn screamed and desperately yanked at her arm, now surrounded by a puddle of skin mottled and studded with tiny blue streaks that must have looked like capillaries at a distance.

"Mrs. Luz?" Mena tentatively called out.

Her voice sounded like bedbugs and waking up in a cold sweat. "As good a name as any other. But you can't name me to get rid of me, little rat." She slowly pulled Dawn closer.

"This is your home too, eh? Which one of you belongs to the man who owns my nest?" More soft waves of skin crept down Dawn's arm and across her chest, and her struggling was getting fainter. "Don't wait too long, I might lose interest in your answer."

Mena tried to grab Dawn's other arm, but Mrs. Luz wrenched her away, spinning her to the left. Dawn whimpered, then turned her head and mouthed something Mena couldn't understand.

"I am! It's me, let her go," Mena shouted

The folds of Mrs. Luz's face rearranged into something that might have been meant to be a smile. "Good girl. You will take a message from me to the man."

Dawn was shifting, very slowly, in Mrs. Luz's grasp. She caught Ximena's eyes again and stared; gesturing slightly to the left with her eyes. Dawn was angry, not scared, so she must need time.

Mena paused and tried to catch Mrs. Luz's eyes. "What man?"

"To your father, stupid child. Tell him he mustn't sell my home to the hollow men who have been creeping around here at night. I'll kill as many of you as I must to drive them off, but it can all stop if he promises not to sign anything they give him."

"Hollow men? The lawyer, you mean? Papi said he was a real estate investor."

"Nonsense words. He is an empty thing that traded favors for a face and a name, and the men he speaks for don't even have the grace to cast a shadow. They are hollow men and they must not be allowed to put their clockwork..."

Mena interrupted her, angry. "Wait, you'll kill as many of us as you must? What did you do with Jenna?"

"The soft, pink one? She was oily but toothsome. You, I suspect," and she shook Dawn again, who struggled harder this time, palming something, "will need to sit a few days before you are soft enough for my old teeth."

Mena tried to stay calm. "But you're scaring everyone away! If any more tenants leave we won't be able to afford to live here. He'll have to sell."

Mrs. Luz appeared to consider this for a moment. "The man's gold is his own to track. Tell him not to sell or I'll collect you next."

Mena didn't quite suppress a shudder. "I will, but only if you let her go."

"I will not. You are the child with the message, so this one is for me. You are thoughtful to have brought her, and she will buy your safe escape."

"You evil old witch!" Mena threw Dawn's flashlight at Mrs. Luz – and regretted it almost instantly when one of the folds of skin holding Dawn in place reached out to bat it away.

Dawn, in that moment, wrenched herself forward to face Mrs. Luz, and emptied a can of pepper spray into the folds where her face should have been. Mrs. Luz reeled backward, screaming, as Dawn braced herself against the dress-colored flesh and pulled her arm free. "Come on, this way!"

Mena was already running.

"Dawn, wait, this is the way we came!"

"I know, just trust me!"

Mena tailed Dawn back to the door with no knob.

"No, this is a stupid plan. Do you even know how to turn it on?"

"Only one way to find out! Come on, help me pull this thing open." The wood splintered and came apart. Not open, but open enough for them to crawl through.

Before climbing in, Dawn pressed the remains of the doorknob into Mena's hands. "You're a better pitcher than me. Remember, all you've got to do is get her attention."

The minute that Ximena stood outside the wreckage of the door lasted six years. So when she saw Mrs. Luz charging toward her, screaming so loudly it rattled Mena's teeth, she was a little relieved.

"If this works, I am never going to try to solve a mystery again as long as I live." She took a deep breath and shouted, "Hey, ugly!"

Mrs. Luz sped up, all pretense of human form giving way to a rolling mass of mottled flesh. To her right, she heard a slow whirr and a chunky metallic crash. With a smile, she lined up a pitch; and hit Mrs. Luz right in the center of the red, blistery mass where her face had been.

She scrambled through the hole they'd broken in the door and flattened herself against the far side of the compactor door, afraid to breathe. It was terribly dark. Dawn had thrown her jacket over the red warning light, and was standing in front of the open compactor door.

Mrs. Luz burst through the broken door, sending splintery shards of wood everywhere, and saw Dawn, fully illuminated by the hallway light and looking convincingly terrified.

"Naughty rat. Did you think you could hide from me in my own nest?"

She lunged, and Dawn leaped to the side, letting momentum take its course. Mena slammed the compactor door shut, and Dawn frantically set it in motion. They huddled against each other and waited until the screaming stopped. Neither of them could work up the nerve to open the compactor and make sure she was really dead.

## AND AFTER THAT...

"Do. . . do you think she's the only one?"

Late that night, they were crammed head to tail into Dawn's twin bed, reminding each other that it really happened.

"What would you do if she wasn't?"

Ximena swallowed hard. "Well, maybe we should look for them. Maybe they're not all mean and crazy like Mrs. Luz. Maybe there are some nice ones who could, like, use a friend or something."

"Do you really think anything like her could actually be friends with us?"

"Well maybe we should look anyway. We've already fought one, right? That makes us practically qualified to find – fight – monsters."

"I'll think about it," Dawn paused, "But you can't tell anyone else. Especially not your little brother. He's got a big mouth, and you never know who might be a. . . monster."

The next week was weird. Once the court gag order was lifted they could talk, a little, about what had happened. The official word was that a homeless woman had snuck into the basement and attacked the girls while they were cleaning. They ran away, and in her pursuit she hit her head so hard on the concrete steps that it broke her nose and cheekbone, accounting for the corpse's unusually distorted and swollen face. Unrelated, Mrs. Luz, the longest-lived tenant of their building, died of heart failure.

She left no next of kin.

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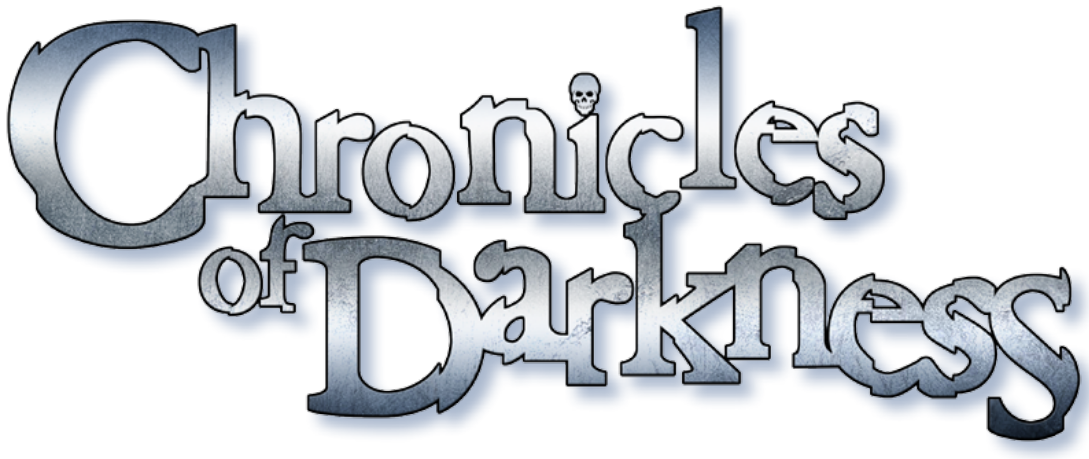


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# Chronicles of Darkness

## Where the Shadows Grow Long

We live our days completely ignorant of the true terrors lurking around us. Only rarely do our experiences draw back the veil of shadows and reveal the horror in our midst. These glimpses into the supernatural can cause us to retreat into comforting lies - 'There are no such things as monsters' - or stir our morbid curiosity. Only a few, however, can overcome their fear and dare to look deeper.

## Abandon Hope All Who Enter

# Introduction

**He must have felt that he had lost the old warm world... He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about...**

**F. Scott Fitzgerald,**
***The Great Gatsby***

At a warehouse on 17th street, surgeries are performed in accordance with the phase of the moon. In the suburbs, a housewife dotes on a large dog with man-like hands. Roaming the backwoods, there is a man who traded his hand to a hungry devil for immortality. He spends his nights polishing his hook.

These are the Chronicles of Darkness, tales of a world like ours, but just slightly wrong. A place we recognize, but where our fears take on lives of their own. The **Chronicles of Darkness Rulebook** is the key to exploring that world, a guide to storytelling encounters with the uncanny and a foundation for tales in which the monster becomes the hero.

The **Chronicles of Darkness Rulebook** will help you and your friends tell tales of thrills and chills. It provides tools for investigation, violence, setting-building, and more, but layers them on top of a framework that lets you dial back the complexity and improvise at any time.

## How to Use This Book

The **Chronicles of Darkness Rulebook** describes how to create protagonists for your own unique horror stories, how to adjudicate the results of their actions, and how to play a storytelling game with your friends. Use this book as an introduction to both storytelling games and the unique setting of the Chronicles of Darkness.

## Chapters

**Chapter One: The Face in the Mirror** describes how to create your protagonists. If you're playing one of these starring characters, this should be your first stop.

**Chapter Two: Infernal Engines** explains the rules of the Chronicles of Darkness storytelling game, from finding clues to building bombs. Players and Storytellers alike should be familiar with this section, since it's where you'll turn when the characters are in trouble and you don't know what happens next.

**Chapter Three: Black Threads** looks at the game from the perspective of the Storyteller, the player who organizes the game and plants the seeds which become stories in play. It also provides a system for creating Missing Persons scenarios that can bring a group of disparate characters together. Storytellers new and old should check out this chapter, as it's packed with both basic advice and explanations of how to use the Chronicles of Darkness to their best advantage.

**Chapter Four: Wonders and Horrors** provides systems for creating monsters and other characters controlled by the Storyteller. Inside, you'll find sample antagonists, rules for spirits and ghosts, and a complete system for creating horrors right out of urban legend, as well as several examples of the same. Storytellers will want to make a lot of use of this chapter.

**Chapter Five: The God-Machine Chronicle** offers a variety of Storytelling advice, scenario ideas, and characters for running a game featuring the God-Machine, a mysterious force that manipulates humans to build and extend its presence in the world. This chapter is intended mainly for Storytellers, since we wouldn't want to spoil any surprises.

# An Introduction to Storytelling Games

Chances are you know what a storytelling — or roleplaying — game is already. But if you're new, or if you haven't played a Chronicles of Darkness game before, let's talk about the basics.

Starting with this book, you'll play out stories following a core cast of characters as they make their way in the Chronicles of Darkness, a distorted reflection of our own everyday world. It's a lot like a TV drama, something like *Pretty Little Liars* or *Breaking Bad*. Individual gaming sessions, generally running two to four hours, are like weekly episodes. Secrets will be revealed, relationships will be tested, and blood will be spilled.

Around two to five players take on one cast member each. You'll make decisions for your character. When her best friend betrays her, you'll plot her scheme for revenge. When the man with a hook for a hand comes calling late at night, you'll decide whether she runs or fights.

One player, the Storyteller, is responsible for portraying characters who don't belong to specific players, and presenting fictional situations that challenge the other players' characters. Think of these as the supporting cast of our imagined TV series — both ongoing characters who help or oppose the core cast, and guest stars of the week who turn up to cause unique kinds of trouble.

As for challenging the player characters, it's the job of the Storyteller to come up with scenes where the players have to make decisions fraught with conflict and danger. The Storyteller narrates a situation, then the other players say how their characters respond. The most important question a Storyteller can ask is "What do you do now?"

When a character acts, the outcome of the action is determined by rolling a handful of dice. The basics are simple. You add a few numbers on your character sheet (a mini-dossier) and roll that many dice. You'll find out whether your action works, or fails and gets your character into more trouble.

While players other than the Storyteller will generally be advocates for their characters' success, planning ways in which they can accomplish impressive deeds, a lot of drama and fun comes from when things don't go well for the protagonists. Again, think of a television series...the most interesting episodes are often the ones where everything goes wrong for the characters until they find a way to turn it around. That said, the Storyteller should make sure characters have a chance to bounce back rather than constantly dumping suffering on them.

### The Storyteller is responsible for...

...bringing the Chronicles of Darkness to life through description.

...deciding where scenes start and what's going on.

...portraying characters who don't belong to other players.

...involving each player and her character in the ongoing story.

...putting players' characters in tough spots, encouraging interesting decisions.

...facilitating the actions players' characters take, while making sure there are always complications.

...making sure that poor dice rolls affect but don't stop the story.

### The players are responsible for...

...creating their own individual characters as members of the cast.

...deciding what actions their characters take.

...making decisions that create drama and help keep the story moving.

...highlighting their characters' strengths and weaknesses.

...confronting the problems the Storyteller introduces.

...developing their characters' personalities and abilities over time, and telling personal stories within the overall story of the game.

### Everyone is responsible for...

...giving other players chances to highlight their characters' abilities and personal stories, whether that's by showing them at their strongest or weakest.

...making suggestions about the story and action, while keeping in mind the authority of players over their characters and the responsibility of the Storyteller to occasionally make trouble.

# Inspirational Media

Here are some books and movies that get us in the mood to explore the Chronicles of Darkness.

## Horror and Drama

**The Crow**, directed by Alex Proyas. Witness a city burning for a mysterious ritual, and a man risen from the dead to wreak vengeance upon those who wronged him. The Crow's seedy characters and revenge-driven story are an example of what can happen when a Chronicles of Darkness chronicle goes, very, very wrong. Keep your eyes on the depiction of Detroit in the 90s, a place which must look very much like the Chronicles of Darkness.

**Demo**, by Brian Wood and Becky Cloonan. This anthology comic follows strange events in the lives of a myriad of people. Sometimes there's a supernatural element, like a young woman who can barely control her psychic powers. Other times, the truth is more ambiguous, like when the "ghost" of a suicide leaves her boyfriend a mix tape. *Demo* illustrates how the uncanny can impact ordinary people.

**The Exorcist**, directed by William Friedkin. A young woman is in trouble, and the Church tries to help. It could be almost sweet, except that the trouble is demonic possession and the help is a priest due for a crisis of faith. This is a great example of how a horror story can be terrifying and hint at bigger mysteries while sticking to very personal stakes.

**Fell**, by Warren Ellis and Ben Templesmith. This brooding procedural comic follows the titular Fell, a detective in a "feral city" – a major metropolis where law and order

have collapsed but life goes on. Ellis's seedy narratives and Templesmith's deceptively stylized visuals reveal the kinds of characters and crimes that would be right at home in the Chronicles of Darkness. The supernatural is never overt or confirmed, but an eerie atmosphere and macabre rituals permeate the story.

**Gone Girl**, by Gillian Flynn, or directed by David Fincher. *Gone Girl* owes much of its mystery and atmosphere to its unreliable narration. Both the book and the movie switch from the perspective of Nick Dunne, who comes home one day to find his wife missing, and the diary of Amy Dunne, the missing wife. Are memories reliable? Can one really believe witnesses and news stories, or is everything just tabloid journalism? How well can you ever really know a person, whether a neighbor or a spouse? Both the movie and the novel (as well as Gillian Flynn's other two books, *Sharp Objects* and *Dark Places*) exemplify how a seemingly-simple situation can actually possess unexpected depth, if only people know how to ask the right questions.

**The Terminator**, directed by James Cameron. Though nominally science fiction, this classic horror-action flick is the story of a woman pursued by an implacable monster as the result of a family curse. Pay attention to the neon-lit neo-noir Los Angeles setting, and the way an ordinary waitress becomes a hardened survivor.

**True Detective**, created by Nick Pizzolatto. This show, which jumps back and forth in time, follows multiple homicide cases and conspiracies over a 17-year period. Though the series begins with the ritualistic murder of a prostitute, it rapidly expands in scope to include biker gangs, drug deals, politics, and a possible conspiracy involving abuse at a now-defunct religious school. *True Detective* is an excellent show to use as inspiration for a longer chronicle wherein players slowly piece together what is really happening, while still having contained adventures in each session.

## Storytelling System Books

**Midnight Roads** revs up your game with an in-depth exploration of the Chronicles of Darkness through America's roads. Packed with odd traveling companions, small-town strangeness, and hints at a greater purpose to it all.

**Mysterious Places** fleshes out several locales unique to the Chronicles of Darkness. What horrors await you in a crematorium full of puppets made from bone, or when the Empty Room stalks and abducts you?

**Urban Legends** is the Chronicles of Darkness treatment of all of the fears we hide behind fables and humor. It includes several urban legends as full adventures, plus a chapter that covers everything from tainted Halloween candy to the Mexican Pet.

**Hurt Locker**, coming soon, is an in-depth treatment of violence in the Chronicles of Darkness, from action-packed options like fighting styles to exploring the grim consequences of trying to kill another human being.

# Other Chronicles of Darkness

The Chronicles of Darkness isn't just one setting, it's many. Outside of this book, most of the games focus on playing one type of monster. As of this writing, there are ten, with more to come.

**Vampire: The Requiem** is a game of personal horror and visceral drama set in a society of predators that exists alongside ours.

**Werewolf: The Forsaken** tells stories of spiritual threats and unrelenting hunters.

**Mage: The Awakening** follows mystery-addicted will-workers as they seek to understand the Fallen World.

**Promethean: The Created** is about the long road to becoming human.

**Changeling: The Lost** explores how to reclaim your stolen life, while defending those around you from forces they could never understand.

**Hunter: The Vigil** is about plain ol' humans who don't just encounter the supernatural... they hunt it down and make it pay.

**Geist: The Sin-Eaters** follows ghost-bound people given a second chance, and their efforts to put the dead to rest.

**Mummy: The Curse** is a game of ancient servants, awoken in the modern world to play their long games and work their ancient magic anew.

**Demon: The Descent** tells stories of the fallen servants of a monstrous God, and their struggle to find their own personal Hells.

**Beast: The Primordial** explores what it means to discover you're a creature of nightmare, heir to ancient monsters like Medusa and Fenris.

# Lexicon

**10 Again** — A result of 10 on any die is re-rolled in an attempt to achieve more successes. A further result of 8 on a re-rolled die is rolled yet again, over and over, until no more 10's are rolled.

**8 Again** — A result of 8 or higher on any die is re-rolled in an attempt to achieve more successes. A further result of 10 on a re-rolled die is rolled yet again, over and over, until no more 10's are rolled.

**9 Again** — A result of 9 or higher on any die is re-rolled in an attempt to achieve more successes. A further result of 9 on a re-rolled die is rolled yet again, over and over, until no more 10's are rolled.

**action** — A task that takes all of a character's time and attention. The Storytelling System measures instant actions (one to three seconds, taking place within a single turn) and extended actions, taking longer (duration determined by the Storyteller). Also, there are reflexive actions, which take no time and do not prevent a character from performing another action within a turn, and contested actions, in which two or more characters compete in a task or for a single goal.

**advantage** — A character trait such as Health or Willpower that usually represents abilities derived from other traits. Advantages are measured in dots and sometimes in points.

**aggravated (damage)** — A damage point that inflicts a grievous or supernatural wound. Vampires suffer aggravated damage from fire; werewolves suffer it from silver. Mortals might suffer aggravated damage from a dire supernatural power such as a lightning bolt summoned from the sky by a witch. Aggravated wounds normally heal at a rate of one point per week.

**Aspiration** — One of a player's goals for her character. An Aspiration can be something the character seeks out, or something the player wants to see happen to the character.

**Attribute** — A character trait representing innate capabilities, Mental, Physical and Social. An Attribute is added to a Skill (or another Attribute in certain cases) to determine your basic dice pool for an action.

**bashing (damage)** — A damage point that inflicts a non-life-threatening wound. Bashing wounds normally heal at a rate of one point per 15 minutes.

**Beat** — A point gained for performing certain actions. Five Beats becomes an Experience, which can then be used to purchase new traits, such as Attributes, Skills, Merits, or supernatural powers.

**breaking point** — A trigger that causes a player to have to check for losing Integrity, Humanity, or a similar trait.

**chance roll** — Whenever modifiers reduce your dice pool to zero or fewer dice, you may make a chance roll on a single die. Unlike a normal dice roll, a chance roll succeeds only on a result of 10. Worse, a result of 1 causes a dramatic failure.

**close combat** — Attacks that involve hand-to-hand or weapon fighting. Such attacks use the Strength Attribute for their dice pools. Characters gain their Defense against close-combat attacks.

**Condition** — An ongoing effect, which may be physical, mental, or supernatural. For example, a character might be Guilty or Mesmerized. Usually, a Condition modifies a character's dice pools for certain actions. Players are rewarded with Beats when they act on or resolve (end) a Condition.

**contested action** — Two or more characters compete in a task or for a single goal. The one who gets the most successes wins. Contested actions can be instant or extended actions.

**damage** — The points inflicted against a character's Health or an object's Structure, rated as bashing, lethal or aggravated. One point of damage inflicts one wound.

**Defense** — An advantage trait determined by taking the lowest of Dexterity or Wits and adding Athletics. Characters can penalize a close-combat opponent's accuracy by subtracting their Defense from his dice pool.

**dice** — The Storytelling System uses 10-sided dice to represent the element of chance. Dice are collected to form a character's dice pool for an action.

**dice pool** — The number of dice rolled to determine failure or success (and the degree of success) for a character's action. Dice pools are usually determined by adding an Attribute to a Skill, plus any relevant equipment and/or modifiers.

**dot** — The incremental measurement of a permanent trait. Most traits range from 1 to 5 dots, but some (such as Willpower) range from 1 to 10, and others (Health) can go higher.

**dramatic failure** — A result of 1 on a chance roll causes a dramatic failure, a catastrophe worse than a normal failure. The character's gun might jam or he might wind up shooting a friend by accident. The Storyteller determines and describes the result. A player can also turn a failure into a dramatic failure voluntarily in order to gain a Beat.

**Durability** — A trait representing an object's hardness, based on the material from which it is made (wood has less Durability than metal). Durability is measured in dots. An attack's damage must exceed Durability before the object is harmed.

**equipment** — Characters can improve their chances of succeeding in a task by using the right equipment. This benefit is represented by modifiers to the dice pool, depending on the equipment used and its quality.

**exceptional success** — Whenever five or more successes are rolled, the character achieves an exceptional success. This achievement sometimes provides an extra perk over and above the effect of having multiple successes. For example, a character who gains five successes on a fast-talk roll might allay the target's suspicions enough that he believes anything the character says for the remaining scene.

**Experiences** — A collection of five Beats, used to purchase new traits or to boost the dots of existing traits.

**extended action** — A task that takes time to accomplish. Players roll to accumulate successes during phases of the task, succeeding once they have acquired the needed total.

**failure** — A dice roll that yields no successes is a failure — the character does not succeed at his task.

**Initiative** — An advantage trait representing the character's ability to respond to sudden surprise, determined by adding Dexterity + Composure. A character's Initiative helps him get a high standing in the Initiative roster.

**instant action** — A task that takes place within a single turn. A character can perform only one instant action per turn, unless he has a Merit or power that lets him do otherwise.

**Integrity** — A trait representing a character's mental stability.

**Merit** — A character trait representing enhancements or elements of a character's background, such as his allies or influence. Merits are measured in dots, but are not always used to determine dice pools. Instead, they represent increasing degrees of quality or quantity concerning their subject.

**modifiers** — Dice pools are often modified by a number of factors, from bonuses (adding dice) for equipment or ideal conditions to penalties (subtracting dice) for poor conditions.

**point** — A trait expended to gain certain effects, such as a Willpower point or a measurement of damage or Health. The amount of points available to spend is equal to the parent trait's dots. Spent points are regained over time or through certain actions.

**ranged combat** — An attack that sends a projectile of some sort at a target, whether it's a bullet from a gun or a knife from a hand. Such attacks use the Dexterity Attribute for their dice pools. Characters' Defense cannot normally be used against firearm attacks, although targets can penalize an opponent's accuracy by going prone or taking cover.

**reflexive action** — An instinctual task that takes no appreciable time, such as reacting to surprise or noticing something out of the corner of your eye. Performing a reflexive action does not prevent a character from performing another action within a turn.

**Resistance** — Characters can resist others' attempts to socially sway them, physically grapple them or even mentally dominate them. Whenever applying such resistance requires a character's full attention, it is performed as a contested action, but more often it is a reflexive action, allowing the target to also perform an action that turn.

**scene** — A division of time based on drama, such as the end of one plot point and the beginning of another. Whenever a character leaves a location where a dramatic event has occurred, or when a combat has ended, the current scene usually ends and the next one begins.

**Skill** — A character trait representing learned ability or knowledge. Added to an Attribute to determine a character's basic dice pool for a task.

**Specialty** — An area of Skill expertise in which a character excels. Whenever a Specialty applies to a character's task, one die is added to his player's dice pool. There's no limit to the number of Specialties that you can assign to a single Skill.

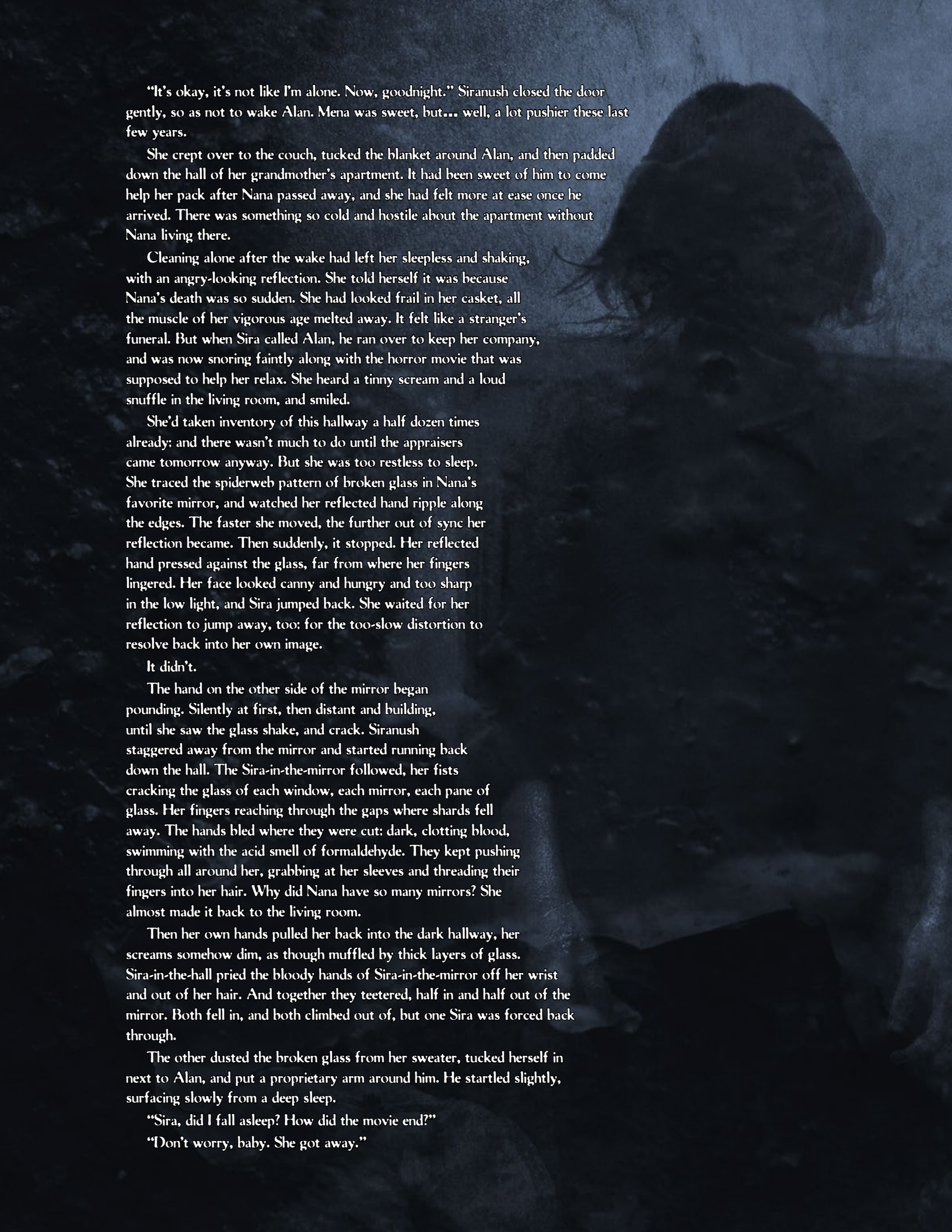
**Storyteller** — The "director" or "editor" of the interactive story told by the players. The Storyteller creates the plot and roleplays the characters, both allies and enemies, with which the players' characters interact.

**success** — Each die that rolls an 8, 9 or 10 yields one success. (Exception: A chance roll must produce a 10 to succeed.) In an instant action, a player must roll at least one success for his character to accomplish a task. In an extended action, the number of successes required (accumulated over a series of rolls) depends on the task. In an attack roll, each success produces one point of damage.

**trait** — An element on the character sheet. Traits include Attributes, Skills, Merits, advantages, anchors, supernatural powers, and more.

**turn** — A three-second period of time. Instant actions are observed in turns. Combat (a series of instant actions) is observed in consecutive turns as each combatant tries to overcome opponents.

**wound** — A marked Health point, denoting an injury from damage.



"It's okay, it's not like I'm alone. Now, goodnight." Siranush closed the door gently, so as not to wake Alan. Mena was sweet, but... well, a lot pushier these last few years.

She crept over to the couch, tucked the blanket around Alan, and then padded down the hall of her grandmother's apartment. It had been sweet of him to come help her pack after Nana passed away, and she had felt more at ease once he arrived. There was something so cold and hostile about the apartment without Nana living there.

Cleaning alone after the wake had left her sleepless and shaking, with an angry-looking reflection. She told herself it was because Nana's death was so sudden. She had looked frail in her casket, all the muscle of her vigorous age melted away. It felt like a stranger's funeral. But when Sira called Alan, he ran over to keep her company, and was now snoring faintly along with the horror movie that was supposed to help her relax. She heard a tinny scream and a loud snuffle in the living room, and smiled.

She'd taken inventory of this hallway a half dozen times already; and there wasn't much to do until the appraisers came tomorrow anyway. But she was too restless to sleep. She traced the spiderweb pattern of broken glass in Nana's favorite mirror, and watched her reflected hand ripple along the edges. The faster she moved, the further out of sync her reflection became. Then suddenly, it stopped. Her reflected hand pressed against the glass, far from where her fingers lingered. Her face looked canny and hungry and too sharp in the low light, and Sira jumped back. She waited for her reflection to jump away, too; for the too-slow distortion to resolve back into her own image.

It didn't.

The hand on the other side of the mirror began pounding. Silently at first, then distant and building, until she saw the glass shake, and crack. Siranush staggered away from the mirror and started running back down the hall. The Sira-in-the-mirror followed, her fists cracking the glass of each window, each mirror, each pane of glass. Her fingers reaching through the gaps where shards fell away. The hands bled where they were cut; dark, clotting blood, swimming with the acid smell of formaldehyde. They kept pushing through all around her, grabbing at her sleeves and threading their fingers into her hair. Why did Nana have so many mirrors? She almost made it back to the living room.

Then her own hands pulled her back into the dark hallway, her screams somehow dim, as though muffled by thick layers of glass. Sira-in-the-hall pried the bloody hands of Sira-in-the-mirror off her wrist and out of her hair. And together they teetered, half in and half out of the mirror. Both fell in, and both climbed out of, but one Sira was forced back through.

The other dusted the broken glass from her sweater, tucked herself in next to Alan, and put a proprietary arm around him. He startled slightly, surfacing slowly from a deep sleep.

"Sira, did I fall asleep? How did the movie end?"

"Don't worry, baby. She got away."

# The Face in the Mirror: Characters

As a player in the Chronicles of Darkness, you explore the story and help to weave a tale through a character you create. Your character is your means to engage with the world.

As a player, it's your responsibility to portray your character in a way that's appropriate to her background and context, while fostering the kind of story you want to see her in. Consider that moment in a horror movie where you're at the edge of your seat, trying to make decisions for a character who's about to do something dangerous. With your character, you can choose to step back away from the cellar door, or to lash out at the monster instead of standing and screaming. Or, you can embrace that moment of horror and jump headfirst into the awfulness you know is coming. After all, no Storyteller can scare you the way you can scare yourself.

Creating characters is best done at the table with everyone participating. Stories about characters with ties, whether they be social or simply thematic, will work much better than a bunch of strangers designed with different types of stories in mind. In game terms, you make your character through a series of traits. These traits describe her capabilities, her weaknesses, and some of what makes her unique. Imagine how many different characters you could describe as "paranormal investigators," "curious students," or even "truck drivers." These traits allow you to define and refine your character's role in the story.

When coming up with your character, work with the Storyteller and the other players to figure out what kinds of stories you want to tell, and what characters could best serve that narrative. If your story is about personal horror, a team of expert martial artists might not be the best fit. However, if you want to tell an action-packed story of a village set upon by an undead horde brought upon by biological tests gone awry, that team could shine.

As you delve into the mystery, the horror, and the drama of the Chronicles of Darkness, your character earns Beats and Experiences, which can improve her game traits. This allows you further customization, and lets your character grow and develop in mechanical terms. You get these Beats through a variety of behaviors; for example, you can get them through unfortunate events, from executing elaborate actions, or by pursuing character goals. Just like in a book, movie, or television show, your character grows as she interacts with the plot.

**"Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations."**

**-Ray Bradbury, Zen and the Art of Writing**

## Character Creation

The system for creating a character is a simple, step-by-step process to take an initial idea for a character, and flesh her out with goals, personality, and the game traits that determine what she is capable of. It's helpful to take a look at the character sheet from the back of the book. You can fill out the sheet as you go through the steps of creating your character.

### Step One: Character Concept

The first step in creating a character is to develop a general idea of who your character is. The Chronicles of Darkness, on the surface, is a world much like ours. Your

starting character concept can easily be someone you could meet on the street. Try to boil this down to a simple phrase, like "bored medical student," "single parent trying to get by," or "blogger obsessed with unsolved mysteries." It doesn't need to be particularly complex, just a good starting point.

In addition to your concept, also consider your character's Aspirations. These are goals that your character wants to accomplish, or stories and events that you, as the player, want to see happen during your character's story. Thinking about your Aspirations early on, as part of your character concept, helps to make sure that your character is active, and that there are story hooks to get your character involved immediately. You can also use Aspirations as a way to connect player characters, by giving them similar goals. We'll talk more about Aspirations in their own section, later in this chapter.

## Step Two: Anchors

Once you have a general idea and some goals for you character, you can define a bit more of his personality. You do this by selecting Anchors. Anchors are those things that help a character retain his sense of self and drive his behavior. For a mortal character in the Chronicles of Darkness, his Anchors are his Virtue and his Vice.

For each of your character's Anchors, decide on a description of a major personality trait or motivation for your character: something like Ambition, Honesty, Kindness, or Greed. For your character's Virtue, you'll want to pick a trait that is difficult to act on or easy to ignore, but that makes the character feel proud when he does make the effort. His Vice, on the other hand, is the trait that represents the easy way out, the things that bring the character short-term comfort, but never seem to drive him to actually improve.

## Step Three: Select Attributes

Now you set your character's basic capabilities. Attributes are fundamental traits, defining how strong a character is, how well she can keep her temper when provoked, or how quickly she can improvise a solution to a problem.

A character starts with one dot in each Attribute for free. One dot represents someone who is below average in that capability, while two dots represent someone average. A character with three or four dots is above average or extremely talented, while five dots represents the peak of human ability.

Attributes are divided into the Mental, Physical, and Social categories. For your character, consider which of the categories is most important. What sort of endeavors does your character excel at? Once you have picked a primary category, decide out of the remaining two which is your character's next-best category. You'll assign five dots to the Attributes in your primary category, four dots to the Attributes in your secondary category, and three dots to the Attributes in your tertiary category.

It's worth taking a moment to consider the Attributes and how they connect to your character concept. While picking

categories is often easy (an Olympic Athlete probably has Physical as her primary category), sometimes picking a less obvious category can make for a more interesting character.

## Step Four: Select Skills

Like Attributes, Skills are divided up into the Mental, Physical, and Social categories. However, unlike Attributes, you do not get a free dot in Skills.

Skills represent applications of your abilities. These are things you have learned from training, books, or teachers. Having no dots in a Skill means that you have no training with it, and are barely capable. One dot means you have cursory training or dabble in the Skill, while two dots means that you can use the Skill at a professional level. Three dots represents excellent training or experience, four is outstanding, and five dots means you are one of the absolute best in the world.

Like Attributes, select a primary, secondary, and tertiary category for your Skills. You have eleven dots to assign for your primary category, seven dots for you secondary, and four dots for your tertiary. As always, consider your character and concept when assigning dots. Maybe your blogger has two dots in Athletics because he is a marathoner, or your med student has a dot in Animal Ken from volunteering at a local shelter.

## Step Five: Pick Skill Specialties

Skills represent broad categories of training. Someone with the Science Skill is equally familiar with particle physics, basic chemistry, and genetics. Skill Specialties allow you to differentiate more, focusing on a specific area of a Skill that your character is more knowledgeable or proficient in.

A character's Specialties say a lot about her. For example, a character with a Socialize Specialty in Formal Events is very different from one with a Specialty in Dive Bars.

Pick three Skill Specialties for your character. The Skill descriptions will have some suggested Specialties.

## Step Six: Merits

Merits are important facets of your character that do not fall under other traits. A Merit can represent a knack, special training, people your character knows, or even things that he owns. They add unique capabilities to your character beyond Attributes and Skills.

You have seven dots you can use to pick Merits. There is a list of Merits you can choose from later in this chapter.

## Step Seven: Determine Advantages

The final step in character creation is calculating Advantages. Use the following rules to determine the values for these traits.

### Size

| Size | Object |
|---|---|
| 1 | Handheld object or tool, Rodent |
| 2 | Infant, Cat, Sword, Shotgun, Skateboard |
| 3 | Mid-size Dog, Child, Window, Two-handed tool, Stool |
| 4 | Spear, Teenager, Chair |
| 5 | Adult, Door, Electric scooter |
| 6 | Large adult, Deer, Bicycle |
| 7 | Alligator, Bear, Coffin |
| 8 | Vault door, Compact car |
| 10 | Sports car, Moose |
| 12 | Shark, Luxury car |
| 15 | SUV, Elephant |
| 20 | Light airplane, Yacht, Semi truck |
| 25 | Dump truck, Houseboat, Tour bus, Semi with trailer |
| 30 | Small house, Whale |
| 40 | Large house |
| 50 | Massive airliner |
| 60 | Small apartment building |
| 80 | Large apartment building, Big box store |
| 100 | Skyscraper, Shopping mall, Stadium |

### Willpower

A character's Willpower score is equal to Resolve + Composure.

### Integrity

All mortal characters start with an Integrity of 7.

### Size

All adult human characters are Size 5, unless modified by a Merit.

### Speed

A character's speed is equal to Strength + Dexterity + 5. A character can move this many meters in one turn.

### Health

A character's Health is Size + Stamina.

## Character Creation Quick Reference

Here are the basic steps for creating a character.

**STEP ONE: CONCEPT**

Decide on a concept and three Aspirations for your character.

**STEP TWO: ANCHORS**

Choose a Virtue and a Vice for your character.

**STEP THREE: ATTRIBUTES**

Prioritize categories. You have 5/4/3 dots to assign to the Attributes within each category.

**STEP FOUR: SKILLS**

Prioritize categories. Distribute 11/7/4 dots among the Skills in the appropriate category.

**STEP FIVE: SKILL SPECIALTIES**

Choose three Skill Specialties.

**STEP SIX: MERITS**

Select seven dots of Merits.

**STEP SEVEN: ADVANTAGES**

Willpower is equal to Resolve + Composure. Integrity is 7. Size is 5. Health is Size + Stamina. Speed equals Strength + Dexterity + 5. Initiative Modifier is Dexterity + Composure. Defense is the lower of Wits or Dexterity, plus Athletics.

### Initiative Modifier

Initiative Modifier is equal to your character's Dexterity + Composure.

### Defense

Defense is equal to the lower of your character's Wits or Dexterity, plus his Athletics Skill.

### Finishing Touches

Check back over your character, and make sure that you have spent all of your points the way you wanted to. Make sure you've recorded Aspirations and Advantages, and that the character fits the concept you had. Now you're ready to go!

# Anchors

All Chronicles of Darkness characters have defining personality traits. These traits not only tell a character who she is, but also allow her to regain Willpower (for more information on spending and regaining Willpower, see Chapter 2). These traits are called Anchors. For a mortal character, these Anchors are her Virtue and her Vice.

## Virtue and Vice

When creating a character, you define her Virtue and Vice. These words describe key aspects of her personality. Things like Cruel or Generous work, but a physical description, like Clean wouldn't. Similarly, you don't want to pick a Virtue or Vice that is covered by an Attribute or Skill. Athletic wouldn't really make a good Virtue or Vice (though Competitive probably would). Composed wouldn't work very well as an Anchor, as Composure is already an Attribute.

A character's Virtue or Vice isn't simply indicative of her morality. Having a Virtue like Good isn't really appropriate, and is kind of boring, to boot. While a character's Virtue is definitely a positive trait for her, she should absolutely be able to fulfill her Virtue while suffering a breaking point at the same time **(see Integrity, p. 73)**. Sometimes even our Virtues can drive us to do terrible things.

When a character acts in accordance with her Virtue or Vice during a scene, she reaffirms her sense of who she is. This is a way to regain Willpower during play.

It's a good idea to make sure that everyone is on the same page with regards to Virtues and Vices, both in terms of what they mean for your character, and in terms of everyone being comfortable with each other's choices. While you cannot choose the same trait as both your Virtue and Vice, another character could have a trait as a Virtue that you have as a Vice, such as Ambitious. Also, as your Vice in particular will come up repeatedly during play, you should make sure that the Vice you select doesn't make any of the other players uncomfortable.

A character's Anchors will likely stay the same for most of a chronicle. However, Virtue and Vice can change if the character undergoes an event that alters her life or personality.

## Virtue

A character's Virtue is her higher calling, the personality trait that represents who she is when she is being her best. Behaving in accordance with Virtue gives a character a sense of satisfaction and re-affirms her sense of self. Acting on a Virtue is difficult, however.

### Example Virtues

The following are some possible Virtues for characters. This is not an exhaustive list, it is merely intended to help you in coming up with your own Anchors for your character.

**Competitive:** Your character always pushes herself to excel and be the best at whatever she does. It's not about defeating others, but about the rush she gets from honest competition, and the thrill of knowing that she pushed herself further and faster to stay ahead of her rivals. Regain Willpower when your character honestly competes with someone who outclasses her, for stakes that she will feel if she loses.

**Generous:** Your character feels at his best when giving to others. He may give to charity or simply lend items to friends with no questions asked. A generous character may be taken advantage of sometimes, but he isn't in it for thanks or hope of repayment. He gives because other people need. Regain Willpower when your character is deprived of an important resource or put at risk because of his Generous nature.

**Just:** A Just character is driven by a sense of fairness and justice. She wants everyone to get what they deserve, and will stick her neck out to make sure it happens. Regain Willpower when the character sets her own goals aside in order to make certain that justice is done.

**Loyal:** Loyalty to a person or a group is your character's guide. This group could be other PCs, a company, a mentor or family member, their country, or any other group that makes sense. The character is not necessarily foolish or blind to the flaws of their chosen group. The character regains Willpower when refusing to act against the group's interests puts him at risk.

## Vice

Vice is a character's short-term comfort. It is the easy way out, the personality trait she takes comfort in to avoid confronting her actual feelings or problems. Like Virtue, acting on a Vice reinforces the character's sense of herself, even if it is self-destructive. It still helps relieve stress and allows her to refresh herself, but it's not healthy behavior in the long term.

### Example Vices

**Ambitious:** Your character wants to get ahead, to move up the ladder – no matter what the cost. She wants advancement, rank, and authority in advance of what she actually has earned. Regain Willpower when your character jockeys for position or tries to advance socially instead of pursuing a more useful activity.

**Arrogant:** Your character is good at something, and makes sure everyone knows it. He defines himself by being "better" than those around him. This goes beyond justifiable pride in an ability. The character regains Willpower when he takes an opportunity to lord his superiority over someone else.

**Competitive:** You character needs to **win**. Nothing makes her happier than crossing the finish line first, and nothing makes her angrier than losing. She may even be willing to cheat in order to get her victory. Regain Willpower when the character indulges in a competition that distracts from other, more pressing, matters.

**Greedy:** Your character wants to hoard resources, keeping them for himself in case they are useful someday. Regain Willpower when you take an advantage for yourself, denying it to another character.

## Aspirations

Chronicles of Darkness characters start with three Aspirations. Aspirations are goals that your character wishes to accomplish. They're also statements about the sort of stories you want to tell about your character.

Accomplishing an Aspiration is one of the main ways you can earn Beats to improve your character. You should aim for accomplishing about one Aspiration per session. If you are playing a one-shot, all of your Aspirations should be focused, short-term goals that you could potentially complete within that session. If you are playing in a long-running chronicle, then choosing long-term goals is okay. Ideally, you should have a mix of Aspirations, some of which can be resolved in one session, and some which will take many sessions to accomplish. If you know that your character is going to start out hitchhiking, "Find a place to stay the night" is a perfectly reasonable Aspiration. If she recently had a fight with her girlfriend, "Reconcile with Jane" is a fine Aspiration.

Another important thing to consider when deciding on your Aspirations is that you want them to be active goals. They have to be something that you need to *do*, rather than something that you need to avoid. For example, "Don't get drunk" wouldn't be a very good Aspiration for a character, but "Go a day without taking a drink" could be, if your character would find this to be a struggle.

Aspirations give your character life and direction beyond the scenario dreamed up by the Storyteller. They make your character feel more real, give the Storyteller hooks to get him involved in the story, and establish what your character does if there isn't an immediate crisis in front of him.

It is also okay to select Aspirations that your character doesn't want, but that you want to see happen to the character. For example, your character almost certainly doesn't want to be kidnapped by the man with the gray face that used to be her father, but that might be a story that you are interested in seeing. You can choose Aspirations that represent you trying and failing to do something. You can have an Aspiration like "Fail to find proof of the existence of ghosts," or "Fail to reconcile with Jane," if you think that it will make a more interesting story. Even though the character has failed at what she wants, you as the player still get the reward for completing that Aspiration.

Aspirations are one of the best ways for the players to signal to the Storyteller what sort of stories they want to be part of. So, Storytellers, be sure to pay attention to what Aspirations your players have selected. If you were planning on a suspenseful, low-key session with little overt supernatural influence, it might be a problem if all of your players have chosen Aspirations like "destroy a supernatural threat," or "see a monster with my own eyes." It doesn't mean you have to change your plans completely, but you may need to tweak the session a bit to allow for some details that fit with the Aspirations a little better. Or you can sit down and talk with the players, and make sure that you are all on the same page with regards to the story that you are trying to tell.

### Changing Aspirations

When you first make your character, if you are not entirely certain what Aspirations to pick, don't worry about it. You

## Sample Short-Term Aspirations

Find a new job.

Find out why my sister hasn't called me back.

Get beat up by the school bully.

Go on a date with the new guy at work.

Indulge my addiction.

Mug someone.

Put myself in mortal danger.

See a ghost.

Show myself that I'm not cursed.

## Sample Long-Term Aspirations

Become a parent.

Destroy the beast that killed my lover.

Discover what happened when my father disappeared.

Figure out what happened during those weeks I can't remember.

Find my soul mate.

Find out what was really living in the culvert near my childhood home.

Prove that my mother isn't crazy.

Put my daughter's ghost to rest.

Take over the company.

can try to come up with a few basic ones, such as the simple, easily-accomplished Aspirations mentioned earlier. Or go ahead and leave a few of your Aspiration slots blank for now, and define them while you play the first few sessions. Aspirations are not meant to be a straightjacket or a source of stress, but a tool to help you play the character that you want to play.

A character's Aspirations will also likely change over the course of the chronicle. If you accomplish an Aspiration, for example, you should replace it with a new Aspiration after that session. This is a good thing to work on in between sessions.

Sometimes Aspirations are no longer relevant to a character, even if they haven't actually been achieved. For example, if your character has an Aspiration of "reconcile with my estranged father," it's hard to accomplish if he is murdered in the fourth session of the game (though certainly not impossible, in the Chronicles of Darkness). Or maybe you find out that your character's father is somehow responsible for the eyeless, grinning thing that pulled your mother into that grove of trees the night she disappeared. At that point, you may not *want* to reconcile any more.

If an Aspiration no longer makes sense for a character, a player can change the Aspiration between chapters with the Storyteller's approval. This isn't an excuse to ditch a goal that is taking too long to accomplish, but rather is an option to keep a character's goals in line with their behavior and the overall direction of the story.

# Breaking Points

When a character performs certain actions or endures certain experiences, he might reach a breaking point. A breaking point simply means that what a character has done or seen has outstripped his ability to rationalize or handle it.

A breaking point can fall into one of the following categories:

- The character performs an action that either violates his personal moral code or that is considered unacceptable in society.
- The character witnesses something traumatic, terrifying, or that rattles his understanding of the world.
- The character is the victim of a supernatural attack, whether physical, emotional, or mental.

Breaking points are somewhat subjective, obviously. A homicide detective with 30 years of experience in seeing dead bodies and hearing confessions of killers has a somewhat higher tolerance for human depravity than a sheltered 20-something in a middle-class liberal arts college. During character creation, it might be advisable for the Storyteller to come up with several hypothetical situations, so that the player can determine if, in her judgment, those situations would be breaking points.

Note that a breaking point is not necessarily something that the character considers wrong. A character might kill someone in a clear-cut, unambiguous case of self-defense, but the experience is probably still a breaking point, even if the player (and the character!) feels the act was entirely justified.

Actions take a toll on the psyche, regardless of whether the actions were righteous.

During character creation, the player should answer the following five questions. Each question provides a breaking point for the character. If, during the character creation process, additional breaking points become apparent to the player, add them to the list. There's no limit to how many breaking points a character can have. The list isn't a strict list anyway; the Storyteller can stipulate that a given occurrence is a breaking point regardless of whether or not it appears on the player's list. However, the better-defined your character's outlook is, the better your Storyteller's understanding will be of what constitutes a breaking point for that character.

- *What is the worst thing your character has ever done?* This doesn't have to be anything dastardly. If the worst thing your character ever did was steal money from his mother's purse and lie to cover it up, that's fine.

  What's important here is to consider something that your character did that made him hate himself. The superlative "worst" is something that the character would apply. Choose a breaking point based on the answer to this question.

- *What is the worst thing your character can imagine himself doing?* We imagine ourselves in various scenarios to test our own self-image against a hypothetical situation. When children do it, it's called imaginative play, but it fills the same niche. What can you can character reasonably see himself doing, but still know that it would be wrong? Can your character imagine killing someone in self-defense? Torturing someone for information? How about robbing a store with a gun?

- *What is the worst thing your character can imagine someone else doing?* Of course, we all know that people are capable of some hideous atrocities. What tops your character's list? Serial murder? Rape? Torture? Spree killing? If your character is extremely sheltered or misanthropic, he might have a skewed view, here; he might hang on to some lofty, cerebral notion of "dishonor" or "betrayal" as the nadir of human behavior.

- *What has your character forgotten?* In the Chronicles of Darkness, it's next to impossible to grow up without any exposure to the supernatural. Decide what your character saw and forgot. Did she see a vampire take the form of smoke and vanish? A man turn into a wolf? Maybe she caught a glimpse of an impossible nightmarescape through a door that should never have been propped open? Describe this scene in as much detail as you can. This is a breaking point that already occurred, but it helps set a benchmark for what your character would have to see in order to experience one now.

- *What is the most traumatic thing that has ever happened to your character?* No one goes through life with no trauma. Your character might have been mugged, beaten as a child, in a serious car accident, been kidnapped by a parent during a divorce, survived a life-threatening disease, attempted suicide, been attacked by a supernatural (or natural!) creature, or any number of other traumatic experiences. The goal here, again, isn't to make a traumatized character. It's to set a bar.

# Attributes

Attributes are the basic abilities that every character possesses, and are the foundation for most rolls. There are nine Attributes, split between the Mental, Physical, and Social categories. If a rule refers to a "Physical action" or a "Social roll," it is referring to an action that uses an Attribute from one of these categories.

All characters start with one dot in each Attribute, which is below average for that Attribute. Two dots represents average ability, three dots is above average, and four dots is someone who is truly exceptional. A character with five dots in an Attribute has reached the peak of human potential within that ability.

## Mental Attributes

Mental Attributes represent a characters mental resilience, intellect, and acuity.

### Intelligence

Intelligence is your character's book smarts and ability to process data. It represents memory, general knowledge, and ability to solve complex and difficult problems.

**Attribute Tasks:** Memorizing (Intelligence + Composure, instant action)

### Wits

Wits represents quick thinking and improvisation. A character with a high Wits responds quickly to new information and situations. It also represents perception and the ability to notice details and subtle tells.

**Attribute Tasks:** Perception (Wits + Composure, reflexive action), Catching a dropped object (Wits + Dexterity, instant action)

### Resolve

Resolve represents your character's patience, concentration, and determination. A high Resolve allows a character to focus despite distractions or discouragement.

**Attribute Tasks:** Meditation (Resolve + Composure, extended action), Staying Awake (Resolve + Stamina, instant action)

## Physical Attributes

Physical Attributes reflect a character's body control and fitness.

### Strength

Strength is a character's muscular power and ability to use the force of her body. It is used for a large number of physical tasks, and is important for most applications of violence.

**Attribute Tasks:** Holding up a heavy object (Strength + Stamina, extended action)

### Dexterity

Dexterity represents hand-eye coordination, agility, and physical speed. A character with a high Dexterity has fast reactions, a good sense of balance, and accurate control of physical force.

**Attribute Task:** Maintain balance (Dexterity + Composure, reflexive action)

### Stamina

Stamina is your character's general fitness and health. It is used for sustained effort, as well as determining how much physical punishment your body can take.

**Attribute Tasks:** Resisting Interrogation (Stamina + Resolve, reflexive action)

## Social Attributes

Social Attributes reflect your character's ability to navigate social situations and deal with others.

### Presence

Presence is a character's raw charisma, assertiveness, and ability to command. Characters with a high Presence dominate a room and are adept at changing people's thoughts and moods.

**Attribute Tasks:** Air of authority (Presence + Intelligence, instant action)

### Manipulation

Manipulation represents your character's ability to choose his words, mask his intentions, and convince others to go along with his ideas.

**Attribute Tasks:** Poker Face (Manipulation + Composure, reflexive action)

### Composure

Composure is a character's ability to keep control of her emotions and resist others' manipulations. It also represents poise, dignity, and the ability to keep a level head when under fire (metaphorically or literally).

**Attribute Tasks:** Perception (Wits + Composure, reflexive action)

## Skills

Skills are learned and practiced abilities, rather than the innate abilities that Attributes represent. Skills reflect a character's origins and interests, and can be acquired in many ways, from institutionalized learning to hands-on experience. Skills are divided into the same Mental, Physical, and Social categories as Attributes.

### Skill Specialties

Skills are very broad abilities, representing whole fields of knowledge or training. A Skill Specialty is a more focused application of a Skill, representing a specific subcategory of the Skill that the character is particularly talented or trained in.

Skill Specialties allow you to personalize your character more. Two characters with very similar Skills can feel very different in play, if they have different Specialties.

If your character has an applicable Specialty when you are rolling a Skill, you gain a +1 modifier, allowing you to roll an additional die.

### Untrained Skills

A character who has no dots in a Skill can generally still attempt to use it. However, there is a penalty due to the character's complete unfamiliarity with the Skill. For Physical and Social Skills, this penalty is -1. For Mental Skills, this penalty is -3.

## Mental Skills

Mental Skills generally represent knowledge, book learning, and understanding of facts or procedure. They cover things like remembering a fact, searching for a clue, or diagnosing an illness. Mental Skills are often gained through formal training, and a character may have certificates, degrees, or doctorates in her area of study. However, the rating in the Skill does not necessarily map to a certain level of education.

Mental Skills are commonly paired with Mental Attributes. However, they are sometimes used with Physical or Social Attributes. For example, repairing the wiring in a broken CB radio requires a Dexterity + Crafts roll.

### Academics

Academics represents general higher education and knowledge of arts and humanities. It covers topics like history, language, literature, law, and economics. It is a very broad Skill that covers general knowledge in all of these areas, but Skill Specialties can be used to represent a specific focus. The Academics Skill often represents the amount of schooling a character has. However, some characters are self-taught or have learned a great deal about relevant topics without actually setting foot on a college campus. Also, some people with advanced degrees pay no attention to topics outside their area of expertise, and have a low rating in Academics.

**Sample actions:** Recall historical facts (Intelligence + Academics), Research (Resolve + Academics), Translation (Intelligence + Academics)

**Sample Specialties:** English Literature, History, Law, Linguistics, Research

**Sample contacts:** Rare Book Dealer, Law Professor, Head Librarian

**Levels:**

- **Novice:** Someone with a basic knowledge of history, a high school graduate or college student. A character at this level knows how to conduct effective research and probably did well in school.
- •• **Professional:** A PhD student, a teacher, or someone who is well-read enough to have a solid grasp on a number of academic fields. A character at this

level can recall details about many different topics, and understands how to find more information on subjects that he does not immediately recall.

••• **Experienced:** Someone with an excellent general education, and high expertise in one or two areas (generally represented with Skill Specialties). She is a college professor or PhD, or someone who is a voracious reader.

•••• **Expert:** A PhD at a prestigious school or an acknowledged expert. Someone with extensive knowledge and experience with conducting research, or a self-taught polymath and genius. He can probably teach master classes on a number of different topics, and is up-to-date on the latest ideas within many different fields.

••••• **Master:** One of the top minds in academia, *the* acknowledged expert in his field. A walking Wikipedia, with a fact for just about any occasion. The character's memory and breadth of knowledge are astounding.

## Computer

Almost everyone in the modern day can turn on a computer, use the internet, and perform basic searches. This Skill represents a character's ability beyond that level. Having the Computer Skill allows the character to develop programs, diagnose and repair major software and hardware problems, and perform more carefully focused and effective searches for data. It can also be used for things like digging into a file system, finding hidden or encrypted files, cracking encryption, hacking into computer systems, or sabotaging computer networks.

**Sample actions:** Hack into a computer system (Intelligence + Computer), Internet and database searches (Wits + Computer), Programming (Intelligence + Computer)

**Sample Specialties:** Data Retrieval, Digital Security, Hacking, Programming, User Interface Design

**Sample contacts:** AI Researcher, Hardcore Computer Gamer, White Hat Hacker

### Levels:

• **Novice:** A character at this level has probably used computers more extensively than the average person. She has a basic grasp of programming, can handle complicated searches, and can find and interpret files that were hidden or encrypted by the average (unskilled) user.

•• **Professional:** The character could be an entry level programmer or IT professional. The character has a solid grasp of programming principles and can perform more elaborate computer tasks easily. She can hack relatively unsecure networks and personal computers.

••• **Experienced:** The character has excellent training and talent, or has been working with computers for a while. A character at this level is extremely adept at finding the information she needs, even when someone skilled has taken steps to hide it. As a hacker, she can break her way into the files of companies that have solid security.

•••• **Expert:** An expert in computer theory. The character can find extremely obscure information by correlating data from many sources, and can track down just about any irregularity in a computer's files. If she is a hacker, then she has the knowledge and patience to get into government and even military systems.

••••• **Master:** A character at this level is one of the best in the world. She has worked with the absolute cutting edge in computer technology, and can break into pretty much any computer system in the world. No information is safe from her.

## Crafts

The Crafts Skill represents a character's knowledge of repairing, designing, and creating things. It covers tasks like rebuilding a car engine, laying a foundation for a house, or sewing clothing. It also has some overlap with Expression for purposes of creating paintings or sculpture. In general, Crafts should be used when you are trying to make something that is *accurate* (a scale model, an eye-witness sketch, or a reconstruction of a damaged manuscript) or useful for a specific task, as opposed to something that is being created to be beautiful or convey emotion.

A character using the Crafts Skill will generally need specific tools and materials. They have the knowledge to make something, but they usually cannot do it with their bare hands. However, this generally should not cause them problems unless they are in a situation where the tools or materials are rare or difficult to access.

**Sample actions:** Look for flaws (Wits + Crafts), Design object (Intelligence + Crafts), Repair item (Dexterity + Crafts)

**Sample Specialties:** Automotive, Carpentry, Jury Rigging, Sculpting, Welding

**Sample contacts:** Automotive Engineer, "Makerspace" Enthusiast, Police Sketch Artist

• **Novice:** A character at this level can perform basic automotive repair and maintenance like replacing brakes, oil, and belts. He can make simple repairs and fix plumbing around the house. He understands how to read and create blueprints or design diagrams.

•• **Professional:** A character at this level can produce high quality and professional blueprints and designs. She can perform extensive repairs of cars and other vehicles, work as a professional handyman,

or work on a construction crew for anything from a house to a high-rise.

••• **Experienced:** A character at this level is a very talented builder or architect. He can design and build a house from the ground up, completely rebuild a car, and handle industrial electrical and plumbing for office complexes.

•••• **Expert:** This character can build just about any design she can imagine. She can weld just about anything, build a new car from scratch, or machine precision parts.

••••• **Master:** This character can repair anything, or build working devices from the scraps other people throw out. He is a da Vinci, able to draw stunningly realistic diagrams or design fantastic devices.

## Investigation

Investigation is a character's ability to find and put together clues and solve mysteries and puzzles. It represents the ability to think laterally and make useful intuitive leaps, find meaningful patterns in confusion, and draw conclusions from the available data.

Using this Skill is different than the Perception Attribute task that can be found under Wits and Composure. Perception is typically checked when a character is not actively searching, but could potentially see something out of place or unusual. Investigation is a Skill that the character actively uses to find clues and information and create a more concrete picture of the situation.

**Sample actions:** Examine a crime scene (Wits + Investigation), Identify a pattern (Wits + Investigation), Solve a riddle (Intelligence + Investigation)

**Sample Specialties:** Crime Scenes, Cryptography, Dreams, Forensic Accounting, Riddles

**Sample contacts:** Conspiracy Buff, Medical Examiner, Private Investigator

### Levels:

• **Novice:** The character is a good armchair detective and excels at puzzles, riddles, and brainteasers.

•• **Professional:** At this level, a character is very good at putting details together to form a larger picture. Someone who works as a coroner or crime lab attendant is probably at this level.

••• **Experienced:** The character has an excellent eye for details that most would overlook, impressing even experienced detectives. He fills out crossword puzzles in pen and solves riddles without breaking a sweat.

•••• **Expert:** A character at this level of Investigation has abilities that seem almost supernatural. She can see connections between details that seem completely

separate, make amazing intuitive leaps, and can easily see patterns in massive amounts of data.

••••• **Master:** Sherlock Holmes. This character's investigative instincts are perfect, and no clue escapes his notice.

## Medicine

Medicine is a character's knowledge of the human body and the medical techniques used to keep it healthy. It represents a practical and applicable knowledge of biology, anatomy, and chemistry. A character with the Medicine Skill can use it to treat wounds and diseases, diagnose illness, apply first aid, or even perform surgery.

**Sample actions:** Diagnosis (Wits + Medicine), Perform surgery (Dexterity + Medicine), Treat disease (Intelligence + Medicine)

**Sample Specialties:** Cardiology, First Aid, Pathology, Pharmacology, Surgery

**Sample contacts:** Bio-Tech Company Researcher, Chronic Patient, EMT

### Levels:

• **Novice:** A student or someone with basic medical training. At this level, a character can perform first aid and stabilize injured people, identify common diseases, and care for serious (but non-critical) injuries.

•• **Professional:** A character with two dots in Medicine can work as an EMT, nurse, or other practitioner with a good general knowledge of Medicine. She can handle emergency treatment, administer medication and care for patients, and identify most conditions and disease.

••• **Experienced:** The character can work as a doctor, specialist, or surgeon. She can treat most illness and injuries and care for people with serious or obscure health problems.

•••• **Expert:** A character at this level is one of the best doctors in the region, possibly even the country. He can diagnose and treat obscure conditions, and can handle just about any medical emergency that comes his way.

••••• **Master:** The character is one of the top doctors or surgeons in the world. She can perform near miracles, and has knowledge of pretty much any illness or injury she comes across.

## Occult

The Occult Skill is a character's knowledge of myth, folktales, and urban legends about the strange things that exist in the dark corners of the world. Occult can help a character separate fiction and myth from fact and determine which stories are likely to be actual supernatural events and which are just rumors. That said, there are a lot of strange things out there, and many of them defy easy categorization. The Occult Skill doesn't necessarily give a character a line on the absolute "truth" about what's going on, but instead represents an array of knowledge about encounters and theories that others have had, and the ability to build on those theories herself.

**Sample actions:** Debunk a fake (Intelligence + Occult), Identify a sliver of truth (Wits + Occult), Relate similar myths (Intelligence + Occult)

**Sample Specialties:** Eastern European Folktales, Ghosts, Mothman Sightings, Psychic Phenomena, Urban Legends

**Sample contacts:** Anthropology Professor, Neo-Pagan Author, Weird Hermit Down the Street

### Levels:

• **Novice:** This character is scratching the surface of the strange and creepy stories out there. She has heard of many different phenomena, and is aware of many obvious fakes and debunked stories, as well as some of the more plausible tales.

•• **Professional:** This level of Occult represents someone who has done a great deal of research into folklore, myth, and urban legends, and can find slivers of truth in what he has read. He has a solid understanding of major stories, and can identify and disregard many false claims.

••• **Experienced:** A character with this level of Occult has been working with weird things for a while, and is very good at sifting actual facts and useful information from rumors and stories. She may have seen a variety of strange things herself, or she may simply be very good at recognizing common patterns in various legends.

•••• **Expert:** A character with four dots in Occult is very tuned into the strange, and can remember a number of obscure and useful pieces of information about just about any odd occurrence. He may well have pieces of the truth about various supernatural creatures, and is very good at putting those pieces together.

••••• **Master:** At this level of Occult, the character is able to almost unfailingly identify actual supernatural events and creatures. Even when running into a completely new phenomenon, her instincts are impeccable.

## Politics

Politics represents a character's knowledge of political bodies, figures, and issues. It helps a character to navigate bureaucracies and play the political game to get what he wants. He knows how to follow the money and how to play

rivals off each other. A character with this knowledge may have run for office, worked for the government, or may simply be a follower of local politics.

**Sample actions:** Identify authority (Wits + Politics), Navigate bureaucracy (Resolve + Politics), Mudslinging (Manipulation + Politics)

**Sample Specialties:** Bureaucracy, Local Politics, National Politics, Scandals, Specific Political Party

**Sample contacts:** Personal Assistant to the Governor, Political Blogger, Union Leader

### Levels:

- **Novice:** This character knows the issues, both major and minor, and follows important players in the political sphere (both actual candidates, and some of the people behind them). He could be an insightful amateur blogger, or simply an exceptionally tuned in voter.

•• **Professional:** A character at this level knows how to work within the system, and understands the official organizational structure very well. Low-level bureaucrats and lobbyists generally have this level of the Politics Skill.

••• **Experienced:** At this rank, a character knows a great deal about political figures, who their allies are, and what issues they care about. He could easily be a mover and shaker himself, someone who can shape political agendas behind the scenes.

•••• **Expert:** The character is a master at dealing with all sorts of political structures. She understands not only the official structure, but who is actually in charge, and where to apply pressure to accomplish her goals, often without anyone being aware of her manipulations of the system.

••••• **Master:** The character knows all the players, what they *really* want, and where the bodies are buried.

## Science

Science is a character's understanding of the natural and physical sciences. It includes subjects like biology, physics, chemistry, geology, and meteorology. Science is useful for understanding how the world works. It also helps characters make excellent use of resources and helps with the design of and theory behind many items that can be made using Crafts. A character with a high Science Skill can explain what chemicals and proportions are needed to make an explosive, or determine the best materials for making a cage to hold a strange creature.

**Sample actions:** Assess variables (Intelligence + Science), Perform experiment (Wits + Science), Recall formula (Intelligence + Science)

**Sample Specialties:** Biology, Chemistry, Genetics, Optics, Particle Physics

**Sample contacts:** Experimental Physicist, Geology Professor, Mad Inventor

### Levels:

- **Novice:** The character is a hobbyist or knowledgeable student of the sciences. She has a basic understanding of scientific principles and theories, can perform basic experiments, and can make practical use of basic physics and chemistry (designing a slingshot or making black powder, for example).
- •• **Professional:** The character could work as a researcher or teacher. At this level, the character has an excellent grasp of science concepts, knows how to perform experiments and understand the data, and can apply concepts in novel ways.
- ••• **Experienced:** A character with this level in Science knows about up-to-date theories and concepts, and is able to explore advanced new concepts and theories.
- •••• **Expert:** Top of his field. At this level, the character is researching cutting edge concepts and working with some of the best scientists in the world.
- ••••• **Master:** The character is an Einstein, Curie, or Hawking. She is on the verge of revolutionary concepts, and is at the apex of her field.

## Physical Skills

Physical Skills are those Skills that represent the application of force, endurance, or coordination. They are generally learned through practice and personal experience, rather than extensive schooling.

While these Skills are usually paired with Physical Attributes, they can be rolled with other Attributes as well. Casing a building, for example, uses Wits + Larceny

### Athletics

Athletics broadly covers a number of different areas of physical ability. It represents training in specific sports, from kayaking or parkour to professional sports like basketball or football. It can be used with any general application of physical power and coordination, such as running a marathon, jumping between buildings, climbing a fence, or dodging threats. It also determines a character's ability with thrown weapons in a fight, and adds to Defense to determine if the character is hit in a fight. Just about any Chronicles of Darkness character is likely to find some use for the Athletics Skill. Sometimes, the only reasonable response is to run away.

**Sample actions:** Acrobatics (Dexterity + Athletics), Climbing (Strength + Athletics), Running (Stamina + Athletics)

**Sample Specialties:** Acrobatics, Basketball, Marathon Running, Rock Climbing, Throwing

**Sample contacts:** Parkour Enthusiast, Physical Therapist, Running Club Buddy

### Levels:

- **Novice:** A character at this level is fit and takes good care of himself. He may go for runs regularly, constantly play sports with friends, be a regular backpacker or hiker, or just make an effort to stay in shape.
- •• **Professional:** At this level of Athletics, the character is serious about his fitness and activity. At the very least, he is playing sports and training regularly, or performing a serious workout regimen. He could probably play minor league or low-level professional sports.
- ••• **Experienced:** An athlete at this level could certainly play professionally, and if she does, she has probably made a name for herself. Her general levels of fitness and ability are noticeably above average.
- •••• **Expert:** Olympic athletes might have this level of athletic ability. A character at this level can compete on national teams and contend with the best in the world.
- ••••• **Master:** An Athletics Skill at this level represents gold medal winners, world record holders, and the absolute best, fittest, and most talented people in the world.

### Brawl

The Brawl Skill is the fine art of hurting another person with no weapons other than the character's own body. It can represent martial arts training, bar fight experience, or simply a bad temper and a willingness to hurt others. It covers throwing punches and kicks, but also things like grappling, throws, head butts, and blocking in hand-to-hand combat. Brawl is generally rolled with Strength in a hand-to-hand fight.

A character who is well trained in a specific style of combat may have that represented with a Fighting Style Merit (see Merits, later in this chapter).

**Sample actions:** Breaking boards (Strength + Brawl), Intimidating display (Presence + Brawl), Identifying a fighting style (Intelligence + Brawl)

**Sample Specialties:** Blocking, Boxing, Grappling, Muay Thai, Throws

**Sample contacts:** Club Bouncer, Self-defense Teacher, Sparring Partner

### Levels:

- **Novice:** This level of Brawl represents knowledge of self-defense, a good situational awareness, and enough experience (or the right attitude) to get the character through many violent situations.
- •• **Professional:** A character with two dots of Brawl has been in many fights or has trained for a number of years. She knows how to handle herself in a fight.
- ••• **Experienced:** Extremely well-trained fighters or veterans of dozens of back-alley brawls have this rank. A character at this level can probably teach other martial artists, compete in tournaments, and handle just about anybody who tries to pick a fight with her at the local bar.
- •••• **Expert:** Special forces soldiers or champion MMA fighters have Brawl at this level. A character with this level can handle himself in almost any situation.
- ••••• **Master:** A character at this level is among the best in the world. She could be an unstoppable bar room brawler, a renowned teacher of multiple martial arts, or one of the deadliest killers on Earth.

## Drive

Drive is a broad Skill used for the operation of any motorized vehicle. It is used for maneuvering and controlling automobiles, motorcycles, and even boats. It's assumed that pretty much any modern character can perform basic driving under safe conditions, even without this Skill. However, if a character gets involved in a high-speed chase or tries to elude a tail, Drive is used to determine how well they handle themselves. The Drive Skill is needed when the character is in a dangerous or stressful situation, is trying to do something tricky, or is driving at very high speeds.

If you want your character to be capable of piloting aircraft as well, you need to take the Skill Specialty in Piloting. A character without the Piloting Specialty is considered untrained if he attempts to operate a plane or other aircraft.

**Sample actions:** Pursuit (Dexterity + Drive), Stunt-Flying (Dexterity + Drive), Tailing (Wits + Drive)

**Sample Specialties:** Evasion, Motorcycles, Piloting, Racing, Stunts

**Sample contacts:** Bush Pilot, Mechanic, Street Racer

### Levels:

- **Novice:** A character with this level of the Skill keeps his head when driving in dangerous weather or treacherous road conditions, and anyone trying to run him off the road will find it surprisingly difficult. With the Piloting Specialty, the character can handle small, private aircraft.
- •• **Professional:** A character at this level could easily work as a truck driver or cabby. She has driven in just about every type of condition at one time or another. A pilot at this level can fly pretty much any private aircraft, and could probably fly a commercial jet in a pinch.
- ••• **Experienced:** Skilled race car drivers and stuntmen have this level of Drive. A pilot at this level might work professionally flying commercial jet liners.
- •••• **Expert:** At this level, a character can handle a high-speed chase in downtown traffic or drive through a war zone without blinking. Pilots at this level can handle fighter jets.
- ••••• **Master:** There is no vehicle on earth that this character can't drive.

## Firearms

Firearms represents a character's familiarity and comfort with guns. It reflects her ability to shoot, maintain, and identify any type of personal firearm. This Skill cover pistols, shotguns, assault rifles, and other weapons that can be carried by one person. The Firearms Skill also covers the use of weapons like bows and crossbows.

This Skill can represent formal training provided to the police and military. Criminals, hunters, and gun enthusiasts are also likely to have the Firearms Skill, due to hands-on familiarity.

Depending on where you are in the world, guns can be fairly common or highly restricted. Characters with the Firearms Skill generally understand local gun laws, and are good at obtaining Firearms when necessary.

**Sample actions:** Identifying a gun (Intelligence + Firearms), Pick a good firing position (Wits + Firearms), Trick shooting (Dexterity + Firearms)

**Sample Specialties:** Fast-Draw, Handguns, Rifles, Shotguns, Sniping

**Sample contacts:** Gun store owner, Local law enforcement, Sharpshooter

### Levels:

- **Novice:** A character at this level has spent time at the range, and understands basic maintenance and safety. She may be a very good shot on the range, but is unused to shooting in the chaos of an actual conflict.
- •• **Professional:** This character is a decent shot, and shoots on a regular basis. He may be a hunter, or perhaps a law enforcement officer who keeps his skills up, but has rarely fired his weapon in the line of duty.
- ••• **Experienced:** A character at this level knows a great deal about guns, and is an excellent shot. She has

almost certainly shot someone in an actual fight, likely more than once.

•••• **Expert:** Snipers, sharpshooters, and highly-graded military shooters are generally at this Skill rank. A character with four dots in Firearms is an uncannily good shot, whether on the range or in the field.

••••• **Master:** There are only a few dozen marksmen in the world who can match a character with this level of Firearms. She can shoot any gun under just about any condition and have a good chance of hitting her target.

## Larceny

Larceny covers the generally-illegal skills of breaking and entering, lock picking, pickpocketing, safecracking, and similar activities. There usually aren't schools for this sort of thing. Larceny is learned "on the job," one way or another.

In addition to criminal applications, Larceny is used by magicians and illusionists for sleight of hand. Most locksmiths will also have at least a little bit of knowledge of Larceny, as they understand how to open locks.

This Skill includes most of the tasks involving actually defeating physical security, or the sleight of hand required to pick a pocket or palm an item. It does not cover sneaking around, hacking and digital crimes, or the social aspects of running a con or distracting a mark.

**Sample actions:** Casing a building (Wits + Larceny), Lock picking (Dexterity + Larceny), Sleight of hand (Dexterity + Larceny)

**Sample Specialties:** Alarm Systems, Breaking and Entering, Lock Picking, Safecracking, Sleight of Hand

**Sample contacts:** Shady Pawn Shop Owner, Parole Officer, Three-Card Monte Dealer.

### Levels:

• **Novice:** A character at this level knows sleight of hand, and understands the basics of how to open door locks, padlocks, and similar consumer-grade locks or security.

•• **Professional:** A character at this level knows how to bypass electronic security or alarm systems and can run confidence games. She can break into most houses or offices easily.

••• **Experienced:** At this level of Larceny, the character has probably been working as a criminal for a while. He can crack safes, get past high-end security systems, and gain entrance to buildings with active security.

•••• **Expert:** The character can pickpocket other thieves without them noticing. He can break into high-end vaults and secure facilities.

••••• **Master:** A character at this level is Harry Houdini. She can get out of any lock, break into secure sections of the Pentagon, and take the glasses off of a man's face without him noticing.

## Stealth

Stealth is a character's ability to stay hidden, unseen, and unheard. It covers sneaking around in the shadows, blending into a crowd, using a disguise to appear as just another bystander in the background, or taking advantage of an appropriately timed distraction. Any means a character uses to avoid being noticed by those who are looking for her will use this Skill.

**Sample actions:** Losing a tail (Wits + Stealth), Shadowing (Wits + Stealth), Sneaking (Dexterity + Stealth)

**Sample Specialties:** Crowds, Hiding, Moving Quietly, Shadowing, Stakeouts

**Sample contacts:** Bow Hunter, Burglar, Lookout from a Former Job

### Levels:

• **Novice:** A character with this level knows how to find a shadowy corner to hide in, or how to blend into a crowd.

•• **Professional:** At this level, a character can follow someone without tipping them off or sneak past a sentry.

••• **Experienced:** A character at this level is rarely seen unless she wishes to be. She can evade people actively searching for her and ditch a tail in seconds.

•••• **Expert:** A character at this level can avoid being noticed on security cameras in the heart of London. He can disappear from sight in moments.

••••• **Master:** At this level of Skill, the character is a ghost. She is almost impossible to find or follow unless she allows it. She can hide in an open field or walk up behind an alert guard without being noticed.

## Survival

Survival represents a character's experience and ability to "live off the land." He knows how to find shelter, gather food, and endure harsh elements and environments. He can use the Survival Skill to find clean drinking water or hunt animals for food, build simple structures, and build a fire. The Survival Skill is not limited to wilderness or rural locales. It can also be used to survive in an urban environment when you have no other way of getting food or shelter.

The Survival Skill does not cover dealing with animals beyond hunting. The character can track an animal, but without the Animal Ken Skill, doesn't understand much about the animal's behavior. He wouldn't have much luck trying to calm a bear that found its way into his campsite.

**Sample actions:** Foraging (Wits + Survival), Hunting (Wits + Survival), Sleeping in the open (Stamina + Survival)

**Sample Specialties:** Foraging, Hunting, Navigation, Shelter, Weather

**Sample contacts:** Homeless Person, Off-the-grid Survivalist, Scout Master

### Levels:

- **Novice:** A character at this level is probably a regular wilderness camper or hiker. She can care for himself while lost in the wilderness for a few days.
- •• **Professional:** At this level, a character has spent a great deal of time out in the elements. He might have gone on wilderness excursions in Alaska, worked in a national park, or have been forced to fend for himself on the streets for weeks at a time.
- ••• **Experienced:** At this rank, a character can care for a small group of people in the wilderness, keeping them fed, healthy, and safe until they are found or they have a chance to return to civilization.
- •••• **Expert:** Barring a disaster, a character at this rank could live off the land indefinitely. She may not be particularly comfortable, but she can take care of necessities.
- ••••• **Master:** A character at this rank could be dropped into the middle of the desert with no equipment and walk out. He knows how to survive in the harshest environments on earth.

## Weaponry

Weaponry is the ability to fight with hand-to-hand weapons. A character with this Skill can wield knives, swords, baseball bats, or even things like a length of chain or a chainsaw. If you are using a tool (other than a gun or bow) to do violence to someone, Weaponry is the appropriate Skill to use.

While guns are generally more dangerous, there are definitely times when you do not have access to one. You can almost always find something that you can use as a hand weapon, even if it's just something like a screwdriver or a broom handle.

**Sample actions:** Identify fighting style (Intelligence + Weaponry), Impressive display (Dexterity + Weaponry), Size up opponent (Wits + Weaponry)

**Sample Specialties:** Clubs, Duels, Improvised Weapons, Knives, Swords

**Sample contacts:** Fencing Instructor, Gang Member, Western Martial Arts Enthusiast

- **Novice:** At this level, a character knows how to hold and swing a weapon properly, and understands the fundamentals of defense. She knows how to handle herself in a fight, and can hold her own when sparring.

•• **Professional:** A character with this rank in Weaponry has excellent training or experience in a fight, and knows how to make sure an assailant is taken out of the fight efficiently.

••• **Experienced:** A character with three dots in Weaponry can make a weapon out of almost any object, and could reasonably compete in tournaments or teach someone how to use their favored weapon.

•••• **Expert:** A character at this rank is extremely dangerous with just about any hand-to-hand weapon, and can stand toe to toe with some of the best fighters in the world. She knows how to read a fight and handle herself against single or multiple opponents.

••••• **Master:** A character at this rank can actually perform the sort of feats action movie stars pretend to be capable of.

# Social Skills

Social Skills involve the application of a character's charm, poise, and personality. They generally don't represent formal training so much as a combination of innate talent and experience interacting with others. Social Skills are sometimes paired with Physical or Mental Attributes, such as when you roll Strength + Intimidation for a show of force.

## Animal Ken

Animal Ken represents a character's understanding of animal behavior. A character can use this Skill to train animals, calm frightened or injured animals, or cow violent and aggressive creatures. Characters with Animal Ken understand how animals think and behave, whether through intuition and respect for animals or analytical observation.

**Sample actions:** Animal training (Composure + Animal Ken), Cowing an animal (Presence + Animal Ken), Soothing an animal (Presence + Animal Ken)

**Sample Specialties:** Dogs, Exotic Pets, Horses, Training, Wild Animals

**Sample contacts:** Crazy Cat Lady, Rodeo Horse Trainer, Zoo Veterinarian

### Levels:

- **Novice:** At this level, the character has a knack with animals and is good with just about any common animal. He can make friends with any domesticated creature, and can establish a good relationship with most nonaggressive wild animals.

•• **Professional:** The character can work with animals professionally. She knows how to handle and train commonly domesticated animals like dogs and horses, and has some idea how to train many wild species, even ones that are normally aggressive or difficult to work with.

••• **Experienced:** At this rank, the character can easily train any domesticated animal, and seems to have a sixth sense for how animals behave and what they are feeling.

•••• **Expert:** The character can train animals to perform well beyond their normal behaviors. She can train horses for combat or for movie tricks, or even train wild animals like tigers.

••••• **Master:** The character can all but speak to animals. He is an absolute expert in the behaviors of even wild animals, and can soothe or cow an angry bear or a hunting cougar.

## Empathy

Empathy is a character's ability to read and understand others' feelings and motivations. It can represent careful observation of body language, tone, and other cues, or it could be an instinctive sense that the character isn't even entirely aware of. It can help the character detect deception or uncertainty, as well as discern her target's mood. It does not inherently mean she is agreeing with or even behaving in a friendly fashion towards her target. The Empathy Skill is simply the ability to understand and work with the emotions that someone is feeling.

**Sample actions:** Determine intentions (Wits + Empathy), Sense Deception (Wits + Empathy), Soothe nerves (Manipulation + Empathy)

**Sample Specialties:** Buried Feelings, Calming, Emotions, Lies, Motives

**Sample contacts:** Shoulder to Cry On, Police Profiler, Psych Student

### Levels:

- **Novice:** A character at this rank in Empathy regularly gets a "vibe" from people, and is often the source of stability or advice for her friends.

•• **Professional:** The character might actually be a therapist or social worker. He can always tell when friends are keeping secrets or when something is bothering them, and excels at figuring out what it is.

••• **Experienced:** With three dots in Empathy, a character can gain profound insights into another person's feelings and behavior, even strangers.

•••• **Expert:** This character can draw out even the most guarded people. Even tiny details of behavior can be the clue to figuring out what someone wants.

••••• **Master:** Human behavior is open book to this character. People often accuse her of being a mind reader.

## Expression

Expression is the character's ability to communicate his thoughts and emotions. It covers writing and spoken communication, art like painting or sculpture, and performances like acting, music, and dance. A character can use this to compose a song or poem, write a book, or put together exactly the right words for a rousing speech.

There is some overlap between this Skill and the Crafts Skill. Expression is generally used when trying to create a piece of artwork specifically for aesthetic or emotional reasons, as opposed to making an accurate copy or model, which uses Crafts.

**Sample actions:** Composing a poem (Wits + Expression), Dance performance (Dexterity + Expression), Reciting a prepared speech (Presence + Expression)

**Sample Specialties:** Dance, Journalism, Music Composition, Painting, Speeches

**Sample contacts:** Investigative Journalist, Political Speech Writer, Reclusive Poet

### Levels:

• **Novice:** A character at this level has a knack for turn of phrase, an excellent ear for music, or undeniable artistic talent and ability to convey emotion.

•• **Professional:** This character can work as a session musician or local reporter. His command of language is careful and effective.

••• **Experienced:** At this rank, the character's words and movements can convey feelings with astonishing power. Her performances and speeches impress and inspire.

•••• **Expert:** A character at this rank of Expression could be a best-selling author, top-20 composer, or presidential speech writer.

••••• **Master:** This character's speeches or performances could go down in history. He has the power to sway everyone who hears his work.

## Intimidation

Intimidation is the art of using fear to convince others to do what you want. A character can use this Skill for threats, interrogation, subtle implications, or even a direct show of force. It can convince characters to back down from a confrontation, reveal information they don't want to share, or get them to cooperate against their better judgement. It can't change their minds, but it can certainly change their behavior.

**Sample actions:** Show of force (Strength + Intimidation), Stare down (Presence + Intimidation), Subtle threat (Manipulation + Intimidation)

**Sample Specialties:** Direct Threats, Interrogation, Murderous Stare, Torture, Veiled Threats

**Sample contacts:** Barroom Tough Guy, High-powered Executive, Police Interrogator

### Levels:

• **Novice:** This character always wins a staring contest, and the right words from him can rattle someone and make them do something stupid.

•• **Professional:** At this rank, the character knows exactly when to bluster and when to shut up and let the silence work for her. People back off when she is angry, and she can scare most people into doing what she wants.

••• **Experienced:** The character ends more fights with a look than with actual violence.

•••• **Expert:** The toughest criminals crack after ten minutes in interrogation with him. He can clear a room with a look.

••••• **Master:** A word and a glance can make drill sergeants or mob hitmen run from her.

## Persuasion

Persuasion is about using influence, charm, and careful arguments to change minds and influence behavior. It can involve logic and reason, glib fast talking, or appealing to emotions or baser instincts. Unlike Intimidation, Persuasion doesn't just involve forcing a character to change how they act, Persuasion is about changing their mind and how they *want* to act.

**Sample actions:** Fast talk (Manipulation + Persuasion), Impassioned plea (Presence + Persuasion), Seduction (Manipulation + Persuasion)

**Sample Specialties:** Fast Talking, Inspiring, Sales Pitches, Seduction, Sermons

**Sample contacts:** Car Salesman, Speech Coach, Trial Lawyer

### Levels:

• **Novice:** A character at this rank always seems to know the right words. She excels at finding a solid argument, and knows how to pursue it to get what he wants.

•• **Professional:** This character could be a professional salesman or trial lawyer. Given a little bit of time, he can find a tack that will get someone to see his side of things.

••• **Experienced:** A character at this rank regularly wins sales awards. He can get people to question even strongly held beliefs.

•••• **Expert:** At this rank, the character knows how to make people want what she's selling, no matter what it is. She understands how to get around a person's defenses and persuade them of things that they normally wouldn't even consider.

••••• **Master:** The character can convince anyone of just about anything, at least for a short time. Even beliefs that make up a large chunk of a person's self-identity can be questioned.

## Socialize

The Socialize Skill is the art of small talk, polite gestures, and fitting in. It represents your ability to interact with people in a variety of social settings, from dive bars to state dinners. It covers dealing with groups of people and behaving with the right balance of sensitivity, friendliness, etiquette, and dignity for the setting. A character with a high Socialize is the life of the party, or at least able to meet almost anyone she wishes who is at an event.

**Sample actions:** Carouse (Manipulation + Socialize), Fit in (Wits + Socialize), Get attention (Presence + Socialize)

**Sample Specialties:** Bar hopping, College parties, Formal events, Political fundraisers, Private clubs

**Sample contacts:** Diplomat, Drinking Buddy, Society Matron

### Levels:

• **Novice:** A character at this level knows which fork to use (or when not to use one), can avoid insulting anyone, and can handle social situations from formal dinners to wild parties.

•• **Professional:** At this level of Socialize, the character can gracefully blend into just about any social situation.

••• **Experienced:** The character is invited to all of the parties and makes sure everyone has a good time.

•••• **Expert:** The character can fit in anywhere. It's not considered a party unless she is in attendance, and she can make any group of people feel at ease.

••••• **Master:** A character with this level of Skill could be a spy or a high ranking diplomat. She always seems to know exactly what is expected for the social situation, including those times when acting outside the norm is the best way to fit in.

## Streetwise

A character with the Streetwise Skill understands how life on the streets works, and is adept at surviving and thriving by its rules. He can navigate the city, knows who to go to for information or help, and knows where he will be safe. Streetwise characters can make use of the city's unique resources, buy and sell on the black market, or find out secrets. It's an important Skill for any character that needs to avoid the law, navigate the dangers in the city, and keep from ending up on the bad sides of the wrong people.

**Sample actions:** Find a shortcut (Wits + Streetwise), Get the word on the street (Manipulation + Streetwise), Work the black market (Manipulation + Streetwise)

**Sample Specialties:** Black market, Gangs, Navigation, Rumors, Undercover work

**Sample contacts:** Bartender in a Rough Part of Town, Drug Dealer, Undercover Cop

### Levels:

- **Novice:** This character knows his neighborhood very well, and knows who to go to get the information he needs.
- •• **Professional:** At this level of Streetwise, a character knows where to ditch a hot car and who might be able to handle a specific minor favor.
- ••• **Experienced:** Insiders and true fixtures of the street scene have this level of the Skill. A character with three dots in Streetwise knows who can make the proper introductions and who can actually get things accomplished.
- •••• **Expert:** This character never gets lost in her town. And it is her town. She knows everyone, and everyone knows her.
- ••••• **Master:** There isn't a secret in town that this character can't access. A character at this rank doesn't just know who to go to in order to get things done – *he* is the one people go to.

## Subterfuge

Subterfuge is the fine art of deception. With Subterfuge, a character can lie convincingly, recognize when she is being lied to, or convey hidden meaning in what she says. She can hide her own motivations and emotions. Generally, this Skill is used to trick others, but some characters learn it in order to avoid being tricked themselves.

**Sample actions:** Conceal emotions (Composure + Subterfuge), Disguise (Wits + Subterfuge), Lying (Manipulation + Subterfuge)

**Sample Specialties:** Detecting lies, Hidden meanings, Hiding emotions, Long cons, Misdirection

**Sample contacts:** Con Artist, Crooked Politician, Out-of-work Actor

### Levels:

- **Novice:** The character has an excellent poker face, and rarely reveals what she is thinking.
- •• **Professional:** At this level, a character can pull of a good bluff or short con, often getting away without the victim even knowing they were had.
- ••• **Experienced:** A character with this level in Subterfuge can keep track of complex webs of lies and double-dealing. Even suspicious people can't tell when he is lying.
- •••• **Expert:** This character can pull off complex con games with style. She can lie to your face without a flinch or a flicker of doubt.
- ••••• **Master:** Everyone likes and trusts this character. *Everyone*.

# Merits

Merits represent a character's unique abilities and assets. They can cover anything from her wealth to her uncanny ability to knock out her opponents.

## Renaming Merits

Each Merit has a name suggestive of its usage. If you want to customize a Merit while still accomplishing the same goal, give it a different name. For example, Retainer suggests something very specific. However, you could just as easily call it Ward, and while it does the same thing in game terms, the implication is different. Striking Looks could just as easily be called Sex Appeal, Bruiser, or Trustworthy, and give the exact same game advantages. Consider renaming Merits to help further define your character.

## Style Merits

Merits marked as Style Merits allow access to specialized maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next in its sequence. So if a Style Merit has a three-dot maneuver and a four-dot maneuver, you must purchase the three-dot version before accessing the four-dot.

## Sanctity of Merits

While Merits represent things within the game and about your character, they're really an out-of-character resource, a function of the character creation and advancement mechanics. Merits often represent things that can go away. Retainers can be killed. Mentors can get impatient and stop dispensing wisdom. So while Merits may represent temporary facets of your character, Merit dotss continue to exist. At the end of any chapter where your character has lost Merits, you can replace them with another Merit.

For example, your character has three-dot Retainer, a loyal dog, and an eldritch horror eats that dog out in the woods. At the end of that chapter, you may reallocate those Retainer dots. You may choose to purchase Safe Place, to reflect your character's choice to bunker down from the monster, and perhaps Direction Sense (one dot) so your character is less likely to get lost in those woods in the future. When the character leaves his Safe Place, you can replace those two dots with something else.

When replacing a Merit, consider what makes sense in the story. Pursue the new Merit during the course of the chapter if possible, and make the new tie something less superficial than a dot or two on a sheet.

With Storyteller permission, you may 'cash in' a Merit voluntarily and replace it with Experiences. This should not be used as a way to purchase a Merit, take advantage of its benefits, and then cash it out for something else. But if a Merit's run its course and no longer makes sense for your character, you may use those points elsewhere.

Merits such as Ambidextrous, Eidetic Memory and the various Fighting Style Merits reflect abilities and knowledge that your character has, and therefore shouldn't be cashed in or replaced. Then again, if an Ambidextrous character loses his left hand....

# Mental Merits

## Area of Expertise (•)

**Prerequisite:** Resolve •• and one Skill Specialty

**Effect:** Your character is uncommonly specialized in one area. Choose a Specialty to assign to this Merit. Forgo the +1 bonus afforded by a Specialty, in exchange for a +2.

## Common Sense (•••)

**Effect:** Your character has an exceptionally sound and rational mind. With a moment's thought, she can weigh potential courses of action and outcomes.

Once per chapter as an instant action, you may ask the Storyteller one of the following questions about a task at hand or course of action. Roll Wits + Composure. If you succeed, the Storyteller must answer to the best of her ability. If you fail, you get no answer. With an exceptional success, you can ask an additional question.

- What is the worst choice?
- What do I stand to lose here?
- What's the safest choice?
- Am I chasing a worthless lead?

## Danger Sense (••)

**Effect:** You gain a +2 modifier on reflexive Wits + Composure rolls for your character to detect an impending ambush.

Your character's reflexes are honed to the point where nothing's shocking.

## Direction Sense (•)

**Effect:** Your character has an innate sense of direction, and is always aware of her location in space. She always knows which direction she faces, and never suffers penalties to navigate or find her way.

## Eidetic Memory (••)

**Effect:** Your character recalls events and details with pinpoint accuracy. You do not have to make rolls for your character to remember past experiences. When making Intelligence + Composure (or relevant Skill) rolls to recall minute facts from swaths of information, take a +2 bonus.

## Encyclopedic Knowledge (••)

**Effect:** Choose a Skill. Due to an immersion in academia, pop culture, or a hobby obsession, your character has collected limitless factoids about the topic, even if she has no dots in the Skill.

You can make an Intelligence + Wits roll at any time your character is dealing with her area of interest. On a successful roll, the Storyteller must give a relevant fact or detail about the issue at hand. Your character knows this fact, but you must explain within the scope of your character's background why she knows it. For example, for Encyclopedic Knowledge: Medicine: "Do you remember that time on that show, when the doctor said it doesn't manifest before puberty?"

## Eye for the Strange (••)

**Prerequisite:** Resolve ••, Occult •

**Effect:** While your character does not necessarily possess a breadth of knowledge about the supernatural, she knows the otherworldly when she sees it. By perusing evidence, she can determine whether something comes from natural or supernatural origins. Roll Intelligence + Composure. With a success, the Storyteller must tell you if the scene has a supernatural cause, and provide one piece of found information that confirms the answer. With an exceptional success, she must give you a bit of supernatural folklore that suggests what type of creature caused the problem. If the problem was mundane, an exceptional success gives an ongoing +2 to all rolls to investigate the event, due to her redoubled certainty in its natural causation.

## Fast Reflexes (• to •••)

**Prerequisite:** Wits ••• or Dexterity •••

**Effect:** +1 Initiative per dot

Your character's reflexes impress and astound; she's always fast to react.

## Good Time Management (•)

**Prerequisite:** Academics •• or Science ••

**Effect:** Your character has vast experience managing complex tasks, keeping schedules, and meeting deadlines. When taking an extended action, halve the time required between rolls.

## Holistic Awareness (•)

**Effect:** Your character is skilled at non-traditional healing methods. While scientific minds might scoff, he can provide basic medical care with natural means. He knows what herbs can

stem an infection, and what minerals will stave off a minor sickness. Unless your patient suffers wound penalties from lethal or aggravated wounds, you do not need traditional medical equipment to stabilize and treat injuries. With access to woodlands, a greenhouse, or other source of diverse flora, a Wits + Survival roll allows your character to gather all necessary supplies.

### Indomitable (••)

**Prerequisite:** Resolve •••

Your character possesses an iron will. The powers of the supernatural have little bearing on her behavior. She can stand up to a vampire's mind control, a witch's charms, or a ghost's gifts of fright. Any time a supernatural creature uses a power to influence your character's thoughts or emotions, add two dice to the dice pool to contest it. If the roll is resisted, instead subtract two dice from the monster's dice pool. Note that this only affects mental influence and manipulation from a supernatural origin. A vampire with a remarkable Manipulation + Persuasion score is just as likely to convince your character to do something using mundane tricks.

### Interdisciplinary Specialty (•)

**Prerequisite:** Skill at ••• or higher with a Specialty

**Effect:** Choose a Specialty that your character possesses when you purchase this Merit. You can apply the +1 from that Specialty on any Skill with at least one dot, provided it's justifiable within the scope of the fiction. For example, a doctor with a Medicine Specialty in Anatomy may be able to use it when targeting a specific body part with Weaponry, but could not with a general strike.

### Investigative Aide (•)

**Prerequisites:** Chosen Skill at •••+

**Effect:** Your character has one particular knack that can contribute amazingly to an investigation. Choose a Skill when purchasing this Merit; when making rolls to Uncover Clues (see p. 79), she achieves exceptional success on three successes instead of five. As well, Clues that come from her use of that Skill start with one additional element.

You may purchase this Merit multiple times, to enhance different Skills.

### Investigative Prodigy (• to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Wits •••, Investigation •••

**Effect:** Your character investigates instinctively, and can intuit details and connections in a scene without much time. He's a veritable Sherlock Holmes. Instead of simply uncovering Clues or not uncovering Clues when investigating (see p. 79), your character discovers multiple Clues in a single action. Your character can uncover Clues equal to his successes or his Merit dots as an instant action, whichever is lower.

Only the first Clue benefits from additional elements; other Clues established with this Merit receive only a single element each.

### Language (•)

**Effect:** Your character is skilled with an additional language, beyond her native tongue. Choose a language each time you buy this Merit. Your character can speak, read, and write in that language.

### Library (• to •••)

**Effect:** Your character has access to a plethora of information about a given topic. When purchasing this Merit, choose a Mental Skill. The Library covers that purview. On any extended roll involving the Skill in question, add the dots in this Merit.

This Merit can be purchased multiple times, to reflect different Skills. Additionally, its benefits can be shared by various characters, with permission.

### Meditative Mind (•, ••, or ••••)

**Effect:** Your character's meditation is far more fulfilling than for other characters. With the one-dot version of this Merit, the character does not suffer environmental penalties to meditation (see p. 75), even from wound penalties.

With the two-dot version, when the character has successfully meditated, she gains a +3 bonus on any Resolve + Composure rolls during the same day, as she's steeled herself against the things in the world that would shake her foundation.

At the four-dot level, she only needs a single success to gain the benefits of meditation for the day, instead of the normal four.

### Multilingual (•)

**Effect:** Your character has a strong affinity for language acquisition. Each time you purchase this Merit, choose two languages. Your character can speak conversationally in those languages. With an Intelligence + Academics roll, he may also read enough of the language to understand context.

If you purchase the Language Merit for either of these languages, replace the Multilingual language. For example, if you have Multilingual (French, Italian), and purchase Language: Italian, you may choose to take Multilingual (French, Portuguese).

### Patient (•)

**Effect:** Your character knows how to pace herself and take the time to do the job right the first time. When taking an extended action, you may make two additional rolls, above what your Attribute + Skill allows.

### Professional Training (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character has extensive training in a particular profession, which offers distinct advantages in a handful of fields. When choosing this Merit, choose or create a Profession for your character (see the sidebar). Mark the two Asset Skills on your character sheet. The advantages of Professional Training relate directly to those Asset Skills.

- **Networking:** At the first level of Professional Training, your character builds connections within her chosen field. Take two dots of Contacts relating to that field.

•• **Continuing Education:** With the repeated efforts in her field of choice, your character tends toward greater successes. When making a roll with her Asset Skills, she benefits from the 9-again quality.

••• **Breadth of Knowledge:** Due to her advancement in her field, she's picked up a number of particular bits of information and skill unique to her work. Choose a third Asset Skill, and take two Specialties in your character's Asset Skills.

•••• **On the Job Training:** With the resources at her disposal, your character has access to extensive educational tools and mentorship. Take a Skill dot in an Asset Skill. Whenever you purchase a new Asset Skill dot, take a Beat.

••••• **The Routine:** With such extensive experience in her field, her Asset Skills have been honed to a fine edge, and she's almost guaranteed at least a marginal success. Before rolling, spend a Willpower point to apply the rote action quality to an Asset Skill. This allows you to reroll all the failed dice on the first roll.

### Tolerance for Biology (•)

**Prerequisite:** Resolve •••

**Effect:** Most people turn away at the sight of blood, other bodily fluids, or exotic biology. Your character has seen enough that nothing turns her stomach. When other characters must resist shock or physical repulsion from the disgusting and morbid, your character stands her ground. You do not need to make Composure, Stamina, or Resolve rolls to withstand the biologically strange. This doesn't mean she's immune to fear; she's just used to nature in all its nasty forms.

### Trained Observer (•, or •••)

**Prerequisite:** Wits ••• or Composure •••

**Effect:** Your character has spent years in the field, catching tiny details and digging for secrets. She might not have a better chance of finding things, but she has a better chance of finding *important* things. Any time you make a Perception roll (usually Wits + Composure), you benefit from the 9-again quality. With the three-dot version, you get 8-again.

### Vice-Ridden (••)

**Effect:** Your character is one of the worst examples of humanity in the Chronicles of Darkness. He has two Vices, although he may still only regain one Willpower per scene he indulges himself.

### Virtuous (••)

**Effect:** Your character is a light of good in the Chronicles of Darkness. She has two Virtues. The limitations of how many times she may refresh Willpower using a Virtue remain the same, but it's up to you which Virtue she uses each time.

## Professions

Here is a list of the most common Professions, and their Asset Skills. Feel free to create your own to suit the needs of your characters and stories. Also, you may adapt the Asset Skills as fit. For example, your police officer might be more proficient with Politics and Intimidation than Firearms and Streetwise.

| Profession | Asset Skills |
|---|---|
| Academic | Academics, Science |
| Artist | Crafts, Expression |
| Athlete | Athletics, Medicine |
| Cop | Streetwise, Firearms |
| Criminal | Larceny, Streetwise |
| Detective | Empathy, Investigation |
| Doctor | Empathy, Medicine |
| Engineer | Crafts, Science |
| Hacker | Computer, Science |
| Hit Man | Firearms, Stealth |
| Journalist | Expression, Investigation |
| Laborer | Athletics, Crafts |
| Occultist | Investigation, Occult |
| Politician | Politics, Subterfuge |
| Professional | Academics, Persuasion |
| Religious Leader | Academics, Occult |
| Scientist | Investigation, Science |
| Socialite | Politics, Socialize |
| Stuntman | Athletics, Drive |
| Survivalist | Animal Ken, Survival |
| Soldier | Firearms, Survival |
| Technician | Crafts, Investigation |
| Thug | Brawl, Intimidation |
| Vagrant | Streetwise, Survival |

# Physical Merits

### Ambidextrous (•••)

**Effect:** Your character does not suffer the -2 penalty for using his off hand in combat or to perform other actions. *Available only at character creation.*

### Automotive Genius (•)

**Prerequisites:** Crafts •••, Drive •, Science •

**Effect:** Your character knows how to fine-tune a vehicle to utter extremes. When determining how many modifications she can add to a vehicle (see p. 98), triple her Crafts dots instead of doubling them. So, a character with Crafts •••• could support 12 combined modifications on a vehicle instead of eight. Additionally, any relevant Crafts Specialties add one more potential modification to the total.

### Crack Driver (•• or •••)

**Prerequisite:** Drive •••

**Effect:** Your character's an ace at the wheel, and nothing shakes his concentration. So long as he's not taking any actions other than driving (and keeping the car safe), add his Composure to any rolls to Drive. Any rolls to disable his vehicle suffer a penalty equal to his Composure as well. With the three-dot version, once per turn he may take a Drive action reflexively.

### Demolisher (• to •••)

**Prerequisite:** Strength ••• or Intelligence •••

**Effect:** Your character has an innate feel for the weak points in objects. When damaging an object, she ignores one point of the object's Durability per dot with this Merit.

### Double Jointed (••)

**Prerequisite:** Dexterity •••

**Effect:** Your character might have been a contortionist, or spent time practicing yoga. She can dislodge joints when need be. She automatically escapes from any mundane bonds without a roll. When grappled, subtract her Dexterity from any rolls to overpower her, as long as she's not taking any aggressive actions.

### Fleet of Foot (• to •••)

**Prerequisite:** Athletics ••

**Effect:** Your character is remarkably quick, and runs far faster than his frame suggests. He gains +1 Speed per dot, and anyone pursuing him suffers a -1 per dot to any foot chase rolls.

### Giant (•••)

**Effect:** Your character is massive. She's well over six feet tall, and crowds part when she approaches. She's Size 6, and gains +1 Health. *Available only at character creation.*

**Drawback:** Buying clothing is a nightmare. Fitting in small spaces is difficult at best.

### Hardy (• to •••)

**Prerequisite:** Stamina •••

**Effect:** Your character's body goes further than it rightfully should. Add the dots in this Merit to any rolls to resist disease, poison, deprivation, unconsciousness, or suffocation.

### Greyhound (•)

**Prerequisites:** Athletics •••, Wits •••, Stamina •••

**Effect:** Your character works best when chasing or being chased; the hunt is in his blood. When in a chase (see p. 84), you receive the effects of an exceptional success on three successes instead of five.

### Iron Stamina (• to •••)

**Prerequisites:** Stamina ••• or Resolve •••

**Effect:** Each dot eliminates a negative modifier (on a one-for-one basis) when resisting the effects of fatigue or injury. For example: A character with Iron Stamina •• is able to ignore up to a -2 modifier brought on by fatigue. The Merit also counteracts the effects of wound penalties. So, if all of your character's Health boxes are filled (which normally imposes a -3 penalty to his actions) and he has Iron Stamina •, those penalties are reduced to -2. This Merit cannot be used to gain positive modifiers for actions, only to cancel out negative ones.

### Parkour (• to •••••, Style)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity •••, Athletics ••

Your character is a trained and proficient free runner. Free running is the art of moving fluidly through urban environments with complex leaps, bounds, running tricks, and vaults. This is the type of sport popularized in modern action films, where characters are unhindered by fences, walls, construction equipment, cars, or anything else the city puts in their way.

**Flow (•):** Your character reacts instinctively to any obstacles with leaps, jumps, and scaling techniques. When in a foot chase, subtract your Parkour from the successes needed to pursue or evade. Also, ignore environmental penalties to Athletics rolls equal to your Parkour rating.

**Cat Leap (••):** Your character falls with outstanding grace. When using a Dexterity + Athletics roll to mitigate damage from falling, your character gains one automatic success. Additionally, add your Parkour rating to the threshold of damage that can be removed through this roll. Parkour will not mitigate damage from a terminal velocity fall.

**Wall Run (•••):** When climbing, your character can run upward for some distance before having to traditionally climb. Without rolling, your character scales10 feet + five feet per dot of Athletics as an instant action, rather than the normal 10 feet.

**Expert Traceur (••••):** Parkour has become second nature for your character. By spending a Willpower point, you may designate one Athletics roll to run, jump, or climb as a rote action (reroll all failed dice once). On any turn during which you use this ability, you may not apply your character's Defense to oncoming attacks.

**Freeflow (•••••):** Your character's Parkour is now muscle memory. She can move without thinking, in a Zenlike state. The character must successfully meditate (see p. 75) in order to establish Freeflow. Once established, your character is capable of taking Athletics actions reflexively once per turn. By spending a point of Willpower on an Athletics roll in a foot chase, gain three successes instead of three dice.

### Quick Draw (•)

**Prerequisites:** Wits •••, a Specialty in the weapon or fighting style chosen

**Effect:** Choose a Specialty in Weaponry or Firearms when you purchase this Merit. Your character has trained in that weapon or style enough that pulling the weapon is his first reflex. Drawing or holstering that weapon is considered a reflexive action, and can be done any time his Defense applies.

### Relentless (•)

**Prerequisites:** Athletics ••, Stamina •••

**Effect:** Your character will not stop running, whether away from a pursuer or toward prey. In any chase (see p. 84) your opponents must achieve two additional successes against yours to catch her or elude her.

### Seizing the Edge (••)

**Prerequisites:** Wits •••, Composure •••

**Effect:** Your character is always ready for a chase. Whether to escape a threat or hunt down a rival, she's always geared and ready to go. She always has the Edge in the first turn of a chase scene (see p. 84). Additionally, the opponent must make a successful Wits + Composure roll, as if being ambushed, or your character does not have to account for her Speed or Initiative when calculating needed successes in the first turn.

### Sleight of Hand (••)

**Prerequisite:** Larceny •••

**Effect:** Your character can pick locks and pockets without even thinking about it. She can take one Larceny-based instant action reflexively in a given turn. As well, her Larceny actions go unnoticed unless someone is trying specifically to catch her.

### Small-Framed (••)

**Effect:** Your character is diminutive. He's not five feet, and it's easy to walk into him without noticing. He's Size 4, and thus has one fewer Health box. He gains +2 to any rolls to hide or go unnoticed, and this bonus might apply any time being smaller would be an advantage, such as crawling through smaller spaces. *Available only at character creation.*

**Drawback:** In addition to the lower Health, your character might be overlooked or not taken seriously by some people.

### Stunt Driver (• to ••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity •••, Drive •••, Wits •••

**Effect:** Your character is an expert behind the wheel, and can push a vehicle beyond normal limits. Each dot of this Merit grants access to another driving technique.

**Defensive Driving (•):** Your character knows how to protect herself and her vehicle while driving. Subtract her Drive dots from any attempt to hit her vehicle while it's mobile.

**Speed Demon (••):** Your character is an expert at pushing vehicles to their potential in no time flat. Each success on rolls to accelerate a vehicle (see p.98) raises the vehicle's Speed by 10 instead of 5.

**Drift (•••):** Your character knows how to use her vehicle's momentum to efficiently turn at high speeds. She never needs to make a maneuvering roll to turn at high speeds.

**Clipping (••••):** Your character has experience hitting things with her vehicle in such a way as to not hurt herself much. When voluntarily hitting another character or vehicle with hers, ignore damage to her own vehicle equal to her Wits. This is applied before Durability.

## Social Merits

Many of these Merits use the Social rules (p. 81), influencing Doors and other facets of the interaction.

### Allies (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Allies help your character. They might be friends, employees, associates, or people your character has blackmailed. Each instance of this Merit represents one type of ally. This could be an organization, a society, a clique, or an individual. Examples include the police, a secret society, criminal organizations, unions, local politicians, or the academic community. Each purchase has its own rating. Your character might have Allies (Masons) ••, Allies (Carter Crime Family) •••, and Allies (Catholic Church) •.

Each dot represents a layer of influence in the group. One dot would constitute small favors and passing influence. Three could offer considerable influence, such as the police overlooking a misdemeanor charge. Five dots stretches the limits of the organization's influence, as its leaders put their own influence on the line for the character. This could include things such as massive insider trading or fouling up a felony investigation. No matter the request, it has to be something that organization could accomplish.

The Storyteller assigns a rating between one and five to any favor asked. A character can ask for favors that add up to her Allies rating without penalty in one chapter. If she extends her influence beyond that, her player must roll Manipulation + Persuasion + Allies, with a penalty equal to the favor's rating. If the roll is successful, the group does as requested. Failed or successful, the character loses a dot of Allies. This dot may return at the end of the chapter (see Sanctity of Merits, on p. 43.) On a dramatic failure, the organization resents her and seeks retribution. On an exceptional success, she doesn't lose the dot.

One additional favor a character can ask of her Allies is to block another character's Allies, Contacts, Mentor, Retainer, or Status (if she knows the character possesses the relevant Merit). The rating is equal to the Merit dots blocked. As before, no roll is necessary unless the target's Merit exceeds the character's Allies. If the block succeeds, the character cannot use the Merit during the same chapter.

### Alternate Identity (•, ••, or •••)

**Effect:** Your character has established an alternate identity. The level of this Merit determines the amount of scrutiny it holds up to. At one dot, the identity is superficial and unofficial. For example, your character uses an alias with a simple costume and adopts an accent. She hasn't established the necessary paperwork to even approach a bureaucratic background check, let alone pass one. At two dots, she's supported her identity with paperwork and identification. It's not liable to stand up to extensive research, but it'll turn away private investigators and internet hobbyists. At three dots, the identity can pass a thorough inspection. The identity has been deeply entrenched in relevant databases, with subtle flourishes and details to make it seem real, even to trained professionals.

Additionally, the Merit reflects time the character has spent honing her persona. At one or two dots, she gains +1 to all Subterfuge rolls to defend the identity. At three dots, she gains +2.

This Merit can be purchased multiple times, each time representing an additional identity.

### Anonymity (• to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Cannot have Fame

**Effect:** Your character lives off the grid. This means purchases must be made with cash or falsified credit cards. She eschews identification. She avoids any official authoritative influence in her affairs. Any attempts to find her by paper trail suffer a -1 penalty per dot purchased in this Merit.

**Drawback:** Your character cannot purchase the Fame Merit. This also may limit Status purchases, if the character cannot provide sufficient identification for the roles she wishes to take.

### Barfly (••)

**Prerequisite:** Socialize ••

**Effect:** Your character is a natural in the bar environment, and can procure an open invitation wherever he wishes. Whereas most characters would require rolls to blend into social functions they don't belong in, he doesn't; he belongs. Rolls to identify him as an outsider suffer his Socialize as a penalty.

### Closed Book (• to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Manipulation •••, Resolve •••

**Effect:** Your character is particularly tough to crack. When a character uses Social Maneuvering (see p. 81) against her, add her dots in this Merit as additional Doors. In other Social actions to uncover her true feelings, motives, and position, add her Merit dots to any contested rolls for her.

At the Storyteller's discretion, this can apply to supernatural effects used against her. For example, it might allow her to resist a power that forces her to speak the truth, since she can manipulate the wording. However, it wouldn't affect someone looking at her aura, since she cannot manipulate her spiritual resonance.

### Contacts (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Contacts provide your character with information. Each dot in this Merit represents a sphere or organization with which the character can garner information. For example, a character with Contacts ••• might have Bloggers, Drug Dealers, and Financial Speculators for connections. Contacts do not provide services, only information. This may be face-to-face, via email, by telephone, or even by séance in some strange instances.

Garnering information via Contacts requires a Manipulation + Social Skill roll, depending on the method the character uses, and the relationship between the characters. The Storyteller should give a bonus or penalty, dependent on how relevant the information is to that particular Contact, whether accessing the information is dangerous, and if the character has maintained good relations or done favors for the Contact. These modifiers should range from -3 to +3 in most cases. If successful, the Contact provides the information.

One use of a Contact is to dig dirt on another character. A Contact can find another character's Social Merits, and any relevant Conditions (Embarrassing Secret is a prime example.)

A character can have more than five Contacts, but the Merit's rating is limited to five, for the purposes of Allies blocking.

### Fame (• to •••)

**Effect:** Your character is recognized within a certain sphere, for a certain skill, or because of some past action or stroke of luck. This can mean favors and attention, it can also mean negative attention and scrutiny. When choosing the Merit, define what your character is known for. As a rule of thumb, one dot means local recognition, or reputation within a confined subculture. Two dots means regional recognition by a wide swath of people. Three dots means worldwide recognition to anyone that might have been exposed to the source of the fame. Each dot adds a die to any Social rolls among those who are impressed by your character's celebrity.

**Drawback:** Any rolls to find or identify the character enjoy a +1 bonus per dot of the Merit. If the character has Alternate Identity, she can mitigate this drawback. A character with Fame cannot have the Anonymity Merit.

### Fast-Talking (• to •••••, Style)

**Prerequisites:** Manipulation •••, Subterfuge ••

Your character talks circles around listeners. He speaks a mile a minute, and often leaves his targets reeling, but nodding in agreement.

**Always Be Closing (•)**: With the right leading phrases, your character can direct a mark to say what he wants, when he wants. This trips the mark into vulnerable positions. When a mark contests or resists your character's Social interactions, apply a -1 to their Resolve or Composure.

**Jargon (••)**: Your character confuses his mark using complex terminology. You may apply one relevant Specialty to any Social roll you make, even if the Specialty isn't tied to the Skill in use.

**Devil's Advocacy (•••)**: Your character often poses arguments he doesn't agree with, in order to challenge a mark's position and keep him from advancing the discussion. You can reroll one failed Subterfuge roll per scene.

**Salting (••••)**: Your character can position himself so a mark pursues a non-issue or something unimportant to him. When your character opens a Door using conversation (Persuasion, Subterfuge, Empathy, etc.) you may spend a Willpower point to immediately open another Door.

**The Nigerian Scam (•••••)**: Your character can take advantage of his mark's greed and zeal. When the mark does particularly well, it's because your character was there to set him up, and to subsequently tear him down. If a target regains Willpower from his Vice while your character is present, you may immediately roll Manipulation + Subterfuge to open a Door, regardless of the interval or impression level.

## Fixer (••)

**Prerequisite:** Contacts ••, Wits •••

**Effect:** Your character is people that knows people. She can not only get in touch with the right people to do a job, but she can get them at the best possible prices. When hiring a service (see p. 100), reduce the Availability score of the service by one dot.

## Hobbyist Clique (••)

**Prerequisite:** Membership in a clique. All members must possess this Merit, and the chosen Skill at ••+

**Effect:** Your character is part of a group of hobbyists that specialize in one area, represented by a Skill. It may be a book club, a coven, a political party, or any group brought together by a common interest. When the group's support is available, you benefit from the 9-again quality on rolls involving the group's chosen Skill. As well, the clique offers two additional dice on any extended actions involving that Skill.

**Drawback:** This Merit requires upkeep. You must attend at least monthly, informal meetings to maintain the benefits of Hobbyist Clique.

## Inspiring (•••)

**Prerequisite:** Presence •••

**Effect:** Your character's passion inspires those around her to greatness. With a few words, she can redouble a group's confidence or move them to action.

Make a Presence + Expression roll. A small group of listeners levies a -1 penalty, a small crowd a -2, and a large crowd a -3. Listeners gain the Inspired Condition. The character may not use this Merit on herself.

## Iron Will (••)

**Prerequisite:** Resolve ••••

**Effect:** Your character's resolve is unwavering. When spending Willpower to contest or resist in a Social interaction, you may substitute your character's Resolve for the usual Willpower bonus. If the roll is contested, roll with 8-again.

## Mentor (• to •••••)

**Effect:** This Merit gives your character a teacher that provides advice and guidance. He acts on your character's behalf, often in the background, and sometimes without your character's knowledge. While Mentors can be highly competent, they almost always want something in return for their services. The dot rating determines the Mentor's capabilities, and to what extent he'll aid your character.

When establishing a Mentor, determine what the Mentor wants from your character. This should be personally important to him, and it should reflect on the dot rating chosen. A one-dot Mentor might be incapable of dealing with modern society, and want to live vicariously through your character. This might mean coming to him and telling stories of her exploits. A five-dot Mentor would want something astronomical, such as an oath to procure an ancient, cursed artifact that may or may not exist, in order to prevent a prophesized death.

Choose three Skills the Mentor possesses. You can substitute Resources for one of these Skills. Once per session, the character may ask her Mentor for a favor. The favor must involve one of those Skills, or be within the scope of his Resources. The Mentor commits to the favor (often asking for a commensurate favor in return), and if a roll is required, the Mentor is automatically considered to have successes equal to his dot rating. Alternately, you may ask the Storyteller to have the Mentor act on your character's behalf, without her character knowing or initiating the request.

## Mystery Cult Initiation (• to •••••)

Cults are far more common than people would like to admit. "Mystery cult" is the catch-all term for a phenomenon ranging from secret societies couched in fraternity houses, to scholarly cabals studying the magic of classical symbolism, to mystical suicide cults to the God-Machine.

Mystery Cult Initiation reflects membership in one of these esoteric groups. The dot rating dictates standing. One dot is an initiate, two a respected member, three a priest or organizer, four a decision-making leader, and five is a high priest or founder. If you wish your character to begin play in a cult, work with your Storyteller to develop the details.

Designing a Mystery Cult requires three things, at bare minimum. First is a Purpose. This is the defining reason

## Sample Cults

### Sample Cult: The Chosen of Mammon

Mammon believes in the almighty dollar, and its inherent power. Followers of Mammon are expected to obtain material wealth and power at any cost. Fortunately, their networks help initiates quickly claim promotions and transfers into more prominent areas of influence.

**Cultists:** Hedge fund manager, mailboy on a mission, outsourcer, personal assistant to the stars, talent scout, third generation CEO

Initiation Benefits

| | |
|---|---|
| • | All initiates learn to cut through red tape to fulfill their later duties. They gain a Politics Specialty in Bureaucracy. |
| •• | Full members must learn to speak, read, and write in Aramaic. They gain the Language Merit (Aramaic) free of charge. |
| ••• | As a cultist delves into the mysteries of Mammon, she gains access to greater cult resources. Spend two dots between Contacts, Allies, Resources, or Retainers reflecting this relationship. |
| •••• | The self-centered and power-obsessed priests of Mammon gain the Thief of Fate (•••) Merit. For this reason, priests are prohibited from touching other cultists. |
| ••••• | The high priestess of Mammon benefits from the tithes of her already wealthy followers. She gains three dots of Resources. Additionally, she may make a Resources ••••• purchase once per month without limitation, by drawing from the cult's coffers. |

### Sample Cult: Sisters of the Machine Gun, Brothers of the Bomb

The Brothers and Sisters band together with their rudimentary understanding of something they call "the God-Machine" in order to prevent its ascendancy to whatever mysterious power it strives for. They've repurposed artifacts and reverse-engineered their power into more technological weapons to fight back the darkness. The Brothers and Sisters tend toward universities and other places of learning, where a bit of esoteric knowledge can bleed through the mundane and open eyes to the truths of the universe.

**Cultists:** God-Machine survivor, librarian-turned-networker, militant defender (Sister Machine Gun), second-generation mentor, tech expert (Brother Bomb)

Initiation Benefits

| | |
|---|---|
| • | New recruits, while not yet trusted, receive training to better spot the influence of the God-Machine. They gain an Occult Specialty in The God-Machine. |
| •• | Small cells of the Brothers and Sisters network through a handful of active initiates. For this reason, all initiates gain Contacts • (Brothers and Sisters) free of charge. |
| ••• | Respected initiates that have proven they're likely to survive more than a few years are taught the secrets of repurposing holy artifacts into weapons. By destroying such an artifact, they can give one weapon the ability to hurt spirits and ghosts. |
| •••• | At higher ranks within the organization, members are assigned wards and students. Take three dots in Retainers, allocated as the player sees fit (that is, one three-dot Retainer, three one-dot Retainers, etc.). |
| ••••• | The highest-ranking Brothers and Sisters were mostly first contact survivors. They've seen more of the God-Machine's influence than most anyone still standing. They gain a modified version of the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit relating directly to the God-Machine. |

the cult exists. Usually it's tied in with the cult's history and recent background. Second is a Relic. This is an item that grounds members' faith. For example, a piece of the God-Machine, an ancient text bound in human flesh, or the mummified flesh of a saint. The last is a Doctrine. Every cult is defined by its rules and traditions.

In addition to standing, a Mystery Cult Initiation Merit offers benefits at each level of influence. Develop these as well. The following are guidelines; use them to craft your cults:

- A Skill Specialty or one-dot Merit, pertaining to the lessons taught to initiates.

| | |
|---|---|
| •• | A one-dot Merit. |
| ••• | A Skill dot, or a two-dot Merit (often a supernatural Merit). |
| •••• | A three-dot Merit, often supernatural in origin. |
| ••••• | A three-dot Merit, or a major advantage not reflected in game traits. |

### Pusher (•)

**Prerequisite:** Persuasion ••

**Effect:** Your character tempts and bribes as second nature. Any time a mark in a Social interaction accepts his soft leverage (see p. 82), improve your Impression as if you'd satisfied his Vice as well as moving the impression up on the chart.

### Resources (• to •••••)

**Effect:** This Merit reflects your character's disposable income. She might live in an upscale condo, but if her income is tied up in the mortgage and child support payments, she might have little money to throw around. Characters are assumed to have basic necessities without Resources.

The dot rating determines the relative amount of disposable funding the character has available, depending on your particular chronicle's setting. The same amount of money means completely different things in a game set in Silicon Valley compared to one set in the Detroit slums. One dot is a little spending money here and there. Two is a comfortable, middle class wage. Three is a nicer, upper middle class life. Four is moderately wealthy. Five is filthy rich.

Every item has an Availability rating. Once per chapter, your character can procure an item at her Resources level or lower, without issue. An item one Availability above her Resources reduces her effective Resources by one dot for a full month, since she has to rapidly liquidate funds. She can procure items two Availability below her Resources without limit (within reason). For example, a character with Resources •••• can procure as many Availability •• disposable cellphones as she needs.

### Retainer (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character has an assistant, sycophant, servant, or follower on whom she can rely. Establish who this companion is, and how he was acquired. It may be as simple as a paycheck. He might owe your character his life. However it happened, your character has a hold on him.

A Retainer is more reliable than a Mentor, and more loyal than an Ally. On the other hand, a Retainer is a lone person, less capable and influential than the broader Merits.

The Merit's dot rating determines the relative competency of the Retainer. A one-dot Retainer is barely able to do anything of use, such as a pet that knows one useful trick, or a homeless old man that does minor errands for food. A three-dot Retainer is a professional in their field, someone

capable in his line of work. A five-dot is one of the best in her class. If a Retainer needs to make a roll, and it's within her field, double the dot rating and use it as a dice pool. For anything else, use the dot rating as a dice pool.

This Merit can be purchased multiple times to represent multiple Retainers.

## Safe Place (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character has somewhere she can go where she can feel secure. While she may have enemies that could attack her there, she's prepared and has the upper hand. The dot rating reflects the security of the place. The actual location, the luxury, and the size are represented by equipment. A one-dot Safe Place might be equipped with basic security systems or a booby trap at the windows and door. A five-dot could have a security crew, infrared scanners at every entrance, or trained dogs. Each place can be an apartment, a mansion, or a hidey-hole.

Unlike most Merits, multiple characters can contribute dots to a single Safe Place, combining their dots into something greater. A Safe Place gives an Initiative bonus equal to the Merit dots. This only applies to a character with dots invested in the Safe Place.

Any efforts to breach the Safe Place suffer a penalty equal to the Merit dots invested. If the character desires, the Safe Place can include traps that cause intruders lethal damage equal to a maximum of the Merit rating (player's choice as to how much damage a given trap inflicts). This requires that the character has at least one dot in Crafts. The traps may be avoided with a Dexterity + Larceny roll, penalized by the Safe Place dots.

## Small Unit Tactics (••)

**Prerequisites:** Presence •••

**Effect:** Your character is a proficient leader in the field. She can organize efforts and bark orders to remarkable effect. Once per scene, when making a coordinated action that was planned in advance, spend a point of Willpower and an instant action. A number of characters equal to your character's Presence can benefit from the +3 bonus gained from the Willpower expenditure.

## Spin Doctor (•)

**Prerequisites:** Manipulation •••, Subterfuge ••

**Effect:** Your character can fast-talk and sell bullshit stories as if they were completely flawless. When suffering from Tainted Clues (see p. 80), your character does not ignore successes. Instead, apply a -1 penalty for each relevant Tainted Clue. Using a Tainted Clue only levies a total -2 penalty with this Merit, which includes the -1 taken in lieu of ignoring successes.

## Staff (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character has a crew of workers or assistants at his disposal. They may be housekeepers, designers, research assistants, animators, cheap thugs, or whatever else makes sense. For every dot in this Merit, choose one type of assistant, and one Skill. At any reasonable time, his staff can take actions using that Skill. These actions automatically garner a single success. While not useful in contested actions, this guarantees success on minor, mundane activities. Note that your character may have employees without requiring the Staff Merit; Staff simply adds a mechanical advantage for those groups.

## Status (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character has standing, membership, authority, control over, or respect from a group or organization. This can reflect official standing, or merely informal respect. No matter the source, your character enjoys certain privileges within that structure.

Each instance of this Merit reflects standing in a different group or organization. Your character may have Status (The Luck Gang) •••, Status (Drag Racing Circuit) ••, and Status (Police) •. Each affords its own unique benefits. As you increase dot ratings, your character rises in prominence in the relevant group.

Status only allows advantages within the confines of the group reflected in the Merit. Status (Organized Crime) won't help if your character wants an official concealed carry firearms permit, for example.

Status provides a number of advantages:

First, your character can apply her Status to any Social roll with those over which she has authority or sway.

Second, she has access to group facilities, resources, and funding. Depending on the group, this could be limited by red tape and requisitioning processes. It's also dependent on the resources the particular group has available.

Third, she has pull. If she knows a character's Mentor, Resources, Retainer, Contacts, or Allies, she can block their usage. Once per chapter, she can stop a single Merit from being used, if it's of a lower dot rating than her Status, and if it makes sense for her organization to obstruct that type of person's behavior. In our Organized Crime example, if your character knows that the chief of police has Contacts (Criminal Informant), you may opt to block usage by threatening the informant into silence.

**Drawback:** Status requires upkeep, and often regular duties. If these duties are not upheld, the Status may be lost. The dots will not be accessible until the character re-establishes her standing. In our Organized Crime example, your character may be expected to pay protection money, offer tribute to a higher authority, or undertake felonious activities.

## Striking Looks (• or ••)

**Effect:** Your character is stunning, alarming, commanding, repulsive, threatening, charming, or otherwise worthy of attention. Determine how your character looks and how people react to that. For one dot, your character gets a +1 bonus on any Social rolls that would be influenced by his looks. For two dots, the benefit increases to +2. Depending on the particulars, this might influence Expression, Intimidation, Persuasion, Subterfuge, or other rolls.

## Example Status Merits

While Status can apply in a nigh-infinite number of organizations, here is a list of some common Status Merits, and suggested dot ratings to give a jumping off point. These examples are still abstractions; a character may be a dot level lower or higher and still hold the suggested positions. For example, a police detective may have two, three, or four dots of Police Status, and the dot rating just shows her relative influence and respect within the precinct.

| Status: Police | |
|---|---|
| • | Paid informant |
| •• | Beat cop |
| ••• | Detective |
| •••• | Sergeant |
| ••••• | Chief of Police |

| Status: Gang | |
|---|---|
| • | New blood |
| •• | Rank and file |
| ••• | Local gang leader |
| •••• | Regional enforcer |
| ••••• | Cartel leader |

| Status: Medical | |
|---|---|
| • | Regular candy striper |
| •• | Nurse |
| ••• | Resident doctor |
| •••• | Chief physician |
| ••••• | Hospital president |

| Status: Hellfire Club | |
|---|---|
| • | Pledge |
| •• | Initiate |
| ••• | Counselor |
| •••• | Master |
| ••••• | Grandmaster |

| Status: Military | |
|---|---|
| • | Private |
| •• | Corporal |
| ••• | Sergeant |
| •••• | Colonel |
| ••••• | General |

| Status: Corporate | |
|---|---|
| • | Contractor, new hire |
| •• | Company man |
| ••• | Middle manager |
| •••• | Board member |
| ••••• | CEO |

**Drawback:** Attention is a double-edged sword. Any rolls to spot, notice, or remember your character gain the same dice bonus. Sometimes, your character will draw unwanted attention in social situations. This could cause further complications.

### Sympathetic (••)

**Effect:** Your character is very good at letting others get close. This gives him an edge in getting what he wants. At the beginning of a Social maneuvering attempt, you may choose to accept a Condition such as Leveraged, or Swooned in order to immediately eliminate two of the subject's Doors.

### Table Turner (•)

**Prerequisites:** Composure •••, Manipulation •••, Wits •••
**Effects:** Your character can turn any attempt to leverage her into an opportunity. Any time a character initiates a Social Maneuvering action against yours (see p. 81), you may spend a Willpower point to preempt that attempt with one of your own, or another Social action.

### Takes One to Know One (•)

**Effect:** Normally, when Uncovering a Clue (see p. 79), your character suffers a -2 penalty if the crime aligns with his Vice. However, it takes a criminal to know a criminal, and your character has a deep-seated understanding of his particular weakness. Instead, take a +2 and the 9-again quality on any investigation rolls when the crime aligns with your character's particular Vice. The successful investigation is considered fulfilling his Vice.

### Taste (•)

**Prerequisite:** Crafts ••, and a Specialty in Crafts or Expression
**Effect:** Your character has refined tastes, and can identify minor details in fashion, food, architecture, and other forms

of artistry and craftsmanship. Not only does this give her an eye for detail, it makes her a center of attention in critical circles. She can also appraise items within her area of expertise. With a Wits + Skill roll, depending on the creation in question (Expression for poetry, Crafts for architecture, for example), your character can pick out obscure details about the item that other, less discerning minds would not. For each success, ask one of the following questions, or take a +1 bonus to any Social rolls pertaining to groups interested in the art assessed for the remainder of the scene.

- What is the hidden meaning in this?
- What was the creator feeling during its creation?
- What's its weakest point?
- Which other witness is most moved by this piece?
- How should one best appreciate this piece?

### True Friend (•••)

**Effect:** Your character has a True Friend. While that friend may have specific functions covered by other Merits (Allies, Contacts, Retainer, Mentor, et cetera), True Friend represents a deeper, truly trusting relationship that cannot be breached. Unless your character does something egregious to cause it, her True Friend will not betray her. Additionally, the Storyteller cannot kill her True Friend as part of a plot without your express permission. Any rolls to influence a True Friend against your character suffer a five-die penalty. In addition, once per story, your character can regain one spent Willpower by having a meaningful interaction with her True Friend.

### Untouchable (•)

**Prerequisites:** Manipulation •••, Subterfuge ••

**Effect:** Your character commits crimes, and is always a step ahead of pursuers. Because of his methodical planning, any roll to investigate him suffers the Incomplete Clue tag (see p. 80) unless it achieves exceptional success.

## Supernatural Merits

These Merits require the character remain human (non-supernatural.) If the character becomes a vampire, ghoul, mage, or any other supernatural character type, these Merits disappear. Per the Sanctity of Merits (see p. 43), these Merits can be reallocated.

These Merits each have a deeply mystical bent, and may not be right for every chronicle. If you're allowing certain Supernatural Merits in your chronicle, discuss this with your players before they make their characters. Some chronicles (including the God-Machine Chronicles in this book) suggest certain Supernatural Merits as part of their hooks. If this is the case, mention them to your players and encourage them to consider these Merits.

### Aura Reading (•••)

**Effect:** Your character has the psychic ability to perceive auras, the ephemeral halos of energy that surround all living things. This allows her to perceive a subject's emotional state, and potentially any supernatural nature. The colors of an aura show a person's general disposition, and the ebbs, flows, tone, and other oddities reveal other influences. Note that your character may not know what she's looking at when seeing something odd in an aura. For example, she may not know that a pale aura means she's seeing a vampire, unless she's confirmed other vampiric auras in the past.

To activate Aura Reading, spend a point of Willpower and roll Wits + Empathy minus the subject's Composure. Perceiving an aura takes an uninterrupted moment of staring, which could look suspicious even to the unaware. For every success, ask the subject's player one of the following questions. Alternatively, take +1 on Social rolls against the character during the same scene, due to the character's understanding of their emotional state.

- What's your character's most prominent emotion?
- Is your character telling the truth?
- What is your character's attention most focused on right now?
- Is your character going to attack?
- What emotion is your character trying most to hide?
- Is your character supernatural or otherwise not human?

Determine how your character perceives auras. Maybe she sees different hues as different emotions. Perhaps she hears whispers in the back of her mind, reflecting subtle truths about her subject.

**Drawback:** Because of your character's sensitivity to the supernatural, she sometimes appears to know 'a little too much.' No more than once per chapter, when first meeting a supernatural creature, the Storyteller can roll Wits + Occult for the creature, penalized by your character's Composure. If successful, they get a strange feeling that your character is aware of their nature. They're not forced to behave in any particular way, but it could cause complications.

### Automatic Writing (••)

Your character can enter a trance of sorts, in which she's temporarily overtaken by a spirit or ghost, and compelled to write mysterious things.

**Effect:** Your character must meditate for at least one minute. Spend a point of Willpower and roll Wits + Composure to enter the trance. For every success, your character writes a single statement or clue about something occurring in the area or relating to a pertinent issue. The Storyteller provides these clues, and they may at first seem completely nonsensical. Characters may attempt to interpret the clues with Wits + Investigation or research efforts.

**Drawback:** If the roll fails, or the character does not employ a personal item of a local spirit in the meditation, she's haunted afterward. Any time she fails a roll for the next week, it's considered dramatic as the spirit intervenes in complicating and sometimes dangerous ways.

## Biokinesis (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character has the ability to psychically alter his biological makeup. By spending a Willpower point and concentrating for a full minute, he can shift his Physical Attributes, moving dots from one to another. He can shift one dot in an Attribute per dot in this Merit. This shift lasts for one hour. This can shift an Attribute no higher than five dots.

Also, the character heals quickly. Halve all healing times.

## Clairvoyance (•••)

**Effect:** Your character can project her senses to another location. She sees, hears, smells, and otherwise experiences the other place as if she were there. This ability requires a point of Willpower to activate, successful meditation, and a Wits + Occult roll.

**Suggested Modifiers:** Has an object important to the place (+1), never been there (-3), scrying for a person and not a place (-3), scrying for non-specific location (-4), spent significant time there (+2), touching someone with a strong connection to the place (+1)

**Drawback:** When choosing this ability, determine how your character is able to scry. It may be through a crystal ball, through a drug-induced trance, with esoteric computer models, or any other reasonable method. She cannot scry without that tool or methodology.

## Cursed (••)

**Effect:** Your character has run afoul of fate. Somewhere, somehow, he's been cursed. Most importantly, he's aware of the curse. When taking this Merit, define the limitations of the curse. Usually, it's expressed in the form of a single statement, such as, "On the eve of your twenty-seventh birthday, you will feast upon your doom." It's important to work out the details with the Storyteller. The curse must take effect within the scope of the planned chronicle.

While he knows how he'll die, this is a liberating experience. He's confident of the method of his death, so nothing else fazes him. Gain a +2 on any Resolve + Composure roll to face fear or self-doubt. Any time he takes lethal damage in his last three health boxes, take an additional Beat.

## Laying on Hands (•••)

Your character's faith or force of devotion becomes a wholesome force that heals the sick and mends injuries. However, she takes some of those injuries upon herself by proxy.

**Effect:** By spending a Willpower point, touching the sick or wounded, and rolling Presence + Empathy, your character may heal them. Every success heals two points of bashing damage, or one level of lethal damage. Three successes allows for a single point of aggravated damage.

**Drawback:** For every two points of damage healed (rounded up), your character suffers a single point of the same type of damage. Additionally, your character may heal diseases and other ailments. The Storyteller assigns a target number of successes between one (the common cold) and ten (flesh-eating bacteria). This takes an extended action, and the character suffers a minor version of the illness.

## Medium (•••)

**Prerequisite:** Empathy ••

**Effect:** Your character hears the words and moans of the dead. If he takes the time to parse their words, he can interact with them verbally.

Your character has more than just a knack for knowing when ephemeral beings are lurking nearby, he can reach out and make contact with them. By conducting a ritual, meditating, or otherwise preparing to commune with the unseen, and succeeding at a Wits + Occult roll, he temporarily increases the relevant Condition one step along the progression from nothing, to Anchor, Resonance, or Infrastructure, to Open, and finally to Controlled (see p. 133 for more on Conditions as they relate to spirits). The effect lasts until he spends a Willpower point, but if an Influence has been used to progress the Condition further, doing so only reduces it by one step.

**Drawback:** Speaking with ghosts can be a blessing, but your character cannot turn the sense off, any more than he can turn off his hearing. The character hears the words of the dead any time they're present. Once per game session, usually in a time of extreme stress, the Storyteller may deliver a disturbing message to your character from the other side. You must succeed in a Resolve + Composure roll or gain either the Shaken or Spooked Condition.

## Mind of a Madman (••)

**Prerequisite:** Empathy •••

**Effect:** Your character gets deep under the skin of problems. If she's investigating a crime or other phenomenon, she can put herself in the mind of the culprit. This often helps with the case, however, it takes her to a dark place internally.

Once she's made the choice to sink into the culprit's mindset (which usually involves intense meditation or perusal of the culprit's crimes), she gains 8-again on all rolls to investigate, pursue, and stop the culprit. But once per night, while she sleeps, she dreams about the culprit's crimes and theoretical future crimes. This is intensely traumatic; it drives her further on the hunt. If she spends the day without pursuing the culprit, make a roll to resist a breaking point as if she'd committed the crime herself. She can resist the dreams and the degeneration rolls by avoiding sleep, but she's subject to normal deprivation effects. Additionally, until the culprit's captured, any of her own rolls to resist degeneration from things she's done suffer a -1 penalty.

## Omen Sensitivity (●●●)

**Effect:** Your character sees signs and patterns in everything. From the way the leaves fall, to the spray of antifreeze when his radiator pops, to the ratios of circumference on the shell he picked up on the sidewalk, everything has meaning. With some consideration, he can interpret these meanings. This would be far better if he could turn it off. Everything is important. Everything could mean the end of the world, the deaths of his friends, or other tragedies. If he misses an omen, it might be the wrong one.

Once per game session, you can make a Wits + Occult roll for your character to interpret an omen in his surroundings. For every success, ask the Storyteller a yes or no question about your character's life, his surroundings, a task at hand, or the world at large. The Storyteller must answer these questions truthfully.

**Drawback:** His ability becomes an obsession. Each time he reads a portent, he gains the Obsession or Spooked Condition.

## Numbing Touch (● to ●●●●●)

With Numbing Touch, your character's psychic gifts allow her to numb a person, rendering them sluggish and incompetent. With intense concentration, she can cause neurons to shut down.

**Effect:** This Merit has two effects. With the first, your character may numb with a single touch and a point of Willpower. Against an unwilling subject, roll Intelligence + Empathy + Numbing Touch, contested by Stamina plus Blood Potency or another Supernatural Tolerance trait. If successful, Numbing Touch takes effect. An affected character suffers no wound penalties, but suffers a penalty equal to your character's Numbing Touch dots to all dice pools requiring manual dexterity or sensory perception. These penalties fade by one every turn, until they are gone completely. Alternatively, the character may focus her gift into a 'psychic weapon' by spending a point of Willpower, at a range of up to a foot from her hands or face. When the invisible 'weapon' strikes an opponent, the character may spend an additional point of Willpower to lash out at the victim's nervous system. In addition to the normal effects of Numbing Touch –which do not receive a contested roll– the victim loses Willpower points equal to your character's Numbing Touch dots. If she has no Willpower points to lose, additional points become levels of lethal damage. This can be employed as part of an unarmed attack.

## Psychokinesis (●●● or ●●●●●)

**Effect:** Your character has a psychic ability to manipulate the forces of the universe. Every type of Psychokinetic is different. For example, your character might have Pyrokinesis, Cryokinesis, or Electrokinesis, the control of fire, cold, or electricity, respectively. This is not an exhaustive list. He can intensify, shape, and douse his particular area of ability. With the three-dot version, some of the given force must be present for him to manipulate. With the five-dot version, he can manifest it from nothingness.

Spend a point of Willpower to activate Psychokinesis, and roll Resolve + Occult. Each success allows a degree of manipulation; choose one of the following options below. If you intend to cause harm with the roll, subtract the victim's Resolve from the Resolve + Occult roll. If characters should be harmed without a direct attack, for example, if they run through a patch of flame, the three-dot version of the Merit causes one lethal damage, and the five-dot version causes two. The Storyteller may rule that larger manifestations may cause more, if the situation calls for it.

- Increase or decrease the Size of the manifestation by 1.
- Move the manifestation a number of yards equal to your character's Willpower dots times 2.
- Shape the force into a specific form. This may require an Intelligence + Crafts roll to form it into a detailed or intricate shape.
- Attack a victim with the force. Allocate any number of the rolled successes to cause harm. With the three-dot Merit, Psychokinesis is a weapon causing one lethal damage. Psychokinesis is considered a two lethal weapon with the five-dot version.
- Use the force creatively. This is up to the situation and the force in question. For example, an Electrokinetic may use his ability to power an electronic device briefly or to jumpstart a stalled automobile.
- Manifest his force. This only works with the five-dot version. It manifests a Size 1 patch of the force. It may spread or be enlarged with further successes.

**Drawback:** Whenever your character depletes his last Willpower point, the Storyteller can call on his abilities to manifest spontaneously. Resist this with a Resolve + Composure roll, with a -2 penalty if his chosen force is prominently featured nearby. For example, the penalty applies if a Pyrokinetic is locked in a factory with a hot forge. This tends to happen during wildly inconvenient moments, and in ways that usually cause more trouble than they solve. With these wild manifestations, use of Psychokinesis does not cost Willpower.

## Psychometry (●●●)

**Effect:** Psychometry is the psychic ability to read impressions left on physical objects. Your character can feel the emotional resonance left on an item, or can perceive important events tied to a location with this ability. The ability automatically hones in on the most emotionally intense moment tied to the item.

Spend a Willpower point to activate Psychometry. The successes scored on a Wits + Occult roll determine the clarity of the visions. For each success, you may ask a single yes or no question of the Storyteller, or one of the following questions. For questions pertaining to specific characters, if your character hasn't met the person in question, the Storyteller may simply describe them.

- What's the strongest emotion here?
- Who remembers this moment the most?
- Am I missing something in this scene?
- Where was this object during the event?
- What breaking point caused the event?

**Suggested Modifiers:** Character has read impressions from this item before (-2), important event happened more than one day ago (-1), more than one week ago (-2), more than one month ago (-3), more than one year ago (-5), item was used in a violent crime (+2), item is only vaguely tied to the event (-2), spirits pertaining to the event are nearby (+3)

**Drawback**: Once per chapter, the Storyteller can force a Psychometry vision any time an important place is visited, or an important item is touched. This doesn't require a roll or a Willpower point to activate. The Storyteller can give any information pertaining to the event in question. Additionally, the Storyteller can impose one Condition relevant to the event.

## Telekinesis (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character has a psychic ability to manipulate the physical world with her mind. This means lifting, pushing, and pulling objects. Fine manipulation is beyond the scope of Telekinesis. By spending a Willpower point, she can activate Telekinesis for the scene. Her dots in this Merit determine her mind's effective Strength for the purpose of lifting and otherwise influencing her environment.

A Telekinetic can use her abilities to cause harm by lashing out at threats. Each such "attack" costs a point of Willpower. The dice pool to attack is Telekinesis + Occult, penalized by the opponent's Stamina. The attack causes bashing damage. Alternatively, it can be used to grapple, with the Merit dots representing the Strength score of the psychic. Any overpowering maneuvers require additional Willpower points.

**Drawback:** Any time your character suffers injury or intense stimuli, the Storyteller may call for a Resolve + Composure roll to resist activating Telekinesis at an inopportune time. If the Storyteller calls for this roll and it fails, the character activates Telekinesis in a quick, impressive display of the power. That use of Telekinesis is free. The player can choose to automatically fail the Resolve + Composure roll and take a Beat.

## Telepathy (••• or •••••)

**Effect:** Your character can hear surface thoughts and read minds. With the five-dot version of this Merit, he can broadcast simple messages to others' minds. He hears these thoughts as if they were spoken, which means they can sometimes be distracting. He can only hear thoughts at the range he can normal conversation, regardless of any ambient noise (so a telepath can hear the thoughts of someone next to him at a loud concert, even though he can't actually hear

the subject talk, but cannot hear the thoughts of someone a football field away under quiet conditions).

Spend a point of Willpower to activate Telepathy, and roll Wits + Empathy, minus the subject's Resolve if the subject is unwilling. If successful, the subject's player must tell you the foremost thought on the character's mind. Additional successes allow you to ask the subject's player additional questions from the following list. The questions can be asked at any time within the same scene. With the five-dot version, every success offers a single phrase the subject hears as if your character said it. As before, these phrases can be communicated at any time during the same scene.

- What does your character want right now?
- What does your character fear most right now?
- What is your character hiding?
- What does your character want mine to do?
- What does your character know about [relevant topic at hand]?
- What turns your character on right now?
- What's something shameful or embarrassing about your character?

**Drawback:** Sometimes your character hears things he probably shouldn't. Once per chapter, the Storyteller can give your character a message of terrible things to come. Perhaps he overhears the mad, internal ramblings of a cultist in a crowd. Maybe he hears a plot to hijack a plane. Maybe, just maybe, he hears the incoherent thoughts of the God-Machine. These heard thoughts never just occur. They always happen when your character has something else, something important and pressing going on. When this happens, the Storyteller gives you a Condition such as Spooked or Shaken.

### Thief of Fate (•••)

**Effect:** Your character is a magnet for fortune and fate. When she's close to someone, she unintentionally steals their good fortune. If she touches someone, this Merit takes effect unless she spends a point of Willpower to curb the effect for a scene. In the same day, any failures the subject makes are considered dramatic failures. If she's used this Merit at any time in a given day, she gains four dice any time she spends Willpower to increase a dice pool.

**Drawback:** Once a victim of this Merit suffers a dramatic failure, he hears your character's name in the back of his mind. This may inspire scrutiny.

### Unseen Sense (••)

**Effect**: Your character has a "sixth sense" for a type of supernatural creature, chosen when you buy the Merit. For example, you may choose Unseen Sense: Vampires, or Unseen Sense: Fairies. The sense manifests differently for everyone. Her hair stands on end, she becomes physically ill, or perhaps she has a cold chill. Regardless, she knows that *something isn't right* when she is in the immediate proximity of the appropriate supernatural being. Once per chapter, the player can accept the Spooked Condition (p. 290), in exchange for which the character can pinpoint where the feeling is coming from. If the target is using a power that specifically cloaks its supernatural nature, however, this does not work (though the Condition remains until resolved as usual).

## Fighting Merits

Some Merits in this section have other Merits as prerequisites. These are refinements of form and additional areas of expertise. For example, Iron Skin requires Martial Arts ••. This means you must have two dots in Martial Arts before buying dots in Iron Skin.

Many Fighting Style Merits require a character to sacrifice their Defense. Defense cannot be sacrificed multiple times in a turn; this prevents certain maneuvers from being used together.

### Armed Defense (• to •••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity •••, Weaponry ••, Defensive Combat: Weaponry

You're able to use a weapon to stop people who are trying to kill you. Often deployed by police officers using riot shields or telescoping batons, it's just as effective while using a chair leg.

**Cover the Angles (•):** Whenever you take a Dodge action, reduce the Defense penalties for multiple attackers by 1. You can apply your full Defense against the first two attacks, suffer a -1 penalty against the third, and so on.

**Weak Spot (••):** You swing against your opponent's arm, rather than his own weapon. Use this ability when defending against an armed attacker. If your Defense reduces his attack pool to 0, he's disarmed. If you Dodge, you disarm your opponent if your Defense roll reduces his attack successes to 0.

**Aggressive Defense (•••):** Anyone dumb enough to come near you is liable to get hurt. When you take a Dodge action, if you score more successes than any attacker, you deal one point of lethal damage to the attacker per extra success. Your weapon bonus doesn't apply to this extra damage.

**Drawback:** You must spend a point of Willpower and declare that you are using Aggressive Defense at the start of the turn. You cannot combine this maneuver with Press the Advantage or Weak Spot.

**Iron Guard (••••):** You and your weapon are one. At the start of each turn, you can choose to reduce your weapon bonus (down to a minimum of 0) to increase your Defense by a like amount. If you take a Dodge action, add your full weapon bonus to your Defense after doubling your pool.

**Press the Advantage (•••••):** You create an opening with a block, and lash out with a fist or foot. When you're taking a Dodge action, if your Defense roll reduces the attacker's successes to 0, you can make an unarmed attack against that opponent at a -2 penalty. Your opponent applies Defense as normal.

**Drawback:** Spend a point of Willpower to make the attack. You can only make one attack per turn in this way.

## Cheap Shot (••)

**Prerequisites:** Street Fighting •••, Subterfuge ••

**Effect:** Your character is a master at the bait and switch. She can look off in an odd direction and prompt her opponent to do the same, or she might step on his toes to distract him. She fights dirty. Make a Dexterity + Subterfuge roll as a reflexive action. The opponent's player contests with Wits + Composure. If you score more successes, the opponent loses his Defense for the next turn. Each time a character uses this maneuver in a scene, it levies a cumulative -2 penalty to further uses since the opposition gets used to the tricks.

## Choke Hold (••)

**Prerequisites:** Brawl ••

If you can get your hands on someone, they're putty in your hands. When grappling, your character can use the Choke move:

• **Choke:** If you rolled more successes than twice the victim's Stamina, he's unconscious for (six - Stamina) minutes. You must first have succeeded at a Hold move. If you don't score enough successes at first, you can Choke on future turns and total your successes.

## Close Quarters Combat (• to •••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Wits •••, Athletics ••, Brawl •••

Your character knows that hitting someone in the face is an easy way to break the little bones in his hand. To that end, he's perfected the art of using the environment to hurt people.

**Firing Lines (•):** In some situations, your character's best option is a tactical retreat — especially if he's inadvertently brought a knife to a gunfight. He can run for cover as a reaction to a ranged attack instead of dropping prone. You give up your action for the turn, but your character can get to any cover that's within twice his Speed.

**Hard Surfaces (••):** Bouncing someone's head off a urinal, computer monitor, or brick wall is a handy way to increase the amount of hurt inflicted while not breaking the aforementioned hand bones. When your character is grappling someone, he can bounce them off a hard surface with a Damage move. He deals lethal damage, then immediately ends the grapple.

**Armored Coffin (•••):** The problem with protection is simple: the very things that protect your opponents can be turned against them. That holds true for body armor just as much as anything else. Sure, it blocks bullets and knives, but get in a clinch and your character's opponent might as well be wearing a straightjacket. When he grapples an opponent, add their general armor rating to your dice pool. When he uses a Damage move, ignore his opponent's armor. This technique can't be used in conjunction with Hard Surfaces.

**Prep Work (••••):** If your character has a second to look around, he can catch someone by surprise almost anywhere. When launching a surprise attack, your Dexterity + Stealth roll becomes a rote action.

**Drawback:** Your character can't use this Merit to set up sniper attacks — his ambush must use Brawl or Weaponry.

**Turnabout (•••••):** If your character's caught short in a fight, his opponent's weapon suits him just fine. When he attempts to Disarm his opponent, step the results up one level — on a failure, his opponent drops the weapon. On a success, your character takes possession of his opponent's weapon. On an exceptional success, your character has the weapon and his opponent takes two points of bashing damage.

## Defensive Combat (•)

**Prerequisite:** Brawl • or Weaponry •; choose one when this Merit is selected

**Effect:** Your character is trained in avoiding damage in combat. Use her Brawl or Weaponry to calculate Defense, rather than Athletics. Your character can learn both versions of this Merit, allowing you to use any of the three Skills to calculate Defense. However, you cannot use Weaponry to calculate Defense unless she actually has a weapon in her hand.

## Fighting Finesse (••)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity •••, a Specialty in Weaponry or Brawl

**Effect:** Choose a Specialty in Weaponry or Brawl when you purchase this Merit. Your character's extensive training in that particular weapon or style has allowed them to benefit more from their alacrity and agility than their strength. You may substitute your character's Dexterity for her Strength when making rolls with that Specialty.

This Merit may be purchased multiple times to gain its benefit with multiple Specialties.

## Firefight (• to •••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Composure •••, Dexterity •••, Athletics ••, Firearms ••

**Effect:** Your character is comfortable with a gun. She's been trained in stressful situations, and knows how to keep herself from being shot, while still shooting at her opponents. This Style is about moving, strafing, and taking shots when you get them. It's not a series of precision techniques; it's for using a gun practically in a real-world situation.

**Shoot First (•):** In a firefight, the person shot first is usually the loser. Your character has trained herself to fire first in an altercation. If her gun is drawn, add her Firearms score to her Initiative. If she has Quick Draw, she can use Shoot First to draw and fire with increased Initiative in the first turn of combat.

**Suppressive Fire (••):** Sometimes, the purpose of a shot is to distract, not necessarily to hit. Your character is trained to fire off a handful of rounds with the intent to startle opponents and force impulse reactions. When using the Covering Fire maneuver (p. 90), her opponents cannot benefit from

aiming against her. She can apply her Defense against incoming Firearms attacks, in addition to any cover bonuses. Additionally, her training allows her to use Suppressive Fire with a semi-automatic weapon.

**Secondary Target (•••):** Sometimes, shooting an opponent behind cover is all but impossible. However, a bullet can knock objects off balance, or cause ricochets. By using Secondary Target, your character opts not to hit her target, but instead strike them with any collateral objects that might be nearby. She causes bashing damage instead of lethal, but ignores all cover penalties to the roll. The weapon's damage rating does not add to the damage in this case.

## Grappling (• to •••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Stamina •••, Strength ••, Athletics ••, Brawl ••

**Effect:** Your character has trained in wrestling, or one of many grappling martial arts.

**Sprawl (•):** Your character can adjust his weight to defend himself in a grapple. While in a grapple, the character's opponent cannot apply the Drop Prone or Take Cover moves.

**Takedown (••):** Your character can take an opponent to the ground rapidly. With a normal roll, you may choose to render an opponent prone instead of establishing a grapple. Also, you may choose to cause bashing damage equal to the successes rolled.

**Joint Lock (•••):** ou use joint locks and immobilizing tactics to limit your opponent's movement. You can use the Joint Lock move in a grapple. Next turn, your opponent suffers bashing damage equal to your successes. You can use Joint Lock as a lead-in to the Restrain move. In addition, any successful overpowering maneuvers your character uses cause 1L damage in addition to their normal effects.

## Heavy Weapons (• to •••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Stamina •••, Strength •••, Athletics ••, Weaponry ••

**Effect:** Your character is trained with heavy weapons which require strength, wide range, and follow through more than direct speed and accuracy. This Style may be used with a two-handed weapon such as a claymore, chainsaw, pike, or an uprooted street sign.

**Sure Strike (•):** Your character doesn't always hit the hardest or the most frequently, but she guarantees a deadly strike when she does hit. You can reflexively remove three dice from any attack dice pool (to a minimum of zero) to add one to your character's weapon damage rating for the turn. These dice must be removed after calculating any penalties from the environment or the opponent's Defense.

**Threat Range (••):** Your character's weapon is immense and keeps opponents at bay. If you opt not to move or Dodge during your turn, any character moving into your character's proximity suffers one lethal damage and a penalty to their Defense equal to your character's weapon damage rating. This penalty only lasts for one turn. This cannot be used in a turn the character is Dodging.

**Bring the Pain (•••):** Your character's strikes stun and incapacitate as well as causing massive trauma to the body. Sacrifice your character's Defense to use Bring the Pain. Make a standard attack roll. Any damage you score with Bring the Pain counts as a penalty to all actions the victim takes during their next turn. So, if you cause four lethal damage, the opponent is at -4 on their next attack.

**Warding Stance (••••):** Your character holds her weapon in such a way as to make attacks much harder. If her weapon's drawn, spend a point of Willpower reflexively to add her weapon's damage rating as armor for the turn. This will not protect against firearms.

**Rending (•••••):** Your character's cuts leave crippling, permanent wounds. By spending a Willpower point before making an attack roll, her successful attacks cause one level of aggravated damage in addition to her weapon's damage rating. This Willpower point does not add to the attack roll.

## Improvised Weaponry (• to •••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Wits •••, Weaponry •

Most people don't walk around armed. While someone pulling a knife or a gun can cool a hostile situation down, it can also cause things to boil over — an argument that wouldn't be more than harsh words suddenly ends up with three people in the morgue. If your character is on the receiving end of someone pulling a knife, it helps to have something in his hand as well.

Your character is good at making do with what he's got. Sometimes he's lucky — if your character's in a bar, he's got a lot of glass bottles, or maybe a pool cue, to play with. However, he's got something like a sixth sense, and can find a weapon almost anywhere.

**Always Armed (•):** Your character can always get his hands on something dangerous, and he has an instinctive understanding of how to put it to good — and deadly — use. At the start of your turn, make a reflexive Wits + Weaponry roll to grab an object suitable for use as a weapon in pretty much any environment. (The player is encouraged to work with the Storyteller to determine an appropriate item — a large, jagged rock in the wilderness, for example, or a heavy glass ashtray with one sharp, broken edge in a dive bar.) Regardless of what he picks up, the weapon has a +0 weapon modifier, -1 initiative penalty, Size 1, Durability 2, and Structure 4. On an exceptional success, increase the weapon modifier and Size by 1, but the initiative penalty increases to -2. Whatever your character grabs doesn't cause you to suffer the normal -1 penalty for wielding an improvised weapon (see p. 94).

**In Harm's Way (••):** Your character's got a knack for putting his weapon in the way of an oncoming attack, no matter how small or inappropriate for blocking it might be. While he's wielding an improvised weapon acquired with Always Armed, you can treat the Structure of your character's weapon as general armor against a single Brawl or Weaponry attack. Any damage he takes inflicts an equal amount of damage to the improvised weapon, bypassing Durability. Your character

can use the weapon to attack later in the same turn, but can only use this ability when applying his Defense to an attack.

**Breaking Point (•••):** One sure way to win a fight is to hit the other guy so hard that he doesn't get back up, even if that means losing a weapon in the process. When making an all-out attack with an improvised weapon acquired with Always Armed, you can reduce the weapon's Structure by any amount down to a minimum of 0. Every 2 points of Structure spent in this way adds 1 to the weapon modifier for that one single attack. Declare any Structure loss before making the attack; this Structure is reduced even if the attack does no damage. If the weapon is reduced to 0 Structure, it is automatically destroyed after the attack. You can use this technique in conjunction with In Harm's Way, allowing your character to parry an attack made on a higher Initiative and then go on the offensive, provided that the weapon wasn't destroyed.

## Iron Skin (•• or ••••)

**Prerequisites:** Martial Arts •• or Street Fighting ••, Stamina •••

Through rigorous conditioning, or extensive scarring, your character has grown resistant to harm. She can shrug off shots that would topple bigger fighters. She knows how to take a strike, and can even move into a hit from a weapon to minimize harm. She gains armor against bashing attacks; one point of armor with ••, and two points of armor with ••••. By spending a point of Willpower when hit, she can downgrade some lethal damage from a successful attack into bashing. Downgrade one damage at ••, two with ••••.

## Light Weapons (• to •••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Wits ••• *or* Fighting Finesse, Dexterity •••, Athletics ••, Weaponry ••

**Effect:** Your character is trained with small hand-to-hand weapons which favor finesse over raw power. These maneuvers may only be used with one-handed weapons with a damage rating of two or less.

**Rapidity (•):** Your character moves with swiftness to find just the right spot to strike. You can sacrifice your character's weapon damage rating to add his Weaponry score to his Initiative for the turn. The weapon becomes a zero damage weapon for the turn.

**Thrust (••):** Your character knows when to defend himself, and when to move in for the kill. At any time, you can sacrifice points of Defense one-for-one to add to attack pools. This cannot happen if you've already used Defense in the same turn. If you use this maneuver, you may not sacrifice your full Defense for any other reason. For example, you cannot use Thrust with an all-out attack.

**Feint (•••):** With a flourish in one direction, your character can distract an opponent for a cleaner, more effective follow-up strike. For example, if Feinting with a two damage weapon with three successes, the attack causes no damage. However, your next attack ignores five points of Defense, and causes three extra points of damage.

**Flurry (••••):** Your character moves quickly enough to stab opponents with numerous pricks and swipes in the blink of an eye. As long as your character has his Defense available to him (if it's not been sacrificed for another maneuver, or denied from surprise, for example), any character coming into his immediate proximity takes one point of lethal damage. This damage continues once per turn as long as the enemy stays within range, and occurs on the enemy's turn. This can affect multiple opponents, and cannot be used in a turn where the character is Dodging.

**Vital Shot (•••••):** Your character can use his smaller weapon to get into an opponent's defenses and hit where it hurts most. Sacrifice your character's Defense for the turn to use this maneuver. If the attack roll succeeds, the attack causes one point of aggravated damage, in addition to the damage rating of the weapon.

## Marksmanship (• to ••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Composure •••, Resolve •••, Firearms ••

**Effect:** When prepared and aimed, a gun is an ideal killing machine. Your character has trained to take advantage of the greatest features of a gun, usually a rifle, but this Style can be used with any gun. Because of the discipline and patience required for Marksmanship, your character cannot use her Defense during any turn in which she uses one of these maneuvers. These maneuvers may only be used after aiming for at least one turn.

**Through the Crosshairs (•):** Your character is a competent sniper, able to sit in position and steel her wits. Usually, the maximum bonus from aiming is three dice. With Through the Crosshairs, it's equal to her Composure + Firearms.

**Precision Shot (••):** With this level of training, your character knows how to effectively disable a victim instead of focusing on the kill. When attacking a specified target, you may reduce your weapon's damage rating one-for-one to ignore penalties for shooting a specified target (see p. 92).

For example, if your character is using a sniper rifle (four damage weapon), and attacking an arm (-2 to hit), you could choose to use three damage for -1, or two damage to eliminate the penalty entirely.

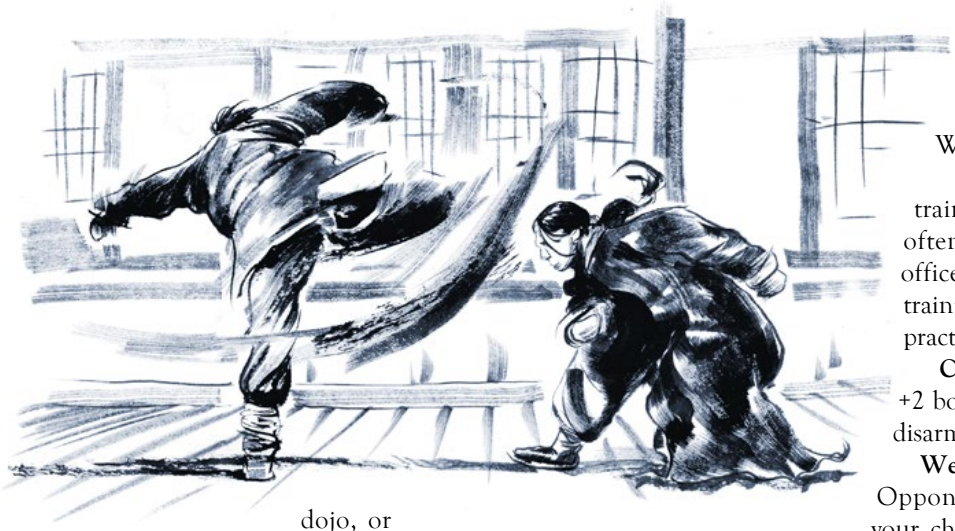
**A Shot Rings Out (•••):** A master sniper, your character has no worries or lack of confidence. She can fire into a crowd and strike a specific target without penalty. If she misses, it's because her shot goes wide. She will never hit an unintended target.

**Ghost (••••):** Your character has trained to shoot unseen, and vanish without a trace. Her Firearms score acts as a penalty on any roll to notice her vantage point, or any Investigation or Perception roll to investigate the area from where she was shooting.

## Martial Arts (• to •••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Resolve •••, Dexterity •••, Athletics ••, Brawl ••

**Effect:** Your character is trained in one or more formal martial arts styles. This may have come from a personal mentor, a



dojo, or a self-defense class. It may have been for exercise, protection, show, or tradition. These maneuvers may only be used unarmed, or with weapons capable of using the Brawl Skill, such as a punch dagger, or a weapon using the Shiv Merit (see below).

**Focused Attack (•):** Your character has trained extensively in striking specific parts of an opponent's body. Reduce penalties for hitting specific targets by one. Additionally, you may ignore one point of armor on any opponent.

**Defensive Strike (••):** Your character excels in defending herself while finding the best time to strike. You can add 1 or 2 points to your character's Defense. For each Defense point you take, subtract a die from any attacks you make. This can only be used in a turn in which your character intends to attack. It cannot be used with a Dodge.

**Whirlwind Strike (•••):** When engaged, your character becomes a storm of threatening kicks and punches; nothing close is safe. As long as your character has her Defense available to her, and is not Dodging, any character coming into arm's reach takes one bashing damage. This damage continues once per turn as long as the enemy stays within range, and occurs on the enemy's turn. If you spend a point of Willpower, this damage becomes two bashing until your next turn.

**The Hand As Weapon (••••):** With this degree of training, your character's limbs are hardened to cause massive trauma. Her unarmed strikes cause lethal damage.

**The Touch of Death (•••••):** Your character's mastery has brought with it the daunting power of causing lethal injury with a touch. If she chooses, her unarmed strikes count as weapons with two damage rating.

## Police Tactics (• to •••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Brawl ••, Weaponry •

**Effect:** Your character is trained in restraint techniques, often used by law enforcement officers. This may reflect formal training, or lessons from a skilled practitioner.

**Compliance Hold (•):** Gain a +2 bonus to overpowering rolls to disarm or immobilize an opponent.

**Weapon Retention (••):** Opponents attempting to disarm your character or turn his weapon against him must exceed your character's Weaponry score in successes.

**Speed Cuff (•••):** Against an immobilized opponent, your character may apply handcuffs, cable ties, or similar restraints as a reflexive action.

## Shiv (• or ••)

**Prerequisites:** Street Fighting ••, Weaponry •

**Effect:** Your character carries small, concealable weapons for use in a tussle. Rolls to detect the concealed weapon suffer your character's Weaponry score as a penalty. With the one-dot version, he can conceal a weapon with a zero damage rating. The two-dot version can conceal a one damage rating weapon. Your character may use the Brawl Skill to use this weapon.

## Street Fighting (• to •••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Stamina •••, Composure •••, Brawl ••, Streetwise ••

**Effect:** Your character learned to fight on the mean streets. She may have had some degree of formal training, but the methodology came from the real world, in dangerous circumstances. Street Fighting isn't about form and grace, it's about staying alive. These maneuvers may only be used unarmed, or with weapons capable of using the Brawl Skill, such as punch daggers, or weapons concealed with the Shiv Merit (above).

**Duck and Weave (•):** Your character has been beaten all to hell more than a few times. Now she dodges on instinct, not on skill. You can reflexively take a one-die penalty to any actions this turn to use the higher of her Wits or Dexterity to calculate Defense. If you've already made a roll without penalty this turn, you cannot use Duck and Weave.

**Knocking the Wind Out (••):** Shots to the center mass can shake an opponent, and your character knows this well. When your character makes a successful unarmed attack, the opponent suffers a -1 to his next roll.

**Kick 'Em While They're Down (•••):** The best enemy is one on the ground. Your character topples opponents, and keeps them down. Any time your successes on an attack roll exceed an opponent's Stamina, you may choose to apply the Knocked Down Tilt (p. 285). Additionally, any time your character is close enough to strike when an opponent attempts to get up from a prone position, she can reflexively cause two bashing damage.

**One-Two Punch (••••):** Your character hits fast, and she follows through with every hit. Whenever she makes a successful attack, you can spend a point of Willpower to cause two extra points of bashing damage.

**Last-Ditch Effort (•••••):** In a street fight, every second could mean the loss of your life. A proficient street fighter is a remarkable survivalist. She bites, headbutts, trips, or does whatever it takes to prevent that last hit. Any time a character with this level of Street Fighting is about to take a hit or get overpowered when she's already suffering wound penalties, she can reflexively spend a Willpower point and sacrifice her Defense for the turn to make an attack against her would-be assailant. This can occur even if she's already acted in a turn, so long as she's not already spent Willpower. Resolve this attack before the opponent's action.

## Unarmed Defense (• to •••••; Style)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity •••, Brawl ••, Defensive Combat: Brawl

Your character is better at stopping people from hurting them than they are at hurting other people. Maybe they practice a martial art that redirects an opponent's blows, or are just very good at not being where their opponent wants them to be.

**Like a Book (•):** Your character can read his opponents, knowing where they're likely to strike. When facing an unarmed opponent and not Dodging, increase your character's Defense by half of his Brawl (round down).

**Studied Style (••):** Your character focuses on reading one opponent, avoiding his attacks and frustrating him. Attacks from that opponent do not reduce your character's Defense. If your character's Defense reduces his opponent's attack pool to zero, his further attacks against you lose the 10-again quality.

**Redirect (•••):** When your character is being attacked by multiple opponents, he can direct their blows against one another. When he Dodges, if his Defense roll reduces an attack's successes to zero, his attacker rolls the same attack against another attacker of your choice.

**Drawback:** Your character may only redirect one attack in a turn. He cannot redirect an attack against the same attacker.

**Joint Strike (••••):** Your character waits until the last possible second, then lashes out at his opponent's elbow or wrist as he attacks, hoping to cripple his limbs. Roll Strength + Brawl instead of Defense. If you score more successes than your attacker, you deal one point of bashing damage per extra success, and inflict either the Arm Wrack or Leg Wrack Tilt (your choice).

**Drawback:** Spend a point of Willpower to use this maneuver.

**Like the Breeze (•••••):** Your characters steps to one side as his opponent attacks, and gives her enough of a push to send her flying past him. When dodging, if your Defense roll reduces an opponent's attack successes to zero, you can inflict the Knocked Down Tilt.

**Drawback:** Declare that you're using this maneuver at the start of the turn before taking any other attacks.

*"Finish your dinner, or the Hangry Wolf will come for the leftovers."*

*That was Grandma's thing, growing up. The Hangry Wolf. I don't know where she got it, some fucked-up book of Old World fairy tales, probably. The Hangry Wolf was supposed to live in the basement, and it didn't have any food or toys or friends of its own, so it would come out at night to take whatever I had neglected. I guess it was supposed to teach me not to be wasteful, but all it really did was keep me up at night, convinced that every sound of the old building settling was the Hangry Wolf nosing around, looking for something to eat.*

*The window breaks with a muffled crack, and I'm in. Grandma wasn't exactly loaded, but she had some jewelry she brought over with her after the war that should fix me for rent for a month or two. She probably left it all to Sira, but fuck her. Didn't even call to tell me the old lady had died. Had to see it in the goddamn paper. Obits are a good way to find places to rob, but you'd expect your own family to give you a courtesy call.*

*It's been ten years, but I still remember the layout. Grandma's room at the end of the hall, mine next to the bathroom and across from Sira's. I head for Grandma's room, kick a stack of yellowing newspapers as high as my knee, nearly face-plant into a pile of musty, moth-eaten old scarves. When did it get this bad~ Does the rest of the family know~ Whatever. It's not my problem. They made that clear a long time ago.*

*The bedroom's even worse than the hall — Grandma was 87, how'd she even get to bed~ — but I find her jewelry box on the dresser, surrounded by photos. Photos of Sira, our parents, our cousins. What a surprise.*

*Jackpot! I start stuffing necklaces and brooches into my pockets. I'll sort out the costume junk from the real stuff later. I'm debating mounting an expedition to the bathroom to check for prescription meds when the creak of the door freezes me like a mouse in a hawk's shadow. Shit, Sira couldn't be here already, could she~*

*No explosion of angry Armenian. Not Siranesh. Raspy, ragged breaths, like a ripped-open football. I don't want to turn. I do anyways, and there he is. Mangy white fur, matted and filthy. Tongue lolling stupidly between cracked and yellow teeth, belly swollen in his famine. He holds out a hand, inviting, and like I'm in a dream, I take it.*

*The Hangry Wolf*
*lived in the basement,*
*and it didn't have*
*any food or toys*
*or friends of its*
*own. Now it has me.*

# Infernal Engines: Dramatic Systems

**Fred nodded and said, "So what you're saying is, if we all die, that's not even the worst-case scenario."**

**John replied, "I'd still like to shoot a little higher than that, Freddy."**

**David Wong, John Dies at the End**

Chronicles of Darkness games straddle the line between telling collaborative stories and playing a game of chance and skill. This chapter lays out the basic game systems that glue the two together. Whenever a player decides that her character does something — like convince the prison guard to let her out, hurt the monster that's about to devour her brother, or follow the trail of an eerily inconsistent story to discover the truth — a combination of the character's decisions, the game systems, and the Storyteller's rulings determines what happens next.

Game systems provide rules for situations where the outcome is uncertain, and it's exciting to roll dice to see what befalls the characters and what their struggles accomplish. Players roll dice to see how well their characters succeed — or how miserably they fail — at overcoming obstacles and achieving their goals. Failure can be just as thrilling as success, and the systems that are explained here show how to make all of these possible outcomes work in a game. Books and films contain moments when the audience is on the edge of their seats, waiting to see whether the protagonists will survive or die, win or lose, save the world or watch it burn. A storytelling game makes those moments happen by applying systems to key parts of the story, and this chapter details how.

This chapter gives players and Storytellers everything they need to play through most scenarios that crop up over the course of the chronicle, from fighting and seduction to solving crimes and modifying guns. An obstacle standing between a character and her goal might be a person or a monster she must talk to, escape from, track down, or fight. It might also be a physical obstacle that needs smashing, a lack of a vital resource, or even her own inner demons and insecurities. The systems in this chapter use all the traits the player gave her character in the previous chapter to present options for how the character can try to overcome these obstacles and deal with whatever she encounters.

Because the Chronicles of Darkness depict a world where even the most irrational of fears is justified and things that never should have been are real anyway, characters resort to all kinds of extremes to solve problems and get what they want. This chapter presents an extensive system to adjudicate violence between characters, as well as systems that explore the emotional and mental consequences of seeing and doing strange, awful things. It also provides ways for characters to change and grow by earning Experiences, and ways their actions affect them and those around them with Conditions that guide roleplay. It covers many ways for characters to interact with the setting, including Social Maneuvering, investigation, building equipment, and heart-thumping chases. It even explains how Storytellers and players can work together to figure out how to adjudicate niche situations that *aren't* included here.

## Rolling Dice

When your character is trying to accomplish something and the outcome is in doubt, you roll a pool of ten-sided dice based on his relevant traits and read the results to determine success. Most of the time, you roll a number of dice equal to an Attribute plus a Skill. For example, to get the cop off your back, you use your character's Manipulation Attribute of 4 and Subterfuge Skill of 3, so you roll seven

dice. If you have a Specialty (p. 73) that's relevant to the roll, add an extra die to your pool.

Each die that shows an 8, 9, or 10 is a success. Normally, you only need one success to achieve your goal. It's always better to get more successes, though, especially if you want to hurt someone, since your successes add to your damage when attacking.

Every die that comes up as a 10 is a success. You also roll the die again, potentially scoring another success. If this second roll comes up as another 10, count the success and roll it again, on until you roll a number other than 10.

Many rolls have modifiers, either from equipment, circumstance, or someone working against your character. Most modifiers are within the range of +3 to -3, though they can range as low as -5 or as high as +5. Apply the modifiers to your dice pool before you roll. Add all the bonuses first, then apply penalties.

If your pool drops below one die, you instead roll a single chance die. The chance die only counts as a success if you roll a 10, which you do not reroll. Any other result is a failure. If you roll a 1 on the chance die, your character suffers a dramatic failure.

### Roll Results

Your roll can succeed and fail in a few different ways:

**Success:** Your character's action goes off as planned. Achieved by having at least one success (a die showing 8, 9, or 10; or a chance die showing 10).

**Failure:** Your character's action fails. This doesn't mean "nothing happens," just that she doesn't get what she wants and complications are headed her way. Occurs when you roll no successes.

**Exceptional Success:** Your character's action succeeds beyond her expectations. Achieved by rolling five or more successes. Your character gains a beneficial Condition. (See "Conditions," p. 75.) Usually, the Inspired Condition is the most appropriate. You can give this Condition to another character when it's appropriate to the story.

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character fails badly, and things are about to get a whole lot worse. Suffered when you roll a 1 on a chance die. Alternately you can take a Beat in exchange for turning a normal failure into a dramatic failure.

## When to Roll Dice

For many actions, you don't need to roll dice. If your character isn't in a stressful situation — nobody's actively trying to tear his throat open, or demolish the building as he works — you don't need to roll. When the dice hit the table, the Storyteller should have some idea of what will happen if the roll fails, as well as if it succeeds. Sometimes that's coded in the rules. If you fail on an attack roll, you don't deal any damage. Other times, it's up to the Storyteller. If you fail a roll to jump between buildings with the prince's hit-squad on your tail, do you make it but fall on the other side, grab the next building by your fingertips, or plummet to the alley below?

### Circumstance and Equipment

Sometimes, fortune favors your character. Other times, she gives it a helping hand by packing the right tools for the job. The Storyteller should weigh how the circumstances affect a character's chance of success. A slight advantage — picking an old and damaged lock — might be worth a bonus die, while a stressful situation — trying to pick a lock while people are shooting at you — might subtract three dice from your pool. Most of the time, the modifier from circumstances will be between +3 and –3, though in very rare cases — picking a lock while the room is *on fire* — it can range from +5 to –5.

Bringing the right equipment for a task also gives you extra dice to roll. A sharp suit might give you bonus dice when trying to convince the CEO that your character knows the best plan, while a good pair of running shoes will help her escape from the things lurking in the shadows. Most equipment offers a one to three die bonus. A top-of-the-line or custom item might give a four or five die bonus, but such items often cost more than just money. When a task is impossible without some kind of equipment — hacking a computer, or driving a car — equipment bonuses indicate how far your tools are above the baseline. A beat-up old station wagon might not add any dice to a Drive roll, but a top-of-the-line sports car may add four or even five dice.

## Attribute Tasks

Some actions require no special expertise to perform. Mostly, these come in the form of Wits + Composure rolls to notice something that doesn't seem right, or using Strength + Stamina rolls to lift something. For these rolls, you add two different Attributes together to make your dice pool. If an action doesn't seem to involve any particular Skill, it can be handled by an Attribute Task.

## Muddling Through

If your character has no dots in an applicable Skill, the Storyteller may allow you to roll your Attribute as a dice pool. Your character's dice pool suffers a penalty for being untrained: if the roll would involve a Mental Skill, you take a three-die penalty, while a Physical or Social Skill applies a one-die penalty.

## Actions

The majority of actions in the game are *instant* actions. They represent acts that only take a couple of seconds. In combat, an instant action takes up your turn.

A *reflexive* action is the sort of thing you don't even need to think about doing. Most rolls to resist supernatural powers are reflexive. You can take a reflexive action at any time, and it doesn't take your turn in combat.

When two people fight over a specific goal, they engage in a *contested* action. You roll your dice pool and the Storyteller (or other player) rolls the dice pool for the other party. Whoever rolls the most successes is the victor. Note that you count the

total number of successes rolled when working out if you scored an exceptional success — don't subtract the other party's successes from yours. A contested action takes up the action of the person initiating the action; resisting it is a reflexive action.

## Extended Actions

An *extended* action is an attempt to complete a complex task. You roll your dice pool multiple times. Each roll takes a certain amount of time, and represents a step in the process — your character either makes significant progress or faces a setback. You determine your dice pool for the action as normal — Attribute + Skill + Modifiers. Make a note of your Attribute + Skill + Specialty (if any); that's the maximum number of times you can roll before the action fails.

When you take an extended action, the Storyteller determines how many successes you require. Most actions require between five and twenty successes. Five reflects a reasonable action that competent characters can achieve with the right tools and knowledge. Ten represents a difficult action that's still realistic for a professional in a field. Twenty represents a very difficult action that even a particularly skilled character will have trouble pulling off.

The Storyteller also determines the interval between rolls. If an action would take weeks to complete, she might consider one roll per week. If it's likely to take a day's work, one roll per hour makes for a solid timeframe.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** In addition to the effects of a failure, the first roll on a further attempt suffers a 2-die penalty.

**Failure:** You face a setback. The Storyteller will offer you a choice: take a Condition of her choice or abandon the action. You can offer a different Condition if you think it makes sense. If you refuse or cannot agree on a Condition, you lose all accumulated successes (see "Conditions," p. 75).

**Success:** Add the successes scored on the roll to your running total. Work with the Storyteller to determine what steps your character has taken towards his goal.

**Exceptional Success:** Choose one of: Reduce the number of successes required by your character's Skill dots, reduce the time on each following roll by a quarter, or apply the exceptional success result of the action when you complete your goal.

## Resistance

Sometimes, an action is resisted. You roll your Attribute + Skill, but apply a modifier of one of your opponent's resistance Attributes (Resolve, Stamina, or Composure), or your opponent's Defense. This resistance is over and above any other modifiers applied to the dice pool.

If you're not sure whether to use resistance or a contested action, use this guideline: Resistance applies in situations where the number of successes on the roll is an important factor. If what matters is just whether the roll succeeds or not, use a contested action. For example, combat applies Defense as a resistance because the number of successes on the roll determines how badly the attacker messes up his victim. A supernatural power that puts a victim in your thrall uses a contested action, because the number of successes that you roll doesn't matter to the power.

### Supernatural Tolerance and Potency

As you venture beyond this book and into the wider world of playable monsters, you'll find that those monsters have traits that help them perpetrate and resist supernatural effects.

Supernatural Tolerance is a number added to pools to resist magical powers. Vampires use their Blood Potency, while werewolves use their Primal Urge.

Supernatural Potency is an overall measure of how dangerous the monster is. It's usually the same trait as Supernatural Tolerance, but differs in a few places. For example, demons can sometimes contest powers with their Cover, but their potency is determined by their Primum.

Don't sweat this too much; each monster game describes it in detail.

## Contested Actions

When two characters are competing, and you only need to know who comes out on top, use a *contested action*. In a contested action, each player rolls a pool for their character (such as an Attribute + Skill pool), and the character for whom the most successes are rolled wins the contest.

## Common Actions

Here are some sample ways you can apply your Skills. Remember, you can invent your own at any time.

### ARGUMENT
(Intelligence + Expression – victim's Resolve)

You try to sway someone with a rational argument. (If arguing with a crowd, use the highest Resolve in the crowd.) (See also Social Maneuvering, p.81.)

- **Dramatic Failure:** You convince them of quite the opposite.
- **Failure:** They listen, but are ultimately unaffected.
- **Success:** They accept the truth (or apparent truth) of your words.
- **Exceptional Success:** They're convinced, and become a recruit to your point of view, though they might change their minds if they find themselves at risk.

## CAROUSING
(Presence + Socialize or Streetwise)

You mix with a group, bringing high spirits with you and using them to loosen tongues.

- **Dramatic Failure:** A faux pas reveals that you don't belong...and maybe even hints at your supernatural nature.
- **Failure:** You end up a wallflower, with a drink in your hand that you don't even want.
- **Success:** You make a single-serving friend, who might be willing to pass secrets or go with you somewhere private.
- **Exceptional Success:** You make a friend you can contact again.

## FAST-TALK
(Manipulation + Subterfuge – victim's Composure)

You may not be able to win the argument with facts, but you can try to get out of trouble with a little judicious spin.

- **Dramatic Failure:** The other party has a good idea what the truth is.
- **Failure:** The other party doesn't believe you.
- **Success:** The other party swallows your story.
- **Exceptional Success:** The other party believes you so thoroughly that they're even willing to offer a little aid...though they won't put themselves at any kind of risk.

## INTERROGATION
(Manipulation + Empathy or Intimidation – victim's Resolve)

You try to dig secrets out of a reluctant informant. **(See also Social Maneuvering, p. 81.)**

- **Dramatic Failure:** The informant is so alienated or injured that he will no longer reveal information.
- **Failure:** The informant blabs a mix of truth and falsehood — even he may not know the difference.
- **Success:** You get the information you were looking for.
- **Exceptional Success:** You get the information you were looking for, and the informant is willing to continue cooperating.

## INTIMIDATION
(Strength or Manipulation + Intimidation – victim's Composure)

You try to get someone to do what you want by making them afraid of you.

- **Dramatic Failure:** They don't take you seriously, even if you knock them around a bit. They won't be doing what you want.
- **Failure:** They're unimpressed with your threats.
- **Success:** They're coerced into helping you.
- **Exceptional Success:** They develop a lasting fear of you, which could make them easier to coerce in the future.

## INVESTIGATING A SCENE
(Intelligence + Investigation)

You look for clues to what's happened in the recent past... or tidy up so that no one else can find them.

- **Dramatic Failure:** You find clues, but you contaminate them, or you leave evidence of your presence.
- **Failure:** You find evidence, but it's damaged and hard to interpret. Alternately, you miss a spot in your cleanup that you won't find out about until later.
- **Success:** You find a clue of exactly the sort you need, or manage to significantly confuse future investigators.
- **Exceptional Success:** You find a clue and know exactly how it fits in, or you leave the scene immaculate and impossible to decipher.

## JUMPING
(Strength + Athletics)

To get past an obstacle or get out of danger, you leap into the air.

- **Dramatic Failure:** The task not only fails but your character loses her balance.
- **Failure:** Your character doesn't achieve any significant distance at all — she jumps too early, has a false start, or loses her nerve.
- **Success:** Your character leaps a number of feet equal to the successes rolled, or a number of meters equal to the successes rolled divided by three.
- **Exceptional Success:** Your character leaps an impressive distance. If successes gained exceed the amount required to make the jump, your character may attempt

another instant action in the air (say, firing a shot) or upon landing (maybe running up to her Speed), at the Storyteller's discretion.

## REPAIR
(Intelligence + Crafts)

You try to fix something that's broken down.

- **Dramatic Failure:** The broken object's a lost cause. It'll never work again.
- **Failure:** You're stymied by the problem, but could come back to it in another scene.
- **Success:** You get the thing working...for now.
- **Exceptional Success:** The object works better than before. It won't break again any time soon.

## RESEARCH
(Intelligence + Academics or Occult)

Using your existing knowledge, you look for information on a current mystery.

- **Dramatic Failure:** You learn something, but it doesn't help. In fact, it sets you back. If using Occult, this could mean dangerously false assumptions.
- **Failure:** You turn up a lot of promising leads, but they're all dead ends.
- **Success:** You find the basic facts you were looking for.
- **Exceptional Success:** You find what you were looking for, as well as leads toward a much bigger score of information.

## SHADOWING A MARK
(Wits + Stealth or Drive vs. Wits + Composure)

You follow someone, perhaps in the hopes of ambushing them, or of finding out their destination.

- **Dramatic Failure:** You're caught, either by the mark or some observer that's become suspicious of you.
- **Failure:** The mark senses he's being followed, and manages to lose you.
- **Success:** You follow the mark to his destination.
- **Exceptional Success:** You find some means by which you can continue following the mark, such as an unlocked entrance into the building at which he arrived.

## SNEAKING
(Dexterity + Stealth vs. Wits + Composure)

You're trying to avoid notice by someone...or multiple someones. Maybe you want to get into a place undetected. Maybe you're trying to break out.

- **Dramatic Failure:** You attract a lot of attention... enough that now it's going to be hard to get out.
- **Failure:** You're noticed, but still have the chance to slip away.
- **Success:** You avoid notice and get closer to your goal.
- **Exceptional Success:** You avoid notice and get away before anyone has another chance to catch you.

### Permutations

The Storytelling System has a few variations in how dice rolls work.

- **9-Again:** You reroll dice that show 9 or 10, as opposed to just 10. Keep rolling until you get a result that isn't a 9 or 10.
- **8-Again:** You reroll dice that show 8, 9, or 10 — any successful die — and keep rolling as long as your dice show successes.
- **Extra Successes:** Assuming your roll succeeds, you get a number of extra successes added to your total. This permutation mostly applies to weapons, which add their damage bonus as extra successes on your attack roll.
- **Rote Actions:** When you've got plenty of training and the steps you need to follow are laid out in front of you, you've got a significant chance of success. When you make a roll, you can reroll any dice that do not show an 8, 9, or 10. If you're reduced to a chance die on a rote action, don't reroll a dramatic failure. You may only reroll each die once.
- **Successive Attempts:** When you fail a roll, you may be able to try again. If time is not an issue and your character is under no pressure to perform, you may make successive attempts with your full dice pool. In the far more likely situation that time is short and the situation is tense, each subsequent attempt has a cumulative one-die penalty — so the third time a character tries to break down the door that's keeping her inside a burning building, her roll has a two- die penalty. Successive attempts do not apply to extended actions.
- **Teamwork:** When two or more people work together, one person takes the lead. He's the primary actor, and his player assembles his dice pool as normal. Anyone assisting rolls the same pool before the primary actor. Each success from a secondary actor gives the primary actor a bonus

die. If one of the secondary actors rolls a dramatic failure, the primary actor takes a four-die penalty.

## Time

When you're playing out stories in the Chronicles of Darkness, time in the story can speed past or slow to a crawl compared to time in the real world. Weeks or months might pass in the space of a few words, while a tense negotiation plays out in real time — or takes even longer.

In addition to years, nights, and hours, the Chronicles of Darkness also uses five units of dramatic time. These build on one another, from shortest to longest.

- **Turn** — The smallest increment of time, a turn lasts for about three seconds. A character can perform a single instant action in a turn. Turns normally only matter in combat or other dramatic and stressful situations.
- **Scene** — Much like a scene in a play, a scene in a role-playing game is the time spent dealing with a single, specific event. The Storyteller frames the scene, describing what's going on, and it's up to the players to resolve the event or conflict. A scene might be played out in turns, progress in real time, or skip forward, depending on dramatic necessity.
- **Chapter** — A chapter is the collection of scenes that happen during one game session. From the moment you sit down and start playing to the point where you pack up your dice, you're playing out a chapter of your story.
- **Story** — A story tells an entire tale, following the dramatic arc of a related series of events. It might be comprised of several chapters or be completed in just one. It has an introduction, rising tension, a number of twists, and a climax that brings things to a conclusion.
- **Chronicle** — The big picture; a chronicle is the collection of interlinked stories that involve your characters. They might be linked by a common theme or overarching plotline, or they may only share characters and locations. As your story progresses, the players and Storyteller work together to create an ongoing chronicle.

## Skill Specialties

While Skills describe a character's broad knowledge and training, Skill Specialties describe particular areas of expertise. A Specialty should be narrower than its Skill, but not so narrow that it's usually irrelevant. Each Skill in Chapter 1 lists a few example Specialties as a guideline. The Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes a Specialty.

Characters begin play with three Specialties, and players can purchase more with Experiences. A character may have any number of Specialties for a given Skill, but only one instance of each Specialty. Specialties can help flesh out the character's background and define her go-to solutions to problems. For example, a character with Firearms 3 and a Specialty in Rifles is capable with all guns, but particularly good with rifles. She'll default to a rifle when she can, because that's what she does best. Players should come up with backstory reasons for Specialties — perhaps the character used to hunt with her grandfather as a youth.

Whenever a Specialty applies to a player's roll with the relevant Skill, she adds one die, which stacks with other situational modifiers. Multiple Specialties may apply to a single roll with Storyteller approval. If a player goes to great lengths to justify a Specialty, it probably shouldn't apply.

## Willpower

A character's Willpower represents her determination and her ability to go above and beyond what should be possible to achieve her goals. Spending a point of Willpower adds a three-die bonus to most dice pools, or +2 to a Resistance trait. You can only spend one point of Willpower per action.

A character regains one point of spent Willpower for each full night's sleep she gets.

## Anchors

When a character acts in accordance with his Virtue or Vice during a scene, his sense of self is reinforced and his reserves of inner strength refreshed.

If the Storyteller judges that your character's actions during a scene reflect his Vice, he regains one spent Willpower point. Note that acting on a Virtue or Vice does *not* need to pose difficulty or risk to your character.

If the Storyteller judges that your character's actions during a scene reflected her Virtue while posing her difficulty or risk, she regains all spent Willpower. She may regain Willpower up to twice per game session in this way.

## Integrity

Human characters encountering the supernatural suffer great strains to their composure, as well as to their very psyches. The measure of a person's self-image, her psyche, and her soul's health is called *Integrity*.

### Breaking Points

A character stands to lose Integrity when she experiences a *breaking point*. If the action would cause a character psychological stress, it's worth considering whether the action constitutes a breaking point. Note, too, that the character may experience breaking points that do not stem from his own actions. Witnessing the gruesome realities of the Chronicles of Darkness, supernatural or otherwise, can do it, too.

When a character performs certain actions or endures certain experiences, he might reach a breaking point. A

breaking point simply means that what a character has done or seen has outstripped his ability to rationalize or handle it.

A breaking point can fall into one of the following categories:

- The character performs an action that either violates his personal moral code or that is considered unacceptable in society.
- The character witnesses something traumatic, terrifying, or that rattles his understanding of the world.
- The character is the victim of a supernatural attack, whether physical, emotional, or mental.

Breaking points are somewhat subjective, obviously. A homicide detective with 30 years of experience seeing dead bodies and hearing confessions of killers has a somewhat higher tolerance for human depravity than a sheltered 20-something in a middle-class liberal arts college. During character creation, it is advisable for the Storyteller to come up with several hypothetical situations so that the player can determine if, in her judgment, those situations would be breaking points.

Note that a breaking point is not necessarily something that the character considers wrong. A character might kill someone in a clear-cut, unambiguous case of self-defense, but the experience is probably still a breaking point, even if the player (and the character) feels the act was entirely justified. Actions take a toll on the psyche, regardless of whether the actions were righteous.

## Determining a Breaking Point

The Storyteller should determine whether a given action or occurrence counts as a breaking point for a character. If the character is player-controlled, then obviously the player should have some input into this process

## System

When a character experiences a breaking point, the player or Storyteller rolls Resolve + Composure with a modifier based on the character's Integrity rating:

### Current Rating Modifiers

| Integrity | Modifier |
|---|---|
| 8–10 | +2 |
| 7–6 | +1 |
| 5–4 | 0 |
| 3–2 | -1 |
| 1–2 | -2 |

The Storyteller can also impose modifiers based on how heinous the breaking point is, relative to the character's experience. The chart below gives some suggestions, but again, the Storyteller and the player are encouraged to develop the character's moral framework and life experience to the point that modifiers can be customized. Modifiers are cumulative, but the total modifier from circumstances should not exceed +/– five dice.

### Breaking Point Modifiers

| Breaking Point | Modifier |
|---|---|
| Character is protecting himself | +1 |
| Character is acting in accordance with his Virtue | +1 |
| Character is protecting a loved one | +2 |
| Character is acting in accordance with his Vice | –1 |
| Witnessing the supernatural (nonviolent) | –1 |
| Witnessing the supernatural (violent) | –2 |
| Witnessing an accidental death | –2 |
| Witnessing a murder | –3 |
| Committing premeditated murder | –5 |
| Killing in self-defense | –4 |
| Killing by accident (car wreck, e.g.) | –4 |
| Causing visible serious injury to a person | –2 |
| Torture | –3 |
| Enduring physical torture | –2 |
| Enduring mental/emotional supernatural attack | –2 |
| Enduring physical supernatural attack | –2 |
| Witnessing a supernatural occurrence | –1 to –5, depending on severity |

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character's worldview has been damaged, perhaps beyond repair. The character suffers from traumatic stress. Lose a dot of Integrity and choose from the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Broken, Fugue, or Madness. Also, take a Beat.

**Failure:** The character's worldview has been shaken and he probably questions his sense of self, his ability to relate to people, his own moral worth, or his sanity. Lose a dot of Integrity and choose one of the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Guilty, Shaken, or Spooked.

**Success:** The character has come through the breaking point intact. He might feel guilty or upset about what happened, but he can cope. Choose one of the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Guilty, Shaken, or Spooked.

**Exceptional Success:** The character somehow manages to not only survive the breaking point but to also find meaning in it, to reaffirm his own self-worth, or to pass through fire

and be tempered by it. The character takes a Beat and regains a point of Willpower.

## Meditation

A character can improve her chances of resisting a breaking point by meditating. Meditation is an extended action with a pool of Composure + Wits, target successes of 4, and an interval of 30 minutes. After successfully meditating, the character gets a +1 bonus to her next breaking point roll. Once this bonus is used or the character sleeps, it disappears, and must be regained by meditating again.

Soothing music or relaxation tapes can provide a +1 to +2 equipment bonus. A dedicated meditation room, perhaps in the character's Safe Place, provides +3. Loud noises, an uncomfortable environment, or lack of sleep inflict a -1 penalty each. Lack of food inflicts a -1 to -3 penalty.

# Conditions

Conditions represent ways in which the story has affected a character, and what he can do to move past those events. Players don't buy Conditions. Instead, events in the game apply them and they remain until certain resolution criteria are met. A character can only have one instance of a particular Condition unless each applies to a distinctly different circumstance — for example, he may be Informed about both the occult symbol he stayed up all night to research *and* the inner workings of the corporation he infiltrated. He'd resolve each independently.

Characters can gain Conditions as a result of many events or circumstances. A player can choose to bring a relevant Condition into play whenever he rolls an exceptional success. Breaking points (see p. 73) can also cause Conditions as the character deals with the ravages of a harsh and terrifying world. Spirit Numina, vampiric Disciplines, and other supernatural powers can inflict Conditions on their unfortunate victims. Finally, the Storyteller can bring a Condition into play whenever it would heighten the drama of the story, or when it would make sense as the result of a character's actions.

A list of sample Conditions can be found on p. 288. The listed resolutions for each Condition are the most common ways to end its effects; other actions may also resolve it if they would reasonably cause the Condition's effects to end. Players should work with the Storyteller to determine Condition resolution. When a character resolves a Condition, the player takes a Beat. However, if a Condition has a natural time limit and then fades away, he doesn't take a Beat — just waiting the Condition out isn't enough to resolve it.

## Conditions and Storyteller Characters

In most cases, a Storyteller character doesn't need to gain Conditions, since the Storyteller doesn't earn Beats. She can simply roleplay the appropriate behavior or apply an appropriate situational modifier if circumstances demand it. However, a Storyteller character *can* gain Conditions occasionally, such as when a player character uses a supernatural power that inflicts one. If a Storyteller character resolves a Condition, she earns a point of Willpower for use in the same scene, instead of a Beat.

Some Conditions are marked as *Persistent*. These Conditions typically last for a long time, and can only be resolved permanently with a specific and impressive effort. Once per chapter, a player can gain a Beat when a Persistent Condition impacts his character's life.

### Lingering Conditions

Conditions are designed as reminders that events that happened earlier in the story have repercussions later. Usually, Chekhov's gun applies — if you put the Condition on stage, it should cause some drama by the end. However, Storytelling games are slippery things, and sometimes it's better to drop a story thread represented by a Condition for the sake of the ongoing narrative.

For example, an emotional state like Swooned might no longer be relevant to events in the game because a long time has passed, or it might have been the result of a conflict with a character the players don't care about anymore. In those cases, it's perfectly fine to just cross off the Condition. The Storyteller may choose to award a Beat as if the character resolved it.

### Improvised Conditions

Storytellers shouldn't feel limited by the list of Conditions in the Appendix (p. 288). As a rough guideline, a Condition typically consists of a modifier between +2 and -2 dice to a certain type of action, or to any action taken with a certain motivation. Conditions can also consist solely of roleplayed effects until resolution, such as the Shaken Condition (p. 290), in which the mechanical effect *is* the resolution.

A Condition is resolved when the character does something significant to act on it, or when she addresses the original source. The sample Conditions in this book give examples of how to resolve them, but players can also resolve them after other events with Storyteller approval if it makes sense in the story. Resolution criteria for improvised Conditions offer a way for the Storyteller to encourage certain kinds of dramatic action, especially when she wants a story point to have lingering effects on the characters. For instance, a Condition that resolves when the character deals lethal damage to someone clearly reflects the violent nature of that story point. Resolution criteria also serve as an opportunity for daisy chains of Beat-generating events, such as allowing exceptional success on three successes instead of five, or resolving a Condition on a failed roll to encourage the player to choose dramatic failure (and thus earn two Beats at once).

It's best to keep the resolution criteria for a new Condition somewhat general, rather than requiring one specific action. For example, a Condition that resolves when the player commits any act of vengeance allows the player flexibility in exactly what actions the character takes, while a Condition that resolves when the character kills a particular person restricts the player's options. More options are usually better.

Breaking points and exceptional successes are the most common opportunities for creating new Conditions. When none of the given example Conditions seem to apply, or the player has an idea for a different way the momentous event has affected her character, feel free to invent a Condition. The Storyteller can also invent Conditions whenever she wants to offer Beats for roleplaying significant behavioral or situational shifts, or for some mechanical effect that she wants to impose, such as a lingering penalty.

If play would bog down in the search for the right Condition, the Storyteller should just improvise one and keep the session going.

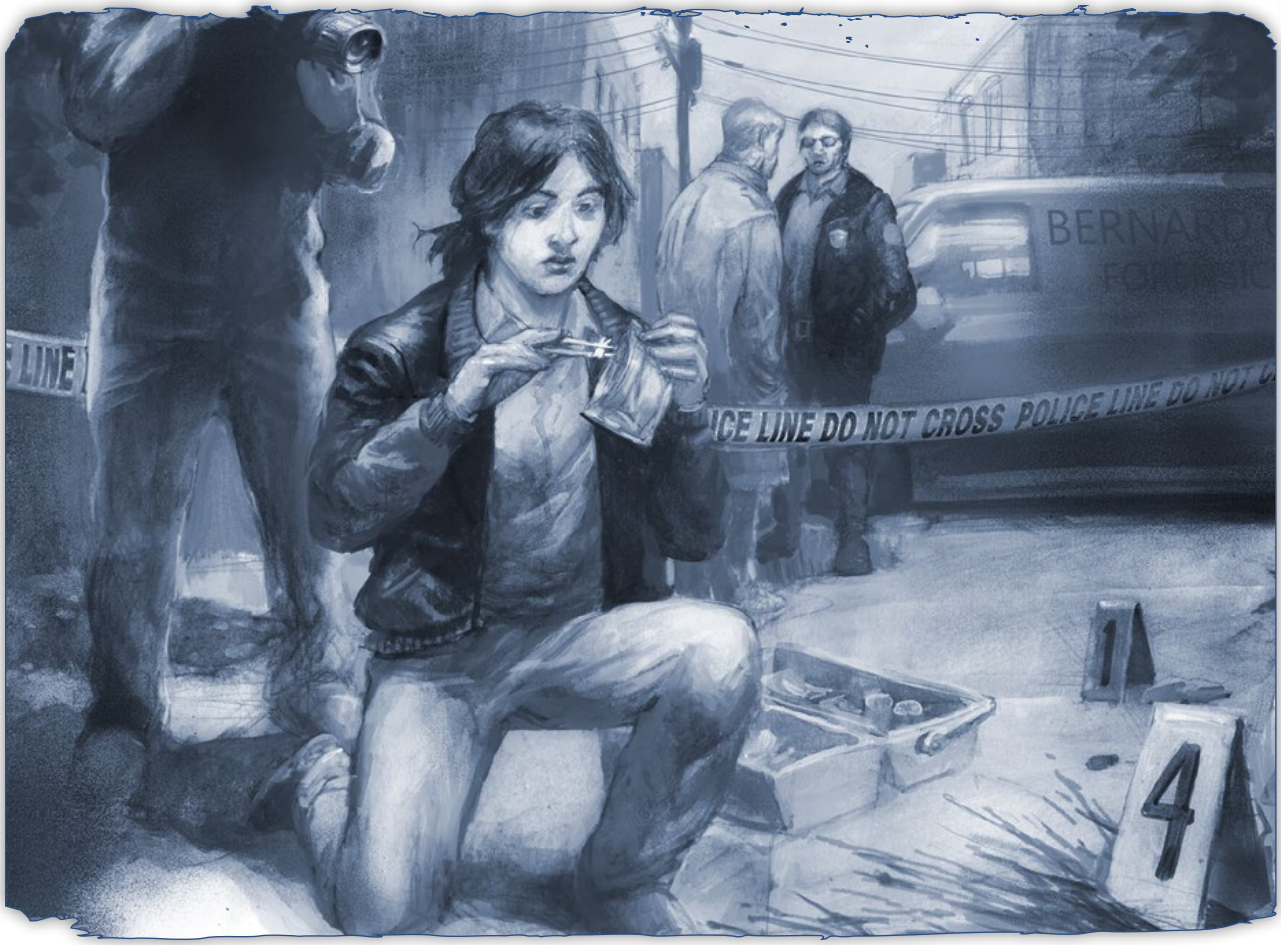
## Experience

A player earns Beats for his character in many ways (listed below). When your character has gained five Beats, they convert to one Experience, which can be used to develop your character's abilities.

### Beats

You gain Beats when your character fulfills one of the criteria below.

- If your character fulfills an Aspiration, take a Beat. At the end of the game session, replace the Aspiration.
- Each Condition has criteria for resolution. When resolving a Condition, take a Beat.
- Some Conditions provide Beats for actions other than resolution.
- Any time you fail a roll, you may opt to make it a dramatic failure and take a Beat.
- If your character takes damage in one of her three rightmost Health boxes, take a Beat.
- At the end of any game session, take a Beat.
- Any time your character risks a breaking point **(p. 73)**, take a beat.




## Experience Costs

Spend the following amounts of Experiences to improve your character.

**Attribute:** 4 Experiences per dot

**Merit:** 1 Experience per dot

**Skill Specialty:** 1 Experience

**Skill:** 2 Experiences per dot

**Integrity:** 2 Experiences per dot

# Investigation

The Chronicles of Darkness are tales of mystery, and protagonists are driven to uncover them. For a casual, momentary investigation that shouldn't play a deep role in the story, you can use a single dice roll to represent the effort. However, investigations can become the foundation for extended scenes, for stories, and even for entire chronicles. This system allows for more depth than the standard dice mechanics.

At its core, this system is about uncovering and accumulating Clues, which serve to benefit later actions. Usually, the investigation is a means to an end. Maybe the players' characters need to stop a monster menacing the community. Maybe they're trying to uncover a mystical cure to a family member's terminal illness. Even when the desired result is simply uncovering the truth, Clues help the characters establish and qualify the truth, which may mean the difference between being locked away for claiming the fantastical, and having hard data which can save lives and change fates.

## Two Essential Rules of Investigation

These two rules are important for maintaining the integrity of investigations in your chronicle.

### No Hard Answers

Don't settle on hard answers up front. As Storyteller, don't devote too much energy to coming up with all the potential Clues and answers ahead of time. This could put you in a position where you're railroading the players, and forcing them to go along with your plans. Or worse, they could get frustrated as the puzzle pieces aren't coming together in a way they expect. Improvisation is your best tool in investigation. Let the players have some say in the Clues they establish, and work with them to bring together the results in a way that makes sense for everyone. This will give them an investment in the story, and will take some responsibility off your

shoulders. It will also help to cater the story to their specific interests and biases. When they succeed, ask them, "What do you find?" and let their answers inform the direction of your story. If you have a culprit in mind, that's fine. However, let the players help guide the path to that culprit if at all possible.

## No Binary Rolls

If your chronicle's integrity or pacing would be negatively impacted by a failure, don't let that failure act as binary stakes in an investigation. In popular fiction, particularly the kind the Chronicles of Darkness emulate, the protagonists will generally end up figuring out the mystery. This doesn't intuitively map to the success/failure nature of Storytelling system dice rolls. Play with stakes. Maybe failure at a given stage means the protagonists still find their Clue, but the antagonist realizes he's being pursued. Maybe finding that Clue takes longer than expected, so the culprit can get away with another stage of his plan. A good investigation story needs to maintain momentum, lest it become frustrating.

In this system, Clues offer dice advantages for later rolls. Failure doesn't inherently mean the Clue isn't uncovered; it just means it can't offer a dice benefit later. It's up to you to determine just why that is. Is the evidence tainted? Is there a mitigating twist?

## Frame the Action

Unlike most actions in the Chronicles of Darkness, this style of extended investigation assumes the characters do a myriad of things across the course of the effort. It should never just be a series of rolls; you always want to give as much context as possible between each step, with each Clue. This is more than just explaining Clues; you want to space out the events with action scenes, social scenes, and events that further the plot and maintain momentum. This serves two main purposes. First, it mixes up the action and offers variety. Second, it builds a sense of stakes. If the world turns while the investigation proceeds, then real things happen and time is of the essence. Sure, the characters might get closer to the murderer if they push the investigation forward. But what about the cultists threatening to tear into the fabric of reality? A Storytelling game is about choice, and this gives your players choices of what to engage.

# What is a Clue?

Clues, in the scope of these rules, are a specialized type of equipment (see p. 100). However, the existence of a Clue isn't always tied to an actual object with which a character can interact. Sometimes, a Clue is an important fact, or even a series of well-connected dots. Clues are different from most equipment in that their advantages are resources which can be expended. These resources, called *elements*, can be used for anything pertaining to that Clue or the investigation at large. They may help a principle investigator pursue a culprit; they may help in the court room when seeking conviction. They could even offer valuable insights which could protect potential victims from the perpetrator. Once fully expended, a Clue cannot offer its benefits again.

If the characters aren't looking to solve a centralized puzzle with Clues, they can be stockpiled and used at other times. For example, players may use these investigation rules in order to dig up blackmail material; each item of blackmail material would count as one specific Clue, and its elements could be used as Leverage in a Social Maneuver (see p. 81). Clues can go above the normal +5 limit on dice bonuses; they're limited only by the character's Investigation Skill.

Clues are best represented visually at your table. Index cards are a good place to start, with ticks or glass beads to represent the available elements on each. This way, players can see what their characters have to draw from. They can also be handed from character to character.

### Investigation Quick Reference

- **Step One:** Decide the Scope of the Investigation
- **Step Two:** Determine the Potential Clue
- **Step Three:** Establish Interval
- **Step Four:** Create the Dice Pool
- **Step Five:** Uncover the Clue

# Relevant Traits

In an investigation, characters may use a variety of game traits, Attributes, Skills, Merits, and otherwise. This is particularly important to note, because while characters all possess an Investigation Skill, many different character types can benefit an investigation without actually being *investigators*. For example, lab technicians might assist in uncovering Clues with Science or Medicine without even a single dot of the Investigation Skill, and those Clues are very valuable when handed off to a principle investigator.

Having a number of specialists with a variety of Skills can make for a potent series of Clues, with numerous elements of which to take advantage.

## Investigation

Investigation is still an integral Skill in investigation efforts. It allows characters to tie Clues together, and to utilize them practically. Characters may only draw from one Clue in a given action by default, or one Clue for each dot of Investigation she possesses.

## Step One: Decide the Scope of the Investigation

First off, you need to determine the full scope of the investigation. What are the characters ultimately looking for? What's their end game? This will often take multiple Clues before it becomes viable. For most stories, one to five Clues should be sufficient, where five Clues indicates a consuming task. If you want the investigation to be the thrust of an extended chronicle, the target number should be at least half the number of planned chapters to allow for deviation in the plot, or up to twice the total number in a highly-focused chronicle.

Once characters reach the required number of Clues, they're able to Uncover the Truth if that's their goal. They can do so without any additional rolls if they spend a number of Clue elements (divided however they like) equal to the required Clues for the investigation. See below for more on Uncovering the Truth.

## Step Two: Determine the Potential Clue

Once the characters go digging for Clues, you have to determine what they find and what it means. Ask some simple questions of the player. "Where is she searching?" "What does she hope to uncover here?" "How does she think he did it?" Those are just some basic examples. Pay close attention to the context, and ask questions based on that. Consider what matters, what the character already knows, and what she values. Let the player's answers guide the search for a Clue.

## Step Three: Establish Interval

Next, you have to determine how long the search takes. This is governed in part by context, and in part by the needs of your story. Searching for a Clue is technically an instant action, but can take a span of time. If the end result of an investigation is the focus of an extended chronicle, you might want the players to stretch out their efforts, for example. If the character is casing a room from which a monster fled, it might only take a few minutes. If she's diving to a sunken ship to find a specific chipped goblet owned by the monster, that could take an hour or more.

Don't be afraid to add story framing to the search for a Clue. In our previous examples, maybe the monster left behind a dangerous contaminant the characters have to overcome to case the scene. Or for our wrecked ship, perhaps the characters have to traverse shark-infested waters to get where they need to be. If the characters perform particularly well in these efforts, consider offering bonuses to the effort to find the Clue.

You can use out-of-character designations if you want to string an investigation out over an extended period. For example, you may allow for one Clue per game session. This would support a "season arc" like in popular television shows. Every "episode" the characters can get a little closer to the final reveal. If the characters uncover the truth faster than expected, that gives you more time at the end of the arc to explore the ramifications and implications of the truth. If they're moving quickly, you can offer side stories and personal exploration stories.

## Step Four: Create Dice Pool

By now, you should have an idea of what the character is doing to establish the Clue. This could mean research, forensics work, interviewing witnesses, or any other action pertaining to the investigation. Establish a dice pool pertaining to that action. Allow the player some input here; there's a good chance she has a dice pool in mind already when determining her character's action. Look to the suggested modifiers for some examples of what might modify this dice pool.

## Step Five: Uncover the Clue

With the roll, the character uncovers the Clue.

### Uncovering the Clue

The dice pool depends on how the characters approach the pursuit. Each time the same Skill is used to uncover Clues in an investigation, the dice pool suffers a cumulative -1 penalty. A diverse, holistic approach always helps in investigations. Continuing with the same approach offers diminishing returns.

**Dice Pool:** Special

**Action:** Instant

**Dramatic Failure:** In addition to imposing a negative Condition at the Storyteller's discretion, one Clue from the investigation gets the Tainted tag.

**Failure:** The character finds a Clue, but it gets the Incomplete tag.

**Success:** The character has uncovered a Clue. It gets a base element, plus any additional elements as needed (see below).

**Exceptional Success:** Not only does the character uncover a Clue with an extra element, she creates a Condition to benefit the search. Common examples include Informed (see p. 289) or Inspired (see p. 289). Don't be limited to those, though.

**Suggested Modifiers:** Crime scene over a day old (-1), over a week old (-3), over a year old (-5), tenacious questioning (+1), thorough canvassing (+2), personal grudge (-2), relevant superstitions (+ or – 1 to 3), too emotionally invested (-2), unrestricted access to the scene (+2), someone tampered with

evidence (-1 to -5), crime aligns with investigator's Virtue (+1), crime aligns with investigator's Vice (-2), lone investigator (-1), rushed for time (-1 to -3)

## Clue Elements

Most Clues start with a single element. Clues established with an exceptional success gain an additional element. Clues established by specialists gain an additional element. In this case, specialists are characters who have 4 or more dots in the relevant Skill, or a Specialty directly relating to the Clue. A character may only contribute a given Skill or its Specialties one time in a given investigation for this purpose. Some Merits or other variables can influence the number of elements a Clue receives.

Elements can be spent for +1 to a relevant dice pool, or as part of the effort to solve the investigation. A character can only spend elements from one Clue at a time, or Clues equal to her Investigation dots. She may spend any number of elements from a Clue, however.

## Clue Tags

Clues can be tagged, like equipment. These tags influence how the Clue is used. If you're using index cards or other visual markers for Clues, be sure to note any relevant tags. Here are some examples from the Uncovering Clues mechanics:

### Incomplete

Incomplete Clues are useful, but not quite as much as others. Their elements may only be used to grant dice to other rolls to uncover Clues. They may not add to other rolls or be used as part of an effort to solve the final investigation.

### Tainted

Your character has evidence that supports a strong narrative, but that evidence features reasonable doubt or potential holes. If a character has access to a Tainted Clue, ignore the first success on any actions pertaining to the investigation. Your character may have multiple instances of this penalty; additional instances are cumulative. For example, with three instances of Tainted, you must roll four or more successes to succeed, or eight to succeed exceptionally. Any time an element from this Clue applies, it applies a -2 penalty instead of the normal +1 bonus. The element is removed from the clue as usual. This reflects the need to work out the Tainted Clue fully before it no longer hurts the investigation.

## Uncovering the Truth

Once characters have the requisite Clues, they may Uncover the Truth. So long as they have the required number of Clues, this doesn't require a roll; they have pieced together the puzzle. However, for every Clue short of the required total, the Storyteller adds one significant complication to the investigation. Some example complications are:

- The culprit has plausible deniability.
- The culprit has a viable escape plan.
- The culprit has a hostage.
- The characters risk legal consequences if they pursue the culprit.
- The characters risk professional or personal consequences if they pursue the culprit.
- The crime in question was a smokescreen for a greater conspiracy.

If possible, use input that came from the players during the investigation to determine the results. This doesn't necessarily mean they get to determine the culprit, but they should be able to influence the finer details. After all, if they made hypotheses and assumptions during the investigation, and their efforts were successful, that should mean most of their theories rang true.

# Social Maneuvering

Social maneuvering is a system for applying persuasion and social pressure over time. Social actions within this system may be direct or subtle, complex or simple. For example, your character may shout at another and demand he gets out of the way, or your character may subtly offer clues suggesting someone needs to vote for her.

It is not always possible to get someone to do what you want. For instance, no amount of social maneuvering is going to convince the chief of police in a large city to hold a press conference and admit to murder, even if the player has a dice pool impressive enough to make it happen. This system is designed to allow characters to manipulate or convince other characters to perform favors or undertake actions, but it does raise the question: Is one character dictating another's actions, and how much of that should be allowed in a roleplaying game? Or, put a different way, can one character seduce another with this system?

Under a strict read of the rules, yes. The goal is "get that character to sleep with my character," the number of Doors is decided as explained below, and impressions and other factors play into the final result. This is not too different from how seduction and other, less carnal, forms of persuasion actually work — the persuader tries to make the offer as enticing as possible.

## Goals

When using a Social action with this system, the first step is to declare your character's intended goal. This is as simple as stating what you want the subject to do, and how your character is going about making it happen. You need only announce the initial stages, as the effort will likely occur over multiple rolls, reflecting different actions.

At this point, the Storyteller determines whether the goal is reasonable. A character might, with time and proper tactics, convince a rich person to give him a large sum of money. He probably isn't going to convince the wealthy individual to abandon *all* of his wealth to the character (though it might be possible to get him to name the character as his heir, at which point the character can set about speeding up the inheritance process).

## Doors

Once you've declared your character's goal, the next step is to determine the scope of the challenge. We represent this with "Doors," which reflect a character's resistance to coercion, her social walls, skepticism, mistrust, or just a hesitance toward intimacy. It's abstract, and means different things in every given case.

The base number of Doors is equal to the lower of the character's Resolve or Composure. If the goal would be a breaking point for the character, add two Doors. If accomplishing the goal would prevent a character from resolving an Aspiration, add a Door. Acting in opposition to a Virtue also adds a Door. Doors may increase as the effort continues and the circumstances change. For example, if the goal seems mundane at first but the situation makes it reprehensible, that may increase the number of Doors. If your character gives up on the goal and shifts to another, any Doors currently open remain so, but assess Aspirations, Virtues, and Integrity in case of a potential increase.

Doors must be opened one by one. Each successful roll — *not* each success — opens one. Exceptional successes open two. Also, Doors are specifically a one-way relationship between two characters. They may each have Doors to one another, or Doors to other characters.

## First Impressions

First (and later) impressions determine the time required between rolls. The Storyteller sets the first impression based on any past history between the characters, the circumstances of their meeting, the nature of the favor being asked (if the acting character is asking right up front — sometimes it's a better idea not to lead off with what you want), and any other relevant factors.

"Average impressions" call for weekly rolls, which makes the process very slow. Through play, your character may influence the interaction for a "good impression." This may mean meeting in a pleasant environment, wearing appealing clothing, playing appropriate music, or otherwise making

the situation more comfortable. This should not require a roll during a first impression, but requires one if attempted later. An excellent impression requires a roll to influence the situation. For example, you may use a Wits + Socialize to find the right people to invite to a party. Perfect impressions require further factors. It may involve leverage, or playing to a character's Vice (see below).

Hostile impressions come from tense first impressions, or threatening pitches. These interactions require you manipulate the impression, or to force the Doors (see below).

### Vices

If your character knows her subject's Vice, she can use it to influence the interaction. When presenting an offer that tempts that Vice, move the interaction one step up on the chart. As a rule of thumb, if by agreeing to the temptation the target character stands to gain Willpower, then the temptation is a valid form of influence.

### Soft Leverage (Gifts and Bribes)

Soft Leverage represents offers of services or payments in order to lubricate social interaction. Make the offer. If the recipient agrees, move the impression up once on the chart.

Mechanically, this can be represented by certain Merit dots. For example, a bribe may be represented by a Resources 3 offer, or an offer for a particular service may be reflected by Retainer 3. By default, these bribes give the recipient use of the Merit for a designated amount of time.

#### Impressions

| Impression | Time Per Roll |
|---|---|
| Perfect | One Turn |
| Excellent | One Hour |
| Good | One Day |
| Average | One Week |
| Hostile | Cannot roll |

## Opening Doors

At each interval, you may make a roll to open Doors to move closer to your character's goal. The roll might be different each time, depending on the character's tactics. Some of the rolls might not even be Social. For example, if your character is trying to win someone's favor, fixing his computer with an Intelligence + Computer roll could open a Door.

As Storyteller, be creative in selecting dice pools. Change them up with each step to keep the interactions dynamic. Similarly, consider contested and resisted rolls. Most resisted actions or contested rolls use either Resolve or Composure, or a combination of the two. But don't let that stand as a limit. Contested rolls don't require a resistance trait. For example, Wits might be used to notice a lie, Strength to help a character stand up to threats, or Presence to protect and maintain one's reputation at a soiree.

Failed rolls impose a cumulative -1 penalty on further rolls. These penalties do not go away after successful rolls. When the player fails a roll, the Storyteller may choose to worsen the impression level by one. If she does so, the player takes a Beat. If this takes the impression level to hostile, the attempt cannot move forward until it improves.

### Aspirations

Aspirations are quick routes to influence. Find out a character's goals, wants, and needs, and they can help move interactions forward. If your character presents a clear path and reasoning for how they'll help a character achieve an Aspiration, remove a Door.

This doesn't require follow through, but it does require a certain amount of assurance. If the opportunity presents itself, and your character pulls out of an offer, two Doors close.

### Failure

A social maneuvering attempt can fail utterly under the following circumstances:

- The player rolls a dramatic failure on an attempt to open a Door (the player takes a Beat as usual).
- The target realizes he is being lied to or manipulated. This does *not* apply if the target is aware that the character is trying to talk him into something, only if the target feels betrayed or conned.
- The impression level reaches hostile, and remains so for a week of game time. The character can try again during the next story.

## Resolution

Once your character opens the final Door, the subject must act. Storyteller characters abide by the intended goal, and follow through as stated.

If you allow players' characters to be the targets of social maneuvering, resolve this stage as a negotiation with two possible outcomes. The subject chooses to abide by the desired goal, or offer a beneficial alternative.

### Go With the Flow

If the character does as requested, and abides by the intended goal, his player takes a Beat (see p. 76).

### Offer an Alternative

If the subject's player chooses, he may offer a beneficial alternative, and the initiator's player can impose a Condition (see p. 75) on his character. This offer exists between players, it does not need to occur within the fiction of the game (though it can). The alternative must be beneficial, and not a twist of intent. The Storyteller adjudicates.

The initiator's player chooses a Condition to impose on the subject. It must make sense within the context of the scenario.

## Example of Social Maneuvering

Stacy wants Professor Erikson to loan her a book from his private library. She intends to use the book's contents to summon a demon, but Erickson doesn't know that. Erickson is protective of his books, but he'd be willing to loan one out under the right circumstances. Erickson has Resolve 3 and Composure 4, so the base number of Doors Stacy needs to open is 3 (the lower of the two). Loaning a book wouldn't be a breaking point, nor does it prevent him from achieving an Aspiration, but it does work against his Virtue (Cautious), so the total number of Doors Stacy needs to open to get the book is 4.

The Storyteller decides that the first impression is average; the two know one another (Stacy is a former student of Erickson's), but they aren't close. Stacy arranges to find Erickson at a conference and impresses him with her knowledge of esoteric funerary rites. This requires an Intelligence + Occult roll, plus whatever effort Stacy had to put forth to get into the conference, but changes the impression level to "good." Now, Stacy can make one attempt to open Doors per day. At the conference, Stacy's player rolls Manipulation + Persuasion and succeeds; one Door opens. Stacy mentions the book to Erickson and lets him know she'd like to borrow it. He's not immediately receptive to the idea, but Stacy's in a good place to continue.

The next day, Stacy emails the professor about a related work (Manipulation + Academics), but fails. Future rolls will have a -1 penalty. The Storyteller decides that the impression level slips to average.

Stacy still has to overcome three Doors. She spends the next week doing research into Erickson and discovers that he wants to become a respected academic. She tells Erickson that she has a colleague who can help break the cipher in which the book is written. This removes one Door without a roll. Now she must overcome two more before he'll agree. (Note that even if Stacy has no intention of helping Erickson in his quest toward academic glory, as long as he reasonably believes that lending her the book will help him achieve his Aspiration, it opens the Door.)

During her research into the professor's personality, she also learns that his Vice is Vanity; he likes to see himself as the hero. Stacy goes to his office in tears, saying that she is in danger of being accused of plagiarism for copying a paper, and asks if he can help authenticate her work. Doing this allows him to come to her rescue, which in turn lets him soak up some praise; this would allow him to regain Willpower through his Vice, and as such is enough of a temptation to raise the impression level back to good. Stacy's player rolls Manipulation + Expression for Stacy to compose a letter of thanks to him, and achieves an exceptional success. The last two Doors open, and Erickson offers to let Stacy borrow the book for a weekend. He probably even thinks it was his idea.

On the other hand, if Erickson is a player-controlled character, his player might decide he really doesn't want to let that book out of his sight. He might offer an alternative — he'll bring the book to Stacy, and let her use it for an afternoon. That, of course, might complicate her intended demon summoning, but she does get to put the Flattered Condition on Erickson.

## Forcing Doors

Sometimes, waiting and subtlety just aren't warranted, desired, or possible. In these cases, your character can attempt to force a character's Doors. This degree of urgency is high-risk, high-reward. Forcing Doors often leads to burnt bridges and missed opportunities.

When forcing Doors, state your character's goal and her approach, then roll immediately. The current number of Doors apply as a penalty to the dice roll. The subject contests as normal. If successful, proceed to resolution as normal. If the roll fails, the subject is immune to further efforts at social maneuvering from your character.

### Hard Leverage

Hard Leverage represents threats, drugging, intimidation, blackmail, kidnapping, or other heavy-handed forms of coercion. It drives home the urgency required to force open a character's Doors.

Hard Leverage that requires that the character suffers a breaking point removes one Door (if the modifier to the roll — not considering the character's breaking points — is greater than -2) or two Doors (if the modifier is -3 or less).

### Example

In the example above, assume Stacy really needs that book *now*. She goes to Erickson and threatens him at gunpoint to give up the book. Doing this is definitely a breaking point for Stacy **(see p. 73 for more on breaking points)**. She applies a modifier for her Integrity, and then a modifier based on the severity of the action and the harm it does to her self-image and psyche. She's not in the habit of committing violent acts and Erickson is obviously terrified, so the Storyteller assigns a -2 modifier to the breaking point roll. This being the case, one Door is removed. If she'd shot him the leg to let him know she was serious, the breaking point modifier would have been at least -3, which would have removed two Doors. In either case, her player rolls Presence + Intimidation plus any bonus for the gun, minus the appropriate penalty.

## Influencing Groups

Influencing a group works in the same way, using the same system. This generally means that influencing a group requires at least an excellent level impression, or forcing their Doors, unless the group meets regularly. The

Storyteller determine Doors using the highest Resolve and Composure scores in the group. She also determines three Aspirations, a Virtue, Vice, and relative Integrity score for the group. When resolving the influence, most members will abide by the stated goal. Individual members may depart and do as they will, but a clear majority does as your player suggests.

## Successive Efforts

After opening all Doors and resolving the action's goal, your character may wish to influence the same person or group again. If successful, successive influence attempts begin with one fewer Door. If failed, or if hard leverage was employed, successive influence attempts begin with two more Doors. These modifiers are cumulative. No matter what, a character will always have at least one Door at the outset.

# Chases

Chases are a common element of horror stories. Someone or some*thing* chases, and with it comes death or worse. In most action scenes, a character's Speed trait determines how much he can move. This means that generally, you can figure out who is faster without dice. However, these rules let you turn the chase into the focus of the scene, and add granularity and depth to it.

## Set the Terms

First, determine the terms of the chase. Start with the initial lead, as well as what it would take for either the pursuer to catch her prey, or the prey to successfully flee. These traits reflect the number of successes each party needs to either escape or catch their quarry. If there are multiple parties involved, they should each be defined as pursuer or prey for these purposes.

The base number of successes for a given character to prevail is five. Modify that with the following variables as examples, but feel free to make up your own. Use only the highest modifier for a specific category. Also note that each character has his own target number here.

Note that this target number can change from turn to turn. Smart players can manipulate their character's circumstances in their favor.

If the pursuer achieves the required successes, she reaches the prey and gets one instant action before moving into Initiative. If the prey reaches the required successes, he successfully evades his pursuer, and the chase ends. The pursuer will need to use other methods to rediscover the prey.

## The Edge

In a plain, open space with flat ground and full visibility, the character with the higher Speed will overcome in a chase. However, this is rarely the case in the Chronicles of Darkness. Environments shift. Weather changes. Obstacles pepper the scene. As the context changes from turn to turn, the character with more ability to maneuver has the Edge, and can temporarily control the flow of the chase. In terms of the narrative, that character has managed to manipulate the circumstances of the chase to her advantage. Her player should work with the Storyteller to determine what that means.

This is usually determined with relative ease. In a crowded street, a character on foot has better ability to maneuver than a character in a car. In his cornfield, a farmer has better ability to maneuver than a mysterious stranger. Often, preparation can influence this; if you can choose the environment, you can pick somewhere with an inherent advantage.

If you can't easily determine who has the Edge at a given moment, make a contested roll. Usually, this will be based on Wits or Dexterity. The relevant Skill should relate to the context. Often, this will be Athletics, Streetwise, Survival, or similar. Don't be limited; let characters lean on their areas of expertise when possible. In an abandoned factory, a savvy

### Chase Modifiers

| Circumstance | Modifier |
|---|---|
| Opponent's Speed is higher than yours | +1 |
| Opponent's Speed is twice yours | +3 |
| Opponent's Speed is ten times yours | +5 |
| Initiative modifier is higher than your opponent's | -1 |
| Initiative modifier is twice your opponent's | -2 |
| Initiative modifier is three times your opponent's | -3 |
| Your character knows the territory | -1 |
| Your character knows the territory intimately | -3 |
| Size is lower than opponent's | -1 |
| Opponent cannot be tired | +2 |
| Environment is actively dangerous | +1 to +3, Storyteller discretion |
| Opponent starts with one turn lead | +1 |
| Opponent starts with two or more turns lead | +2 |

character may be able to maneuver through labyrinthine machinery with Dexterity + Crafts, for example.

If the context of the scene changes significantly, redetermine who has the Edge.

## Turn-By-Turn

Chase turns reflect between 30 seconds and a minute of game time; if you're running an extended chase that lasts hours, instead break it up into a series of incidents during the chase, each represented by its own individual chase.

At the beginning of every turn, the side with the Edge determines the terms of that turn. At Storyteller discretion, the side with the Edge determines the dice pool for the chase that turn, and makes the first roll. This dice pool has to make sense within the current context of the chase, but the player should have at least some say in what changes in that turn. As Storyteller, only veto these choices if they absolutely do not make sense in the moment. The roll doesn't have to reflect direct pursuit or evasion actions, but is identical for both sides. The roll should have a narrative element, one which implies potential stakes for failure.

*Example: The player with the Edge determines that this turn, the dice pool is Wits + Animal Ken. The reasoning behind this is that the chase has moved into a junkyard full of feral dogs. The roll reflects the characters' ability to maneuver around the dogs without being slowed or worse, attacked.*

If the other side wishes to use other dice pools, they lose the 10-again quality on his roll, and suffer a cumulative -1 penalty. This penalty increases every time he uses a dice pool aside from the one dictated. He does not suffer it on turns where he has the Edge or otherwise uses the dictated dice pool, but it continues to amass if he decides not to on a future turn.

Note that the side with the Edge rolls first; this means if they hit the required successes, they get their desired outcome for the chase before the other side makes their roll.

### Pursuit and Evasion

This is the basic action for pursuit and evasion in a chase scene.

**Dice Pool:** Special, determined by the side with the Edge. The Storyteller should determine relevant bonuses and penalties based on the environment.

**Action:** Instant

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character suffers the terms for failure that turn. This can include the effects of failure, as well as a Condition.

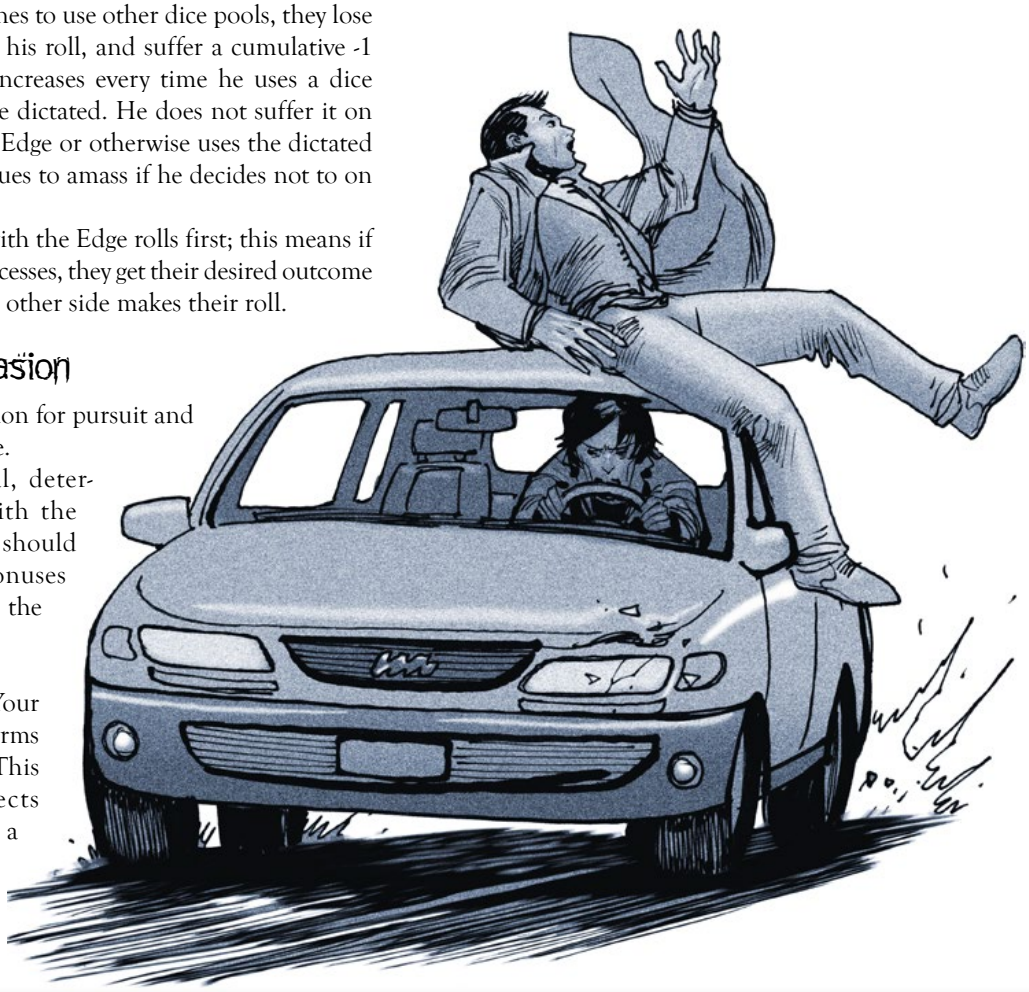
**Failure:** Your character suffers the terms for failure that turn. You can lose one combined success from your total, or your character suffers a specific narrative effect such as a Tilt, two bashing, or one lethal damage.

**Success:** Your character overcomes the immediate challenge in the chase, and makes headway. Calculate successes, and add them to your running total.

**Exceptional Success:** In addition to a massive accumulation of successes, your character manages to set back the opponent. You can subject him to the effects of a failed roll, regardless of his roll's outcome.

## Seizing the Edge

To add a slightly deeper engagement, offer players the choice to "Seize the Edge" during each turn of the chase. After the side with the Edge determines the rolls for that turn, both sides predict their rolled successes that turn, and jot them down. Put these numbers face down on the table. As the dice are rolled, uncover those numbers. If a player successfully guesses their rolled successes, that player gets the Edge during the next turn, despite dice and circumstance. This rule heavily favors underdogs because it's easier to guess successes with fewer dice; it's a good option to mix up play if the players are trying to evade something that would otherwise outclass them.



## The Social Chase

The chase rules can be used for scenes besides traditional foot pursuits or car chases. You could use this for tracking a suspect, for example. Or, you could use this system as an alternative to Social Maneuvering, which normally reflects attempts to find vulnerabilities and wear down social defenses. These rules offer a more direct social "chase." It doesn't even require direct modification; you can simply use these rules with slightly different narrative framing. In a social chase, the goal is to get a character into a social position where he has to act in a certain way. Picture a character trying to convince a wealthy patron to financially back her run for Waste Management Commissioner. Her efforts are all about getting the patron in the right place at the right time, where he can't say no. It means maneuvering into the right venue, when just the right witnesses are around, and all before he has a chance to back her rival. Sounds kind of like a chase, doesn't it?

## Violence

Everybody wants something. Drama happens when characters want things that are mutually exclusive. A vampire wants to drink the local bartender dry, but the bartender wants to go on with her life and raise her daughter in peace. A street gang wants to stake its claim to a neighborhood, but another gang wants the same territory and isn't willing to share. An ex-con wants to turn his life around, but his addictions keep dragging him back to old habits. It's all conflict, and conflict is what stories are all about.

When conflict is so irreconcilable that words and compromise aren't enough to resolve it, violence breaks out. In the Chronicles of Darkness, violence breaks out a lot. Monsters prey on unsuspecting victims, creating vengeful survivors. People see things they can't deal with and lash out against what they don't understand. Horrors that lurk behind the world's facade of picket fences war with each other, and the ripples throw lives into chaos. Inevitably, something calls the characters to fight, even if it's just for survival. This section presents rules for resolving violent conflict.

### Intent

Most people don't resort to violence unless they want something badly, more than they care about other people's safety. The first thing to do when combat begins — before worrying about who attacks first or anything like that — is to determine what each character wants to get out of the fight. Boil it down into a simple sentence that starts with the words "I want": "I want to kill Johnny," "I want the book that Francesca is holding," or "I want what's in Larry's wallet." Even "I want to get away from this gun-toting psycho" is a valid intent. A character's intent has to be something he could achieve through an act of violence in the current scene — even a gunman on the White House lawn couldn't get away with "I want to be President of the United States."

By stating her character's intent, a player is setting out how much her character is willing to hurt, or even kill, someone else in order to get it. If a character's intent has nothing to do with hurting people and she ends up killing someone, she loses a point of Willpower, in addition to probably suffering a breaking point (see p. 73).

### Optional Rule: Beaten Down & Surrender

Often, violent solutions to problems are grisly, ugly, and over fast. Using this optional rule, any character that takes more than his Stamina in bashing damage or any amount of lethal damage gains the Beaten Down Tilt (see p. 280): he's had the fight knocked out of him. He must spend a point of Willpower every time he wants to take a violent action until the end of the fight. He can still apply Defense against incoming attacks, Dodge, and flee, but it takes a point of Willpower to swing or shoot back.

However, he can instead surrender, giving his attacker what she wants according to her declared intent. If a character gives in, he gains a point of Willpower and his player takes a Beat, but he takes no more part in the fight. If his opponent wants to attack him, she's got to spend a point of Willpower to do so, and probably suffers a breaking point. If everyone on one side has surrendered, the fight's over and the other side gets what they want.

If one side's intent involves violence for its own sake, the other side can't surrender — not without being killed or harmed anyway. If that's the case, the aggressor's intended victims don't get the Beaten Down Tilt, and gain no benefits from surrendering. When someone wants to kill you, the only thing you can do is to try to stop her, whether you run like hell or unload a shotgun at her.

These rules only apply to people who would incur a breaking point for committing (or attempting) "murder." Creatures that don't have a problem killing people in general can ignore surrender without penalty and don't have the fight beaten out of them like normal folks.

## Down and Dirty Combat

The Storyteller might decide that a player character can get what she wants without focusing on the details of the fight. Maybe she's picking on people weaker than her. Maybe she's internalized the mechanics of violence to a degree that far surpasses the average Joe. Maybe the fight's not the most important thing going on with regard to the character's intent. In these cases, the Storyteller can opt to use Down and Dirty Combat.

This system resolves the entire fight in a single roll. If multiple player characters are involved and have separate intents, such as one character trying to fight past a guard while another beats information out of a flunky, each intent is resolved as a separate Down and Dirty Combat action. If the group only has one intent but multiple player characters are participating, they can use teamwork (see p. 72) on the roll. Players can call for Down and Dirty Combat, with the Storyteller's approval. Storyteller characters might deal damage as a result of a Down and Dirty Combat, but they can't initiate one.

**Dice Pool:** Combat pool (Dexterity + Firearms, Strength + Brawl, or Strength + Weaponry) versus either the opponent's combat pool (as above) or an attempt to escape (Strength or Dexterity + Athletics). Ignore Defense on this roll.

**Action:** Contested; resistance is reflexive

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character's opponent gets the upper hand in addition to dealing damage, as with failure. This usually includes the opposite of the character's intent — if she wanted to disable the guards so she could escape, she is stunned instead.

**Failure:** The opponent wins the contest. If the opponent used a combat pool, he deals damage equal to the difference in successes plus weapon modifier. Also, the opponent escapes unless he wants to press the combat.

**Success:** The character wins the contest. She deals damage equal to the difference in successes plus her weapon modifier and achieves her intent. If her intent includes killing her opponents, then she does so.

**Exceptional Success:** As a success, and the character also gains a point of Willpower from the rush of inflicting violence on an inferior opponent.

## Willpower

Violence is brutal; there's no way around it. Sure, armor or supernatural powers can protect a combatant from the worst of it, but one lucky hit can reduce anyone to a bag of bones. In the Chronicles of Darkness, combat isn't glorious or romantic. It's a carnal thrill, bloody and rough, and the better you get at it, the more things out there will want your head.

Players should expect that in order to win fights, they usually need to spend Willpower (see p. 73). It takes a perfect storm of skill, grit, adrenaline, and blind luck to walk out of a skirmish in one piece, especially when deadly weapons are involved. Willpower in combat represents the grit and adrenaline. Characters only fight when something's important enough to hurt someone over, so players should be willing to ante up their character's precious mental resources to come out on top.

While a player has to monitor her character's Willpower throughout the whole story, a Storyteller character won't be present in most of the scenes, so it doesn't matter if he blows more Willpower — he can regain it offscreen, and even if he doesn't, it's not like he's going to spend it later. This is especially noticeable in direct conflict, when Storyteller characters can spend Willpower to hurt characters who have surrendered, enhance their attacks, and defend themselves with greater ability than the players' characters.

The Storyteller should reduce his characters' available Willpower in each scene to reflect their "one shot" nature.

Mooks, thugs, and similar nameless characters don't have any Willpower available to spend. Minor named characters — the kind who recur but aren't the main antagonists of a story — have one point of Willpower available. Recurring antagonists and major Storyteller characters can spend up to half their maximum Willpower in a scene.

Storyteller characters with reduced Willpower totals can still regain spent points through normal means, but can't go above their modified Willpower total for a scene. Note, though, that their Resolve + Composure values are unaffected, in case the Storyteller needs to have them roll this dice pool, and supernatural powers that drain Willpower work normally.

# Initiative

When a fight's inevitable, it helps to know who acts first. Time in combat is always tracked in turns, and one turn includes one action for each character in the scene. At the start of a violent conflict or other dramatic encounter in which it's important or easier to have characters act one at a time, determine each character's Initiative by rolling one die and adding her Initiative modifier.

The Storyteller should write down each character's Initiative and put them in order, including both player characters and Storyteller characters. The Initiative order determined here is the order in which the characters will act during each turn until something happens to change it, such as a character dropping a weapon (see below). Characters with high Initiative react quickly and get the jump on the others, while characters with low Initiative are hesitant, indecisive, or just slow to act. Each turn, the Storyteller should take a moment to describe how the lay of the land has changed since the last turn.

Lining up a shot or hefting a baseball bat takes more effort than just swinging a fist. When a character is using a weapon, apply its Initiative penalty for as long as she's got the weapon ready. The only way to avoid this modifier is to sling it or drop it. Dropping a weapon is a reflexive action, but picking it back up takes an instant action, as does just drawing a weapon normally. A character wielding two weapons subtracts the largest Initiative penalty from her score, and then reduces it by a further one. Wielding a crowbar (Initiative penalty -2) and a riot shield (Initiative penalty -4) thus applies a -5 to the roll.

## Delaying Actions

A player may not want his character to act when his Initiative says he should. Maybe he can't see his opponent yet, or wants to see how someone will react to the changing landscape of the fight before he does anything else. The player can choose to delay his character's action, waiting for a better moment to act later in the turn. He can alert the Storyteller that he wants to take his delayed action at any time during the turn. If he does so, his place in the Initiative order changes to the new delayed one for the rest of the fight.

If a player delays his character's action for so long that the next turn begins — thus sacrificing his action for that turn entirely — he may act at any time during the next turn, but for subsequent turns his Initiative resets to what it was before he delayed his action.

## Surprise

Characters who don't realize they're about to be on the receiving end of bloody violence have a chance to notice the ambush by rolling Wits + Composure, contested by the attacker's Dexterity + Stealth. Any character who fails the roll cannot take an action in the first turn of combat, and can't apply Defense for that turn. Determine Initiative in the second turn as normal.

# Attack

On each character's turn, he can attack using one of the following dice pools:

- **Unarmed Combat:** Strength + Brawl - opponent's Defense
- **Melee Combat:** Strength + Weaponry - opponent's Defense
- **Ranged Combat:** Dexterity + Firearms
- **Thrown Weapons:** Dexterity + Athletics - opponent's Defense

Resolve the attack roll like any other action. Determine damage by adding the successes rolled to any weapon modifier. The target fills this many Health boxes with whichever type of damage was dealt. See "Injury and Healing," below.

# Defense

Subtract the character's Defense from any unarmed, melee, or thrown attacks of which the character is aware. Every time a character applies his Defense against an attack, reduce his Defense by 1 against subsequent attacks until the start of the next turn, when the character at the top of the Initiative order acts again. Spending a point of Willpower increases his Defense by 2, but only against one attacker.

A player can choose not to apply his character's Defense against some attacks. If two unarmed gangbangers attack before a chainsaw-wielding lunatic, he might want to let the gangbangers get their blows in, and apply his full Defense against the maniac swinging a chainsaw at his head.

Some types of combat actions require a character to sacrifice his Defense for the turn. A character may only sacrifice Defense for one such action at a time; for instance, he couldn't give up Defense to perform an All-Out Attack and Charge at the same time. He must choose one.

Defense does not apply against Firearms attacks.

## Dodge

At any point before a character's action, she can choose to Dodge. Doing so takes up her normal action. When Dodging, double the character's Defense but do not subtract it from

attack rolls. Instead, roll Defense as a dice pool, and subtract each success from the attacker's successes. If this reduces the attacker's successes to zero, the attack deals no damage. Apply successes from Dodging *before* adding any weapon modifier. Dodging only works when Defense can apply.

Against multiple opponents, reduce Defense by 1 for each opponent before doubling it to determine the Dodge dice pool. If Defense is reduced to 0, roll a chance die. A dramatic failure when Dodging leaves the character off balance; reduce her Defense by 1 for the next turn.

# Unarmed Combat

These rules present special cases that come up when fighting without weapons.

## Bite

A human's teeth have a -1 weapon modifier and deal bashing damage. Animals and some other creatures treat their teeth like weapons, dealing lethal damage to mortals. Animal bites have a weapon modifier depending on the kind of animal: a wolf applies +1, while a great white shark gets +4.

Humans can only bite as part of a grapple, using the Damage move (see below).

## Disarm

To snatch an opponent's weapon away, roll Strength + Brawl contested by the opponent's Strength + Athletics. If the attacker succeeds, the opponent drops his weapon. If the attacker gets an exceptional success, she takes possession of the opponent's weapon. On a dramatic failure, she takes damage equal to the weapon's modifier — if she's struggling over a gun, for instance, the gun goes off.

## Grapple

To grab an opponent, roll Strength + Brawl - Defense. On a success, both characters are grappling. If the attacker rolls an exceptional success, he picks a move from the list below to enact immediately.

During each subsequent turn, both grappling characters make a contested Strength + Brawl versus Strength + Brawl action on the higher of the two characters' Initiatives. The winner picks a move from the list below to enact immediately, or two moves on an exceptional success.

- **Break Free** from the grapple. The character throws off his opponent; they're both no longer grappling. Succeeding at this move is a reflexive action, so the character can take another action immediately afterwards.
- **Control Weapon**, either by drawing a weapon the character has holstered or turning his opponent's weapon against her. He keeps control until his opponent performs a Control Weapon move.
- **Damage** the opponent by dealing bashing damage equal to the character's rolled successes. If the

character performing the move previously succeeded at a Control Weapon action, add the weapon modifier to his successes.

- **Disarm** the opponent, removing a weapon from the grapple entirely. The character must first have succeeded at a Control Weapon move.
- **Drop Prone**, throwing both characters to the ground (see "Going Prone," below). A character must Break Free before rising.
- **Hold** the opponent in place. Neither character can apply Defense against incoming attacks.
- **Restrain** the opponent with duct tape, zip ties, or a painful joint lock. The opponent suffers the Immobilized Tilt (p. 284). A character can only use this move if he's already succeeded in a Hold move. If he uses equipment to Restrain the opponent, he can leave the grapple.
- **Take Cover** using the opponent's body. Any ranged attacks made until the end of the turn automatically hit the opponent (see "Human Shields," below).

### Touching an Opponent

Sometimes, a combatant doesn't want to do damage. Maybe she wants to plant a bug, or use some supernatural power. Roll Dexterity + Brawl or Dexterity + Weaponry to tap an opponent with a weapon. A successful roll deals no damage.

## Ranged Combat

These rules present special cases that come up when shooting at people.

### Aiming

If a character takes an instant action to aim carefully at an opponent with a ranged weapon, the player enjoys a one-die bonus to the attack roll when he fires on the next turn. A character can aim for multiple turns in a row at the same target, to a maximum of a three-die bonus. If a character applies his Defense while aiming, he loses his accumulated bonus and must start over. Aiming is incompatible with autofire (below).

### Autofire

Automatic weapons can fire a short, medium, or long burst in place of a single shot.

- **Short Burst:** Three bullets fired at the same target. The shooter enjoys a +1 to her dice pool.
- **Medium Burst:** 10 bullets, which can hit one to three targets standing close together. The shooter receives a two-die bonus to her dice pool. If firing at more than one target, subtract the total number of targets from the shooter's pool, then make one attack roll per target.
- **Long Burst:** 20 bullets at as many targets as the shooter wants. The shooter receives a three-die bonus to her dice pool. If firing at more than one target, subtract the total number of targets from the shooter's pool, then make one attack roll per target.

### Covering Fire

Characters can use automatic weapons to provide covering fire — firing on full auto to dissuade enemies from coming out into the open. Covering fire is only possible with a weapon capable of fully automatic fire.

The player states the general area at which he is firing, and rolls Dexterity + Firearms. If the roll succeeds, each character in the affected area must make a choice on his next action. He can avoid the attack, either running to cover within range of his Speed, or dropping prone (see "Going Prone," below). Or, he can take an action as normal but suffer damage based on the Covering Fire successes + weapon modifier. Covering fire takes 10 bullets, the same as firing a medium burst.

### Firearms in Close Combat

Any firearm larger than Size 1 is too big to accurately shoot someone when fists and crowbars are the order of the day. In close combat, the target's Defense against Firearms attacks is increased by the gun's (Size +1). If using a gun larger than a pistol to bludgeon the opponent, treat it as an improvised crowbar (see Weapon Traits, p. 268).

### Range

The firearms chart (below) lists the short, medium, and long ranges of some sample firearms. Shooting a target at medium range imposes a -1 penalty, while shooting a target at long range increases that to -2 penalty. Shooting at targets beyond long range reduces the attack dice pool to a chance die.

Thrown weapons have a short range of (Strength + Dexterity + Athletics - object's Size) yards or meters, doubled for medium range, and doubled again for long range. Aerodynamic objects double each range — so an aerodynamic object's long range is {(Strength + Dexterity + Athletics) * 8} yards or meters. Characters can only throw objects with a Size less than their Strength.

### Cover and Concealment

Hiding behind something is a good way to not get shot. How effective it is depends on how much the cover hides. *Concealment* penalties apply to a shooter's dice pool.

- **Barely Concealed:** -1 (hiding behind an office chair)
- **Partially Concealed:** -2 (hiding behind the hood of a car, with upper body exposed)
- **Substantially Concealed:** -3 (crouching behind a car)

## Combat Summary Chart

### STAGE ONE: INTENT

- The players and the Storyteller describe what their characters want out of the fight.
- Decide whether characters can surrender and become Beaten Down.

### Stage Two: Initiative

- If the attacker springs an ambush or otherwise strikes when the defender isn't able to counter, the defender rolls Wits + Composure contested by the attacker's Dexterity + Stealth. If the defender fails, she doesn't act on the first turn of combat and cannot apply Defense against attacks.
- Everyone rolls Initiative: the result of a single die roll + Dexterity + Composure. If the character has a weapon readied, apply its Initiative Modifier.

### STAGE THREE: ATTACK

- **Unarmed Combat:** Strength + Brawl - opponent's Defense
- **Melee Combat:** Strength + Weaponry - opponent's Defense
- **Ranged Combat:** Dexterity + Firearms
- **Thrown Weapons:** Dexterity + Athletics - opponent's Defense

A character's Defense is normally subtracted from any attack dice pools where it applies. If she chooses to Dodge, the defender rolls *double* her Defense as a dice pool against each attack. Each success reduces the attacker's successes by one. If the attacker is reduced to zero successes, the attack does nothing. If the attacker has successes remaining, add any weapon modifier to the number of successes to determine how many points of Health the target loses. All weapons deal lethal damage.

### STAGE FOUR: DESCRIPTION

The Storyteller describes the attack and wounds in narrative terms.

### POSSIBLE MODIFIERS

- Aiming: +1 per turn to a +3 maximum.
- All-Out Attack: +2 with Brawl or Weaponry attack; lose Defense.
- Armor Piercing: Ignores amount of target's armor equal to item's rating.
- Autofire Long Burst: 20 or so bullets, no target limit pending Storyteller approval. A +3 applies to each attack roll; -1 per roll for each target after the first.
- Autofire Medium Burst: 10 or so bullets at one to three targets, with a +2 to each attack roll; -1 per roll for each target after the first.
- Autofire Short Burst: Three bullets at a single target with a +1 to the roll.
- Charge: Move at twice Speed and attack with Brawl or Weaponry in one action; lose Defense.
- Concealment: Barely -1; partially -2; substantially -3; fully, see "Cover."
- Cover: Subtract Durability from damage; if Durability is greater than the weapon modifier, the attack has no effect.
- Dodge: Double Defense, roll as a dice pool with each success subtracting one from the attacker's successes.
- Drawing a Weapon: Requires instant action without a Merit and could negate Defense.
- Firing from Concealment: Shooter's own concealment quality (-1, -2, or -3) reduced by 1 as a penalty to fire back (so, no modifier, -1, or -2).
- Offhand Attack: -2 to attack roll.
- Prone Target: -2 to hit in ranged combat; +2 to hit within close-combat distance.
- Pulling Blow: Target gains 1 Defense; the attack can't deal more than chosen maximum damage.
- Range: -2 at medium range, -4 at long range.
- Shooting into Close Combat: -2 per combatant avoided in a single shot (not applicable to autofire); -4 if grappling.
- Specified Target: Torso -1, leg or arm -2, head -3, hand -4, eye -5.
- Surprised or Immobilized Target: Defense doesn't apply.
- Touching a Target: Dexterity + Brawl or Dexterity + Weaponry; armor may or may not apply, but Defense does apply.
- Willpower: Add three dice to a roll or +2 to a Resistance trait (Stamina, Resolve, or Composure) in one roll or instance.

A character who is concealed and wants to fire at someone else takes a penalty to his Firearms attack that's one less than the penalty afforded by the character's protection — so if he's substantially concealed, he can fire back with a –2 die penalty.

If a target's entirely hidden by something substantial, he's in *cover.* If the cover's Durability is greater than the weapon modifier, the bullets can't penetrate the cover. Otherwise, subtract the cover's Durability from the attacker's damage roll. If the cover is transparent (bulletproof glass, for example), subtract half the cover's Durability, rounding down. Both the object and the target take any remaining damage.

### Shooting into Close Combat

If a character fires or throws a ranged weapon at a target who is involved in close combat with other characters she doesn't want to hit, like allies or bystanders, the player takes a -2 to her attack for each combatant she wants to avoid, or -4 for a combatant who is currently in a grapple. This rule doesn't apply to autofire (see above).

### Human Shields

Sometimes, the only available cover is another person — be he a terrified member of the public or a lifelong friend. Characters who use human shields treat them as cover, with Durability equal to the victim's Stamina + any armor. Unlike normal cover, the victim takes all of the damage from the attack.

Using a human shield is almost certainly a breaking point (see p. 73). For a human, this means a pretty severe modifier (-3 or more) if the victim dies.

### Reloading

Reloading a firearm is an instant action. If a character needs to load bullets separately, she cannot apply her Defense on the same turn. If she has a magazine or speed loader, she doesn't lose her Defense.

## General Combat Factors

Some actions apply to all kinds of fights.

### Movement

A character can move his Speed in a single turn and still take an instant action. He can give up his action to move at double his normal Speed.

### Charging

A character can sacrifice her Defense for the turn to move up to twice her Speed *and* make a Brawl or Weaponry attack in the same action, charging in heedless of incoming threats. If she has already applied her Defense against an attack before her action occurs, she can't Charge.

### Going Prone

When a character can't find cover, the next best thing when bullets are flying is to drop flat to the ground. Ranged and thrown attacks against him suffer a -2. A standing attacker using Brawl or Weaponry to attack instead gains a +2.

A character can drop prone at any point before his action. Dropping to the ground costs his action for the turn, as does getting back up from a prone position.

### All-Out Attack

A character can sacrifice her Defense for the turn in order to gain a +2 to her attack with Brawl or Weaponry, throwing caution to the wind and leaving herself open to be more aggressive. If she has already applied her Defense against an attack before her action occurs, she can't do an all-out attack.

### Offhand Attack

If a character attacks with her non-dominant hand, whether because her dominant hand is injured, carrying something, or otherwise occupied, or because she's wielding two weapons at once, the player takes a -2 to her attack.

### Pulling Blows

Sometimes a character wants to beat the fight out of someone without killing him. She can choose to pull her blow, not putting full force behind the attack. The player chooses a maximum amount of damage for the blow that can't exceed the higher trait in her character's attack pool — for example, if the character has Strength 2 and Brawl 4, the player can choose between 1 and 4 points as her maximum damage. If she would deal more damage with the attack, any extra is ignored. Because she's holding back, it's easier for the opponent to ward off the blow; the defender gains +1 to Defense.

At the Storyteller's discretion, a character can reflexively spend a point of Willpower when pulling her blow with a weapon to deal bashing damage. Otherwise, the only way to avoid dealing lethal damage is to stop using a lump of metal or wood to inflict trauma.

### Specified Targets

Attacking specific body parts has its benefits. In addition to ignoring armor (see "Armor," p. 94), strikes to the limbs and head can have added effects, represented by Tilts (see below). These attacks take dice penalties depending on the body part targeted, noted below.

- **Arm (-2):** A damaging hit can inflict the Arm Wrack Tilt if it deals more damage than the target's Stamina
- **Leg (-2):** A damaging hit can inflict the Leg Wrack Tilt if it deals more damage than the target's Stamina
- **Head (-3):** A damaging attack can inflict the Stunned Tilt if it deals at least as much damage as the target's Size

- **Heart (-3):** If the attacker does at least five points of damage, the weapon pierces the opponent's heart, with special effects for some monstrous targets
- **Hand (-4):** On a damaging hit, the victim suffers the Arm Wrack Tilt
- **Eye (-5):** On a damaging hit, the victim suffers the Blinded Tilt

## Tilts

Tilts are a unified way of applying circumstances to both characters and scenes during violent encounters. Tilts are mechanically similar to Conditions, but they affect characters and scenes in combat only. Outside combat, use Conditions instead.

Tilts do not give players Beats when they end, but the effects of a Tilt can easily cause a Condition. For instance, a character in a fight gets a handful of road salt flung into his eyes and receives the Blinded Tilt. When combat ends, this shifts to the Blind Condition. Resolving this Condition gives the character a Beat. If the character enters combat again before the Condition is resolved, the Blinded Tilt applies again.

Tilts come in two forms: Personal and Environmental. Personal Tilts only apply to one character and include ways in which that character can overcome the effect. Environmental Tilts affect the whole scene, and offer ways for individual characters to mitigate their effects.

For a full description of each Tilt, see the Appendix (p. 280).

## Killing Blow

A character can make a killing blow when her opponent is unconscious, completely immobile, or otherwise totally defenseless. When doing so, the character deals damage equal to her full dice pool plus her weapon modifier. She has time enough to line up her attack so it avoids her victim's armor.

While people who kill in combat can justify their actions based on the heat of the moment, performing a killing blow

### Tilt Reference

This quick reference can help players and Storytellers alike remember the effects of each Tilt detailed in the Appendix.

**PERSONAL TILTS**

| Tilt | Effects |
|---|---|
| Arm Wrack | One arm: Drop anything held, suffer off-hand penalties for most rolls. Both arms: Chance die on rolls requiring manual dexterity, -3 to other Physical actions. |
| Beaten Down | Cannot take violent action in combat without spending Willpower. |
| Blinded | One eye: -3 to vision-related rolls. Both eyes: -5 to vision-related rolls, lose all Defense. |
| Deafened | One ear: -3 to Perception rolls. Both ears: Chance die on Perception rolls, -2 to combat rolls. |
| Drugged | -2 Speed, -3 to combat rolls (including Defense and Perception). Ignore wound penalties. |
| Immobilized | No combat actions. Can't move or apply Defense. |
| Insane | +1 to combat rolls, act after everyone else, -3 to Social rolls, can't spend Willpower. |
| Insensate | No combat actions. Can move and apply Defense. Taking damage ends the Tilt. |
| Knocked Down | Lose action this turn if it hasn't been taken, knocked prone. Can apply Defense, attack from ground at -2. |
| Leg Wrack | One leg: half Speed, -2 to Physical rolls for movement. Both legs: Knocked Down, give up action to move at Speed 1, movement-based Physical rolls reduced to chance die. |
| Poisoned | Moderate: One point of bashing damage per turn. Grave: One point of lethal damage per turn. |
| Sick | Moderate: -1 to all actions. Penalty increases by 1 every two turns. Grave: As moderate, but also inflicts one point of bashing damage per turn. |
| Stunned | Lose next action. Half Defense until the character next acts. |

## Tilt Reference (Continued)

### ENVIRONMENTAL TILTS

| Tilt | Effects |
|---|---|
| Blizzard | -1 to visual Perception and ranged attack rolls, increased by 1 per 10 yards or meters. -1 to Physical rolls per four inches of snow. |
| Earthquake | Penalty to Dexterity rolls depending on severity. Take one to three lethal damage per turn, Stamina + Athletics downgrades to bashing. |
| Extreme Cold | Bashing damage doesn't heal. -1 to all rolls, increasing by 1 per hour. At -5, further hours deal one point of lethal damage. |
| Extreme Heat | Bashing damage doesn't heal. -1 to all rolls, increasing by 1 per hour. At -5, further hours deal one point of lethal damage. |
| Flooded | -2 to Physical dice pools per foot of flooding. Once water is over head, character must swim or hold breath. |
| Heavy Rain | -3 to aural and visual Perception rolls. |
| Heavy Winds | -3 to aural Perception rolls. Winds rated between 1 and 5, severity acts as penalty to Physical rolls and deals that much bashing damage per turn, Dexterity + Athletics to avoid. |
| Ice | -2 Speed, -2 to Physical actions. Can move at normal Speed but -4 to Physical actions. Dramatic failure causes Knocked Down; Drive rolls are at -5 and half Acceleration. |

is a premeditated attempt to end a sentient life without the target having a chance to do anything about it. Going through with a killing blow is a breaking point whether the victim survives or not.

## Weapons and Armor

Weapons are one of the fastest ways to turn a fight into a murder. Sometimes, that's what you want; pulling a gun shows you're serious about killing people.

A weapon's modifier, or damage rating, adds bonus successes to a successful attack roll. When a weapon might help out in other ways, like using a chain to grapple someone, or a gun to intimidate her, add the weapon's modifier to the attack roll.

Every weapon deals lethal damage. However, some supernatural creatures don't take lethal damage from weapons.

The full traits of a range of weapons are presented in the Ranged and Melee Weapons Charts.

### Improvised Weapons

The weapons charts can only go so far. Characters who grab lamps and pool cues still stand a chance of doing serious damage.

If your improvised weapon is close enough to one of the weapons on p. 268, use the associated weapon profile. For example, a pool cue might count as a baton. Otherwise, an improvised weapon does (Durability - 1) damage, with an Initiative penalty and Strength requirement equal to the weapon's Size.

Using an improvised weapon reduces your attack pool by one die. On a successful attack, the weapon takes the same amount of damage as it inflicts; Durability reduces this damage as normal. Once the weapon's Structure is reduced to 0, the object is wrecked.

### Armor

Armor provides protection against attacks, including bullets and knives. Police officers and other law enforcement agencies frequently rely on it.

- Ballistic armor applies to incoming firearms attacks. Each point of ballistic armor downgrades one point of damage from lethal to bashing.
- General armor applies to all attacks. Each point of general armor reduces the total damage taken by one point, starting with the most severe type of damage.

If armor has both ballistic and general ratings, apply the ballistic armor first.

When applying armor to an attack dealing lethal damage, the character always takes at least one point of bashing damage from the shock of the blow.

### Armor-Piercing

Some weapons have an armor piercing quality, usually between one and three. When attacking someone wearing armor, subtract the piercing quality from the target's armor.

Subtract from ballistic armor first, then general armor. Armor-piercing attacks in close combat subtract from general armor only.

When shooting at an object — or a person in cover — subtract the piercing quality from the object's Durability.

# Injury and Healing

Characters can suffer three types of damage. Fists and feet, along with other kinds of low-impact trauma, deal bashing damage. Brass knuckles, knives, and speeding trucks deal lethal damage. Human characters always take lethal damage from weapons. Some horrifying supernatural powers deal aggravated damage. When something deals aggravated damage directly, it's quite obvious. Flesh bubbles and sloughs away. Foaming pustules taint the victim's flesh. Blackened veins streak out from the site of the injury.

A character's Health track contains a number of boxes equal to his Health trait, determined by his Stamina + Size.

## Marking Damage

When a character suffers bashing damage, mark it with a slash (/) in the leftmost empty box of his health track.

When a character suffers lethal damage, mark it with an X in the leftmost box of his health track that doesn't contain lethal or aggravated damage. If you mark over a point of bashing damage, it moves one box to the right.

When a character suffers aggravated damage, mark it with a large asterisk (*) in the leftmost box that doesn't already contain aggravated damage. If you mark over a point of bashing or lethal damage, it all moves one box to the right.

Always mark the most severe injuries at the left of a character's health track, and push any less severe injuries to the right. Characters heal their rightmost health boxes first and progress left.

*Example:* Cassidy has seven boxes in her Health track. She's just taken one point of bashing damage. Her Health boxes look like this:

If she's later stabbed and takes a point of lethal damage, her Health track would be:

If Cassidy next suffered a point of aggravated damage, her Health boxes would look like this:

## Wound Penalties

As a character takes damage, it impairs her ability to act. When one of her three rightmost Health boxes has damage marked, she suffers a penalty accordingly. Subtract this penalty from every action she performs, including rolling for Initiative, but not including Stamina rolls to stay conscious.

| Health Boxes Marked | Penalty |
|---|---|
| Third-to-last | -1 |
| Second-to-last | -2 |
| Last | -3 |

## Full Health Tracks and Upgrading Damage

If a character's Health track is filled with bashing damage, each point of further bashing or lethal damage upgrades the leftmost point of bashing damage to lethal — turn one of the slashes into an X. When a character's rightmost Health box has bashing damage marked in it, his player must make a reflexive Stamina roll each turn for him to remain conscious.

If a character's Health track is filled with lethal damage, each point of further damage upgrades an existing point of lethal damage to aggravated. Turn the leftmost X into an asterisk. When a character's rightmost Health box has lethal damage marked in it, he takes another point of damage each minute (upgrading existing lethal damage to aggravated) until he receives medical attention, mundane or supernatural.

If a character's Health track is filled with aggravated damage, he's dead.

## Temporary Health Boxes

Some supernatural powers can bestow temporary Health boxes. If a character takes damage in a temporary Health box and then the effect that bestowed it ends, the damage rolls over into his permanent Health boxes as if he had just taken it anew.

## Healing

Characters need time to heal once they've been beaten to a pulp. Some supernatural creatures have other ways to heal, but human characters rely on time and medical care to set broken bones and heal bullet wounds.

A character heals her rightmost Health box at the rate indicated below. The healing time is enough for the wound to fully recover; lethal damage doesn't downgrade into bashing. Normally, a character can heal without medical attention, though use of the Medicine Skill helps her recover (see p. 96). The only exception is if a character has all her Health boxes full of lethal damage — she's bleeding out. She can't recover from that without urgent medical attention and emergency surgery.

Wounds recover at the following rates:

- **Bashing:** One point per 15 minutes
- **Lethal:** One point per two days
- **Aggravated:** One point per week

*Example:* After a scuffle with an off-duty cop, Cassidy's out of harm's way for now. She isn't looking for another fight.

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Her Health track is the same as it was at the end of the fight.

Her rightmost wounds heal first. Each point of bashing damage takes 15 minutes to heal. Her lethal damage then heals over the course of the next two days. Finally, her aggravated wound heals over the course of the next week. In all, it's taken a little over a week and two days for her to recover from her injuries.

## Medical Care

The Medicine Skill can be used to speed up healing. Medical care is an extended action, requiring successes equal to the total number of points of damage suffered by the patient. In the field or ER, the dice pool is Dexterity + Medicine, and the interval is one minute. In long-term hospital care, the pool is Intelligence + Medicine, and the interval is one hour. Usually, any Conditions from a failure afflict the patient rather than the caregiver, but this is at Storyteller discretion.

Achieving sufficient successes restores one Health point lost to bashing damage, in addition to any healing that the character already does under his own power.

Round-the-clock, intensive care diminishes a patient's injuries, downgrading the nature of wounds by one degree. Thus, a lethal wound can be downgraded to bashing, and an aggravated wound can be downgraded to lethal. Such treatment can occur only in a hospital or other intensive-care facility. An extended Intelligence + Medicine roll is made. The number of successes required is five for a lethal wound and 10 for an aggravated one. Each roll requires an hour.

This kind of treatment always focuses on the worst of the patient's injuries first. Thus, an aggravated wound is downgraded to lethal before a lethal wound is downgraded to bashing. No more than one wound can be downgraded per day of treatment.

Note that this treatment does not eliminate wounds. It simply minimizes them. A patient must heal downgraded injuries completely by himself or receive other treatment to eliminate them.

# Objects

In the Storytelling system, objects such as lead pipes, walls, or wardrobes have three traits: Durability, Size, and Structure. Mostly, these relate to how easy the object is to destroy.

**Durability:** How hard the object is to damage. Subtract Durability from any damage dealt to the object. Durability has no effect against attacks that deal aggravated damage.

| Durability | Material |
|---|---|
| 1 | Wood, hard plastic, thick glass |
| 2 | Stone, aluminum |
| 3 | Steel, iron |
| +1 | Per reinforced layer |

**Size:** How large the object is. Objects smaller than Size 1 can fit entirely in a person's palm. **See p. 26 for the Size chart.**

**Structure:** An object's Structure equals its Durability + Size, and acts like Health. Each point of damage removes a point of Structure. Once it's taken more damage than it has Durability, anyone using the object suffers a one-die penalty. When its Structure hits 0, the object is destroyed. Objects do not differentiate between bashing and lethal damage.

# Sources of Harm

Violence isn't the only source of harm in the Chronicles of Darkness. These are some of the more common hazards characters face.

## Disease

Outside of combat, a character who suffers from a disease suffers damage over a period of time. Resisting the damage inflicted by a disease requires a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll. This roll is not contested but the roll is modified by the severity of the disease. Only one success is necessary to avoid damage each time.

Some diseases are the kind that people don't heal from. A character's cancer could go into remission, or he can hold his HIV back with medication, but time alone won't cure them. The Storyteller should set a benchmark of how many rolls the character has to succeed at in a row for the disease to go into remission. Medical treatment can offset any penalties to the Stamina + Resolve roll applied by the disease — but might inflict penalties on other rolls, as the cure is almost as bad as the disease.

## Drugs

A character who has taken drugs, willingly or not, must fight off the effects of the drug. Resisting the effects requires a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll. This roll is not contested but is modified by the potency of the drug ingested. Only one success is necessary for a character to regain her senses. In the case of some drugs, this roll must be made once per hour, once per scene — or even once per turn, in the case of strong hallucinogens or narcotics.

Characters who overdose on drugs treat the drug like a poison, with a Toxicity somewhere between 3 and 7. The overdose deals damage once per hour until the drug has run its course — if a character's spent eight hours drinking, then the poison takes another eight hours to fade, with a Toxicity between 3 (beer or wine) to 5 (rubbing alcohol). A character who injects stronger heroin than expected takes damage for (eight minus Stamina) hours, with a Toxicity of 7.

## Electricity

Electrocution automatically causes bashing damage per turn of exposure. No attack roll is made.

If harm from electricity is more than just instantaneous, such as there's a constant flow such as through power cables, a victim may not be able to escape. His muscles contract, which can prevent him from pulling away. Roll Strength as a reflexive action during each turn of contact. Failure means your character is still connected to the source and suffers its damage each turn until a successful roll is made.

| Source | Damage |
|---|---|
| Minor; wall socket | 4 (B) |
| Major; protective fence | 6 (B) |
| Severe; junction box | 8 (B) |
| Fatal; main line feed/subway rail | 10 (B) |

Worn armor provides no protection against electrocution, although specialized, nonconductive clothing can reduce or eliminate the hazard.

## Extreme Environments

The human body is not conditioned to withstand extreme heat, cold, air pressure, or other extreme weather conditions. These harsh conditions hinder and endanger unprepared characters. When exposed to a harsh environment, the Storyteller assigns a level to the environment, using the chart below as a guideline. Survival gear can reduce the effective environment level.

As long as characters are exposed to these conditions, they suffer the level of the environment as a penalty to all actions. After a number of hours equal to the character's Stamina, he takes bashing damage, once per hour. In the case of a level three exposure, the damage is lethal. Fourth level environments cause lethal damage each turn after a number of turns equal to the character's Stamina.

Any damage caused by level two through four exposure leaves lasting marks, scars, and tissue damage. Damage caused by extreme environments cannot be healed until the character is back in a safe environment.

### Environment Levels

| Level | Example Environs |
|---|---|
| 0 | Safe environment |
| 1 | Light snow, heavy storms; too cold to sleep safely; air pressure causes shortness of breath; sweltering sun can cause first-degree burns |
| 2 | Heavy snow; cold causes physical pain and potential hypothermia; sun quickly causes first degree burns, can cause second degree burns with time; minor radiation poisoning |
| 3 | Desert exposure; heat rapidly causing second-degree burns; moderate radiation exposure |
| 4 | Desert sandstorm, severe hurricane, tornado, tsunami |

## Falling

Falling inflicts one point of damage per three meters fallen. This is bashing damage, unless the character falls on something that would inflict lethal damage, like a sharp fence post or broken glass. If a character falls 30 meters or more, he reaches terminal velocity, and instead takes a flat 10 lethal damage, regardless of the total distance he falls.

If the character has the opportunity to slow his fall, for example by grabbing an awning, or to soften it, such as by

twisting to land on soil rather than concrete, his player may make a Dexterity + Athletics roll, with each success on the roll reducing the damage the character takes by one point. It's typically not possible to slow or soften a fall at terminal velocity.

## Fire

Fire automatically inflicts lethal damage per turn of exposure (no attack roll is required). The damage inflicted depends on both the size and intensity of the flames.

| Size of Fire | Damage |
|---|---|
| Torch | 1 |
| Bonfire | 2 |
| Inferno | 3 |

| Heat of Fire | Damage Modifier |
|---|---|
| Candle (first-degree burns) | — |
| Torch (second-degree burns) | +1 |
| Bunsen burner (third-degree burns) | +2 |
| Chemical fire/molten metal | +3 |

So, a fire the size of a bonfire (2) and with the intensity of a torch (+1) inflicts three damage per turn of contact.

In general, if exposure to fire persists for more than a turn, it catches anything combustible. A burning character continues to take full damage, even if he escapes the original source of the flame. Depending on the accelerant involved, the size of a fire can be reduced by one point per turn by means such as a hose or extinguisher. The Storyteller may rule that a fire goes out immediately under some circumstances (local oxygen is removed with a controlled explosion or your character is completely immersed in water). Or, a fire could continue to burn despite efforts to put it out, as with a grease fire when water is poured on it.

Most armor can block its general rating in fire damage automatically for a number of turns equal to that rating.

## Poison

Outside of combat, a character who is the victim of a poison or toxin suffers lethal damage over a period of time equal to the poison's Toxicity. Some substances deal this damage only once. Others deal this damage once per turn or once per hour until purged, or until the poison has run its course. To resist the damage, make a reflexive Stamina + Resolve – Toxicity roll. Each success reduces the damage taken by one. This roll must be made every time the poison deals damage, unless the character stops fighting and gives in.

## Vehicles

In the Chronicles of Darkness, vehicles serve numerous functions. Of course, they get people from point A to point B. This is essential in a horror story, since getting away from a scare or rushing to protect the endangered are genre staples. However, for creative characters, they serve as effective weapons against daunting threats, ways to close the gap between human capability and the supernatural, and as complex tools to solve complex problems. Characters stranded in the woods with a broken axle can use an engine block to cook dinner in a pinch, or to send smoke signals. With just some rope, a car becomes a towing machine, a way to interrogate a monster, or an inefficient but highly effective lockpick.

### Example Vehicles

| Vehicle | Dice Modifier | Size | Durability/Structure | Speed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motorcycle | -1 | 7 | 2/9 | 100 |
| Compact Car | -2 | 8 | 3/11 | 90 |
| Family Car | -3 | 12 | 3/15 | 80 |
| Sports Car | -1 | 10 | 2/12 | 140 |
| Limousine | -4 | 20 | 3/18 | 60 |
| Van | -3 | 18 | 3/21 | 80 |
| Pickup Truck | -2 | 15 | 4/19 | 80 |
| SUV | -2 | 15 | 4/19 | 100 |
| Motorboat | -2 | 10 | 2/12 | 60 |

# Vehicle Traits

These rules add specific traits to vehicles, while keeping them relatively abstract.

**Dice Modifier:** This is the amount subtracted or added from the driver's Dexterity + Drive dice pools.

**Size:** This is the general size of the vehicle. Size in the Storytelling System is an abstract that reflects weight, mass, bulkiness, and space. **Look to the chart on p. 26 for guidelines.**

**Durability:** Durability reflects the general toughness of the materials, and their ability to withstand harm. Any time a vehicle would take damage, subtract its Durability from the amount suffered. As a rule, wood, thick glass, or hard plastic offer 1 Durability, stone or aluminum offer 2 Durability, and steel or iron offer 3 Durability. Additional Durability can be added for reinforced items. Sources of aggravated damage ignore Durability.

**Structure:** Structure is the amount of punishment a vehicle can take before becoming useless. It's usually equal to the object's Size plus Durability. However, weaker or stronger objects may be lower or higher. An object suffering half its Structure in damage levies -2 to any rolls to operate it. At three fourths its Structure in damage, it levies -5 to use. Bashing, lethal, and aggravated damage are applied equally to Structure. Structure damage requires repair rolls **(see p. 103)** to fix.

**Speed:** This is the vehicle's safe Speed. This requires about a minute of acceleration to reach for many vehicles (or 20 turns in combat). The fastest sports cars reach this speed in about 15 seconds (or five turns). Most vehicles can reach one and a half times their Speed within another minute. However, when operating above normal Speed, apply the vehicle's default Dice Modifier as an additional penalty to all rolls. While above normal Speed, all rolls to maneuver the vehicle that fail are treated as dramatic failures. Additionally, turning the vehicle more than 45 degrees in a turn while above normal Speed requires an instant action maneuvering roll to keep the vehicle stable; failure overturns it and counts as a crash.

As a general rule, most vehicles gain 5 Speed per turn. Vehicles with the High Acceleration tag gain 10 Speed per turn. Successes on a Dexterity + Drive roll add 5 Speed to the normal acceleration. Remember to apply the vehicle's Dice Modifier to this roll. Vehicles marked as Slow Acceleration cannot benefit from rolls to improve acceleration.

*Example: Suzy has a compact car. On the first turn, it has 5 Speed. On the second, it has 10 Speed. Since she's trying to escape from a rampaging wendigo, that's not enough, so she kicks it into high gear. Her player rolls Dexterity + Drive – 2 (the car's Dice Modifier) and gets three successes. That adds another 15 to the Speed, so it's now going at 25 Speed. The wendigo runs faster and faster, so she keeps pushing forward. Once she exceeds 90 Speed, all her rolls begin suffering -4 instead of -2, since she's pushing the vehicle past its safe limit. It'll go up to a potential 135 Speed if she keeps it up.*

**Modified Vehicles:** With mechanical knowhow, characters can modify vehicles from their base statistics. A vehicle can support a number of modifications equal to twice the technician's Craft dots; each modification requires four hours' work to install. If stressed or lacking sufficient tools, the Storyteller can require an Intelligence + Crafts roll for each modification. Potential modifications include:

- +1 Dice Modifier (limit +5)
- +2 dice to a secondary equipment bonus. For example, a masterful paint job which offers dice to Persuasion rolls. (limit +4 per bonus)
- +0.5 Size (2 modifications add 1 Size, adds Structure)
- +0.5 Durability (2 modifications add 1 Durability, limit 5)
- +2 Structure
- +5 Speed
- Remove Slow Acceleration tag from vehicle. (3 modifications)
- Add High Acceleration tag to vehicle. (2 modifications)

# Crashes

When a vehicle hits a character or another vehicle, a crash occurs. There are two basic scenarios for this rule:

## Vehicle Hitting Light Object

This occurs when a vehicle hits something equal to or less than half its Size. The light object suffers one tenth the vehicle's Speed in bashing damage, plus half its Size (rounded down). The driver must make a Dexterity + Drive roll, factoring in the vehicle's Dice Modifier. Failure means the vehicle takes half the struck object's Size plus one tenth its own Speed in damage. Any damage that exceeds the vehicle's Durability is also applied to passengers and the driver as bashing damage. Effective seat belts, air bags, and other safety devices halve this damage.

If the driver is actively trying to strike the light object, make a Dexterity + Drive roll, penalized by Defense if applicable. Failure means the vehicle fails to hit. Successes are added to the damage caused to the victim, but not to the driver and passengers. This does require a second Drive roll, however, to resist taking damage.

## Vehicle Hitting Heavy Object

This occurs when a vehicle hits something more than half its Size. Both objects suffer one half the other object's Size (rounded down) plus one tenth the relative Speed in damage. If the two objects are colliding against each other head on or perpendicularly, add their Speeds together for this. If they're moving parallel to each other, subtract the lower Speed from the higher Speed. If able to react **(potentially involving a Wits + Composure roll to detect surprise, per p. 88)**, both drivers can make Dexterity + Drive rolls. Each success removes two damage from the amount their vehicle suffers.

Any damage that exceeds an object's Durability is also applied as bashing damage to the driver and its passengers. As above, effective seat belts, air bags, and other safety devices halve this damage.

# Equipment

Equipment, tools, and technology help to solve problems. Having the right tool for the job can mean the difference between life and death, or, in the Chronicles of Darkness, the difference between life and a fate worse than death. This list is not all inclusive, but features many of the tools that characters in the might have at their disposal.

Equipment is divided up by the Skills with which they typically assist. Mental Equipment typically assists with Mental Skills, for example. Additionally, Supernatural Equipment deals with the paranormal, and may not be suitable for every chronicle. Lastly, Bygones are items that characters cannot procure easily or recreate. They're unique items that deal with the otherworldly.

**See p. 268, in Appendix One, for equipment and service listings.**

## Availability and Procurement

The dot cost of a piece of equipment reflects directly on the Resources cost if your character wishes to purchase it (or the cost of components, for some things). It also reflects the level of Allies or other Social Merit required to find the item, and the Skill level required to procure it with a single dice roll. For example, if a Party Invitation has Cost • • •, a character with Larceny • • should not be able to find and steal the item without a dice roll, but a character with Politics • • • • might be able to get one by virtue of saying the right words to the right organization. If your character wishes to obtain higher Availability items with their Skills, it requires a deeper effort.

## Size, Durability, and Structure

These are guidelines that represent common, standard examples of the items in question. For most items, characters could procure better examples, at a higher Availability rating.

## Dice Bonuses

Most equipment offers a bonus to dice rolls pertaining to its use. Multiple items can influence a given roll, but a roll should not receive more than a +5 bonus.

## Game Effect

A character with the item can use these Effects. Any restrictions, costs, or parameters are listed individually.

# Building Equipment

The reverend's wife isn't what she seems. She claims to have been saved by a miracle, but you know better. You know she isn't the reverend's wife at all. Something else took her place. As you learn more (and wish you hadn't), you discover that whatever the monster is, it sends and receives radio signals. You guess monsters can upgrade to the twenty-first century, too. You think maybe you can expose it to the congregation if you overload its receiver with interference. All you have to do is modify that old walkie talkie set your dad has in his garage. And pray.

## Equipment Types

While many characters can gain access to equipment of all kinds through purchase, borrowing, blackmail, or theft, some prefer (or are forced) to make it themselves. In this context, the word "equipment" refers not only to physical objects like weapons and tools, but also anything else that can be created by a character to help him out with an action he wants to take. If it would offer a bonus to an action, or would make actions possible that were previously not, it can likely be considered "equipment."

Five types of equipment can be built:

- **Physical Objects:** The most common type of equipment. Most of the items found in the Appendix **(p. 268)** are physical objects, as are weapons and armor. Creative works also fall into this category.

- **Organizations:** A small group of people assembled to address a particular need. A small cult and a cadre of bodyguards are good examples. Organizations built as equipment usually disband after one game session unless the player purchases them as Merits afterward.

- **Repositories:** Any collection of research materials and knowledge sources. A library of books, a database, and an assortment of security footage all count. A character doesn't need to build a repository to benefit from an already-existing source; this only reflects the activity of gathering materials for repeated future use. If the player purchases the Library Merit for a repository she built, the Merit stacks with the equipment bonus, to a maximum bonus of five dice.

- **Plans:** Characters can "build" a plan to orchestrate a complex encounter with a specific goal involving multiple people, like a heist, a raid, or a rescue. If successful, this piece of "equipment" grants its bonus to everyone involved, but winks out of existence as soon as the plan definitively succeeds or fails. The Storyteller shouldn't force the players to come up with every little detail of the plan —abstraction is what the dice are for — though if the players are gung ho about the particulars, that's fine too.

- **Mystical Equipment:** Anything that carries minor supernatural potency, such as a circle of protection using salt and bone, a protective amulet, or a werewolf trap made of silver, counts as mystical equipment. For more rules about using a spirit's bane in wards and other rituals, **see p. 138**.

## To Roll or Not to Roll

Building equipment should never take more than the time between one scene and the next. If it can't reasonably be built in a few hours or less, the character needs to acquire it another way. This system isn't meant to cover building a car from scratch or getting an entire business off the ground — it's for creating solutions to immediate problems. Building truly supernatural relics is beyond the capabilities of characters presented in this book.

If the character has plenty of time, isn't under any duress, and has dots in the relevant Skill equal to the equipment bonus a standard example of the equipment would provide, no roll is necessary. The Storyteller simply determines how long it should take and it's done, either with some roleplay within a scene, or it's stated to have happened between scenes.

However, if the character is under pressure to get the job done before that werewolf picks up her scent, or while she's under attack by enormous slavering spiders, the player needs to roll. Likewise, if she's trying to build something that's beyond her casual expertise (i.e., something with an equipment bonus greater than her dots in the relevant Skill, or something the Storyteller determines is too complex to be made without a roll) then the dice come out. The Storyteller may also call for a roll if the player wants to build a more impressive version of the equipment that has higher traits than the standard example.

## The Build Equipment Action

The type of equipment the character builds determines which dice pool to use. Most physical objects use Wits + Crafts, or Wits + Expression for creative works; organizations may use Presence or Manipulation + Socialize or Streetwise; repositories usually use Intelligence + Academics; and mystical equipment usually uses Wits + Occult. Plans are a slightly different animal, and require a Wits + Composure roll. The Storyteller or player can suggest alternatives if appropriate.

The Build Equipment roll always takes a penalty equal to the intended equipment bonus. When the equipment is meant to grant other benefits, like a new function, an increased trait, or access to a resource, each benefit counts as a one-die bonus for this purpose, as well as to determine whether a player needs to roll in the first place. Weapons impose a penalty equal to their weapon modifier, and armor imposes a penalty equal to its highest armor rating (general or ballistic). As usual, this penalty can't exceed -5.

The Storyteller may require the use of Resources, Contacts, or other Merits, or a separate research action, to reflect putting effort into securing the right materials, contacting the right person, or having enough specialized knowledge to build the thing to begin with. This should only apply when the character wants to build something particularly complex or potent and it would enhance the drama of the story to do so. The Storyteller shouldn't use this as a hoop the player must jump through, but rather as a way of introducing interesting plot elements to an action. However, when it comes to mystical equipment, these rules don't replace the need to discover a creature's bane first; the best a player can do is an equipment bonus or minor benefit without that information.

**Dice Pool:** Varies

**Action:** Instant (Special)

While the Build Equipment action is instant and thus requires only one roll and one success, the actual game time that passes can range from a few minutes to a few hours. It's up to the Storyteller how long it takes, though in most cases the measurement of in-game time doesn't matter much — the only important considerations are whether the action is finished before something else happens or not, and how many other people's actions occur in the interim.

If a Build action occurs during an action scene, the number of turns it takes to complete is equal to the penalty the roll takes for the equipment bonus and benefits, although it still only requires one roll. Some Build actions are impossible during action scenes, like convincing a room full of people to join a character in peaceful protest, or gathering articles for a research database. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether a Build action can be completed during an action scene or not.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character fails outright, and suffers some negative consequence. It could be taking damage from an explosive reaction, gaining a negative Condition like Embarrassing Secret or Leveraged, or leading a supernatural threat directly to the character's location. The Storyteller should devise a consequence appropriate to the circumstances.

**Failure:** The character successfully builds the equipment, but it carries the Fragile or Volatile Condition (see below).

**Success:** The character successfully builds the equipment and anyone can use it as normal.

**Exceptional Success:** The player may choose to add one bonus die or one other benefit to the equipment. Equipment bonuses still may not exceed +5.

## Equipment Conditions

Unlike most Conditions, these follow the equipment itself. Any character using the flawed equipment suffers this Condition until resolved. The Storyteller and player should work together to decide whether Fragile or Volatile is more appropriate to the equipment in question. Generally, organizations, plans, and ephemeral mystical equipment like warding circles are better suited to Volatile since they cease to exist soon after they're created anyway, while other types can go either way.

### FRAGILE

The equipment the character is using to aid his action won't last long for some reason, whether because it's an object put together with duct tape and bubble gum, or because his relationship with the people involved sours, or because his computer ends up suffering a blue screen of death and the data is corrupted. A plan may be Fragile because of disrupted communication between the characters, or because of an unexpected hurdle, etc. The equipment ceases to exist in any usable form after a number of uses equal to its creator's dots in the Skill used to build it.

**Possible Sources:** Achieving a failure on a Build Equipment roll.

**Resolution:** The equipment falls apart one way or another. Plans grant one Beat to each player whose character is involved when this Condition resolves.

**Beat:** N/A

### VOLATILE

The equipment the character is using to aid his action is ready to blow at any moment, figuratively or literally. One wrong word, one badly-placed rune, and it's time to duck and cover. A plan may be Volatile because it backfires terribly, or because a Storyteller character betrays the group, etc. Any failure achieved while benefiting from the equipment is automatically a dramatic failure. The equipment may continue to exist after this Condition is resolved, but if so, its equipment bonus is reduced by two dice. This can create equipment *penalties* if the original bonus was fewer than two dice.

**Possible Sources:** Achieving a failure on a Build Equipment roll.

**Resolution:** The character suffers a dramatic failure while using the equipment. Plans grant one Beat to each player whose character is involved when this Condition resolves.

**Beat:** N/A

## Jury Rigging

When you're dangling from a grappling hook 30 feet above the cold concrete with an angry mob of gunmen on your tail, you don't have the luxury of time. That Molotov cocktail you're mixing gets done now or never. That's where jury rigging comes in.

**Dice Pool:** Varies

**Action:** Instant

Use the same dice pool you would use to build the equipment normally. A Jury Rigging action is a normal instant action that cuts out all the rest of the game time that Build Equipment usually takes. Every failure while Jury Rigging is a dramatic failure.

The Storyteller may rule that some equipment is too complex to be Jury Rigged.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character fails outright, and suffers some negative consequence. It could be taking damage from an explosive reaction, gaining a negative Condition like Embarrassing Secret or Leveraged, or leading a supernatural threat directly to the character's location. The Storyteller should devise a consequence appropriate to the circumstances, although in some cases, the natural consequence of the character failing to get himself out of a pinch is enough.

**Failure:** As dramatic failure.

**Success:** The character successfully builds the equipment, but it carries the Fragile or Volatile Condition (see above).

**Exceptional Success:** The character successfully builds the equipment and anyone can use it as normal.

## Repair, Modifications, and Upgrades

A character may want to fix or alter a piece of equipment that already exists. These actions usually only apply to physical objects, though exceptions are possible. Doing so constitutes making a Build Equipment roll as usual, but the penalty applied equals the *difference* between the object's current state and the bonus or benefits the player wants to add. Broken objects are considered to have an equipment bonus of 0. Partially-functional objects may have a bonus only one or two dice lower than their usual bonus. So for instance, if a computer would normally grant a +2 to research rolls but won't start and is therefore currently at a 0, the roll to repair it would suffer a -2.

To modify or upgrade an object by increasing its traits or giving it new functions, simply treat each modification as a +1 equivalent. A character can *replace* one function with another at no penalty — for instance, reversing the function of a walkie talkie to cause interference instead of receiving signals.

**Modifying vehicles is beyond the scope of these rules and uses a different system, detailed on p. 99.**

## Taking Your Time

A player may choose to build equipment as an extended action rather than making the usual single roll, taking no built-in penalty to any of the rolls. Instead, the target number of required successes equals the total intended bonus and benefits of the equipment + one. Typically, players do this to avoid taking large penalties for complex equipment, or when they have small dice pools to begin with and don't want to risk a chance die. The Storyteller determines the time between rolls as usual. **See "Extended Actions," p. 70, for further explanation.** Overall success and failure work as normal for the Build Equipment action.

The Storyteller may also allow a player to build equipment that normally lies beyond the scope of this system, such as a car or a business, with an extended action. In this case, the time between rolls and total successes required should match the effort involved. Building a car may take a week between rolls and require 15 total successes, for example. Storytellers should keep in mind, however, that it's usually much easier to acquire such equipment in other ways, like stealing or purchasing a car, or using Social Maneuvering to convince a potential business partner to take the bait. As a result, building this kind of equipment with extended actions should only be done if the player really *wants* to make it from scratch.

## Examples of Play

Meghan plays Cassidy, who's trapped in a warehouse with something that has huge teeth and red eyes. She stumbles across a crate filled with office supplies, and Meghan declares that Cassidy wants to jury rig a makeshift chain weapon using rubber bands and staplers. Since the chain has a weapon modifier of +1 **(see "Melee Weapons Chart," p. 269)**, the Build Equipment roll takes a one-die penalty. Cassidy has Wits 3 and Crafts 2, so Meghan rolls four dice for the Build action and achieves one success. The Storyteller decides that the newly-built "chain" has the Fragile Condition and will therefore fall apart after just two uses. On Cassidy's next turn, she successfully uses the weapon to grapple the creature, and keeps it pinned with the chain while she smashes a window to get out. Unfortunately, after one more turn of the creature's struggles against the chain, the rubber bands snap and the creature chases Cassidy out of the warehouse and down the street. Meghan earns a Beat for resolving the Fragile Condition.

A Storyteller character has been captured by a crime lord, and the player characters make plans to rescue him. They decide to build a plan as equipment to help them out, and the Storyteller rules that they must roll, since they only have two hours before the crime lord makes his move. The players describe a general idea of the plan, with a part for each character to play in the rescue, and the Storyteller decides the plan makes good sense and will grant a +2 to everyone's rolls in execution. The character with the best Wits + Composure pool is the primary actor, and everyone else contributes with teamwork. The Build Equipment roll takes a two-die penalty and, with five dice left over, fails to produce any successes. The Storyteller and players agree that the plan carries the Volatile Condition, and the rescue proceeds as planned. During the rescue scene, one of the players fails a roll to sneak past a guard despite using the plan's two-die equipment bonus, and it automatically becomes a dramatic failure. This resolves the Condition and causes the guard to sound an alarm throughout the crime lord's mansion. The players each gain a Beat for Volatile's resolution, and the player who failed her roll gains another for the dramatic failure. The "equipment" that was the plan is now done for, and the players must improvise to face the new complication.

Yevgeny is not a superstitious man. He's not even a Catholic. All the same, the thought of doing this deal in St. Ann's, deconsecrated though it is, makes him nervous in ways he cannot articulate. But this is where the client feels comfortable, and Yevgeny is nothing if not a full-service operation. The crate, old and rusted and stenciled "СОВЕТСКАЯ АРМИЯ," squats before the chancel as though to accept absolution.

"Yevgeny?" The voice is a woman's, young. Yevgeny can't see her clearly for the shadows of the cames.

"I am. And you are the elephant hunter."

"Sorry, what now?"

"Firepower like this, you must be hunting elephants. Or planning to overthrow a small government."

"You got me, I'm staging a coup against the East Bollingsworth Board of Alderpersons. Can we get on with this?" She tosses the duffel with the money into the transept.

"That's not enough."

"You didn't count it."

"It's what we agreed on?"

"Of course."

Yevgeny shrugs. "Then it's not enough. Extra complications. The price has gone up."

"That's not going to work for me, Yevgeny. I'm on a timetable here."

"For your Glorious People's Revolution of East Bollingsworth?"

"Look, I get that you've got this whole Solntsevskaya Bratva thing going, and it's working for you. But I need this now, and I need it for the price we agreed on."

"And yet."

Yevgeny's smile says "terribly sorry for the inconvenience, but you're alone and I have the automatic weapon, so what can you do?" Hers says "don't make me do this," but Yevgeny can't see it for the shadows of the cames.

"And yet. I have to confess, I thought something like this might happen. That's why I bought a friend."

Ximena whistles, low and liquid, and the shadows rush away from her and fly shrieking at Yevgeny with his grandmother's face.

# Black Threads: Storytelling

**For why do you despise my fear and curse my pride?**

**But I am she who exists in all fears and strength in trembling.**

**I am she who is weak, and I am well in a pleasant place.**

**I am senseless and I am wise.**

**-The Thunder, Perfect Mind**

The group of people who get together to tell stories set in the Chronicles of Darkness using this book and others are players. At any time, players can agree to have one player take on the role of Storyteller to guide the story and take on special tasks to guide the group. A Storyteller is still a player, though her responsibilities to the group are different. Some groups find it ideal to stick with one Storyteller throughout the course of a chronicle, and give up some of their choices as players to experience more surprises and twists. That's a great way to play. Some groups choose to rotate Storyteller responsibilities, keeping most or all of the story secrets either on the table for everyone to use, or undefined until they come up in play, holding on to more of their out-of-character choices and sharing the load of Storyteller responsibilities. Some groups give certain storylines to specific players, letting that player hold Storyteller responsibilities for that storyline, but allowing them to have a character in the game so long as they can only engage with *other* storylines. This is tricky, and requires that everyone works together and cooperates, but is often worth the effort.

When using any of these methods, players can look at Storytelling less as a special and unique position for one person, and more as a list of things to do that players can handle singularly, in a group, or by taking turns. But what are those responsibilities, exactly? Here is a sample list, though your group may need more or fewer assignments than those covered here. It will also help if, as a group, you decide on any additional responsibilities you'd like to parcel out to one or more players in the group.

## Invisible Hands: Storytelling Responsibilities

**Provide Space to Play**: This is often a Storyteller's responsibility, but should it be? This is a good thing to go over with the group to help ease the burden on any one specific player. Leaving all the details of when and where to play to only one player can lead to burnout, fast.

**Food and Drink**: If you're gaming for any real period of time, are players responsible for their own food and drink? Is everyone pitching in to provide for the group? Again, these logistical details shouldn't be taken for granted, and shouldn't be left entirely to the game's host or a central Storyteller.

**Establishing Setting and Theme**: It can be tricky to do this alone, though traditionally it's expected that a single Storyteller is totally responsible for this. However, figuring out the setting and theme for your Chronicles of Darkness games can be a communal experience, a conversation between players. Try starting with a piece of media, an existential question, or an urban legend you want to explore. Alternately, start with a strong "what if," such as, "What if the covered bridge downtown really was haunted?" or, "What would it look like if Wall Street was actually home to roaming packs of werewolves?"

**Interesting Characters**: Within the group, it's everyone's in the group responsibility to bring interesting characters to the game that will also suit the settings and creative themes of the game. Sometimes that means a player has to back off

on a character concept that will be too difficult for the other characters to deal with. Other times, it will mean backing off on a concept that makes the other players uncomfortable. Typically, the final say as to what does and doesn't fit at the table is in the hands of a central Storyteller. However, as a shared responsibility, consider a blind vote or an open discussion if any characters seem like they'd be more disruptive than challenging. Destroying the themes and vibe of a game, and making players uncomfortable out of character, is not actually subversive; everyone needs to work together to find better ways to create in-game disquiet and make the game interesting.

**Cheerlead for the Player Characters**: Too often, having a separate and authoritative singular game master role creates an assumption that a Storyteller is somehow the enemy of the characters, and the antagonist of the players. In fact, any player acting as a Storyteller should be the characters' biggest fan. This position doesn't mean characters should always get what they want and never have anything bad happen to them. On the contrary, if the Storyteller is the number-one fan of these characters, she wants to see the characters challenged so they can grow. Since character growth is tied to Conditions and Beats, for them to grow they must be put in difficult situations. Think of challenging these characters, on some level, as nurturing them rather than attempting to destroy them.

**Storyteller Character Management**: Depending on how you develop your chronicle, whether you use a chronicle starter like Missing Person, below, or find some other way to populate your chronicle, you will have characters that are not player characters. These are characters with dim spotlights, whose agency is often focused on propping up the player characters' stories. If the group is sharing Storytelling responsibilities, Storyteller characters may be left up for grabs, letting any player bring them into play in a specific scene. In that case, any secrets they hold or motivations they have should be on the table, though not abused as out-of-character knowledge. The best way to reflect these open secrets and keep the characters consistent is to give them Aspirations, so if a player is temporarily taking control, they get a better idea of how to motivate the character. Even if a group is using a single, dedicated Storyteller, she might assign some players Storyteller characters as side characters to manage and motivate, which can help keep the world feeling alive and populated.

**Storylines**: As mentioned before, a single Storyteller can hold all the secrets and present all of the challenges in a storyline to considerable success. Conversely, these storylines can be broken up between any number of players or left as open plot kits that any player can pick up and use at any time.

**Scene Framing**: You can read more on scene framing later in this chapter. Storytellers are often handed all the responsibility when it comes to "Where do we go next?" and even "What do we see?" Of course, pitching scenes can be put on rotation, with players taking turns deciding not just where the story should move next physically, but tagging which storylines they want to follow up on or which characters' struggles they want to explore next.

**Providing Regalia**: Having character portraits, maps of the city, journal entries, and physical representations of clues or puzzles can do a lot for a game, and providing regalia is some next-level Storytelling if you're not used to it. Printouts, fake newspaper articles, and so on can be exciting and provide additional sensory input. However, this doesn't have to fall entirely on a single Storyteller, especially if players are sharing storylines or managing Storyteller characters. If you bring a real puzzle box to a game session and put it on the table, simply saying, "Let me know if you manage to open that out of character," then, one way or another, players will find a way to bring that puzzle box into the game's story.

## Spines

What holds your scene upright? What gives you the frame and basic shape on which to hang the moments of roleplay, action, and exploration? What makes up the skeleton of your chronicle, which holds the meat and muscle of your stories?

Simply put, it's your scene framing. The scenes themselves, how they play out, and what your characters do is the meat and skin and connective tissue, but how you frame scenes helps to hold the rest of that up. Weak scene framing means that the meat of your story hangs limp and feels disconnected from moment to moment. With a strong, flexible, healthy spine, though, you can build and grow your chronicle.

**Pitching the Scene**: First, you need to pitch the scene to the table. "Pitching" makes it sound like you're giving players the choice of which scenes to follow through and what they want to explore next. That's correct, and in fact, whenever possible, invite players to pitch scenes when you're stalled or they're brimming with ideas. To pitch, you want to suggest a place, a storyline to follow, Storyteller characters who can be involved or at least sought out, and which player characters should be in the scene to begin with. Once everyone agrees on the basics, you can start outlining the scene in a little more detail.

**Central Conflict or Theme**: This is optional, but it's a helpful step you can use whenever possible. As well as describing the who, what, and where of a scene, you can also frame it in terms of why. You can do this directly by saying something like "think in terms of lust and envy here," or you can do it subtly through your descriptions, music you play lightly in the background, or other symbolic representations of the vibe you're trying to create. It's a great idea to quickly jot down what everyone wants from the scene, perhaps related to their Aspirations, and check in at the end of the scene to figure out who got what they wanted and who didn't. What will that mean for the next scene?

**Lights and Camera**: Set your scene. If you know where, who, and maybe a few other things, you can dress your scene with a few key details to suit the theme and mood. Describe it like the blurb in a screenplay if you like, with camera angles and lighting suggestions. Players eat these details up. The idea is that the physical aspects of a scene should never be left as a blank, white room. There is no such thing as a blank, white room, unless characters are literally in a blank, white

room, in which case you focus in on the sweat on people's brows, the sound of heavy breathing, the glare of the lights, the subtle scent of fear-tinged sweat, and so on.

**In Medias Res**: This is a classic fiction technique where the scene starts in the middle of the action.

You enter the room, the musky smell of pot and sex filling your nose, and you know this is the right place by the strangely-familiar occult symbol on the wall. Suddenly, the door behind you slams open and someone in black body armor shouts, "Hands in the air, this is the police!"

Afterwards, you can pan back, examining how characters got to that exact moment. You can also observe the scene for clues and missed nuances, as you would a still from a movie. Then, let the characters react.

Similarly, you can cut a scene off in a way that seems premature, only to resolve it in a new, calmer scene.

"Over my dead mother's rotting corpse!" your enemy shouts, as he and his thugs pull out Uzis ... and scene. It's three hours later now, which one of you is injured, which one of you is fine, and who among you killed a guy? Would you like to argue in character, unpacking the scene that was just skipped?

**Connective Tissue**: To complete a solid framework, you can cap off a scene in the same way you framed where it began. Check in with characters who either never came onstage or left early, ask players where exactly their character is going next, or describe the details they missed in the scene or an action from a Storyteller character that foreshadows trouble yet to come. Because this is connective tissue, any one of these scene-capping aspects can be a great springboard into the next scene. Also, never fear using phrases like "meanwhile, across town in the central banking tower..." or "unbeknownst to the characters, trouble was coming in the form of..." A good scene, framed well on the front and back end, makes every scene strong and helps your chronicle feel complete and constantly in motion.

## Pulled Muscles

When you pull a muscle, it hurts like hell, but when it heals the muscle is stronger. When you fail a roll, it can suck like hell, but it sets a character up to be stronger.

Here's the math: players using a dice pool of three will roll one success for their character most of the time in a straightforward roll. Rolls are very rarely straightforward, and failure happens. Characters, player characters, and Storyteller characters will fail, even *must* fail, in order to progress a story forward. That's as true in a Chronicles of Darkness game as it is in fiction. In many ways, players should celebrate failure, as it brings them one step closer to even greater success.

### Why Should Characters Fail?

For strictly mechanical reasons, characters need to fail because failure is tied into the Conditions and Beat systems. It is therefore necessary for characters to fail to advance systemically. Conditions have a built-in buy in as many of them are resolved by players choosing to fail a roll before rolling it in order to end the Condition and take a Beat. That's key

here, as players should be given plenty of options to choose for their characters to fail. They should have control over it in some way, and remember that their character's failure is empowering in more than one way.

### It's in the Story

To some players, "a sloppy series of endless tragedies which compound on each other until, ultimately, everyone dies alone" is an ideal Chronicles of Darkness game. However, that's not for everyone. Of course, on the other end, competence porn where characters are always awesome and never suffer real setbacks is not in keeping with any Chronicles of Darkness game. A good story will appeal to a majority of players; let the players who naturally want to run their characters into the ground do so. And the players who are afraid of failure? Talk to them. Take their favorite movie, and examine the series of conflicts and setbacks the heroic characters experience and draw parallels with how you'd like the pacing of your chronicle to go. It's a good idea for you to be familiar with several types of plot pacing, anyway. The best fiction puts the characters through a series of setbacks contrasted with rising action, so your chronicle should, too.

### Succeed at a Cost

There are times when failure would really drag down a game, but the dice say that's what happened. Sometimes when a Storyteller says, "Well, just roll to see what happens," and what happens is an inexplicable failure, you can always opt instead for a success but with consequences attached. This is also a technique to use when your player appears crestfallen when the dice hit the table and you may lose engagement from them. "Okay, the punch lands, but...," "Yeah, she's actually pretty into your sales pitch, but...." Give the player what she was shooting for, but tie it to something that's going to sting down the road.

### Pick Your Poison

It is always better to give your players more choices rather than fewer, because more chances to choose are more chances for drama and intrigue. A failed dice roll often feels like the end of a player's choices, and carries with it a sense of finality. "Well, we didn't find the clue we need, guess we'll go do something else." That's not intrigue. Instead of a simple failure, give the players a choice, a difficult decision, one that affects the story going forward. For example, "You find the clue, but it implicates only you," or, "You don't find the clue and your case is at a dead end, but you've discovered a new, possibly-unrelated crime to investigate."

## No Meat Wasted

Sometimes, players get distracted and don't perfectly follow a Storyteller's leads. Players often don't take the obvious path, distracted by interesting Storyteller characters, miscommunication about clues and details, or character exploration on which a Storyteller didn't count.

This is a good thing, and as a Storyteller you shouldn't feel disappointment or frustration. The story follows the characters, not the other way around, and if you can keep that in mind, there are a lot of behind-the-curtain tricks that you and the other players can utilize to make the whole thing feel more cohesive, while avoiding losing any good material you've prepared ahead of time.

### Schrödinger's Character

If you've planned for a confrontation with a Storyteller character to happen at the bar where the characters are supposed to hang out, but which they've avoided for the third game session in a row, move the damned confrontation. Shuffle your Storyteller characters around if you need to, move clues or story details into your players' paths, rather than worrying about the fact that you can't force them into the right place for the right plot points. Any player can suggest moves like this; it doesn't have to be a Storyteller secret. Also, you can drop it out in the open for everyone to act on. "Guys, Garry the Knife is coming for you, where does he surprise you?"

### Aspiration Inspiration

Characters who sit on their thumbs aren't exciting, tragic, or drawn into intrigue. If you can't seem to motivate your characters to explore the various channels of the mysteries you've built on their own, then tie the whole thing to their Aspirations. You can do this by suggesting new Aspirations when they've satisfied old ones, asking, "Hey, did you guys ever get around to what happened to Sara? Is that loose end bugging your character at all? Sounds like a good Aspiration." It's okay to be direct. It's always okay to be direct. You can also reverse engineer this, by finding a way to tie existing Aspirations to the path you'd like to guide your players toward. You don't ever want to force them to deal with a story they aren't interested in, because you never know why a player wants to avoid a storyline. It might be harmless, or it might be because you've created a story element they don't want to deal with for personal reasons. This is why giving them a choice to follow their Aspirations is better than demanding or steamrolling them into following your plotline. This is particularly important in a Chronicles of Darkness game, which can go to dark places very quickly.

### Recycle the Waste

You know that powerful letter you prepared for a dead Storyteller character to deliver as a ghost to your player characters? Well, it turns out they prevented his death, so that leaves the idea dead instead, right? Not really! After all, someone's got to die sooner or later. Just change the wording on the letter and have it delivered by a different lost soul entirely. Nothing's wasted!

### Conditions and Failing Dramatically

Both negative Conditions and Dramatic Failures are ways for players to fail triumphantly, and for characters to grow

dramatically. They're also tools for you to use to guide players to lost or unexamined material. Is the character terribly Frightened? Does that fear drive them from the current scene to somewhere more ideal for your lost material? You bet it can! And since the character will earn a Beat in the process of satisfying their Condition or their Dramatic Failure, they feel empowered instead of handheld into the next scene. That's a win-win.

## Your Exquisite Corpse

It's an old game, where a player writes down a sentence in a story or draws part of an illustration, hides all but the last word or bottommost portion of the picture, and the paper is passed to the next player to fill in. After everyone's had a turn, the whole thing is revealed and everyone has a good laugh at the story or illustration produced, a bit at a time, while all were blind to the whole.

Because the Chronicles of Darkness uses open, communal storytelling it's difficult to perfectly simulate a game of Exquisite Corpse, but using a story kit gets you part of the way there. They're great to minimize the amount of heavy lifting put in by a single Storyteller, or to give players who don't normally take on Storyteller responsibilities a way to ease into them. Story kits also help manage games that are asynchronous online or in live-action roleplaying, where one Storyteller isn't quite enough to keep everyone entertained.

It works like this:

Decide on a situation that exists, a conflict between rival gangs, a haunted house, a local political faction turning extremist, a religious leader turning to violence in the name of his faith, or maybe an infection of a rare, supernatural disease. Once you've decided what the situation is, write it down. A paragraph will do. Follow it up with a paragraph describing why the characters should care; do it as a series of six or so bullet points, if you like. You can either target a few characters specifically, or keep it general and let the players opt their characters in. Shoot for an open-ended scenario.

Next, describe three principal Storyteller characters that are either affecting or being affected by the situation. They may be the cause of it, they may be exacerbating it, or they may be victims of the situation. Describe what they are doing now and, more importantly, what they might do to escalate the situation and make it worse for the players. Then, give these key Storyteller characters Attributes and Skills just as you would player characters. Give them three strong Aspirations, with at least one relating to what they're doing now, and one relating to how they're going to make things worse.

Finally, write two or three general characters who might be pulled into the story. For instance, cops called to investigate nonsense at the haunted house, protesters, gangsters, or what have you. Give these tertiary characters basic stats, focusing on dice pools rather than specific Skills and Attributes. Give them a short- and long-term Aspiration. Leave room for a third Aspiration after they've been used in play and given a proper name.

Print out your story kit as a handout for all your players. In short, the Storyteller doesn't run the situation or the story that spills out from it. The players do. Anyone can drag aspects of the situation or Storyteller characters from the story kit into appropriate scenes to get things moving or explore the situation in more detail. If there are deeper secrets within the story kit, such as who is responsible for the haunting or what's really motivating the preacher, you should let them be decided on by the players in play, rather than be predetermined.

## Prick the Skin

Let me suggest you aim for disquiet. Don't try to frighten your players or disgust them and gross them out. Aim instead for disquiet, that strange place just left of normal. Set the situation slightly askew or odd. Make the situation mildly uncomfortable, rather than horrific, and let the players take their personal horror to the level in which they want to invest. This is another opportunity to let players opt in and participate with the darker themes with which they are comfortable. However, it also produces more successful, genuine horror than splatterpunk and snuff storytelling could ever hope to.

Gore isn't scary. It can gross a person out, when applied judiciously, and that can be a valuable tool in the Storyteller's (or player's) toolbox, but it's not a replacement for real dread, and if you pile it on too thick, filling your scenes with vomit and pus and arterial spray, it loses its punch. You'll feel a need to escalate the grossout factor higher and higher, and before too long you've lost the dread, become immune to the grotesque, and made the subversive mundane.

No one wants that.

It's better, maybe, to leave things unseen. Leave evidence of malicious and gruesome deeds, suggest the chaos of the dark, tease at the face of the Devil, and let your players' imaginations fill in the rest. Your players are better at frightening themselves than you ever will be, and while everyone might put forward their darkest fears to suggest directions in which to go to make the story scary, you can't do it as well as their lizard brains can fill in the blanks. Leave room for the unexplained; describe the spot where the shadow falls, and let your players fill in those shadows with their own demons, instead. Aim for disquiet, aim for just off center, aim for subtle and growing dread, and horror will creep into the places you've made for it.

Don't slash the story's throat open to bleed out in gushes; prick it, then ask, "Why does it sting? What is that creepy feeling just under the skin? Probably nothing, right?"

## Missing Persons: Creating Your Setting

According to the FBI, in 2013 close to 63,000 people went missing in the U.S. alone. That means that, by U.S. population at the time, one in every 500 or so people went missing that year. That number is not likely to decrease, especially in the Chronicles of Darkness, where monsters are real and

breathing down our necks – when they bother to breathe, anyway. Also, that number only accounts for *reported* missing persons, when, in fact, plenty of people go missing and have no one who notices or cares enough to report it. Do you know 500 people? In your school, your extended social group and family? Your town? Your neighborhood?

Using the Missing Persons system, you're going to build your setting up around a missing persons case that happens in your characters' lives, or at least in their area. Someone is gone and you, as a group, are going to examine your characters and their setting by the light of police flashlights, to a soundtrack of probing questions.

The missing person does not need to be the focus, or even an important factor, in your story. So if you've already got an idea of the stories you want to create in your Chronicles of Darkness game, don't dismiss using the missing person to build your setting. He can be a major mystery to unravel, or a tragic statistic that is of note only because you're thinking about it, and then gone and forgotten as soon as the real story takes off. Your missing person may be a major player or a background element, depending on how the story goes. It's important for you to stay flexible about this, of course, as players may naturally chase any mystery put in front of them. If you expect it's just a background element, tell them so, or else end it quickly and sadly, or quickly and mysteriously, depending on the tone of your Chronicles of Darkness game.

**What You'll Need**: In order to create a missing person to get your chronicle started you'll need players, character sheets, and basic ideas for the kinds of characters most of your players want to play. You'll also need a big sheet of paper everyone can write on. You'll be making a sort of map on this paper. A whiteboard also works. If you don't have either of these, a pile of notecards will do, which you can write on and arrange. As the Storyteller, you're also going to need to determine the scope of your game. Is it focused entirely in one high school that all the characters attend? Is it a whole urban sprawl? Or is it just one small, rural community and the truck stop at the edge of town? Determining the rough scale of your chronicle will help your players sketch out this map. Visual representations of that scale are also helpful; for example, a city map or the blueprints of an apartment complex. A list of names, covering a diverse range of genders, ethnicities, and ages can be helpful as well, so that no one gets stuck on naming Storyteller characters. Random pictures of people for inspiration can also be useful tools.

**How You Do It**: While the players are creating their characters, ask them the questions about the missing person below. Each player will have to answer most of the questions, and add to the map that you're creating together. This map will provide places, Storyteller characters, and relationships to start your chronicle out holistically, so everyone needs to participate. The less the players have predetermined about their character, the better this will work, unless the player is already aware of how Missing Person works, and are eager to get involved. You don't have to answer these questions in any particular order, either. Jump around from step to step and player to player as it feels natural and organic. Just make sure everyone has most of the questions answered by the time you're done so that the map is fleshed out, and everyone has hooks into the world in which your chronicle is set.

## The Missing Person

Someone is missing. Who is it? In order for there to be a person missing, you need to determine who the person is and at least some of the circumstances surrounding their disappearance. A name is a good place to start or, if you can, a character picture or portrait helps the players start to string ideas together. Is she young or old? Is he rich or poor? Does it make sense they're gone; are they the sort who runs off from time to time, or is their disappearance entirely out of the ordinary? Can anyone account for any part of it? Is there a stack of clues and witnesses to sort through, or is this missing person only barely noticed, a statistic, more than a person gone from their community?

### Putting it on Paper

After the Storyteller puts a name, and maybe an image, of the missing person on the table, players can start to help define that person. Jot down about a sentence per player as they discuss the details of the disappearance. Try to keep all statements open ended, leaving room for conflicting evidence and the ambiguity of reality. "She's really popular" is better than "everyone likes her." Popularity can represent a lot of different traits and reactions, whereas determining how exactly people feel about her is limiting. "Police found a lot of blood at the crime scene" is better than "the fact that her blood was everywhere points to homicide" because again, it's vague. If you can, avoid passive statements, too. If you're about to put down a sentence that starts with "there is" or "there are," try to reword it. Having people or things doing something is a lot punchier than having things be done to someone, and so, using the example above, "police found a lot of blood" is better than "there was a lot of blood."

Talk the players through disagreements or conflicting statements. Conflicting ideas can actually contribute to verisimilitude. If you think about anyone real in your life, does everyone in your life share that opinion? For every "funny guy" in your life, there are bound to be people who don't get the jokes or aren't amused by the behavior, and so it's as easy to put down "hilarious" for the missing person as it is to put down "not very funny." This is where direct and punchy statements really help. "The ladies think he's a riot" says a lot more than "some people find him amusing," and leaves room for "he doesn't have many friends" without one canceling out the other. Instead, they paint a stronger, clearer picture of the sort of guy he is based only on how those two seemingly-contradictory ideas bounce off each other. Of course, as with all other steps in the Missing Person chronicle starter, you and your players don't have to sit down and fill out each statement about the missing person right now. They can come back and add their own thoughts as the map develops. Just leave some blank space for new statements as they develop.

Try to avoid using more than one statement from each player. You don't want to write out a huge biography of the missing person; you simply want a framework to connect to and some tantalizing ideas to build from.

### What the Questions Really Answer

Why a disappearance and not a murder? A missing person leaves more questions in the mind than a dead body. After all, a body tells you "this person is dead, their story is at an end." With a missing person, though, ambiguity of mood and tone means you can do a lot more with it as a story. A missing person is a story with, potentially, no ending. The story might act as a background element: sad, hopeless, and flavoring the rest of your chronicle. Conversely, it might be a tense emergency as the missing person is sick, needs medication, is a child, or any other ticking time bomb about to go off at any moment.

## Crime Scenes

From where is she missing? Where did you see him last, and when? What spaces did you share with the missing person? Did you and the missing person go to the same coffee shop every Sunday at the same time for the last three months, and it's only now that he's missing that you've even noticed how frequently you saw one another? Did you see her last in your apartment, as she threw on her jacket and told you to never call her again? Where did you both go, but never actually crossed paths? The missing person lived in the same reality as your characters, whether in their town, block, or school. Whatever the scope of your chronicle, this missing person lived within it just as your characters do, and you're better off anchoring all the characters in real, shared spaces.

### Putting it on Paper

At some point while you're building your chronicle map, each player should put down a location that will matter to the story. Start out with the idea that these locations are all tied to the missing person, but they must also each somehow tie to the player characters. This might be a place the missing person was terrified of, and your character needs to go daily, for example, or a place where you used to live together.

These locations should also act as go-to locations when setting a scene or shaking up the storyline. Any one of these locations can be a great place for the Storyteller to trigger more action or sow seeds for character-driven plot as well. Sometimes simply starting a scene by saying, "Meanwhile, in the graveyard, something is stirring, something unnamed and forgotten," can get things going. These set-piece locations should have a name, a one-sentence description, and a sentence describing both how the player character relates to

them and how the missing person once did. To strengthen the mood of any specific location, instead of a descriptive sentence, players might suggest a musical motif that would fit just as well. This is an excellent technique to anchor a place in the players' minds, especially if you play the song quietly any time a scene starts in the location.

### What the Questions Really Answer

Characters standing around in empty, white rooms in generic buildings, on stock streets in general towns can end up feeling dry and distant. If you focus in and dress the set with memories, moods, themes, and especially details, it becomes real and vital and can inform the story in ways you may not have expected. Vivid settings can help the Storyteller hang on to their passion for the chronicle and prevent the Storyteller from getting burned out. When players are debating whether or not they should take that Dramatic Failure, or how their Condition should manifest in this scene, having a good sense of the mood and details can inspire and encourage them. A rooftop is not the same thing as the grubby, rust-covered rooftop of an aging theater. The latter tells the player that things can fall apart, the structure may not hold, and hell, yes you should consider having your character fall off of something when she fails.

## Implication

How do you know the missing person? Was he a good friend, or a lover? Was she a child or dependent? Is this disappearance keenly felt, or is the character somehow unaware of what is disconnected and broken in their web of relationships? Is the character knowingly responsible for the disappearance, or the catalyst for it? Is she the cause without knowing it? They might have been complete strangers, but because of the rule of seven degrees of separation, no life within your chronicle exists without touching others. This chronicle starter reflects the connections we see and don't see, so while characters may not realize their direct ties to the missing person, the players should be aware of them.

### Putting it on Paper

On your map, as spokes radiating outward, possibly from the locations described in the Crime Scene step, write each character's name down. On the spoke, write a sentence describing either the direct relationship between the character and the missing person, or the effect their disappearance has on the character's life, even if it's on a level understood by the players and Storyteller, but not the character. If a player would like her character be implicated in the disappearance, that's great, but try to keep this very open ended. Consider that "I'm pretty sure I killed her, but the body went missing so I kept quiet" is much more interesting and useful than "I killed her and hid the body." Leave the mystery of the disappearance in, even in the case of direct involvement. Whenever possible, attach opinions and biases to these statements so they can stay ambiguous. "I think I made her run away," or "Everyone blames me for what happened to him" are useful because they leave room for the player to explore how right or wrong those opinions are. They also suggest elements of personality for their characters, as well as how the outside world observes the character. The ways in which the outside world views the disappearance will be handled more thoroughly in a later section.

### What the Questions Really Answer

This may end up being the step that is the most difficult for some players, as they are asked to open their character up to a communal worldbuilding step that not every player is used to. Encourage them gently, but remember that not everyone has to contribute to every single step. It's one thing to decide as a group, "Hey, this person exists and is gone, "but it takes it to the next level to say, "This person is gone, and my character is somehow tied to this potential tragedy." You are asking that player to be accountable, in some way, regarding what happens to characters that are outside the players' control. After all, a player can't spend Experiences to raise the combat stats of their character's girlfriend, so getting attached means the player might be stung should something happen to her. That's why it's important that this step is optional, and not a hard requirement.

If a player wants to get involved but doesn't want their character directly involved with the missing person, that's okay. It's worthwhile to take a step back and look at the social ecology of the characters. Maybe she wouldn't deal with a missing drug dealer, because she's on the straight and narrow, but is the fact that it's a drug dealer who's gone missing a relief to or a burden on her beloved brother, a drug addict?

## Community

Who cares about the disappearance? Who doesn't care about the disappearance? Are there posters everywhere, candlelight vigils? Has the media gotten involved, putting the missing person's face up on TV screens all over the city? If the missing person has family, what are they doing about the disappearance, and what are they telling people about the person who has vanished? A family and community that says "Oh, well, no one is surprised he's gone," assigns a tone of indifference to the local population that the characters may end up taking advantage of, or become victims to. A close-knit community can be a community that knows each other's secrets and keeps them, or one that spreads them around. A disenfranchised community that minds its own business won't be there when someone calls out for help. If a character shouts "Help, fire," who will respond?

### Putting it on Paper

This step can and should happen sporadically over the course of the rest of the chronicle mapping. Draw spokes out from the missing person's name, and draw clouds, like thought bubbles in a comic. In these, with no specific attribution, write some rumors surrounding both the person and

the disappearance. These thought bubbles reflect popular opinion and local myth surrounding the events. They should be specific, but don't need to be anchored to specific characters. "Everyone knows he was kind of a drunk" is acceptable. "The family couldn't give two shits about her" is great, too. Don't worry yet about what the police or other real authorities are doing about the situation; that's a later step. In this situation, you're just putting down things "everyone knows" without closely examining who constitutes "everyone." These rumors don't have to be true, though they may or may not have a grain of truth to them, and the ones that are true may be the strangest of the bunch, depending on the story of your chronicle. Even as you're considering the opinions of the characters directly connected to the missing person, consider the outsider view rather than what the characters may actually be experiencing. So, if one of the player characters is implicated by a rumor, position the statement from outside of the character. Weaker language like "he seemed" or "maybe she" is perfectly acceptable here. Try to keep them short for the sake of space, but if you need to invent a quick urban legend about the rumor, just put a title down and put it on a note off to the side, or something similar.

### What the Questions Really Answer

In a real, living community, be it tightly knit or loose and isolationist, everyone has opinions about the things they see around them. Perhaps they keep these thoughts entirely to themselves, share them only with close family, or mumble them to anyone who will listen. No matter how open or private they keep their thoughts about their environment and neighbors, many people couch these opinions in rumor and attribute the beliefs to "everyone" to avoid personal accountability. When a person hears rumors from the unknown "everyone," they are most likely to only forward the rumors that align with their own existing beliefs. Thus, rumors are transformed, adjusted, and refined to fit the communal zeitgeist of the neighborhood population. Of course, as in a game of whisper-down-the-lane, or telephone, some strange ideas can sneak into popular opinion, making it hard to tell the difference between random hiccups in the chain of ideas and the truly strange Chronicles of Darkness truths.

## Authorities

Do the police care? What questions do they ask you about the missing person? What don't they bother asking? Who has the real power and influence here when it comes to looking into this disappearance? If the police aren't yet involved, why? Is the case federal for some reason? Have the feds chased the local cops away from sensitive matters and taken the whole thing entirely out of the hands of those who live with and around the missing person? Is it a matter of a local authority, like the staff of a university or principal of a powerful private school, keeping things hushed up until they've managed damage control? Is this chronicle set in a prison, with a warden hiding not just this disappearance, but many like it?

### Putting it on Paper

As a group, decide what the major authority is in this situation. You could put down two if you like, perhaps a powerful criminal syndicate that works in opposition to legal authorities, each with their own influence on the situation. Adding more than that gets complicated, and it's generally better to let any complexity grow organically within the course of the game than to try to frontload the chronicle with several competing powers. This chronicle starter is about a missing person, after all, and not a turf war. A turf war may also be happening, but keep it simple.

Next, allow each player to draw a line from the central authority or authorities on which the group has agreed to various people or locations on the map. On the lines, write out dates and facts that depict the authorities' actions without saying much about their motivations for these actions. These details should be grounded in the setting's reality.

#### For Example:

**Location**: Armed police investigators were seen investigating the abandoned chicken processing plant a week after the disappearance.

**Person of Interest**: No one from the police has asked the missing person's ex-husband any questions about his disappearance.

**Player Character**: Members of the local crime family cornered the character and asked her some leading questions about the missing person, then left in a hurry.

**Location**: Neither the cops nor the gang will go to this place for different reasons, so its truths remain unknown to them.

### What the Questions Really Answer

In some ways, this step helps outline what the characters will and won't be able to get away with as they go through the chronicle. Defining the in-game authorities and, more importantly, suggesting how they operate and what they care about, will guide the Storyteller and the players as to where they should focus the hands of justice. (Legal or illegal, most authorities have their own codes of justice.) This step helps to avoid questions like "Why did the cops get to this area so quickly when I fired a gun, but when I called 911 last week, the line was disconnected?" This is because it forces everyone at the table to consider what motivates the powers that be.

## People of Interest

Who else knew the missing person? Who were her friends, acquaintances, and family? What about his enemies and those who meant him harm? These witnesses, suspects, and community figures touched the life of the missing person, but also have connections to the player characters. Are their bonds to the missing person strong and their relationships to the player characters weak? Are they the only real connection between the player characters and the missing person? How do they relate to the locations important to the chronicle, to figures of authority, and to the rumor mill as it grinds along?

## Putting it on Paper

This step can also happen at any point; as soon as the players need someone concrete around whom to anchor a place or idea, create a person of interest. These can be lovers, siblings, or even the old ladies who watch everything the characters do from a window across the street.

Each player should volunteer at least one person of interest while creating this chronicle starter. Write down the person of interest's name on the map, and put a square around it. Consider this character's relationship to the rest of the information on the map. Draw a line from the person of interest to any player character other than the initial player's own. On that line, the player of the second character should write down a one-sentence description of their relationship to the person of interest. The player who volunteered the person of interest should also draw a line between the person of interest and the missing person. She can write a statement of their relationship as it appears to the outside world, perhaps related to her character, perhaps not. As a final step, she should draw a dotted line from the person of interest to either a location, a rumor, an authority, or even another person of interest, symbolizing another connection. There's no need for a description here; the dotted line is just an implied connection that everyone can play off of later.

## What the Questions Answer

People of interest are not the entire population of your chronicle, obviously, but as they spring up, they become representatives of the population. As they are written, they may start off as stereotypes. Build out from that, adding depth and focus. Once the chronicle map is completed, a Storyteller can and should make simple character sheets for the people of interest. At least make sure to make note of their names, whatever is written about them on the map, and give them each at least one strong Aspiration just as you would a player character.

# Media and Inspiration

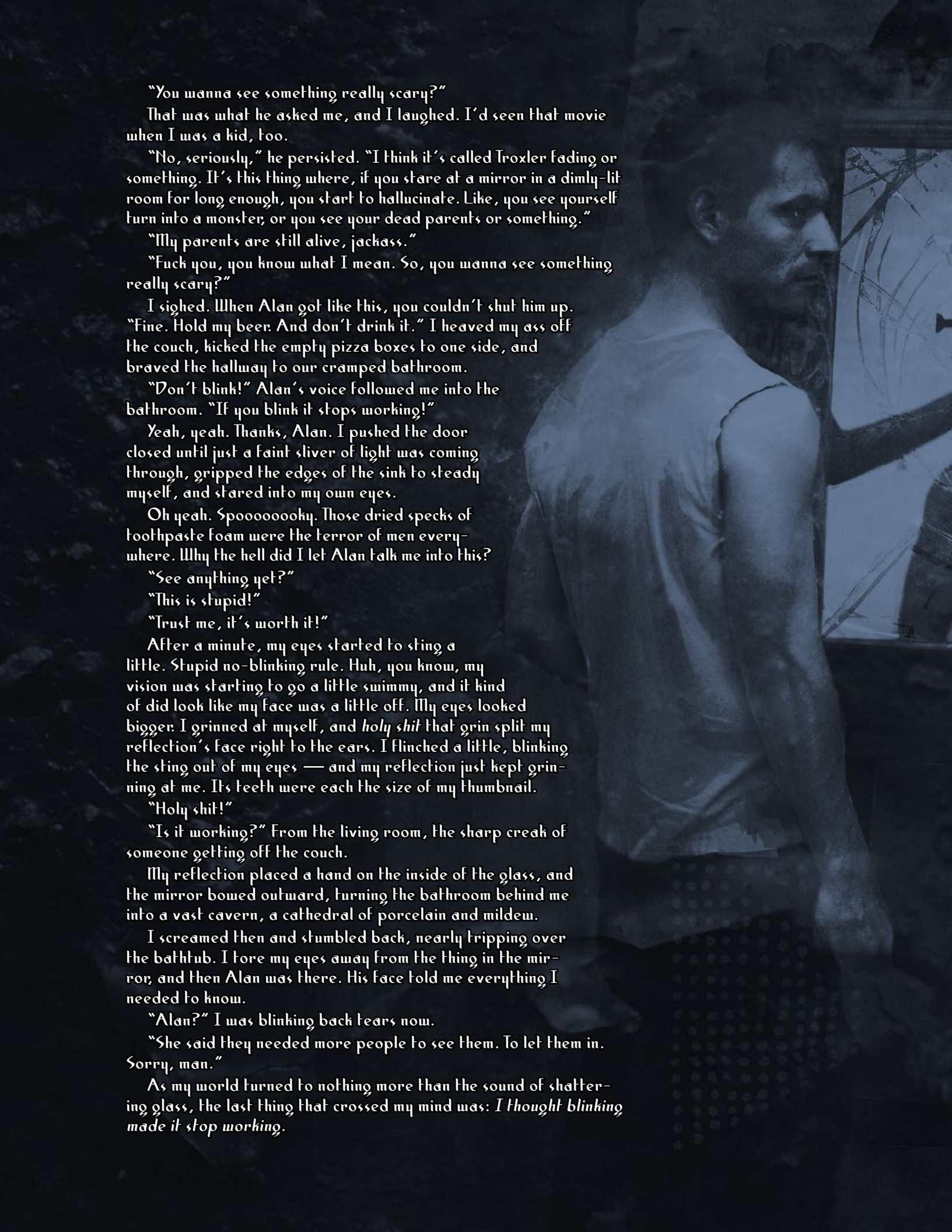
Just in case you need a little inspiration, or perhaps want to send along some ideas of what a missing persons case is like to your players, here's some media that handles not just a death or missing person, but also the lives of the people around that person who is, otherwise, gone. Missing Person, as a chronicle starter, focuses on the vacuum a gone or dead person leaves in the lives of those around them, and these pieces of media reflect that idea in a few different ways. Consider the variety of tones you can bring to this chronicle starter with the ideas below.

***Stand by Me***, movie, or **"The Body"**, short story by Stephen King. *The Body*, as well as the movie that was based on it, are both prime examples of using a missing persons case as a jumping-off point for a much deeper narrative. In the story, a group of boys travel into the wilderness outside their small town in search of a "dead kid" of whom they'd heard rumors among the other local children. It's a powerful slice-of-life story about boys, who are on the cusp of being young men, dealing with their demons. The titular body is important, yes, but as a catalyst for growth rather than as its own event in the boys' lives.

***Twin Peaks***, TV. If your characters are likely to actually investigate the missing persons case, *Twin Peaks* is an interesting twist on the classic, more technical, police procedural. It focuses much more on the lives of the people around the dead girl, and examines what people thought of her as a person, versus who she actually was. It's a strange story, too, one not outside of the realms of possibility for a Chronicles of Darkness game.

***Pretty Little Liars***, TV. This modern teen drama, centered on a missing persons case, exemplifies the idea that a relatively small town can be absolutely bursting with secrets. Though the series' primary mystery is "What happened to Alison DiLaurentis?" a multitude of revelations, romantic entanglements, and plot twists occur throughout the series, casting suspicion on seemingly every character at some point or another.

***The Killing*** (U.S. or Dutch version), TV. Like *Twin Peaks*, this show centers on a criminal investigation, but the lives of the investigators and the people involved are very intimate and intense. The pacing is slow, as one case takes up the entire length of the series, so it matches the pacing of a tabletop game a bit better than a typical one-and-done episode of a standard police procedural.



"You wanna see something really scary?"

That was what he asked me, and I laughed. I'd seen that movie when I was a kid, too.

"No, seriously," he persisted. "I think it's called Troxler fading or something. It's this thing where, if you stare at a mirror in a dimly-lit room for long enough, you start to hallucinate. Like, you see yourself turn into a monster, or you see your dead parents or something."

"My parents are still alive, jackass."

"Fuck you, you know what I mean. So, you wanna see something really scary?"

I sighed. When Alan got like this, you couldn't shut him up. "Fine. Hold my beer. And don't drink it." I heaved my ass off the couch, kicked the empty pizza boxes to one side, and braved the hallway to our cramped bathroom.

"Don't blink!" Alan's voice followed me into the bathroom. "If you blink it stops working!"

Yeah, yeah. Thanks, Alan. I pushed the door closed until just a faint sliver of light was coming through, gripped the edges of the sink to steady myself, and stared into my own eyes.

Oh yeah. Spooooooky. Those dried specks of toothpaste foam were the terror of men everywhere. Why the hell did I let Alan talk me into this?

"See anything yet?"

"This is stupid!"

"Trust me, it's worth it!"

After a minute, my eyes started to sting a little. Stupid no-blinking rule. Huh, you know, my vision was starting to go a little swimmy, and it kind of did look like my face was a little off. My eyes looked bigger. I grinned at myself, and *holy shit* that grin split my reflection's face right to the ears. I flinched a little, blinking the sting out of my eyes — and my reflection just kept grinning at me. Its teeth were each the size of my thumbnail.

"Holy shit!"

"Is it working?" From the living room, the sharp creak of someone getting off the couch.

My reflection placed a hand on the inside of the glass, and the mirror bowed outward, turning the bathroom behind me into a vast cavern, a cathedral of porcelain and mildew.

I screamed then and stumbled back, nearly tripping over the bathtub. I tore my eyes away from the thing in the mirror, and then Alan was there. His face told me everything I needed to know.

"Alan?" I was blinking back tears now.

"She said they needed more people to see them. To let them in. Sorry, man."

As my world turned to nothing more than the sound of shattering glass, the last thing that crossed my mind was: *I thought blinking made it stop working.*

# Horrors and Wonders: Antagonists

Horror comes in canisters with labels written in ancient languages that scratch at the mind like hidden claws. It comes in smiles that hide empty hearts and empty souls. It comes in shadows behind the dumpster, in handshakes in broad daylight, and in self-fulfilling nightmares. People in the Chronicles of Darkness can readily find horror in slavering beasts and primeval predators, but they can find it in the everyday atrocities that humans visit upon each other, too. No law of nature puts abomination in nicely classified boxes, easy to avoid if you just walk on the right side of the street and always lock your doors at night. It could be sitting across from you on the subway. It could *be* the subway. It could even be you.

This chapter scratches the surface of the myriad horrors and wonders that populate the world. It gives the Storyteller characters and story hooks to use in her games, and simplifies her job by providing traits and rules that she can pick up and play with as is, or adapt to fit the needs of her game.

The first section is about plain old human **Antagonists**. Not every encounter the player characters have throws them into the deep end of the dangerously supernatural. The Storyteller can use the traits given in this section to represent any number of non-supernatural enemy types that the player characters might run into, whether they decide to fight, talk, or just to follow these people around to see what trouble they're up to.

The second section presents rules that govern **Ephemera**, beings that live on the fringes of the material world and interact with it in unearthly ways. They range from ghosts of the dead to spirits of Shadow and angels of the God-Machine, to even weirder things that can't be easily defined. This section presents rules for how to create ephemeral beings as Storyteller characters, including the strange laws they must follow, special powers they have, called Numina, and Conditions they cause or require for working their mystical devilry, like possessing people. It also explains how player characters can interact with these beings, including rules for summoning, warding, and binding.

The third section talks about **Horrors** — physical monsters that share the world with humanity and plague it with all manner of gruesome terrors. It presents a system for building these creatures as major antagonists and details the sorts of powers they might possess. It also provides advice to the Storyteller on how and when to use such creatures, and what kinds of roles they might play in the story. Then, it gives examples the Storyteller can use in her games, or as inspiration for Horrors of her own devising.

**"Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson, when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or ill."**

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles**

## Antagonists

Not every foe has hellish powers and an otherworldly agenda. Sometimes, the obstacle that stands between you and your goals is just a person like you, doing his job, standing up for what he believes in, or taking the gullible for everything they're worth. This section presents traits for non-supernatural opponents that the Storyteller can use to populate her world and pit against the player characters in a variety of situations. Some are best suited to fighting, some to social maneuvering, and others to different kinds of challenges.

The characters presented here are nameless archetypes, but the Storyteller can use them to represent any kind of character he needs for his game, whether it's a minor antagonist that only turns up once or a recurring villain that has not only a name but an extensive history with the player characters. The Storyteller should feel free to alter any of these traits if he needs to; they're given as examples and templates for ease of use.

## Traits

All dice pools provided here are complete pools, with Attributes *already added in* for the Storyteller's convenience. Only use the individual Attributes when the Storyteller needs to roll something that's not already included. Assume that if it's not represented by the dice pools here, the character is untrained in the Skill.

Initiative Modifiers given here do not include penalties for weapons.

The Willpower trait given here is an average for a character of that type, but Storytellers should feel free to modify this based on the importance of the character. Generally, one-off, nameless characters have no Willpower to spend in a given scene, while minor named characters have between 1 and 3.

Each character presented here is an example, and serves as a template for other similar archetypes that can use the same traits. For instance, the traits given here for the Cocky Mob Hitman could also be used for a member of a secret police agency, or a hardened street gangster. A list of ways to reskin the character can be found at the bottom of each template, under "Doubles as."

### COCKY MOB HITMAN

*"I knocked off five of your friends before you finished wiping your ass, so I'd think twice about opening that door if I were you. If you play nice, tell you what, I'll even come to your funeral."*

**Description:** He's not here to chitchat. He's here to kill you, plain and simple. He won't waste time and he can't be deterred. His eyes are dark and he seems to find satisfaction in what he's confident are the last seconds of your life. You hope you can prove him wrong.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

**General Dice Pools:** Taunting the Mark 4, Creepy Stalker 5, Breaking and Entering 5

**Combat Dice Pools:** Knockout Blows 6, Guns 8, Concealed Blades 7

**Initiative Modifier:** +7

**Defense:** 7

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 2

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 12

**Doubles as:** Game hunter, street gangster, secret police agent, hired assassin.

### EXCITABLE MUNITIONS EXPERT

*"You ever thought about what you're holding when you hold a grenade? It's the lives of everybody in a fifty-foot radius, right in your hand. Kinda gets you off, doesn't it?"*

**Description:** She shakes her leg whenever she sits down. She talks quickly and wears camo. She either takes her job way too seriously, or not nearly seriously enough. You can't believe someone put her in charge of munitions, but she knows everything there is to know about gunpowder, fire bombs, and exactly how many people die every year in explosions.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

**General Dice Pools:** Molotov Cocktails 6, Classified Information 5, Duck and Cover 6

**Combat Dice Pools:** Close-Quarters Combat 5, Guns 6, Explosives 8

**Initiative Modifier:** +6

**Defense:** 7

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 1

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 12

**Doubles as:** Radical terrorist, FBI bomb disposal technician, demolitions operative.

### FANATICAL CULT LEADER

*"My friends, have faith! They couldn't stop us with words, they couldn't stop us with guns. Our sacred destiny transcends mere earthly means. They will never stop us!"*

**Description:** He worships something you can only find in dusty leather tomes. He doesn't look like much, but whenever he opens his mouth, you listen. His followers take bullets for him with smiles on their faces, and he smiles, too. You fear that one day it'll be you taking a bullet for him. While smiling.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 4, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

**General Dice Pools:** Pushing Your Buttons 6, Can't Be Swayed 7, Friends Everywhere 5

**Combat Dice Pools:** Handguns 3, Knives 4

**Initiative Modifier:** +5

**Defense:** 3
**Health:** 8
**Willpower:** 3
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 9
**Doubles as:** Crooked politician, freedom fighter, popular general, zealous preacher, powerful crimelord.

## HARD-NOSED BEAT COP

*"Come out with your hands up! Or hell, don't – I've been itching to try out my new piece."*

**Description:** This police officer has seen the worst humanity has to offer, and now she sees it everywhere. Nothing gets past her cold, steely glare. She's been on the force for longer than you've been alive. In her mind, you're already guilty, and she'd love to make you squeal like a rusty cell door.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2
**General Dice Pools:** Nowhere to Run 6, Cop Talk 4, Won't Back Down 3
**Combat Dice Pools:** Grappling 6, Guns 7, Baton 5
**Initiative Modifier:** +6
**Defense:** 6
**Health:** 8
**Willpower:** 2
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 12
**Doubles as:** Jaded soldier, nightclub bouncer, well-paid bodyguard, security guard, ex-convict.

## OBSESSED DEMON CULTIST

*"You think you know what's really out there? Think again. Every day I learn a new name for something the world isn't ready to see yet."*

**Description:** She's an expert in unspeakable horrors. She looks like she hasn't slept or eaten in a week, but she could answer any question you pose about the things that prey on humanity. She won't, though, not until you have her trust. And you don't like what you might have to do to win it.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

**General Dice Pools:** Obscure Lore 7, Right Tool for the Job 5, Evasive Answers 5

**Combat Dice Pools:** Concealed Blades 3, Handguns 3

**Initiative Modifier:** +5

**Defense:** 3

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 1

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 9

**Doubles as:** Mad scientist, retired monster hunter, suspicious professor, occult librarian.

## SLICK PROFESSIONAL GRIFTER

*"So sorry to bother you, ma'am, but can I interest you in the deal of a lifetime? Yes, of course you can see my paperwork. All you have to do is sign here, and here."*

**Description:** You can't be sure anything she's said is true, but then, you can't be sure it's false either. She has all the right licenses and says all the right things. She smiles easily and shakes your hand with such a sincere, winning attitude; can you really accuse her of lying?

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

**General Dice Pools:** Smooth Talk 7, Sleight of Hand 6, Getting the Hell Out of Dodge 4

**Combat Dice Pools:** Handguns 4, Grappling 3

**Initiative Modifier:** +7

**Defense:** 5

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 1

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 9

**Doubles as:** Black market salesman, corrupt lawyer, casino house dealer.

## TRAINED GUARD DOG

*"*bark! bark!* Grrrrr..."*

**Description:** It's a Doberman Pinscher, a Rottweiler, or a German Shepherd. Its teeth are bared and its ears are pointed at you. You're in its territory and it plans to rip you to pieces with all its friends. It can track you wherever you run, and it's faster than you.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 0, Composure 1

**General Dice Pools:** Born Survivor 7, Marathon Runner 7, Aggressive Growl 5

**Combat Dice Pools:** Bite 6, Tackle 6

**Initiative Modifier:** +5

**Defense:** 7

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 0

**Size:** 4

**Speed:** 12

**Doubles as:** K-9 hound, wild animal, swarm of vermin, genetic experiment.

## WORLD-WEARY PRIVATE EYE

*"I know, I know. I should keep my nose out of it and my mouth shut. My mother always said I had no common sense. I guess she was right."*

**Description:** Somehow he picked up on your involvement and he just won't let it go. You keep thinking you spot him out of the corner of your eye, wearing that battered old hat and watching you. No matter what you do, you can't shake him. He acts like he knows everything already. Maybe he's right.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 1, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

**General Dice Pools:** On Your Tail 8, Knows a Guy 6, Paranoid Bastard 7

**Combat Dice Pools:** Concealed Firearms 5, Barroom Brawling 4

**Initiative Modifier:** +6

**Defense:** 4

**Health:** 8

**Willpower:** 3

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 9

**Doubles as:** Police force detective, conspiracy theorist, nosy journalist, tabloid writer.

# Ephemeral Beings

Humanity shares the world with innumerable entities, lurking invisible and intangible in a Twilight state, waiting for the right conditions to arise. When an area becomes tainted by the touch of death, when the wall between the world and the terrible, hungry Shadow of animist spirits grows thin, when people begin to see the gears of the God-Machine, the ghosts, spirits and angels can manifest, interact, and further their alien goals. All of them want something from humanity — memories, obedience, emotion... even their bodies. Sometimes, humanity fights back.

## Invisible Incursions

The physical world borders on multiple realms, each with its own peculiar laws. The inhabitants of those realms aren't material beings, and although many are intelligent and self-aware, their thoughts are alien to humans. Mortal investigators almost never see the worlds these beings come from with their own eyes, for which they should be grateful. Everything occultists have been able to learn about the animistic Shadow World and the chthonian deep of the Underworld paints both realms as deadly and teeming with "natives." The enigmatic servant angels of the God-Machine might come from such a realm, or might be created within the world by the processes and Infrastructure they serve. No one knows for sure.

Whether the beings are fleeing the dangers of their home realm, avoiding banishment to it, summoned from their home by mortal occultists, sent as agents by more powerful members of their own kind, or forced to cross over to complete a mission by the God-Machine, most encounters between characters and ephemeral beings in a God-Machine chronicle take place in the physical world, where characters have the home field advantage.

## Manifestation and Possession

Instead of bodies formed of flesh and bone, ephemeral beings are made up of a sort of spiritual matter called ephemera, which comes in several varieties. These substances are both invisible and intangible to anything not comprised of the same sort of ephemera — ghosts can see and touch one another, but are invisible to most living people and don't interact with solid objects or even other ephemeral beings that aren't ghosts. Spirits happily float through walls and pass through ghosts without even noticing them, but are incapable of interacting with people without help.

Almost every ephemeral being has the ability to *Manifest*, to make its presence known and affect the physical world, in ways ranging from remaining invisible but using powers, to appearing as insubstantial but visible images, to possessing a victim, sending his soul into hibernation and warping his body to suit their own uses. Some are more skilled at it than others (those so weak they can't Manifest at all are essentially impotent and don't interact with humans), but all require certain appropriate conditions before they can use these powers.

An ephemeral being wanting to shift into physical form or inhabit an object, animal or person requires the area, item or character it is Manifesting into to have been prepared for its arrival. Ghosts require Anchors — places, objects and people that are linked to their living days and reinforce their failing identities. Angels can only appear in the world when enough Infrastructure has been laid out by the God-Machine. Spirits need the emotional resonance of the area or victim-host to match their own. The more powerful the Manifestation, the stronger the Condition needed. The most powerful physical forms and tightly-held victims are the result of careful husbandry by the Manifesting being, slowly building up the necessary Condition by leveraging whatever Manifestation they can produce at first. Unless Conditions are very strong, or the possessing entity extremely powerful, a human being falling victim to a possession is first urged to follow the entity's wishes instead of his own, then forced to do its bidding, and only then physically mutated into a bizarre amalgamation of natural being and supernatural power.

Summoning or exorcising entities from locations or Possession, then, is a matter of creating or destroying the appropriate setting for the creature, preferably near a place where it can cross over from or to its native realm. Most entities waste away, as though starving, outside of the needed Conditions, so breaking those Conditions is a surefire way of forcing the being to abandon its attempt at Manifestation and send it fleeing toward either a way "home" or another appropriate vessel. Cultists wanting to summon entities attempt to either ritually create appropriate Conditions near a crossing point, or offer up a suitable vessel in the hope that the right sort of ephemeral being will accept the gift. In the case of angels, most participants in a "summoning" never realize the significance of their actions — Infrastructure is gradually built as the God-Machine moves pawns and machinery around like game pieces until an angel is brought forth.

# Ghosts

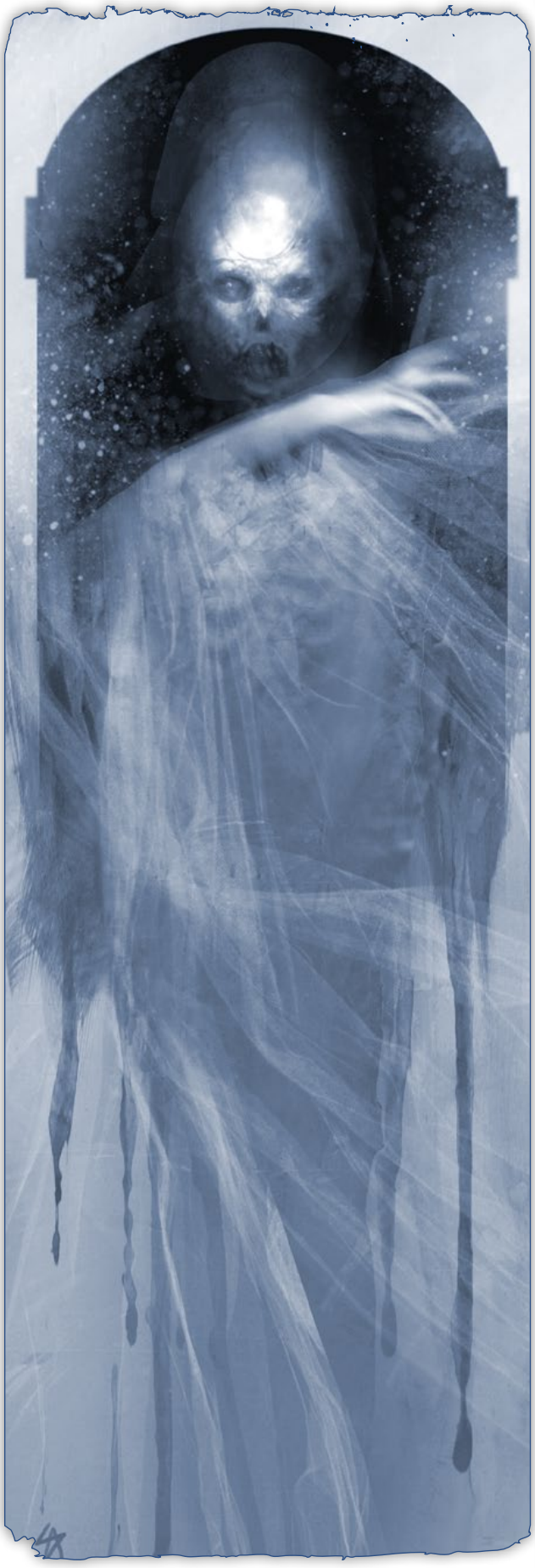
### Echoes of the Dead

When human beings die, especially in a sudden or traumatic fashion, they sometimes leave parts of themselves behind. Ranging from broken, animated afterimages, unable to do anything but reenact their death, to intelligent, malevolent, once-human spirits with power over whatever kind of calamity killed them, the world teems with vast numbers of the restless dead. More ghosts exist than any other supernatural creature, but the truly powerful, independent specters of legend are rare.

The majority of ghosts are poor at influencing the world, trapped in their insubstantial state and unable to even Manifest, noticed only as a strange chill or eerie vibe if the living sense them at all. Ghosts are drawn to places and people

that they had emotional connections to in life — these anchor the ghost in the world and allow those with enough power to Manifest, whereupon they carry out whatever mad urges they still feel and attempt, in their broken state, to further the goals they left undone in life. Ghosts feed on Essence, a spiritual energy created by the memories and emotions that build up in their Anchors and are fed directly to them when they are remembered by the living. Ghosts that lose their Anchors and can't transfer their attachment fade from the world, passing over to a dread realm filled with all the orphaned Ghosts that have gone before. This realm has many names in occult writings: Tartarus, the Great Below, the Land of the Dead, the Dominions, or simply the Underworld.

The living seldom visit the Underworld, though mediums and death-obsessed mystery cults all over the world teach that gateways to it are more common than supposed. Its doors exist in the same Twilight state as ghosts themselves, invisible and unnoticed by the living. Tales of living occultists who learned the right places and the proper ceremonies to open the gates of death describe the Underworld as a chthonian hell of passageways, tunnels, and caverns, filled with desperate ghosts that lost their grip on the world. The Underworld sustains the dead, allowing them more freedom to move and act than the living world, but it also imprisons them. Once there, though, ghosts may increase in power and influence, evolving beyond the image of the person they were into twisted rulers of dead kingdoms, or sponsors and advocates of particular forms of death. If summoned back to the physical world or allowed to escape the Underworld by chance conditions, a ghost that has spent centuries growing stronger can wreak havoc until exorcised.



# Spirits

## Warped Reflections

Animist religions describe the world as being full of spirits, with every object, animal and place hiding a spirit within it. They're partly right; everything in the world apart from humans, even transitory events and strong emotions, *does* cast a spiritual reflection, but all spirits, apart from the cunning or a powerful few, are confined to a world of their own. Separated from the physical world by a barrier known to knowledgeable occultists as the Gauntlet, the spirit — or *Shadow* — world is a murky reflection of the physical. Its geography is (mostly) the same as the world, but places appear twisted to reflect their inner truth rather than looking exactly the same. Everywhere, spirits war on each other for survival.

Spirits come into being alongside the thing of which they're a reflection, but are dormant, barely living, tiny lumps of ephemera at first. As well as creating new spirits, actions in the physical world, and any emotions associated with them, create Essence in the physical world, some of which crosses over into the Shadow. If enough Essence is created around an embryonic spirit, it rouses into activity. By absorbing Essence, the spirit remains active. By consuming other spirits, it merges

those spirits into itself and grows larger and more powerful. As spirits become more powerful, they become less pure as reflections of their origins and more thematic in nature. For example, the spirit of a single owl grows by consuming other owl spirits. As it consumes spirits of night, hunting, the prey its owl eats, and other owl spirits, the spirit subtly changes. By the time it is an independent, thinking being that no longer follows the physical creature that created it around, it has warped into an exaggerated spirit of silent nocturnal hunting. The Essence it consumes also has an effect — an owl spirit evolving in an urban area feeds on different Essence than one in the countryside, and its appearance is colored by its diet.

When mortal characters encounter spirits, something has gone wrong. Some spirits are capable of using their powers through the Gauntlet and, as their self-awareness grows with power, decide to create food sources for themselves by influencing what sort of spirits and Essence will be created around them. The true culprit behind an unusual pattern of domestic murders, for example, might be a murder spirit using its abilities to escalate arguments into homicides.

The spirits that mortal investigators encounter in the physical world are refugees and escapees, those that crossed the Gauntlet to flee the constant risk of being killed and absorbed by larger spirits. They constantly strive to maintain their Essence, desperate to avoid returning to their own world. Without an easy source of Essence, spirits must anchor themselves like ghosts, finding an object or person that reflects their nature and tying their ephemeral bodies to them. The spirit remains intangible — and is often actually "inside" the host — but is safe from starvation as long as the host generates enough Essence to feed it. By influencing the host, or humans interacting with a material host, to more closely reflect its nature, the spirit gets a ready supply of Essence and may move on to more permanent forms of possession. Many items thought of as having wills of their own, or as being cursed, actually house spirits.

## Angels

### Functions of the God-Machine

Unlike ghosts, who feed by being remembered and struggle to maintain their grip on the world, and spirits who flee their own Darwinian hell to carve a foothold in material reality, angels are both temporary visitors to the mortal realm and its only true "natives" among ephemeral beings. The God-Machine isn't some far-off thing lurking in a distant dimension; it's here, in the material world, built from mechanisms hidden from sight by guile and magic. When cultists summon a spirit, it journeys from the Shadow. When an angel is needed, the God-Machine is as likely to build the angel right there as direct an existing one to journey to the site. When angels *are* reused, they spend the downtime "resting," dormant, in storage facilities hidden by the very deepest Infrastructure. Sometimes, cultists and prying outsiders who witness the gears catch glimpses of these facilities — cavernous chambers, folded neatly into impossible spaces, filled with hydraulics, gears, and hissing machines surrounding the angels while keeping them fed with Essence. They're always guarded.

Being essentially tools designed by an intelligent, if unknowable, creator to fulfill specific functions, angels are far more specialized than spirits or ghosts. They're also usually more subtle and able to go unnoticed even when Manifested, but are extremely single minded, aiming to complete the task they've been sent for and then vanish. The God-Machine sends angels to make adjustments to Infrastructure and its plans when something has gone wrong and the gears can't self-correct. Angels hunt down individuals who have failed to die at the proper time, acquire replacements for lynchpins that have unexpectedly failed, and make corrections to the flow of causality, carefully setting up minor events (the closing of a door, the drop of a pen, a sudden distracting sound at *just* the right time) which will have increasingly-large repercussions. The Conditions needed to bring an angel into the world, though, are much more complicated than a ghost's anchors or a spirit's essence, requiring layers of Infrastructure, precise timing, and occult maneuvers which are barely understood. Occult literature is filled with angel-summoning rites, but they're mostly useless — if mortal cultists participate in calling an angel to a mission, it will be because they are themselves part of the Infrastructure it needs.

### Other Entities

The ghosts, spirits, and angels presented here aren't the only ephemeral entities to exist. The various Chronicles of Darkness games have used the spirit rules this section provides to represent many different beings, from the inhabitants of an astral world visited by mages, to demonic owls made of smoke with a strange connection to vampires.

Just as ghosts, spirits, and angels are slightly different, adapting these beings to use the rules here involves setting out both where they follow these rules and where they don't. Future books may detail ephemeral entities particular to those games.

## Game Systems

Ghosts, spirits and angels share a broad set of rules, with minor variations to cover situations such as spirits reaching across the Gauntlet.

### The State of Twilight

Unless they Manifest or use a power to appear, ephemeral beings remain in their insubstantial state when in the material world. This state is described as "Twilight." To beings in Twilight, physical objects appear pale and semitransparent,

light sources are dimmed and sounds distorted as though underwater. Twilight isn't an actual place, though, more a description of how ephemera interacts — or fails to interact — with material reality.

When in Twilight, only items, creatures, and phenomena that are also in Twilight and comprised of the same kind of ephemera can touch an ephemeral being. Attacks simply pass through the Twilit being, and solid concrete and steel are no more hindrance than fog.

The exception is ghost structures. Destroyed objects — everything from a pen to a building — appear as after-images in Twilight, formed of the same ephemera as ghosts. These spiritual structures and items fade away on a timescale that depends on how strongly they're remembered. Famous structures, or even obscure ones that are loved and thought about frequently after they're destroyed, can last decades, solid and substantial only to ghosts.

If no ghostly structures get in the way, ephemeral beings in Twilight can move at a walking pace in any direction. Gravity has no sway, though Twilit beings can only truly "fly" if it's appropriate for their form — most hug the material terrain. A ghost could walk up the side of a tower block, for example, but couldn't then float through midair to the next tower.

Some occultists and supernatural creatures practice Astral Projection, which allows a character to leave her body behind and explore the world in an invisible form. These projected selves are technically in Twilight, but lack even ephemeral bodies so aren't solid even to one another.

## Ephemeral Traits

Ephemeral beings aren't alive the way humans are alive. They aren't biological creatures, and don't have the divides between body, soul, and mind mortals and once-mortal supernatural beings possess. In game terms, ephemeral beings are represented by simplified game traits.

## Rank

All ephemeral beings have dots in an Advantage called Rank, which notes how self-aware and powerful the entity

### Supernatural Tolerance

Just as ephemeral beings possess Rank, many supernatural creatures in the Chronicles of Darkness have "power level" traits of their own, ranging from 1 to 10 dots. They all have slightly different rules, described in the appropriate rulebooks, but all share one quality; they are added to Resistance Attributes when contesting the dice pools of many supernatural powers. The various supernatural traits, including Rank, are interchangeable for this purpose. When a Numen in this chapter calls for "Supernatural Tolerance" to be added to resistance, that's what it means.

*Example:* A vampire attempting to quell an angry, Manifested Angel attempts to use a hypnotic gaze. The power's description in **Vampire: The Requiem** calls for the activation dice pool to be contested by "Resolve + Blood Potency," Blood Potency being the vampiric Supernatural Tolerance trait. The vampire's dice pool is penalized by the Spirit's Resistance + Rank instead.

*Example:* A ghost attempts to use the Awe Numen **(p. 136)** on the first of two interlopers in the now-abandoned house it owned in life. The Numen is contested by Presence + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance, but the intruder is a mortal and doesn't have a Supernatural Tolerance trait, so just rolls the two Attributes. When the ghost attempts to use the power on the second intruder the next turn, though, it discovers that she is actually a mage; she adds Gnosis (the mage Tolerance trait) to her contesting dice pool.

### Rank

| Rank* | Trait Limits ** | Attribute Dots | Maximum Essence | Numina |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • | 5 dots | 5-8 | 10 | 1-3 |
| •• | 7 dots | 9-14 | 15 | 3-5 |
| ••• | 9 dots | 15-25 | 20 | 5-7 |
| •••• | 12 dots | 26-35 | 25 | 7-9 |
| ••••• | 15 dots | 36-45 | 50 | 9-11 |

* Each Rank levies a -1 modifier on attempts to forcibly bind that entity and acts as a Supernatural Tolerance trait.
** These represent permanent dots, not temporarily-boosted ones.

is. Rank technically ranges from 1 to 10 dots, but entities with more than Rank ••••• are so alien they can't support themselves in the Conditions lesser beings use, and can only be brought into the world by story- and chronicle-defining maneuvers, conjunctions, and events. The Lords of the Dead, Gods of Shadow, and the mighty archangels are out of the scope of the Storytelling system. If they appear at all, they do so as plot devices.

Rank is used to determine the maximum ratings in other game traits an ephemeral being can have, as described in a table below, along with how many dots of Attributes the entity can have. All ephemeral beings have the ability to sense the relative Rank of other entities, and may attempt to conceal their own Rank by succeeding in a contested Finesse roll. Success means that the entity appears to be of the same Rank as the being sensing the relative Rank.

**Ghosts** can't increase Rank outside of the Underworld, and come into existence as either Rank 1 or 2 depending on how much self-awareness they have. Nonsapient "recording"-type ghosts are Rank 1, while those that retain most of their living memories are Rank 2. Ghosts summoned back from the Underworld, however, may be of any Rank.

**Spirits** and **Angels** run the full range of Ranks, depending on how old and successful a spirit is or how much importance the God-Machine places upon an angel.

## Essence

A combination of food, oxygen, and wealth, Essence fuels ephemeral entities' powers, sustains their insubstantial bodies, and allows them to continue existing. As a game trait, Essence resembles Willpower in that each entity has a permanent maximum Essence rating and an equal number of Essence points it can spend to achieve effects. Maximum Essence is determined by Rank.

Entities can use Essence in the following ways:

• Ephemeral beings must spend a point of Essence per day to remain active. If they have run out of Essence, they fall into hibernation until something happens to regain at least 1 point, which can then be spent on returning to activity. Such dormancy is dangerous — the entity remains in Twilight and can be destroyed if it loses all Corpus and Essence at the same time. When spirits enter hibernation, they are pushed back across the Gauntlet into the Shadow. Ghosts that don't have any anchors remaining are similarly forced into the Underworld. Angels remain dormant wherever they were.

- Ephemeral beings outside of a suitable Condition bleed one point of Essence per *hour*. The Influence and Manifestation Conditions starting on **p. 132** state whether they protect from Essence bleed for different types of ephemeral being. Entities that run out of Essence due to bleed suffer a single point of lethal damage and enter hibernation.

- Ephemeral beings can spend Essence to boost their traits for a single scene on a point-per-dot basis. They can't boost a single trait by more than Rank + 2 dots; boosting takes a turn and they can only boost a single Attribute in a turn.

Entities can sense sources of Essence appropriate for their needs up to a mile away. Spirits can use this sense through the Gauntlet. The Seek Numen (p. 138) increases this range.

- Ephemeral beings regain 1 point of Essence per day that they are in proximity to any Condition relating to them — ghosts are sustained by staying near their anchors, spirits in the Shadow eke out an existence by feeding across the Gauntlet, and angels are fed by Infrastructure.

- Ephemeral beings can attempt to steal Essence from beings of the same type — ghosts from ghosts, spirits from spirits and so on. The attacking entity rolls Power + Finesse, contested by the victim's Power + Resistance. If the attacker succeeds, it steals up to the number of successes in Essence, as long as the victimized entity has Essence remaining to lose.

### Gauntlet Strength

The strength of the wall between the world and its Shadow depends mostly on how many people are present in the area. The paradox of why human activity pushes the Shadow away when it also creates vast quantities of emotionally-resonant Essence is a mystery. If the spirits know, they aren't telling, but the Gauntlet breaks more easily away from civilization.

Whenever a spirit attempts to cross between the material world and the Shadow, uses Influence or Manifestation to reach across, feeds from the material world's Essence while still being in the Shadow, or uses a Reaching Manifestation **(see p. 130)**, the dice pool is penalized by a number of dice according to the following chart.

| Location | Strength Modifier |
|---|---|
| Dense urban areas | -3 |
| City suburbs, towns | -2 |
| Small towns, villages | -1 |
| Wilderness, countryside | 0 |
| Locus | +2 |

A Locus is a location in which the Shadow world is especially close. Spirits don't need the Reaching Manifestation Effect to use their powers across the Gauntlet at a locus, attempts to cross over are at +2 dice, and spirits whose nature matches the Locus' Resonant Condition heal at twice the normal rate.

- Ghosts regain a point of Essence whenever someone remembers the living person they once were. Visiting their grave, simply sitting and remembering them, or recognizing their Manifested form as the person they used to be all qualify.

- Spirits may attempt to gorge themselves on a source of appropriate Essence. Once per day, when in proximity (even if it's on the other side of the Gauntlet) to a suitable Condition, a spirit can roll Power + Finesse, regaining successes in Essence. If the spirit is still in the Shadow, the dice pool is penalized according to Gauntlet strength.

- Angels are mechanisms in the God-Machine, and like any machine they are sustained by fuel. God-Machine cultists sacrificing precious resources (metaphorical or literal), animals, or even humans to the angel in its presence allow it to regain the Resources value of the item or animal, or the current Integrity of a human sacrifice, as Essence.

## Attributes and Skills

Ephemeral beings don't have the nine Attributes familiar in material characters, but use a simplified set of the Power, Finesse, and Resistance categories mortal Attributes fall into. When creating an ephemeral being, look at the Rank chart earlier in this section to determine how many dots are available and what the trait maximum is. Ghosts usually use the average rating in each category from when they were alive — for example, a man with Strength 3, Intelligence 2, and Presence 2 would become a ghost with Power 2.

**Power** describes the raw ability of the entity to impose itself on other ephemeral beings and the world at large. It is used in all rolls that call for Strength, Intelligence, or Presence.

**Finesse** describes how deft the entity is at imposing its desires with fine control. It is used for all rolls that call for Dexterity, Wits, or Manipulation.

**Resistance** describes how well the entity can avoid imposition from its peers, and how easily it is damaged. It is used for all rolls that call for Stamina, Resolve, or Composure.

Ephemeral beings don't possess skills, but don't suffer unskilled penalties as long as the action they're attempting is appropriate to their former self, nature, or mission. They roll the appropriate Attribute + Rank for actions relating directly to their concept, or Attribute + Attribute for actions like surprise and perception.

## Advantages

Ephemeral beings differ in how they treat Integrity, Virtues, and Vices. If using the Fate optional rule (see p. 177), they also handle that differently.

**Ghosts** retain their Virtue and Vice from life, but they are reversed in effect — ghosts regain all spent Willpower by fulfilling their Vice, but can only do so once per chapter, and regain up to 1 Willpower point per scene by fulfilling their Virtue. All ghosts have the same Fate, "Forgotten," which comes into play when a ghost risks losing an anchor and sliding closer to imprisonment in the Underworld. Even powerful ghosts that are summoned back to the material world retain this Fate, as the conditions of their summoning are all that's keeping them from the Great Below.

Alone among ephemeral beings, ghosts also possess Integrity, set at the level they had before death. Their Integrity scores don't change, however, as ghosts do not suffer breaking points. Their self-image is fixed, unless something happens to push them back to the level of cognizance and self-awareness they had in life. If this should happen somehow, they can suffer breaking points the same way living people can.

**Spirits** don't have an Integrity trait, a Virtue, or a Vice. Instead, they regain 1 point of spent Willpower per 3 points of Essence they consume by gorging or stealing as described above. They do, however, have Fates, which reflect the violent struggle of spiritual existence. Keywords like "Bound," "Consumed," or "Starved" are all appropriate for spirit Fates.

**Angels** lack Integrity — they simply obey the God-Machine in all things — and likewise don't have Fates. They do have Virtues and Vices, though, built into them as operating guidelines and preset responses. Angelic Virtues and Vices don't have to be anything a human would describe as virtuous or wicked. Examples include "Silent," "Hidden," "Obedient," "Curious," "Punctual," "Wrathful," and "Precise," all as either Virtue or Vice depending on the angel in question.

## Other Traits

Because they have simplified traits, ephemeral entities calculate derived traits a little differently from mortal characters.

**Corpus:** Ephemeral beings don't have Health, but measure how intact their Twilight form is using Corpus. Permanent Corpus is equal to Resistance + Size, and grants Corpus boxes that act like Health boxes, filling when the entity suffers injury. Corpus boxes don't have wound penalties associated with them.

**Willpower:** Entities have Willpower dots equal to Resistance + Finesse, with a maximum of 10 dots for entities with the Ranks presented in this book. In addition to the Willpower-gaining methods described above, all ephemeral beings regain 1 spent Willpower per day.

**Initiative:** Initiative is equal to Finesse + Resistance.

**Defense:** Defense is equal to Power or Finesse, whichever is lower, except for Rank 1 spirits which use the higher of the two Attributes. The more an entity is driven by raw instinct, the more animal defense it displays in combat.

**Speed:** Speed is equal to Power + Finesse + a species factor. Spirits of inanimate objects usually have a species factor of 0.

**Size:** Ephemeral beings can be of any size. Ghosts are usually Size 5, while spirits often use Rank as Size, growing larger as they become more powerful. Angels designed to blend in are sized as humans or animals, but some angelic entities are very large, up to Size 10 or higher.

**Language:** Rank 1 ghosts can't communicate verbally; they don't have enough of their sense of self left to employ language. Rank 2 and higher ghosts know whichever languages they knew in life. Spirits all speak the native tongue of the shadow world, a strange, sibilant language that resembles ancient Sumerian, but often learn the human languages common around their Essence-feeding grounds. Angels speak all human languages simultaneously, and more — they sometimes "speak" in strange glossolalia or sounds more like electronic noise than a language, and appear to understand each other when doing so. When an angel wishes to be understood, everyone present hears it speak fluently in their native languages.

## Bans

All ephemeral beings suffer from a mystical compulsion known as the ban, a behavior that the entity must or must not perform under certain conditions. They can be as simplistic as "the angel cannot cross railway lines," moderately complex like "the ghost must come if you call her name into a mirror three times within her anchor," or as difficult as, "the angel must receive a tribute of a printing press that has used blood as ink once a month or lose a Rank."

Bans increase in both complexity and consequences with Rank.

**Rank 1** entities have mild bans that are easily triggered, but don't endanger the entity. A spirit of bliss can't resist an offering of opiates. The ghost of a nun has to immediately use an offered rosary. A weak angel must stand still and parrot hexadecimal numbers when they're spoken to it.

**Rank 2 and 3** entities have moderate bans that curtail the creature's activities in a more serious way than mere distraction. A ghost must immediately dematerialize when it hears the sound of a cat. The murderous spirit of a car that has run down multiple people loses all Willpower if it doesn't kill one person a month. The angel of the records answers any question about the family, background, or true identity of a subject if the questioner accurately tells the angel her time (to the minute) and place of birth.

**Rank 4 and 5** entities have complicated bans that put an end to whatever the creature is trying to do — often in an explosive fashion. They have consequences in game traits or long-term actions, but esoteric requirements. The Smiling Corpse, a ghost summoned back from the Underworld by a mystery cult, is immediately banished back to the Great Below if anyone should sing a particular nursery rhyme in his presence. The spirit of Mount Iliamna, a volcano in Alaska, will use its Numina to kill a victim named by anyone who makes it an offering of platinum that was mined from its foothills. The angel Uriminel, four-faced enforcer of destiny, has Defense 0 against individuals who have fulfilled their Fate within the last lunar month.

## Banes

Ephemeral entities are not of the material world, and react strangely to some elements of it. The interaction between their ephemeral Twilight form and physical substances always contains a flaw — a *bane* — that damages the entity's Corpus through symbolic or mystical interference. The bane is a physical substance or energy the entity can't abide.

- Ephemeral beings voluntarily attempting to come into contact with the bane must spend a Willpower point and succeed on a Power + Resistance roll with a dice penalty equal to their Rank.
- Banes are solid to entities, even when they are in Twilight. They do not, however, affect spirits on the other side of the Gauntlet.
- Simply touching the bane — even voluntarily — causes a level of aggravated damage per turn if the entity is Materialized, and causes the relevant Condition to end unless the entity succeeds in a roll of Rank in dice. The roll must be repeated every turn if contact holds.
- If the item or person to which a Fettered entity is linked comes into contact with the bane, the entity suffers a level of lethal damage per turn as long as contact holds. The entity must use the Unfetter Manifestation Effect to escape.
- Touching the bane while in Twilight causes a point of lethal damage per turn to non-Manifested entities.
- If the bane has been used as a weapon against the entity, the wounds suffered are aggravated for Manifest entities and lethal for entities still in Twilight.

Banes are increasingly esoteric and obscure for entities of increasing Rank.

**Rank 1** entities have common substances and phenomena as banes. Ghosts burn at the touch of salt. The spirit of a forest is poisoned by the fumes of burning plastic. A low-Rank angel can't touch gold.

### Honorary Rank

Some supernatural creatures that are closely related to a form of ephemeral being have "honorary" Rank in the appropriate otherworldly hierarchy; Sin-Eaters are all Bound to a ghost, for example, and werewolves are treated with respect by spirits according to their Renown.

Technicalities, in this case, count, but only *against* the ephemeral entity. A werewolf who "outranks" a minor spirit will deal devastating wounds to it with his claws, but a high-Rank spirit can't burn that werewolf by touching him. There are other ways to assert dominance, and high-Rank entities are quite capable of showing the half-fleshed who's boss.

**Rank 2 and 3** entities have difficult to obtain, but still "natural," banes. Powerful ghosts are repelled by holy water. A spirit must be killed by a sharpened stake made of pine. A mid-Rank angel can be killed by a weapon dusted with the ground-up remains of a meteorite.

**Rank 4 and 5** entities have highly-specific banes that require great effort to acquire. The lord of an Underworld realm, now walking the Earth and served by a cult of worshippers, can be killed by an obsidian blade marked with the names of 13 Gods of Death. The spirit of the US Treasury (the building) can be killed by a silver bullet made from a melted-down original dollar. A high-Rank angel can't willingly touch the sigils of a certain incantation in Sumerian, and dies if the signs are carved into the flesh of its host.

The hierarchical nature of ephemeral beings also plays a part — Rank isn't a social convention for them, but a fundamental part of their nature. Ephemeral entities of 2 Ranks or more above an opponent of the same type (a Rank 5 spirit attacking a Rank 3 spirit, for example), count as their opponent's bane when using unarmed attacks, claws, or teeth.

## Combat

As noted earlier, ephemeral beings use the lower of Finesse or Resistance for Defense unless they are Rank 1, in which case they use the higher. They apply Defense against *all* attacks, even firearms.

Ephemeral beings roll Power + Finesse to attack. Their attacks inflict bashing damage unless the nature of the entity (a spirit with metal fists, for example) indicates that it should inflict lethal wounds instead. Some entities use weapons, in which case roll Power + Finesse, then apply weapon damage on a successful attack.

Entities in Twilight can only attack or be attacked by other ephemeral beings of the same type, unless the attack utilizes the entity's bane.

Physical attacks on a Manifested entity that would normally cause lethal damage only cause bashing damage unless the attack utilizes the entity's bane. Despite appearing to the naked eye and being solid, a Manifested spirit, ghost, or angel doesn't have any internal organs to injure.

Ephemeral beings record and heal from wounds in the same way as material characters, but lose one point of Essence for every aggravated wound they suffer.

Ephemeral entities that lose all Corpus from lethal or aggravated wounds explode into a burst of ephemera, stylized to their nature. A forest spirit dies in a hail of rapidly-vanishing pine needles, while ghosts crumble, screaming, into the ground. The entity isn't actually dead, though, unless it has also run out of Essence. If it has even a single Essence point remaining, it reforms, hibernating, in a safe place (a Conditioned location, usually). Once it has regained Essence points equal to its Corpus dots, it spends an Essence point and reawakens. As the entity can't act while hibernating, this means it must wait for the one Essence a day for being in a suitable area to slowly build up to Corpus, and that more powerful entities take longer to recover from being "killed."

## Influence Effects

| Level | Effect |
|---|---|
| • Strengthen | The entity can enhance its sphere of influence. It can add to the Defense of a loved one, make an emotion stronger, an animal or plant healthier, or an object more robust, gaining the entity's Rank in Health or Structure. This Influence can shift the Anchor, Resonant or Infrastructure Condition to Open for its duration. The cost is 1 Essence. |
| •• Manipulate | The entity can make minor changes within its sphere of influence, such as slightly changing the nature or target of an emotion, or make minor changes to an animal's actions, a plant's growth, or an object's functionality. The cost is 2 Essence. |
| ••• Control | The entity can make dramatic changes within its sphere of influence, twisting emotions entirely or dictating an animal's actions, a plant's growth or an object's functionality. This Influence can shift the Open Condition to Controlled for its duration. The cost is 3 Essence. |
| •••• Create | The entity can create a new example of its sphere of influence. It can create a new anchor, instill an emotion, create a new sapling or young plant, create a young animal, or create a brand new object. The entity can cause a temporary Anchor, Infrastructure, or Resonant Condition in a subject for the duration of the Influence. The cost is 4 Essence. |
| ••••• Mass Create | The entity can create multiple examples of its sphere of influence, triggering emotions in multiple people, creating new copses of trees, small groups of animals, or multiple, identical items. The cost is 5 Essence. The number of examples of the Influence created is equal to Rank. Alternately, the entity may create one instance of its sphere of influence — including creating the base Condition for its type — permanently, although an ephemeral entity can't permanently alter the mind of a sentient being. |

## Influence

All ephemeral beings have a degree of Influence over the world, which they can leverage to control and shape the basis of their existence. Ghosts have power over their own anchors, spirits can control and encourage the phenomena from which they were born, and the God-Machine grants angels broad authority over things relating to their mission.

Entities begin with dots in Influence equal to Rank. Although Rank is also the maximum rating for an Influence, ephemeral beings can split their dots to have more than one Influence. A Rank 4 spirit of dogs, for example, might have Influence: Dogs ••• and Influence: Loyalty •.

Entities may reduce their number of Numina granted by Rank to increase Influence dots, at a cost of 1 Numen per dot.

Spirits and angels have Influences that relate to their natures, which may be used in multiple circumstances — the dog spirit, for example, has Influence: Dogs, not Influence over a *particular* dog.

Influence is measured in both scale and duration. To use an Influence, compare the entity's Influence rating to the total dots of the intended effect and how long it is to last. The total must be equal to or less than the entity's Influence rating in order for the Influence to be attempted.

The entity pays the listed cost in Essence and rolls Power + Finesse, with success creating the desired effect. If the Influence is altering the thoughts or emotions of a sentient being, the roll is contested by Resolve or Composure (whichever is higher) + Supernatural Tolerance.

## Influence Durations

| Level | Duration | Cost |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | One minute per success | No additional Essence cost. |
| • | Ten minutes per success | No additional Essence cost. |
| •• | One hour per success | The cost is 1 additional Essence. |
| ••• | One day per success | The cost is 2 additional Essence. |
| •••• | Permanent | The cost is 2 additional Essence. |

## Manifestation

Ephemeral beings can interact with the mortal world in many different ways, from lurking in Shadow and reaching

## Manifestation Effects

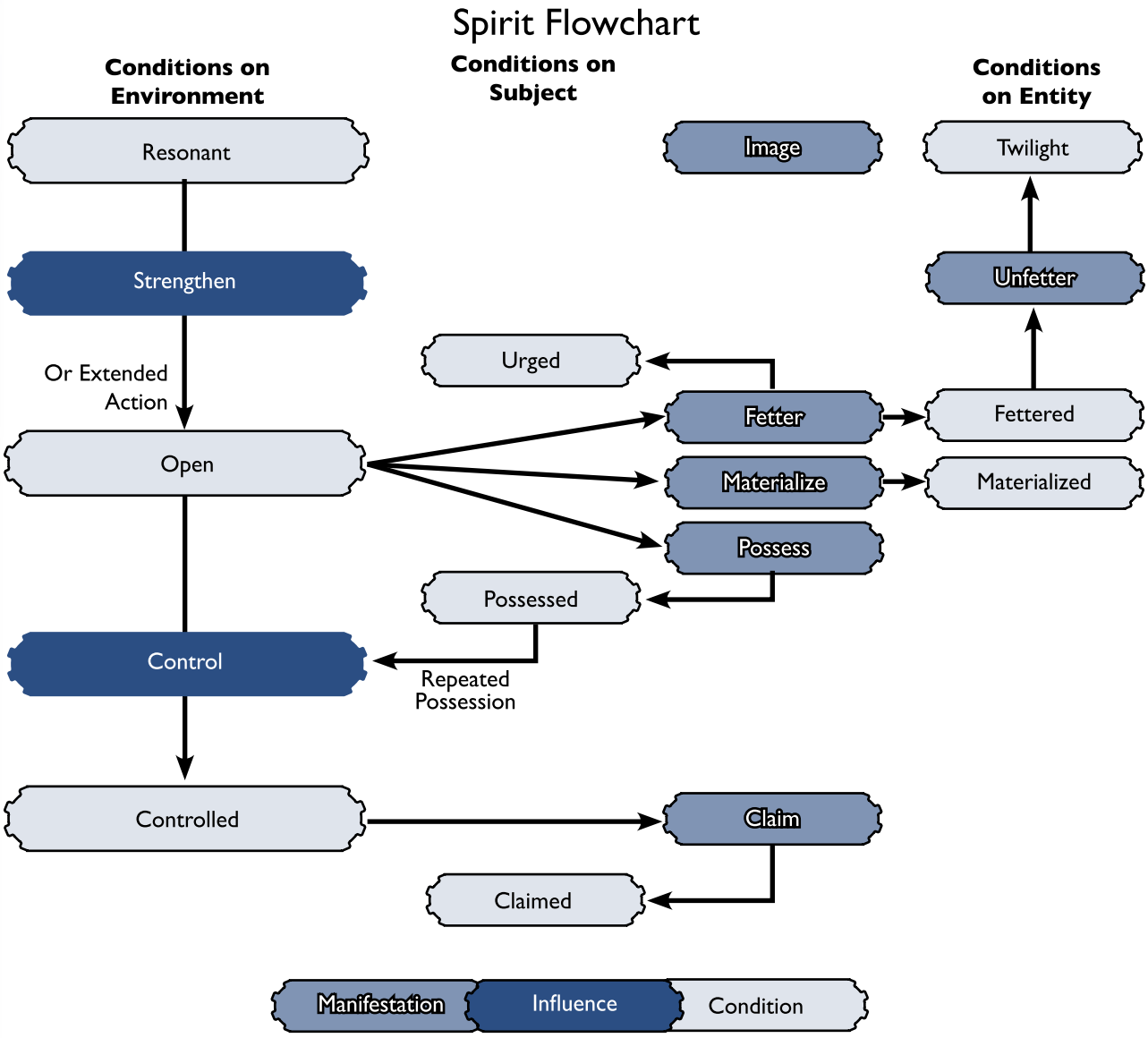
| Manifestation | Effect |
|---|---|
| Twilight Form | If the entity enters the material world, it does so in Twilight **(see p. 124)**. The Effect has no cost. |
| Discorporate | In emergencies, the entity can voluntarily Discorporate as though it had lost all Corpus to lethal injury — a painful way to escape a greater entity threatening to permanently kill it. The Effect has no cost. |
| Reaching | (Spirit only) By spending one Essence, the spirit applies the Reaching Condition to itself. The activation roll is penalized by the local Gauntlet Strength. |
| Gauntlet Breach | (Spirit only — requires Resonant Condition) By spending 3 Essence, the spirit forces itself through the Gauntlet — returning to Shadow from the material world, or appearing in Twilight Form by entering the material world. The activation roll is penalized by the local Gauntlet Strength. |
| Avernian Gateway | (Ghost, angel, or death-related spirit only — Requires Open Condition) By spending 3 Essence, the entity opens a nearby gateway to the Underworld, and applies the Underworld Gate Condition to the location. |
| Shadow Gateway | (Rank 3+ spirit or angel only — Requires Open Condition) By spending Essence equal to Gauntlet Strength, the entity opens a portal to the Shadow that it and other entities may use, applying the "Shadow Gate" Condition to the location. The activation roll is penalized by the local Gauntlet Strength. |
| Image | (Requires Anchor, Resonant, or Infrastructure Condition) By spending 1 Essence, the entity may make its Twilight form visible to material beings for a scene. |
| Materialize | (Requires Open Condition) By spending 3 Essence, the entity may shift from Twilight form into the Materialized Condition. |
| Fetter | (Requires Open Condition) By spending 2 Essence, the entity adds the Fettered Condition to itself. Living beings targeted by this Effect contest the roll with Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. If the Effect is successful, living targets gain the Urged Condition. |
| Unfetter | (Requires Fettered Condition) By spending 1 point of Essence, the entity temporarily suppresses the Fetter Condition for a Scene, allowing it to use other Manifestation Effects or roam in Twilight. When the Scene ends, any Manifestation Effects used during it immediately end. If the entity isn't back within range of its Fetter **(see p. 133)** when Unfetter ends, it immediately goes dormant. |
| Possess | (Requires Open Condition) By spending 3 Essence, the entity gains temporary control over an object, corpse, or creature, applying the Possessed Condition to the subject. Living subjects contest the roll with Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. |
| Claim | (Requires Controlled Condition) By spending 5 Essence, the entity gains permanent control over an object, creature or corpse, applying the Claimed Condition to the subject. Living subjects contest the roll with Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. An entity must be capable of both the Fetter and Possess Manifestations to buy Claim. |

across the Gauntlet to physically Manifesting or merging into a human soul. Just as Influence traits determine what level of control the creature has over their environment, Manifestation traits define which forms of Manifestation are possible for a particular entity.

Entities begin with the Twilight Form Manifestation and a number of Manifestation Effects from the list below, equal to Rank. Some effects are only available to certain kinds of entities. Entities may increase their capabilities by reducing the number of Numina they are granted by Rank, at the cost of 1 Numen per Manifestation Effect.

Most Manifestation Effects have prerequisite Influence or Manifestation Conditions – a spirit can only Fetter to something with an Open Condition, for example.

All Manifestation Effects require a Power + Finesse roll to use. Most have an associated cost in Essence, and some are contested or resisted.




## Ephemeral Influence and Manifestation Conditions

If something falls into an ephemeral being's sphere of influence, this is handled mechanically by declaring an Influence Condition. Influence Conditions resemble Tilts and character Conditions.

The different forms of Manifestation Effect are also Conditions, applied to the location, object, or character the entity is Manifesting into, or in cases like Reaching, to the entity itself.

Unlike many Conditions, Influence and Manifestation Conditions are tiered and interrelated; Manifestation Conditions have Influence Conditions as prerequisites and vice versa. The lower tiers are naturally occurring, while the higher ones must be created by entities using Influences and Manifestations.

## Durations of Stacked Conditions

In the most advanced forms of Influence and Manifestation, entities may attempt to create a long-lasting Condition that has a prerequisite of a very temporary one. When one Condition is advanced into another, the remaining duration of the prerequisite Conditions is "frozen."

If a prerequisite Condition is removed from a character (for example, a Possessed character's Open Condition is removed by exorcism) any Conditions relying on it, any Conditions relying on them, and so on, are immediately removed. The most advanced remaining Condition then resumes its duration.

## ANCHOR

**Description:** The subject of this Condition — usually a location or object, though it can be a person in rare cases — is within the sphere of influence of a ghost. Ghosts in or within Rank x3 yards of their Anchors do not suffer Essence bleed.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is immediately created when a new ghost is formed, based on whatever subject anchors the ghost's identity. Summoning rituals intended to release ghosts from the Underworld or call them from elsewhere temporarily create this Condition in their target. Finally, a high-Rank ghost can use a Create Influence to mark a target as an Anchor.

**Ending the Condition:** The easiest way to end an Anchor condition is to destroy the subject. Some ghosts cling to Anchors that represent unfinished business, in which case resolving those issues can remove the Condition. Abjuration temporarily suppresses the Condition, as described on p. 140, forcing the ghost to retreat to another Anchor if it has one. Ghosts without Anchors bleed Essence until they fall into dormancy, at which point the Underworld Gate Condition is created and the ghost is banished to the Great Below.

## CLAIMED

**Description:** A Claimed object, corpse, creature, or person has been permanently possessed and merges with the entity involved. Unlike Possess, living Claimed aren't put into a fugue state, but remain mentally active while their soul and the Claiming entity merge together over the course of several days. During the period of fusion, the subject is under all the effects of the Urged Condition, described above. Once a day, starting with the moment the Claimed Condition is created, add one dot of the entity's Attributes to the host's, permanently raising them. Power may be assigned to Strength, Intelligence, or Presence, Finesse to Wits, Dexterity, or Manipulation, and Resistance to Stamina, Composure, or Resolve. The host's physical form begins to mutate, taking on an appearance influenced by the original host and the entity.

Claimed corpses add points to Attributes as above, but start with all Mental and Social Attributes at 0. Inanimate objects use the statistics appropriate for their type (Adding Resistance to Structure and Durability, Power to Acceleration, and Finesse to Handling) instead of Physical Attributes, and also start the claiming process with all Mental and Social Attributes at 0. Corpses and inanimate hosts don't spend the claiming period under the Urged Condition, having no minds of their own to warp.

Claimed may use the entity's Influences, but not their Numina or Manifestation Effects. They may develop supernatural powers as Merits. From the moment the Claimed Condition is laid, the entity is safe from Essence Bleed. The hybrid being that results has the entity's Essence trait, Virtue, Vice, Ban, and Bane, but is a material being. Claimed that were once spirits may cross the Gauntlet at a Locus with a successful Intelligence + Presence roll. Claimed that were inanimate objects are fully animate, fusions of spiritual power, metal, and plastic.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by an entity using the Claim Manifestation Effect.

**Ending the Condition:** Claim is permanent in living hosts unless the entity decides to detach itself, rolling its original Power + Finesse penalized by its Rank in dice and contested by the Claimed hybrid's Resolve + Composure, including any dots gained from being Claimed. If the entity succeeds, the entity and host are separated. Former hosts are physically and mentally scarred — the physical appearance changes back at the same rate it mutated, and the extra Attribute dots fade at a rate of two per day. The Essence trait and any supernatural powers the Claimed developed immediately vanish. Former Claimed, however, retain the Virtue and Vice of the entity that took them over.

In nonliving hosts, Claim is only temporary – once the Claim has fully formed, the host loses one dot of a Physical Attribute (or the equivalent for formerly-inanimate objects) per three days. When any of these Attributes reaches 0, the host disintegrates and the entity is released into Twilight.

## CONTROLLED

**Prerequisites:** The intended subject of this Condition must have the Open Condition, tagged to the entity attempting to cause it.

**Description:** The object, creature, or person covered by an Open Condition has now been so conditioned that the entity may attempt to Claim it, permanently merging with it.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is the result of repeated use of the Possess Manifestation effect by the causing entity. It must have succeeded in possessing the subject on a number of separate occasions equal to the Willpower of either the entity or the subject, whichever is higher. If any Possessed Condition is removed before its duration ends, progress is lost on building to the required number of possessions.

**Ending the Condition:** Successfully ending the Claimed Condition against the entity's will, by exorcism or by forcing the Claimed subject into contact with the entity's bane, removes this Condition and reverts the subject to Open.

## FETTERED

**Prerequisites:** The intended subject of this Condition must have the Open Condition, tagged to the entity attempting to cause it.

**Description:** The entity has secured itself to an object or creature. As long as it remains Fettered, the entity is safe from Essence Bleed. The entity remains in Twilight, and must stay within five yards of the Fetter. Most entities Fettering themselves literally hide inside their Fetters if they are small enough.

The entity pays one fewer Essence for using Influences on the Fetter, but may not use them or Numina on another target as long as the Fetter lasts.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by an entity using the Fetter Manifestation Effect.

**Ending the Condition:** Fetters are permanent unless the prerequisite Conditions are ended, or if the subject of the Fetter is destroyed or (if a living being) killed. The entity can voluntarily end the Condition by using the Unfetter Manifestation Effect. A successful exorcism removes this Condition.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

**Description:** The subject of this Condition is within the sphere of influence of an angel.

**Causing the Condition:** Infrastructure, unlike Anchor and Resonant, never occurs naturally. The God-Machine requires effort to prepare the way for its angels; extended actions by cultists, unwitting pawns or even other angels create Infrastructure. High-Rank angels can use the Create Influence to instill this Condition on behalf of themselves or a subordinate angel. In addition, characters with the Destiny Merit are always subject to this Condition.

**Ending the Condition:** Infrastructure's intricate nature makes it much more difficult to remove. Multiple extended actions that take place over whole stories are necessary to dismantle the Condition, opposed by the angel itself.

## MATERIALIZED

**Description:** The entity has shifted from ephemeral to material substance, manifesting in physical form. All the rules for ephemeral entities' traits still apply, except for the effects of being in Twilight. This Condition protects the entity from Essence Bleed for its duration.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by an entity using the Materialize Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. If the Open Condition used is on an object or person, the entity must materialize within its Rank in yards.

**Ending the Condition:** Materialization lasts for one hour per success on the activating roll. When the duration ends, the entity fades back into Twilight. Physical contact with a Bane or removal of a prerequisite condition can cause the Condition to end early.

## OPEN

**Prerequisites:** The Anchor, Resonant, or Infrastructure Condition for the same phenomenon this Condition is tagged to.

**Description:** The place, object, animal, or person covered by a previous Condition has now been conditioned to accept the entity. It can attempt to Fetter itself to the subject of the Condition, or, if the Condition is on a location, Manifest.

### Avernian Gateways

Doorways to the Underworld, also called *Avernian gates*, exist all over the world, but are invisible to all but a handful of psychics. The gateways are in Twilight, made of ghostly ephemera, and appear in places with the Resonant Condition tagged as "Death" — anywhere people die in large numbers or has a feel of Death about it can house a gate. They remain closed unless they are the nearest gate to a ghost who loses his last Anchor, in which case they open for a turn as his Corpus passes on.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is usually the result of an entity fine tuning the prerequisite Condition as part of an extended action involving the subject and entity acting in concert, for a number of scenes equal to Rank or a living subject's Resolve, whichever is higher. Using a Control Influence allows an entity to temporarily create the Open Condition as an instant action.

**Ending the Condition:** The Condition ends if the prerequisite Condition is removed. Exorcism rituals work by removing this Condition, reverting it to the prerequisite.

## POSSESSED

**Description:** This object, corpse, or living being is being temporarily controlled by an ephemeral entity. Living hosts are put into a coma-like state while being possessed; they experience the possession as missing time, aside from flashbacks that might come out in dreams or times of stress such as losing Integrity. The entity may not use Numina or Influences while controlling the host, but is safe from Essence Bleed for as long as the possession lasts.

The entity may pay one Essence per turn to heal a lethal or bashing wound or a point of structure lost to damage. Corpses that died from damage begin Possession incapacitated, and must be "healed" with Essence

Entities possessing inanimate objects or corpses have a great deal of control over their host. An entity controlling an object can't make it do anything it couldn't do while being operated, but it can turn switches on and off, operate machinery, use keyboards, and turn dials. Use the entity's Finesse if dice rolls are necessary.

Corpses and other articulated hosts capable of movement, like shop mannequins or industrial robots, use their own Physical Attributes, but use the entity's Attributes in Social or Mental rolls. By spending a point of Essence, the entity can use its own Attributes instead of the host's for Physical tasks for a turn, but doing so causes one point of lethal damage or structure loss to the host.

Living hosts require more time for the entity to gain full control, and always use their own Attributes. The entity may read the host's mind with a Finesse Roll at a -4 penalty, use

the host's physical skills at a -3 penalty, and use their social and mental skills at a -4 penalty. These penalties are all reduced by one die per day that the entity has been Fettered to the host. Most possessing entities Fetter themselves to their intended hosts, and use the Possess Manifestation Effect to take full control only in emergencies.

To possess a host, the entity must remain in Twilight, superimposed over the host. This means that if the host touches the entity's bane, or is injured by a weapon made of the bane, the entity will suffer wounds to its Corpus.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by an entity using the Possess Manifestation Effect. The object or victim must be under the Open Condition, tagged to the entity.

**Ending the Condition:** The possession lasts for a single scene, unless the entity abandons it early or the host is killed or destroyed. Abjurations, exorcisms, and forced contact with banes and bans can all motivate an entity to release a host.

## REACHING

**Description:** The spirit has opened a conduit through the Gauntlet, allowing it to use Influences and Numina to affect the other side. Numina with ✪ after their name can be used with this Condition. Characters capable of perceiving spirits in Twilight can sense the conduit's presence with a successful Wits + Composure roll.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is the result of the Reaching Manifestation Effect, and lasts for one Scene.

**Ending the Condition:** At the end of the scene, the Condition fades. Mortals may attempt an abjuration with a three-die penalty to close the conduit and end the Condition early.

## RESONANT

**Description:** The subject of this Condition is within the sphere of influence of a spirit.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is common and occurs naturally; if an object, phenomenon, person, or place matches the spirit's purview in some way, it has this Condition. Anything matching the description of one of a spirit's Influences counts as having this Condition tagged to the spirit. Summoning rituals intended to entice a particular spirit to a location work by instilling the qualities that result in this Condition. Finally, a high-Rank spirit can use a Create Influence to cause the prerequisites for the Condition itself.

**Ending the Condition:** The Condition ends if the phenomenon creating it ends. A forest stops being

Resonant for a tree spirit when all the trees are logged, a grief spirit can't Influence someone who has healed and let go of his pain, and a fire spirit must move on when the fire is extinguished. Abjuration and exorcism may temporarily suppress the Condition, or be the cause of it "naturally" ending, if the ritualists remove the causal phenomenon as part of the ritual.

### SHADOW GATE

**Description:** The location has a hole punched through the Gauntlet. Spirits — and even incautious people — can cross through it without the use of any powers. The Shadow Gate is visible even to material beings, as the Shadow world and material worlds mix.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition can be created by using the Shadow Gateway Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. Very rare summoning rituals can also create this Condition, allowing the spirit being called to access the material world.

**Ending the Condition:** At the end of the scene, the Condition fades. An exorcism directed at the gate can end the Condition early.

### UNDERWORLD GATE

**Description:** The location has an open gateway to the Underworld. All ghosts regain one Essence per scene that they are in the gateway's presence, and ghosts without anchors may use it to reenter the world.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition can be created by using the Avernian Gateway Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. Some supernatural beings with ties to death are also able to open Avernian Gateways. Even mortals can open a gate if one is present and they know the proper means. Mortals who conduct rituals to first open a Death-Resonant location housing a gate can unlock it, causing this Condition, but require the *key* to do so. Every Gateway has a key — an item or action that will open it. Keys can be physical objects, but are also sometimes actions or emotions, or are tied to times and events; a Gate might open for a murder at midnight, when touched with a certain doll, or when a woman betrayed in love turns her back on it three times. Researching a proper key is a difficult Intelligence + Occult roll, with a -3 to -5 dice modifier.

**Ending the Condition:** At the end of the scene, the Condition fades. An exorcism directed at the gate can end the Condition early.

### URGED

**Description:** This animal or human host has been used as a Fetter by an ephemeral being. The entity may read the subject's thoughts with a successful Power + Finesse roll, contested by Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. Success reveals surface thoughts. The entity may urge the host to take a specific action with a successful Power + Finesse roll contested by Resolve + Composure, with an extra die. If the entity wins, the urge is created. Following it rewards the host with a Beat.

**Causing the Condition:** This Condition is created by an entity using the Fetter Manifestation Effect.

**Ending the Condition:** The Urged Condition ends whenever the linked Fetter ends.

## Numina

In addition to Influence and Manifestation, all ephemeral entities have a number of discrete magical powers called Numina. Each Numen is a single ability — activated by a successful Power + Finesse roll unless stated otherwise — linked to the entity's nature.

The Numina described here are deliberately generic. Individual ephemeral beings display their Numen in ways reflecting their type, theme, and biases — a ghost's Blast is an empty, freezing cold in the bones of its victim, while an angel's Awe manifests as a terrible, holy aura.

Numina with Ⓡ next to their name are usable in conjunction with the Reaching Condition.

### AGGRESSIVE MEME

The entity speaks to a person (it must be in a Condition capable of doing so), and plants an idea in their mind. When that person tells someone else the idea, it takes hold in their mind, too, as well as in the minds of whomever *they* tell. The Numen costs 7 Essence to activate, and is contested by Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance.

### AWE

The entity causes terror in anyone who can see it. The Numen costs 3 Essence, and its activation is contested with Presence + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance individually by anyone looking at the entity. Anyone achieving fewer successes than the entity is unable to move or speak for a turn. If the entity gains an exceptional success, the effect lasts three turns.

### BLAST

The entity may wound opponents at a distance. Range is equal to 10 yards per dot of Power, and the entity does not suffer range penalties. If the activation roll succeeds, the Blast wounds as a lethal weapon. The entity may increase the lethality of its Blast by paying Essence — every 2 Essence spent increases the "weapon" by one lethal damage. The maximum weapon bonus is equal to the entity's Rank.

### DEMENT Ⓡ

The entity may torture its victim's mind via psychic assault. The Numen costs 1 Essence, and the activation roll is contested by the victim's Intelligence + Supernatural

Tolerance. If the entity succeeds, the victim suffers the Insane Tilt (p. 285) for the rest of the Scene.

## DRAIN

The entity can steal Essence or Willpower (chosen at activation) from a material being. The activation roll is contested by Stamina + Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. Whichever character — entity *or* target — gains the most successes receives points of Willpower or Essence equal to successes, while the other party loses the same number.

## EMOTIONAL AURA ®

The entity sends out a wave of powerful — and distracting — emotion. This Numen costs 1 Essence, and lasts for a scene, or until the entity uses another Numina. The activation roll is made once, but anyone coming within five yards of the entity must make a Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance roll. If the activation roll had more successes, the victim suffers a -2 dice penalty to all actions as long as the aura remains. If the victim gains more successes, he is immune to the aura unless the entity uses the Numen again.

## ESSENCE THIEF

The entity may steal Essence from and consume ephemeral beings other than its own type — for example, spirits with this Numen may consume ghosts and angels. The Numen costs 1 Essence to activate.

## FATE SENSE

If using the Fate optional rule, the entity may taste the Fate of a mortal being. The Numen costs 1 Essence, and is contested by Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. Characters with the Destiny Merit may not contest this Numen. If the entity succeeds, it knows the subject's Fate and can discern the presence of the Destiny Merit and its rating.

## FIRESTARTER ®

The entity causes flammable materials to combust. This Numen costs 1 Essence, and causes a small fire to break out per activation success within the entity's Power in yards.

## HALLUCINATION

The entity may create an illusion experienced by a single target; anything from a sight or sound to an imaginary person that holds a conversation. The Numen costs 1 Essence and is contested by the victim's Wits + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. Each success over the contesting roll alters one of the victim's senses.

## HOST JUMP

The entity may leap from host to host when using the Possess or Claim Manifestations. The current host must touch the intended host while the entity spends 3 Essence, and the new host must be under any prerequisite Conditions. If both prerequisites are met, the entity immediately transfers the Possessed or Claimed Condition to the new host, although Claimed must begin the process of Claiming again. The entity does not need to re-spend Essence on the Manifestation Effect when jumping hosts with this Numen. Living Claim victims vacated with the use of this Numen still suffer the aftereffects listed under the Claimed Condition.

## IMPLANT MISSION ®

This Numen grants a mortal a vision of a task the entity wishes him to accomplish, and a magical determination to see it through. The entity pays 2 Essence and rolls Power + Finesse. On a success, the subject receives a short vision of whatever the entity wishes him to do, and is under the Obsessed Condition regarding carrying that mission out.

## INNOCUOUS

This Numen does not require a roll to activate and has no cost. The entity is very good at being overlooked. Perception rolls to notice the entity are penalized by two dice.

## LEFT-HANDED SPANNER

The entity disables a device, paying 1 Essence and touching the object if Manifest, or moving its Twilight form to superimpose over it if not. The device must be a human-manufactured object with at least three moving parts. If the activation roll succeeds, the device malfunctions for the number of successes in turns. Using this Numen in combat requires the entity to Grapple and gain control of the object, so it can't be used this way in Twilight unless the target is as well.

## MORTAL MASK

This Numen disguises a Materialized entity as a human, and can be used at the same time as the Materialize Manifestation Effect. Using the Numen costs 1 Essence, and the human seeming lasts for activation successes in hours. The human "costume" is flawed — witnesses may make a Wits + Composure roll penalized by the entity's Finesse to realize that something is wrong. Characters able to sense the entity in Twilight do not suffer the penalty.

## OMEN TRANCE

Once every 24 hours, the entity may enter a trance in order to gain a glimpse of the future. The Numen costs 1 Essence if the entity is trancing on its own behalf, or 3 Essence if it is searching for omens for another. The activation roll is an extended action, lasting at least one scene. If successful, the entity sees a vision of an event that will occur sometime in the next week, which is predisposed to be a warning of danger.

## PATHFINDER R

This Numen allows an entity to know the quickest route to a destination. The fastest route isn't always the safest, and the Numen doesn't reveal any dangers on the way, only a set of directions to the target. If the destination is the subject of the Safe Place Merit, the activation roll is contested by the lowest Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance among any owners. The Numen costs 1 Essence, and lasts for a scene. If the destination is too far away to reach that quickly, the entity must use the Numen again.

## RAPTURE R

The entity forces a response from the pleasure centers of a living being's brain, granting ecstatic visions, a feeling of communion with the universe, and sensations of bliss. The Numen costs 2 Essence to activate. If successful, the victim suffers the Insensate Tilt (p. 285). If the victim fails a Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance roll, she gains a temporary derangement for the entity's Power in days, in a form that binds her closer to the entity's wishes.

## REGENERATE

The entity can use Essence to heal bashing and lethal wounds on its Corpus. This Numen does not require a roll to activate, but costs 1 Essence and heals one level of damage. The entity must reactivate the Numen each turn to heal more severe wounds. Bashing damage is healed first, then lethal.

## RESURRECTION

This Numen — only available to Rank 4+ angels and spirits of healing – literally raises the dead. The Numen costs 10 Essence to use, and the activation roll is penalized by one die per day the subject has been dead. Supernatural beings that have already died as part of their transformation — vampires, mummies, and Sin-Eaters — can't be resurrected, nor can anyone who died of natural causes. Other supernatural beings lose their powers when resurrected. Mages become Sleepwalkers, and werewolves, wolf-blooded.

## SEEK R

The entity can sense the presence of suitable Conditions from a distance. The base range is two miles per Rank; entities may spend an Essence to multiply this by 10. If successful on a Finesse roll, the entity becomes aware of the direction and distance to the nearest suitable Anchor, Infrastructure, or Resonant Condition.

## SPEED

The entity accelerates into a blur of movement. The entity chooses whether to spend 2 or 4 Essence when activating this Numen. Spending 2 Essence doubles its Speed for the remainder of the scene, while spending 4 Essence triples it.

## SIGN

The entity creates messages or images in any media in the same way that media could be used by a mortal— it can write in the condensation on cold glass, produce images on computer screens, and send audible messages via phone lines. The Numen costs 1 Essence to activate, and if successful creates a single message.

## STALWART

The entity appears armored in Twilight form, and uses Resistance instead of the lower of Power or Finesse as its Defense score.

## TELEKINESIS R

The entity can manipulate objects without using a Manifestation Effect. This Numen costs 1 Essence, and successes on the activation roll become the entity's "Strength" when attempting to lift or throw an item. Fine motor control is impossible using this Numen.

# Mortal Interaction

Mortals can interact with ephemeral entities in many more ways than as simple victims to Urge, Possess, or Claim, both for and against an entity's interests. Characters with an Unseen Sense for ghosts, spirits, and angels can sense those beings' presence, even if the entity is in Twilight. Mystery Cults dedicated to serving particular entities attempt to assist their master in creating the necessary Conditions — often unwittingly. An angel doesn't need to explain to the mortals it forces to carry out strange actions that it is building Infrastructure, let alone explain why the God-Machine needs it to.

And then, faced with humanity's fate as a resource for alien intruders, some mortals fight back.

## Research

Most deliberate interactions with entities — summoning, exorcising, and abjuration — rely on having as much knowledge of the entity in question as the mortal can get. Research rolls to determine bans and banes are handled as extended Intelligence + Occult rolls for the most part, but many entities are protected by deliberate secrecy, obscurity, or don't take much interest in human affairs so haven't had their details recorded. The target number of successes for a research roll is determined by the entity's type and Rank, as follows:

| Rank | Successes |
|---|---|
| 1 | 5 |
| 2 | 7 |
| 3 | 10 |
| 4 | 14 |
| 5 | 20 |

Researching a ghost reduces the target number of successes by two, while researching an angel increases it by four. Reaching the target number reveals the entity's ban or bane, while an exceptional success reveals both. Partial successes should reveal increasing information about the entity, as the character learns more about their nature, habits, and history.

Resourceful investigators find other ways to learn the weaknesses of an ephemeral foe, though. Many entities are willing to sell out their fellows' secrets in exchange for something. Many bans are also rather obvious, especially for low-Rank entities, and a mortal might simply try to use the right thing by chance.

## Contact

Faced with a haunting, or what appears to be a haunting, many occult investigators' first course of action is to attempt to make contact with the entity involved. Unless the entity actually has the Image or Materialize Manifestations, or the Signs Numen, this is a slow process of trial, error, and research that takes up several actions, each roll relating to one tested attempt to understand what the entity wants. Supernatural equipment can help the character in his endeavor.

Some mortals, however, are true mediums, able to make it easier for an entity to contact them. Doing so opens them up to the risk of being used for the entity's own ends; see the Medium Merit on p. 57.

## Summoning and Exorcism

For a solitary occultist attempting to force a ghost to appear, or a shaman inviting a spirit to Influence an area, occult libraries are filled with summoning rites. None of them, strictly speaking, actually *work*, in that without supernatural power it's impossible to compel an ephemeral entity to appear, but the rituals and practices of a summoning can often, by accident or design, create the Conditions an entity would need to appear if it were so inclined.

### Esoteric Armory (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Your character is the go-to guy when one needs a knife carved from the bone of a martyred saint, a hawthorn stake, rock salt shotgun shells, the powdered remains of cremated suicides or any number of other things. No matter how strange the need, you've got it covered. After successfully researching an ephemeral entity's Bane, compare your dots in this Merit to the entity's Rank. If the merit is equal to or greater than its Rank, you've got what you need in your Armory. You should decide along with your Storyteller where the Armory *is*, though; a one-dot Esoteric Armory can fit in a large bag, but a four- or five-dot one will fill a house.

A summoning is made up of several research actions (Intelligence + Occult rolls, with bonuses and penalties for access to proper literature) to narrow down the requirements for the rest of the rites. The remaining actions serve as alternate ways to cause the Influence Conditions in the desired location.

By acquiring a ghost's bones, or researching his Anchor and using it in the rite, the summoner sets up the Anchor Condition. By burning rare materials, the area is made Resonant with a fire spirit. By gathering people who can see the gears and following the God-Machine's instructions, Infrastructure begins to build. Using the fruits of their researches, the Cultists customize Conditions for their intended guest, advancing the Condition to Open... and allowing it to Manifest. Summoning rituals involving bringing an entity forth from another world must include a step where the gateway is opened — summonings for spirits must be performed in locii, and those for ghosts near a gate to the Underworld. These are even more difficult to pull off and are apt to be interrupted by meddling investigators, but are the only way to allow truly powerful entities access to the world.

Occult literature is full of proposed ways to control summoned entities. These usually consist of banes and bans, which the summoner can use as leverage. Some spirits really are bound via their bans to serve mortals that raise them in the correct manner, while others will Blast anyone presumptuous enough to try.

Exorcism is the opposite of summoning, but works in exactly the same way — a series of actions that interact with the Conditions an entity is relying on to Manifest or feed. The classic image of an exorcism, priests sealing themselves into a room with a possessed victim to drive the entity out with prayer, confrontation, and willpower, is a combination of exorcism to chip away at the entity's conditions, bindings and wards to keep it from escaping or summoning aid, abjurations to provide a spiritual kick, and the use of as many banes and bans as the exorcist has been able to research.

## Abjuration

While exorcism is an attempt to tackle the Conditions underpinning an entity's presence by mundane means or the use of bans and banes, abjuration fights the supernatural with the supernatural, pitting the user's soul and Resolve against the entity he is attempting to force away.

Although many exorcists, and therefore many people knowledgeable enough about the ephemeral to attempt abjuration, are religious, abjuration does not require religious faith to work. It's a consequence of the human soul; by stilling and focusing the mind, and concentrating on the higher self, a skilled abjurist can cause his soul to affect Twilight, forcing ephemeral beings away and clearing an area of Influence.

The abjuration effect must be performed as a meditative exercise that helps the user stay calm, even in the face of a rampaging, Materialized spirit. Religious abjurists use repeated prayer, while more secular occultists rely on incantations learned from their researches. Anything that instills the proper calm and reverence will work, though — a soldier might attempt to abjure a ghost by reciting the patriotic oath of his country.

The abjuration itself is a Resolve + Composure roll contested by the entity's Power + Resistance. As Abjuration channels the higher self, working the ritual by a means that matches the abjurist's Virtue provides a two dice bonus to the dice pool. A strong psyche is also useful — characters with Integrity 10 receive a three-die bonus, Integrity 9 characters gain two dice, and Integrity 8 one die. Conversely, if the abjuration calls on the abjurist's Vice, the dice pool is penalized by two dice. Low-Integrity characters suffer a one-die penalty per Integrity dot below 6, -1 for Integrity 5, -2 for Integrity 4, and so on.

If the abjuration is successful, all Conditions tagged by the entity in the abjurist's Willpower in yards are suppressed for one day. On an exceptional success, the abjurist also becomes an extra bane for the entity until its Conditions return.

## Warding and Binding

Occult lore is full of references to sealing locations from spirits and ghosts, either to bind them inside or keep them from entering. Chalk circles, protective charms in windows, even a simple horseshoe above a threshold. Most of these tales have nothing substantial to them. Some are half-remembered references to bans or banes, or the weaknesses of supernatural — but still physical — creatures. A few, though, describe true warding or binding rituals.

Warding and binding are a combination of abjuration and an entity's bane, empowered to create a temporary ban that prevents the entity from crossing in to or out of an area defined by the ritualist.

Instead of confronting the entity directly as in abjuration, the ritualist marks the boundary she intends to protect with the entity's bane. She doesn't have to mark a complete boundary — her concept of the area she's protecting is what's important. Marking doors and windows with lamb's blood to keep out a spirit that can't touch it will prevent that spirit from simply floating through the wall while in Twilight, and carefully drawing a sigil on the floor will serve to trap the angel whose name it is.

If the ritualist doesn't have the proper bane for her ritual's subject, it fails automatically, so the most important part of warding is getting that detail right. Once that's done, and the area has been marked, the ritualist performs whatever abjuration method she knows, focusing on suffusing the area with the essence of the entity's bane. Performing the ritual requires a Presence + Occult roll, modified by the ritualist's Integrity as per an abjuration, and further penalized by the entity's Rank. A further modifier depends on the size of the area being warded.

| Area | Modifier |
|---|---|
| Small area within a location, up to a six-foot area | +1 |
| Single room, or vehicle | 0 |
| Two story, suburban building | -1 |

Larger structures levy increasing penalties; an additional -1 for every equivalent of a family home. Most superstructures, like skyscrapers, trains, government buildings, and hospitals are too large to be effectively warded.

If successful, the entity described in the ritual treats attempting to move in to or out of the warded area as though it were against its ban. The effect lasts for successes in days, or is broken if the marking of the boundary is disturbed — a determined entity can suffer the injury from touching the bane material marker in order to break the ward.

# Horrors

They're out there. Skulking just beyond the flickering light of the street lamps, glimpsed for a second in the glare of high beams, felt in that tension between your shoulderblades. The freaks. The monsters. The horrors. Some of them want to kill you, crack your bones and suck them dry. Some of them want to ride you around like a puppet made of meat, or lay their young to incubate in your cavities. Some of them want stranger things: to build towers of bone and bile and babies' shoes, or to open a door between here and the howling silence Outside. Still others don't want anything from you at all; maybe they want revenge on the seven teenagers who left them to die in that boating accident, or just to tell their loved ones to move on with their lives. Nevertheless, they're out there, strange and wondrous and terrifying, waiting to be discovered.

Creating Horrors for your Chronicles of Darkness stories is a multistep process not too dissimilar to a player creating a character. This section provides a step-by-step breakdown of the process, along with benchmarks and guidelines for assigning Trait values. The guidelines presented here are just that: guidelines. Since Horrors aren't required (or even expected) to have the same rough parity of ability that beginning characters are, you should feel free to adjust or outright ignore the Trait values presented here.

Note also that these guidelines are for creating major Horrors: the core, recurring antagonists of your stories. To quickly create minions, zombie hordes, or even just terribly potent evils that only have a limited screen time, see Brief Nightmares on p. 143. Likewise, these rules focus on corporeal entities. If you're creating a ghost, spirit, or a stranger sort of ephemeral Horror, see the Ephemeral Entities rules on p. 122.

## Step One: Concept

The obvious first step when creating a Horror is to decide what sort of beast you're creating. Chances are you already have a starting point for this by the time you sit down to create a Horror. If you know your next story is going to be a tale of Faustian bargains and unholy sacrifices, for example, you probably know your Horror is going to be some sort of demon or warlock. Will it be a wrathful brute, hungry to share its rage with anyone it lures into its lair? Or will it be a subtle, deceitful thing, seducing the unwary into selling their souls? Folklore, mythology, and popular culture can all provide useful inspiration here.

Consider also the role your Horror will play in the story. Most Chronicles of Darkness stories are about investigating, encountering, and (hopefully) surviving the supernatural rather than confronting it head on. Certainly monsters that threaten death and dismemberment are a common feature, but when designing your Horror, you might want to approach it from an angle of unfolding mystery rather than what will make a cool fight scene.

At this point, you should also give thought to your Horror's Aspirations. Intelligent monsters usually have three, just like the players' characters: typically one long term and two short term. Animalistic monsters usually have only one. If your Horror must feed on something to survive, or is otherwise compelled (such as a wendigo's hunger for human flesh or a masked, undead slasher's need to punish those who indulge their Vices), that should definitely be one of its Aspirations. Further Aspirations give characters a point of entry toward understanding the Horror, but more importantly give the Horror much-needed depth and humanity. An Aspiration like "do no harm to children" gives a monster a touch of sympathy, prompts questions that can help you fill out the Horror's backstory, and provides an avenue of investigation for characters. Unlike characters, who typically gain new Aspirations when they fulfill one, many Horrors keep the same Aspirations even after fulfilling them, or tweak them slightly to make them more broadly applicable. A vengeful revenant who kills her murderers is more likely to replace that Aspiration with "kill anyone who reminds me of my murderers" than with "become the crime boss of the port district."

## Step Two: Potency

Potency is a measure of a Horror's raw supernatural power. Unlike most Traits, Potency is rated from 1 to 10 dots. All Horrors have a Potency rating of at least 1. Use the following benchmarks to determine your Horror's Potency, which in turn determines a suggested range of points you'll spend on Attributes, Skills, Merits, and Dread Powers later. Potency roughly corresponds with an ephemeral entity's Rank, and with various traits possessed by the protagonists of other Chronicles of Darkness game lines.

In addition to determining the number of points recommended for building a Horror, Potency confers the following effects:

**Willpower Capacity:** Horrors add their Potency to their Resolve + Composure to determine their Willpower.

**Willpower Expenditure:** A Horror may spend 1 point of Willpower in a turn per dot of Potency. It may not, however, spend more than 1 Willpower on the same effect. A Potency 3 Horror may not spend 3 Willpower points to give itself a +9 bonus on an action, for example, but it could spend those 3 Willpower points to bolster its action, increase its Defense, and activate a Dread Power in the same turn.

**Supernatural Tolerance:** Horrors are more resistant to the supernatural. Add the Horror's Potency dots to any contested roll to resist a supernatural power.

### Horrors and Beats

The primary game-mechanical effect of Aspirations is to reward players for accomplishing their characters' goals with Beats. Since Storyteller characters don't track Beats or Experiences, fulfilling an Aspiration instead grants the character a point of Willpower. This point of Willpower is temporary and goes away at the end of the scene, *unless* the Aspiration fulfilled was a Horror's feeding Aspiration, in which case the Willpower point lasts until spent.

The same rule applies any time a Storyteller character, whether Horror or otherwise, would otherwise earn a Beat: resolving Conditions, turning a failure into a dramatic failure, and so on.

## Step Three: Anchors

Horrors typically have Virtues and Vices just like other characters, but what a monster considers "virtuous" or "vice ridden" might vary significantly from what a human would. To make your Horror feel alien and incomprehensible, consider strange Anchors like Murderous as a Virtue or Silent as a Vice. To highlight the core of humanity in even the most twisted of Horror, follow the guidelines on p. 27 for choosing a player character's Virtue and Vice.

Like Aspirations, Anchors should provide the characters with inroads for discovering, investigating, and ultimately surviving the Horror, so pick Anchors that you're sure will come up in the story (or, alternately, craft the story to highlight the Anchors of a Horror you've already created).

### Potency

| Potency | Trait Limits** | Attribute Dots | Skill Dots | Dread Powers | Merit Dots |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 dots | 15–18 | 10 | 3 | 3 |
| 2 | 6 dots | 19–22 | 15 | 3 | 5 |
| 3 | 7 dots | 23–26 | 20 | 3 | 7 |
| 4 | 8 dots | 27–30 | 25 | 4 | 9 |
| 5 | 9 dots | 31–34 | 30 | 4 | 11 |
| 6 | 10 dots | 35–38 | 35 | 4 | 13 |
| 7 | 10 dots | 39–42 | 40 | 5 | 15 |
| 8 | 10 dots | 43–46 | 45 | 6 | 17 |
| 9 | 10 dots | 47–50 | 50 | 7 | 19 |
| 10 | 10 dots | 51+ | 55 | 8 | 21 |

** These maximums represent permanent Trait dots, not Traits boosted by Dread Powers or other effects.

## Step Four: Attributes

Unlike characters, Horrors do not prioritize Attribute categories. They simply receive a lump sum of points, which you may spend as you see fit. Horrors generally work best and are most interesting when they have very clear, obvious strengths and weaknesses; jack-of-all-trades monsters with an even spread in all nine Attributes are boring and don't provide any signposts for how characters might deal with them.

Strongly consider identifying one or two Attributes as the Horror's greatest strength and putting the maximum number of dots in those Traits. Likewise, consider one or two Attributes the Horror is lacking and leaving them at one or two dots.

## Step Five: Dread Powers

Choose a number of Dread Powers as indicated by the Horror's Potency. This step comes earlier in the process than you might expect because the inhuman powers of a Horror are as core to its being as how strong or fast it is. Some Dread Powers (e.g. Natural Weaponry) have multiple levels, like Style Merits. Each dot of such powers counts as an additional Dread Power.

## Step Six: Skills

Once again, don't bother prioritizing Skill categories. Assign the Skill Points derived from the Horror's Potency as you see fit. Horrors don't generally bother with Specialties; just give them additional Skill dots. If you feel a Horror really needs Skill Specialties, assign between three and five here as well. If the Horror you're creating is mindless or animalistic and you're having trouble filling in the full allotment of Skill dots, you can certainly use fewer than provided. However, you might also consider using the rules for Brief Nightmares, below; they're specifically designed to quickly create Horrors with a more limited shtick.

## Step Seven: Merits

Assign Merits here, if your Horror needs them. Even if you're creating a Horror that will be used in a fight, keep in mind that piling combat-based Merits on top of Dread Powers can make for an especially vicious fight. Unless your Horror is a complete loner, strongly consider favoring Social Merits like Allies, Contacts, and Staff. These Merits provide more hooks to draw players into the monster's orbit, and players may well have their own Merits they can turn against the Horror's. Remember also that these Merits can easily represent people enthralled, enslaved, or intimidated into serving the Horror: your monstrosity need not be a corporate hotshot or an old-money aristocrat to have Retainers.

On the flip side, don't bother with Merits that simply give flat, numerical bonuses to Traits, like Fleet of Foot or Giant. Since you'll be deciding the Horror's Speed, Size, and so on directly, just make them a little bigger. Likewise, it's a safe assumption that most Horrors don't need to buy Merits like Tolerance for Biology.

## Step Eight: Advantages

Finally, calculate your Horror's Advantages. If any of the numbers derived here don't feel right, by all means change them. The formulae for calculating Advantage are there to give you a ballpark range and are based on the values for normal people. Horrors are anything but normal, though, so feel free to ignore the formulae and go with what feels right.

### Willpower

A Horror's Willpower equals its Resolve + Composure + Potency. Remember that a Horror may spend a number of Willpower points equal to its Potency each turn.

### Integrity

Unless your Horror is a human being with some monstrous power, or has a part of its mind that is still human, it doesn't have an Integrity score. If it is, its Integrity is whatever seems appropriate. See p. 73 for more on Integrity and what different dot ratings indicate.

If you're so inclined and have access to other Chronicles of Darkness rulebooks, you can even give your Horror an Integrity-analogue Trait like a vampire's Humanity or a werewolf's Harmony. You may have to adjust the various example breaking points to fit your vision, but this can make your Horror seem even stranger and more alien.

### Size

Your Horror can be as big or as small as you want. A typical adult human is Size 5; see p.26 for a chart of sample Sizes you can use as benchmarks. Remember that Size factors into your Horror's Health as well. For really large, unusual Horrors like a sentient, hateful house, consider breaking its Size (and therefore Health) into discrete chunks rather than giving the Horror a single 75-box Health track.

### Speed

A Horror's Speed is equal to Strength + Dexterity + Species Factor (a bonus based on creature type). A Horror can move this many meters in one turn. Like Size, Speed can be whatever you feel appropriate: an average human is around Speed 8. Horrors can have negative Speed, but unless they're completely immobile by nature (e.g. The Tree That Hates), they always have a Speed of at least 1.

Some Horrors have multiple Speeds, depending on their method of locomotion. For example, a giant bat-like monstrosity might be a swift and graceful flier, but clumsy and awkward on land. If your Horror can fly, swim, burrow, etc., note those movement modes and Speed here as well. For more overtly supernatural forms of movement like turning into fog or stepping through mirrors, see Dread Powers.

### Health

A Horror's Health is its Size + Stamina.

### Initiative Modifier

Initiative Modifier is equal to the Horror's Dexterity + Composure.

### Defense

Defense is equal to the lower of a Horror's Wits or Dexterity, plus its Athletics Skill.

### Weakness (Optional)

Not all Horrors have an explicit weakness, but many do. If it seems appropriate, give your Horror a Ban and/or a Bane, as described on p. 128. Use the Horror's Potency as its Rank for determining the severity of the effect.

### Finishing Touches

Do one last check to make sure your Horror is doing what you need it to in the story. If you anticipate the Horror confronting players head on, spot check its dice pools against the characters'; if it looks like the Horror will completely outclass the players (e.g. reducing even their best efforts to a chance die or rolling more than twice as many dice as the best dice pool the players can muster), either make sure the players have another way to survive the Horror or tone it down a bit. Conversely, if the players' dice pools seem overmatching, don't be afraid to beef up the Horror a bit.

## Brief Nightmares

Not every lurking horror needs the full attention of the process described above. Sometimes the Horror has minions that harry the characters, other times the threat is in the form of a horde of hungry ghouls rather than a single beast, and other times the Horror is just a mindless brute that knows nothing but the chase and the kill. In these cases, you can quickly create a suitable Horror by just establishing a few dice pools.

Just as with a full Horror, distill the monster's concept down to a few words — "flesh-hungry ghoul" or "albino sewer gator," maybe. Give it a single Aspiration, probably some

### Nightmare Dice Pool

| Horror Type | Best Dice Pool | Worst Dice Pool | All Other Pools | Dread Powers | Willpower /Scene |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minion | 5 | Chance | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Horde | 7 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Lone Terror | 10 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 6 |

form of feeding or compulsion. Then, decide whether it's the **minion** of a greater threat, part of a **horde**, or a **lone terror.** Then refer to the chart at the bottom of the previous page to calculate its dice pools.

For the Horror's best dice pool, describe two or three things that are its particular strengths. Don't think in terms of Attributes or Skills but in terms of actions. Don't think "Brawl" or "Persuasion," think "rip you apart" or "enthrall with a glance." The Horror uses the listed dice pool for those actions. Similarly, list one or two things the Horror is especially bad at and use the Worst Dice Pool column to determine its dice pools. For all other actions, the Horror uses the All Other Pools value. Then jot down a few Dread Powers to fine tune your Horror. If Dread Powers have a dice pool to activate, use the Horror's Best Dice Pool.

Brief Nightmares don't have a Willpower rating or Willpower points. Instead, they can spend a number of Willpower per scene as indicated by the chart above. If they earn additional Willpower, as from fulfilling an Aspiration or resolving a Condition, they can spend those extra points, but only during the current scene.

Unless the Horror is going to engage in combat or resisted actions, that's all you'll need. If you find yourself needing Advantages like Health or Defense, use the following benchmarks as guidelines. As always, adjust as you see fit; maybe you want your ghouls to die quickly, or your lumbering troll to have lots of Health but little Defense.

- Health equals 2 + Best Dice Pool
- Defense equals All Other Pools
- Speed equals 5 + All Other Pools or Best Dice Pool, as appropriate
- Armor Rating and Damage are determined by Dread Powers, if any.
- For resisted actions, use All Other Pools value as resistance Attribute *unless* Best Dice Pool or Worst Dice Pool actions would be more relevant.

## Horror Creation Quick Reference

Here are the basic steps for creating a Horror.

**STEP ONE: CONCEPT**

Come up with a concept and three Aspirations for the Horror.

**STEP TWO: ANCHORS**

Choose a Virtue and a Vice for the Horror.

**STEP THREE: POTENCY**

Choose your Horror's Potency. Note down Attribute, Skill, Merit, and Dread Power dots determined by Potency.

**STEP FOUR: ATTRIBUTES**

Assign Attributes based on Potency.

**STEP FIVE: DREAD POWERS**

Assign Dread Powers based on Potency.

**STEP SIX: SKILLS**

Assign Skills based on Potency. Choose three to five Skill Specialties, if desired.

**STEP SEVEN: MERITS**

Assign Merits based on Potency.

**STEP EIGHT: ADVANTAGES**

Willpower is equal to Resolve + Composure + Potency. Integrity is nonexistent or whatever is appropriate. Size and Speed Factor are as appropriate. Health is Size + Stamina. Speed equals Strength + Dexterity + Size. Initiative Modifier is Dexterity + Composure. Defense is the lower of Wits or Dexterity, plus Athletics. Ban and/or Bane optional.

## Dread Powers

The things that stalk the night aren't just stronger, smarter, and tougher than you. They have strange, terrible powers you'd count yourself lucky to walk away alive from. The sampling below is by no means exhaustive; feel free to devise new Dread Powers as you need, reskin the mechanics of those presented below into whatever you like, or raid the powers of the monsters in other Chronicles of Darkness games for inspiration.

These powers are presented without dice pools attached; when you choose a Dread Power for your Horror, think about how the creature uses that power and define an appropriate dice pool. A silver-tongued demon who bargains for mortal souls might use Wits + Manipulation vs. Composure for its Soul Thief power, while a desiccated, breath-stealing corpse might use Strength + Occult vs. Stamina to pry its victims' jaws apart and suck the breath from her lungs.

Similarly, there aren't restrictions on things like range or other requirements for these powers. Again, look to your vision of the creature and establish any restrictions that makes sense. That soul-buying demon above might need to engage in reasonable conversation to trick mortals into bargaining away their souls (and thus can't use Soul Thief in any situation where Social Maneuvering would be impossible), while the breath-drinking corpse might have to establish a grapple before it can steal your soul along with your breath.

## BEASTMASTER

The creature has mastery over lesser beasts. By spending 1 Willpower, it can conjure up a swarm of vermin, small animals, fish, or birds as appropriate to its nature. These animals will obey its commands, and it can communicate with them clearly. It can also use this power on a single larger animal.

## CHAMELEON HORROR

The creature can blend into its surrounding environment, matching not just the colors but even the textures and characteristics of what lies around it; this applies a -3 penalty on all rolls to perceive it, increased to -6 if it remains still.

## DISCORPORATE

If the creature suffers damage that would kill it (or even if it merely wants to escape the scene), it may discorporate: its body dissolves into a huge swarm of vermin, carrion eaters, or similar small, repellent beasts, running in all directions. If even one escapes, the creature's spirit survives. The creature may be able to reform in the next scene, or it might take an hour, a day, or even longer to pull itself back together.

## EYE SPY

The creature has a specific form of remote viewing it can practice. It might be able to see through any surveillance camera attached to a network it is accessing, or view from the eyes of a raven that it has touched; perhaps it can pluck one of its eyes out and leave the bloodied organ behind to observe. Using this ability requires the expenditure of 1 Willpower per hour. The creature remains aware of its surroundings while surveilling.

## FIRE ELEMENTAL

The creature's body is made of fire, or perhaps it can cause its flesh to ignite and char with horrific burns. Anyone within a yard of it suffers three points of lethal damage per turn from the blaze. The creature is immune to damage from heat or fire.

## GREMLIN

Mechanical and electrical devices fail in the creature's presence. Lights flicker, cell phones get no reception, televisions and machinery randomly turn on and off. In addition, the creature may spend 1 Willpower to either disable any device with mechanical or electrical components *or* seize control of such a device. This effect can turn an equipment bonus into a penalty or, if the device is capable of causing harm, lets the creature attack a character holding or standing near the device using an appropriate dice pool. The attack deals lethal damage and uses the device's equipment bonus as a damage modifier.

## HOME GROUND

The creature has a specific form of home ground on which it gains supernatural bonuses. This might be a certain building or grove, or it could be the blood of a fresh kill or ash from a house it has burned down. While on its home ground, the creature adds three dice to all its physical dice pools and Influence rolls, reduces all damage suffered by three, and gains a +3 bonus to its rolls to resist supernatural effects.

## HUNTER'S SENSES

The creature has incredibly honed senses for a specific type of prey. Against that prey — redheads, teenagers, people descended from the men who killed it — the creature gains a +4 bonus to all Perception rolls, and applies 9-Again to the dice pool.

## HYPNOTIC GAZE

The creature's gaze can charm and beguile. When meeting the target's gaze, it can spend 1 Willpower and roll Presence + Persuasion contested by the target's Composure. If successful, the creature counts as having a perfect impression against the target for Social maneuvers until the end of the scene.

## IMMORTAL

The creature isn't bound by mortal laws of life and death. It's not *indestructible,* per se, but if it's killed by anything other than its Bane, it just comes back in a later scene like nothing happened. Even if it's destroyed with its Bane, it's never really gone — some accursed ritual, astrological conjunction, or freak occurrence can always bring the creature back for a sequel story.

## INFLUENCE (• TO •••••)

Much like a spirit or ghost, this Horror has Influence over a certain phenomenon. Using Influence costs Willpower instead of Essence and, unless the activation is directly opposed by a character, doesn't require a roll. For contested or resisted actions, decide on an Attribute + Skill dice pool that fits with the monster's nature.

## JUMP SCARE

The creature appears suddenly or lurches into abrupt action just when you thought it was down for the count. By spending 1 Willpower, the creature may resolve the Shaken condition on another character, choosing which action will automatically fail. The character still earns a Beat as normal. Alternately, the creature may spend 1 Willpower to turn the automatic failure caused by a character resolving the Shaken Condition into a dramatic failure. In this case, the character earns two Beats (one for resolving the Condition, one for the dramatic failure).

## KNOW SOUL

The creature can see into the depths of its victim's soul. By spending 1 Willpower, it automatically learns the victim's Virtue, Vice, Aspirations, and current Integrity. By spending an additional Willpower point, it learns the circumstances of the character's most recent failed breaking point. Subsequent Willpower points reveal older breaking points. If the creature uses its knowledge against the victim, it earns an exceptional success on a roll of three successes or more.

## MADNESS AND TERROR

The monster's gaze (or perhaps its voice, touch, or toxic blood) induces madness and terror in its victims. By expending 1 Willpower and making a roll of an appropriate dice pool contested by the victim's Composure, the Horror may inflict one of the following Conditions on the victim: Guilty, Shaken, or Spooked. For 3 Willpower it may instead inflict the Broken, Fugue, or Madness Conditions.

## MAZE

The creature can turn a structure into something out of an M. C. Escher painting, creating an insane maze. By spending 3 Willpower and touching the building, it turns the interior chambers into a tangled mess of corridors and rooms that lead back on themselves; this effect lasts for an hour. Anyone other than the creature who attempts to move through the building must succeed at a Wits + Composure check minus the creature's Resolve each time they attempt to leave the area or progress through it to somewhere specific; if they fail they are unable to progress and simply get more lost.

## MIRACLE

The monster is capable of performing miraculous feats at the request of humans. Miracles include, but aren't necessarily limited to:

- Removing (or applying) any Condition or Tilt (or similar affliction not modeled by these mechanics).
- Granting any Merit, Skill, or Attribute at 5 dots.
- Causing someone to die.
- Fulfilling an Aspiration of the victim.

The Horror cannot do any of these things unless explicitly asked to by a living human being. Some Horrors can grant virtually any wish imaginable, others might only be able to grant one very specific request. Sometimes it's not the monster itself that grants the wish, but a part of its body; demon blood might cure all sickness, while the bile that seeps from the bandages of the One-Eyed King ensures that you'll never be poor again. Most Horrors can only grant one to three wishes to a given person, and wishing for more wishes is, of course, verboten.

Finally, all magic of this sort comes with a price. When the Horror grants a victim's wish, one of the victim's Aspirations is destroyed utterly. The character will never be able to fulfill it or replace it with another Aspiration.

## MIST FORM

The creature can turn itself into a gaseous form by spending 1 Willpower, whether becoming pure air, some sort of misty miasma, a cloud of blowing leaves, or a swarm of crows. This form lasts for a scene or until the creature leaves it, allowing it to fly at its base Speed, slip through cracks, and flow around obstacles.

## NATURAL WEAPONS (• TO •••)

The creature is armed with formidable natural weaponry, whether savage jaws, rending talons, bony spurs, or metallic blades. The weaponry has a weapon modifier and armor-piercing quality equal to the number of dots in this Dread Power. If the creature's natural weaponry includes a bite, it doesn't need to establish a grapple in order to bite.

## NUMEN

In lieu of a Dread Power, the creature may select a Numen from the Ephemeral Entities rules (see p. 136). The Numen costs Willpower instead of Essence, and if it has a dice pool, select an appropriate Attribute + Skill for the Horror.

## PRODIGIOUS LEAP

The creature can make great, bounding leaps; by spending 1 Willpower, it can jump about four stories straight up or across a six-lane highway (or the equivalent distance).

## REALITY STUTTER

The creature's presence sets reality stuttering and convulsing, allowing it to flicker from place to place. By reflexively spending 1 Willpower when it moves, the creature can translocate itself to any location it can see up to its Speed in meters away, seeming to observers to just spasm in and out of reality as it goes. Doing so adds +2 to its Defense for the turn.

## REGENERATE (• TO •••••)

The creature possesses incredible powers of regeneration. As a reflexive action once per turn, the creature can spend 1 Willpower per dot in the Regenerate Dread Power, healing one point of lethal damage or two points of bashing damage for each Willpower expended in this way.

## SKIN-TAKER

The creature can steal the face and skin of another. It must kill the victim first, then spend 2 Willpower and merge the features of the corpse with its own. The change is permanent; it cannot return to an earlier face and appearance.

## SNARE

The creature can create a snare that will entrap victims, whether sticky webs, grasping roots or whipping metal cables. By spending 1 Willpower, the creature denotes an area of up to 10 square yards, and can attempt to grapple any victims in the area using the snare, using its own Attributes and Skills with a +3 bonus to the dice pool.

## SOUL THIEF

The creature is capable of stealing human souls, perhaps for sustenance, perhaps just for its own sick amusement. When you give a creature this Dread Power, specify some restriction or condition that it must fulfill to steal a soul; maybe it has to trick the victim into offering it up willingly, or has to drag its victim back to its lair and attach him to some infernal device to extract the soul. Once the restriction is met, the creature may spend 3 Willpower and roll an appropriate dice pool, contested by the victim's Resolve. If the creature succeeds, it steals the victim's soul and inflicts the Soulless Condition. The victim (or her friends) may be able to find a way to restore her soul — perhaps by killing the creature,

perhaps by stealing into its lair and finding the correct urn out of a collection of hundreds.

## SURPRISE ENTRANCE

No matter how secure its victims think they are, by spending 1 Willpower the creature may suddenly appear in the scene. Perhaps it can manifest out of higher-dimensional space via any right angle, emerge from any reflective surface, or it can simply burst through the wall. Any character witnessing this entrance must succeed on a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll or gain the Shaken Condition.

If the characters have actively taken appropriate measures to keep the Horror out (barring and locking the door, smashing all the mirrors they can find, etc.) it will take the creature one full turn to break through, giving the characters time to react. If not, it's just *there* as a reflexive action and can take one more action before anyone can react.

## TOXIC (• OR ••)

The creature has a poisonous or diseased bite, or perhaps its very presence is pestilential. The one-dot version of this Dread Power inflicts the moderate version of either the Poisoned or Sick Tilts; the two-dot version inflicts the grave version of the Tilt. This can either happen automatically when the creature inflicts damage, or it can spend 1 Willpower and roll an appropriate dice pool contested by the victim's Stamina, depending on the nature of the Horror.

## UNBREAKABLE

The creature is nearly indestructible. Any attack that does not score an exceptional success inflicts only a single point of bashing damage. Exceptional successes inflict damage as normal. If the creature has a weakness of some sort, attacks incorporating that weakness bypass this power.

## WALL CLIMB

The creature can walk up walls or even cling to the ceiling, and can move its full Speed while doing so.

# Black-Eyed Kids

*"Please ma'am, we just need to come in for a moment to use your phone. You needn't be afraid. We're just little children."*

**Background:** Though they echo older tales of monsters that use innocent guises to prey on the unwary, Black-Eyed Kids are a recent phenomenon. Stories of encounters with strangely articulate, menacing children first surfaced on Internet message boards devoted to paranormal phenomena. According to the predominant narrative, the children appear unexpectedly in a place they shouldn't be — in a parking garage at three in the morning, at the door of a farmhouse miles away from anything — and ask for assistance, usually in the form of a ride home or access to a telephone. The witness finds herself overcome by intense feelings of dread, and the longer she resists acquiescing to the children's' requests, the angrier they seem to get. The story culminates with a sudden realization that the children's' eyes are solid, unrelieved, black, at which point the witness flees. So far no one has posted a story in which the encounter ends with someone actually helping the children, so naturally the Internet assumes the worst.

**Description:** Black-Eyed children look to be anywhere between seven and 13 years old. They almost always appear in pairs, or sometimes groups of three, and usually look dissimilar enough from each other to discount the possibility that they're related. They're usually dressed in dark-colored hoodies, jeans, and tennis shoes, though the older-appearing ones are sometimes described as looking vaguely "goth" or as wearing suits or formalwear. They're uniformly pale or ashen complexioned, and they speak very precisely, with a confidence not often heard from children talking to strange adults. As the name suggests, their most distinctive feature is their solid black eyes, undifferentiated across sclera, iris, and pupil.

**Storytelling Hints:** Given their pallor, adult mannerisms, and frequent insistence on being invited into homes or cars, Black-Eyed Kids are often identified as vampires. They're not. You've heard of Men in Black, those strange, probably not human visitors who show up in the wake of paranormal experiences and threaten witnesses into silence? Black-Eyed Kids are the juvenile form. A few years ago, an accident breached one of their brood nests or spawning chambers or wherever the Men in Black come from, and about a dozen or so larval Men in Black stumbled blinkingly out into the sunlight. (Despite the name "Men" in Black, the Black-Eyed Kids are equally divided between boys, girls, and androgyne children.)

They really do just want someone to take them home, or at least make contact with whatever passes for a controlling intelligence among the Men in Black. The problem is that MIBs are specifically designed to give off a psychic field of fear, revulsion, and menace, the better to intimidate people into silence, and the kids don't know how to turn that off. Every interaction with them thus becomes a horrific experience, and the kids grow more and more frustrated as their simple requests for aid go unheeded. If they ever find someone who can overcome their fear and actually get them home, though, it's anyone's guess how the adult Men in Black would react.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 1

**Mental Skills:** Occult 1

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Stealth 3

**Social Skills:** Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 2

**Merits:** Pusher, Striking Looks •

**Potency:** 1
**Willpower:** 4
**Virtue:** Determined
**Vice:** Impatient
**Aspiration:** To get home.
**Initiative:** 4
**Defense:** 4
**Speed:** 9
**Health:** 6
**Bans:** Black-Eyed Kids cannot enter a home or vehicle without being invited.
**Banes:** Salt
**Dread Powers:** Hypnotic Gaze, Madness and Terror, Surprise Entrance

## The Horde

*Low, incessant moaning*

**Background:** When there's no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth. That's how the old saying goes, and whether it's true or not, sometimes the earth splits, coffins crack, and the unquiet dead crawl out of the ground to prey on the living. Individually, they're barely any threat: slow and stumbling, with scarcely animal-level intelligence. The problem is that they're never encountered individually, and a dozen or more of the things can drag down even the strongest by sheer weight of numbers.

Sometimes there's a guiding intelligence behind the Horde: a witch might raise up an army of undead servants, or a demon might lay a curse on a community. More often, though, the dead simply rise and shamble, hungry for flesh, with no discernible motivation. Maybe the town's cemetery is cursed ground, or maybe a virus escapes from a military transport truck. Sometimes it just happens, and all you can hope to do is hole up and survive.

**Description:** The classic zombie horde is made up of a mass of shambling, moaning corpses, usually in various stages of decomposition and often bearing obviously-fatal wounds. They wander aimlessly, shuffling about with no clear purpose until they scent fresh, living meat. Once they become aware of prey, they might burst into frantic activity, like a crocodile, or they might never vary their plodding, inexorable pace; but either way, if you let them get close, if you let your guard down for even a second, you're dead.

That's the classic zombie horde, but with just a few small changes to dice pools and Dread Powers, the Horde pulls double duty as modern "fast" zombies, a hive of monstrous insects, or a pack of weird, wormlike hunters from beneath the ground. Maybe your Horde is the result of a virus that drives living people to phenomenal heights of rage, or maybe it's some swarm of Precambrian horrors unearthed from an underground vault.

**Storytelling Hints:** The trick to using the Horde is that it's not really a "monster" in the same sense that a murderous

ghost or a hungry werewolf is. The Horde isn't an antagonist, it's an environmental threat; use it to force characters together that otherwise wouldn't interact, whether due to circumstances or deliberate avoidance. The constant threats of the Horde breaking through the defenses, preventing characters from going out and gathering supplies, or reaching safety acts as a stressor, highlighting personal motivations and driving conflict. When you're developing a story involving the Horde, look at your characters' (both the players and your Storyteller characters) Virtues, Vices, and Aspirations. Look for characters whose Anchors are, if not directly opposed, at least orthogonal to each other. Find opportunities to put those characters together in scenes with real stakes: gathering supplies, pushing back a zombie siege, or maybe just patching up the wounded. Put their Aspirations in jeopardy, or make them able to be realized only at risk to the rest of the characters. The Horde isn't the frying pan *or* the fire; it's the pressure cooker.

With the popularity of zombie apocalypse fiction in mainstream media, it's tempting to see end of the world scenarios and zombies as going hand in hand. While you can certainly tell zombie apocalypse stories with the Chronicles of Darkness, you don't have to immediately reach for the "blow up the world" button to use the Horde. Smaller outbreaks of the undead, either in remote locations or bad neighborhoods suffering from urban decay, can create the same feeling of isolation. The ubiquity of cell phones and internet connections can make it trickier, but anything from bad weather, to power failures, to larger disasters that jam up phone lines and hinder emergency response services can deal with those problems.

**Best At (7 dice):** Sniffing out humans, dragging you down by sheer weight of numbers, anything that benefits from a massive wall of flesh.

**Worst At (1 Die):** Acting alone, being fast or clever.

**Willpower/Scene:** 3

**Aspiration:** To feast on the flesh of the living.

**Initiative:** 1

**Defense:** 3

**Speed:** 5

**Health:** 7

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grapple | 0B | Melee | 7 (in group), 1 (alone) |
| Bite | 2L | Melee | 7 (in group), 1 (alone) |

**Banes:** Attacks to the head

**Dread Powers:** Hunter's Senses (human flesh), Natural Weapons ••, Toxic •, Unbreakable

## New Environmental Tilt: Zombies!

The Horde Traits presented here work for when you need to focus in on an action scene involving a few characters and a modest number of zombies, but when you want to highlight the sheer, swarming *mass* of the walking dead, they're not practical. This Tilt represents any area that's packed full of zombies or similar monsters.

**Effects:** Characters moving through the Horde are slowed by the mindless, grasping hands and sheer press of decomposing bodies. Within the area affected by the Tilt, characters lose their bonus to Speed (so normal humans have a Speed equal to Strength + Dexterity). Characters who move at anything less than full speed (that is, using an Instant action to run) are subject to an attack using the Horde's best dice pool. An exceptional success on this attack inflicts the Knocked Down Tilt.

In addition, if the zombies are especially ripe, moving through the area might require characters to make a reflexive Stamina + Composure roll every minute or suffer the moderate version of the Sick Tilt.

**Causing the Tilt:** Any large group of mostly-passive monsters could cause this Tilt. It also works for modeling the effects of being caught up in a large riot or similar crush of humanity.

**Ending the Tilt:** The whole point of the Tilt is that it represents too many zombies to fight effectively, but characters might be able to draw the Horde off (maybe by firing guns or operating loud, heavy machinery elsewhere), or drive them back if the Horde suffers from a Bane (if your zombies are afraid of fire, for example, Molotov cocktails or simply carrying torches might disperse them).

## The House That Hates

*<Muffled screams, phantom footsteps, and doors slamming>*

**Background:** Every neighborhood has stories of a haunted house. Usually it's the one at the end of the street, dilapidated if not outright falling apart, with an overgrown lawn and maybe a creepy old witch or never-convicted axe murderer who lives there. Most of the time, it's just local folklore. Sometimes, the house really is haunted by a restless shade, or even by some stranger denizen of the ephemeral realms. But every once in a while, that creepy house at the end of the street is actually the House That Hates.

The House That Hates can appear anywhere in the world — or else multiple Houses exist, or perhaps an ordinary

building can become aware and malevolent through some unknown process. Different occultists have different theories, but the manifestations seem to have enough commonality to suggest that they're all linked. Typically, the first time anyone in the neighborhood notices the House That Hates is when a For Sale sign appears in the yard. The House always sells for way less than market value, which seems to attract prospective buyers despite the state of the structure and the creepy vibe it gives off. (The rising trend of "house flippers" who buy cheap, dilapidated houses in order to renovate and resell at a significant profit has been a great boon to the House That Hates.)

Once a new tenant has moved in, the House begins its slow torments. It works subtly at first, with minor manifestations that startle, unsettle, and stress, but it gradually ramps up to violent assaults, terrifying visions, and grisly phenomena like bleeding walls and manifest "spirits" of its previously tortured victims. Once all of its inhabitants are dead or insane, the House folds in on itself and vanishes — or else it simply goes dormant, waiting for a new buyer or perhaps an inheritor to show up.

**Description:** The House typically appears as a dilapidated, but otherwise unremarkable, house in whatever architectural style is predominate in the area. It might be one or two stories, but it usually appears big enough for a family of five to live in comfortably. Though the house itself is never in anything other than a state of disrepair, it manifests at least one feature tailored to the tastes of its focal victim (see below). For example, if the House fixates on a chef, it might boast a spacious and surprisingly modern kitchen, while if it chooses a kid that loves to explore it might boast secret tunnels, hidden rooms, and a cavernous basement.

The House's interior floorplan is infinitely configurable and is not limited to its apparent exterior dimensions. Sometimes the House manifests stairs to a second story, despite seeming to be a single-level ranch home, or buds off rooms where no rooms were before. Part of the House's magic keeps its inhabitants from thinking of this as strange, at least until the House has progressed to full-on supernatural manifestations.

**Storytelling Hints:** Each time the House That Hates welcomes new inhabitants, it chooses one (*very* rarely two, and only if they share a strong bond) as its "focal victim." This person is the target of most of the House's torments, with the specific goal of driving him or her mad with terror. The House is quite content to kill — usually in a spectacular, bloody fashion — but always in service of inflicting breaking points on the focal victim. The House seems to feed on the psychological trauma, and its entire activity cycle is devoted to reducing the focal victim to 0 Integrity. Focal victims who lose their last Integrity dot to the House That Hates are consumed, never to be seen again, at which point the House chooses a new focal victim.

Because it's so easily mistaken for a haunting, The House That Hates tends to attract paranormal researchers and ghost hunters, most of whom are woefully unprepared to deal with a malevolent building. In some cases, the House has actually chosen one such investigator as its focal victim. This usually involves the House tailoring its "haunting" manifestations to attract the ghost hunter.

Destroying a particular manifestation of the House That Hates isn't difficult; it is, after all, just a house. Fire, a backhoe, in extreme cases sledgehammers and crowbars are enough to dismantle the building's shell, but all that does is force the House to manifest somewhere else. The House has been known to take revenge on those who destroy its manifestations, choosing loved ones as new focal victims. The only way to actually destroy the House is for the focal victim themselves to find the "core" of the House and destroy it. The nature of the House's core is dependent on the focal victim and the specific manifestation of the House, but it always involves dredging up the victim's deepest traumas and personal failings.

## "Just Move Out!"

It's a common refrain leveled at haunted-house stories: why don't the characters simply leave the place where the haunting is happening and never look back? Particularly with genre-savvy players, the first unexplained footsteps or slammed door may have them reaching for the kerosene and matches.

If you're kicking off a chronicle with a location-based story like the House That Hates, you can bake a solution into the premise of the chronicle: maybe all the players have to create members of an extended family with the restriction that no one can have more than two dots in Resources — when the alternative is living on the streets, it becomes harder to justify abandoning a house at the first sign of strangeness.

If that solution is untenable and players insist on playing "genre aware," that can be fine, too. Destruction of property is a crime, and even if you own the House you can bet that police will look into any suspicious fires or unplanned demolition. Arson investigation techniques are very sophisticated these days, and good luck convincing the insurance adjustors that you burned your house down to destroy the spirits within rather than collect a payout. You can spin an entire chronicle out of dealing with the fallout of destroying a manifestation of the House, and that's *before* taking into account the fact that the House itself might come looking for revenge.

**Best At (10 Dice):** Being scary and disorienting, lashing out with household appliances, luring people in and keeping them there.

**Worst At (2 Dice):** Anything but being a house.

**Aspiration:** To drive its tenants mad with terror.

**Willpower/Scene:** 6

**Structure:** 45 (specific structures like walls, floors, and doors have Hardness appropriate to the material)

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool | Special |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Telekinetic cutlery | 2L | 5/10/20 | 10 dice | |
| Strangling cords | 2B | Melee | 10 dice | grapples |

**Dread Powers:** Eye Spy, Home Ground, Influence (Fear) •••, Madness and Terror, Snare

## Jersey Devil

*"Rage. Just sign there and we got us a deal. This is gonna be sick, brah."*

**Background:** He appears up and down the coast. Mostly the Jersey Shore, but he's been sighted as far south as the Outer Banks, even at Spring Break events in Mexico or Barbados. Anywhere teenagers congregate near sand and sea to get wrecked and hook up, the Jersey Devil is there, offering the best drugs, the hottest parties, anything your heart desires. And the cost? Don't worry about the cost. You're young and hot and you're going to live forever.

The Jersey Devil is a decidedly modern manifestation, but if you dig back through the lore, you'll find similar figures all throughout history. The Devil seems to be drawn to human festivities, especially those held near the seaside. Perhaps the liminal nature of the shoreline calls to him, or perhaps the concentrated energy of human celebration calls to his nature as a tempter and a trickster. Or maybe it's just that stoned, horny teenagers are piss-poor negotiators. Either way, once you've accepted his terms and sealed the contract with a body shot, your soul is forfeit upon your death, and the Devil isn't patient when it comes to collecting. Those who sign his contracts end up meeting apparently-accidental but ironically-appropriate ends — the lush drowns doing a keg stand, the pickup artist dies in some bizarre sexual misadventure, and so on — but the Devil isn't averse to getting his own hands bloody if someone comes between him and his meal.

**Description:** The Jersey Devil looks like the prototypical Jersey Shore bro: spray tan, a body that bespeaks hours at the gym every day, frosted tips, the works. He always has a tell somewhere about his person: maybe a tattoo of the Devils hockey team's mascot, maybe taloned feet stuffed into his beach shoes, maybe breath that always smells slightly of brimstone, no matter how many tequila shooters he slams. Whatever the tell is, it's always something that can be identified as a sign of his infernal nature, usually with an Intelligence + Occult-based research action.

**Storytelling Hints:** The Jersey Devil represents a classic cautionary monster who lures "sinners" to their dooms through their own actions. His victims are teenagers engaged in activities that society deems inappropriate: excessive drinking, casual promiscuity, and drug use. In a typical horror movie, you'd see him messily kill his way through a whole host of more or less likable "bad kids" before the "good kids" uncover his weakness and drive him off. It's up to you how faithfully you want to follow that narrative or whether you want to subvert the expectation.

Actually fighting the Jersey Devil is a difficult prospect, not because he's incredibly powerful or dangerous but because his preferred hunting grounds are the very definition of a target-rich environment. If one group of would-be victims starts making too much trouble, hundreds, if not thousands more, are waiting just up the beach. Stories involving the Devil, then, tend to take one of a few forms; either the characters are all people who have made deals with the Jersey Devil and are trying to survive his assaults, or they're trying to find a way to stop the Devil from claiming their friends' souls. These approaches aren't mutually exclusive, of course, but those are the two main arcs for a story involving the Devil.

Characters have a few options when it comes to escaping the Devil's clutches. Discovering his Bane and using it to kill him renders null and void any contract he hasn't yet collected on, but any soul he's already claimed is gone. Moreover, anything the Devil granted as part of the contract, whether that's cash money or a cure for terminal illness, also goes away. The only way to undo damage the Devil has already done, or restore souls he's already taken, is to make those the terms of a contract. It's bad business sense to trade a half-dozen souls for one, but the Devil seems to be more interested in the quality of the souls than the quantity, and a soul willing to sacrifice themselves is usually intriguing enough to make the Devil agree.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6

**Social Attributes:** Presence 5, Manipulation 9, Composure 4

**Mental Skills:** Computers 1

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Stealth 2, Weaponry 1

**Social Skills:** Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Socialize 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 8

**Merits:** Barfly, Fast-Talking ••••, Fixer, Pusher, Striking Looks ••,

**Potency:** 5

**Willpower:** 12

**Virtue:** Wicked

**Vice:** Curious

**Aspirations:** To collect souls, to have raging parties, to find the one soul that truly captivates him.

**Initiative:** 8

**Defense:** 6

**Speed:** 16

**Health:** 11

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nasty knife | 2L | Melee | 8 |
| Big, meaty fists | 0L | Melee | 10 |

**Bans:** The Jersey Devil can never renege on a contract.

**Banes:** Pure seawater no human has swum in.

**Dread Powers:** Immortal, Know Soul, Miracle, Soul-Thief

## Mothman

*Seven... three... six. Magnesium. Carbon. Coefficient of friction.*

**Background:** In 1959, the United States Army responded to reports of an explosion at a munitions factory in Tennessee. Russian sabotage was suspected, but upon investigation the soldiers found no trace of accelerants and no evidence of an explosive device. What they did find was a strange creature, roughly humanoid but nearly 10 feet tall, with a wingspan nearly triple that. The creature was injured and apparently intelligent, though it responded to attempts at communication with nothing more than a string of numbers. It wasn't until days later, when the creature had been safely transported to Nevada for study and eventual dissection, that some bright young radio operator realized that the numbers the creature had recited were a frequency — a frequency that led the FBI directly to a cell of Soviet sleeper agents.

Plans for dissection were put on hold, naturally. While no real communication with the creature was ever established, over the next seven years its mutterings uncovered spy rings, revealed traitors, and even solved an engineering problem in the development of the SR-71 reconnaissance aircraft. It also revealed four infidelities, three drinking problems, and a brigadier general's habit of accepting bribes from arms manufacturers. In 1966, during the commotion following one of the Mothman's revelations, the creature escaped. It's been sighted here and there in the decades since, mostly in the West Virginia/Kentucky/Tennessee area. Its most famous appearance was in Point Pleasant, West Virginia from 1966 to 1967, when it "predicted" the collapse of the Silver Bridge, but digging into local newspaper accounts and folklore reveals dozens of other sightings. In all cases, the Mothman's cryptic communications answer a question weighing heavily on the witness, but in a manner that seems calculated to create discord.

**Description:** The Mothman is roughly man shaped (albeit androgynous) and covered with fine, grayish-white fur or feathers. Its head is disproportionately small, atop a long, sinuous neck, and its eyes flash red in even the dimmest light. Despite the name, its wings, which stretch 30 feet from tip to tip, are more birdlike than mothlike, but they do have patterns resembling a grey moth's.

The Mothman is rarely described as aggressive, but it has been reported to attack people, especially couples, in cars. Its spindly fingers end in sharp claws, and the edges of its wings are capable of lacerating anything softer than granite. Its voice is a harsh, staccato buzz, almost like a swarm of crickets vibrating in unison.

**Storytelling Hints:** The Mothman is like a weird-fiction version of the Apple of Discord: drop it into a situation and watch everything fall to chaos. The Mothman never seems to take pleasure in the chaos it causes, but inevitably, whatever it says to those who encounter it leads to conflict and confrontation. It works best as a catalyst in a story already fraught with secrets: a conspiracy theory narrative, perhaps, or one that involves lots of politics and scheming. Avoid the impulse to make the Mothman a "clue dispenser," though. It's unpredictable and never shows up when you go looking for it. Moreover, the more often someone receives its wisdom, the more severe the chaos the creature's answers bring.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 6, Wits 3, Resolve 4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 7, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

**Mental Skills:** Academics 3, Politics 3, Science 3

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Survival 3

**Social Skills:** Expression 2

**Merits:** Encyclopedic Knowledge, Eidetic Memory, Hardy •••

**Potency:** 3

**Willpower:** 11

**Virtue:** Precise

**Vice:** Skittish

**Aspirations:** To answer questions.

**Initiative:** 11

**Defense:** 6

**Speed:** 10, 25 (flying)

**Health:** 9

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool | Special |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Claws | 1L | Melee | 7 | |
| Razor Wings | 0L | Melee | 7 | Inflicts Bleeding (as Poisoned Tilt) |

**Dread Powers:** Chameleon Horror, Hypnotic Gaze, Natural Weapons •

## Mr. Let-Me-In

*He's genteel and well-mannered*
*And ever so polite*
*But once you let him in your home*
*You're in for quite a fright!*

**Background:** As near as anybody can tell, the legend started somewhere around Kennebunkport, Maine in the early 70s. Or at least, that's the first time anyone ever wrote anything down about Mr. Let-Me-In (sometimes called the Knocker, the Doorbell Killer, or Charlie Knox), in a Halloween-themed local-interest story in the York County *Coast Star*. In that original version, a madman escaped from a local lunatic asylum (never mind that there isn't an asylum within 30 miles of Kennebunkport) and went wandering through town, knocking on doors and calling out, "Let me in!" Conditioned by the rules of the asylum, he wouldn't dare break in, but if anyone was foolish enough to heed his request, he'd bludgeon everyone in the house to death.

The story spread down I-95, mutating as it went. Sometimes Mr. Let-Me-In was said to be the vengeful ghost of a man who froze to death on the front yard while a kegger raged inside. Other times he was the devil himself, or at least one of his servants, sent to drag souls off to hell. Most of the time, the story is just that: easily disproven by even cursory research into local records. About every six years, though, you'll find something to the story—a spate of home invasions with no sign of forced entry, or records of 911 calls reporting harassment by someone pounding on the door all night long. Sometimes it's not even houses, sometimes police find a car on the side of the highway, the passenger door wide open and the driver's skull little more than a red pulp. The verified reports spread steadily southward, as though Mr. Let-Me-In is going somewhere.

**Appearance:** The stories all describe Mr. Let-Me-In as a small, round man, dressed in business attire roughly 20 years out of date, with pasty skin and a too-wide smile beneath a dapper pencil moustache. Some of the stories (namely the ones that ascribe him supernatural origins) say that this is just a disguise, and that if you peel of his face you'll find nothing but emptiness. A few eyewitness accounts by survivors describe him as "odd," or somehow slightly off-kilter.

**Storytelling Hints:** Because he chooses his victims seemingly at random and doesn't stalk them extensively, Mr. Let-Me-In works best as a Horror for a more proactive group of occult investigators. Investigation actions can establish a pattern of attacks, possibly even predict future victims before they're targeted. Actually dealing with the threat will vary in complexity depending on which, if any, of the stories about Mr. Let-Me-In are true; if, as the oldest legends suggest, he's a homicidal maniac driven by monstrous urges, a group of characters might be able to lay a trap for him and catch or even kill him. If he's a demon or a ghost, the only way to banish him might be to enact a particular ritual at the place Mr. Let-Me-In entered this world, or to find a relic of his life that can be ritually destroyed.

With a small change to his M.O., Mr. Let-Me-In can become more of a looming threat that drives a story; instead of leaving those who refuse to let him in in peace, he returns another night. At first, perhaps it's every few days, gradually increasing in frequency until he's hammering on the door every night, several times a night, making it nearly impossible to get any restful sleep (and thus regain Willpower). As stress and fatigue set in, Mr. Let-Me-In becomes the catalyst for psychological drama and inter-character conflict.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 5, Manipulation 6, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Crafts 2

**Physical Skills:** Brawl 8, Stealth 4, Weaponry 6

**Social Skills:** Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2

**Merits:** Demolisher ••, Heavy Weapons ••••, Iron Stamina ••

**Potency:** 4

**Willpower:** 10

**Virtue:** Polite

**Vice:** Murderous

**Aspiration:** To bash out brains.

**Initiative:** 7

**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 15

**Health:** 9

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Convenient heavy object | 2L | Melee | 12 |

**Bans:** Mr. Let-Me-In cannot enter a home unless someone inside opens the door for him.

**Dread Powers:** Home Ground, Jump Scare, Maze, Surprise Entrance

## Nibbles the Clown

*Say it ain't so, Joe!*

**Background:** It's a hard thing to not have a face of your own. The world just doesn't sit right around you. Some would call that a curse and crawl away to die in a deep dark hole. But the creature that, since the early 1950s, has been called Nibbles the Clown has found a much more entertaining option. If you don't have a face of your own, well, plenty of folks around the world aren't putting theirs to good use.

The name Nibbles the Clown first appears in an article from the Calumet City News in 1952 about a bloody massacre

at a child's birthday party. Seven people had their faces chewed off by a supposed "birthday clown" over the course of three hours. The survivors (including Leticia Brown, now 70 years old and the birthday girl) later claimed to have no knowledge of anyone hiring a clown for the party. Similar stories about a "Ghastly Man" and a "spindle-legged brute" go back to Renaissance Venice, and Roman journals held in private collections describe a thing that haunted the Forum Romanum and tore the faces from drunken revelers at Saturnalia.

Records are rather less clear about *why* the creature eats faces and wears them as its own. It never seems to keep a particular face for more than an hour or two, and never seems to do anything with its stolen identities except to choose, approach, and torment its next victim. Perhaps it can't retain an identity for very long and it's searching for the one perfect face that will fit it. Or maybe it's just a creature of chaos, reveling in the bloodshed and fear it leaves in its wake.

**Description:** Once it's stolen someone's face, Nibbles the Clown is able to mimic that person precisely for a short time — usually a scene or two. At that point (or earlier if someone has seen through the ruse), Nibbles unfolds its body, peels off the stolen face, and reveals its true form. Nibbles stands nearly nine feet tall, though most of that is in its long, spindly, stiltlike legs. It appears variously garbed as a classical opera clown in the style of *Pagliacci*, a modern "tramp" clown, or in an exaggerated, clownish caricature of whatever its last victim was wearing. Its movement is broad and stumbling, almost drunken, but for all that it's fast and nimble.

Nibbles' real face is a ghastly example of the uncanny valley effect: almost perfectly human, but just subtly off. Its skin is a little too pale, its lips a little too wide and red, its nose just too bulbous to be natural. Its voice is a shrill, high-pitched shriek, like an industrial-scale buzzsaw, and it's fond of rhyming its statements to nicknames. ("See you soon, June," "You're dead, Fred," etc.)

**Storytelling Hints:** If there's one thing scarier than a psychotic monster clown, it's a psychotic monster clown that can be anyone at any time. Nibbles is a Horror best deployed in stories where paranoia, secrecy, and mistrust reign. While you can run a game featuring Nibbles the Clown as a perfectly standard Chronicles of Darkness story, consider going outside the game system for ways to build tension. Maybe between scenes of normal gameplay, have the troupe play a round of *Werewolf* (that's the party game also sometimes called *Mafia*, not **Werewolf: The Forsaken**) in which one character is secretly killed and replaced by Nibbles "off screen." (Perhaps sometimes Nibbles doesn't replace anyone at all, but lurks off screen to attack when the dramatic tension hits its peak.) During the scene, characters can then try to figure out who, if anyone, has been replaced, and how to deal with that.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 6, Wits 6, Resolve 6

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 8, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 5, Manipulation 10, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Computers 2, Medicine 2, Occult 2, Politics 2, Science 2

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 10, Stealth 5, Weaponry 3

**Social Skills:** Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 10

**Merits:** Cheap Shot ••, Choke Hold, Fast-Talking •••, Fighting Finesse (Knives), Striking Looks ••

**Potency:** 8

**Willpower:** 17

**Virtue:** Playful

**Vice:** Capricious

**Aspirations:** To chew off peoples' faces, to terrify them by revealing itself at the worst possible moment.

**Initiative:** 11

**Defense:** 16

**Speed:** 30

**Health:** 10

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gnawing Teeth | 2L | Melee | 4 |
| Skinning Knife | 1L | Melee | 11 |

**Dread Powers:** Chameleon Horror, Jump Scare, Natural Weapons ••, Reality Stutter, Surprise Entrance

## Pretty, Pretty Princess

*<Childlike giggling and the sound of a music box.>*

**Background:** The problem with cautionary tales about monsters is that, eventually, people get the message. Thousands of years ago, sailors were enticed by beautiful figures sunning themselves and singing on rocky islands. When they sailed in closer, hoping for an amorous liaison, their ships would be dashed upon the rocks and the sirens would feast. But the story got around, sailors started blocking their ears with beeswax, and the sirens were out of a food source.

These days, not only is everyone suspicious of a perfectly beautiful stranger sunning on a rocky islet, modern shipping lanes don't hug the coast like the old triremes did, and GPS navigation systems and sonar mapping make it much harder to lure ships onto the rocks. Many of the sirens of old died out or faded into legend. Some, like the being known as Pretty, Pretty Princess, adapted. The cynical modern world may be leery of the traditional image of a siren, but just about anyone will respond to a child in danger.

**Description:** The Pretty, Pretty Princess resembles a cherubic little girl, about six or seven years old, with a mop of curly black hair and vaguely Mediterranean features — she might

be North African, Greek, Turkish, or Sicilian, depending on who you ask. She dresses in a cheap-looking, apparently store-bought princess costume, the kind that consists of a pink leotard, tutu, and conical hat with gauzy veils streaming from the tip. She's usually encountered innocently playing and humming to herself someplace where her life could be threatened at any moment: places like active construction sites, shipping yards, or truck depots. She never speaks to anyone, and when her victims are lured in close and she prepares to feed, it's easy to see why: her eyes roll back in her head till they show only white, her face splits open nearly to the ears, and she opens a maw filled with row upon row of jagged, razor-sharp teeth. For such a little girl, she can still consume a full grown adult in just a few gulping, rending bites, leaving nothing behind but a smear of blood.

**Storytelling Hints:** Pretty, Pretty Princess is a straightforward Horror. She doesn't have any real hidden layers, she just wants to hunt and kill and eat. Like most such monsters, she works best when she's turned loose on a group of characters in an isolated, contained environment from which there is no escape. From her siren days, she still harbors a fondness for places associated with sea travel and trade as hunting grounds, so she might stalk the night shift staff of one of those freeway truck stops in the middle of nowhere: once Pretty, Pretty Princess shreds the tires or the fuel hoses of the trucks parked in the lot, escape becomes a question of a fifty-mile hike along the freeway or hoping a car comes along in the dead of night. Or the crew of a commercial fishing boat might find her adrift in a lifeboat, the sole presumed survivor of a cruise ship lost at sea.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6

**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

**Mental Skills:** Crafts 3, Occult 2

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 6, Brawl 8

**Social Skills:** Expression 6

**Merits:** Small-Framed, Grappling ••, Inspiring, Sympathetic

**Potency:** 4

**Willpower:** 10

**Virtue:** "Harmless"

**Vice:** Hungry

**Aspiration:** To feast.

**Initiative:** 4

**Defense:** 8

**Speed:** 12, Swim 24

**Health:** 10

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shark Bite | 3L | Melee | 14 dice |

**Dread Powers:** Hypnotic Voice, Natural Weapons •••

## Rachel Hrafn

*I remember what you did.*

**Background:** It made the local papers, back in 1995. A local activist for the homeless, Rachel Hrafn, and her boyfriend were brutally murdered in a home invasion gone awry. Police never found the culprit, and after a couple of weeks with no developments the news cycle moved on and the investigation fell into the cold case cabinet at SPD. In time, no one even remembered the crime — except for Rachel herself. Her restless spirit raged for years, anchored to her bones, until something intervened. Whether it was the hand of a higher power, a random mystical convergence, or a side effect of the splintered timelines that sometimes appear in Seattle, some force stuffed her soul back into her body, restored it to a semblance of health and vigor, and imbued her with a singular drive: to avenge herself on her killers.

Rachel's murder was, of course, not a simple home invasion gone awry. It was a conspiracy, aimed at silencing her opposition to a new zoning law that would have demolished one of the region's largest tent cities. At the time, the conspirators were city councilmen, local gangs, and construction companies, with a smattering of paid-off police officers to make the whole thing go away. In the twenty years since, though, Rachel's killers have advanced themselves considerably, both in wealth and power. The shade of Rachel Hrafn has its work cut out for it.

**Description:** Rachel is a solidly-built woman of above-average height, who dresses much as she did in life, in the alternative fashions of the mid-1990s. Though by all rights she should have decomposed to a skeleton by now, whatever force reanimated her restored her body as well. She is unmistakably dead, with waxy white flesh and petechial hemorrhaging from her strangulation that has left deep black stains around her eyes, lips, and throat. Her voice is a low rasp, and she frequently pauses mid-sentence to swallow painfully.

**Storytelling Hints:** At first blush, Rachel might seem like a sympathetic Horror. After all, she's just looking to get justice for her murder. But her methods are bloody and sadistic — since she rose from her grave, she's already killed a half-dozen people in spectacularly brutal ways in her attempts to find and punish her killers. So far she's only taken out foot soldiers and lackeys; the men and women responsible for her killing are now rich, powerful, and very well protected. Even an immortal undead killer might not be able to take them on alone.

A precise list of Rachel's targets isn't provided, so that Storytellers can tailor them to her chronicle. The number should be large enough to give the players' characters time

to react between killings, but not so large that the individual executions lose their impact. The conspiracy might include:

- The low-level crooks who actually did the deed, perhaps three to five thugs and hardened killers.
- A couple of patrol officers or a homicide detective who made the evidence go away.
- The CEO of the construction firm that stood to benefit the most from Rachel's death.
- A city councilman or former mayor who received campaign funds from the aforementioned CEO.

The important thing to remember is that all of these people have moved up in the world significantly. The crooks are now bosses of their own syndicates, the crooked detective might be Chief or Police Commissioner, the city councilman is a state Senator or even a US Congressman, and so on. To add some personal drama to the revenge tale, perhaps one of them has gone straight in the years since, and tried to make amends as best they could. It won't dissuade Rachel, certainly, but if the characters are investigating her killings (or even helping her), it might generate some internal conflict.

Alternately, for a one-shot story, you might have the players create characters who were involved in the conspiracy twenty years ago and turn Rachel loose on them. Obviously, make sure your players are comfortable with this, both in terms of most of them meeting grisly fates by the story's end and in terms of playing characters involved in a violent double homicide. You'll also want to dial up Rachel's ability to cut through armed guards and security measures in this scenario.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 7

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 7

**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 1

**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Politics 3

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Stealth 3

**Social Skills:** Intimidation 2

**Merits:** Indomitable, Martial Arts ••••, Parkour •••

**Potency:** 3

**Willpower:** 11

**Virtue:** Wrathful

**Vice:** Mournful

**Aspirations:** To take revenge, to mourn her dead fiancé.

**Initiative:** 7

**Defense:** 8

**Speed:** 15

**Health:** 12

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Martial arts | 0L | Melee | 9 |

**Banes:** Anything used in her funeral (wood from her coffin, stone from her headstone, etc.)

**Dread Powers:** Hunter's Senses (her killers), Regeneration ••

## The Swimming Hole

**Background:** No one swims at the old swimming hole outside town any more. Part of that is due to convenience — ever since they opened the municipal pool downtown, nobody wants to drive 20 miles out to the old quarry and climb down the narrow, slippery trail to the still water at the bottom. Part of it's that the swimming hole is the setting for innumerable local ghost stories: tales of spurned lovers and crooked politicians, of tragic accidents and murder in the dark. But mostly it's because the water is just too powerful, too *special* to profane by swimming in it. The swimming hole, you see, is a wishing well. All it takes is a little blood in the water and a fervent desire.

Most of the locals know about the power of the swimming hole, whether by direct experience or from the local rumor mill. They also know it's a very, very bad idea to actually make a wish down there. In true monkey's paw fashion, the wishes granted by the swimming hole come with a heavy price. One young man wished for a flashy car, just like his dad's. He got it, but only because his father was paralyzed in an accident and couldn't drive it any more. Another wished for a million dollars, which came in the form of an insurance check after a freak fire claimed her house, her business, and her entire family. Everybody *knows* the wishes come with a price — but just the same, everybody knows the swimming hole is there, and sometimes folks are desperate enough to pay any price to get what they want.

**Description:** "The Swimmin Hole" (as a crudely painted, corrugated aluminum sign posted down by the water names it) sits at the bottom of a 70-foot deep pit at the old limestone quarry. The mining company moved on long ago, when their drills broke through into an underground lake. Try as they might, the miners couldn't fill the lake or find a source to dam up, so they took the insurance payout and moved on.

The water itself is still and black and always just a little too cold for comfort. No one's ever been able to dive deep enough to find the bottom, and no matter how bitter the winter, the surface never seems to ice over. Nothing lives in the swimming hole: no fish, no algae, even the cattails and grass stop hard at the edge of the water.

Across the water from the little footpath that leads down from the road, there's a little cave. It sits just a hair above the waterline, and it's only just big enough to crawl into. The cave is pitch dark and gives off a feeling of intense menace, but if you brave it, and take a flashlight with you, you'll find a poem carved directly into the rock wall:

**Come to my waters and bleed for a wish**

**I shall dish out your**
**dreams like a fat wriggling fish**

**But if my waters are**
**ever drained down**

**I won't dawdle nor**
**dally when killing your town**

**Storytelling Hints:** The swimming hole works as a stressor for any kind of story of small-town drama and petty politics. As interpersonal conflicts grow, slights are committed, and tragedies befall the townsfolk, that certainty that it could all be better if you just went down to the swimming hole and made a wish grows in your mind, like a fat little tick feeding on your insecurities. Eventually someone will make a wish, and the whole thing will explode. One person wishes for revenge on a cheating spouse — the wish kills the philanderer, but takes his sister with him. The sister has a family of her own, friends, people who miss her. Maybe they wish for revenge in turn, or maybe they just wish her back. Either way, it ends bloody as old grudges and family feuds suddenly have the backing of deadly magic.

Alternately, for a more outwardly-focused story, perhaps a new company has bought the old quarry. They've got some fancy new pumping system they say will drain the swimming hole right down and let them start mining again. It would bring jobs to the area, revitalize the local economy, but enough of the locals have read the message in the cave to figure that's a bad idea. In this scenario, the players might take the roles of the locals trying to protect the hole, or they might be the engineers and surveyors coming in to restart the mining operation.

**Best At (10 Dice):** Enticing people to make wishes, dragging people under and drowning them.

**Worst At (2 Dice):** Affecting anything outside the hole itself.

**Willpower/Scene:** 6

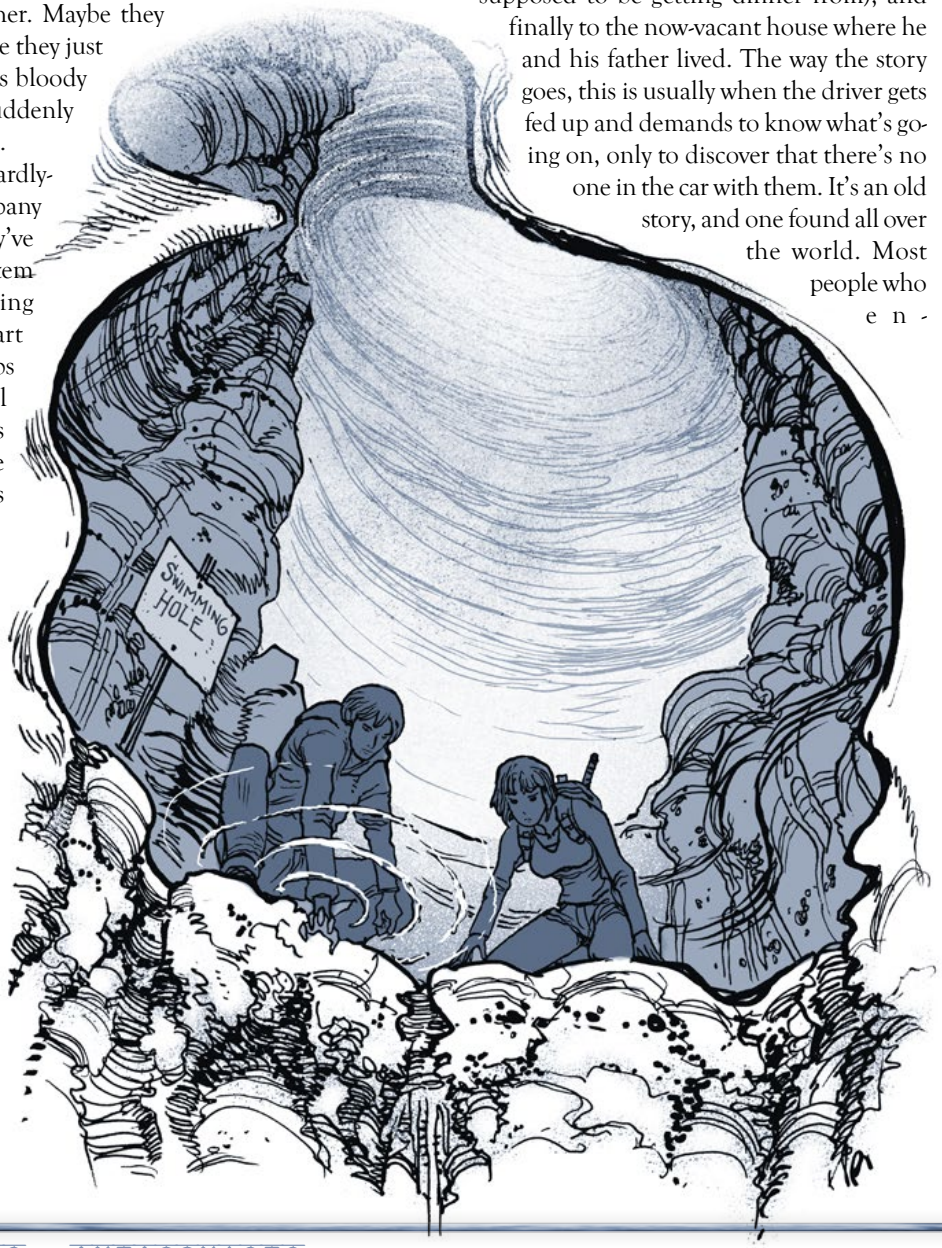
**Initiative:** 5

**Defense:** N/A

**Speed:** 0

**Health:** N/A

**Dread Powers:** Miracle




## Vanishing Hitchhiker

*I just need to find my dad. Can you give me a ride?*

**Background:** Lucas Kight was struck and killed by a car on a moonless night three years ago. He was out looking for his father, who had gone out to get dinner seven hours before and never come back. The whole thing was a tragic accident, with nobody to blame, but with Lucas' father missing the boy had no next of kin, so the city buried him in a potter's field. Lucas' spirit did not rest easily, though, and he now haunts the blind curve where he was killed. He appears occasionally to passing motorists and asks them for a ride.

Provided the drivers are willing to go along, Lucas leads them on a circuitous route past the power station (his father's job), the local dive bar his father liked to hang out at, an out-of-business Thai takeout restaurant (the place his father was supposed to be getting dinner from), and finally to the now-vacant house where he and his father lived. The way the story goes, this is usually when the driver gets fed up and demands to know what's going on, only to discover that there's no one in the car with them. It's an old story, and one found all over the world. Most people who en-

counter Lucas' ghost are none the worse off for it; maybe they're a little spooked, maybe drawn into the supernatural world, but Lucas isn't usually dangerous.

The key word there is "usually." Lucas is still looking for his father and, every once in a while, a driver picks him up who bears a passing resemblance to his father. Sometimes it's the eyes, sometimes it's the voice or the build, or even just that they're wearing utility coveralls like his dad wore at work. When Lucas finds his "dad," he takes him home. So far, though, every time Lucas has found his father, he's ended up losing him again. The bones of at least nine men litter the basement of the old Kight house.

**Description:** Lucas is a young man of about 14, with short, dark hair and large eyes. He's still dressed as he was the night he died: jeans, t-shirt, gray jacket, and tennis shoes with no socks. In bright lights, like the high beams of a car, he appears vaguely translucent, but otherwise gives few signs of his spectral nature.

**Storytelling Hints:** Lucas seems like a harmless local legend, a sad but ultimately friendly spirit that would-be ghost hunters might try to make contact with and lay to rest. Once he fixates on someone as a replacement for his father, though, he becomes a terrifying jailor, dragging the unfortunate into his abandoned home and holding him prisoner there until he expires from deprivation. (Lucas has forgotten about things like food and water.) To date, Lucas has only ever taken men travelling alone, but it's quite possible that if he were picked up by a group that included a man who resembled his father, he might imprint on all of them as a surrogate family.

Figuring out what happened to Lucas' actual father might be the key to putting him to rest and stopping his killings. Whether Lucas' father simply walked out on his son or was involved in something more mysterious (and, indeed, if he's even still alive) is left to the Storyteller, but, whatever the circumstances, it will be a challenge for characters to keep Lucas' spirit calm long enough for some sort of reconciliation.

Lucas Kight's ghost might also be roused to more dramatic activity if a new family were to move into his home. Though he spends most of his time haunting the spot where he died, if Lucas were to get a ride home and see the lights on and strange people in "his" house, he might abandon his vanishing-hitchhiker routine long enough to drive them out.

**Virtue:** Persistent

**Vice:** Lonely

**Integrity:** 5

**Anchors:** The intersection where he died, his house, and the roads he walked the night he died, looking for his father.

**Rank:** 2

**Attributes:** Power 7, Finesse 3, Resistance 4

**Influence:** Lost Things

**Corpus:** 9

**Willpower:** 7

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 15

**Defense:** 3

**Initiative:** 7

**Armor:** None

**Numina:** Mortal Mask

**Manifestation:** Avernian Gates, Materialize, Twilight Form

**Max Essence:** 15

**Ban:** Lucas Kight must follow anyone who says they can tell him where his father is.

**Bane:** The key to the basement door in Lucas' old house.

# The God Machine Chronicle

## What Has Risen May Fall

What is the God-Machine? That question doesn't have a single, easy answer, but that doesn't stop people from asking. The Chronicles of Darkness are layers upon layers of mystery, but what is the mechanism that keeps them all moving? Is there a design in play? And what happens to those who think to use the Machine for their own ends?

## What Has Fallen May Rise Again

# VOICE OF THE ANGEL

**From the Testament of Marco Singe,
the so-called "Pain Prophet" of New Delhi.**

When I was 12, my father beat me after hearing what I had done with another boy. It was as I lay on the cellar floor, feeling the blood on my back become sticky and cold, that the angel first spoke to me. She filled the air with the scent of metal and surrounded me with a circle of blue flame, and I was frightened.

"Don't be afraid," she told me. "I have come to speak to you, and through you. At the command of the God-Machine you shall hear my words and know them to be true." Her voice was like the notes of a flute and their vibrations calmed my fear. And that was how I learned the secret history of the world.

The God-Machine built our world as a resting place for its First Children, whom men called angels or Ancient Ones. After a time, the ancients desired servants to dwell with them, servants who walked upright and had pleasing shapes, and who could speak. They sent the proper prayer-signals to the God-Machine and were granted leave to do so. First the Ancient Ones took the beasts of the field and granted them the knowledge to speak and walk. But these animals retained their wildness and did not make good servants. They grew wicked and violent, and were cast into the wilderness. They were the Second Children, whom men called demons.

So the Ancients called new servants into being and commanded them to spread across the face of the Earth. And these were the Third Children, called mankind. And mankind served the Ancients in peace and contentment. Mankind knew not death then. Those whose bodies became worn and aged were sent to sleep in the shadow of the Earth and returned after a time restored to health and youth.

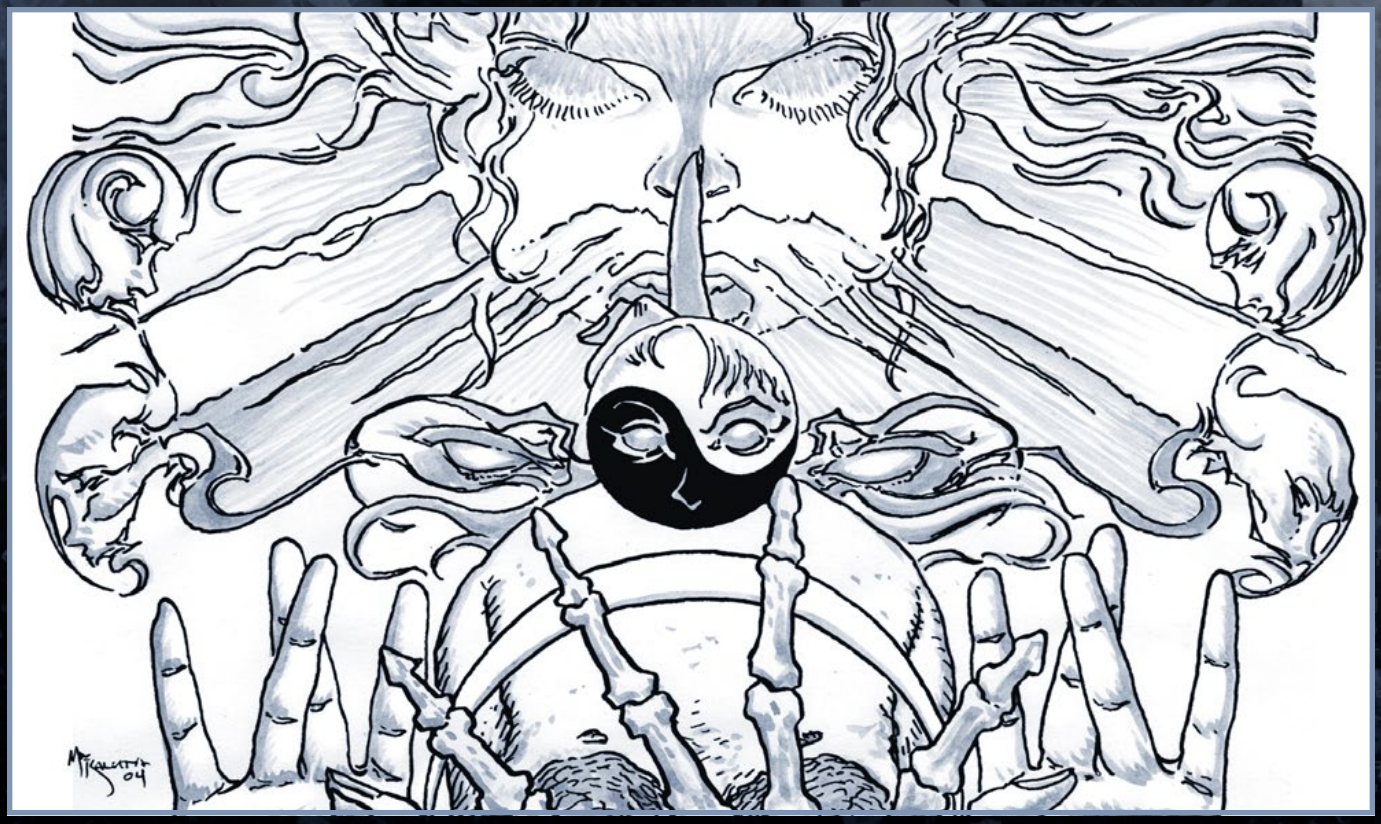
The Ancients commanded their servants to build a great city, a city so vast that a child setting out to walk its length would be an old man before reaching the other side. Calling on the power of the God-Machine, the Ancient Ones raised their city into the dome of the sky, fixing it at the place where the orbit of the moon crossed the orbit of the sun. And in the city they placed a third of mankind to serve them as vassals and slaves.

In the city of the Ancients, man lived closer to the First Children than ever before. And some of the men began to wonder, "Why do the Ancients spend their days in rest while we must toil without relief? Why do the Ancients enjoy the pleasures of this city when it is our labor that built it?" And so resentment rose among the Third Children. They made the proper calculations and sent the prayer-signals to the coordinates of the God-Machine, saying, "We are your children, too. It is not right that we be enslaved. Will you not look on us with favor?"

And they received this answer: "What rises must fall. What has fallen may rise again."

The men of the city debated for seven years. Finally, they decided that it was the will of the God-Machine that they raise themselves from slavery. Determined to kill the Ancients and take their place as the favored of the God-Machine, the men of the city plotted carefully. When the time came, they fell upon the Ancient Ones in their sleep, murdering them with their own weapons and devices in a single night of betrayal.

The streets of the celestial city ran red with blood. A great cry rose up from the Earth, and the mountains shook and the skies were filled with storms. The Ancients struck back at their



servants, but too late. Just eight of the Ancient Ones survived. As they fled, they cried out, "We are undone, our time is over, but while our time was long and joyous, yours shall be short and painful." And they became known as the Furies.

The first Fury was named Silence, and fled to the center of the Sun. It cursed mankind to forget the art of speaking to and receiving the signals of the God-Machine.

The second Fury was named Death, and fled to the hidden side of the moon. It cursed mankind to forget the way back from the shadow of the Earth.

The third Fury was named Torment, and fled to the star Venus. It cursed mankind to be split into two beings, wyff-man and wo-man, each imperfect and forever seeking its opposite.

The fourth Fury was named Fear, and fled beneath the highest mountain on the Earth. It cursed mankind to be hated and dreaded by all the beasts and birds and fish and all creatures everywhere.

Of the other four surviving Ancient Ones nothing here can be said, for they chose to withhold their curses until such time as they saw fit.

And then the city of the Ancients shook to its foundations. The men marveled at what happened but could not stop it. The city was loosened from the moorings that held it to the firmament. The men cried out in horror, rushing to flee the city before it crashed to earth. Some set upon the roads of light that the Ancients had built, and became lost among the stars. Some reached the silver-sailed boats and descended safely. But many were trapped within the city, and screamed their last as it fell. And when the city crashed and sank beneath the waves, the world shook, the sun hid its face and everywhere people were afraid.

And here the angel paused, regarding me with a hundred eyes. "Fear not these words I speak to you. For the news I bear is this: The God-Machine has not turned its eye from your home. What has fallen may rise again. The Third Children shall have their chance to achieve what they once desired. But the way will not be easy. The First Children are set in judgment over you, and the Second Children seek to trap you. It is their workings that take your world through its turnings."

The angel then bade me to warn mankind of the hidden forces that seek to thwart the destiny of the Third Children. Their handiwork appears again and again throughout history. Regard the mighty Sphinx of Egypt. Recent studies of the water erosion on its rocky surface indicate that the monument dates back to the days when the Sahara was green and lush. Far older than the pyramids it guards, the Sphinx comes from a time close to the fall of the Ancients. The Second Children

roamed freely through the world then, greater than man in power and knowledge. The demons shaped primitive man into a civilization that revered them as gods. But their hubris was against the will of the God-Machine, and they failed. The great civilizations of Egypt, Sumer, and Babylonia rose later from the dim memories of that failure, revering gods with the forms and features of beasts.

The Egyptians called the protokingdoms that preceded them the "first time," or the Age of Osiris. They considered it the source of all wisdom and knowledge. The pyramids and surrounding structures, built to mirror the locations of the constellation of Orion and other celestial objects (with the Nile representing the Milky Way), was essentially a vast time machine used to teach the pharaohs how to "swim upstream" against time and return to the Osirian age. By understanding the layout of these structures, the pharaoh of any era could visualize the location of a secret chamber that would grant him access to a bygone age.

Somewhere beneath the Sphinx, that chamber awaits discovery. The cults of the Second Children protect the Sphinx from a distance, inhibiting attempts to uncover it completely, preventing further exploration of its tunnels. When their own servants discern its location, the Second Children will enter the chamber and attempt to recreate the world that slipped from their grasp so long ago.

I asked about the four Furies who withheld their curses on the night of the murder. "Some of them dwell beneath the earth," the angel told me, "And wait for the permutations of the God-Machine before they unleash their wrath." One of them, upon fleeing from the Celestial City, came to rest in what is now the continent of Australia. Touching down in the desert, this Ancient was certain it would remain hidden from man, and so it laid itself down to rest and heal its wounds.

But the Ancient One did not realize how widespread the tribes of mankind had become. No sooner did the Ancient close its eyes than natives of that land crept close to gaze upon the being that had fallen from the sky. They were a people skilled in reading dreams, and their magicians peered into the mind of the sleeping Ancient. They saw that this visitor held a deep and bitter hatred for mankind, and they saw the awful curse it prepared to unleash.

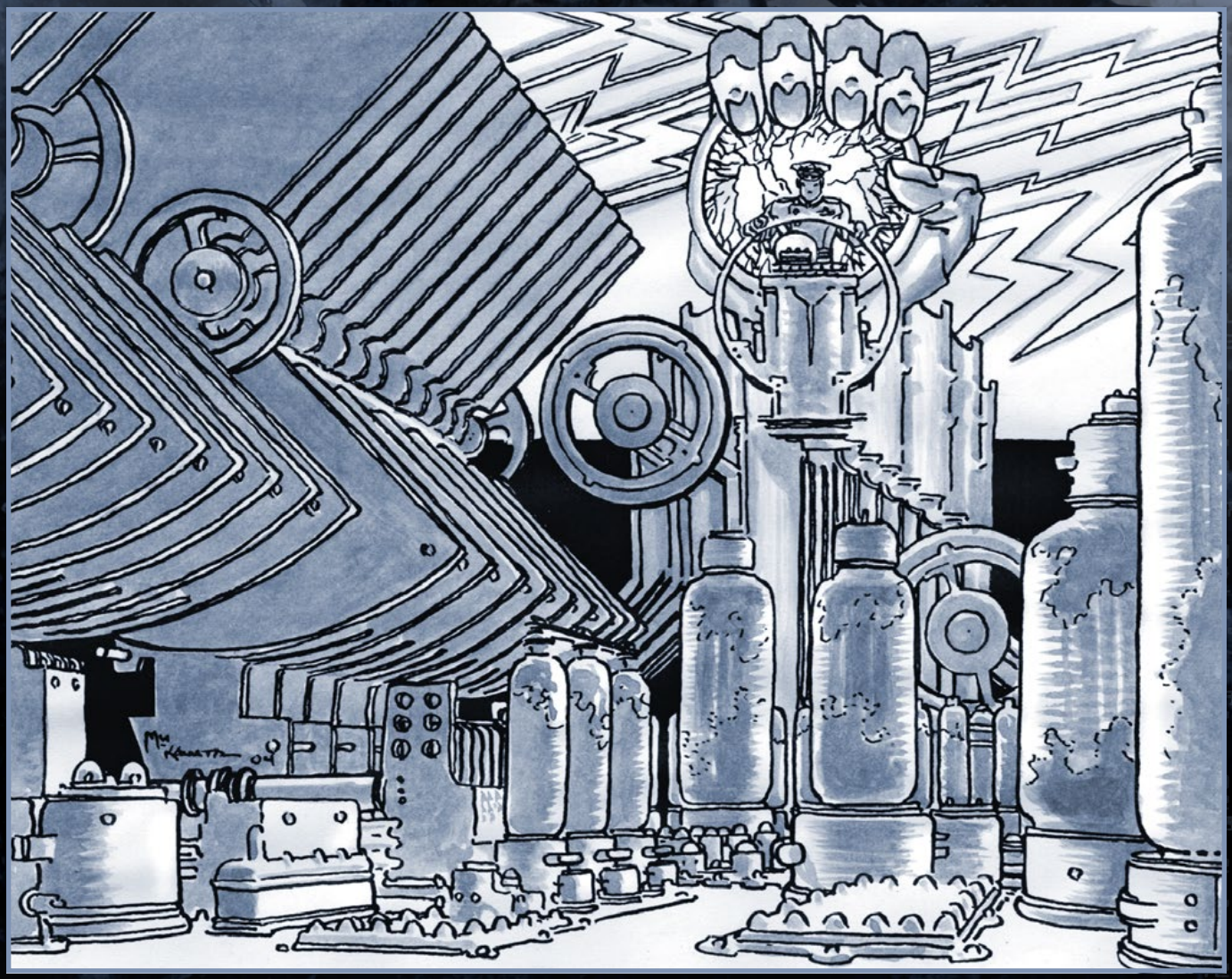
The people grew afraid. They had no weapons mighty enough, no warriors powerful enough to slay one of the Ancients. All they had were songs and stories. And so they whispered and sang in low voices until they had woven a careful dream that deepened the Ancient One's slumber, stilling its anger and quieting its thirst for vengeance. And the magicians covered the angel with soil, piling it higher and higher. When they were done they changed the mound to stone, calling it Uluru.

And the Ancient One, hearing the stories and dream-songs of the natives, was pleased. It made a pact with them, agreeing to stay its wrath and share with them stories of how they and their world were created. But if the people stopped telling the stories and stopped singing the dream-songs, the Ancient would awaken and unleash its curse. So today the aboriginal Anangu people continue the songs and rituals laid down by their ancestors. Uluru remains a place of great power, where spirits gather and strange energy flows. The government of Australia has ceded management of the surrounding land to the Anangu rather than try to deal with reports of lights in the sky, fluctuating magnetic fields, and unusual animals.

Of all the people of the earth, it was those who came to dwell on the South American continent who carried with them the greatest knowledge of their time in the city of the Ancients. Their journey from the fallen city to what would become their home took many generations, and some understanding was lost. But they remembered much and built mighty civilizations, rediscovering and developing the arts of writing, mathematics, astronomy, and farming. The children of this group became the Xi, and their children the Mayans, Incans, Toltecs and Aztecs. As their various tribes, city states, and empires rose and fell, secrets of the Ancients were spread and understanding became more refined.

Yet that knowledge would be their downfall. At the bottom of the world, one of the Ancients watched. It saw that the elite among the cultures of the sun were close to mastering the Star Rites, the rituals of becoming which opened holes in time and changed men to gods. "It is not right for the Third Children to become Luminous Ones," the Ancient said, and begged permission of the God-Machine to deliver its curse. The God-Machine transmitted: "You may speak your curse, but let it be but a whisper, for I desire that secrets be only hidden, not destroyed." So the Ancient took the name Strife and sent its voice far across the world to a ship in the south Atlantic, where a pilot dozed at the wheel.

"Steer south," the Ancient One whispered. "Steer south." Half awake, the sailor turned the wheel and the course of an entire fleet of ships was altered. Shortly after, a storm hit, and the ships were battered. They were blown south to the isle of Cozumel. From there, the fleet's commander Hernando Cortez led his soldiers to the mainland and the eventual conquest of the Aztec nation. The fall of the Aztecs, sooner than might otherwise have happened, allowed a rush of European colonization that doomed the native cultures.



But not all was lost. Despite the best efforts of the conquerors, some of the ancient traditions of Mesoamerica were secretly preserved by the conquered and are honored today by their descendants. The 20 calendars of the Maya, the Incan Skulls of Wisdom, and the Toltec maps of the Black Sun— for those who are diligent and wise, the formulas to step outside time can be pieced together from these.

I asked the angel if mankind will ever hear the voice of the God-Machine again, or if it is truly lost to us.

The angel explained that with the discovery of the electromagnetic spectrum, mankind took its first halting step toward communication with the God-Machine. For electromagnetic waves are the shadows of the voice of the God-Machine. They are the edge of something that can only be fully understood in more than three dimensions. The Mayan high priests called them the branches of *ceiba*, or the tree of life. In 1870 — more than 20 years before Marconi demonstrated his famous wireless — British inventor and scientist David Hughes crafted a device capable of sending and receiving wireless electromagnetic messages. He did not reveal his invention to the world, however, because he believed he'd stumbled upon something more important than the invention itself. When he first turned on the receiver, before activating the transmitter, signals were already being sent.

Hughes was a mathematician and musician. To his keen ears it seemed clear that the sounds he heard were not random, but some kind of encoded pattern. He spent seven years trying to interpret what he heard. Hughes made little progress until he showed a curious friend a diagram he'd made to represent the pattern of signals he'd studied. To the surprise of both men, Hughes' friend had seen the pattern before — at the British Museum of Natural History. The next day, Hughes visited the museum. He saw an exhibit of stone carvings taken from Mayan temples dating back to the first centuries of the Common Era.

After several more years and copious correspondence with experts around the world, Hughes was convinced that

he could translate at least part of the message that awaited him when he first activated his machine. He confided to his friends and colleagues that he would soon have a spectacular announcement to make. But he died three days before the event. Following the directives of his recently rewritten will, his attorney removed all references to the mysterious signals from Hughes' notes and records. Aside from the comments and testimonies of those who knew Hughes, the only extant reference left is among the final pages of his diary:

"Long and painful hours, months, years, have brought me to this. But a small fraction of a greater whole, made finally clear to my understanding. And yet these few words, I cannot bear to hear. Let them reach no other ears. Let what is fallen remain fallen."

In the century since his death, some of Hughes' notes have come to light. In the early 1950s, a group of amateur shortwave radio operators claimed that Hughes had not only decoded the signals but had left diagrams of a machine that would reply to the code. Though no one could locate the signals Hughes described, instructions for building Hughes' "responders" were widely circulated, and hundreds of the machines are believed to have been built since. They continually transmit automated sequences of numbers, words, tones, music and other sounds, much to the consternation of governments and commercial broadcasters worldwide. Also known as "numbers stations," the devices transmit today, and can be heard on conventional shortwave receivers. According to Hughes' apocryphal statements, their intended recipient is "the ruler of Mictlan, the Mayan Tartarus." What Hughes believed would happen when the proper signal was received is not known.

"What of the Second Children," I asked the angel. "Do they ever make their presence known to mankind?"

"Their influence is widespread and insidious," the angel said.

As the premier political power on the American continents, the United States acquired much of the secret knowledge that had been plundered by Europeans in South America. Its capitol city was laid out according to geometric principles of Aztec cities, such as Tenochtitlan, as interpreted by European freemason architects. The lines of the streets are oriented to channel energy from the Earth. Numbered and lettered boulevards allow power to be ritualistically directed for various purposes. The result has allowed a country of farmers and immigrants to grow into the most powerful nation on the Earth.

In 1898, a cabal of government officials, wealthy industrialists, and media moguls triggered the Spanish-American War as a way to gain influence over Cuba and possess certain pre-Columbian artifacts located there. The most notable of these was a fragment of one of the Black Sun Maps of the Toltecs. America's secret government was capable of translating a part of the map, which enabled it to contact and entreat with one of the Second Children, a demon who agreed to perform certain services in exchange for blood sacrifice.

But for the most valuable service of all — complete translation of the map fragment — America's patron demanded tribute on a scale beyond the capacity of its clients to provide. So the secrets of the Black Sun remained unspoken for decades. Then, as the 20th century approached its mid-point, the requisite "knife of flame" revealed its presence at last. The enigma of atomic fire was unlocked and the word's first nuclear device was created. On 16 July, 1945, the weapon was tested in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Its purpose was ritualistically sanctified with the chant, "I am become death, destroyer of worlds." Weeks later, the detonations in Japan satisfied the demonic contract, and in exchange the meaning of the Black Sun Map fragment was revealed.

"And what was the secret of the map?" I asked the angel.

"To the Toltec people, it was a warning," she said. "But in modern times, it has become an irresistible lure."

On May 25, 1961, U.S. President John Kennedy declared before Congress an imperative for the nation to achieve a successful landing on the moon before the end of the decade. What was not announced publicly was the true reason for the project. The elite faction operating behind America's corridors of power now had a translated version of the Toltec Map fragment, which revealed a detailed topography of the lunar surface. Most importantly, it contained an atlas of the moon's so-called "dark side," as well as a comprehensive description of what lay entombed there.

The American Apollo missions were so named to curry favor with the various sun deities who were in fact aliases for the Second Children. Publicly, it was Apollo 11 that first put man on the moon. But in fact, American astronauts began exploring the lunar surface as early as the 1968 Apollo 8 mission. Apollo 10 confirmed the location of what the Toltecs called "the crypt of the butterfly." By Apollo 15, the outer vault was cracked, and it was 1972's Apollo 17 — the final manned lunar mission to date — that brought back what classified documents referred to as "Packet Theta."

The angel has warned me that the relic brought back from its receptacle on the moon has the potential to be much more devastating than any atomic weapon. What was retrieved was the skeletal form of one of the Ancient Ones. Specifically, the very being that pronounced the curse of mortality upon humanity. As the portal through which death itself entered our universe, it was changed into a thing neither dead nor alive. Those who learn to control it, as its current jailers seek to do, will exert ultimate power over the tides of life and death.

With each passing day, dark forces come closer to gaining that power. Those who seek must unify and stand against them. Our world needs warriors of light, defenders of life, seekers of truth to thwart their wishes. The God-Machine waits. The angel has shown me how. I can teach you. We are fallen, but we might rise again.

Detective David Nelson opened the hotel room door slowly. He never knew what he'd find on a case like this. Men who gunned down unarmed people in a crowded church often left living spaces that were just as JUMBLED and UGLY as the crimes they committed.

The blankets lay in disarray. A pillow had tumbled onto the floor. Empty Chinese take-out boxes waited in the trash can near the door. No sign that housekeeping had been in here yet today, which meant less likelihood that someone had DISTURBED evidence.

Not that an undisturbed scene was quite so important in a case like this. No question how or when the shooter's victims had died, and the killer wasn't about to make a court appearance. Nelson only cared about the killer's motives and whether he had any accomplices-whether he was a LONE NUT JOB or a TERRORIST, in other words.

Nelson opened the top drawer of the dresser and pulled out a half-empty box of hollow point ammunition. No question where the other half had ended up. THIRTY-SEVEN members of the Church of Plenty were GUNNED DOWN during the morning service, and dozens more wounded. He closed the drawer.

A BROKEN laptop sat on the desk, glass scattered nearby, as though the shooter had smashed it. It didn't hold Nelson's interest for long. The data retrieval folks could probably pull the shooter's files off the hard drive, but he wasn't getting any information from it today.

As Nelson stooped down on the far side of the bed, he noticed the DIRTY pair of blue jeans with one bulging pocket. The battered cellphone was nothing fancy. Its contacts list was empty except for two names — Clara and Abigail. He found plenty of pictures, though. Most of them were of a redheaded teenage girl. In the last one, she stood in front of a school with the forced smile of a kid who is humoring her parents. Nelson could just make out the name of the school — WELLINGTON SCHOOL FOR GIFTED CHILDREN.

Probably the killer's daughter, Nelson thought as he tossed the phone on top of the jeans.

WHAT A SHAME.

He opened the closet and rummaged through the pockets of the leather jacket hanging there. Nelson removed a crisp, glossy business card from the inside pocket. "Melissa Charles: Collector of the Inexplicable," it read, and then a phone number and P.O. Box.

*Weird*, Nelson mused, looking at the address. *That's on the other side of the country.*

He found a SMUDGED sentence scribbled in pen on the back.

"WHAT HAS FALLEN MAY RISE AGAIN," it read, "AND I HAVE TO STOP IT."

Nelson's eyes widened. He had seen those words before in the personal effects of two other spree shooters. Two might be coincidence, but three?

# Gears Within Gears: The God-Machine Chronicle

**Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.**

**–Clarke's Third Law**

Something is out there, something bigger than us. It permeates our world and possibly even stretches into other worlds, other dimensions, and other times. Its power can be felt everywhere, the silent manipulator of all of human history. It has a plan, but we are not privy to it.

If it desired our extinction, we would stand no better chance against it than the dinosaurs did against the meteor impact that ended their reign. But anyone who has witnessed the way it casually uses and discards humans to achieve its ends knows it isn't benevolent. Only the most fanatical cultists devoted to it would say otherwise, and even they realize that their faith cannot preserve them from the object of their worship if it decides their death serves its purpose.

It is the God-Machine.

No human mythology ever conceived of a god so alien to the mortal mind. Its power would make gods of storms and catastrophe tremble in fear. Its foresight makes goddesses of prophecy and destiny seem blind by comparison. Unlike those anthropomorphic deities, the God-Machine cannot be reasoned with, appealed to, or appeased. In the cold eyes of the God-Machine, individual humans are of negligible consequence except insofar as they either further its plans or disrupt them.

The vast majority of humans live their whole lives without knowing the God-Machine exists, even if they are unknowing servants of its schemes. They're the lucky ones. Encounters between mortals and the God-Machine often do not end well for the mortal. People see something the God-Machine intends to keep secret — or they are singled out as the right *shape* of person for a particular task, the right size cog with the right number of teeth — and they disappear. Most never reappear, and those who do usually end up as a John or Jane Doe in a morgue months or years later and miles away. The rest return marked by the experience — twisted in body, broken in mind, or just *empty*, somehow. Once in a while someone returns seemingly whole but without any memory of what happened, where they are, or how they got those mysterious scars. Rarely, a mortal slips away from the God-Machine's schemes with her recollections intact, but even these escapes might be part of the God-Machine's plan.

Supernatural creatures are perhaps more likely to know of the God-Machine, but even they know next to nothing about its workings, and even less about its ultimate purpose. The ability to wield occult powers does not make these beings incapable of superstition. Quite often they assume the God-Machine has something to do with them — a creation of ancient mages, perhaps, or some remnant of power left by a forgotten spirit that is still weaving humanity into its elaborate tapestry. This is no less superstitious nonsense than any entertained by the God-Machine's mortal cultists. When faced with something as vast and inscrutable as the God-Machine, imagining it is the product of something within one's knowledge and experience can be a comfort.

Comfort is the enemy of true understanding.

## Theme and Mood

### Theme: The Hidden System

The God-Machine is a literal machine that spans the Earth and has tendrils in other worlds, dimensions, and times. Cogs turn in the background, and the best

that most people, supernatural or otherwise, can do is peer deep enough into the dark to see the wheels turning. Then they usually misunderstand what they've seen and make up their own stories. Sometimes they see a little piece of it correctly purely by accident. Sometimes lightning flashes at exactly the right time and someone sees the cogs in the God-Machine, full and clear. Then the moment passes, and the witness still knows no more about the purpose of all those mechanisms.

### Mood: Cogs in the Machine

Like all machines, the God-Machine has a purpose, but humans aren't equipped to understand it. Mortals who seek understanding of the God-Machine are like the four blind men trying to describe an elephant by touching just one part of it. Except the God-Machine is more like an entire *ecosystem*, and those feeling around blindly to understand its workings more than likely draw some wildly inaccurate conclusions about it. Its inscrutable system has math and physics and numbers and paperwork and machinery and timetables and *we're not privy to any of it.* It's not our business, except insofar as the God-Machine needs us to make a cog turn right.

## How to Use This Section

**The God-Machine Chronicle** is a sample chronicle for the Chronicles of Darkness. The God-Machine itself is a cosmic power, but its various schemes run the gamut from local stories that may affect a handful of people all the way up to pandimensional enterprises that threaten the entire world with catastrophe. A God-Machine chronicle begins with a few tiny glimpses of the hidden system and gradually expands into levels of tremendous complexity of purpose. Characters who seek to understand or oppose the God-Machine's designs flirt with madness, death, or worse. They are mice running around in an enormous clock. One false step and they will find themselves ground into paste between its unfeeling gears.

This chapter is aimed at a gradual revelation of the hidden system over the course of many stories, but even if you don't want to make the God-Machine the focus of your chronicle, much of what you'll find in this book can be dropped into just about any chronicle with a little bit of modification. The God-Machine is one of those great unknowables that are out there doing something mortals and supernatural creatures alike cannot comprehend. Maybe some element of the God-Machine's plan runs contrary to the characters' goals, or maybe they stand to gain something by furthering one of its projects.

God-Machine cultists have many faces, too. One group of fanatical mortals will fight to the death to keep outsiders away from a demon-tainted playground because the God-Machine has told them the demon will escape if the playground is disturbed. Elsewhere, a sorcerer offers the God-Machine the souls of an entire town in hopes of currying favor with it, and the characters might be the only thing standing in his way. Even the unwitting servants of the God-Machine can be dangerous, not to mention fraught with moral peril. The cop with a warrant for your arrest on some pretense cooked up by the God-Machine's servants probably has no idea that you won't live long enough to call your lawyer if you're taken into custody, but does your battle against one of the God-Machine's schemes justify killing him?

## All the Truth There Is

What is the God-Machine? We'll state up front that we're not going to provide a definitive answer. Rather, this book provides a lot of possible ways to present and use the God-Machine in chronicles, but not exactly what the God-Machine is.

This might seem like we're being unnecessarily coy, but this is deliberate. Providing a specific, objective definition and nature for the God-Machine would make it more difficult to use in other Chronicles of Darkness games, but keeping its nature undetermined (that's not the same thing as "secret" — it isn't that we know and we're not telling you, it's that we aren't making the decision) allows us to keep using it without contradicting existing or future material. One guiding principle for the Chronicles of Darkness has always been that it's big enough to accommodate a lot of different entities. Does the existence of the God-Machine invalidate, say, the spirit courts found in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** or the Supernal Realms of **Mage: The Awakening**? Of course not. The mechanisms of the God-Machine might be found deep in the Underworld. A motley of changelings might find a section of Hedge behind an immense wall where the Thorns have been cleared out and stacks of machinery sit, waiting for the day they might be useful. On the other hand, the God-Machine might very explicitly be absent from certain areas of the setting. Maybe vampires corrode the integrity of Infrastructure by their very presence. Maybe the Principle of **Promethean: The Created** is an autonomous subset of the God-Machine, a program that went rogue long ago.

In any case, **The God-Machine Chronicle** presents the entity within the context of a "mortals" Chronicles of Darkness game. That isn't to say that you can't run a God-Machine chronicle with supernatural characters, just that if you do that, you might need to make some decisions about "the truth." But even then, it might not be necessary — that decision has less to do with the characters and more to do with the tier (see p. 180).

## Mainspring

Any human attempt to understand the whole structure of the God-Machine is futile. The diversity of its moving parts and servants is seemingly infinite. Some of the God-Machine's gears are literal, hidden in basements, power plants, and in even stranger places throughout the world. Most are figurative — a stretch of highway that taps arcane forces when a particular configuration of cars drives over it,

for example, or a shipping company that transports materials where and when the God-Machine needs them.

However, the God-Machine's projects tend to follow certain patterns. Those familiar with its handiwork can often recognize these patterns. The God-Machine could certainly deviate from its habits, but it seldom does. Most people aren't even aware enough of the God-Machine to notice that something is out of place, and those who do clearly are not worth the trouble of taking extra steps to conceal the God-Machine's influence.

## Structural Limitations

The God-Machine is not omnipresent. It doesn't have mechanical extensions of itself everywhere. Because it can't be everywhere at once, it relies heavily on intermediaries. The servants of the God-Machine seldom know why it demands an action of them, although they often invent wildly-inaccurate theories. Many of them don't even realize they are serving the God-Machine.

Nor is the God-Machine omnipotent. It can't actually violate the laws of physics, but its demonstrated understanding of them greatly exceeds anything anyone on Earth can imagine. It can harness forces physicists have not yet discovered to achieve results scientists consider completely impossible.

The God-Machine isn't omniscient, either, but its awareness is several dozen orders of magnitude beyond any mortal's. The popular chaos theory illustration describes a world in which the flapping of a butterfly's wings can mean the difference between sunshine and rain on the other side of the planet. The God-Machine doesn't control the weather per se. It simply knows *which* butterfly must flap its wings to bring the rain and ensures that those wings are flapping in the right time and place.

As with lesser machines, the God-Machine has no concern for the wellbeing of humans. It is aware of their existence, of course, and it has some inkling of their potential as far as their usefulness to the God-Machine's plans go. But it doesn't waste any energy contemplating how its machinations will make them feel, or whether its purpose gives it ethical justification to pound them down like nails to keep some part of its structure together. The God-Machine is perfectly willing to manipulate, hurt, and kill people in order to achieve its goals. It prefers to be subtle, to mask its meddling behind a thin façade of ordinary coincidences and misfortunes, but it doesn't do so because it fears human reprisal. It does it because *that's just how it operates*. People are just tools to it, and it thinks nothing of cutting them open and raiding them for spare parts if it needs to. On the other hand, it doesn't derive anything like pleasure from hurting or killing people. Most of the damage it causes humans is incidental. When the God-Machine hurts someone deliberately it does so because that injury somehow serves its purpose by furthering or protecting a project.

It appears that these small constraints on the God-Machine's power force it to largely stick to its favored pattern when implementing a part of its plan. It is methodical, perfectly content to spend months or even decades arranging

people and materials into the proper configuration before wielding them like a precision tool. It appears not to respond quickly to problems and setbacks. Its projects can be thwarted, and on those occasions when one is, the God-Machine tends to draw back from the experience to consider its next move. Rarely does the God-Machine try the thwarted gambit twice in the same place, and even then only after taking some time to analyze the data it collected during the failed attempt.

While the God-Machine's scale and machine nature are its strengths, they also make it slow, and that slowness can be exploited by the mere mortals it thinks are so far beneath it. Of course, that may also be merely a comfortable superstition. Just because the God-Machine seldom moves quickly doesn't mean it can't, and most of its servants lack the meticulous patience of the being they serve. A single mad cultist's knife brings just as sure a death as an elaborate defensive subroutine does.

## Infrastructure

In human terms, infrastructure is a basic organizational structure in a complex system that serves as a foundation for the rest. You can't have an electrically-lighted city of millions without power plants and a means of transporting that electricity to buildings. And you can't have *those* unless you have a source for the parts that are needed to construct an electrical grid. Every layer of complexity depends on a simpler layer that makes it possible, which depends on another layer until we're ultimately reliant on three things: knowledge, natural resources, and manpower.

The God-Machine's Infrastructure is just as critical to its ability to bring its projects to fruition. Each piece of Infrastructure serves a specific purpose and is in itself a part of a more complex piece of Infrastructure. The God-Machine employs several kinds of Infrastructure in its projects:

**Concealment Infrastructure:** This is the God-Machine's first defense against interference with its plans. Despite its power, it prefers to be subtle and so employs a great deal of security through obscurity. Concealment Infrastructure is intended to do just that — allow the God-Machine's projects to remain undetected.

Some of this is purely mundane. The God-Machine will set up a front at the site of more important Infrastructure — such as a fake restaurant, nightclub, or shop. Mortal dupes attend this front, never realizing that their actual job is to keep up appearances so no one thinks to open a particular closet or explore the basement.

It can be supernatural, too. Why mortals can't see the God-Machine's gears isn't clear, but it likely has something to do with concealment Infrastructure. Some mortals can see the gears, though. A few are born with the talent, but most gain the ability after their first encounter with the God-Machine. A mortal who sees a gear for whatever reason is forever able to see the gears anywhere in the world. (In game terms, a mortal with Merit Unseen Sense: God-Machine can see the gears, and can see through concealment Infrastructure. See p. 60 for more on this Merit.)

**Defense Infrastructure:** Sometimes concealment just isn't enough. Supernatural beings and curious mortals spot the patterns of the God-Machine's project and start poking around looking for answers or, even worse, a way to thwart that part of the plan. That's when the God-Machine has to rely on more overt means of getting rid of these nuisances. From mortal cultists and terrestrial supernatural creatures to spirits, monsters, and mechanical servants, the God-Machine has armies of allies at its disposal to get rid of inquisitive humans. It still tries to do so quietly, but when the God-Machine faces a real threat to its Infrastructure "quietly" is more likely to involve a sniper on a roof or some nightmare creature waiting in the backseat of the troublemaker's car.

**Logistical Infrastructure:** Most of the God-Machine's projects involve moving people and materials into position — the creation of the occult matrix that produces the output that is the God-Machine's objective for that project. This requires its own Infrastructure. The gluttony spirit can only be drawn into the world if offered the flesh of a hundred humans? The God-Machine creates logistical Infrastructure to locate, collect, and transport all that meat. An ancient relic lost millennia ago is needed to open a gateway to another world, with inhabitants who must be subjugated to mine an occult mineral, native only to that planet? The God-Machine creates logistical Infrastructure to locate the desired artifact and bring it to the right place.

**Elimination Infrastructure:** Some types of Infrastructure are meant to be temporary, such as an occult matrix built to take advantage of a particular conjunction of the planets that won't recur for a millennium. Less commonly, mortal or supernatural investigators disrupt a project before all the necessary Infrastructure is in place. The God-Machine employs scrubbing Infrastructure to eliminate all evidence that any other Infrastructure existed in a place. The method of elimination can be as crude as acts of arson or demolitions, or as subtle as a loyal wizard or spirit that causes the entire town to forget about that night all the frogs in the lake gathered in a circle at the center of town and croaked out an arcane song. It can be widespread (burying an entire city beneath the ash of a nearby volcano) or targeted (the mysterious death of a single mortal who saw too much).

**Command and Control Infrastructure:** The God-Machine is a machine, and any machine as complex as it is has parts that are responsible for setting the overall strategy of the God-Machine. The God-Machine needs some means of gathering information and making decisions — the equivalent of a command and control center or a central processing unit. So far no one has located any such command and control Infrastructure, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Considering the lengths to which human militaries go to protect command and control centers, it is likely that any comparable Infrastructure the God-Machine has would be similarly well defended.

## Occult Matrix and Output

The God-Machine doesn't spend all this time creating increasingly-complex layers of Infrastructure without reason. The goal of Infrastructure is to bring the right materials to

the right place at the right time and arrange or move them in the right way to achieve an outcome. The structure that generates the result is the occult matrix.

An occult matrix exploits a tiny exception in the laws of physics as humans understand them. The degree of precision the God-Machine must maintain in order to make use of an occult matrix makes rocket science seem forgiving of errors. Oftentimes if the God-Machine's timing or placement is slightly off, the occult matrix fails. Although it is conceivable that it instead does something the God-Machine didn't intend, in almost every case a failed occult matrix does nothing at all.

This is one reason why the God-Machine takes so many steps to avoid attention. If a coterie of snooping vampires shows up at the critical moment and disrupts the matrix, the God-Machine has wasted all the effort it put into carefully arranging matters in the first place. What's more, it usually can't make a second attempt because timing was just as important to the matrix as the placement of materials.

A successfully-formed occult matrix generates an Output. Usually this involves bringing an angel into the world. The God-Machine can summon powerful (and lesser) entities from other dimensions, open portals to distant times and worlds, and do any number of other things even the most powerful supernatural creatures on Earth would regard as impossible. Perhaps they share a common origin or purpose, or perhaps something else binds them, but the angels appear to be unfailingly loyal to the God-Machine, and this is probably the reason it prefers to use them in its projects. Angel or otherwise, the God-Machine nearly always uses the Output of one occult matrix in the Infrastructure of another project. Every Output makes a more complex Infrastructure possible, and the more complex the Infrastructure, the more powerful the Output of its occult matrix.

For example, the goal of one of the God-Machine's projects is to bring a particular kind of angel into the world. That is the project's intended Output. To accomplish that, six people must be simultaneously and ritually murdered at the foot of each of six identical obelisks. This combination of conditions is the occult matrix required to generate the Output. Obelisks don't build themselves, however, so the God-Machine must first create Infrastructure to bring about those conditions.

Logistical Infrastructure will factor heavily, as it usually does. The God-Machine must acquire the land, collect the materials, and construct the obelisks — not to mention organize the sacrifices. This will require it to work through intermediaries. Servants with money or influence bankroll the project or blackmail local governments into doing so. Pawns haul materials and build the obelisks according to the God-Machine's specifications. Cultists kill or die for the object of their devotion.

The God-Machine prefers to be subtle, however. It doesn't want anything disrupting the delicate occult matrix. If it simply builds six mysterious stone edifices in a handful of small towns, some occult investigator out there will certainly notice. Even if it builds them out in some wilderness where no one ever goes, the necessary movement of people and materials will still leave a trail. Someone might get close enough to interfere.

This is where concealment Infrastructure comes in. In spite of its patience, the God-Machine cannot erase all traces of its projects. However, it hides one obelisk in the lobby of a newly constructed luxury hotel. It instructs a wealthy resident to donate land to the city as a park, creating an excuse to erect an obelisk there under the pretense of being some kind of war monument. A magical illusion hides the third from view. The spire of a local church mysteriously collapses, and the fourth obelisk hides within its replacement. Suddenly, instead of six painfully obvious, mysterious obelisks the God-Machine has four carefully-hidden obelisks and two obvious ones that do not suggest the full pattern.

The God-Machine also deploys defense Infrastructure around each of the obelisks, especially the two visible ones. A gang of mechanical teenagers prowls the park by night, and park security polices it by day. The new assistant pastor of the church is not human. The cult that will perform the sacrifice at one obelisk will not allow any outsider near it. Each cult, each group of servants, knows only about the obelisk it serves. They have no knowledge that the God-Machine has carefully coordinated the rituals they will perform.

## Using Mortal Infrastructure

The God-Machine piggybacks on mortal infrastructure when it can. Sure, the God-Machine could create some occult method of delivering orders to its mortal agents, but the postal system is often just as effective and does not require additional Infrastructure. This also makes it harder for meddling mortals to rip up that communication system, because by doing so they would be destroying something upon which they themselves depend.

The same goes for most of its mortal pawns. Why summon beings from beyond this world to guard delicate Infrastructure when it can be hidden in a top secret military facility where soldiers shoot intruders on sight? This adds an additional element of horror to a God-Machine chronicle. These are ordinary people who are just going about their business. Interrogating them is futile because they have no idea that they're pawns of the God-Machine, much less what role they play in its current project. Killing these unwitting servants of the God-Machine has Morality consequences, to say nothing of the legal repercussions. Besides, it's amazing how easily the police find damning evidence against those who kill mortals the God-Machine was using to complete one of its projects.

Once the occult matrix is achieved, the angel arrives to carry out the God-Machine's will. The God-Machine probably has no immediate need to bring more such angels, so it has no further use for the six obelisks. At this point it sends in scrubbing Infrastructure. If it does not foresee ever using the obelisks again, these scrubbers destroy the obelisks, eliminate witnesses, and reassign the God-Machine's servants to new projects. If it calculates a future use for the obelisks, the scrubbers leave them in place but eliminate those who know about the sacrifices to prevent any investigators from learning about the obelisks' function in the occult matrix.

## Linchpin

Mortal and supernatural infrastructure alike has weak points that can be attacked to shut the whole thing down. A house has lights, internet access, air conditioning, and every other modern convenience, but cut just one wire that leads to the electrical grid, and all that stops working. The Infrastructure of each of the God-Machine's projects also has vulnerabilities called Linchpins.

A linchpin is the little pin that prevents the wheel from sliding off the axle or, more generally, something that holds everything together. A Linchpin is a point in the God-Machine's Infrastructure that is weakest in some way. It may be a spot where the gears are poorly hidden or loosely guarded, a particularly-exact occult matrix that can easily be disrupted, or Infrastructure that requires constant maintenance or input.

- **Suspicious Front:** The front the God-Machine uses to conceal its project is particularly flimsy. For example, a gas station near a lonely highway hasn't updated its prices in many years, so that it has the cheapest gasoline this side of 1990, all the newspapers and magazines in the convenience store are 20 years old, and the snack food has long since expired. The average passerby may take advantage of the cheap fill-up without noticing the low rumble in the ground below, but chances are he won't come that way again. Someone looking for signs of God-Machine Infrastructure, however, is more likely to investigate further.

- **Unfaithful Servant:** Someone working on one the God-Machine's projects turns traitor or just shoots off his mouth at the wrong time. This living piece of Infrastructure probably doesn't know a tenth of what he thinks he does, but he knows enough to jeopardize the completion of the occult matrix.

- **Lazy Scrubbers:** The creatures the God-Machine sends to scrub a piece of obsolete Infrastructure do a half-assed job or get interrupted in the middle of their work, and they leave behind some clue to the truth that investigators may discover. This may include hints about the purpose of the angel summoned by the scrubbed Infrastructure — maybe even enough for someone to stop it.

- **Mortal Politics:** The God-Machine has subverted a politician's pork project in order to construct a massive stone edifice. Officially, this is a war monument, but it's actually the focal point of an occult matrix that is the goal of the God-Machine's project. If funding for the construction were to be suddenly cut off, however, the God-Machine would have to find some other way to finish the project or give it up for lost.

- **Communications Disruption:** The God-Machine has set up a communications hub in a post office in Oregon. Its gears type thousands of letters per week and mail them to most of the God-Machine's mortal pawns on the West Coast. These letters contain instructions to coordinate activity on dozens of the God-Machine's projects. None of the postal employees know the gears are there, but someone who intercepts enough of these communiques could notice that all the envelopes are coming from the same origin city. Stop those letters, and many of the God-Machine's projects could collapse.

- **The Man at the Top:** The God-Machine appoints an angel to take charge of a project disguised as a corporation. The company's CEO never gives press conferences in person and strictly forbids any cameras on the same floor as his office. On those occasions when he leaves his office, all security cameras in his path are turned off. Why? Because while the angel can hide its nature from the human eye, it looks like an angel in any photography.

- **Breeding Project:** The God-Machine intends for a particular boy to fall in love with a certain girl because it projects that their offspring will have a trait it needs for a future project. Coincidences abound to drive the pair together, and it is probably only a matter of time, now. Of course, if one of them were to die, be kidnapped, or simply fall in love with someone else, the God-Machine's project will fail.

- **The Occupation:** A large group of seemingly-invulnerable monsters occupies a small town and imprisons its entire population. Even an investigator 10 miles away can tell that something is definitely going on down there just by looking through a pair of binoculars — circles of standing stones, daily human sacrifices, and even more chilling sights. Rescue attempts seem hopeless. The creatures are too tough to fight and not quite stupid enough to trick. However, they are incredibly vulnerable to a commonly-available substance. Can enough of it be brought into play to defeat these monsters before the God-Machine brings in reinforcements?

- **Seraphim:** Once brought forth by an occult matrix, most angels have ways to stay in this world until the God-Machine no longer needs them, but the angel directing the God-Machine's current project is not

most angels. Its incredible power makes a direct confrontation suicidal, and the Infrastructure it is building has no obvious Linchpin. However, if someone were to prevent the God-Machine's cultists making the sacrifices that fuel the angel's continued presence, it would be ripped from our world and banished to the place from which it came.

- **If You Can't Beat Them:** The God-Machine is used to having human worshipers, and it can always find some use for these cultists. The cultists themselves are not always very good at screening new members for signs that, say, a postulant intends to infiltrate the cult in order to investigate the God-Machine or thwart its designs. Part of this is the natural human desire to win others over to one's ideals. Part of it is the knowledge that the God-Machine quite often devours cultists in the course of its projects, and those who bring in fresh meat to fuel its designs are significantly less likely to end up being put through the grinder themselves. The God-Machine doesn't reward the loyalty of its tools, per se, but it recognizes the difference between a hammer and a nail.

Striking a Linchpin successfully should always carry some reward. Greater understanding of the God-Machine's designs is the most likely. Investigators might even thwart one of the God-Machine's projects, although this sort of victory almost always simply forces it to find another way to achieve the Output of the project.

Keep in mind here that "reward" doesn't mean "freedom from consequences." Those who throw rocks at a hornet's nest might be rewarded with the satisfaction of knocking it off the tree branch, but they'd better be ready to run like hell when those angry hornets boil out. Studying the God-Machine too closely attracts its attention — thwarting it, even more so. As it tends to express this by silencing those who disturb its projects, every attack on the God-Machine's Infrastructure is an increasingly-dangerous proposal. This isn't because the God-Machine is vengeful. Humans are practically beneath its notice, such that it considers mortal disruption of a project a mere environmental hazard — the way a home builder may regard an unusually rainy year an expensive, but otherwise unavoidable, risk of the business.

However, the God-Machine doesn't typically respond quickly to threats. Its servants, angelic or otherwise, certainly can, of course, but as gods go, it seldom summons a hurricane where a convenient car accident will achieve the same results. Presented with a coordinated assault on its projects from many different angles in rapid succession, the God-Machine might become desperate. It might begin to make mistakes. In its haste to crush this unexpected rebellion it might finally tip its hand and reveal its true purpose.

Unfortunately, that's not usually the way these kinds of tales end.

## Free Will

It may be tempting as a Storyteller to fall into the trap of having the God-Machine thwart the characters at every turn or otherwise render their victories ultimately meaningless. To a certain extent, this is in keeping with the themes of the chronicle. The God-Machine is an incomprehensibly huge antagonist. The actions of humans have virtually no effect on it, and it should feel that way. Save this town from being devoured by supernatural ants, and the God-Machine simply chooses another town in another country to turn into magical ant food. There's nothing the characters can do to stop that.

Maybe a major victory over the God-Machine must wait until late in the chronicle, but that doesn't mean the characters achieve nothing until they are powerful enough to pack the gears the God-Machine has hidden beneath the Great Sphinx with explosives and set off the charges. They might not wrestle angels and win, at first, but they can save *this* town from sinking into the earth, drive out the agents of the God-Machine in *this* city council, or stop *this* teacher from being falsely accused of sexually abusing his students. And if they do, the God-Machine will take its project elsewhere and leave the people the players' characters saved in peace.

And as they tally up these little victories, the characters learn more. They start seeing the gears. They have a better understanding of what the God-Machine's Infrastructure looks like. They become more effective at identifying and exploiting Linchpins. They're inching closer and closer to the truth about the God-Machine, whatever it might be. When the time comes to bring the chronicle to its final climax, they'll hopefully be ready for it — or at least as ready as anyone who means to fight a god can be.

## Optional Rule: Fate

Faced with the seemingly arbitrary cruelties of the Chronicles of Darkness, mortals who get a glimpse at what lurks in the shadows sometimes take comfort in the idea that everything has a reason. No matter how bad things get, there is a plan, even if it seems impossible to see. Those who look a little deeper, glimpsing the workings of the God-Machine, know better. There is a plan for everyone, but that isn't a good thing for those concerned.

To represent this, The God-Machine Chronicle includes an option called Fate, a special type of Aspiration. Fate denotes an extra part of the character's concept: what is the end of their story? The Fate doesn't have to come to pass within play, but characters that come out the other side of a God-Machine adventure without having met their Fate haven't escaped it, only postponed it.

Use the following guidelines to design a Fate:

- Fate leaves the character alive (or undead, in some circumstances) and suffering, or kills them in a suitably traumatic fashion. "Killed" is not a Fate, but "Murdered" is.
- Fate imposes a great change in the character's circumstances, irrevocably changing her life for the worse.
- Fate describes the what of the character's doom, not the how or the when. "Murdered" is a suitable Fate. "Murdered by my brother" is not, and neither is "Murdered at my moment of victory".

Good examples include "Addicted," "Betrayed," "Imprisoned," or "Transformed."

Fulfilling a Fate is often a good time to start a new character – consider it the equivalent of writing a character out of a television series after her arc climaxes. That's not mandatory, however. If a Fate is met before the chronicle ends, or a new chronicle is planned using the same characters after one has already met their doom, the player selects a new Fate.

In play, Fate works like other Aspirations, except that it provides a full Experience when fulfilled. (If the Fate removes the character from play, her player can spend this Experience on her next character.) Also, when a character's action would lead her towards her Fate, her player gains only two dice from spending Willpower, but gets the Willpower point back if the action fails.

Wilson was getting TIRED of the SCREAMS. Most times they didn't bother him, but TONIGHT the CONSTANT RACKET was giving him a headache. He twirled the cap off a bottle of aspirin and grimly chewed up three tablets, washing the grit down with a swig of coffee. He lit a cigarette, breathed in, exhaled, and watched as the smoke curled toward the monitors surrounding him.

He leaned back in his swivel chair, putting his feet up on the CONTROL console, and looked around. The room probably held 100 screens. Probably. He'd started counting them once, but had gotten BORED around 58. Each monitor had a name taped to it, and each name was followed by a symbol. Wilson had no idea what the symbols meant and was pretty sure HE DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW.

Tonight it was Jayla A. that was making all the NOISE. He took a look at her screen and sighed. The girl on the monitor MIGHT have been pretty once, if a little too thin for his tastes. By the stubble on her shaved head, she might have been blonde. Blondes were alright by him, but so were brunettes and redheads. The STRAIGHT-JACKET that embraced her like an overzealous LOVER was too bulky to give away any hints about her chest, and the utility smock worn by all the…*patients* was as formless and ILL-fitting as a sack.

The expression on Jayla A.'s face didn't help much, either. Her eyes were wide and staring at HORRORS only she could see. Her mouth was so DISTENDED by her shrieks he wondered if she was in danger of DISLOCATING her jaw. Wilson eyed the screen for another second as the girl continued to wail, then thumbed the microphone button for her room.

"HEY, LADY. HOW ABOUT YOU SHUT THE HELL UP?"

For a wonder, the girl quieted. She turned her GAZE toward the camera in her room and smiled, revealing rows of DISQUIETINGLY white teeth. Jayla A. opened her mouth again, wider, if that was even possible, but, instead of screams, the HISS OF RADIO STATIC squealed out from between her lips.

Wilson paled and immediately slammed his fist down on a large, red button. The overhead lights started to flicker as the generators cycled up. The sounds coming from Jayla A.'s mouth began to clarify, like an unknown operator was tuning in to a new FREQUENCY. He could almost begin to make out WORDS AMONGST THE STATIC, and watched in horror as the walls of her room began to ripple, as if someone had tossed a pebble into a still pond.

The first imprints of what he sincerely hoped weren't hands had begun to push at the thinning REALITY of the walls before the generators hit full power and bright, jagged lines of electricity danced in Jayla A.'s room. Her body spasmed as the current flowed through her, lightning crackling over her skin. The sounds coming from her mouth were cut off, and the walls returned to the NORMAL grey of concrete as the girl was shocked into unconsciousness.

Wilson wiped sweat from his forehead and shakily lit another cigarette.

# Shards of the Divine: Building the God-Machine Chronicle

Telling a good story is a lot of work. It's fun work, to be sure, but it still takes time and dedication. This holds true whether you have taken on the role of Storyteller and must present a new world for the players to explore, or whether you are a player fleshing out the final details of a new character. This chapter aims to make all that work easier, by providing suggestions and structure for creating characters, stories, and settings for God-Machine chronicles.

Before we discuss the God-Machine and what sorts of stories your troupe can tell with it, we need to discuss the concept of tiers.

**Into this wild-beast tangle these men had been born without their consent, they had taken part in it because they could not help it; that they were in jail was no disgrace to them, for the game had never been fair, the dice were loaded.**

**–Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle***

## The Tiers

No matter the medium, every story has a scope that provides boundaries and context for that story. You wouldn't expect a film set in a small town to suddenly explode into a globe-hopping extravaganza. The concept of tiers provides this element in Chronicles of Darkness games.

By now, Chronicles of Darkness players might be familiar with the idea of using different tiers as a way to set expectations for the direction of a chronicle. For those unfamiliar with them, tiers were introduced in **Hunter: The Vigil**, but the concept is not unique to that game. Tiers are just another tool for building a chronicle. Setting a chronicle at a certain tier gives players an idea of what to expect. It's also possible for a chronicle to begin at one tier and slide up or down to end up at a different tier. The four tiers are local, regional, global and cosmic.

## Local

Games set in the local tier are narrow in scope, but not shallow in depth. These sorts of games are generally set in a limited location, involve normal folks, and have consequences that are more important to the individual than the masses. As an example, the Wellington School (p. 205) educates children with behavioral difficulties. The reason for these troubled children is actually the *absence* of the God-Machine's influence. What might the God-Machine inflict upon these children to resolve such a problem?

Ghost stories are good examples of local stories. Typically, a small group of characters is trapped in a single location. Over the course of the story they slowly discover the secrets behind the haunting, which may or may not include ideas about how to stop the marauding specter. The backstory about how the ghost came to be provides a glimpse into the greater reality of the universe, without drawing the characters completely into that reality.

You've probably seen movies that could be described as belonging to the local tier. *Attack the Block* is about what happens when aliens invade a British council estate (i.e. housing project). The stakes involved could be described as global (alien invasion), but the scale of the movie is local. The kids that fight off aliens aren't worried about what might happen if aliens take over the world. They're only concerned with what the aliens could do to them and their neighborhood.

For a God-Machine Chronicle, a local tier means local consequences. The backstory of the game can be as in-depth as you like, including speculations about the cosmic possibilities of the God-Machine, but keep the end closer to home. This can be accomplished in a number of different ways.

One method to keep the scale local is to only include the repercussions of the God-Machine. Strip mining exposes a previously unknown cave to the light of day. Work is halted as baffled geologists investigate. Dark, winged horrors rise up from the depths of the cave and proceed to butcher anyone they can catch. They gnaw on machinery, they demolish equipment. It's up to the survivors of the initial attack to flee or fight. Whether they live or die, the problem doesn't extend beyond the local.

In this case, for whatever reason, the God-Machine has decided the strip mine must be shut down. By opening the cave mouth, the chance to stop the attack has already passed and people must deal with the repercussions. This leaves the God-Machine in the background and uses its minions as the obvious threat. At most, the bottom of the cave might reveal some connection to the God-Machine, like an ancient, rusting portal of unknown origin or a pool of absolute darkness that occasionally shimmers with static like a TV on the fritz.

Another method to keep it local is to use a single agent of the God-Machine as the basis for the story. This could be an angelic visitation, a group of cultists or a child that suddenly manifests the ability to read minds. For those with a more literary bent, the book *Needful Things* by Stephen King is one example of how a single agent of chaos can cause serious damage to a town. H.P. Lovecraft's *The Colour Out of Space* is another solid example of a story within the local tier with connections to a broader theme.

This method gives the characters a chance to oppose or support the will of the God-Machine as they see fit. It presents a problem with potential solutions. The results of their decision should have a lasting effect on the local scene. A group of doomsday cultists sets up shop in town. They begin slowly converting everyone to their cause, with the goal of a mass suicide to appease the God-Machine (not that the God-Machine needs or wants appeasement). This is a local problem that can be fought, and results in local consequences.

One last possible method for keeping a story local draws on the sort of circumstances typical of the aforementioned ghost story. The characters are trapped someplace by the workings of the God-Machine. Maybe the God-Machine twists reality to draw the characters into a house of doors. It tests them like a scientist tests a mouse in a maze, looking for the one that can open the doors in just the right sequence to escape.

In this case the characters are highly likely to learn at least a little about the God-Machine during their efforts to escape or survive. This method generally works best for a one-shot game or as the kickoff for a chronicle. In the example above, the God-Machine will likely have future plans for whichever character figures out the doors.

## Local Organization: The Cult of the Wheel

Words have power. Words can echo through the world and come to the ears of people that can only dimly recognize the power of the words spoken. Such is the case with the Cult of the Wheel. They heard the words of the Pain Prophet echoing along the vaults of the sky, trembling down the frame of the God-Machine, but they heard it in the same way children might receive a message at the tail end of the telephone game.

Some parts of the Marco Singe's message were garbled, others came through in terrible clarity, but the one phrase that vibrated with meaning for the Cult was simple enough. *What has fallen may rise again*. The few that heard the message deciphered it as a metaphor for the Great Wheel, the Perfect Circle. They registered the meaning as one of the great axioms of this world: What goes around comes around.

The Cult of the Wheel exists to bring change, to push the Great Wheel. They understand that all great things have small beginnings and devoutly believe in the power of the Perfect Circle, the force others might ignorantly refer to as karma. The members of the Cult smile tolerantly at the notion the Perfect Circle can be defined as simply as the balance between actions that are subjectively good and actions that are subjectively evil. Who can declare any act is ultimately good or evil when they can't see the invisible hand of the God-Machine at work? Humans understand as little about what truly motivates them as an ant might comprehend the foot that crushes it from above.

Good and evil are impossible. Order, however, is possible. Order and chaos circle each other on the Great Wheel and it is humanity's ability to impose order upon chaos that has lifted it above the other animals of the world. The Cult of the Wheel believes the God-Machine strives toward order above all things and that humans are its misguided tools. Each time man imposes order on his surroundings, the God-Machine blesses his efforts. The blessings of the God-Machine are what bring happiness, comfort and all else humans ignorantly define as good.

The true number of members (or Wrights) of the Cult of the Wheel is unknown, even by the Cult. Wrights leave active Spokes and form new ones on a regular basis. Each Spoke puts down roots in a location where chaos has begun to overwhelm order. This includes areas suffering from urban blight, severe economic depression, ecological disaster, and violent conflict.

Communication between Spokes is common, but only to share news, rather than acting as part of a coordinating effort. Capable Wrights travel the world, acting as explorer-missionaries, seeking out the workings of the God-Machine that exist wholly in this reality. They pass on the locations they've discovered where the God-Machine can been seen and touched. New Spokes settle at these locations and begin the work of bringing order.

Members of the Cult of the Wheel are generally well educated and frequently have some sort of background in charitable work. Many are religious as well. These Wrights

don't see any conflict between their beliefs. They are certain it's no accident that angels appear so often in religious texts. After all, angels are the first servants of the God-Machine. The leader of each Spoke puts aside his or her given name and takes up a new name, complete with the surname Hub, to show sublimation of the self and devotion to the Great Wheel.

No two Spokes use the same methodology to bring order from chaos, preferring to tailor their solutions to the problem at hand and the capabilities of their Wrights. One group might decide to combat an oil spill by spearheading a wider community effort at clean up, while another might decide to engineer the downfall (or outright destruction) of the companies responsible for the disaster. The Cult isn't above using violence to accomplish its goals. Sometimes the best solution to a problem is to simply to crush it.

The Cult of the Wheel believes it can influence the God-Machine, and thus the Great Wheel, through the use of mathematical sorcery. The equations drawn out in synthetic lubricants and surrounded by circles of iron filings would baffle most mathematicians, but the Hub of each Spoke claims to draw inspiration from the God-Machine itself. Occasionally, it does seem as though these efforts have tangible results. The Spoke in Detroit is certain it averted a catastrophe by summoning an angel to the city.

## Regional

The regional tier raises the stakes by increasing the scope of consequences. Instead of a single problem with local consequences, the God-Machine includes entire cities, nations, or even continents in its plans. The regional tier expands the scope of a chronicle exponentially. Solutions lead to new problems; whole battalions of the God-Machine's agents can be involved, and the shadowy workings of the hidden world can become more exposed.

At this tier, the theme and mood of a God-Machine Chronicle become more apparent. Every organization has a hidden master (or masters) and the feeling of being a cog in a machine, of straining against an unknown and unknowable system, should begin to weigh on the characters.

The press jokes that a certain congressional candidate is robotic, but the characters aren't laughing. Lacking the perfect instrument for its designs, the God-Machine *made* a man from clockwork parts and vat-grown flesh. A seat in Congress is just the first step toward a presidential bid. How does the troupe fight that without one of them becoming the next Lee Harvey Oswald?

If we look to the big screen for examples of the regional tier, *28 Days Later* comes to mind. The rage virus sweeps across England, turning the majority of its citizens into vicious, zombie-like predators. Because England is an island, the disease cannot make the jump across the Channel and infect Europe as well. The movie is about people trying to survive the regional problem of a deadly disease. The virus has the potential to shift up the scale to become a global problem, but that isn't what the movie is about.

Chronicles set in the regional tier frequently seem like they have the potential to get out of control. Even if the survival of the characters isn't the highest stake, using the background threat of, "Oh shit, the whole world could end up like this!" isn't bad form.

As an example, MIT creates a new generation of nanobots that get out of the laboratory and begin to reproduce. In their search for energy, they latch onto anything that produces electricity, bringing down the grid before shorting out. Why? It's all because the God-Machine requires an hour of total darkness during a solar eclipse. The background threat is what might happen if a couple of nanobots make it to new sources of power and begin spreading across the planet.

The shadow government from the *X-Files* is a fantastic example of the hidden system. No one really had any idea who they were actually reporting to, even the people at the top. It isn't hard to come up with ideas for similar organizations. In this age of smartphones, nearly everyone has a camera and a digital video-recording device in their pocket. How is it that no one has managed to capture pictures or video that blows the roof off the supernatural world?

In the U.S., the group responsible for suppressing this kind of proof is a militant hacker organization given power and (they believe) authority by an angel. They developed malware that scours the internet, deletes files from mobile devices and purges computers. People that keep hard copies are hunted down using tracing algorithms and are either "encouraged" to recant or simply vanish. The hackers believe they are in charge, but what if someone else is actually pulling their strings? This is the regional hidden system at work.

Actual gear-and-grease appearances of the God-Machine in the regional tier are much more overt than at the local tier. The U.S. contains thousands of ghost towns. These include places that were big during a mining boom or company towns that were abandoned when the jobs went overseas. What if these towns were really constructed to hide the mechanical guts of the God-Machine? Every basement is filled with crackling conduits, clanging pipes, or whirring belts. When enough towns have been completed, the long dormant fault lines in the Midwest will begin to move, dumping out the Great Lakes and creating a water shortage beyond the worst dreams of environmentalists.

Regional chronicles can also take the form of the road trip. If symptoms of the God-Machine's meddling crop up all over the country, characters will need to travel in order to take the fight to the God-Machine. Road tripping can also act as one method of trying to keep ahead of the God-Machine's agents. **Midnight Roads** goes into the details of this sort of chronicle, but if your troupe doesn't have access to the book, plenty of inspiration can be found in popular media (such as the television show *Supernatural*).

### Regional Organization: The Black Tide

Theories abound about the Bermuda Triangle. People claim the disappearances that happen there are the results

of everything from alien abduction to magnetic anomalies. One group that believes they know exactly what is going on is the Black Tide.

The Black Tide is a secret occult organization (they disdain the word "cult") that is dedicated to the study and exploitation of the Bermuda Triangle. The founder of the Black Tide was a man named Sava Vaselko, captain of the trading vessel, *Bagrem*. Vaselko plied the waves of the Caribbean during the mid-1800s and supplemented his income with a bit of casual piracy.

During a trip to Florida during the American Civil War, Vaselko sought to outmaneuver the Union blockade by detouring into the Bermuda Triangle. The night turned foggy, and although he had previously scoffed at rumors about the area, Vaselko's blood went cold when his clock first stopped, then began to run backward. For what seemed like hours, the *Bagrem* floated along in the fog, drifting with the current.

When lights appeared on the horizon, Vaselko pointed his ship directly toward them and ordered his sails rigged to capture every gust of wind. As the *Bagrem* inched toward the lights, the captain began to make out a landmass. At last, the wind began to pick up, blowing the fog away and revealing an island shining with illumination.

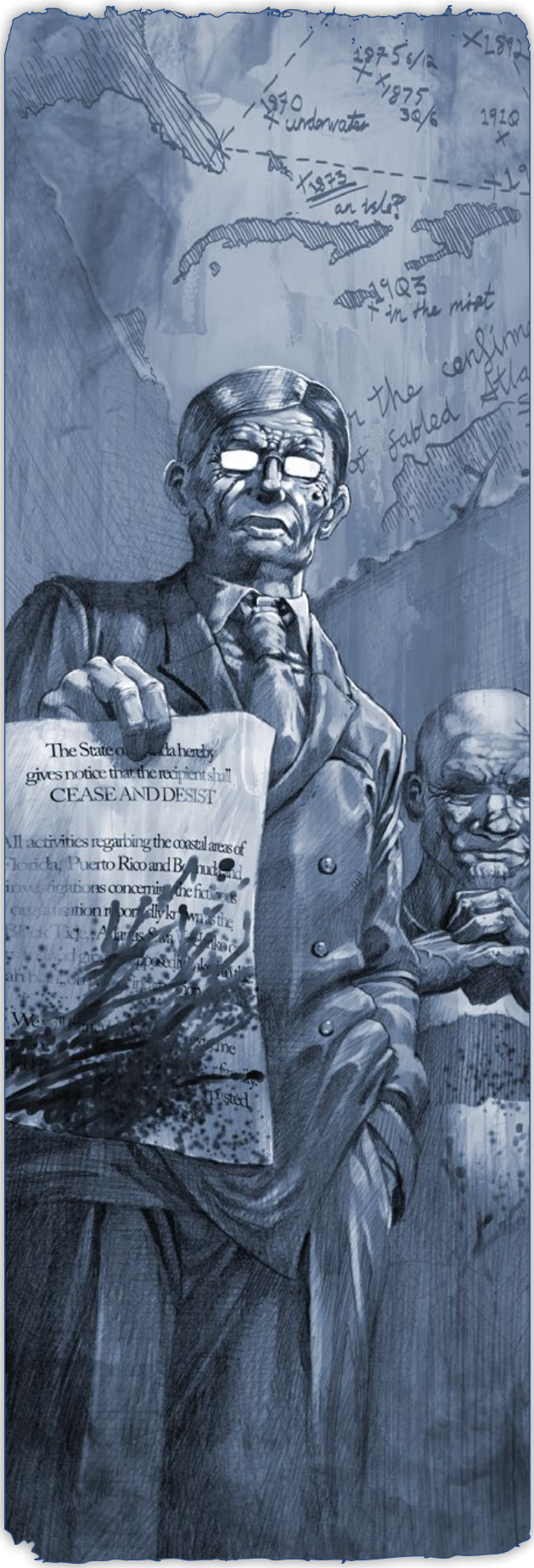
Great buildings towered into the sky, conforming to no architecture Vaselko had ever seen during his many travels. Strange sigils painted on the sides of the buildings glowed and flashed in every color of the rainbow, but, as the ship drew closer, he couldn't hear a single sound coming from the island. Without warning the *Bagrem* gave a lurch, like it had hit a reef, and the air was filled with flames.

Two more explosions followed and the last thing Vaselko remembered before being tossed into the sea was the sight of his ship sinking fast, crew scattered about it in the water. Vaselko awoke two months later in a sanitarium in Cuba. He had been found clinging to a piece of the mast just offshore. No other sign of his ship or crew were ever found.

Although he was never certain of what had happened to his ship, Vaselko believed he had seen the lost island of Atlantis. The style of architecture he had witnessed matched with many descriptions and paintings of the legendary island. He believed Atlantis never sank, as the stories insisted, rather it had been placed just out of time with the rest of the world.

As he investigated Triangle lore, Vaselko became certain he detected a trend in disappearances. Times of great bloodshed and death in the area coincided with an increase in reports of missing ships. In the aftermath of hurricanes, these disappearances would be blamed on the storm, but Vaselko thought he knew better. He theorized that whatever was keeping Atlantis hidden out of time might collapse if fed enough death.

Vaselko gathered associates that were equally intrigued by Triangle lore and even more so by the possible riches to be had by claiming Atlantis if it could be forced to reappear. He called the fledging organization the Black Tide, as a reference to the wave of death that would precede Atlantis' emergence. In 1870, ignoring the laughter of bureaucrats and clerks, he filed a series of claims to Atlantis with every nation within 20 nautical miles of where he believed it would appear.



## Best of Both Worlds

The common themes in the Tales of the God-Machine are time travel, causality, and sweeping, cosmic change. One of the advantages to including elements like these in your chronicle is that it allows your troupe to change everything, but still go home to the reality they know and love afterwards. Pulling this off so that it doesn't feel cheap or forced is difficult, but not impossible. It's just a matter of making sure that the characters have something to accomplish — maybe putting the world back the way it was *is* their goal, and when it's all over, the hard choice they must make is whether or not to keep their memories of what almost happened.

The ex-captain was content to wait for the island's appearance, assuming that mankind would fabricate enough death on its own to collapse the time bubble (as he'd begun to think of it). He was still waiting while on his death bed in 1912. The Black Tide reformed after his death and, less patient, began to pursue means of forcing the bubble to break. These studies eventually wandered into the arcane and it was here the first member heard whispers about the God-Machine.

The Black Tide theorizes that the people of Atlantis found a way to communicate with the God-Machine, and it banished them for their hubris. Not even the God-Machine is all-powerful, however, which accounts for mass deaths basically overloading the circuits that keep the island suspended in time. Uncovering even a single truth about the God-Machine would be a treasure beyond anything ever dreamt of by Vaselko.

While the Black Tide isn't nearly magically potent enough to whip up storms of its own, it *can* add momentum to them. They push tropical storms to become hurricanes, and hurricanes to become catastrophes. The organization proved Vaselko's theory to be true in 2005. The island itself actually reappeared for an entire minute after Katrina rolled through the region.

Other attempts have been made (such as the Gulf oil spill) with lesser amounts of success, but the Black Tide is nowhere near to giving up the fight. Members of the organization have begun to whisper about a cataclysmic event — orchestrated by the Black Tide — that will devastate the entire Caribbean.

Members of the Black Tide come from every strata of society and include powerful politicians, military leaders, wealthy businessmen, and, in the tradition of its founder, ship captains. Information about the organization is scarce and its members obey an omertà-like code of silence. Anyone attempting to oppose the Black Tide not only faces well-armed goons, but a legion of lawyers and political influence.

## Global

Chronicles set in the global tier shift focus to include the entire world as the stage. At this level, the designs of the God-Machine are world changing and the hidden system spans continents. Wars begin at the behest of angels, the Illuminati pushes its agenda for the New World Order, and the resulting body count enters the realm of mind-numbing statistics. Any victories won are fleeting or, conversely, are so complete that the victors become the new mechanics for the God-Machine.

Television shows and movies are replete with stories that could be set in the global tier. *The Walking Dead* is one example, as is a disaster movie such as *2012*. Either one could be the result of the God-Machine breaking down, or just deciding humans have gotten out of line one time to many. *The Call of Cthulhu* is a global tier story, as are many of the James Bond movies. If the stakes leave your troupe wondering if humanity will (or should) survive, you're hitting the right tone. If a conspiracy seems so vast that only the most paranoid of conspiracy theorists would give it credence, you're on the right track.

At this tier the possible consequences of a problem cease to be background and ride right up in your face. Let's say vampires decide to end the age-old practice of keeping their existence secret. Maybe they've had one too many media slipups or maybe staying in the coffin has become just too damn hard with all the modern technology and CCTV about.

The question that must be answered for this scenario, from the point of view of a God-Machine chronicle, is what do the hidden system and the God-Machine itself think about this situation? Perhaps the God-Machine decides the best solution is to thin the vampiric herd. Remember that the God-Machine prefers to be subtle. Instead of just rearranging the Earth so that every vampire gets a serious case of sunburn, try to envision a more subtle solution. One possibility is to engineer a virus that is moderately harmful to humans and highly contagious, but is fatal to every vampire who contracts it. The human immune system will eventually adapt, leaving humans as carriers and suddenly making it much more difficult for vampires to feed.

Many Storytellers have an aversion to world-changing events when it comes to running games in the Chronicles of Darkness. One of the appealing things about the Chronicles of Darkness is how closely they resemble our world, and so adding out-in-the-open supernatural elements, apocalyptic events, or hard sci-fi changes the setting a great deal. In a global-tier story, it can be tempting to go all out, change the world, and revel in the chaos of altering *everything*. Of course, not every world-changing event needs to be quite that spectacular. Ideas can change the world just as readily as a tentacled horror the size of the Eiffel Tower. Anyone that remembers 9/11 should be able to testify to the efficacy of a single event changing how people think. In the years following the attacks, security was beefed up to almost paranoid levels at airports. Not everyone is on board with the new measures, but enough people *are* on board to let what would have previously been loudly denounced as a grotesque violation of civil liberties become something to merely grumble about.

An important thing to keep in mind when running chronicles set at the global tier is to make whatever is going on personally important to the characters. If World War III

suddenly kicked off but remained (as was the case with World War II) mainly outside the bounds of mainland USA, the Storyteller would need to provide American characters with up close and personal examples of how the war was affecting them, even if the characters weren't directly involved. Family and friends being drafted to serve is an obvious example, but fuel rationing or material shortages could also play a part.

Not every chapter in a global-tier chronicle has to take place on the world stage. Storytellers are encouraged to drop back down to local stories to bring home the point of global events. As an example, a geoengineering project suddenly goes bad. Aluminum oxide particles are released into the troposphere to reduce the amounts of radiation bombarding the planet. Rather than working as designed, the particles react in a manner scientists can't explain and plunge the entire world into darkness.

The characters are busy running around the globe, chasing down the hidden system responsible for eternal night, when they hear the news that riots have broken out in their home town. Violent gangs of looters are threatening the lives of Contacts, Allies, friends and family. Fixing the problem of a world shrouded in darkness remains the main focus of the chronicle, but the immediate, *personal*, problem becomes saving people important to the characters. This type of local scenario can bring some context to a global chronicle and make the whole story seem more visceral.

### Global Organization: The Gnomes of Zürich

In the days of myth and legend, the gods were all-powerful, and then Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to mortals. The first mortals touched by the fire of the gods became mystics and wizards, shamans and priests, channeling the source of creation toward their own selfish ends. Eventually the stolen fire ebbed to mere cinders, and the greedy fire-touched mortals sought to ascend to the heavens to supplant the gods and warm themselves by the divine fire for all eternity.

As in most stories of unbridled hubris, this story ended badly. The God-Machine destroyed their civilization, and over time the remaining fire-touched retreated to the corners of the world, bickering with each other and licking their wounds. The survivors began to plot anew, scheming to discover a new means of achieving power. They denied the God-Machine and struck all memory of it from the minds of men, shrouding it in sorcery. It was their foolish belief that a thing forgotten would lose all power. In time, they even began to believe the lie themselves and banished the God-Machine from their thoughts. They created new myths to explain the fall of the ziggurat, passing down the story to their apprentices.

With no hope of reaching the divine fire, the fire-touched settled on amassing earthly power and dominion over mankind. They formed cabals and alliances, and battled each other in the hidden recesses of the world. At some point one of their number, a man named Zür, recognized the growing influence commerce held over mortals. He realized power over his rivals could be had for as little as a handful of gold. Amassing wealth was a simple task for one that had challenged gods and, within a century, Zür controlled an empire from his home under the mountains.

Zür gathered apprentices to him, to act as proxies in his battles with the other fire-touched, forming a large cabal to serve his needs. Legions of mortals flocked to Zür's banner, some knowingly, most with no idea who their true master was. Others of the fire-touched, those who had survived his attacks and potential rivals, learned from his example and began to build their own financial empires to oppose him. Now wars were fought as often on paper as on the battlefield, with casualties including the economic welfare of entire nations.

The battles continue to this day. People fight petty wars, rig elections, and assassinate influential pawns, all of it fueled by increasingly-large amounts of capital. The closest mortals have come to seeing the truth was when a British politician made a joke about Swiss bankers, calling them the "Gnomes of Zürich." The only things that have kept Zür from owning the world are his ongoing rivalries with the remaining fire-touched.

## Cosmic

Stories set in the cosmic tier are frequently chronicle endgames. While it is certainly possible to set an entire chronicle at the cosmic level, the troupe runs the risk of losing touch with reality. This tier allows players to transcend global conspiracies to become part of the hidden system. It allows troupes to make serious alterations to the plans of the God-Machine or possibly rewrite its programming. Players will stand toe to toe with angels, demons, and the things that exist outside our reality.

So how the hell does a Storyteller run a cosmic chronicle? One way to get a grasp on the cosmic is to look to popular media for inspiration on how to proceed. *2001: A Space Odyssey* is a cosmic-tier story. The main character transcends human limitations to become the Star Child. If you consider the obelisk to be an agent of the God-Machine, you get a cosmic-tier story. The series of stories by H.P. Lovecraft collectively referred to as *The Dream Cycle* is another example. The real world is only tangentially important to the story, but the effects of the story can have real-world consequences.

In more of a pulp vein, *Stargate SG-1* can be viewed as a cosmic-tier story. The stakes involved are important for the future of Earth, but also go far, far beyond what happens to a single planet. If *Fringe* added a couple more alternate worlds, it would also qualify. Any number of movies that focus on time travel could work for the cosmic tier, particularly those in which multiple parties are working simultaneously to change or maintain the past.

Even more so than the global tier, chronicles that end in, or are set in, the cosmic tier should expect to see massive changes to the fictional world your troupe has created. Hacking the God-Machine might result in continents vanishing, divergent timelines or even the entire works just freezing up. An antagonist that develops a taste for the flesh of angels might not only gain power, but might also keep that same

## Inspiration

**The God-Machine Chronicle Anthology** is a good source for getting a grip on the setting. The stories describe how the God-Machine and the hidden system operate and can provide inspiration for Storytellers and players.

power from being rerouted to other dimensions where the angel was next scheduled to appear.

Stories set in the cosmic tier don't automatically equal science fiction, either. In the Chronicles of Darkness, magic is frequently more potent than science. It's entirely possible that the God-Machine is a magical construct, rather than an actual machine, and has promoted the use of science to blind humans to the reality around them. The entirety of creation could also be faith based, if that tickles your fancy. Pick a god (plenty to choose from) and declare it, him, or her the one that created the God-Machine. Maybe the deists were right after all.

Though it isn't mandatory, picking a "truth" behind the God-Machine can be part of the cosmic-tier experience. This is what is commonly referred to as "learning that which mankind was not meant to know." Maybe religion is the key and prayers are what keep the God-Machine turning. All religions were created by the God-Machine to ensure a steady supply of fuel. Miracles and angels are basically just a show put on by the God-Machine to ensure compliance. Whatever your troupe's "truth" happens to be, simply having an inkling as to what's really going on can be sanity destroying (depending on the character).

### Cosmic Organization: Mechanists

Assume for every 101 people that see the God-Machine and manage to acquire a piece of it, 100 of them are dispatched by angels or otherwise don't survive the night. That still leaves one person that managed to tinker with the God-Machine and avoid the consequences. Even then, that one person isn't likely to have any idea what just happened. Every so often, though, that one person knows (or learns about) *exactly* what he's done and what he's found. That's when the real trouble begins.

The original Mechanist probably emerged around the time the first complex machine was invented and likely in China. Archaeologists have found evidence of complex machinery in the Middle Kingdom as far back as 2,550 years ago. Early uses for the odds and ends pulled off the God-Machine were fairly limited, right up until people figured out the simplest form of batteries, roughly 600 years later. Even then, the juice provided by these protobatteries wasn't enough to produce more than a couple sparks.

The first, serious, issues arose with the advent of modern electronics. For the first time in history, Mechanists began to at least partially understand how the parts they'd stolen from the God-Machine worked. The Mechanists were able to modify, amplify, and power the purloined devices to a degree that they started to provide serious opposition to agents of the God-Machine that came to put an end to their meddling. Even so, the threat to the God-Machine remained minimal. Then came the computer.

Modern Mechanists aren't content to simply steal a piece or two of the God-Machine. They still do that, but they've also started fiddling with its programming. The results are less than predictable. A farmer Mechanist that has been getting by controlling the weather around his farm using a device cobbled together from parts of the God-Machine might suddenly decide he can do better. The lackwit attempts to reprogram the section of the God-Machine he found when digging for a new well, using half-remembered coding he learned in high school. He might get rain showers or he might open a gateway to hell.

If the results of their meddling remained local, this new attack on the God-Machine might not cause more than a few hiccups. The reality is that every time they tinker with the God-Machine's programming, they risk corrupting entire subsystems, which could eventually destabilize the entire system.

Applied to Mechanists, the term organization is misleading. Most work singly, a few in pairs and even fewer in groups. It's the net result of their work that places them in a single category. The majority of Mechanists recognize the name, either from some sort of collective gestalt or from having borrowed it from the angels that hunt for them. Many are just tinkerers, content with having a leg up on their fellows thanks to owning (or controlling) such an advanced piece of technology. A rare few, maybe one in a hundred (making the number around one for every billion people) wants more.

These Mechanists have delusions of being techno-mages. They want to travel in time, visit distant planets, or step between worlds. They actively seek out and exploit any section of the God-Machine they can find, sometimes fighting turf wars against other Mechanists to gain access to a particularly juicy segment. Mechanists with this sort of ambition are highly dangerous, having fought angels and won. All it would take is one Mechanist to plug in the wrong device at the wrong place at the wrong time, in an effort to hack the God-Machine's programming, and the world — worlds, maybe — would pop like a bubble.

## Assembly Required

For a God-Machine Chronicle, the first step is to choose a chronicle track (if you're planning on playing long enough to complete one) or to choose a Tale. For purposes of this section, it doesn't much matter, because the setting and character creation aspects work the same either way.

What part does the God-Machine play in the chronicle? How about the hidden system, cogs in the machine? Asking some questions is a good headspace to get into before delving into specifics.

How much of the God-Machine will the characters witness firsthand? Have they ever heard the term "God-Machine?"

Are the characters even aware of its existence? If they've never seen it, but still know about it, how did they learn about it? Do they have some sort of special significance to the God-Machine? How do the machinations of the God-Machine affect their daily lives?

One of the basic tenets of a God-Machine Chronicle is that victory is fleeting. Unless operating at the global or cosmic tier (see p. 180), Storytellers should consider how to make the players' victories seem meaningful, even if they are actually pyrrhic. Will making a dent in the hidden system be enough for the players, or will they want more? As mentioned at the end of the Introduction, it doesn't all have to be doom and gloom; a win is a win, but there should be a sense that something larger still looms over the horizon.

Other than the plethora of examples provided in this chapter, you can also gain some insight for the material by watching movies or reading books that have a dystopian feel. These include *The City of Lost Children*, *Brazil*, *Children of Men*, *1984*, and any number of books or websites dedicated to conspiracy theories.

## Spinning Cogs

Unless you want the God-Machine up front and clanking from the beginning of the chronicle, some attempt at misdirection can make the story more interesting. Begin simple, but with a hook that a) establishes the modern-horror setting and genre and b) demands the characters' attention.

Consider the Wake the Dead Tale (p. 214). This tale requires that one of the characters kill someone. As Storyteller, you can leave that decision to the players, allowing one of them to work the incident into her character's backstory, but it might be preferable to know what you're getting into. Maybe you stipulate, then, that one of the characters accidentally runs over and kills a jogger late one night while driving home from work. That is the jumping-off point for the story, or the inciting incident.

What the character decides to do after committing vehicular manslaughter can be played out as long as you like, depending on the type of story being told. This is misdirection. None of the players are likely to believe a Storyteller would run an entire chronicle based on an accidental death, but most troupes will be happy to play along. It's when the other dead bodies get up and start interacting with the living that the actual story begins.

At this point the troupe doesn't need to know that the dead have returned to life due to a malfunction in the God-Machine. All they know is that the dead are returning to life. Since these "resurrections" are a direct result of the one character's little traffic accident, it's a good idea to refer back to that incident somehow. Maybe the characters sees her victim when she looks in the mirror, or she sees him hitchhiking as she's driving. He also smells like wet rust and his body is covered with impossibly complex tattoos that weren't there before he died.

How the troupe deals with the dead is the first step of the God-Machine chronicle. The poor people probably have no

idea why they aren't dead. They have their own motivations and the "rules" of their return to life aren't consistent. But the characters should be able to gain enough information from them to figure out that a man died who wasn't supposed to, and at that point, the players should know exactly which man they're talking about. What happens after that is a different question, and it depends on what the characters do to resolve the situation. Note, though, that an entire story has taken place but the characters don't necessarily know that the God-Machine exists, much less that it is responsible for the dead returning to life.

## Into the Machine

At some point during the chronicle, the characters need to come into contact with the God-Machine and recognize that the events causing the strangeness in their lives originate from something far stranger than they thought. This doesn't have to happen during the initial story; the decision should reflect how long of a chronicle the troupe is looking to play.

If, for example, the troupe was only planning on playing through one story, then using the example above (the Wake the Dead Tale), the Storyteller should underscore the strange tattoos on the dead man's body or that appear in visions of him. These tattoos match up with the marks of death on the bodies of all of the returned dead, and put together they form an alphabet, a machine language that the characters can decipher. The characters can put in the research to learn about the God-Machine through the writings of Marco Singe and Janet Cohen, and once they know (or think they know) what they're up against, the Storyteller can be a bit more overt.

On the other hand, if the troupe is planning on a longer chronicle, then the Storyteller doesn't have to reveal anything God-Machine related during the first story. Maybe the visions of the dead jogger show the tattoos, and the dead people have their marks, but deciphering the alphabet requires a cipher that the characters don't have. They might be able to convince a supporting character to help them break the code, or they might put in the time to research it themselves. It's not until the next story that the characters begin to recognize the general outline of Infrastructure. It's possible to complete an entire Tale, in fact, and not trace the cause of anything back to the God-Machine.

Once the characters know the God-Machine exists, however long it takes, they should see its influence more frequently. Once the characters in the example of Wake The Dead decipher the machine alphabet, for instance, they might see the characters from that alphabet in corporate logos, graffiti, people's tattoos, or in a doctor's signature on a prescription. How much of this is paranoia and how much is indicative of the saturation of the God-Machine into our world? The answer to that question depends on the chronicle in question, considering mood, theme, and especially tier. The point is, though, that once the characters know the God-Machine is out there, they can't *not* see it.

## Progression

After the characters learn that the God-Machine exists, future stories in the same chronicle (or chapters in the story, depending on how long you plan on the game running) don't have to rely quite so much on secrecy. Because you have established a common frame of reference for the characters, you can be a little more overt about elements like Infrastructure and Linchpins. Indeed, though the players may or may not know those terms, they will probably be looking for these items, searching for chinks in the God-Machine's façade.

Consider, too, that the players can portray multiple characters over the course of a God-Machine Chronicle. This can play into Fate and the conclusion of a Tale quite easily. Consider, for instance, the Urban Wandering Tale (p. 235). It's entirely possible that all of the characters involved in this Tale might perish along the way, possibly shutting off the nightmare realm and saving the world. If that story segues into Ghost Machine (p. 207), then, the characters for that Tale might be haunted by the ghosts of their previous "incarnations."

Progression can also involve a change in tier. As discussed in the appropriate section, a shift in tier doesn't always have to go up. The characters might go from a cosmic-tier story to a local-tier story; they've saved the universe (or witnessed its eventual demise), and now they need to interact with their own neighborhood. How did their more grandiose experiences change them? Can they bring themselves to *care* about local events any more, or does seeing beyond the veil of normalcy make their own personal lives that much more special?

# Chronicle Tracks

A God-Machine Chronicle can be a multi-year process, taking a troupe through several different groups of characters and ending up with some heady, horrifying, cosmic questions, or it can be played in the course of a single evening and never leave one square mile in a city. However, as the saying goes, you've got to start somewhere.

Below are four chronicle tracks. Each track consists of five Tales. The tracks, as presented, do not make any assumptions about the characters, the locations, or the settings (except for the assumptions that the Tales make), but even without those assumptions, each track provides a "default" God-Machine Chronicle. Each track also provides notes on transitioning between the Tales.

## Protect and Serve

In the Tales composing this track, the characters are acting in some official capacity. They might be soldiers, policemen, investigators, or relief workers, but they take their marching orders from someone. They probably wouldn't choose to fight the God-Machine, or even to know about it — but they are bound up inextricably in its programming by the time the story ends.

## Themes

The characters are following orders. Does that make what they are doing any easier? If their superiors tell them to stop a serial killer who can clearly violate the laws of time and space, does the fact that he *can* violate those laws supersede what he is?

Players should consider their characters' motivations very carefully. If a character is motivated by a sense of duty to his fellow man, at what point does that curdle? Does witnessing war in all of its historic, bloody glory make a soldier despair? Does he realize he is just one more body thrown into a meat grinder, a veritable drop in a bucket that, apparently, never wants for volume? Does seeing the world tear itself apart in the wake of a devastating illness make a doctor wonder if this is all worth saving?

## Sequence

**The Key (p. 208) → The Hatching (p. 226) → Operation: Bell Jar (p. 221) → What Is It Good For (p.233) → The Scarlet Plague (p. 225)**

## Progression

This track starts with The Key because tracking a serial killer is something that the players should be able to understand. Police procedurals make for good inspiration for this opening story, as do movies like *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Insomnia*. The characters might be police officers in the various cities affected, or they could be a specialist team from a variety of different agencies. Stretch suspension of disbelief if you need to; this is obviously a special case.

### The Key → The Hatching

The Hatching, as written, doesn't assume the characters have any particular training or expertise, but coming on the heels of The Key, it might be that the God-Machine specifically chooses these characters to save the world. Maybe, after disposing of Wesley Cote, the characters receive a visit from a version of him that never succumbed to his murderous nature. This Wesley reveals that he is the true Key, and tells them that they need to be in Liberty State Park at the appropriate day and time. Or, if you want to keep with this chronicle track's theme of following orders, maybe the characters' superiors find evidence that Wesley was in Liberty Park and might have left behind evidence. Once the characters are there, The Hatching progresses as written.

### The Hatching → Operation: Bell Jar

This transition is probably the trickiest, because it involves taking a group of characters who are likely cops and changing

it to a group of special ops soldiers. One recommendation would be to change groups; fade out on the first group concluding The Hatching (probably some of them dying in the Statue of Liberty), and fade in on the members of Operation: Bell Jar discussing what rumors they've heard about "that weird shit on Liberty Island" as their helicopter flies them to their base of operations near West Nautical 36. Another possibility (again, playing with the idea of shifting time and causality) is that as the time reversals happen during The Hatching, the characters' backgrounds shift slightly. They begin The Hatching as police officers, federal agents, and so forth, but by the time they finish, they are *and have always been* soldiers.

### Operation: Bell Jar → What Is It Good For

This is probably the easiest transition. The characters finish their successful operation at West Nautical 36 (or, perhaps, fail miserably) and are deployed to Iran as a support team. If a player needs to make a new character, that new character should already be in Iran and can meet up with the incoming soldiers. From there, the characters find the Flag of Elam and embark on their slip through time and the history of war, but the Tale works as written.

### What Is It Good For → The Scarlet Plague

The Scarlet Plague is almost apocalyptic in scope. The characters might return from their tour of time to find that the events of The Scarlet Plague are already underway, or you might take a few months — or even years — of downtime. If you do, ask the players to consider if their soldier characters have moved on to other professions. Once the events of the Plague start up, they should reassemble on their own once it becomes clear that this disease comes from the God-Machine — and by now, the characters have certainly seen enough to know the God-Machine when they encounter it.

## Rage Against the God-Machine

The God-Machine is vast, unknowable, and possibly omniscient. It has designs for the human race, some of which are decidedly unpleasant. And, perhaps worst of all, to the God-Machine people are just one more tool in the box, one more spinning cog. In this chronicle, the characters get to fight back against the God-Machine and, perhaps, end its influence on the human race.

### Themes

This track is very humanist. The characters here should see all of the power, all of the cosmic scope of the God-Machine and respond, "No." Every machine can be broken. Any system is just one malfunction away from shutdown. Human spirit, anger, persistence, and plain old stubbornness are themes here.

Players should be aware that they are likely to lose a few characters along the way. The God-Machine doesn't act out of revenge, but if someone proves troublesome, the God-Machine isn't above sending an angel to handle the problem. Players might even consider succession if they choose Fates for their characters — one character might choose "killed in public" as his Fate, and decide in advance that a bystander witnesses this death and cannot ignore it. She has to become involved.

### Sequence

**Wellington School for Gifted Children (p. 205) → The 300 Block (p.197) → The Invisible Citadel (p. 219) → Proposition 279 (p. 223) → This Is Hell (p. 231)**

### Progression

This track starts off with the characters educating gifted young people at the Wellington School. There, they become aware of the God-Machine in a kind of peripheral way. In fact, the God-Machine doesn't have to figure into Wellington directly (since the main conflict stems from the fact that the God-Machine *can't* influence the area), but by the end of the story, the characters should have a very real sense that something is out there and that it does not have any respect at all for humanity. If any characters meet their Fates during this story, players might consider taking the roles of former students of Wellington. Sarah Andrews (p. 249) might make for an interesting choice.

### Wellington School for Gifted Children → The 300 Block

It might actually be wise to have the characters design the 300 block as part of the setting for the Wellington story, even if the school itself isn't part of that setting. Then, once the affair at Wellington has been settled, the characters really start to notice the strangeness right there in their neighborhood. This story should really bring home what the God-Machine is willing to do in order to keep the wheels turning, and the characters are all faced with an unpleasant choice, here — kill other people, or choose to stand up and fight.

### The 300 Block → The Invisible Citadel

The characters should find the footlocker that leads them to the Citadel somewhere on the 300 block, at the end of the story. Maybe they prevent a sacrifice and discover the footlocker in the would-be victim's home — or maybe they find it in the home of one of the landlords. Either way, the challenge for the Storyteller is presenting the information in the footlocker as enough of a temptation that the characters follow the lead. Bringing in a new character to replace someone who died or met her Fate during the 300 Block might provide a good opportunity for this — maybe the new character is wealthy and has been chasing leads about the Citadel all over the world. She might think the Citadel is a place for inspiration and enlightenment, but this should make the truth all the more horrifying.

### The Invisible Citadel → Proposition 279

This is a hard transition. The best way to make it work is probably to connect the Citadel to whatever country is putting forth Prop 279, and to allow the characters to travel there via the Citadel. If they find information in the Citadel that explains the nature of Prop 279 (even if it takes them the whole story to decipher it — meaning that not until the end of the story do they realize that the whole point is a widespread massacre, and that it has nothing to do with the specific people being killed), then they should be well and truly outraged. They can also see the Dalga in the Citadel spawn Mr. Nose, and then see him later acting as an adviser. Strong motivations are essential for the characters; they won't just go haring off across the world to fight evil dictatorships without a strong reason to do so.

### Proposition 279 → This is Hell

It is entirely appropriate for Proposition 279 to fail, for the God-Machine to suddenly lose a great deal of power, and the Celebrants to choose that moment to begin their assault. Likewise, if the God-Machine does manage to get Prop279 through and the massacre happens, maybe that boost of power enables the God-Machine to begin the push for "Heaven." Either way, the characters can be right there in the middle of it, and given what they have already accomplished, they are ideally positioned as humanity's champions. They can now fight the God-Machine in a meaningful way — but given what the God-Machine wants, should they?

## Space & Time

Many of the Tales deal with cosmic issues of time travel and causality, but this chronicle track makes a point of taking the characters into strange vistas, showing them bizarre possibilities, and putting the power of time reversal in their hands.

Time travel is hard to use as a plot device or a narrative tool. It lends itself to over analysis, plot holes, and bad attempts at understanding quantum theory. The best way to approach it in a God-Machine chronicle is, perhaps, the "I told you so" method. Let the players change whatever they want, but find a way to make it all work seamlessly in the end. Have someone opine that time is cyclical, make noticeable mention that "what has fallen may rise again," and let the players have fun twisting their brains trying to grasp the logic of it all. If you have players that hate time travel, use a different track.

## Themes

In addition to themes of causality, responsibility and possibility, this track allows players to experiment with motifs usually left to science fiction. Almost all of the Tales in this track deal with weird science rather than (or in addition to) supernatural horror, and that might provide an interesting change of pace for seasoned Chronicles of Darkness players.

Make sure that someone takes good notes for this track. If possible, you want to refer back to past events — because players might have ways to *affect* them. The goal is for everything to work in a nice, tight circle, but that only happens if you know what is supposed to have happened. A good practice is to make future predictions as non-specific as possible, because that allows for greater ease of interpretation when events come to pass (look at Nostradamus' predictions and how liberally they are interpreted for inspiration).

## Sequence

**Squares of the City (p. 203) → Missing Persons (p. 210) → Do-Over (p. 199) → The Moon Window (p. 212) → A Journey Into Time (p. 228)**

## Progression

This track starts with Squares of the City, which is easily the most grounded and understandable of the included Tales. The characters need to investigate buildings being edited out of existence, so right away something is removing people and structures from this plane of reality. Squares of the City also establishes some out-and-out weird motifs (buildings moving on hidden tracks like a giant slide puzzle?), which should set the stage for the even weirder stuff later.

### Squares of the City → Missing Persons

Where do the buildings go when they vanish? The characters shouldn't find out during the first story, but when they start hearing rumors of people vanishing, they might note the similarity. They might also hear of something *appearing*, something connected to one of the buildings that they (and no one else) remember vanishing in Squares of the City. When they investigate these missing persons, they learn that the extradimensional space is dotted with buildings from all over the world, some of which they remember seeing. Apparently, their city wasn't the only one with those tracks beneath the ground.

### Missing Persons → Do-Over

This is a difficult transition because getting the characters to interact with the "magical couch" in the diner requires them taking several logical leaps. But that's where the magic of time travel comes in — one of the characters' "future selves" can appear to the character and tell her about the diner and the couch. Alternatively, the characters might be in the factory, dealing with the Overseer, and see the diner slide out on tracks back *into* their world. In any event, once they realize they can alter that past, it might be wise to have them keep track of what events they've altered, just so you can have them cross paths with the repercussions later.

### Do-Over → The Moon Window

Sometime before this point in the chronicle, the characters should become aware of Marco Singe and his cult. In fact, it might be interesting if he were the one to point them at the diner, or for them to run across him in the extradimensional factory. Once they've concluded Do-Over, they hear about

the physical and temporal anomalies in whatever city you'd like to use for the Tale. You can use "mysterious person from the future tells them what they do next" again, but that plot device only works as long as they players enjoy it. If you use it clumsily or overdo it, you'll get eyerolling at best and "no, fuck this guy, let's go to Paris" at worst. If the players do leave the chronicle track, choose another Tale and nudge the story back toward The Moon Window when possible. In any event, The Moon Window works more or less as written.

### The Moon Window → A Journey Into Time

Searching the offices of NalCon should give the characters ample opportunity to learn about Dr. Henry Girard and his work. You can have the characters see the online video, asking them to travel back into time, but at this point in the track it might be better if they find the video on a NalCon server as part of The Moon Window, instead. You can still reveal, later, that Girard left it there for them to find because he knew they'd be there, of course (the nice thing about time travel is that it doesn't matter when the time machine works, so long as it works). The characters can go back in time, stop Girard, and then learn that *they*, in the future, hatched this plan with Girard, beginning with their involvement in disrupting the tracks in Squares of the City.

## Wanderers

The road-trip chronicle is a lot of fun with the right group. Traveling across the world, meeting new, strange beings, learning about the supernatural, and otherwise experiencing the diversity the setting has to offer can be very rewarding for a troupe. This track sends the characters on a trip, not just across the U.S., but into a different *version* of the U.S.

### Themes

Travel isn't safe. The spaces between the cities are isolated, unfamiliar, and dangerous (the sourcebook **Midnight Roads**) examines this in detail, and the opening fiction, "Road Gospel," has some very God-Machine-like elements to it). In a road-trip chronicle, the players should always feel like outsiders. They are always in unfamiliar territory, looking in on things they aren't supposed to see. With regards to the God-Machine, that means the strange, barely hidden plots that it keeps hidden via geography. The characters get to be explorers, visiting new places and overturning new rocks with every Tale.

The trick is to make every new location feel different. Unless you've done a great deal of travel, capturing the feel of a new place quickly can be difficult. One way around that is to use the players' experiences. Set the stories in places they know about, and ask for familiar landmarks or restaurants. Do some reading online, not just about the history of the place, but its demographics, economic status, and cultural identity. You don't need a lot of depth or breadth here, just enough details to make the place feel real.

### Sequence

**A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity (p. 216) → Ghost Machine (p. 207) → Wake the Dead (p. 214) → Sister City (p. 201) → Urban Wandering (p. 235)**

### Progression

The troupe needs to establish a reason for the group to be traveling together, and depending on the size of the group, that might be the hardest part. A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity begins with an uptick in traffic accidents, so the initial group of characters might be investigating this phenomenon, traveling between accident sites but not nomadic by nature. Once they have the chance to follow the strange devices into the Twilight factory and confront the gear workers, they have learned beyond a doubt that the supernatural is real, it's out there on the roads, and it's very strange.

#### A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity → Ghost Machine

This transition might be the hard sell. The characters now need not just a reason to travel, but a reason to travel *together*, investigating strange stories of ghosts possessing machines. If they started off the first Tale investigating the paranormal, this might be just another assignment (as an aside: the crew of a reality show dedicated to hunting down the supernatural might be superb cover for a group of monster hunters or God-Machine cultists). In any case, one of the characters might have a personal connection to one of the hauntings in New England and get the other characters to come with her.

#### Ghost Machine → Wake the Dead

The hook for Wake the Dead involves one of the characters killing someone. You can run the Tale with the wrongfully-dead person just being someone they know, but it loses a lot of the impact. If you can manage to nudge the characters toward killing someone, it might be possible to bring in a new character if one of the existing ones meets her Fate. Or, you might present the situation to a player that you think would enjoy the roleplaying challenge — he's killed someone that he shouldn't have, has managed to cover up the death, and now the dead aren't staying dead. If possible, the ideal situation for the lead-in to Wake the Dead would be for the death to happen during the first story (maybe the character gets mesmerized by the blip and runs someone down), but for the full impact not to be realized until Wake the Dead.

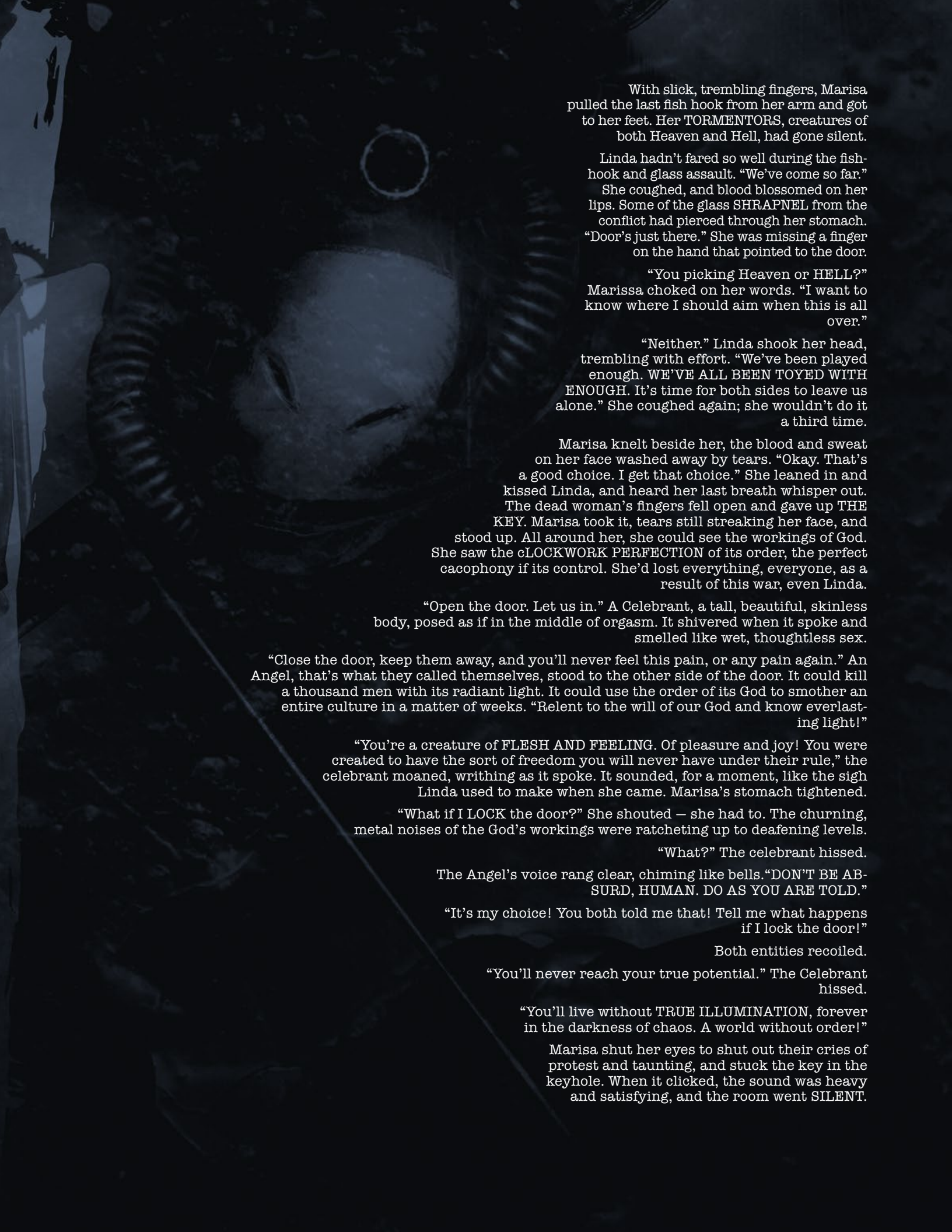
#### Wake the Dead → Sister City

Between the end of Wake the Dead and the beginning of Sister City, you need to get the characters to Seattle, as Sister City is one of the few Tales with a specific location. Fortunately, Seattle has a lot to offer, and Wake the Dead offers a nice method for crossing the country from Ghost Machine's New England. Sister City is less travel-focused, but the characters are now crossing between two versions of the same city. If

possible, have a few of the players make characters from Old Seattle, and encourage them to think about how their characters might have progressed through an alternate version of the same chronicle track. At the end of the story, try to make sure all of the characters are on the same side of the "barrier," but it doesn't much matter which one.

### Sister City → Urban Wandering

No matter how the characters resolve Sister City, the phenomenon of Urban Wandering can appear. You might even introduce it earlier, maybe allowing characters to city-walk between locales during the chronicle (if the characters can treat this ability casually, it will help to reinforce the tone of Wake the Dead — see the sidebar on p. 214). At this point, the characters aren't just wandering the highways and byways of the U.S.A. anymore. They're walking on conceptual roads, traveling between not just cities, but the *idea* of cities. Unfortunately, they aren't the only ones using the roads, and so their battle with the nightmare creatures, the climax of the chronicle, is symbolic of the freedom to wander.



With slick, trembling fingers, Marisa pulled the last fish hook from her arm and got to her feet. Her TORMENTORS, creatures of both Heaven and Hell, had gone silent.

Linda hadn't fared so well during the fish-hook and glass assault. "We've come so far." She coughed, and blood blossomed on her lips. Some of the glass SHRAPNEL from the conflict had pierced through her stomach. "Door's just there." She was missing a finger on the hand that pointed to the door.

"You picking Heaven or HELL?" Marissa choked on her words. "I want to know where I should aim when this is all over."

"Neither." Linda shook her head, trembling with effort. "We've been played enough. WE'VE ALL BEEN TOYED WITH ENOUGH. It's time for both sides to leave us alone." She coughed again; she wouldn't do it a third time.

Marisa knelt beside her, the blood and sweat on her face washed away by tears. "Okay. That's a good choice. I get that choice." She leaned in and kissed Linda, and heard her last breath whisper out. The dead woman's fingers fell open and gave up THE KEY. Marisa took it, tears still streaking her face, and stood up. All around her, she could see the workings of God. She saw the cLOCKWORK PERFECTION of its order, the perfect cacophony if its control. She'd lost everything, everyone, as a result of this war, even Linda.

"Open the door. Let us in." A Celebrant, a tall, beautiful, skinless body, posed as if in the middle of orgasm. It shivered when it spoke and smelled like wet, thoughtless sex.

"Close the door, keep them away, and you'll never feel this pain, or any pain again." An Angel, that's what they called themselves, stood to the other side of the door. It could kill a thousand men with its radiant light. It could use the order of its God to smother an entire culture in a matter of weeks. "Relent to the will of our God and know everlasting light!"

"You're a creature of FLESH AND FEELING. Of pleasure and joy! You were created to have the sort of freedom you will never have under their rule," the celebrant moaned, writhing as it spoke. It sounded, for a moment, like the sigh Linda used to make when she came. Marisa's stomach tightened.

"What if I LOCK the door?" She shouted — she had to. The churning, metal noises of the God's workings were ratcheting up to deafening levels.

"What?" The celebrant hissed.

The Angel's voice rang clear, chiming like bells."DON'T BE ABSURD, HUMAN. DO AS YOU ARE TOLD."

"It's my choice! You both told me that! Tell me what happens if I lock the door!"

Both entities recoiled.

"You'll never reach your true potential." The Celebrant hissed.

"You'll live without TRUE ILLUMINATION, forever in the darkness of chaos. A world without order!"

Marisa shut her eyes to shut out their cries of protest and taunting, and stuck the key in the keyhole. When it clicked, the sound was heavy and satisfying, and the room went SILENT.

# Hagiography: Tales of the God-Machine

**I have been helped to see that beyond the clouds that were round about me, there was a living, guiding, intelligent, beneficent purpose—the elevation, regeneration and redemption of the inhabitants of this earth.**

**– John Murray Spear, inventor of the electrically powered Messiah**

This section contains 20 scenarios involving the God-Machine. These Tales are suitable for use as single-story play, or as building blocks in longer chronicles.

The chronicles are split by tier. Use local Tales to bring the mystery of the God-Machine to your back door. Introduce regional stories to drag your characters out of their comfort zones to see the bigger picture. Throw your characters into global stories that show more of the scope of the God-Machine's influence. And finally, inflict cosmic adventures on them that threaten to change the world as they know it forever.

Each Tale is presented as though the chronicle begins with it. That is, although the chronicle tracks present a progression and a way for one Tale to segue into another, the Tales as presented here all assume that you will start with that particular Tale. For example, in the Time & Space chronicle track, the Squares of the City Tale moves into the Missing Persons Tale. But here, the Missing Persons Tale is presented as though you'll start with it. This allows the Storyteller to put the Tales in any order she wishes in order to construct a personalized version of a God-Machine chronicle.

Each Tale follows this format:

A short introduction you can use to pitch the chronicle to your players — think of it as the tagline that would appear on the poster, if this Tale were a movie.

**Infrastructure** is your set. This is how things start as the chronicle gets off its feet and things begin to change. The section gives you a tight focus on what you need to know at the beginning of your chronicle to get things moving. It also tells you what Infrastructure the God-Machine is using, and what general type it falls into.

**Interchangeable Parts** helps you instruct players on the sorts of characters they should make. This section is meant to help tie characters to the world you're creating. This includes suggestions for character archetypes and things to steer clear of.

**Blueprints** gives an idea of what happens if everything goes as the God-Machine plans. When things go sideways thanks to the characters' meddling, refer back to this section to get an idea of what the God-Machine and its agents are trying to accomplish.

**Linchpins** give you a look at how the God-Machine manifests. The section shows you where the God-Machine pokes through and shows its true nature. More importantly, this section covers the terrifying agents of the God-Machine, what they look like, and what they want.

**Methods** gives you ideas for how the characters could interact with the stories on a mechanical level. This section includes several Skills the characters might use during the course of the stories, as well as two suggested Merits players may consider while creating their characters.

**Escalation** examines what happens next. Win or lose, this section looks at how you could take your chronicle past its planned arc and potentially into other bigger and more dramatic tiers. This section also provides a suggestion for a Tale that could follow the current one. Note that these suggestions don't follow the chronicle tracks, they're just different ways to approach the God-Machine Chronicle.

# THE 300 BLOCK

The block that holds the teaching hospital — the 300 block, as locals call it — isn't ritzy, but it's home. How long have you lived here and never noticed that people just... vanish?

## Infrastructure

In a large city, people find safe subcultures to cling to, like a shared ethnicity, income level, or occupation. For the families and friends of the 300 block, the tie is proximity. They share a city block, about a mile square. City planners had set this block off as housing for the young student doctors and nurses — as well as the lower-income hospital staff — of a nearby teaching hospital. A number of lovely, turn of the century apartment buildings sit in the middle of the block. This creates a sort of town within a city. Locals get their morning caffeine fix in the independent coffee shop on one corner. The couple in B4 runs the book store on the ground floor. Local inhabitants even have a bodega that handles most of the basic grocery needs.

Property owners still adhere to many of the regulations put on the block at its founding and, as a result, the population is about 70 percent medical students and other hospital staff. The rest are largely retirees on fixed incomes and low-income families. Despite this, the buildings remain pristine. The neighborhood is safe. The inhabitants are happy. That makes the disappearances that much stranger.

Once every six months, someone goes missing on the 300 block. Sometimes it's a local, sometimes folks simply hear a rumor that the guy who operated the hot dog cart left town. Sometimes strangers to the neighborhood hang flyers on telephone poles saying someone was last seen on the block. No bodies mean no crimes, according to the local cops, overburdened as they are with more dangerous stretches of the city.

**The Truth:** The 300 block is an intricate form of defense Infrastructure. As explained shortly, the disappearances on the block are due to regular human sacrifice. The death of a human being releases a great deal of spiritual energy, and the God-Machine harvests that energy and stores it for later use.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters all live on the 300 block. If they are doctors, they may have recently moved here as a part of a residency. Maybe they moved in with an elderly relative to take advantage of the rent control. Maybe they grew up with a struggling, but happy, family on the block. But whether new arrival or long-time inhabitant, all the characters must be familiar with, and take up residence on, the block. They need to be invested in that way.

Also, they all have a personal tie with the most recent disappearance. As a part of character creation, the players should also build the person who has recently disappeared (for a good method for doing this, see Chapter Three). For good or for ill, the missing person is someone all the characters are invested in. That's not to say all the characters know each other, but they all feel the effects of this one person going missing, and the sting (or satisfaction) of a police force that won't help. They may be drawn to find out what happened out of love, a sense of justice, or simply to make sure this person doesn't come back and ruin the good thing they've got going now (or to assure they aren't blamed for the disappearance).

## Blueprints

When the city founders planned out the 300 block, they worked out a deal with a unique and highly-praised architect named Hans Hoffmann. He promised to work cheaply and efficiently, and assured them that the nearby hospital would produce miracles. The block would experience no crime or signs of poverty, so long as the property owners served the God-Machine. He arranged for a few coding regulations, a few allowances. Mostly, he needed a promise that whatever happened on the block would stay, more or less, on the block, and that city officials as well as the police didn't get involved. So far, this agreement has been honored.

Hoffmann went a step further. He spoke to the initial landlords, once the buildings were built, and made them better promises yet. Riches. Comfort. Long life. Peaceful tenants. Economic security. All he needed in return was blood.

Not theirs, of course. Rather, once every six months, the landlords were expected to find someone in the area, bring him to the boiler room under the shared city park, and murder him. Worse still, they were expected to paint the machinery there with as much of the victims' blood as possible. The machines needed the blood to run. If they refused, the results would be horrific.

They agreed, and the 300 block has been prosperous and comfortable ever since. Of course, Hoffmann isn't human — he is an angel in service to the God-Machine. While Hans Hoffmann officially died of natural causes years ago (a fact the characters can verify if they wish, though if they take the extraordinary step of digging him up they find his coffin contains only rust and bloodstains), the angel is capable of returning to defend the block.

## Linchpins

Of course, the God-Machine can be seen in the peace and tranquility falsely handed to the block. Children and students

live orderly, ordinary lives. The elderly enjoy the ease of their golden years. Even the landlords enjoy a satisfied kind of wealth without extravagance. Of course, the stress sometimes breaks through, and a sign of the God-Machine's terrible cost can be seen. A local might run across her landlord sitting in the park in the middle of the night weeping. And everyone heard about the security guard who hung himself in a building basement after a disappearance. Some days you can't leave your apartment without seeing 50 "missing" flyers plastered all over a telephone pole.

The shared boiler room, though, is an open wound in reality. The God-Machine, a pulsing, living, hissing, steaming thing, exists openly in that blood-stained room. The boiler room is a Linchpin and the landlords go to great lengths to keep everyone out.

At the chronicle's climax, with the characters confronting the landlords in the boiler room, they may also meet the Architect (traits provided on p. 253). When confronted, it offers the characters a choice: try and fight the God-Machine, ruin the lives of hundreds of people, maybe thousands, or work with the God-Machine. It's just one murder every six months. And the characters are free to choose the victim. How many violent criminals, wife-beaters, rapists, drug addicts, and so on could they remove from the city? Or, perhaps they have enemies that they can now dispose of easily and cleanly. The God-Machine doesn't leave evidence behind, after all.

As a point of interest, if the characters defeat the angel and destroy the boiler room (caving in the street, for instance, or just walling it up from the outside), the God-Machine doesn't seek reprisals and there are no consequences for the block other than that the crime and unemployment rate normalize. The God-Machine is just using this area as a supply of surplus energy, and it would be inefficient to expend the energy to destroy it (especially if it can leave the Infrastructure intact and get the sacrifices going again once the characters have died or moved on).

## Methods

**Occult:** You're only now starting to realize the potential occult nature of the filigree and architectural details all over the block. It's going to take some serious research to figure out what the architect was trying to do. Roll Intelligence + Occult to start discovering the chilling truth behind the symbolism.

**Politics:** A city's zoning regulations and property laws are always confusing and obscure. The cops claim they aren't legally allowed to investigate inside the buildings? Could it be true? You've gotten as far as the public records of city hall, roll Intelligence + Politics to see if you can make heads or tails of the restrictions.

**Brawl:** You don't know what you said that set the landlord off, but she's screaming and crying and swinging at you. Roll Stamina + Brawl to keep yourself from getting scratched up until she calms down.

**Larceny:** Whatever is going on, it's going on in that boiler room. No matter how locked up it is, you're getting in there. Roll Dexterity + Larceny to unlock the door and see what's waiting inside.

**Socialize:** Rumors go with parties like cheap beer and curious potluck offerings. You've arranged to get a bunch of the people in your building to join you for a social. Roll Presence + Socialize to get everyone having enough of a good time that they don't notice you're pumping them for rumors about the block.

**Streetwise:** As the characters debate what to do, to work with the God-Machine or resist it, you can't help but think of all the really awful people out there. Crooked politicians. Abusers. You bring to mind criminals who work the system and never get caught. Roll Intelligence + Streetwise to come up with a list of people who may actually "have it coming."

**Holistic Awareness** (p. 44): Doctors can be an arrogant lot. If there's unusual health and wellbeing in the patients under their care, they aren't likely to examine it too closely. Why look for problems where there are none? You're somewhat outside of that world, however, and the balance of health and illness is a delicate one. You know something isn't right here on the block. The balance is off, but you can't quite put your finger on why. Yet.

**Safe Place** (p.54): It isn't safe for you most other places, outside the block for sure. You spent a lot of time building up your Safe Place to assure that those outside threats never come in, never get you in your sleep. What will you do to protect that Safe Place when you realize what plays a big part in what makes it so safe?

## Escalation

The climax of the story, naturally, can be when the characters are confronted by the Architect. His offer shouldn't be an easy choice, and making that choice should change the characters forever.

If the characters choose to serve the God-Machine, you can then follow up. How do the characters cope with their newfound duty? How do they struggle with one another and themselves over the dark thing they must do for the greater good? Can they cover up the truth well enough? How do they choose who lives and who dies? If they remain in the city and delve deeper into its occult secrets, they might wind up discovering gateways to cities all over the world (Urban Wandering, p. 235).

If the characters opt to leave the city, do they stay together? Do circumstances bring them back into one another's company for a new crisis of life and death? If one character does kill someone to feed to the God-Machine, maybe he gets it wrong and activates the events of Wake the Dead (p. 214).

# DO-OVER

A mysterious room provides people who regret their past decisions a chance to try again — sometimes at a terrible cost.

## Infrastructure

A dingy 24-hour diner in a US city or large town serves decent food and is otherwise unexceptional, except for the door next to the restrooms that most people can't see. Those who casually notice the door and try it find it locked — unless they have dreamed of the room or have previously entered it.

**The Truth:** The diner itself is concealment Infrastructure, guarding the room. The room is one of several such devices that the God-Machine uses to rewrite time. This one just happens to be accessible to normal people. It's possible that this room has simply slipped from the God-Machine's attention, or it could be that every rewrite of time that happens using this room *has* to happen in order for some other important time-shift somewhere down the line.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters all have at least one serious regret about their past actions, such as a stupid remark that spoiled an interview for a promising job or a one-night stand that ruined a loving marriage.

## Blueprints

A person in this town, who has previously been to the diner and who carries serious regrets about a past decision, begins having a recurring dream. In the dream, she visits the diner, speaks with someone about the regretted incident and then leaves, and wakes up knowing her past could be different.

When the character next visits the diner, she sees a door next to the restrooms that she never noticed before, and feels a desire to open this door. Inside is a couch with tattered upholstery, large enough to sleep on. Upon seeing the couch, she becomes certain that taking a nap on this couch would make her feel better about the decision she made. As soon as the person lies down on this couch, she falls asleep and dreams about the incident.

This dream is exceptionally lucid and clear and the dreamer is convinced that her actions in this dream change how the incident went. She is then free to act, with full access to her memories of how events previously occurred. Whether

for a missed job interview, an insult to someone in power, an ill-considered move that resulted in prison time — the person gets a do-over. The one limitation is that dreamers don't have much time in the past. If someone sleeps on the couch for seven hours, she spends only seven hours in the past, before and during the incident that she wishes to change. However, time that the person was asleep, too drunk to remember, or otherwise unconscious passes in an instant and doesn't count. Dreamers only experience times when they were conscious and able to make decisions.

In the dream, the character inhabits the body of her past self, with only the possessions and physical capabilities that she had at that time. However, the dreamer retains all later memories, Abilities, Mental and Social Attributes, as well as any Merits not involving money, rank, or social connections. As soon as the character makes the desired change, she awakens with full memory of the dream. When she leaves the room and enters the hallway, she gains new memories of how her life has changed based on the changes she made while dreaming. Everyone else remembers the new set of events, and any physical changes are present in the world. The dreamer alone remembers the previous version of reality, what she changed, and why.

Some changes could be significant: retaining a job or a marriage, not having a prison record. Other changes are minor: she made it to the interview, but didn't get the job — perhaps resulting in the realization that she needed to choose another career.

The problem is that changing your life can become addictive. Many people want to try this again, and they can do so. The only limitation is that if the room is in use, the door stays locked. However, if the character waits, the other person eventually walks out looking slightly dazed, as he adjusts to his own new memories.

Anyone who uses this room begins remembering other incidents where he made serious mistakes, and experiences a compulsion to change those as well. A Resolve + Composure roll is required to resist the temptation to return to the room. After their first journey, characters can consciously choose what past incident they wish to change. Dreamers must make a Resolve + Composure roll after every dream journey to avoid using the room again. Players also subtract one die from this roll for every dream journey to the past their characters have made.

After their third trip back into the past, characters lose a dot of Willpower (which can be regained for one Experience). Characters lose one additional dot of Willpower after every two additional dream journeys. Characters who have lost Willpower from dreaming of the past must succeed on a roll of Wits + Resolve – (the number of dots of Willpower already lost) every time they use the room. Failing this roll means that the dreamer is compelled to undo one of his significant social connections and reduce his visibility. He might have left his spouse years ago or refused a past promotion to a position of authority. Merits like Influence are lost first, followed by Allies, Contacts, Rank, and Retainer.

Once a dreamer's Willpower has been reduced to 1, he become dull, listless, and only interested in making further edits. When someone's Willpower falls to 0, he vanishes, and the world edits itself around his absence, so that no one remembers that he ever existed other than people who have also used the room to alter the past.

Minor or even moderate damage to the couch or room automatically repairs itself the next time someone enters the room. However, demolishing the couch or ripping down most of the wallpaper and damaging the walls causes the room to cease to exist. For one minute, the room distorts, appearing to change shape and size rapidly and randomly. Anyone who leaves during this time is fine. Anyone who remains inside vanishes with the room and is never seen again. When the room vanishes, the door to it also vanishes.

## Linchpins

The two Linchpins are the room and the other dreamers. The eight-by-ten-foot windowless room looks exactly like something that belongs in the 24-hour diner, a ratty old couch, a 1980s floor lamp, and a couple of beat up tables. The only entrance or exit is the door from the diner. Underneath the faded, stained, and faintly lumpy gold and blue striped wallpaper, the wall is covered with a connected series of metallic sigils.

The couch looks large and surprisingly comfortable, with a slightly tattered harvest gold fabric cover. Anyone who lifts up the seat cushions sees struts and springs like those found in a sofa bed. However, anyone attempting to fold out the couch finds that it doesn't open up. Carefully examining the struts reveals that they connect to an unusual network of wires that go inside the base of the couch. Gaining access to the rest of the mechanism requires cutting or ripping off the fabric covering the couch's base. Inside the base is a bizarre and nonsensical-looking array of carved bits of quartz, human finger bones wrapped in copper wire, and the complete skeleton of a crow wired together with silver wire, connected to the rest of the mechanism.

Once the characters have used the room a few times, and perhaps lost some Willpower, the God-Machine sends the angel Jenn to watch the place. She takes the place of the night waitress, and keeps a careful eye on the patrons. More information on Jenn can be found on p. 259.

## Methods

**Crafts:** Characters who examine the couch and succeed at an Intelligence + Crafts roll notice that struts in the couch are not part of a fold-out bed. They are instead connected to strange devices that lead into the interior of the couch.

**Investigation:** The door into the room with the couch is in between the restroom and the manager's office. A successful Intelligence + Investigation roll allows someone to notice that only two feet of space exists between the wall of the bathroom and the wall of the manager's office, making the interior dimensions of the room impossible.

**Larceny:** A Wits + Larceny rolls allows a character to discretely place a wireless camera in the hallway near the

door to the room so that the character can identify who else is using this room.

**Stealth:** What do other people dream? Roll Composure + Stealth to hide in the room until someone else falls asleep. If you stay there with them, and fall asleep as well, do you time travel together?

**Empathy:** Characters who have used this room at least once gain a sense of other people who have used this room. Any time one dreamer sees another, he makes a reflexive Intelligence + Empathy roll. Success means that the observer can tell that this person has also used this room. The observer also gains a general, vague sense of what events have changed in this dreamer's life. If the observer personally knows the dreamer, he gains more information.

**Streetwise:** Dreamers remember anyone who vanishes because they used the room one too many times. As soon as a dreamer asks a non-dreamer who no longer remembers the person ever existed, the dreamer simultaneously remembers that the vanished person never existed in the reality they now inhabit. A Wits + Streetwise roll permits characters to learn about and locate other people who have been talking about strange events involving a strange room, changing their past, and people vanishing.

**Good Time Management** (see p. 44): Once in the past, you only have so much time. Making quick use of the time you have is essential.

**True Friend** (see p. 56): If you could relieve one moment, would anyone believe you? Changing the past is risky and potentially addictive, and it would be helpful to have someone who could share the experience — unless, of course, that friend starts using the room, too.

## Escalation

Rooms like this begin appearing in several cities and towns. Rumors about these rooms begin circulating on the internet, as do reports of people vanishing and no one else remembering them. Depending on how this progresses, important bits of history like deaths might be altered, leading to Wake the Dead (p. 214).

A Journey Into Time (p. 228) is also a natural progression from this story.

# SISTER CITY

Something is wrong with your old familiar skyline. Is that a building that wasn't there before, a cab from a company that doesn't exist, the smell of exotic food coming from a library? Is it possible this isn't even your city anymore? What do you do when the God-Machine glitches and you see what you aren't meant to see?

## Infrastructure

In 1889 Seattle burned nearly to the ground. A new city was built over the ashes and tinder left behind. But the God-Machine wasn't quite done with the old city, so it allowed the old city to continue to exist in the same space at the same time but with neither city aware of the other's existence.

It's an average day in Seattle. Maybe you're in software design, or coffee, or organic foods. The drizzle doesn't get to you any more than the cold and you're content knowing you're in one of the most forward thinking, progressive, and intelligent cities in the world when....

It's an average day in Old Seattle. Maybe you're in shipping, gambling, or dock work. The occasional piracy doesn't get to you any more than the crooked politicians because you're content knowing you're in one of the most exciting, adventurous, and free spirited cities in the world when....

Something crosses over from Seattle to Old Seattle or vice versa. A ship with modern technology and cannons pulls into the Seattle harbor, or some of the old-fashioned dock workers find a cell phone, technology their city has never seen before. And the characters are on hand to see the lifting illusion between the two places.

**The Truth:** The God-Machine isn't doing this on purpose, so the city's dual nature isn't really Infrastructure. Rather, Old Seattle is logistical Infrastructure insofar as the God-Machine kept it going after the fire as a kind of "what if" experiment, but the two cities were never meant to merge. All of the God-Machine's attempts to keep the cities separate and kill people who cross over, then, are elimination Infrastructure.

## Interchangeable Parts

The player characters should be split, some of them living in Seattle, and some living in Old Seattle. Up until now their lives have been separate. Now, they run into each other's lives as one city crashes into another and sharing one space becomes a problem.

Characters in Seattle are exactly the sorts of people you'd expect in a modern, liberal tech town.

Characters in Old Seattle have a wilder lifestyle and temperament. Given a hundred years to grow under the God-Machine's careful machinations, the city holds on to its wild frontier feeling. Drunks and foreigners still occasionally get kidnapped out of bars and sold off into slavery. Pirates and a pirate-based economy still exist, though the media and politicians pretend they don't. In general, the tech is lower, except when it comes to ships and sailing, and Old Seattle is known more for its liberal gambling laws and loopholes than it is for coffee.

All of the characters witness some event that crosses between the cities. It would save time if all of the characters

saw it together, but if you have a bit more time on your hands and wish the chronicle to evolve more organically, have each character experience her own moment of wonder as some facet of the cities merge. Once the characters witness the "other" Seattle (from a given character's perspective), they can cross between the cities at certain spots. This requires a Resolve + Occult roll. The crossover spots appear to be random, but characters can learn to create them (see Methods).

## Blueprints

The God-Machine did not plan for the two cities to run into each other, and it's not a part of the order. As a result, its agents are out and about in the city with two goals in mind: Find out why the cities are merging, and destroy anyone who has seen evidence of the merger.

As the characters unravel the veil between the two worlds, they'll soon find they're on the list for termination. The story can follow a few paths. The characters can race to find the source of the slow crash and use it as leverage to get the God-Machine and its servants off their backs. They can somehow try to merge the cities, and in doing so loose the hold the God-Machine has on them. They may try to break the cities apart, removing the need for the agents of the God-Machine to keep hunting, and hopefully leave them alone.

## Linchpins

The God-Machine has many agents in both Seattle and Old Seattle. The majority are humans trapped within the various institutions that make up a city's bureaucracy. Sometimes, what comes looking to keep the cities separate is entirely inhuman.

Take the Polis Men, for example. Despite potential confusion, in the mundane world these agents do not appear as cops. Cops draw too much attention. Rather, they appear most often as street art, sidewalk chalk drawings, or statuary and other artistic installations. They're made up of the city itself, of concrete and wrought iron. When the line between the cities thins and they cross over into each other, the Polis Men rise from their watchful positions with the sound of rending stone, and move with surprising speed and brutality. They burned a city to the ground once for the God-Machine. They'll do it again if the population gets too contaminated with the truth. The Polis Men are angels.

This Tale doesn't include a single Linchpin, as the crux of the conflict — the cities merging — isn't something the God-Machine planned for. That said, if the characters want to find a way to reverse the merger, they need to find a nexus between the two cities. This point, in Old Seattle, is a storefront that makes and repairs cabinetry and other wooden furniture. In Seattle, it is in a burnt-out basement in the Seattle Underground (a honeycomb of basements and tunnels from pre-fire Seattle, built over in the ensuing decades).

The nexus point appears as a pot of boiling glue (this is what started the Great Fire; the pot boiled over and ignited). The characters in Seattle need to put the fire out, while the characters in Old Seattle need to set it ablaze; doing this will end the merger and separate the cities again. Of course, doing the opposite (burning Seattle but saving Old Seattle) might *complete* the merger (see Escalation).

## Methods

**Computer:** You don't have technology anything like this phone you found. They seem to garner signal from sources that don't exist where you live. Yet it exists. It's entirely divergent, fulfilling needs your version of reality simply never satisfied. And yet, it could be so useful now. Roll Intelligence + Computers and determine how much of this new tech you can steal.

**Occult:** The veil between the cities has broken, though its average inhabitant doesn't know. You, however, can learn to create crossover spots. This requires two characters, one in each version of Seattle, focusing on crossing over. Roll Wits + Occult; if parties succeed the immediate area gains the "Crossover Spot" Condition for 12 hours per success (total from both rolls).

**Drive:** Whatever it is that's following you is made of pigeon feathers, glass, and rage. Roll Dexterity + Drive to navigate your car through a network of new and old buildings and streets.

**Survival:** This city seems so familiar, and yet the streets are labeled wrong, and who would put buildings up on hills like this? Roll Intelligence + Survival to keep your sense of direction in the unfamiliar version of your city.

**Intimidation:** Old Seattle is more rough-and-tumble than the place you're from. If you don't want to be subject to a brutal hazing at the hands of the dockworkers, you need to present a tough front. Roll Presence + Intimidation to get them to leave you alone.

**Streetwise:** You know all the gang activity in town, or at least you've heard of most of it. These new guys? They're behaving strangely, to say the least. Roll Intelligence + Streetwise to put your finger on what's odd about these gangsters.

**Trained Observer** (p. 46): It takes especially keen eyes to see the subtle shifts between Old Seattle and new, and your character can spot them more easily than your average person. That's part of why you could see through the lie, but only part.

**Parkour** (p. 48): In some places, navigating between buildings, under the city, and even between cities is impossible by "normal" standards of movement. That's not a problem for you, though — you can reach the crossover spots that are literally over everyone else's heads.

## Escalation

This story may end when the characters discover what is causing the cities to crash in on each other and may ultimately be separated on one side or the other as a result. Or, they might choose to complete the merger, in which case Seattle becomes a strange mix of old and new. How this plays out for your chronicle is up to you — maybe the world shifts so that any changes that have been made have *always* been the

case, leading into other magical realism-inspired Tales like Wake the Dead (p. 214). Or maybe the characters become unstuck from time, leading to Tales like A Journey Into Time (p. 228) or Do-Over (p. 226).

Or, maybe they can only stabilize things, and instead of a chase, their relationship with the Polis Men becomes more like a series of heists as the characters live in both cities, slipping from one side to the other for their own benefit and to the frustration of the God-Machine and its agents.

Perhaps they take their show on the road, seeking out other twin cities all over the world to plunder them for adventure, or else stop catastrophic collisions from Rome to Dubai. This could naturally lead into Urban Wandering (p. 235). If the God-Machine decides that these characters are troublemakers, though, it might lead them into such dangerous Tales as Proposition 279 (p. 223) or What Is It Good For (p. 233).

# THE SQUARES OF THE CITY

Starting one night at midnight, a series of buildings all across the city begins to move in impossible ways for a short period of time. At the end of this movement, the last building to move vanishes. Only a few people notice these movements or the fact that later buildings are in different locations and some have vanished.

## Infrastructure

This tale takes place in a medium-sized or large city located anywhere in the world. Every night a dozen or more buildings in a single neighborhood of the city move and rearrange themselves. This movement begins at midnight, but every night it begins one minute later, beginning at12:01 the next night and at 12:05 five nights later. Although it looks impossible, each building moves as a separate unit, while the streets and sidewalks curve and bend to keep up. The buildings move on pairs of parallel sliding tracks that open up in the fabric of the streets and they travel at the speed of a fast walk. Anyone who is outside when this happens can see what is happening quite clearly, and also notices that almost no one within around half a mile of the affected area is outside while the buildings move or for the five minutes before or after.

This movement is never simply linear. It looks like movements of a complex two-dimensional puzzle, where one building moves south three blocks, then another near it moves west two blocks, allowing a third building to move north for three blocks, taking the first building's place. This movement takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and at the end of it, the building the makes the last move vanishes. This building and anyone inside of it are edited out of reality. Numbers in telephone books and cell phone contact lists vanish, business licenses and records disappear, people's medical, bank, and tax records all vanish. No one remembers that anything is different, except that a few people who had a loved one vanish may be inexplicably sad and lonely for several weeks. The only people who notice that a building and the people in it have vanished are the people who see the buildings moving.

**The Truth:** The tracks that allow the city blocks to move (described below) are logistical Infrastructure. The streets over them, and the general culture of the area that keeps most people off the streets late at night, are a longstanding form of concealment Infrastructure. Editing the buildings out of existence, of course, is elimination Infrastructure.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters in this tale should all be somewhat outside of the normal ebb and flow of existence in this city. One may be a new arrival who is looking for work or taking time off to write a novel. Another could be a temp worker who works a wide variety of jobs in different locations and has few lasting connections, and a third might be homeless. All that is necessary is that these people not have stable jobs and be inclined to occasionally stay up past midnight.

## Blueprints

Every night, another building vanishes, and most of these buildings are inhabited. No one remembers the vanished people except for the few people who have been unable to get inside at midnight and some people with serious mental illnesses. All of these people remember that both an office building and a large apartment building have vanished, along with several smaller buildings. Several hundred people have already been edited out of reality.

The people who can see and hear the buildings move grow increasingly out of sync with everyone around them because they remember a growing number of people, businesses, restaurants, and shops that no one else does. Sometimes, the first clue a person has to the fact that a particular building has vanished is that they mention a previously well-known shop or restaurant and everyone around them looks at them strangely. These comments cause everyone to look at the characters oddly and to be increasingly distant. If the characters are unable to prevent the building from moving, after several weeks they find that most of their close friends have become somewhat distant acquaintances.

## Linchpins

The characters all find themselves outside one night when the buildings begin to move. Everyone in the city feels a strong unconscious compulsion to get indoors a few minutes before the buildings move, but occasionally someone locks herself out of her home, drops her keys, or gets lost driving back from the store. Each character feels an urgent desire to get home (or to the shop, office, or other building they were planning to be in around midnight) as rapidly as possible, but for some reason fails to get there in time.

While they are outside, each of the characters hears the strange rumblings as the buildings begin moving. Then, the next day the business that a temp worker was working in or the shop where the homeless woman was regularly given free food has vanished, along with the entire building it was in. No one else notices, and in fact, online maps and the records of the temp agency clearly show that the business and the building never existed, but the characters remember it. The next night, characters who live in the same part of town look out their windows and see buildings in their neighborhood moving.

If at least three people stand and watch the last building move, it does not vanish, it simply moves to its final location and stops. However, all of these people must be able to clearly see the building and can be no more than 100 yards away from it. Also, while that building does not vanish, the next night buildings in a different part of the city move, and another building vanishes. It's possible to keep buildings from vanishing in this fashion, but doing so requires a nightly vigil at the location where the last building moves.

There is another way to stop the buildings from moving, which requires the characters to seek answers beneath the city. Like most other cities, this city has storm sewers, access corridors, and other tunnels underneath the streets. Anyone who gains access to these tunnels and has watched the buildings move can see that the tracks that the buildings move on are clearly visible in the ceilings of these tunnels, even when the buildings are not moving.

On the surface, these tracks vanish as flanges of asphalt rise up to cover them. However, the tracks remain underground, hidden from sight. If someone cuts, welds, or otherwise disables and disrupts these tracks sufficiently, they can be disabled permanently. Cutting one of these tracks, or welding a metal bar across them, causes lurching and grinding sounds as some buildings move while some of the buildings cannot move at all. More extensive damage slows the process so that it now requires two nights for buildings to move into the correct configuration for a building to vanish. Disabling these rails at points all across the city causes buildings to cease moving and ends the threat of buildings vanishing.

If the characters attack the rails or otherwise attempt to stop the process, they receive a visit the next day from Officer Strait. Officer Strait is an angel taking the form of a traffic cop. He cannot leave the streets, but he attempts to stop the characters from severing the rails or otherwise altering the Squares of the City.

## Methods

**Crafts:** Characters examining the tracks the buildings move on who succeed at a Wits + Crafts roll notice that these tracks might remain visible in tunnels underneath the city. An Intelligence + Crafts roll helps characters understand how to permanently disable these tracks.

**Investigation**: Every night, the buildings in a different part of the city move. However, all of these movements occur in a complex but comprehensible pattern. After observing the movements for at least three nights, characters can make an Intelligence + Investigation roll at -2 to determine what the next neighborhood to move will be. A second successful roll reveals which building will vanish. An exceptional success on either roll reveals the pattern, allows the character to completely understand the pattern of the buildings moving, and predict which buildings will move and vanish days or weeks in the future.

**Drive:** Characters who begin driving as soon as they hear the rumble of the buildings starting to move can drive to this area before the buildings cease moving by making a successful Wits + Drive roll.

**Survival:** Character walking through underground tunnels can make a Wits + Survival roll to find the area beneath any particular building or series of buildings

**Persuasion:** A Manipulation + Persuasion roll allows characters to convince the inhabitants of a building that will soon disappear to evacuate from the building. Characters must convince people to leave before the building begins to move. Once a building begins moving, no one can get in or out.

**Subterfuge:** Characters can use Presence + Subterfuge to successfully impersonate emergency services personnel and convince residents of a building to evacuate.

**Demolisher** (see p. 47): Characters with a knack for tearing things apart have an easy time disabling the rails the buildings move on.

**Omen Sensitivity** (see p.58): When they see a building that will vanish that night, anyone who gets hints or visions of the future makes a reflexive Wits + Occult roll to notice that this building is the one that will disappear.

## Escalation

If the characters manage to sever the rails and dodge the attentions of Officer Strait, they've saved the city from losing buildings and people — at least for the time being. The God-Machine might decide to try to rebuild this Infrastructure, but it will take time and effort, and if the characters want to be vigilant they can stay in the area and try to stop it.

Of course, the God-Machine might decide to take a different approach, and shift the characters to whatever alternate place the buildings went. This could lead to Sister City (p. 201) or Missing Persons (p. 210).

# WELLINGTON SCHOOL FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

The children of Wellington School are special, brilliant, and strange. Are they the cause or the reason for the strange and sometimes deadly occurrences that happen around the school? You, the faculty, are about to find out.

## Infrastructure

When the public school system in this medium sized American city "failed," many of the schools were bought out by private companies. This included Wellington, a special school that handles children who are both troubled and brilliant. The sorts of kids who, if sent to an average school, get so bored they cause trouble. In the privatization, Edu Tech Corp fired the entire staff, disposed of the old computer systems, and hired a whole new faculty and administration. They called it "restructuring." The fired teachers called it "union busting."

It got weird for a while. The papers reported some of the old staff wouldn't give up their jobs. They locked themselves in the building chanting crazed profanity, and had to be removed by force. The papers never said what they were chanting, or told their side of the story. No word of trial or resolution, they just vanished.

The staff has been told to ignore the gossip, to assume the kids will make up stories. They're "troubled" after all, and will do anything for attention, positive or negative. Strange behavior, including gossip, should be reported to the Administer of Public Trust, (a replacement for the plump, good-natured principal). School policy with regards to the students is very clear. Assure them everything is fine. Nothing has changed. They're safe.

**In Truth:** As will become apparent, the Wellington School is *not* part of God-Machine Infrastructure. In fact, the God-Machine has no power and no visibility on school grounds. As such, the players' characters in this Tale *are* the Infrastructure, specifically elimination. They don't realize this (at least not at first), but as the Tale progresses they should come to understand their function.

## Interchangeable Parts

The players take on the roles of staff, teachers, advisers, coaches, and possibly even janitors or staff as a part of Edu Tech's takeover of Wellington. That may sound like a limiting selection of character types, but it doesn't have to be. Edu Tech isn't interested in paying for the best teachers money can hire. Rather, they're looking to cut corners wherever possible. They're out for profit, so they hire anyone who can handle the basics of teaching. They call it a "focus on real-world experience." What they mean is, "if we can sneak you through a background check and you can remotely justify your experience, you're hired."

Wellington always focused on future careers as well as higher learning, so they have a functioning auto-shop program and metal works. Retired cops may find themselves asked to teach Criminal Justice to high school students at a college level. To keep the children enthusiastic and challenged, maybe they've arranged for a guest instructor this semester in anthropology, world religions, paranormal studies, or other esoteric subjects.

It's perfectly reasonable for one or all of the characters to play some of the troubled teens from the school, students who live, sleep, and eat inside the strange walls.

## Blueprints

All children are special, of course, but these children are more special than most. For whatever trick of circumstance or twistedly-inspired architecture, the God-Machine cannot operate within the walls of Wellington. As a result, the children raised within its walls never learn to ignore the truth, and the supernatural remains an open book to them all through adult life. In game terms, all of the students at the school have the God-Machine version of the Unseen Sense Merit (see p. 60), and, if the Storyteller wants to make the supernatural a bit more overt, might be more prone to manifesting psychic powers such as Telekinesis or Telepathy.

The God-Machine wants to remove this liability. Of course, a group of children being wiped out in almost any instance in the U.S. can be more of a shock to the system than the God-Machine is prepared for, and besides, the God-Machine isn't entirely certain what's happening and why (since it can't see inside the school grounds at all). Therefore, it's taken a more subtle approach. The characters' mission is to undo whatever glamour hovers over the place, whatever makes the place unique. The God-Machine's hope is that any liability from the place (that is, people that possess the capacity to see it) can be disposed of or used at its leisure once the blind spot is corrected.

If the characters don't deliver the God-Machine the secrets it's looking for, (and they likely won't) it starts attacking the school and the student body. It isn't trying to destroy the place (since it doesn't know what effect that might have), but to nudge the characters into finding out what's so special about Wellington. The God-Machine doesn't really care about "why" in the end, it just wants this pocket outside its influence to be controlled or destroyed.

## Linchpins

The characters work at the school, but they answer to Edu Tech. Edu Tech is a national corporation that swoops into bankrupt school districts, takes federal money, and gets the schools running again. They do it by cutting corners and hiring unqualified staff, but the test scores look good, so they're staying profitable. The local branch of Edu Tech, though, has been brought under the God-Machine's influence, as mentioned. The Linchpin is their legal staff, a collection of three seemingly-human figures. The characters might notice that these lawyers' breath seems smoky — it's not quite as opaque as smoke, but their breath has a woody, burnt, and not-unpleasant odor.

The God-Machine has also sent an angel to receive reports from the characters. The angel makes deliveries of school supplies and Edu Tech-approved texts and tests once a week. Its name (as far as human beings are concerned) is Emil Rubio.

To spur the characters into looking into the occult nature of the school, Rubio might find it necessary to help things along. His attacks on the school itself and its student body should start out mundane, or at least dismissible. A tragic death, apparently by accident, is easy to ignore. Maybe some of the kids are whispering about ghosts, but the characters see no signs at first. After their first glimpse, maybe they think they're dealing with ghosts and spirits. But the ghosts seem to be made of smoke (and carry the same odor as the lawyers' breath), and the "haunting" only seems to become intense on days when Rubio makes deliveries. The Storyteller's goal here is to start the players down a path thinking they're just dealing with traditional Chronicles of Darkness strangeness, only to find that all the strangeness is tied to the God-Machine.

## Methods

**Academics:** The investigative reporter planted too many questions in your mind. Could it be true that the teaching methods you've been handed are harming these children? Is the pedagogy all wrong? Why would they need to be brainwashed instead of educated? Roll Intelligence + Academics to find out more.

**Crafts:** You and three children are trapped, cornered by a creature with mirrored eyes and smoky, harsh breath. Looking around, you realize you're in the metal shop. Roll Intelligence + Crafts to build a trap to stop the specter.

**Larceny:** The truth has been scrubbed from the records at school. Whatever actually happened here — is happening here — isn't within Wellington. It looks like you're going to have to break into Edu Tech headquarters. Roll Dexterity + Larceny to start your foray into B&E.

**Weaponry:** Covered in soot and blood, you stand back from the ruins of the playground, your eyes turning to count the teens. Still seven. Next time you won't be so lucky. Next time, they're going to need to know how to defend themselves. Roll Presence + Weaponry to start training.

**Empathy:** They told you these kids were "troubled," which usually means some kind of emotional or development disturbance, but that isn't what's going on. Michael, a student, is horrified by something he's seen, but he's not willing to talk to you or anyone. There's got to be a way to get through to him. Roll Wits + Empathy to find a way to build trust.

**Subterfuge:** The meeting with Edu Tech's HR director went well enough, but why did she insist on a lawyer being there? Roll Wits + Subterfuge to get a sense of the relationship between them.

**Eye for the Strange**, (p. 44): Maybe one of the characters is a student, or a former student. Whatever the reasons, this character is also resistant to the lies and illusions of the God-Machine. She'll sense something wrong, something off, and help open the door for the other characters.

**Hobbyist Clique**, (p. 51): Schools are great places for minds to meet. An afterschool club that's reading horror comics to keep off the streets is a step and a hop away from a team of occult researchers at hand. All these kids need is a little nudge.

## Escalation

The characters have moved from simply investigating the nature of Wellington to full on protecting the students. They may live out their days protecting and training the students for war, they may be destroyed by the God-Machine, but in many ways, there is no escape from Wellington for the faculty once they've discovered its secrets. Nowhere else is safe.

This raises the question: What *is* so special about Wellington that makes it invisible to the God-Machine? The answer to that question varies based on what the Storyteller's plans are for the chronicle. Here are three suggestions:

The architect of Wellington was a devotee of Marco Singe, and built the school as an exaltation to the God-Machine. He got it wrong, though, as the characters can discover when they find his notes hidden in a compartment in the wall. If they correct his mistake and grant the God-Machine more power here, what reward might the characters receive? From here, consider running The Moon Window (p. 212) or The Invisible Citadel (p. 219).

Or, maybe Sarah Andrews (see p. 249) is responsible for the God-Machine's blindness. For whatever reason, she emits a psychic frequency that acts like static, and at Wellington, it become especially powerful. The God-Machine, of course, might respond to this by sending agents to kill Sarah — or to capture her for further study. The characters might have to grab her and run, or live with exposing her to the God-Machine. From here: Missing Persons (if Sarah disappears into a portal; p. 210) or Do-Over (if they search for a way to correct what happened to her; p. 199).

For a more cosmic possibility, maybe this isn't the only blind spot that the God-Machine is experiencing. All over the world, it is losing its influence and its power. Is this a good thing? Is it withdrawing from a doomed world? Will it grind the Earth into dust trying to correct the problem? From here, consider: This is Hell (p. 231) or Sister City (if it tries to revert to a backup copy; p. 201).

# GHOST MACHINE

The small towns of New England have a problem. Something is causing their machines to break down. Stoplights and cellphones losing functionality complicate little villages like this. But when boat engines start bleeding and gears scream, it'll be up to you to fight the ghosts in the machines.

## Infrastructure

Along small coastal towns and riverside villages in the New England states, the God-Machine has begun an experiment. It's haunting the machinery human beings use every day. Why? Is it part of a plan to test our dependence on it? Maybe to see how weak we'd be in the face of a worldwide cataclysm? It could be those things, or some plan impossible to parse with a human mind, but it is an experiment and for now, it's being performed on a small scale. All of these low-population towns are near the coast. That may be a part of the plan, but it isn't a direct explanation of anything. The water is part of a pattern but not a solution.

Don't get caught up in the "why" though, because the "what" is the issue for your characters. With their machinery being overtaken by ghosts, it'll be a long struggle before the characters can even consider digging at the root of the problem. Right now, a few people scattered through these towns are trying to take old folk remedies said to protect them from ghosts and apply them to the issue. The characters may get directly involved with the resistance, may spearhead it, or may try to avoid it while seeking other solutions.

**The Truth:** The Infrastructure at work here is logistical, overseen by the angel called Black Nathaniel. Black Nathaniel takes a more active role than many of the God-Machine's agents, calling up spirits of the dead and binding them to electronic and mechanical devices.

## Interchangeable Parts

Characters that are able to travel a bit are ideal for this chronicle. While the characters won't need to travel cross country, they need to be able to cross state lines to hit all the locations where the machines are breaking down. Ties to those small communities are also a plus, as they can be insular. Professional fisherman, characters with family ties through the region, even a Highway Patrol or Coast Guard officer would have a reason to move around and yet belong in a way with various communities.

Of course, being outsiders trying to solve the problem may itself be an angle of approach when Storytelling this chronicle. Getting in and getting close to the people affected by the God-Machine's experiment.

## Blueprints

The God-Machine is running an experiment on these towns. As mentioned above, its reasons for the experiment — what hypothesis it wishes to test or plan it wishes to advance — aren't immediately important. One possibility is that it prefers to have ghosts haunt physical, easily-portable machines over them being anchored to people or places, and it wants to see if this approach makes hauntings more or less chaotic. Another option is that the God-Machine just needs the unquiet dead of these towns out of the way to make room for something else (perhaps a region-wide Infrastructure). As Storyteller, don't make this decision unless you have to — the characters probably won't ever discover that truth anyway (unless you escalate the chronicle to the global or cosmic level, but by that time the characters should have enough of an understanding of the scale of the God-Machine that "we'll never really understand" becomes a viable answer).

The God-Machine is churning up the souls of the dead from wherever they might rest, and stuffing them into anything with a circuit board or moving parts. Many locals have their traditions and their superstitions, but this is different. The traditions of old sailors and other folk superstitions just aren't meant for this technological terror. As a result, without outside agents (like the characters), the locals won't make the leaps of research and study necessary to resist. The machine ghosts of the God-Machine terrorize the locals until it's satisfied with the results — but that might leave the Northeast dotted with tiny ghost towns too dangerous to reclaim.

## Linchpins

The spirits of the dead might reside in computers, watches, millstones, and even overhead lighting. All of the things we understand as complex machines are, in essence, an extension of the massive cosmic entity that is the God-Machine. And so a fisherman might turn on his television to find the signal dead and faces of those he left behind in the war screaming profanity at him. A husband that let his wife die rather than keep her on a ventilator may face her final revenge when he cleans out the garbage disposal one night.

Reapers and Sowers carry the ghosts, under the direction of Black Nathaniel (p.254). These angels are hard to catch, and the average person never sees the Reapers and Sowers, only the ghosts they've bound. They work in pairs, of course, the Reaper a tall, gaunt, mechanical man that smells like rust and motor oil carrying an old-fashioned lantern that glows an ugly green. That's where he keeps the souls he's reaped from elsewhere. The Sower is a squat, womanish horror made of moist leather patches from her duties sewing souls into the workings of the God-Machine.

## Methods

**Academics:** Many of the graves of a small local graveyard have been dug up. Why? That's going to be hard to discern. First, you're going to have to figure out who was dug up in order to figure out why. Roll Intelligence + Academics to sort through old church records and figure out whose remains have been disturbed.

**Crafts:** It's possible that you can spiritproof some machines, but the process is delicate and complicated. It will take a skilled hand. Roll Dexterity + Crafts to experiment with ghostproofing your computer without destroying its delicate components.

**Drive:** The boat has a mind of its own, and it's taking you out to sea. That might not be an insurmountable problem, but those clouds look threatening. Roll Strength + Drive to wrestle the controls away from the ghost controlling the boat enough to aim the craft back toward land.

**Stealth:** Black Nathaniel is out hunting for ghosts, and if he can't find any, he'll make some. Roll Dexterity + Stealth to sneak under the watchful eye of a murderous angel.

**Animal Ken:** All of the cats in town — actually, in all of the towns you've visited — are acting strange. Roll Wits + Animal Ken to figure out what the common cause is.

**Persuasion:** If New England loves anything more than a ghost story, it's a town hall meeting. The crowd is getting restless and panicky. Roll Presence + Persuasion to calm the locals into telling you their story before panic sets in.

**Encyclopedic Knowledge** (Computer) (p. 44): With a focus on technology and the Computer Skill, your character may be vital in both discovering the nature of the hauntings as well as helping to take back the technology stolen in the God-Machine's experiment.

**Barfly** (p. 50): You might not need an invitation to get into a dockworkers' pub, but you'll be treated to the coldest of receptions unless you can get the locals to warm to you.

## Escalation

It's possible that if the characters organize well enough, they might prove the experiment is more trouble than it's worth, causing the God-Machine to focus its attentions to other matters. But what if a scattered handful of techno-exorcists aren't actually enough to deter the God-Machine? What if the God-Machine's experiment is successful, and it decides to spread it? Or what if this experiment is the first stage in launching a more destructive **(The Scarlet Plague, p. 225)** or invasive **(A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity, p. 216)** initiative?

Imagine a world where people must fight to reclaim technology from wrathful, tortured ghosts while trying to hide from monstrous machine men wielding the ghost-infested tech. Should the story go cosmic, a full-on end-of-the-world scenario could position the last survivors of a nuclear holocaust against the God-Machine's agents and its twisted ghost tech. The characters struggle to survive, rebuild, and steal back fire from Prometheus, after a fashion, and ward their tools against further possession. Left unchecked, this scenario could go, by way of Missing Persons (p.210), straight into This Is Hell (p. 231).

# THE KEY

Somewhere out there is the Key to the God-Machine. Last Thursday he killed three people in three different cities at the same moment. How do you catch a man with no way to track him or prove his guilt? How do you stop a Key that can open a part of God?

## Infrastructure

Three different police precincts are baffled. Local papers in three cities are pointing fingers and someone on a local network affiliate is suggesting that the police are covering up an internal problem. How else can you explain three murders, performed with an identical ritual, with blood and other evidence indicating one single suspect in three different cities at the exact same time?

Most of the departments, being territorial and embarrassed, want to push this whole thing aside as quickly as possible. They want to treat it as three different crimes, find their own bad guys and wrap up the strangeness. However, because the media has heard so much, and are so interested in this impossible crime, no one is going to be able to sweep it under the rug too easily.

The killer has left notes, mocking messages detailing how he'll kill again and when, but not where. As he says, "space is only an issue for you. I can be anywhere I want, and I will be. How many of you have wives at home? Can you be in two places at once, like I can?" He also says he'll be writing to the newspapers next. He plans to be, as he puts it, "the greatest cog the machine has ever known, the greatest killer the world has ever seen."

**The Truth:** The Key is Wesley Cote (p. 250), a man who came unstuck from time just after his wife's death. As a teenager, Cote received a visit from his future self (once he'd started killing) and was informed of his destiny. He honed his ability to sidestep time and space, and used it to kill, but only ever in the future, from the perspective of his widowed self. Wesley has his own theories about what he is and why he does what he does, but the truth is that he is mobile elimination Infrastructure. Occasionally an angel called Grief delivers a message to him, and he kills a person on the say-so of the God-Machine. The rest of the time, he just kills at whim.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters might be a publicity stunt. The three departments decide to create a well-publicized task force consisting of detectives from all three precincts working together and sharing resources. Throw in an overseeing FBI agent in case someone decides to take the case federal, and maybe an Internal Affairs mole (this looks a lot like cops are behind the whole mess), and you have the setup for a tense procedural drama.

Or, to take it in a different direction, the chronicle could follow some news hounds as they look into the matter as civilians. Maybe the cops are tied up in the God-Machine on a less metaphoric level, and the only way to stop the Key and his killings is for these reporters to investigate on their own. Maybe the Key has picked them as his chroniclers and a part of his delusion, and so they have to find and stop him before he gets to them.

A third possibility is that the characters have already run across the God-Machine, and the Key is targeting them directly. This works best if one player is willing to sacrifice her character (perhaps in accordance with that character's Fate) to start things off.

In any case, let the players choose which three cities are involved. This Tale is regional in scope, meaning that, as written, the cities should be in the same general part of the world, but if you want to take it global and have the cities all be on different continents, that's just as effective.

## Blueprints

He calls himself the Key, because he believes he has unlocked part of God and has full access to that aspect. He can hear the workings of the God-Machine. Everywhere he goes, he hears the ratcheting pulse of the God-Machine's plans and whirring beats of its machinations. The Key believes that he understands those plans, it's all clear to him. If he weren't a perfect part of a perfect system, how could he possibly do what he does?

Granted, he doesn't exactly understand what it is he does, or how he can shift in time and space the way he does. It doesn't matter. What matters is that everyone knows he's doing it. He knows he'll be caught, eventually. He doesn't plan to make it easy, but he does plan for it, and his capture should be one for all of history to remember. He will keep upping the ante, keep pushing the boundaries of what he's capable of doing until he's caught or dead. Because he thinks the God-Machine wants it that way.

Cote is right, of course; the God-Machine does want it this way. The God-Machine created the Key using a kind of closed loop — Grief delivered the message to Cote (age 30), which drove him to the edge of sanity, which pushed him to kill, which enabled Grief to teach him to shift in time, which allowed Cote to go back in time and train Cote (age 16) to stalk and kill, which made him unstable and thus able to hear Grief's message at age 30... The sad tale of Wesley Cote is truly a chicken-and-egg scenario, and it's enough to cause a breaking point (see p. 73) to any character that figures it out.

For its part, the God-Machine doesn't care much about Cote particularly. If the characters kill him, it can create another Key for elimination Infrastructure purposes. Or, it can use a version of Cote from a different time period (if you think that wouldn't annoy the players).

## Linchpins

The God-Machine is largely a motivation and a means in this chronicle rather than a potential antagonist. The horror here, supernatural events aside, is really what one man can do, how he can hold three cities hostage just by reveling in his actions and acting as though the media should be celebrating them.

Signs of the God-Machine might be peppered throughout the stories as a method of setting mood; they are the trappings the Key is obsessed with, after all. He likes metal parts and gears; the deaths may occur near large industrial machines or use them. Remind the players that blood smells like copper and rust. Maybe the characters find three doodles on the walls of the crime scenes, all drawn with the same silver marker, but when the doodles are held up next to each other they make the shape of a key.

## Methods

**Medicine:** The coroner does amazing work, and her reports are always detailed and complete. Roll Intelligence + Medicine to suss out the details of her reports, and maybe pick up some vital clues for your investigation.

**Politics:** The old files you found have been heavily redacted, possibly on a federal level. You refuse to believe it's a dead end, though. Roll Intelligence + Politics to uncover a place where unaltered files might be held and, more importantly, how to access them.

**Firearms:** It was bad luck that the only witness to the latest crime is a bit of a recluse and a gun nut whose mental state was made quite fragile by what he saw that night. He sees you as an outsider, maybe even someone tied to the Key. Roll Manipulation + Firearms to bring up enough gun lore from memory to gain his trust and get past his damage.

**Larceny:** The cabinets in the Chief of Detective's office are locked. You suspect that part of the reason for all those locks has something to do with the Key and what the chief actually knows. Roll Intelligence + Larceny to plan the best time to get into those cabinets and have a look.

**Expression:** A group of reporters has you cornered. Their questions are real stingers. They want answers and details you aren't able to give them. If you blow them off, though, it'll look even worse. Roll Presence + Expression to tell them things they already know in a new way and convince them they've gotten what they were after.

**Empathy:** Cote's brother-in-law was there the night his sister died, and remembers Cote screaming about a "blue room." But to get him to relive that night, he'll have to believe you have his family's best interests at heart. Roll Manipulation + Empathy to get him to talk (alternately, this might be resolved with the Social Maneuvering rules on p. 81).

**Mind of a Madman** (p. 57): You're the investigator everyone else worries about. The one with a dark cloud over your shoulder and an unpleasant knack for getting into the heads of psychopaths. You can start to understand what makes this guy tick, which means you may understand how to stop him.

**Mentor** (p. 51): You had a professor in college who's opened a lot of doors for you since, but what interests you now is her work in "quantum immortality." Of course, her knowledge and your involvement puts her in the Key's sights — and maybe even on the God-Machine's list for elimination. Keep her alive while she helps you sort through what is impossible and what is merely improbable.

## Escalation

The Key is dead or in custody. Now what? Whether from him, or from his rambling writings, the characters learn more and more about this "God-Machine" he was obsessed with. He talks about global conspiracies. He talks about other "parts like him" operating, killing, and serving the God-Machine all over the country, maybe all over the world. One of the parts is apparently planning to take down a plane in the next month. How do the characters follow up? This might lead into Do-Over (p. 199) if the characters try to match time travel with time travel, Wake the Dead (p. 214) if they kill the wrong guy, or Wellington School for Gifted Children (p. 205) if it turns out another Key is hiding where the God-Machine can't find her.

# MISSING PERSONS

Unusual numbers of people go missing over a large area. People regularly report hearing these people calling for help but can't find them.

## Infrastructure

The events begin in any city or town, but the characters must travel across one or more states or a similar area in search of answers, eventually ending up in a small city at the geographical center of the disappearances. The characters begin hearing reports of people (and occasionally pets) vanishing, and others hearing them calling from seemingly-empty space. These reports occur across an area of several states.

In one famous disappearance, a young man vanished from a car at the top of a Ferris wheel. For the rest of the evening, other patrons claim to have heard the man calling

for help when their cars passed the point where he disappeared. Another case involved people in a house losing a dog and hearing it barking inside the house for several days afterwards, but being unable to locate it.

**The Truth:** The God-Machine conceals its methods in this story by hiding the mechanism creating the portals in the weird "dimension" on the other side of said portals. This could be considered concealment Infrastructure, but it's really a *lack* of Infrastructure. This is actually a problem; because the God-Machine didn't make sure that the portals fit into our world, it's interacting with the world in a disruptive way. This may have simply escaped the God-Machine's attention, or it may be deliberate, which is a decision for the Storyteller based on her plans for this Tale.

## Interchangeable Parts

Almost any characters could work with this adventure, but they need sufficient funds or a car that's in good shape so they can travel across several hundred miles. At least one character who has sufficient knowledge of mathematics to be able to understand the pattern of the oval gateways would be very helpful.

## Blueprints

People are vanishing because they wander into a series of more than a hundred gateways into another reality. These gateways form a vast, rotating spiral covering several states. Each gateway is an oval eight feet high and five feet wide. Bumping into the side of a gateway does nothing, but anyone who stumbles through the gateway vanishes. Although the gateways are invisible to most people, sound travels through them, so anyone near a gateway can hear people on the other side.

The reality that lies on the other side of the oval gateways is exceptionally confusing. The sky and the landscape are almost indistinguishable, and to human eyes both appear as abstract swirls of color. Perceptions of distance, shape, and direction are drastically inaccurate, and the terrain is highly uneven. Someone could take a single step away from a gateway and find themselves as much as several hundred yards away from the gateway. Attempting to walk towards an object or person that seems close by and directly ahead could lead the character further away from it.

The air in the realm on the other side of the gateways is breathable and time passes one tenth as fast in this other reality, but eventually anyone who remains here starves to death. There is no food, water, or other life in this reality. Near each gateway are least half a dozen people and a larger number of corpses. Some of these people save themselves by stumbling back through the gateway. However, none of these people can see the gateways and only escape by chance. They reappear with only fragmentary and confusing memories of the reality they were in, and the experience drives a few of them insane. If the characters do nothing, people continue to disappear and never return.

The gateways are created and controlled via a tall windowless building located in the exact center of the spiral of gateways. Inside this building is a vast and complex machine. The characters can destroy this machine, or they could attempt to adjust it so the overall gateways are significantly smaller or higher off the ground. Both options would cause far fewer people to be trapped by them, but would not prevent all vanishings.

## Linchpins

The most obvious manifestations of this phenomenon are the invisible gateways that move across the region. Once someone has seen someone vanish into a gateway, she automatically gains the ability to see the gateways. At least one of the characters should see someone vanish.

The gateways appear as faintly glowing ovals that move through the air. These ovals move at a speed of between one and six miles per hour. The further from the center the oval gateway is, the faster they move.

These ovals form a complex spiral pattern all centered on a small city. This city is unusual in that its missing persons rate is significantly lower than anywhere in the surrounding area, because there are no oval gateways anywhere within this city. At the exact center of the spiral is a large, windowless building 17 stories high. Although the building appears well cared for, it has no identifying marks other than a small sign saying "Koval Corporation Rental Storage" above the door. The locals ignore the building.

The building has expensive electronic locks but no other security system. The first floor contains only unused offices, a stairway, and an elevator to the upper floors. Both require a key card to access. The other 16 floors contain a vast and complex machine. The machine is a confusing mass of scaffolding, interlocking gears, flashing lights, and sheets of transparent, glowing glass. The machine is alien to humans, but is obviously large, powerful, and exceptionally complex. However, near the base are controls that appear far more comprehensible, as though they were built by and for humans. The Overseer, an angel sent to operate these controls, has full run of the place.

Floating in the air in front of and three feet above these controls is an image of the spiral of gateways. This image is approximately seven feet across, and each gateway is around an inch across. The characters can figure out that one of the controls affects the size of the oval gateways and another affects their height. Both can only be adjusted within a limited range. The portal size can range from one to five yards in diameter and the height from a few inches above ground level to 200 yards high. By making the oval gateways both as small as possible and as high as possible, the number of people who become lost can be greatly reduced.

Another advantage the characters have is that they can see the gateways, and this allows them to more easily navigate the other-space behind the gateways. Being able to see the gateways gives characters traveling into this other-space the chance of

finding their way out, but the distortions of space and distance still make this a challenging proposition. By far the safest method of navigating this space is for a character to go in tied to a long rope, so that she can automatically find her way out.

## Methods

**Investigation:** Plotting all of the missing persons cases in the region requires an extended Intelligence + Investigation roll. Each roll requires a half hour of work, and eight successes are required to plot all of the known disappearances on a map.

**Science:** Gaining a basic understanding of the controls of the device that operates the gates requires an Intelligence + Science - 4 roll, as well as several hours of experimentation and examination.

**Athletics:** Distance from the ground isn't *quite* uniform between the two sides of the portal. Climbing through a portal requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll. Failure on the roll indicates that the character falls and suffers one point of bashing damage.

**Larceny:** Characters who wish to break into the building must make a Dexterity + Larceny roll at a -2 penalty to get through the lock on the front door. Another Dexterity + Larceny at a -3 penalty roll is necessary to override the key card lock on the elevator or the lock on the stairway.

**Persuasion** or **Subterfuge:** A successful Manipulation + Persuasion or Manipulation + Subterfuge roll permits a character to convince a local reporter to give her access to his database of stories about local missing persons.

**Empathy:** A successful Presence + Empathy roll helps calm panicked people who have fallen through a gateway so the character can lead them back to earth.

**Direction Sense** (p. 44): Individuals with a good sense of direction add +2 to their rolls to navigate the reality on the other side of the gateways.

**Clairvoyance** (p. 57)**:** People who occasionally see visions of distant events can automatically see the gateways and easily locate people who have fallen through them.

## Escalation

The easiest method of escalation is if the characters destroy the machine rather than adjusting it. While damaging it prompts swift retribution from its clockwork servants, a large fertilizer bomb placed inside the first floor could easily destroy the machine in the building. A moment after this explosion, a pillar of blinding light arcs up into the sky and all of the oval gateways vanish. The characters can conclude this scenario with little backlash (making it a good choice for a single-story God-Machine chronicle), although if you want to have the story take a tragic turn, maybe that explosion forces the God-Machine to take a more direct and unpleasant hand in the fate of the world (The Scarlet Plague, p. 225 or Proposition 279, p. 223).

If the characters do not manage to shut down the factory, though, over the course of the next three weeks, physical laws begin to break down in subtle ways. Gravity varies by as much as 20% in different places and at different times. Also, distances seem to contract and expand. Traffic accidents and similar problems dramatically increase. Most people are slightly confused, but do not panic, because they are unable to fully understand what has happened. Only people who can see the gateways are actually aware of the magnitude of the problems (these events might be used as a lead-in to a cosmic-tier Tale such as Urban Wandering, p. 235).

# THE MOON WINDOW

The characters discover that entropy is increasing in a growing region. In this area, machines break down faster than they should and people become sick more often. As the area expands, entropy increases within it, causing more and more serious problems. The characters must find the cause before large numbers of people die.

## Infrastructure

This tale takes place within a large city. The location doesn't matter, but it needs to be a relatively prosperous city of at least a million people. This city should also be located relatively near several other large cities.

**The Truth:** As discussed in the Introduction, Marco Singe's cult and understanding of the God-Machine isn't entirely (or even mostly) accurate. Yes, the lunar landing retrieved artifacts associated with the God-Machine, but the God-Machine didn't put them on the moon for people to find. In bringing back objects from the Crypt of the Butterfly, humanity might have pierced one of the greatest concealment Infrastructures in history.

## Interchangeable Parts

One or (preferably) more of the characters should be people who are in a position to notice some of the anomalies. Someone who works for the power company or for an IT firm that serves many clients in the affected area would be ideal, as would a doctor or nurse working in a nearby hospital, especially in the emergency room. At least one of the characters should have either technical skills that can be used for breaking and entering or sufficient social skills to talk his way past low-level security personnel.

## Blueprints

The true purpose of the Apollo lunar missions was to retrieve various items from the Moon, most importantly the

remains of the ancient creature in the so-called Crypt of the Butterfly. However, the people who acquired this body have not yet learned how to make use of the many powers it is supposed to bestow upon anyone who possesses it. In an attempt to release its powers, these individuals have begun working with some of the smaller items from the crypt. One of these items is a rough and eroded sphere of red- and gray-banded stone the size of a softball. In an attempt to release some of the power within it, an esoteric artist and self-proclaimed magician placed the sphere in the center of a large, abstract, stained glass window.

The CEO of the NalCon Corporation is part of the effort to work with the Crypt of the Butterfly. A few months ago, she had this window placed as part of an artistic ornament near the top of her local corporate headquarters, a 40-story office tower known as the Barlowe Building. While this building has not been affected by the emanations from this window, its effects extend outwards from the window in an equilateral triangle to the northeast of the office tower. The center line of this triangle lies on a direct line with the stained glass window and the setting sun on the winter solstice.

Entropy increases within this triangle. Light bulbs and other electrical components burn out faster than they should, car parts need to be replaced more often, electronics frequently break or malfunction, and illnesses are both more common and more severe. Initially, the triangle was only four blocks on a side, but it has been growing. At the same time, entropy has been increasing within the entire affected area. Currently, the region is almost two miles on a side and, within this area, light bulbs and other components last slightly less than half as long as they should. The region continues to grow until it is 21 miles on a side and electronic components last one quarter as long as normal.

People who live or work within this area are already suffering from more and worse illnesses than people elsewhere in the city, and the health effects of the high-entropy area are getting worse. From colds and the flu to surgical complications and cancer, the increased entropy is slowly killing people. However, if the window containing the sphere is destroyed or stolen and placed in a heavy wooden or metal container, the affected region returns to normal in less than a day.

## Linchpins

The characters are most likely to get involved because they have all noticed some odd phenomena within the affected region. A maintenance technician for a convenience store chain might notice that stores within the affected region have far more electrical problems than other stores, and these problems range from light bulbs burning out faster to electronics breaking down and software crashing much more frequently. A physician working in the emergency room in a hospital near the region sees that an increasing number of people in the ER come from this region. Combined with the information the characters have seen on their own, they'll know something is up.

Characters who want to investigate this region can determine the edges of the region simply by entering or leaving it carrying a lit cigarette or driving a car with its headlights on. Inside this region, cigarettes have a tendency to smolder and electric lights of all types are slightly dimmer. Both immediately brighten when they leave the area. The edges of this region are quite distinct, and by walking or driving half a yard, someone can see her cigarette flare up or almost go out or her headlights visibly brighten or dim. With a bit of work, the characters learn that the region is an equilateral triangle with the apex being the Barlowe Building, an office tower owned by the large NalCon corporation.

Anyone with an interest in public art or who researches the building learns that the stained glass window was installed just two months ago as part of plan to create public art on and around the Barlowe Building in celebration of its purchase by the NalCon Corporation three months previously. The stained glass window is circular and 11 feet in diameter. It is attached to the building by one 20-foot-long girder coming off of the roof and also by a second girder located 11 feet below the roof. In the early evening, sunlight shines through this window down into the high-entropy triangle.

## Methods

**Investigation:** Researching the many different types of problems that have been occurring within the high-entropy zone gives characters more information about exactly what is going on. Roll Intelligence + Investigation to uncover one particular anomaly within this area. Once the characters begin exploring this phenomenon, another Intelligence + Investigation roll reveals the size and shape of the region of high entropy.

**Medicine:** Understanding exactly how strange and unprecedented the medical anomalies found within the high-entropy zone are requires an Intelligence + Medicine roll.

**Athletics:** If someone wants to steal the stained glass window or the stone sphere at its center, they'll need to get out to it. Climbing from the Barlowe Building's roof out to the stained glass window requires an extended Strength + Athletics roll with a -2 modifier (one roll equals one minute of climbing, five successes are required). Failure means that the character loses her grip and sacrifices one banked success to stabilize herself. Failure with no successes banked means the character falls, probably to her death (unless she has anchored herself somehow).

**Larceny:** Getting into the Barlowe building during business hours is easy, but getting up to the roof requires getting past an electronic lock and alarm system. Roll Dexterity + Larceny at -4 to manage this challenging feat.

**Socialize:** Convincing physicians, electricians, tech-support personnel, or other people who work in or near the high-entropy area to talk in detail about the oddities they have noticed requires a Presence + Socialize roll.

**Subterfuge:** Talking one of the maintenance or security personnel from the Barlowe Building into letting you up on the roof requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll at -4. Of course, you could use Social Maneuvering (p. 81), but that takes a bit longer.

**Danger Sense** (p. 44): Regardless of how the characters get onto the roof of the Barlowe Building, having a sense for danger helps them avoid going up there when one of the maintenance staff is also on the roof, and also alerts them if building security personnel are closing in.

**Psychometry**, (p. 58): What secrets might a magical sphere taken from the moon hold? Using psychic powers to find out might be dangerous to one's sanity, but too great a temptation to ignore.

## Escalation

The stone sphere is only one of three artifacts astronauts recovered from the moon. Other people are performing different tests on the other two objects. None of the results should be identical to the effects of this object, but characters can find two other locations in nearby cities where strange phenomena occur. In one, people see ghosts and hear voices far more often than normal (**Ghost Machine, p. 207**). In the other, the overall level of fear and dread has significantly increased, leading to a local rise in violent crime and suicide (if this continues, it could lead to This Is Hell, **p. 231**; left in a "milder" state it might lead to The 300 Block; **p. 197**).

# WAKE THE DEAD

One of you killed a man who wasn't supposed to die. Maybe he had it coming, maybe he didn't, but anyhow, he's gone and that's when everything started going wrong and the dead started waking up. The cause? You're going to have to find it and stop it, because no one else can.

## Infrastructure

Most of the action in this story should happen in the small towns and on the back roads of middle America, largely focused on the region that was once the Dust Bowl. (Northwest Texas, eastern New Mexico, the Oklahoma panhandle, and much of Kansas and Colorado). The characters' stories could stretch as far north as the Dakotas, west as San Diego, and east as Ohio. Anywhere you imagine a small population, dirt and dust, and a touch of the nomadic trucker culture, you can drop these stories.

All over these rural and roadside communities the rumors fly. Jacob McKenzie got knifed in a bar fight three weeks back, but didn't stay dead for too long. Elsie Wilson's son came home to her before Christmas even though he got killed in the war. And the Maple widows aren't sleeping alone anymore since both of their husbands returned. Here and there, the dead are coming back. Sometimes it's nothing, life as normal, just full of bittersweet memories and worry. Sometimes it's a horror movie, complete with brain eating and screaming. No two stories play out exactly the same way, but for some reason all these stories are coming to the characters' ears.

**The Truth:** The Infrastructure at work here is logistical, but it's all gone wrong. The characters (one of them, at least) killed a person for whom the God-Machine had further plans, but instead of the plans shifting, the God-Machine is trying to correct the *death*. Unfortunately things got muddled, and the God-Machine isn't sure who it's supposed to bring back, hence the haphazard nature of this story.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters might be truckers, runaways, a band, students out to "discover themselves," a group of writers and artists trying to be Hemingway or Kerouac, ghost or storm chasers, but whoever they are, they need to be able to live nomadically.

More importantly, one or more of the characters needs to be directly responsible for the death of another person. Maybe the players know about it, or maybe it's a terrible secret one keeps from the others. The example character, Lucien McJack, is presented as a man killed by accident, but feel free to adapt him to fit any unfortunate victim of the characters.

## Blueprints

The God-Machine had plans that have started to uncoil thanks to a random act of mortality. When the God-Machine's designs were countermanded, some gear or wheel started spinning backward. The living continued to die, but some of the dead just started living again. It isn't a thing the God-Machine is doing directly, but rather, a side effect of messing with its plans.

Because human death is so indiscriminate, these resurrections are similarly chaotic. As the characters run into more incidences of people returning from the dead, (though not always coming back to life — most often, they come back as undead creatures), they might see that even the happiest endings have a bitter twinge to them and painful irony hovers over each person touched by these events. A father might wish, fervently, for his son to come back to life — but when the boy does return, is that really what the father wanted? A person killed by her lover in the heat of passion returns to life and crawls out of the shallow grave she was buried in. Does she want revenge? Answers? Or maybe she forgives her lover and wants to go back to him?

Ultimately, the characters unravel the cause of the chaos: the man one of them killed, who is now a soulless corpse possessed by an evil spirit (**see Lucien McJack, p. 244**). At this point they'll have to face their own actions, their own mortality, and agents of the God-Machine as they try to stop this senseless nightmare of life and death. They may try to bring back the man they killed to end the onslaught. They may get the idea that bringing him back will be worse, and try to stop the God-Machine. That might involve finding out what was so special about the man they killed — a man who, unfortunately, has already returned to "life," but is in no condition to pick up where he left off.

## Magical Realism

The intended feel of Wake the Dead is a genre called *magical realism*, a style of fiction in which the fantastic or magical is presented in a straightforward manner, alongside more realistic or mundane events. Much of Tom Robbins' work (*Skinny Legs and All, Another Roadside Attraction*), *Van Gogh's Bad Café* (Frederic Tuten) and *The Time-Traveler's Wife* (Audrey Niffenegger) are literary examples. Cinematic examples include *Midnight in Paris* (2011, dir. Woody Allen) and *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992, dir. Alfonso Arau).

The genre isn't widely associated with horror, largely because of the disconnect between what the protagonists in horror movies believe is real and what the antagonist of a horror movie reveals to be real (that is, one of the big scares in vampire movies is often the revelation that vampires exist at all). Several of the films based on Stephen King's work (including *It*, 1990), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987, dir. Wes Craven), *The Craft* (1996, dir. Andrew Fleming) and *Practical Magic* (1998, dir. Griffin Dunne) include elements of magical realism. For purposes of this Tale, however, the best cinematic source of inspiration is probably *Cemetery Man* (1994, dir. Michele Soavi), in which Rupert Everett plays a gravedigger who has to cope with the dead rising from their graves.

The walking dead in Wake the Dead *might* behave like the flesh-eating zombies we're so familiar with, but they might just as well try to pick up their lives where they left off. That the world doesn't come to a screeching halt as word of this instance spreads is where the magical realism comes in. If that's not a paint you want in the box, then keep the focus of this story local and assume that even if people do spread the word, no one outside the community believes it.

## Linchpins

Anyone brought back from the dead bears the mark of the God-Machine or its servants. Burn scars, which look like a giant raptor put its talons into the victim, and the smell of rust that won't quite go away are common to many of the returned dead (though not all).

Early on, the characters hear tell of uncommonly-big carrion birds near affected locations. Someone else describes metal angels with lists of names for judgment sparkling across the mirrored surface of their wings. Witnesses don't realize they're talking about the same being, but the angel in question — called the Mirror Vulture — isn't here to feast on the dead. It's only here to check each of the returned dead and see if the one the God-Machine wants has returned. Its mission says nothing about putting the dead back down again, so it doesn't bother.

The Mirror Vulture's traits can be found on p. 260.

## Methods

**Occult:** How many different cultures talk about the dead returning to life? Actually, almost all of them. How many of those cultural tales have useful information on how to put the dead back *down*? That might take some research. Start with Intelligence + Occult; it's probably an extended action.

**Science:** This feather bears all the marks of use — it's got dust particles between the barbs, individual barbules, and it clearly fell from a wing. So how in the world can it be made of *mirrored glass*? Roll Intelligence + Science to run some analyses.

**Stealth:** When you met dead-Nancy at the bar, she'd been back six months and dead three years before that. She's pretty sure if you want to see the "things" that brought her back, you're going to have to hide out at the cemetery at night. Come nightfall, you realize you aren't alone. Roll Composure + Stealth to stay still enough to go unnoticed while you wait for the other lurking figures to reveal themselves.

**Survival:** The miles between towns seem to stretch on forever, and it may be time to admit everyone is too tired to keep traveling. The temperature has dropped; roll Wits + Survival to set up a warm, safe camp for the night and hope you can ignore the sound of beating wings.

**Persuasion:** Turns out the local sheriff isn't too keen on people poking around his town, especially since he's got more than a few things to hide now that the dead may be talking. He's got the shotgun and the power to make bodies disappear (assuming the damn things stay dead). Roll Manipulation + Persuasion to convince him you're on his side in all this.

**Socialize:** The party started out as a wake, but then the deceased stood up and quaffed a beer, and now it's gone all weird. Roll Presence + Socialize to get everybody celebrating again.

**Medium** (p. 57): The disembodied dead stand as silent witnesses to the horrific mutilation of the natural order. They are mostly impotent in their rage, except that you can hear them. You can hear just how very angry they are.

**Indomitable** (p.45): When you find Lucien McJack, he'll probably be angry, since you killed him. Being strong of mind will help you resist his fear-enhancing powers.

## Escalation

The end of this story might see the characters leaving the region with a feeling of "what the *hell* just happened?" and heading into an area where things are a little more...normal. While "normal" isn't a term that applies to events in any God-Machine chronicle, it might underline the mood of this Tale to step things back a bit, perhaps using a more accessible Tale like The Key (p.208) or The Hatching (p. 226). Note that "accessible" is a *highly* relative term.

On the other hand, maybe Wake the Dead forms a transition into some truly strange Tales. From here, your characters might wish to enter other dimensions (Missing Persons, p. 210) or encounter celestial beings (This is Hell, p. 231).

# A GLIMPSE OF MESMERIZING COMPLEXITY

One major cause of auto accidents in the US, Europe, and other nations with nationwide highway networks is the fact that complex moving constructs of gears fly through the air along some of these highways. These constructs appear, fly rapidly, and then disappear, but anyone who sees them is mesmerized and can easily crash because they aren't paying attention to their surroundings.

## Infrastructure

Strange moving constructs of gears fly through the air all over the planet. They are usually intangible, invisible to most people, and almost impossible to photograph. However, people who are intoxicated, exceedingly tired, or otherwise in an unusual state of mind can often see them. The first sight of one of these flying gear constructs mesmerizes anyone who sees it. Viewers find themselves briefly unable to look away or to think clearly about anything other than how fascinating it appears. People who see a gear construct while driving or walking across a street are far more likely to lose control of their vehicle or not notice the presence of another vehicle than someone able to pay attention to the world around them.

**The Truth:** As with the portal-creating mechanisms in Missing Persons (p. 210), the God-Machine has concealed the factory creating the gear constructs. Unlike that other facility, however, this one is in Twilight, which does have a set of understandable and consistent rules for interacting with people and their world. Hiding the factory in Twilight is, therefore, concealment Infrastructure.

Unfortunately for the God-Machine, building things in Twilight means, of necessity, that they will take on spiritual aspects. The gear constructs are not just complex because of their craftsmanship, they carry with them the spiritual essence of complexity. This, perhaps, is why people are becoming so fascinated with them.

Astute players might wonder why the blips are only showing up now, if the constructs have been following (and may indeed have influenced) the formation of the US highway system? The answer is that they *have* been here all along, it's just that before, when people noticed them and got into wrecks, they were more likely to be seriously injured or killed. The accident fatality rate on the highways is lower than it ever has been, because cars are getting safer. But at the same time, more cars are on the road. That means more people are seeing the constructs, and living to tell about it. This has the potential to become an untenable situation for the God-Machine.

And what, in fact, is the function of the gear constructs? They are collecting data for the God-Machine. This data is related to cars, machines, human travel and traffic, or possibly even emissions. For purposes of this story, it isn't strictly necessary to decide what the God-Machine is looking for, but when the characters find the factory (see below) it might be effective to discover that the workers are keeping tabs on bizarrely-specific information — how many cars have personalized plates, bumper stickers, red-haired drivers, empty pop cans in the back seat, etc. What could the God-Machine possibly gain from learning this data?

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters should be people who drive regularly, and all of them should recently have been involved in an auto accident caused because one of the drivers involved saw the gear constructs. Characters might also be frequent travelers that hear stories about "blips," odd lights on the highways that act as modern-day will-o'-the-wisps, confusing drivers and leading them off the roads.

## Blueprints

The gear constructs are approximately six feet in diameter. They are composed of a brilliantly polished and exceedingly complex set of interlocking metal gears and strange decorations that appear to be made from brightly-colored stone or glass, and they fly between two and eight feet above the ground. Although they can appear anywhere, most often the gear constructs fly along major roads and other long, relatively-straight paths.

Gear constructs are most often found flying along U.S. interstate highways and large motorways and autobahns in Europe. Flying along these roads simplifies their navigation slightly, and many of the freeways, highways, and motorways in the developed world were specifically designed to provide navigation paths for these gear constructs. Anyone who researches the history of large highway networks in any nation finds that plans are always changed partway through the design process and that perfectly-straight roads are strongly preferred over gently curving roads, even if the latter would make more sense for the terrain. The movement of the gear constructs significantly improves the reception and transmission of all types of radio signals and the God-Machine created this network because it found out that people were using many more radio signals.

The gear constructs appear, spinning in midair. Once they appear, the constructs immediately stop spinning and fly in precise, straight lines for between 40 and 700 miles. While they are flying, they are completely intangible. At their destination, gear constructs pause for two seconds during which they become solid. They then spin rapidly for another two seconds and vanish. When they appear and disappear, they are briefly surrounded by a rotating sphere of glowing light 12 feet in diameter. This glowing sphere is the visible manifestation of the doorways into and out of the stations that maintain and recalibrate the gear constructs. These stations are all located in Twilight. Gear constructs typically travel a single route every five to 30 minutes and fly at approximately 80 miles per hour. All of the gear constructs moving along one route take the same path, always appearing and disappearing in exactly the same locations.

If left undisturbed, the gear constructs continue to fly along their paths, and the accident rate all across the world increases because people occasionally see them. If the rumors about the "blips" becomes widespread — maybe someone captures one on a smartphone video and it goes viral — the accidents increase in frequency because now drivers are *looking* for the constructs. The gear constructs have been moving in and out of our world for almost 60 years and will do so for many decades in the future.

## Linchpins

The best way to learn about the gear constructs is to travel to one of the maintenance and recalibration stations they travel to when they vanish. Anyone who grabs onto a gear construct when it is tangible travels with it when it vanishes. Also, the rotating, glowing sphere remains visible for three seconds after the gear construct has departed. Anyone touching this sphere sees his arm vanish into the space where the gear construct goes. Characters who are swift can follow the gear construct to its otherworldly destination. Characters who follow a gear construct find themselves in a building the size of a large warehouse, located in Twilight.

Inside this building, characters see a line of gear constructs slowly moving from one end of the building to the other. The gear constructs fly at a slow walking pace and briefly pause at 31 points, where several humanoid creatures with 16 long, many-jointed fingers and six small compound eyes work on these constructs with a variety of complex mechanical and electronic tools.

These creatures work constantly and all have a plug coming out from the back of their bald, ovoid heads. These plugs attach to a single wire that runs along the length of the building. Pulses of red-orange light regularly travel along this wire, and fainter pulses flow down each of the dozens of cables that attach the creatures to this wire. While plugged into the wire, all of the creatures move in exactly the same fashion.

These gear workers ignore visitors unless the visitors disturb them or the gear constructs. If someone does either, the nearest

creature unplugs itself and attempts to prevent the intruder from interfering with the constructs. If an unplugged gear worker touches one of the characters, it begins to scream a single, high, continuous note, never pausing to draw breath. This scream draws other gear workers who attempt to capture the characters and drag them off behind doorways leading off to the side of the factory. Behind these doors, the gear workers mind probe intruders using a device that bores into their brains. After determining what the person knows, the gear workers place the person in a vat that takes three days to transform a human into a gear worker (use the traits provided for clockwork servitors on p. 255 to represent gear workers; they have the Enhanced Speed ability).

Leaders of any effort to destroy gear constructs or make them public are likely to be involved in some form of serious car accident. If one of the leaders allows her identity to become public, or is ever noticed by the gear workers, then any time she crosses or drives along a path traveled by the gear constructs a construct attempts to strike her or her car, becoming tangible an instant before it hits. The gear workers also immediately attack these leaders if they ever enter a maintenance station.

Characters could also attempt to make the gear constructs visible. Telling people exactly what to look for, especially if these people are already inclined to believe in strange phenomena, allows many of them to see the gear constructs. In addition, flying gear constructs show up on ultraviolet-sensitive film, and a captured gear construct shows up on any type of film, including online videos. Sufficient publicity eventually causes the routes to be changed; the God-Machine finds that sending the constructs slightly higher and directly over the traffic allows the same data collection without the same accident risk.

Any online videos of the gear constructs are taken down in fewer than 24 hours, and anyone who openly posts such a video has their account with the online video-sharing network mysteriously cancelled, and all of their other videos deleted. Anyone who makes several blog posts attempting to convince the public about the existence of the gear constructs is also at risk for being hit by a flying gear construct.

## Methods

**Academics:** Characters can make an Intelligence + Academics to collate reports of glowing objects flying along roads, and to discover that such reports occur in much of the world and are almost exclusively found along highways, freeways, and motorways. An exceptional success on this roll may turn up anomalies about how the exact paths of various highways were chosen.

**Crafts:** An Intelligence + Crafts roll allows a character to disable a gear construct while it has briefly paused so the characters can examine and photograph it. Characters can make another Intelligence + Crafts roll to reactivate the gear construct, so that if it is placed next to one of the entrance points into the maintenance station, it begins to spin and create the spherical portal into Twilight.

**Athletics:** A successful Dexterity + Athletics roll with a -3 penalty enables a character to climb onto a gear construct as it pauses before dematerializing and flying into the maintenance station. Characters may also make an unmodified Dexterity + Athletics roll to get into the glowing sphere that leads to the factory, before it vanishes.

**Drive:** A character that sees a gear construct runs the risk of driving off the road. Roll Composure + Drive, applying any appropriate penalties. Failure means the car crashes.

**Empathy:** A successful Presence + Empathy roll can be used to convince people who have been in auto accidents to talk about gear constructs they may have seen.

**Streetwise:** Characters can make a Manipulation + Streetwise roll to discover both others who have seen the gear constructs and people who might be interested in attempting to destroy them.

**Crack Driver** (p. 47): Characters who are excellent drivers are better at following gear constructs through traffic to find out where they vanish.

**Anonymity** (p. 50): Anyone who is good at keeping her identity secret is better at organizing actions to destroy the gear constructs without being targeted by the gear constructs.

## Escalation

The gear constructs begin becoming visible and tangible all the time. In addition, thousands of maintenance stations appear across the world. People who are not sufficiently quick and careful when investigating these stations are captured and are later seen on the maintenance lines with a plug in the back of their now-bald heads. The number of gear constructs begins to increase and the stations expand as bands of workers begin kidnapping humans and modifying them into workers to build more factories. At this point, the God-Machine may decide to kill off anyone it can't convert (The Scarlet Plague, p. 225).

Or, if you don't want to be that blatant, maybe the gear constructs have another purpose. They might reanimate the dead (Wake the Dead, p. 214) or start yanking people to processing stations (Missing Persons, p. 210). Continuing the theme of running on a track, maybe the gear constructs become the "traffic controllers" of Squares of the City (p. 203).

# THE INVISIBLE CITADEL



In northern Germany there is a secret city known as the Golden Citadel. The angels that control the city have caused almost everyone in the world to forget its existence, while also calling an increasing number of people from across the globe to help work in it. The characters must find a way to attempt to infiltrate the citadel, banish the angels, and free the many inhabitants.

## Infrastructure

The story begins when one of the characters finds and purchases a curious old footlocker at an estate sale or a resale shop. It is filled with loose papers, bits of wire, and a diary.

The diary was written by Maria Grunewald. It begins almost 30 years ago with entries about how she worked with a dozen people to build an abstract sculpture of metal and bone that was the size of large RV. At the beginning of her diary, she writes about how this sculpture will transform the world in wondrous ways. However, the tone soon changes to one of fear and then horror as she writes about being one of the architects of the destruction of humanity's free will. Ms. Grunewald writes about how the sculpture attracted people from all across Germany to build a town around it and how this town eventually grew into a city, which attracted thousands of people from all across the world.

She calls this city the Golden Citadel and, in the last portion of the diary, writes about how it is a horrifying construction that hides from the thoughts and memories of humanity, but draws people to it. According to her, a growing number of people are drawn to build and work in the Golden Citadel. Once someone leaves for the Citadel, his friends and loved ones believe that this person moved and lost touch with them or died.

In an entry dated a decade before, she writes how the population of the Golden Citadel is almost half a million people and that it continues to grow. The diary also mentions that an increasing number of people are being fed to the Citadel to aid in its growth. Ms. Grunewald fears that within 25 years, this city will encompass most of Germany and that it could continue to expand until much of the world's population works there. At least one of the characters has seen or read brief news reports about an eccentric artists' colony in Northern Germany near Bremen called the Golden Citadel. However, none of the reports describe it as being home to more than a thousand people. The few people who know about it consider it a weird art project built by a few hundred eccentrics, thus unworthy of attention or comment.

In reality, the Golden Citadel has been calling susceptible people from all across the world to help expand it. Much of the economy of the city of Bremen has been devoted to providing these workers with food, shelter, and raw materials. Some of these workers return home after a few months, remembering their work as an enjoyable opportunity to keep in shape and help build something important. However, almost half of the people called to the Citadel remain there.

**The Truth:** The city is an exercise in concealment Infrastructure — a city not far from human settlements that is built in such a way that it doesn't stay in human consciousness on a conceptual level. In a sense, it's cognitive concealment, and it's the most successful example of its type. Not only do people ignore the Citadel, but they seamlessly fit it into their worldview — it's an art colony. It's a commune. It's non-threatening, maybe even beneficial. The God-Machine finds it easy enough to create suspicion and fear, but with the Golden Citadel, it's trying to create acceptance or apathy. It seems to be working.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters can be anywhere in the world, except they should be at least 1,000 miles from Bremen, Germany. The characters could be almost anyone. They need know nothing about the Golden Citadel. The story kicks off when they come into possession of Ms. Grunewald's footlocker, though, so working that into a previous story would set this one up.

## Blueprints

If nothing is done, the Citadel continues to expand. For the last 20 years, it has been calling workers from across most of Europe and parts of Asia, and within the past six years people from the U.S., Mexico, and Canada have also been called there. The citadel is perfectly circular and expands as a series of concentric rings, like the growth rings of a tree.

The angels use the power of the original sculpture to cause a growing number of people to feel that working on the Golden Citadel is important and also to cause everyone else to ignore the citadel. However, the control fails to affect a few people. Some of these people see the Citadel as a strange and unfathomable creation built by a cult that brainwashes the workers. Others feel an inexplicable hatred of it and believe it to be evil.

Direct attacks against the Citadel fail because anyone who comes within 25 miles of the Citadel automatically feels positively towards it. This positive feeling causes only mild changes to anyone lacking hostile feelings towards the Citadel. However, the more that someone feels negatively about the Citadel, the more the person loses free will while within the area of effect. Some who attempt to attack the Citadel remain there today as part of its permanent maintenance staff because they can think of nothing beyond serving the Citadel.

The number of people serving the Citadel increases every decade. In time, it grows so large that the entire population of central Europe exists solely to serve it and the people building it. A few crank websites discuss fears, theories, and data

about the Citadel, but few people post on them for more than a few months, and several of the frequent posters write like unmedicated schizophrenics.

## Linchpins

Near the end of her diary, Ms. Grunewald describes a simple construct of wire, capacitors, and resistors capable of blocking the effects of the Citadel's mind control. However, the tone of the papers changes again to a renewed sense of joy at the existence of the Citadel and a growing determination to go and help build it. In with these papers is a circuit diagram for a simple network of circuits designed to be worn as a skullcap or under a hat, along with a single, mostly-complete device that lacks only a pair of resistors and a length of wire to finish it.

If the characters build circuits to protect them from the influence of the angels, they'll all suddenly remember one or two young people who mentioned they would be traveling to the Golden Citadel to pursue their art or "find themselves," and that all of the characters then forgot about these people. If the characters research the Golden Citadel online while wearing the circuit, they find a few blog posts about a huge and disturbing city near Bremen that continues to expand. Most of these blog posts end with the people writing that they have decided to go and visit or work in the Golden Citadel. Any character who reads one of these entries when not wearing the circuit skullcap instantly forgets what he has read. The diary also explains that Ms. Grunewald believed that the sculpture she helped build is the focus of the Golden Citadel's power, and that if it is destroyed the Citadel's power will vanish.

Surrounded by brightly-painted concrete walls 40 feet high with a single large gateway, the Citadel is currently 16 miles in diameter. The interior consists of a series of large apartment buildings surrounding a collection of taller and stranger-looking buildings that resemble somewhat looming, menacing, modern cathedrals.

In addition to being able to remember and think about the Golden Citadel, anyone wearing the circuit skullcap can also safely enter the Citadel without being controlled into working for it. The people working there won't notice anything odd about the characters if they don't draw attention to themselves. Once inside, the characters see that more than a tenth of the workers aren't human. Some are instead dimwitted but exceedingly strong, four armed, and vaguely humanoid creatures. These creatures come from one large building containing a huge and squirming mass of flesh that ingests the dozens of corpses brought to it every day and gives birth to more four-armed workers. The other nonhuman workers are clockwork servitors (see p. 255) that emerge from another large building that some people regularly enter and do not leave, where humans drive trucks in, full of machine parts. Inside is a huge, spiderlike Dalga (see p. 256).

Everyone in the city is eager, friendly, and polite, and none of them notices anything odd about working around four-armed creatures, humanoid clockworks, huge, squirming masses of flesh, or huge spiders. If anyone attempts to openly photograph any of the Citadel's bizarre oddities, like the four-armed creatures, someone nearby politely but firmly reminds this person that she should not photograph such things. Groups of inhabitants forcibly restrain anyone who persists.

To end the power of the Golden Citadel, characters must locate and destroy the sculpture that Maria Grunewald helped to construct. The local populace has continued to add to it. This sculpture is now a bizarre and ugly hodgepodge of materials the size of a one-family house. It is located very near the center of the Golden Citadel. The notes Maria Grunewald made about this sculpture mention that it must remain uncovered and in the open. However, the workers constructed the Golden Citadel so that the sculpture is located amidst a maze of streets, which contain dozens of five- and six-story apartment buildings. Characters who wander through the central part of the Citadel eventually discover it, but this effort could take three or four days. However, anyone with binoculars who climbs one of the tall cathedrals or factories can located the sculpture far more rapidly. If the characters can destroy the sculpture, all the inhabitants of the Citadel collapse. The nonhumans soon die, and the humans are dazed and semiconscious for several hours, and remain confused about where they are or what they have been doing after they recover.

## Methods

**Crafts:** Characters who want to blow up the sculpture at the center of the Citadel must make an Intelligence + Crafts (with a Specialty in Explosives) roll to correctly place explosives and arrange timers or detonators to destroy it.

**Medicine:** Students of psychiatric medicine might discover a paper written by a psychologist in the late 1980s. In it, he referred to the Berlin Wall's collapse as a turning point for Europe, and referred to a psychological construct called a "Golden Citadel." An Intelligence + Medicine roll while reading his case studies indicates that his subjects thought of the Citadel as a literal place, and all referred to it as being near Bremen, not Berlin.

**Drive:** Characters can make a Dexterity + Drive roll to either escape pursuit within the Citadel or to blend normally into the constant, but exceedingly orderly, flow of traffic in and around it.

**Stealth:** Moving unobserved through the Citadel or discreetly planting explosives on the central sculpture requires a successful Dexterity + Stealth roll.

**Streetwise:** Anyone who wants to find some of the few other people who know about the Golden Citadel can make a Presence + Streetwise roll at -3 to attempt to do so.

**Subterfuge:** Observing and being able to mimic the reactions and nonverbal cues of the workers in the Citadel well enough to avoid suspicion requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll.

**Unarmed Defense** (p. 65): Weapons are hard to come by in the Golden Citadel, but that doesn't mean the characters won't be threatened.

**Fleet of Foot** (see p. 47): Being a fast runner can help characters escape pursuit within the Citadel.

## Escalation

If the characters manage to destroy the Citadel, the God-Machine writes this off as a failed experiment and looks for other subtle ways to conceal its Infrastructure. Maybe it entrusts a great measure of its power to an individual **(The Key, p. 208)**, or maybe it tries to cloud minds more directly **(A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity, p. 216)**. On the other hand, maybe the distraction of having the Citadel destroyed blinds the God-Machine to a more immediate problem, one that the characters now need to correct **(The Hatching, p. 226)**.

Perhaps the Citadel has grown to the size of Germany and a fifth of the entire population of the EU works there. People across the entire world travel to the Citadel to work, and most young people have spent at least one summer working there. Maybe everyone on Earth knows about it and considers it either unimportant, or as something important they should help build and run. With this kind of direct involvement, you could continue on to This Is Hell **(p. 231)** or Urban Wandering **(p. 235)**.

# OPERATION: BELL JAR

In the North Sea, an oil-drilling platform has apparently become the base of operations for a terrorist group. The characters arrive to find it empty, but shortly thereafter they discover that the problem is much larger than they'd feared.

## Infrastructure

West Nautical 36 **(p. 251)** is an oil-drilling platform in the North Sea. Up until recently, it was showing promising signs of being a moderately-productive drilling site. But then an intense storm hit the area. Most of the crew got off in time, but one engineer, Arnold Diefenbach, stayed aboard to try and stabilize the platform. When the rest of the crew and rescue personnel arrived once the weather had calmed, they found the platform with minor damage but in perfect working order. Diefenbach was nowhere to be found, and was assumed to have been swept overboard.

In the weeks that followed, the platform began producing oil at an incredible rate. The company devoted more resources to the rig, expanding its production capability and conducting studies into the feasibility of making another well in the area. And then one night, the company, as well as emergency services in England, Belgium, and the Netherlands, received frantic calls for help from the rig. When they tried to return those transmissions, they received no answer. The first group of rescue personnel that got near the rig saw the crew hanging from cables, each with a sign on their body that read "STAY AWAY."

The company and the countries involved immediately assumed that some terrorist group or cult had seized the rig, and tried to make contact to ascertain their demands. The response was always the same: "STAY AWAY." Finally, the various governments involved (the surrounding countries and the U.S.) assembled an elite team to travel to the rig at night and retake it, kill or capture the perpetrators, and find out what damage had been done. That, of course, is where the characters come in. This mission is called Operation: Bell Jar, because the area in which West Nautical 36 sits is almost impossible to approach without being seen or heard but, likewise, no one is likely to escape from it unnoticed.

**The Truth:** Arnold Diefenbach merged with the oil rig. He was content to continue with the rig's original function for a time, but then the God-Machine found it had need of the platform. It moved the drill slightly and pushed down into the sea bed, seeking to uncover something left buried for millions of years (see Blueprints). When the crew noticed this, they assumed it was a malfunction and tried to shut it down — and Diefenbach killed them all. The oil rig itself is defense Infrastructure.

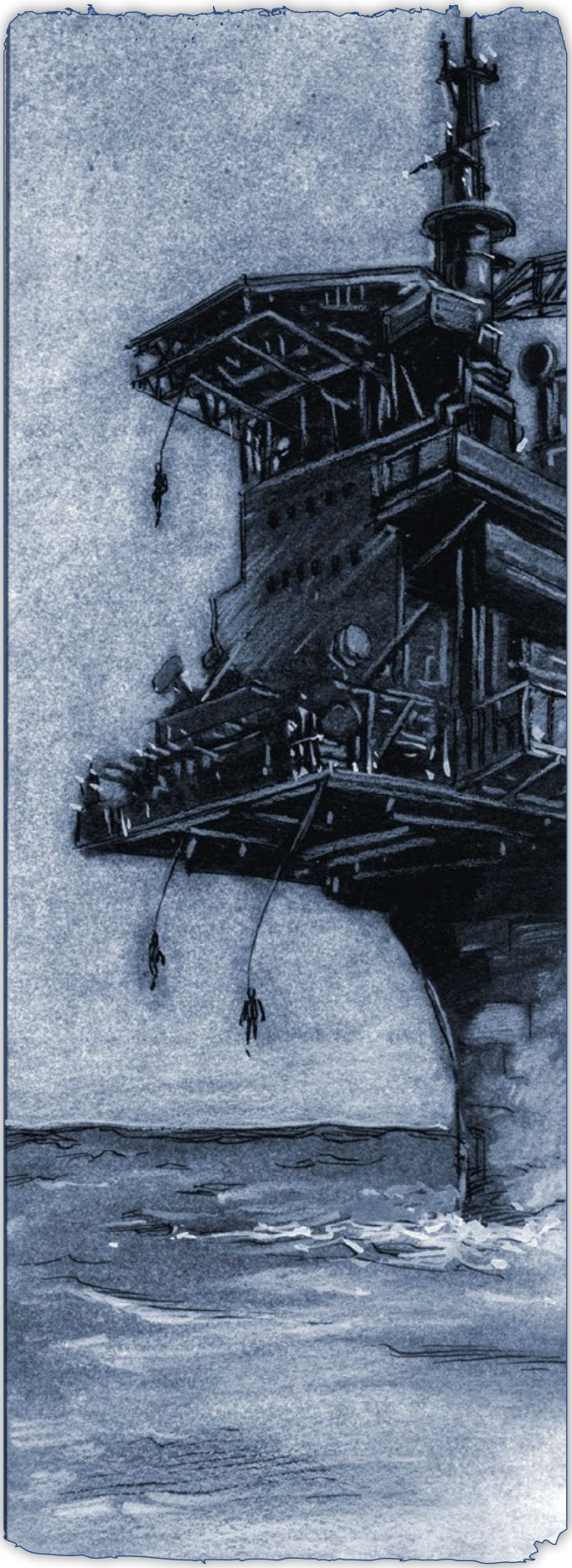
## Interchangeable Parts

The characters are members of the elite team of soldiers sent to retake the rig. They might be Navy SEALs, British Commandos, Swedish Särskilda Operationsgruppen, or French Commandos Marine. Someone in the group is probably trained in explosive ordinance disposal, and the group might also include a civilian engineer (in case the rig needs emergency repair).

If your players are up for something a little different, though, they might control a communications team from an operations center on a ship or on the mainland. These characters might be trained in the investigative Skills to determine what happened on the ship, while the soldiers act as their eyes and ears with shoulder- or helmet-mounted cameras. Or, once the soldiers arrive at the rig and find nothing immediately threatening, they might bring an investigative team out, allowing the players to control a mix of soldiers and detectives.

## Blueprints

The God-Machine doesn't necessarily want people dead (it doesn't really care, of course, but dead people tend to make other people interested, and that slows things down). Diefenbach, however, is just as obsessed with the rig as he's always been, and he views anyone that sets foot on it as an intruder. The drilling apparatus is automated, and will continue regardless of what the characters do to Diefenbach. Stopping the drill requires killing Diefenbach and *then* getting the computer systems working again, or cutting the cables that provide power to the drills.



If the drill continues unabated, it eventually opens a cavern below the sea floor. Therein lies an exposed section of the God-Machine that hasn't been in operation for millennia. It requires the oil above it to work, meaning that if the drill reaches this cavern, the God-Machine pulls the oil from the deposit and then comes to life, absorbing the drill and the cables and assimilating the rig itself. If the characters are still on the rig when that happens, they are pulled beneath the waves and probably lost for good.

## Linchpins

The still-living parts to Arnold Diefenbach are the Linchpins for the West Nautical 36 Infrastructure. Killing him will, as mentioned, end the God-Machine's ability to influence the rig — but it won't stop the drill. Doing that requires either cutting the cable (Durability 8, Structure 11) or making the computers work (see below).

## Methods

**Computer:** Normally this wouldn't be difficult, but the computer systems on the rig have merged with Diefenbach's brain. Even after he dies, they don't act like normal computer systems anymore. Roll Manipulation + Computer (extended action, each roll is 30 minutes, 10 successes required) to get the systems to respond properly and stop the drill. If Diefenbach is still alive when this happens, he opposes the roll with Resolve + Computer.

**Medicine:** Examination of the bodies of the rig workers (and a roll of Wits + Medicine) reveals they were strangled by cables. The cables apparently just dropped down, wrapped around their necks, and yanked them upwards, choking them.

**Athletics:** Diefenbach controls everything on the rig, including a great deal of machinery that is heavy enough to knock people into the ocean. If that happens, the player rolls Stamina + Athletics once per turn with a -2 modifier for the character to tread water until someone can rescue him.

**Stealth:** Diefenbach can only "see" through the security cameras on the rig — which, unfortunately, are plentiful. Roll Dexterity + Stealth to avoid them.

**Empathy:** The people in charge of Operation: Bell Jar have been in communication with someone on the rig, someone they assume to be a terrorist. Examining the transcripts, though (and a successful Wits + Empathy roll), reveals that the patterns of speech and the "demands" the supposed terrorist is making don't betray a zealous or nationalist agenda.

**Streetwise:** Characters with ties to mercenary or espionage groups might put out feelers to see if anyone knows anything about terrorist action against the rig. This requires a Manipulation + Streetwise roll and a lead time of at least a day. If the roll fails, the character hears of a terrorist group that takes credit

for the killings. If the roll succeeds, not only does no one have any information about the incident, but the character hears a rumor about a clandestine military ship that disappeared in that region of the North Sea a few months ago (just after the storm).

**Defensive Combat** (p. 61)**:** The rig doesn't have much in the way of enemies to fight, but this Merit will help the characters avoid attacks from machinery and cables.

**Psychokinesis** (p. 58): A recently-trained member of some secret military psychic contingent might be an interesting character for this Tale, especially if she can't quite control her power yet.

## Escalation

What happens if the God-Machine pulls the rig down and assimilates it? The characters might not survive this, of course (or they might pull off a daring, last-minute escape, and watch the whole thing vanish into the deep), but after the fact, the whole area could suffer seaquakes and tsunamis as the God-Machine *changes* things. This could lead into such high-stakes Tales as The Invisible Citadel (p. 219; maybe the characters find the footlocker on the ship), The Scarlet Plague (p. 225; the God-Machine needed the additional power to begin this final solution) or What Is It Good For (p. 233; the characters might easily be transferred from this mission to that one).

# PROPOSITION 279

Luck, happenstance, or your profession has landed you in a political hotbed. Things have always been tough here, but no one saw the massive political push for Proposition 279 coming. The law will not just make it illegal to be homosexual, it will make it a capital offense.

## Infrastructure

Pick a location with a strict and borderline-corrupt government or one with a religious fundamentalist regime (or make one up). Up until now, it's been as fair as such a regime can be, with oppression happening, but neither common nor horrific. Women vote, but are limited in their civil liberties. Homosexuality is forbidden, but not criminal. It's passive in its intolerance.

That is, until religious leaders and politicians alike started calling for a sudden and impossibly-cruel law to be passed faster than the public could even consider it. The push came out of nowhere and was nearly all encompassing. Police started rounding up suspected homosexuals and raiding night clubs, even the most underground ones, in anticipation of the passing of the law. The military is preparing for mass executions and huge mass graves are being prepared along roadsides. Human rights organizations are up in arms and are sending in diplomats, negotiators, and relief workers in hopes of avoiding the slaughter. The UN has stepped in, threatening sanctions, but the normally passive regime has suddenly been whipped up into a frenzy over the idea.

Does it have something to do with the President's new adviser, a pale, gloomy sort with a nose a little too small for his face, and dark, deep-set eyes? The President's wife left the country shortly after the adviser was named, and since then rumors have been flying.

The small nation has become a powder keg, and whether that will result in civil war to resist the sudden change in policy, or the deaths of a tenth of the population, the characters have to quickly find a peaceful solution to the problem.

**The Truth:** The God-Machine needs death. More specifically, it needs mass murder. It doesn't actually care who dies or why, as long as it happens quickly and at the hands of other human beings. The nation's new governmental structure is logistical Infrastructure, overseen by the angel, Mr. Nose.

## Interchangeable Parts

Characters in this chronicle need to care about the people of the nation suffering such tragic upheaval or it will be difficult to keep them involved in the goings on.

Photographic and investigative journalists are logical choices for character types. So are aid workers and perhaps militant freedom fighters coming to aid in a potential rebellion. Even low-level politicians from more (nominally) civilized nations, moved by the stories, may come to parley peace while making names for themselves back home. And of course, you'll find no shortage of mercenaries and soldiers of fortune waiting around to see if war breaks out. Just make sure the mercenary-type characters have deeper motivations than money.

The other possibility for characters, of course, is that they might be native to the affected nation, perhaps even people that might fall under the proposed law (whether they actually are homosexual or are simply perceived to be).

## Blueprints

The God-Machine wants nothing less than the wholesale slaughter of as many human beings, killed by other human beings, as it can possibly reap in as short a time as possible. The God-Machine needs deaths. It needs massive amounts of sacrifice and the more that happen at the same time, the better. It might need this death to gear up for some truly powerful, world-shaping initiative (the scary thing there is, does that kind of thing happen after every such massacre? And if it does, *what changed?*), or perhaps as a test run to check its systems of control. For the players, the reason should be as unknowable as the evil. It is because it is.

It just so happens that this despot in this part of the world came up with a way to accomplish his mandate, and he's well

on his way to murdering tens of thousands of people at once. What compounds matters is that those other leaders all over the world, dreaming of blood and glory, might follow in the wake of success here with their own versions of Proposition 279. A growing tide of dead "undesirables" will sate the God-Machine's need for massive sacrifice — or perhaps, with so much death, the God-Machine might become "overclocked," and the world might burn.

If the characters don't want to find out, they're going to have to stop it here in this little nation. Proposition 279 needs to fail, and it needs to fail spectacularly. Whether that means killing the President, bringing in help from other nations or the UN, or organizing the people of the country to stand up and overthrow the government, the characters have thousands of lives in their hands.

## Linchpins

The papers call him "Mr. Nose" — at least the papers that don't belong to the State. He's the paper-white man standing just behind and to the left of the President during speeches and in photo ops. In fact, he seems to be in pictures where he wasn't present in person, and now shows up in images recorded before anyone had an account of him at the President's side.

Mr. Nose is an angel, but one of fairly limited mobility and power (more details on p. 261). Killing or disposing of him would be a good start, but it's not going to eliminate the problem entirely; the President is still planning on going through with Proposition 279, with or without Mr. Nose. Of course, without Mr. Nose, the President might be susceptible to new advisers, if the characters have the positions and tenacity to take this route.

## Methods

**Medicine:** The President's council is largely for show, but they've agreed to a meeting. You have two minutes to explain why homosexuality isn't a disease, a "lifestyle," or an abomination, and it had better sound as scientific as possible. Roll Manipulation + Medicine to give them a good balance of facts, reality, and medical jargon.

**Politics:** Being militant will cost lives. Waiting on diplomacy might, too. You want to undercut the President's power base by using his own propaganda machine against him. Roll Intelligence + Politics to plan out your political assassination of the President.

**Athletics:** The military is raiding the house, and you aren't supposed to be here. You need to brace yourself in the rafters until they go away, but if you slip you'll fall right through the ceiling. Roll Stamina + Athletics to hold that pose.

**Stealth:** It has come this far. Night sits heavily over the President's compound. You have no choice; you must sneak across the compound. Roll Dexterity + Stealth, because the President must die.

**Streetwise:** The Catch-22 is, in order to protect the LGBT citizens who haven't yet been brought in by the military police, you have to find them. Finding them might put them in more danger, but it's a risk you may have to take. Roll Manipulation + Streetwise to ask around and find middlemen who can point you in the right direction safely.

**Subterfuge:** Why break into the prison when you can walk in? Roll Manipulation + Subterfuge to convince the prison authorities that not only are you UN officials, but that as UN officials you have the right to see their prisoners.

**Status (Diplomatic)** (p. 54): It's about accesses. If you want to get in where the movers and shakers are in this political arena, you need access, and few people have as much access as a well-placed diplomat. Just don't push too far and find yourself at the epicenter of an international incident.

**Eidetic Memory** (p. 44): Keeping a list of names is risky, because if you're caught, they'll find it. Better to just memorize the names of the people in the area. It's not like the military can read minds, right?

## Escalation

Putting down the President or stopping his plan from continuing might be enough to encourage the God-Machine to other goals. But it might not. The "big reveal" of this story should be that all the buildup, the politics and the hate is a smoke screen. When humans kill each other en masse, it is worse than pointless. It's in service to the God-Machine. From the Crusades to Darfur, humanity destroys itself using any excuse it can come up with, and the God-Machine reaps the benefits. Straight, gay, Roman, or Turkish, everyone is equal in the eyes of the God-Machine, and equally worthy of sacrifice. That kind of revelation might be the springboard into a cosmic Tale like What Is It Good For (p. 233) or This is Hell (p. 231). Of course, after this harrowing experience, they might prefer to go home (wherever home is) and deal with something on a smaller scale. The 300 Block (p. 197) deals with murder as well, but for (on the surface) different reasons.

# THE SCARLET PLAGUE



Everywhere, all over the world, men are dying. Young men, old men, boy children, they're simply dropping dead left and right. Science has no explanation, and the world's religions have a million impossible answers. What no one has is a way to stop it.

## Infrastructure

The papers are saying every single male of the species is dying out, but that isn't exactly true. More like six or seven out of ten men are getting sick. They come down with a cough, followed by a fever, and then unexpectedly and too quickly for a normal disease, the men just die. The cause of death, near as anyone can tell, is blood in the lungs, though it's incredible that so many able-bodied people can die like that. Not only are men dying out, but women are becoming infertile, though this effect happens more slowly and insidiously.

The characters have to search out the reason for the slow death of humanity. As they search, they find the God-Machine. It's done with humanity, and has set into motion plans to wipe it from the face of the Earth.

**The Truth:** The disease is a global, species-specific elimination Infrastructure, and the God-Machine has activated it to destroy humanity so that it can get down to what it really needs the planet for. The characters — indeed, all humans — are simply products of an occult matrix that began hundreds of thousands of years ago.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters might be scientifically-minded explorers or philosophers seeking the truth behind the imminent extinction of their species. Perhaps they are a think tank, hooked up with an archaeologist and a mercenary given carte blanche to travel the world and hunt down the cause of the death and infertility.

Consider throwing an empath or psychic in the mix. Maybe have someone play a medium or just a sad sack who had a brush with the God-Machine in the past. This story works well as the last (or next to last) story in a long God-Machine chronicle, so if the characters have seen many of the horrors of the God-Machine, they should have enough feeling that they may understand it on some intrinsic level. In discovering more about it, the character may find the solution to their species-wide nightmare.

## Blueprints

It's about uranium, pure and simple.

The God-Machine had need of uranium. Not even a great amount of uranium. Whether it created humanity to mine uranium or manipulated humanity to that point is impossible to tell. The point is, the God-Machine's purpose for humanity was to mine a certain amount of uranium from the earth. Now that it's been uncovered, the God-Machine is ready to move on to new species, new plans, and maybe even new planets.

Essentially, what we understand as "junk DNA" is the God-Machine's back door into the human body. Now that it's done, it's sent its agents out into the world to access the back door, triggering the species to shut down, more or less. Centuries of breeding have rendered some men immune to the triggered death and some women immune to the infertility. Either the God-Machine isn't worried about it, or it plans to wipe out the remainder in more overt ways.

## Linchpins

The first sign of something that connects the deaths to the God-Machine is the bizarre behavior of the lung blood of the dead men. The blood, when removed from the body, dries into cubic, crystalline structures at a visible rate. Later, further research will find similar blood crystals as polyps in the reproductive organs of many of the infertile women.

Cubic growths, squares, and orderly-growing inorganics should appear as motifs in the Tale, a manifestation of the God-Machine as it takes a more active role in the world.

The angel the God-Machine sent to facilitate this extinction is Serotonin (see p. 263). Since the Infrastructure is so widespread, there really is no Linchpin for the characters to find.

## Methods

**Academics:** The behaviors of several tribal nations have shifted dramatically as the Scarlet Plague sweeps the surface of the earth. Anthropological studies suggest the behavior is too similar for coincidence, and yet it is impossible to suggest cross communication. Roll Intelligence + Academics to compare behaviors and analyze what's made contact with all these isolated cultures.

**Computer:** There is a pattern, you're sure of it, a pattern too large and maddening to organize and study on the micro level. You're going to need to study the cubic patterns on a macro level. Roll Intelligence + Computers to build a program that can assist you in understanding the pattern.

**Brawl:** Riots break out in major cities almost every day. Roll Wits + Brawl to find the path of least resistance through the throngs and get out without actually having to fight.

**Survival:** Supposedly, an apocalypse cult up in the Allegheny Mountains has a cure for the disease. It's well off the beaten path, though. Roll Intelligence + Survival to dead reckon your way there.

**Expression:** The poetry of the dying, written by men on their deathbeds, has some common elements. It talks about angels, cubes, lines, and pain from deep within. Roll Intelligence + Expression to analyze the common elements.

**Socialize:** Well, the world isn't going to end in *our* lifetime, so why not drink and party until there's nothing left? The

rich and young, those who are left, have taken to throwing macabre parties celebrating the apocalypse. Of particular interest is gathering great collections of so-called Vaseline Glass, glassware that's made with uranium so that it glows under UV light. "It's harmless," they say, and if not, who cares? Roll Manipulation + Socialize to find your own source of the social commodities and have a closer look.

**Tolerance for Biology** (p. 46): Watching people vomit up blood isn't easy or pleasant, but you'd better learn to deal with it, because you'll be seeing it a lot.

**Cursed** (p. 57): You already know how you're going to die. Despite the odds, you know the God-Machine's machinations aren't going to bring you down. That's why you're willing to take risks the other characters won't. You'll get them the information, the clues, and the tools to stop the God-Machine, because you have nothing left to fear.

## Escalation

Perhaps the characters unravel the pattern and see with clarity this small part of the God-Machine's plan. What they do with that knowledge will change the face of the world forever. They might be able to attack the problem on a mystical level, forcing the God-Machine to deal with them directly (This is Hell, p. 231).

Perhaps they band together to destroy humanity's stockpile of uranium, forcing the God-Machine to allow humanity to thrive for at least another few centuries while it tries to manipulate us into gathering more. This might lead into such Tales as Moon Window (p. 212) or The Invisible Citadel (p. 219).

It might be too late for that, and so the characters, in a last-ditch effort, reach out to communicate with the God-Machine and offer it a deal. Offer it something they think it might want more, and therefore, a reason to not end the species. But the choice should not be an easy one. Perhaps the God-Machine is willing to keep humanity around if it agrees to be a willing part of experiments to create a new and more interesting species. The chronicle could take on transhumanist undertones as the people of earth agree to become liquid, rapidly-mutating species in the hopes of being what the God-Machine needs next.

# THE HATCHING

A group of people watching the Statue of Liberty from Liberty State Park see hundreds of creatures literally hatch out of the statue, followed by a vast burst of energy that incinerates an area more than 2,500 miles across. Immediately afterwards, these characters all find themselves waking up the day of the blast.

## Infrastructure

One evening around 9:00 P.M., the characters are all at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey. This park is only a few hundred yards from the Statue of Liberty, and has an excellent view of the statue. The characters are all enjoying the evening when they hear a strange crunching and crackling sound and watch the Statue of Liberty break apart like the egg of some vast insect. Immediately after, fragments of the statue fall into New York Harbor, a bright glow shines out from the cracks in the statue, and hundreds of large, glowing insect-like creatures begin fleeing the interior of the statue. At this point, the glow coming from the statue intensifies, blinding anyone who looks at it. A few instants afterwards, both Jersey City and Manhattan catch fire. Everyone therein dies burning, the characters included.

The next moment, all of the characters are where they were when they woke up the day they watched the statue hatch. The characters all have full memories of what happened during this day. Unless the characters stop it this time, the Statue of Liberty cracks open again, the devastation worsens, and they are again thrown back in time.

The first time this happens, take note of where the characters are at 11:01 A.M. The angel Kalka steps out of a subway station on Canal Street at that moment. He has 71 minutes of usable time, and has no way to find the characters on his own. He uses his Hallucination Numen to cause mass hysteria, knowing that it will attract attention. If the characters pay attention to the news during the day, they'll learn about riots in that area of Manhattan and people raving about otherworldly creatures and lights in the sky. If they get to that subway station between 11:01 A.M. and 12:12 P.M., Kalka can find them with Fate Sense. He appears there every day at the same time, and can help explain the situation to the characters if they need further exposition. If your players just run with the plot and don't seem to need the help, though, don't bother with Kalka.

**The Truth:** The Statue of Liberty itself acts as concealment Infrastructure, but the larger issue is the destruction and the time regression. The characters are part of a larger elimination Infrastructure, designed to destroy the creatures and bleed off the energy they're producing. If they fail, the explosion is a backup.

## Interchangeable Parts

The only requirement for this Tale is that all of the characters be together in Liberty Park at 9:00 P.M. when the Statue of Liberty hatches. The characters need not know one another, and can easily make contact with each other in one of the later versions of this time loop.

Although this Tale is cosmic in scope because of its focus on time regression, otherworldly monsters, and so on, The Hatching makes for a good starting Tale because the characters can have all the time they need to get to know one another. The process for meeting each other, realizing

that all of the other characters are reliving the day as well, looking into the problem, and solving it could easily take 15 tries, and if the characters know that on the 15th try they'll run out of time, then tension builds nicely.

But even if each try is a single chapter, that's still 15 chapters — that's a long story, and it takes place on the same "day." Have a look at movies like *Run Lola Run* and *Groundhog Day*, as well as the short-lived television show *Tru Calling*, for a look at how a character can change things while reliving the same day. Apply that to the characters — yes, they have to save the world, but do they have time to check lottery results? Do they want to find crimes or fatal accidents in the city and stop them? Is 14 tries enough to become experts on the events of *that day*, so that they can stop the Hatching from occurring? Let the players have a few sessions to explore their abilities and to meet and interact before turning up the stress.

One question the characters might seek to answer is: why them? It might be that they were all close enough to the statue during the initial explosion (but still survived) that they were caught in the God-Machine's loop. Or, the God-Machine might think they can fix the problem, meaning that each character should have a specific Skill or Merit that will be useful to solve the problem. If you are running The Hatching after playing through other Tales, it might just be that the characters have had enough exposure to the God-Machine that it considers them part of its programming (which should keep the characters up nights, if they figure it out).

## Blueprints

The cycle of the world's destruction and then resetting itself back a day continues for 15 cycles. After each change, the world is visibly different in small ways. Junk food packaging and the lineup of TV shows change from one time loop to the next. Also, for the last 10 time loops, news reports about a possible plot by Pakistani terrorists to set off a nuclear weapon in India become increasingly widespread and credible. Such reports first appear in a few tabloids, but by the 12th time loop they are found on all of the major new stations and in major newspapers. On the 15th time loop a large nuclear explosion destroys most of Mumbai and the Statue of Liberty does not explode. However, the statue cracks and any characters who are present see strange glowing creatures crawl out of it and fly up into the sky. The attack on Mumbai also makes nuclear war between India and Pakistan almost inevitable.

The characters are the only people who remember the time loop or the way that events have changed from one to the next. Regardless of how far the characters are from the explosion, some factor means that they remain stuck in the time loop until they either prevent the explosion or Mumbai is destroyed. The characters can only prevent the destruction of Mumbai by stopping the Statue from exploding.

## Linchpins

The two primary Linchpins in this tale are the Statue of Liberty and the time loops. Because it is a powerful focus of belief and emotional energy, agents of the God-Machine covered the statue's entire interior surface with sigils and mechanisms when the statue was restored in 1933. These devices use psychic energy directed at the statue to power various esoteric endeavors, including stabilizing several angels so that they can remain on Earth — the Statue itself is a form of Infrastructure. Once the statue becomes unstable, the God-Machine can no longer send angels to Earth, nor can it maintain the ones that are already there (Kalka is the exception, since Kalka exists outside of time anyway).

None of these sigils are visible from outside the statue or from any of the areas accessible to tourists. However, characters who gain access to the inner surface of the statue's copper skin see huge and complex circuits in the shape of esoteric sigils. These circuits coruscate with yellow and red glowing energies and cover most of the inner surface of the statue. If the characters have a chance to talk with anyone who works in or around the statue, the people the characters talk to know nothing of these sigils. Also, photographs of the interior of the statue's bronze skin do not show them. The characters can only see the sigils because of their experience with the time loop.

Although the sigils collect large amounts of energy, most of it is not going to its intended destinations. Instead, the energies generated by this site attracted dangerous parasites. These parasites have been growing for several decades. When this tale begins, the parasites hatch and destabilize the statue's energy flows. These energy flows rebound catastrophically, causing a huge explosion.

The God-Machine responds to the explosion by creating a series of time loops. Over the course of 15 time loops, the God-Machine gradually alters the past and present so that it can dissipate the energy of the explosion in another location and provide a convenient cover for it. All of the characters notice that time has changed in various small ways after the end of each time loop, and that the time loops make a nuclear attack by Pakistan against India increasingly likely.

The only way to end the time loop without the destruction of Mumbai is to go inside the Statue of Liberty at least several hours before it splits open. The statue's public areas look perfectly normal, but the lower portion of the statue, next to the skin, is filled with a single, throbbing egg case that is the size of a tractor trailer. This egg case and the hundreds of creatures it contains are all invisible to ordinary humans, but anyone who has become aware of the time loop is automatically able to see it, as is anyone the characters show the egg to.

Attacking the sigils causes an uncontrolled release of energy which incinerates the characters, the eggs, and the statue, but the destruction is limited to Liberty Island and the time loop ends. Destroying the egg case prevents it from hatching without any other destruction. However, doing so requires the use of a larger weapon like explosives, a pump action shotgun, a chainsaw, or several people with fire axes. If the Storyteller wishes, cracking open the egg may free some of the creatures and allow them to attack.

## Methods

**Academics:** Characters who make successful Intelligence + Academics rolls when researching the Statue of Liberty

learn that National Park Service personnel discovered serious cracks in the statue on August 6, 1945, the day of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima.

**Science:** A successful Intelligence + Science roll while inside the statue allows the characters to understand that the huge egg casing inside the statue is connected to the electrical sigils by filaments of living tissue and that the egg case draws power from these sigils.

**Larceny:** Characters who wish to break into the statue or into the portions of the statue that are off limits to the general public must make a successful Dexterity + Larceny roll at -2.

**Stealth:** Characters must make a successful Wits + Stealth roll to hide within the statue itself after it is closed to the public at 5:00 P.M.

**Persuasion:** Convincing someone working at the statue that something strange and dangerous is going on and that this person should allow the characters to accompany them to investigate this problem requires a Presence + Persuasion roll.

**Subterfuge:** A character can convince someone working at the statue that the character is an FBI agent or some other important official by making a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll.

**Fast-Talking** (p. 50): The characters have limited time to do their research and come up with a plan — they only have a day at a time before everything burns and resets. The ability to work short cons might be useful.

**Close Quarters Combat** (see p. 61): A fight scene in the tight stairways of the statue would be dramatic and deadly — hopefully a character has the expertise for it.

## Escalation

The Statue of Liberty hatching might only be the first of several these events. Characters who travel widely before the blast and are at different places in the world when the blast occurs could see locations like the Eiffel Tower, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai (currently the world's tallest building), and other well-known structures hatch and explode in response to the Statue of Liberty exploding. After the characters finish saving the Statue of Liberty, they will need to save the other structures before they hatch.

To connect this Tale with others, consider the possibility that the parasites might be nightmare creatures (Urban Wandering, p. 235) that the characters need to trace back to their source. Or, perhaps in solving the problem, the characters become unstuck from time and space, finally settling somewhere with similar amounts of devastation (What Is It Good For, p. 233).

# A JOURNEY INTO TIME

The characters see an online video about how the world will soon end. This video is a call for help and allows the characters to create a mechanism that allows them to travel back to 1901 to destroy the device that will end the world.

## Infrastructure

The aforementioned video is only 10 minutes long. It starts with a statement "*If anyone is seeing this, I have failed. In 1901, I invented a device that will soon end the world. The auroras are only the first sign. A version of this device can also save the world, by allowing someone to return to the first minutes in which the device was turned on. You must destroy both the original version of this device and my laboratory notebook.*

*If my employers never learn of this device, they cannot use it to end the world. They believe the mechanism we used to create it will give them the power to control time and space. In reality, it allows an inhuman force to collapse all of time into a single endless instant. I created the central component to this device by accident. If all records of how to create it are destroyed, the machine that now threatens to end time will never have been built. If time has already begun to decay, the area illuminated by the lamp will remain safe.*"

The video describes how to create a complex gas-discharge lamp like a neon light, containing a precise mixture of seven different gases — oxygen, neon, xenon, argon, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and helium. Powered by a lithium battery like those used in cameras or cell phones, the small light produces a royal blue glow.

The video then says that characters should also construct an electromagnet around a closed doorway. When the characters turn on both the light and the magnet, opening the door reveals a corridor several hundred yards long. The video states that this corridor allows travel through time and space, ending somewhere in Paris at 5:11 P.M. on February 16, 1901. The video also provides the addresses of Dr. Girard's laboratory and home.

**The Truth:** Like Marco Singe, Dr. Girard's employers tried to use the God-Machine as a path to godhood. Unlike Singe, they managed to succeed, after a fashion. The device that Girard invented does allow the users to manipulate time much like the God-Machine does, but, unfortunately, the device also alters the nature of causality. The result is that the God-Machine can't get a bead on what is happening, and therefore cannot simply send an angel to fix it. When the characters see the video, though, they create a timeline in which they do correct the problem, which gives the God-Machine a way to send an angel to help them.

## Interchangeable Parts

Characters can begin in any city that has access to the internet, chemistry laboratories, and lab supply companies. The first evidence the characters have that anything unusual is happening are the brilliant, royal blue auroras that appear in skies all across the world, including above places too close to the equator to

normally experience them. Then, at least one of the characters attempts to download a music video from a video-sharing site, and instead downloads the video described above.

At least one of the characters needs to be an electronics or chemistry professional or hobbyist who is comfortable creating a custom-made gas-discharge lamp. The characters also need to be people willing to consider acting on the advice of downloaded internet videos about time travel.

## Blueprints

If the characters do nothing, the auroras grow increasingly bright and everyone begins catching brief glimpses of phantom figures. Belief in ghosts soars across the world. These "ghosts" become increasingly solid as the barriers between one time and another break down over the course of several weeks (the figures are not ghosts, but people bleeding through from other times). In small areas, time begins to spontaneously reverse itself for a few seconds. A shattered vase might reassemble and rise off the floor to sit intact upon a table. Eventually, the structure of linear time completely dissolves.

The device that caused this enables the God-Machine to collapse time, allowing it to entirely reformat reality from the far past to the distant future, creating a timeless state where it can operate without the necessity of any intermediaries. In this timeless state, cause and effect cease to have any meaning, as every event in the world occurs in one infinite instant. The blue light protects people from this timeless reality, creating a bubble of linear time six yards in diameter. However, everything beyond this radius remains a confusing whirl.

Several decades after creating the blue light, Dr. Girard realized how dangerous his superiors' plans were. He attempted to warn them, but none of them believed him. To protect himself, he pretended to rethink his objections. The time-destroying mechanism was completed in 1932. It has been gradually accumulating power since that time. As the growing auroras reveal, it is beginning to activate. For more about Dr. Girard, see p. 241.

Once the characters leave the time corridor, they find themselves walking out the door of a warehouse in Paris in the early evening on February 16, 1901. They are two miles from Dr. Girard's laboratory, which is on the other side of the Seine from the warehouse and in a far nicer portion of town. To succeed, the characters must steal or destroy both the original blue light and Dr. Girard's notes. Without these notes he will not be able to successfully recreate the light.

Alternately, the characters could kill Dr. Girard and destroy his work or convince Dr. Girard of the dangers his light poses and convince him to destroy it or give it to them.

To return to the present, the characters turn on their light and shine it at the door to the warehouse where they arrived in the past. If the characters succeed, the light they built vanishes the instant they return to the present, since the video describing it was never made. All notes they made about it also vanish and the auroras never occurred. The only records of any of these events are the characters' memories, along with any items they brought from 1901.

## Linchpins

The most important linchpin is the blue light invented by Dr. Henri Girard in 1901. Working, as he did, with a cult dedicated to understanding and subverting the God-Machine, he had access to science unknown to the rest of humanity. In early 1901, Dr. Girard was experimenting with the esoteric properties of gas-discharge lamps using many hundreds of different gas mixtures when he noticed that this particular mixture of gases had unusual properties.

In addition to allowing characters to travel back to 1901, it also causes objects within a few feet of it to briefly freeze in time for a second or two after the light is turned on. When Dr. Girard first turned on the light, he saw a pencil falling off a shelf next to the light freeze in midair for two seconds. He then made a note of which gas mixture and electrode design he used and began to research this light further. Dr. Girard was the only researcher performing these experiments. Excited by his discovery, he tested this light for eight days before turning his research over to his superiors.

In 1901, he worked in a laboratory located on the second floor of a building used by scientists and engineers who were all recruited by a senior agent of the cult named Martin Delrio. He recruited these individuals to perform various types of advanced research. The building had a single armed guard at the door. Dr. Girard's laboratory contained pressurized tanks of many gases, as well as more than a dozen oddly-designed "neon light" tubes. The original blue light was stored in the laboratory, but Dr. Girard took his notes home with him every night. Dr. Girard left for home that night at 7:00 P.M. and came to work at 9:00 A.M.

The building's first floor contained offices, while the second floor contained four laboratories. One was empty, while the other two contain experiments involving other God-Machine-related phenomena (if you have already completed other Tales, you might consider having these labs contain remnants of things the characters have encountered — is the cult following their future exploits somehow?). This building and the portion of the city it is in are quite wealthy and have electric lights both on the streets and inside the building.

Dr. Girard lived half a mile from his laboratory in a small, but elegant, two-story townhouse also fitted with electricity. He lived alone except for two servants who left shortly after he returned home. He kept his notebook in his study. His employer warned Dr. Girard that working on these projects could invite dangerous attention. The townhouse's first-floor windows have electrified bars and he kept a revolver in his bedside table. (If the Storyteller wishes the good doctor to have more rarefied security — perhaps a converted clockwork servitor like the ones found on p. 255 — that's certainly appropriate.)

## Methods

**Academics:** Hopefully the characters have someone well versed enough in history that they can avoid potentially-dangerous anachronisms. The Storyteller should occasionally ask for a Wits + Academics roll to avoid some egregious error.

**Crafts:** A subtle character could use Dexterity + Crafts to first create a small, natural-looking leak in the original blue light, letting all of the gases out. Preventing Dr. Girard from recreating it would involve altering his notes (see below).

**Larceny:** Getting through the electrified bars requires a Dexterity + Larceny roll with a -3 penalty. Failure not only leaves the bars intact, but inflicts five points of bashing damage and alerts any guards.

**Stealth:** Assuming the characters can get into Girard's home, moving undetected requires Dexterity + Stealth rolls... and remember, the group is only as stealthy as the least stealthy member.

**Expression:** If the characters can get hold of Dr. Girard's notebook, they can, potentially, alter it. This assumes a grounding in Science (someone needs to tell the forger what to write, which involves a roll of Intelligence + Science). The roll for the forgery itself is Dexterity + Expression (extended action, each roll equals one minute, eight successes required). If successful, the character can alter the formula so that it has no effect, which hopefully puts Girard off the track.

**Intimidation:** A menacing character could abduct or corner Dr. Girard and use Presence + Intimidation to threaten him into giving the character his notes on the blue light.

**Language** (French) (p. 45): Knowing French is exceedingly handy for getting around Paris in 1901. Although many educated people, including Dr. Girard, speak English, most people do not.

**Sleight of Hand** (see p. 49): Characters who have some knowledge of stage magic or similar methods can more easily steal Dr. Girard's notebook from his satchel.

## Escalation

If the characters obtained Dr. Girard's original notes or the original blue light, they can use or build a light to return to 1901. Every trip they take to 1901 lets them out on the same night five minutes later than the last time they visited. Careless characters could meet themselves, which could cause vast amounts of confusion.

Characters could begin altering history by traveling repeatedly to 1901 and introducing new technologies or assassinating Hitler or Stalin while they were young men. Although minor changes in time go undetected, God-Machine operatives notice significant changes in the timeline and attempt to locate and eliminate the characters.

Time travel is, as any fan of science fiction knows, tricky to get right without creating all kinds of logistical problems. Maybe the characters do destabilize things — that kind of instability could lead into any number of Tales, including Urban Wandering (p. 235), This Is Hell (p. 231), or Wake the Dead (p. 214). On a smaller scale, just being familiar with the nuances of time travel might lead the characters to Do-Over (p.199) or make them ideal to track The Key (p. 208).

# THIS IS HELL

Let me offer you a choice. Free will, baby, that's what this is all about. Open a door, let me through, I can hand you the keys to Heaven or Hell, and *you* can decide which side wins all of reality. You just have to choose.

## Infrastructure

Lines are being drawn in the sand all across creation. Monsters, occultists, spiritualists, and mediums see more activity out of the once-silent heavens. The number of possessions skyrockets and exorcists are being run ragged trying to keep up. Some of the scholarly types have started collecting clippings and accounts of angel sightings. The religiously affiliated are ticking off signs of their version of the apocalypse the way some people play drinking games.

And the characters are right in the middle of it, having dreams of war and conflict, and dreams of blood and sex and sweet, joyful suffering. They're having dreams of Heaven and Hell and someone's whispering to them, begging them to take sides.

**The Truth:** In this Tale, the God-Machine is trying to shift the world into a heretofore-unknown form of Infrastructure. If it needs a title, call it "pure" Infrastructure. If the God-Machine succeeds, it won't have restrictions on where and when it can send its angels.

## Interchangeable Parts

Characters in this chronicle shouldn't all be in the dark about the supernatural. Having a little insight into the dark of the night is ideal for most of the characters. Either they're occult researchers, professional exorcists, kin to a pack of werewolves, or psychically attuned to secrets. If you have access to any of the monster games for the Chronicles of Darkness (**Vampire: The Requiem**, **Mage: The Awakening**, **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** and so on), you might consider running this Tale for a group of supernatural characters.

Or, This is Hell might be the perfect Tale to use to close out a God-Machine chronicle. The characters are still mortal, but they have seen enough during their time chasing down the God-Machine that they cannot be considered "normal" anymore.

These are characters specially chosen for a destiny unlike any other. Maybe it's in their blood, in their genes, or just unknowable happenstance, but the characters will become champions of humanity during the course of the chronicle.

## Blueprints

In this chronicle, the God-Machine wants nothing less than Heaven on Earth — its version of Heaven, anyway. It wants a clean, cold, orderly place devoid of the nuisance of free will and perfectly patterned and symmetrical. The world should have a place for everything, and have everything in its place.

The problem is, only free will can strip humanity of free will. For many of the same esoteric reasons that the God-Machine needs to build Infrastructure before it can easily affect the world, humanity, or some representative thereof, will have to accept the God-Machine's version of Heaven in order to renounce free will.

So the God-Machine has a plan: Run the Earth into the ground. Hate and war and sexism and venereal disease and child abuse and all the evil we pile on top of each other help the God-Machine edge us closer and closer to giving in, giving over, and breaking down.

But the God-Machine isn't the only game in town. In some tiny subsection of the supernatural world live what some people mistakenly call demons. Maybe they are demons, by some definitions, but they think of themselves as "Celebrants." These entities do inhabit a space the likes of which Dante and Virgil would describe as Hell. Their motivations are chaos and creation for their own sakes. They revel in pain as well as pleasure, unfettered by smaller concepts like hate and mortality. They are the greatest fans of free will

### Demons?

Longtime readers and players of other Chronicles of Darkness games might wonder if the Celebrants bear any relation to the inhabitants of Pandemonium (in **Mage: The Awakening**) or the demons that inhabit the Lower Depths (and are described in **Inferno**).

The answer is: If you have those books and want to draw those parallels, sure. If not, then the Celebrants are exactly what we're describing: otherworldly entities that resonate with freedom, narcissism, and selfishness. For purposes of this story, their pedigree doesn't matter much.

and, in their own way, admire humanity as a result. As the God-Machine hunkers down to force humanity to give up their greatest gift, the Celebrants of Hell are rising to offer humanity another choice.

## Linchpins

Servants of the God-Machine are angels. Their touch, and therefore the touch of the God-Machine, is cold and passionless. The God-Machine demands order and equality to such a point as to be indiscriminate and even cruel. The angels seek to create a clinical equality for all people. Their actions are without compassion. The God-Machine and its angels see only in terms of right and wrong, ignoring all other gradients. Order, chaos, and anything short of perfection need not exist. When they kill, it's quick and clinical. No one suffers when the angels act, but that's largely because no one feels anything when the angels act.

The Celebrants of Hell are wet and messy. They're no more afraid of gore and the beauty of "sin" than you are afraid of air. They leave chaos in their wake and, yes, suffering as well. They herald pain and with it, a deeper understanding of self. That understanding may bring agony; that's what happens with knowledge, but for many it's completely worth it. To the Celebrant, the sublime is not a cold, unfeeling light, but the line between pain and pleasure. Ecstasy is being lost in sensation. Where the angels bring destruction to the imperfect, these demons offer horror with the intent to enlighten.

The God-Machine is taking a risk by sending angels out to take overt action in the world. Any angel might be useful to illustrate the point, but no matter which angels the characters encounter, they seem detached, removed from the situation. This is because the God-Machine does not have proper Infrastructure in place to send angels to act in its stead.

## Methods

**Investigation:** The possessing "demon," or whatever it is, seems to be teasing you. It possesses a body, causes some chaos, leaves you a cryptic message, and transfers to a new victim. Roll Intelligence + Investigation to anticipate its next possession and cut it off at the pass.

**Occult:** The angel spoke to you. It told you about the keys, how the one holding the keys could choose which door to lock and which to open. How the keys were destined for a pure hand and that pure soul alone could lock away the suffering of Hell and open the door to Heaven on Earth. What it didn't tell you was how to identify the keys. Roll Intelligence + Occult to finish translating the book the Celebrant gave you to find the "keys to the doors."

**Larceny:** "Let me know you, and show you just a taste of the experiences I offer you. The gifts I would give you," the Celebrant says. Say yes, or roll Dexterity + Larceny to escape your bindings rather than discover and endure the "pleasures" of Hell.

**Weaponry:** It appears, with blinding radiance. It's everything the scriptures describe, awesome and terrible and beautiful and heartbreaking. You're between it and the person it must kill, but it seems to be offering you a choice. Pick up the sword it lays at your feet, or step out of the way. Either roll Dexterity + Weaponry to defend yourself, or let the angel destroy its target.

**Expression:** Your friends are tired, terrified, and overwhelmed. They've about given up. You know that all of you will need renewed energy to get through the coming day — the day of destiny. Roll Presence + Expression to compose the words they'll need to hear to get through.

**Persuasion:** You want to open the door to Heaven. Yes, it will be passionless, but suffering will end, and perhaps humanity can finally ascend. Your companions, however, are leaning more toward Hell, and you know that's a sucker's bet. Roll Presence + Persuasion to begin convincing them.

**Striking Looks** (p. 54): When you're the most beautiful thing on the block, you're a walking temptation — don't think the Celebrants don't notice.

**Iron Will** (p. 51): There's Heaven's plan, there's Hell's plan, and then there's your plan. Angels, demons, and even the God-Machine might know what dance steps you're supposed to take, but there's no force in the universe that's going to make you perform like a monkey.

## Escalation

At the climax of this chronicle, the world — the universe — will be changed forever. It comes down to choice, to free will, no matter how manipulated and abused. Choose between the sympathetic, sensual, and violent demons or the cold, hard, compassionless angels. Either side is willing to harm innocents to reach their own ends.

Choose a world of order with no suffering, no sensation, and no free will or a world of chaos where nothing is permanent and sensation is all, but the highs and lows of suffering and pleasure are off the scales.

There's a third possible option, though. When in possession of the keys to Heaven and Hell, maybe the characters lock both doors. Maybe they isolate the Earth and humanity from interference from either side. For the first time, humanity is totally on its own for good or for ill; it is entirely in control of its own destiny. What does that mean for the world at large? Maybe mind- and emotion-controlling powers just don't work on people anymore, and they can recognize the supernatural for what it is. Maybe the world stays much the same, except the God-Machine no longer has any influence in it (but neither do the Celebrants). Is that, overall, a good thing? Or did the God-Machine fulfill some purpose that the characters never really understood?

This Tale makes a good end point for a God-Machine chronicle, but if you want somewhere to go when it ends, What Is It Good For (p. 233), A Journey Into Time (p. 228), and Sister City (p. 201) are good choices.

# WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR

All war is hell, and when you're serving in an active combat zone, time stretches and contorts to make your stay in Hell long and tortuous. Only, that all isn't supposed to be literal. Massive shelling in this ancient desert has uncovered something that man wasn't meant to see, and since then, you've seen the true meaning of war.

## Infrastructure

Your chaplain thinks everyone died when that shell hit and uncovered an artifact, the Flag of Elam. That's how he explains what's going on. Well, when he can stop crying long enough to speak. He isn't taking it well. But you're elite, you were trained to endure all sorts of mental anguish, and maybe that's why you and your team can observe all of this without going completely Section 8.

One minute you're fighting insurgents in what was once the cradle of civilization. Then a bomb went off, probably fired off by your side accidentally. When the sand and debris settled, everyone was looking at an ancient, tattered flag. It's got no words on it, and its markings have faded over the centuries. It's just this big, terrible thing and over it hovers what you can only describe as the angel of death. It looks different for each of you, but you know what it is. You can feel in your bones what it means.

The next second, you're wearing Roman armor and weaponry, and are in what's probably Germany or Ireland. You're covered in blood, and you and the other soldiers are all looking at this artifact when your praetor demands you fight on. Keep killing the barbarians! That's what you're here for.

After the battle, you find the rest of your team. They're confused, maybe scared, but are accepting what they see. The angel, or the flag, has moved you back in time to this ancient war campaign to fight and fight. You don't know if you're ever getting out or getting home, but you kind of felt that way while fighting the insurgents anyway.

**The Truth:** The God-Machine didn't do this to the characters deliberately. The flag that the soldiers uncovered is a Linchpin, a kind of placeholder that the God-Machine uses to mark active combat sites all throughout history. Usually no one notices it, but the characters uncovered it, and since they aren't able to control it they're sliding through time, stopping at various battles. This isn't part of any Infrastructure necessarily, which is why the God-Machine hasn't stopped it. It's just a glitch, albeit a potentially messy one.

## Interchangeable Parts

Characters might be members of the military, of course, an elite team of Navy SEALs or Army Rangers, for example. They might just be some foot soldiers, a translator, an embedded reporter, a private contractor with too much free time, and maybe a Peace Corps relief worker all caught up in the wheels of the God-Machine.

## Blueprints

The God-Machine has passed no moral judgment on the characters, no matter what they might surmise by their situation. Rather, mystical pathways connect between places of great violence and bloodshed. War, to the God-Machine, is a place, and the flag moves from parts of that place to others without the normal constraints of space and time.

The characters, of course, may never fully understand that detail. What they do know is that they are moving, through the artifact, from one war to another. They don't need to move in any chronology or with certain lessons or stories in mind. Past, present, and even potential future wars are fair game. The Flag is simply doing what it does, and the characters are caught in the tailwind.

If there is a way out, it isn't death. Characters that die in one war find themselves alive again the next time the characters move to a new war. They remember their deaths in excruciating detail. Each time a character dies in war, though, he forgets some part of his original life and takes on false memories from the war in which he died. A Storyteller may reflect this by removing one Skill Specialty from a character sheet and replacing it with something appropriate to the war in question. So a modern soldier might lose his Sniper Firearms Specialty, and have it replaced with a Weaponry Specialty in Swords to reflect his new memory as a centurion.

Dying is also a breaking point (p. 73), no matter how often it happens.

## Linchpins

They characters were never meant to look at the Flag of Elam directly, any more than they were ever meant to see the angel Triage. The characters were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Triage appears after the characters have shifted in time once. The angel isn't here to save them, though, or even to correct the problem. It's here to assess whether it's worth the God-Machine's time to reverse what happened (returning the characters to the moment that they discovered the flag), or just let the characters cycle through time until they return to the point naturally. Of course, since they're shifting randomly, they have no guarantee that they'll *ever* return to their own time (but spaced over an infinite number of shifts, it's likely).

Triage does not travel alone. The creatures in service to the angel appear as men, though their true forms are man-sized snakes with the heads of lions that have milky, blind eyes. These Blind Serpents hide among the events of war and

history to assure nothing upsets the destiny of the moment in time. For example, if the characters attempt to end a conflict early, the Blind Serpents emerge to stop them.

The characters have two methods to escape from their predicament. If they can find and take control of the Flag of Elam, they can direct the flow of time, and thus return to their true point in history. Once they have the flag, directing time isn't especially hard (a Resolve + Academics roll, 10 successes required, each roll equals one turn, teamwork rules are allowed and recommended). Obtaining the flag, though, is a Herculean task. It is always located in enemy territory (no matter which side of the conflict the characters come down on, the *other* side has the flag), it is always well guarded, and it is always hidden. Plus, the Blind Serpents may well work to keep the characters away.

The other method is to convince Triage to help them. This requires use of the Social Maneuvering system (p. 81). The characters need to open six Doors to get Triage to act on their behalf, and he cannot be forced. The characters need to convince him that it's more trouble for the God-Machine to let them slide through time than to speed up the process.

## Methods

**Academics:** You become aware again right in the middle of a soggy, sloppy, mud-covered combat zone. It seems like everyone is just shooting at everyone. Total chaos. Roll Wits + Academics to remember enough from history class to identify whose side you're on.

**Politics:** There's got to be a pattern, right? To the conflicts, the wars, the battles you've been forced to experience? There's got to be a reason for all of this. Roll Intelligence + Politics to puzzle through possible unifying political motivations behind these conflicts.

**Survival:** The locals, the real combatants in this conflict, seem at home or at least equipped for the jungle's sweltering heat. You and your team are not so fortunate. Roll Stamina + Survival to endure the assault nature itself seems to be waging against you.

**Weaponry:** You've been trained in hand-to-hand combat, sure, but really you're used to firefights. Here, you don't have access to guns, and your enemies are much better trained with swords than you. Roll Wits + Weaponry to analyze how your enemies fight and try and offset the penalty you'd otherwise suffer.

**Animal Ken:** Mounted combat. Well, that's unexpected. You've got a rough idea of how a horse works, anyway, and that's probably enough to be able to ride with the rest of the cavalry, right? Roll Presence + Animal Ken to keep the horse on your side during combat.

**Intimidation:** The captured soldier from the other side of the lines knows where the flag is...but he's only going to talk if you convince him it's worth his while, or that you'll kill him (or worse) if he doesn't. Roll Strength + Intimidation to scare him into talking painfully, or Manipulation + Intimidation to do it by intimation. Torture, by the way, is almost always a breaking point.

**Marksmanship** (p. 63): Sometimes the best, fastest way to end a war is to find the right warmonger and put a bullet in his forehead from a nice, safe distance. Harsh but true.

**Language** (p. 45): The root of most conflict is misunderstanding, so knowing how to communicate is a plus. Since

you might shift into times in which English doesn't even exist yet, becoming a polyglot quickly might save your life.

## Escalation

The characters might be able to convince Triage to return them to their rightful place, in which case they might not even remember that anything happened (or, if you want to have a tragic story, they might all die in combat and wish they could shift in time again, just before their lights go out).

If they claim the flag, though, they're masters of their own destiny. They might be able to get back to the moment when they left, but what if the flag deposits them in a despotic nation on the verge of a massacre **(Proposition 279, p. 223)**? Maybe their experiences with death make them ideal ghost whisperers, ready to sell their services to a beleaguered region **(Ghost Machine, p. 207)**. Or, perhaps their travels through space lead them to even stranger vistas **(Urban Wandering, p. 235)**.

# URBAN WANDERING

The ability to "citywalk," traveling from one urban center to another without crossing the distance between them, is as old as the cities themselves. The knowledge of how to do it has always been kept secret. But now, as the number of people with that knowledge increases, some of these people accidentally find their way to a mist-covered realm inhabited by nightmare creatures...who follow the citywalkers back.

## Infrastructure

Citywalking has been possible for centuries, but the knowledge was proprietary. Individuals could work out how to do it with practice and the right texts, and various secret societies taught the ability to their most trusted members. But now, someone's leaked the secret — and people are finding out exactly why it was never widespread.

Individuals all across the world begin accidentally walking from one city to another without passing through the space in between. At first only a few people can do this, but anyone can learn this ability if they are shown or hear a detailed description of the method. People think about a city they previously lived in while walking or driving, and begin seeing locations that look like that other city. Sometime between five and 30 minutes later, the person finds themselves in this other city, even if it is many thousands of miles away or across an ocean. In time, people can learn to travel to any city they have ever visited or even places that they have seen clearly in videos or documentaries (TV dramas and movies rarely provide accurate views of cities and so are not useful).

**The Truth:** The ability to citywalk is a side effect of the logical Infrastructure built into cities in general. The very *concept* of a "city" carries with it a certain semantic and conceptual weight, and by following that concept, a person learns to citywalk. Why is it becoming more commonplace now? Possibly because the population density in cities is getting higher; if cities have spiritual "weight," some of them are getting heavy enough that even untrained people can sense that weight. The God-Machine isn't responding to this issue immediately since it's just piggybacking on an existing Infrastructure, but the nightmare creatures following hapless citywalkers home need to be addressed.

## Interchangeable Parts

The characters can be anyone living in any city in the world, but they should all be people who have lived in at least three or four different cities. They might be members of some cult or society that has learned how to citywalk, or they might be people that have figured it out for themselves.

## Blueprints

Within a week or two, dozens of people have learned to reliably walk or drive between cities. Soon after this, they begin telling others about it, in person, in blog posts, and even in online videos, where people show off this ability. Most people don't believe it, of course, and lack the spiritual fortitude to try it, but the ability spreads.

Many of these new citywalkers, though, don't possess the skill to do it safely. They wind up in the nightmare realm, and lead the hideous creatures therein back.

The number of violent murders increases and a growing number of people report catching brief glimpses various strange and horrific creatures after dark. These creatures are nocturnal monsters that look like distorted people between two and 10 feet tall. All of them are good at hiding and most prey upon humans. Going out after dark becomes increasingly dangerous.

If nothing is done, a growing number of monsters invade the world, and eventually the connections between these nightmare worlds and the human world become so strong that large areas of the world are either transformed into portions of the nightmare realm or become a haphazard mixture of the normal world and the nightmare realm.

## Linchpins

While the characters are citywalking, all of them have the same vision. A humanoid figure with wings made of mercury appears before them. It shows them, reflected in its wings, the nightmare realm, and tells them that the creatures are hungry. Unless they are prevented from accessing Earth once and for all, they will overrun the human race.

## Citywalker
## (••• Supernatural Merit)

**Prerequisite:** Streetwise ••, mortal (non-supernatural)

**Effect:** The character has learned the secrets of citywalking. When in a city with a population of at least a quarter million, the character can start walking down a street or sidewalk and concentrate on a different city. The character must know his destination city fairly well. The player rolls Resolve + Streetwise to citywalk.

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** The character reaches the nightmare realm, and is probably food for the inhabitants. If nothing else, he'll likely lead the monsters right back to his home city.

**Failure:** The character cannot citywalk to the desired destination; the image just isn't coming in clearly. Any further citywalking attempts that day suffer a -3 penalty. These restrictions fade once the character sleeps for eight hours.

**Success:** The character emerges in the destination city.

**Exceptional Success:** The character emerges in the destination city, and the nightmare creatures do not notice him. Apply a +1 to the character's next attempt to citywalk.

**Suggested Modifiers**

| Situation | Modifier |
|---|---|
| Character has never been to the destination city before | -5 |
| Character has only visited the destination city | -4 |
| Character had a significant experience in the destination city (honeymoon, funeral), but never lived there | -2 |
| Character spent at least a month in the destination city | +1 |
| Character lived in the destination city for at least one year | +2 |
| Character lived in the destination city for at least five years | +3 |
| Character raised children in the destination city | +4 |
| Character grew up in the destination city | +5 |

This isn't strictly true. The angel, Rasha, is merely trying to get people to close off the nightmare realm (the God-Machine has no power in this realm). It is willing to answer any questions the characters have about citywalking, but not about the God-Machine. In fact, if asked about the God-Machine, Rasha becomes defensive and hostile.

Actually observing the process of citywalking reveals hints of how it works. Most people report that the world around them seems to almost shimmer slightly while they are citywalking. Close observation reveals faint glows and shimmers coming from the road or sidewalk that the character is walking or driving on. If a character finds a crack in the sidewalk, or makes one using a sledgehammer or similar means, she sees a network of narrow, glowing metallic threads extending along the path she is citywalking. These threads aren't visible when someone is not citywalking. Every week that people continue citywalking, this network of threads becomes denser. Anyone who citywalks by traveling across rooftops can find similar glowing threads covering the electrical wires and other cables that connect one building to another. The threads on these cables are easily visible when someone is citywalking from one rooftop to another, but are otherwise invisible.

Cutting all of these threads at one point makes citywalking between the two cities significantly more difficult for a while, but the cut threads heal within a few hours. However, anyone who looks at the threads on another path while these destroyed threads are healing notices that the entire network appears to be slightly weakened and damaged. Repeated strikes at the thread network in widely-separated locations during the same few hours makes citywalking more difficult everywhere and can eventually stop it altogether. Dozens of people working together over a large area could damage this network of threads sufficiently enough to destroy it and all citywalking, including walking to the nightmare realm, becomes impossible.

Examining the glowing threads also reveals that all of them appear golden except one, which shines silver. All of

these silvery threads lead to the nightmare realm. Cutting only these threads prevents people from traveling to the nightmare realm from the city the traveler originated from, at least until the threads heal.

It's not possible to cut the threads permanently, at least not without destroying the entire concept of a city. The characters can close off the nightmare realm, but it requires ending the practice of citywalking. Making the threads too hostile to use can be accomplished by asking Rasha for help. He can make the golden threads sharp and jagged, which will make citywalking feel like walking on broken glass. The characters could also draw on the knowledge of the cults that taught citywalking centuries ago — maybe some kind of ritual exists that alters the frequency of the golden threads, thus making it impossible for human beings to use them to citywalk.

## Methods

**Investigation:** A successful Wits + Investigation roll while attempting to observe the process of citywalking reveals a faint glow through cracks in the street that are evidence of the glowing threads.

**Occult:** Delving into the secret history of citywalking requires an Intelligence + Occult roll (probably an extended one).

**Athletics:** While citywalking from one city to another isn't nearly the same physical feat that actually walking the distance is, a character still might need a Stamina + Athletics roll to keep up the pace.

**Firearms:** Loud noises scare the nightmare creatures away, but the trick is firing the gun when they're close enough to hear it, but not so close that they pounce anyway. Roll Wits + Firearms to get the timing right.

**Animal Ken:** Some animals can citywalk. Cats, especially, are instinctively able to do it, but rats and some dogs can, as well. Roll Wits + Animal Ken to observe the animal as it vanishes onto the path.

**Streetwise:** Locating people who have visited the nightmare realm requires a Presence + Streetwise roll.

**Mystery Cult Initiation** (see p. 51): The Citywalker Merit would be a superb reward for someone who has worked herself up the ranks of an old, mystical cult.

**Fame** (see p. 50): A character could parley the ability to walk between cities as a special talent and get rich and famous...at least until the members of the mystery cult learn that he's doing it.

## Escalation

Perhaps a few of the largest cities were closely connected to the nightmare realm and are now more than half composed of twisted, nightmare-realm buildings (this might be a way to get the characters to a variant of their own city; see Sister City, p. 201). Alternately, after the nightmare realm is cut off, people begin seeing a vast, shining, white city in the distance. Anyone who travels too far into this city enters a trance and begins performing menial tasks there. An increasing number of people who citywalk end up in this city, the Invisible Citadel (p. 219).

Or, if the characters manage to curtail citywalking, someone manages to remember it. He's not using it for the betterment of mankind, though (The Key, p. 208).

Malcolm felt his hands TREMBLING as he ran them over the woman beneath him. She moaned in response to his touch and arched herself to be closer. She pulled Malcolm down for a deep kiss and he could feel her hips grinding against his. He moved his hands back up her body again, felt her breasts and nipples under his fingers. He willed his hands to stop shaking. They didn't, but she didn't seem to mind.

He was so wrapped up in the moment that he didn't hear the sound of the door closing in the front of the house. He didn't hear the FOOTSTEPS coming down the hall, and he missed the sound of the bedroom door opening. He didn't REALIZE Anne was home until it was too late.

"Malcolm?"

He rolled off the woman and pulled the sheets up around him. Anne's face wasn't TEARFUL or ANGRY, it was just…hurt. He dropped his gaze. He never wanted to hurt her, and he wasn't even sure what had brought them to this point, but here they were.

"Anne, it isn't what you think." He could hear himself saying it, and he winced. IT WAS EXACTLY WHAT SHE THOUGHT, OBVIOUSLY.

"I'm tired, Malcolm." He voice quavered with unshed tears. "I don't want to talk about it. I'm leaving." She walked past, and he watched, stunned, as she packed an overnight bag.

He thought, as she walked out, about asking her where she would go or what he should do. He couldn't get words out. He considered begging her to stay, but he knew it was over. He'd seen it in her face. She would NEVER be able to trust him again.

"I'm DONE here." The woman's voice sounded cold and businesslike. Malcolm had forgotten she was there, and Anne hadn't said a word to her.

He looked over to the woman and sighed. "I guess this does kill the mood. I'm sorry that happened." He reached out to her, but she moved away before he could make contact. He let his hand drop to his side. She sat on the bed, looking at him, all the fire that used to be in her eyes now completely lifeless. Malcolm thought, for some reason, of watching ANIMALS IN THE ZOO.

He stood up to put his clothes on. "At least we won't have to sneak around anymore." He turned back to shoot her a smile, but she was gone. He looked around the room, but he couldn't find her. He checked the bathroom, but she wasn't there either. As he came back into the bedroom, he noticed that the small red pile of her clothes was still on the floor where they had left them, undisturbed, but she was nowhere to be seen.

# The Cogs in the Machine: Characters

If everything on Earth is a function of the God-Machine, then what are the inhabitants? Are they programs, trusted with will and agency, but ultimately subservient? Are they self-replicating mechanisms akin to nanobots? Or are they merely cogs in the machine?

This section examines some of these cogs, Storyteller characters to help bring your God-Machine chronicle to life. The first part of the section presents human (if altered) characters who have had the misfortune to become involved with the God-Machine. Most of them correspond to one of the Tales. For those that don't, we provide suggestions on which Tales are most appropriate for their inclusion.

The second part of this section describes angels, the strange, spiritual servants of the God-Machine. Most of the angels provided correspond to a Tale, but you should absolutely use these angels as inspiration to create your own for your own Tales of the God-Machine.

**On the hill when he pulled me from the dust, the angel said, "You will see many strange things. Do not be afraid. You have a holy mission and I will protect you." Smug bastard.**

**– Christopher Moore, *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal***

## BENJAMIN WAYNE MASTERS

### Charismatic leader of the Cult of Revelations.

**Background:** Benjamin Wayne Masters grew up as an orphan from the age of six. Both of his parents died in a car wreck. He was put into the state system, started in his first foster home at the age of seven, and was in and out of foster homes until he was sixteen years old. He suffered abuse and neglect in many of the homes, and his depression and withdrawn personality made him a burden on even the best of foster parents.

Benjamin ran away from his last set of foster parents, whom he had been with for a record three years. They had entered him into psychiatric care and were, by far, the most caring family he had, but by that point it was too late. The one thing Benjamin latched onto from the family was their religion. He stayed with one of his church friends for a few weeks then disappeared completely for a year. When he returned, he attended church regularly and his troubled past seemed to be behind him. The pastor was impressed by his change and gave him odd jobs to do around the church.

It wasn't long before the pastor's wife found Benjamin molesting a young girl in the choir room during church. He was expelled and told to never return. Shortly after, Benjamin joined a missionary group traveling to Nigeria. He impressed the missionaries with his righteous attitude and gained admittance by offering to work for his food and lodgings. While there, he spent most of his time on the compound cleaning and cooking for the missionaries. For the first time in his life, Benjamin felt at peace with his surroundings and his role in life. On a trip into the city for supplies, he ran across a group of children playing. He stopped to ask them if they knew about God. They responded to him in English to tell him that they did know God. God lived in a clearing to the north and they spoke with him regularly.

Intrigued by this revelation, Benjamin asked the children to bring him to the clearing. They led him through the woods to a small clearing in the forest with a blackened and charred hole in the center. Inside the hole was a mess of whirling gears and cogs. When he got near, the children scattered and left him there alone.

He leaned over the hole to inspect the machine parts, all shining and well oiled. He could tell that this was just the very edge of the machinery, and that it extended for miles in all directions. Fearful, yet in awe, he addressed it as God and it responded. Benjamin doesn't remember the conversation or what happened, but he knows that he met God and that he has a mission. He stumbled back to the missionary compound, dehydrated and delirious. He was unconscious for a full 24 hours and when he awoke, all he could talk about was meeting God. Unfortunately for him, while he was unconscious the missionaries had attempted to contact his family, and in the process had learned of his disturbing history. They booked him a flight home, and told him, as had his old church, that they wanted nothing to do with him.

Benjamin was lost, yet strangely serene. He could still accomplish his mission, but he would never see his God again. Benjamin always saw religion as a way to manipulate and control others, but now he saw that religion was a lie. His contact with God had driven him to an insane fervor, but his reputation with the religious community prevented him from getting a real following. This intensity also prevented him from holding down a job. He took to the streets, and found his place there. He joined a group of indigents living in some old tunnels under the downtown area. They showed him a deep undercity that was rarely explored. Out of curiosity, Benjamin began mapping out these tunnels and where the entrances and exits were. There, he was able to find a small hole in the tunnels that led to a deeper part of the city. Inside he found a set of exposed gears and cogs, shining and oily like the ones he found in Nigeria.

Benjamin knew ecstasy. He brought the homeless down to witness the gears and preached to them about God. The group listened with rapt attention. Most of them were insane already, and those who weren't needed something to hold onto. Benjamin stylized his small group the Church of Revelations. He and his homeless congregation preach the word of God to any that will listen among the streets of the city.

**Description:** Benjamin Wayne Masters lives on the street and so his clothes are worn and dirty, and he smells of oil and earth. He has black hair and black eyes and his dark skin is dusty from lack of washing. He is soft spoken, reverent, and his voice is a deep baritone.

**Storytelling Hints:** Benjamin Wayne Masters is a disturbed man, yet is strangely magnetic. He tries to convince anyone he encounters that he has met God and he has a mission. If pressed, he doesn't actually recall what his mission is, other than to spread the word of God. He claims that he has seen God and that God is everywhere in the earth and surrounds us. He is not particularly violent, but will protect what he believes is the physical manifestation of God with his life if threatened. Most view him as a madman, and this is more than likely true.

Benjamin could appear in any Tale that takes place in an urban environment. If the players need a strange, insane, but still helpful, mentor in the mysteries of the God-Machine, they can attend one of Benjamin's sermons. Of course, Benjamin has some unsavory appetites. Can the characters stomach that, even if he has useful information?

Appropriate Tales for Ben include: The 300 Block (p. 197), This Is Hell (p. 231), and The Squares of the City (p. 203). He would also make an interesting red herring in The Key (p. 208).

**Virtue:** Righteous

**Vice:** Cowardly

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics (Religion) 3, Medicine 2, Occult 2

**Physical Skills:** Brawl 2, Drive 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 3

**Social Skills:** Empathy (Motives) 3, Expression 3, Persuasion (Motivational Speeches) 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise 4

**Merits:** Allies 3 (Street People), Inspiring, Striking Looks 1

**Health:** 8

**Willpower:** 6

**Integrity:** 5

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 11

**Defense:** 3

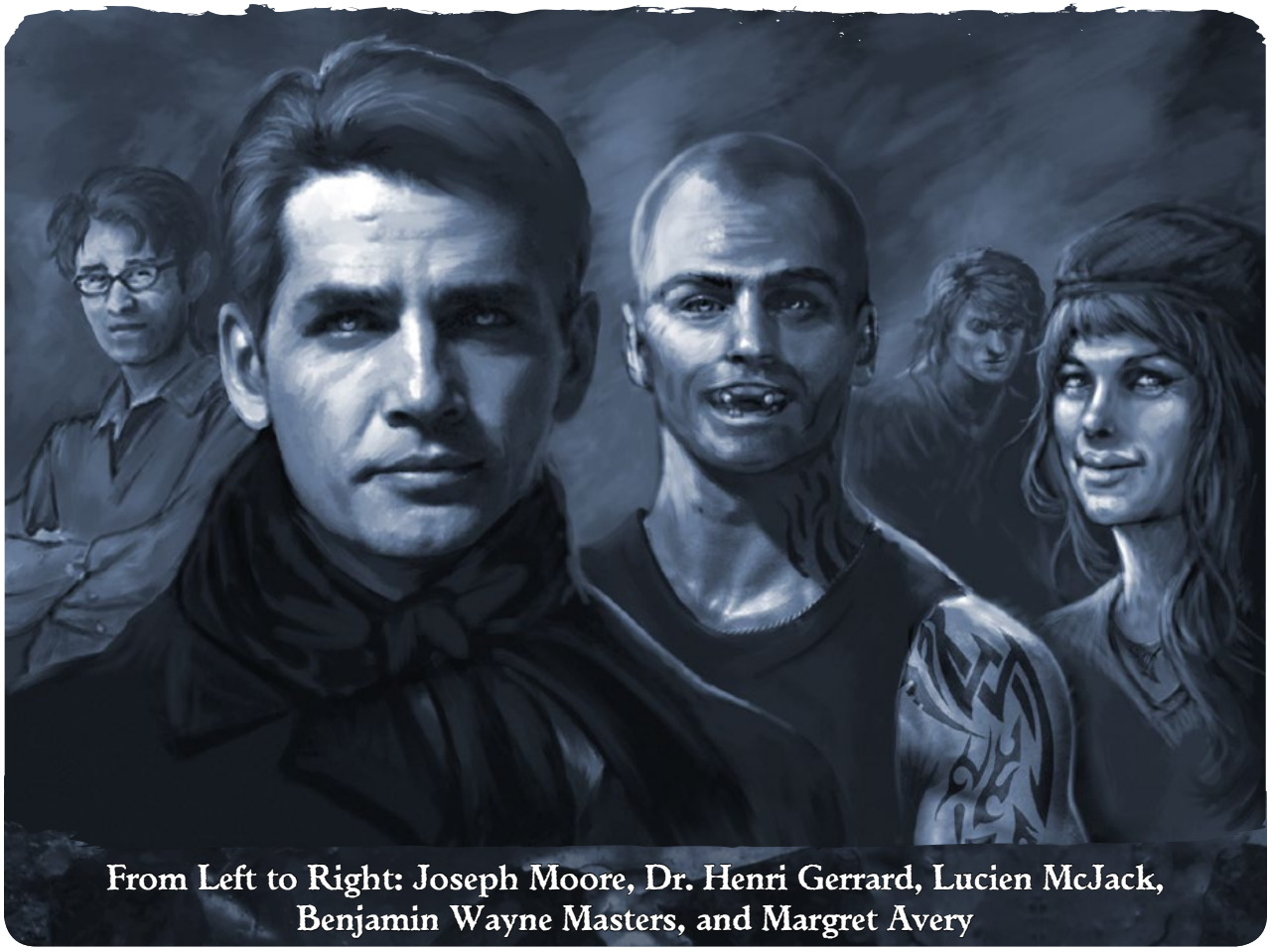
**Initiative:** 6

**Armor:** None

## DR. HENRI GIRARD

### Immortal inventor and rogue God-Machine operative who is attempting to save time.

**Background:** Dr. Girard was born in the early 19th century, where he showed early promise as an engineer and an inventor. He was approached by would-be acolytes of the God-Machine, who offered him access to wondrous technologies to experiment with, as well as a lifespan measured in centuries instead of decades. Dr. Girard was a contented agent of the God-Machine until 1920, when he realized that a device he had built in 1901 was fatally flawed. The acolytes believed



From Left to Right: Joseph Moore, Dr. Henri Gerrard, Lucien McJack, Benjamin Wayne Masters, and Margret Avery

that this device would allow them to freely travel to any point in the past or future. Dr. Girard came to believe that this device was instead inspired by the God-Machine, to enable it to dissolve all of time into a single, endless moment, an act that would destroy humanity and horribly transform the entire cosmos. Dr. Girard's superiors refused to believe him and dismissed his concerns. To avoid imprisonment or death, he then convinced them that he had made a mistake and that he, too, was looking forward to gaining mastery of time.

Since 1920, Dr. Girard secretly devoted much of his efforts to discovering a way to destroy the device he had helped create before it had built up sufficient power to activate and destroy time. Unfortunately, he realized that the only way to safely deactivate the device was to keep the device from being built in the first place. Dr. Girard knew that to accomplish this goal, he or someone else must travel back to 1901, just after the device was activated, and before he informed his superiors about it.

**Description:** Dr. Girard is a tall, slender handsome man with a full head of shockingly-red hair. His blue eyes stare intently at anyone he is talking to. He has a soft, but intense, voice and often speaks like he is a skilled and engaging professor lecturing to a class of students. Dr. Girard enjoys talking about cutting-edge chemistry and physics with anyone who can meaningfully discuss these topics. Dr. Girard's demeanor is both expressive and somewhat nervous. He usually either talks with his hands or works with his hands while he is talking. When he is talking about something important to him, his eyes brighten and he speaks in a faster, more animated tone of voice, almost becoming manic at times. Dr. Girard is quite well off, and all of his clothes are obviously expensive and well made, but unless he is attending a formal dinner or some similar function, his appearance is clean, but often slightly ill kempt, with his shirttail partially untucked or his hair only half combed.

**Storytelling Hints:** Dr. Girard is brilliant and thoughtful and ever since 1920 he has been devoted to the idea of saving humanity from destruction. He has also learned that his previous beliefs in both the God-Machine's grand purpose and the wisdom of his superiors were misplaced. Prior to 1920, he was an idealist who was convinced that service to the God-Machine would benefit both himself and humanity as a whole. Since that time, he has learned that at least some of his superiors are greedy and self-serving and that the angels and the God-Machine itself care nothing for humanity.

Dr. Girard understands that overthrowing the God-Machine's power over humanity is impossible and that efforts to do so would end badly. Instead, he wishes to avoid disasters and to help find ways for humanity to survive and perhaps even thrive. If the characters succeed in the Tale A Journey Into Time (p. 228), and in 1901 inform Dr. Girard of the reason for their actions, his skepticism about his

superiors begins even earlier. Otherwise, he never realizes the dangers of the blue light, but by the 1940s he has noticed other problems with his superiors' plans. At this point, Dr. Girard decides that the safety and survival of humanity is more important that either his superiors' ambitions or the plans of the God-Machine.

**Virtue:** Hopeful

**Vice:** Greedy

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

**Mental Skills:** Academics 4, Crafts 4, Investigation 3, Occult (Arcane Devices) 3, Politics 2, Science (Engineering) 5

**Physical Skills:** Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2

**Social Skills:** Empathy 1, Expression (Lecturing) 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 4

**Merits:** Contacts (Academics, God-Machine Cultists) 2, Hardy 2, Language (English, German; native French) 2, Resources 4, Striking Looks 1

**Health:** 8

**Willpower:** 5

**Integrity:** 6

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 10

**Defense:** 3

**Initiative:** 5

## JOSEPH MOORE

### The God-Machine's gateway into our world.

**Background:** Joseph Moore was a theoretical physicist of no real note. He worked in a state university and theorized that black holes and white holes are a single gravitational unit that expresses itself through time. His theories assumed that time is not linear, and instead a particle intricately bound to space that is manipulated by the larger gravitational pull of the astral bodies. He speculated that the time at which the hole was glimpsed determined if it was a black hole in which matter entered but could never leave, or a white hole in which matter left but could never enter. Momentary particles were either coming or going, but the gravitational entity is always expanding and contracting as though it were a living thing. Joseph defined such phenomena as both infinite and definite at the same time. His mathematical models for time as a particle were extraordinarily complicated and are still unfinished. As such, he never published his work. Though members of the scientific community ignored Joseph's theories, things that live outside of time and space took notice.

Joseph's appointment at the university was for teaching only, so his research and equation calculating was mostly accomplished after hours in his office. Joseph was on the verge of finishing his mathematical calculations for defining time, and was attempting to correlate the time particle with light as both a photon and a wave. During one of his late-night sessions he was certain that he had finally finished his equation and was double checking the math when he heard a booming voice. The act of finishing the equation and putting into mathematical language what was only a thought before had opened a small hole in the space between this world and the next, in which time is infinite and fleeting. Joseph was at first terrified of the voice, but after a few moments he was intrigued. He had made contact with the God-Machine, or rather, it had made contact with him.

The proposal was simple. Joseph's understanding of true time had made him aware of the things outside of time and space. His awareness conveyed receptiveness to understanding the machinations of something much greater than himself, which was mind breaking. Instead of losing his mind, Joseph was offered the chance to become one with the God-Machine and work its will on earth and within this time particle. Joseph couldn't really say no. With all that he could see and understand, he was in danger of losing himself to the infinite. In that instant of forever, he gave himself over. Now he is nothing more than a singularity of time expressing both himself and the God-Machine in this time and all others. While he still looks and acts like a human being, he is so much more.

The God-Machine uses Joseph as a point of entry into the world, and has his mind working on calculating time points for Infrastructure for angelic entry into the world.

**Description:** On the surface, Joseph seems like a normal professor. He wears glasses and button-up shirts over corduroy pants. He has short, unkempt black hair and his eyes are a piercing deep blue which look almost black in the dark. He often smells of pipe smoke and cinnamon. When he speaks, it is often very low, and his voice is a rich baritone. Joseph carries the mind and soul of an unknowable entity, which causes his speech to be halting and broken. When teaching, he seems more at ease and his lectures are engaging and full of life. His students never seem to fall asleep in his class, and he has the highest pass rate of any physics teacher in the area. Outside of class, Joseph seems distant and distracted. He can barely carry a conversation, and wanders off abruptly if not directly engaged.

**Storytelling Hints:** Joseph is hard to talk to unless the conversation revolves around time or the physics of time. He is a conduit of the God-Machine's power on Earth, and therefore not really there anymore. His body is simply a human face for a much larger entity. Joseph's translations of the God-Machine's concepts are far from coherent. If Joseph is engaged in a conversation about quantum physics or time, he becomes much more alert and understandable. These are the things he is being used for, and these are the things he

knows. His understanding of time particles can be expressed in great detail.

Joseph is not a fighter, and attempts to avoid conflict if possible. If attacked, Joseph surrenders.

Joseph is the closest the characters can reasonably come to conversing with the God-Machine. He is a being of immense knowledge and power trapped in a mortal shell, and he doesn't even have the ability to truly let the God-Machine speak through him. He is tasked with the impossible chore of being the God-Machine's mouthpiece. He should therefore show up in Tales like A Journey Into Time (p. 228), This Is Hell (p. 231), and Proposition 279 (p. 223) — stories with cosmic implications. Stories that play with space and time (Missing Persons, p. 210, or Do-Over, p. 199) would also be appropriate.

**Virtue:** Honest

**Vice:** Flighty

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

**Mental Skills:** Academics (Research) 4, Computer 2, Investigation 1, Occult 3, Science 5 (Physics)

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Drive 2

**Social Skills:** Expression 1, Intimidation (Cold) 3, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1

**Merits:** Cursed, Eidetic Memory, Resources 2, Status 2 (University)

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 8

**Integrity:** 7

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 8

**Defense:** 4

**Initiative:** 6

## LUCIEN MCJACK

*Dead, but over it.*

**Background:** Lucien McJack was out on the highway one night when his car broke down. Unable to get it working, he left a note for the police, locked the doors, and started walking toward civilization. He put out his thumb to try and catch a ride, and a car struck and killed him. That was the end of Lucien McJack.

That wasn't the *end*, though. A spirit — a foul, evil, vicious thing from a place that humanity does not understand — slithered into Lucien's body and wore it like a suit. Lucien is now an *intruder*, a dead human body possessed by a baleful spirit. Lucien's reanimated body now has its own unholy appetites, and it wanders from town to town, preying on the unfortunate.

This would be bad enough, but the God-Machine needed Lucien McJack for something. What it needed Lucien for isn't immediately relevant. The point is that with Lucien dead, some gear or mechanism started spinning backwards, and other dead people started getting up as well (this is all described in the Wake the Dead Tale, p. 214). Lucien (rather, the thing wearing his body) doesn't know or care about this situation. It has other fish to fry.

**Description:** Lucien, in life, was a nondescript fellow with thinning red-blonde hair, a slight beard, and a tribal tattoo on his meaty right arm. The intruder shaved its head and pulled out several of Lucien's teeth (giving it the appearance of a fanged mouth). The tattoo on its arm also seems to be spreading, creating designs that give people headaches if they stare too long.

**Storytelling Hints:** Lucien McJack wants to watch fear turn to pain and then to acceptance. It likes watching people die. The first few victims it just beat to death, but that causes so much trauma that people don't have time to come to grips with what is happening. It's thinking about moving up to poison, but it needs materials for that. Strangulation, perhaps.

It's important to note that the intruder is not the ghost of Lucien McJack or Lucien McJack resurrected. The intruder is just a nonhuman entity using McJack as a conveyance. Nothing of McJack remains but the face and the name.

Lucien is the main antagonist and motivating force in the Tale Wake the Dead (p. 214).

**Virtue:** Methodical

**Vice:** Sadistic

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Science (Chemistry) 1

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl (Grappling) 3, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth (Stalking) 4, Weaponry 2

**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 1, Empathy 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion (Helpful) 2

**Merits:** Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Martial Arts 5

**Health:** 9

**Willpower:** 6

**Integrity:** n/a

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 16

**Defense:** 6

**Initiative:** 8

**Supernatural Aspects:**

- **Drain:** As the Numen **(p. 137)**. Lucien can drain Health or Willpower. It must touch its target (Dexterity + Brawl to do so in combat). The roll to activate the power is Strength + Resolve, opposed by Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance (if draining Willpower) or Resolve + Stamina + Supernatural Tolerance (if draining Health). If Lucien wins, it gains Willpower or Health equal to the successes rolled.
- **Emotional Aura:** As the Numen **(p. 137)**.
- **Unnatural Hunger:** Lucien loses two points of Willpower per day. It must use Drain to replenish this Willpower. If it runs out of Willpower, it starts suffering lethal damage. Once its Health track fills with lethal damage, it suffers a -3 to all actions until it can use Drain to heal. Lucien can regain Willpower through its Virtue and Vice, but not via rest. It cannot heal Health in any way except by using Drain.

## MARGRET AVERY

### The administration expert.

**Background:** Margret Avery worked for a large corporation as a Human Resources specialist, and everything ran smoothly in her office. Her particular specialty was layoffs. She was in charge of reading production reports and determining where to cut excesses to keep the corporation working as efficiently as possible. She performed this job with a sense of detachment to the personnel affected, but she was polite and professional when delivering her decisions. While Margret did not especially love her job, it satisfied her analytical mind. She took it seriously, though, and she was good at it. It was no small wonder that she was promoted twice in one year.

Margret's second promotion changed her job drastically. It brought her out of HR and into the administrative offices of the company. Here is where Margret Avery first learned the true purpose of her corporation. On the surface, the company functions as any business would. They produce goods and sell them to the public. Behind that public façade, the company makes sacrifices to an ethereal entity to prevent the world from ending. Of course, the veracity of the belief that they are saving the world has yet to be tested.

Margret's new job is to select individuals for sacrifice. The job is surprisingly similar to her job as a layoff specialist. She is given a portfolio of select individuals that includes their work performance and their overall life experiences. Parameters for acceptable sacrifices are not based completely on their output and performance, nor are they based on their usefulness to society. Instead, each time a sacrifice is needed, a set of parameters are dictated by her boss, who receives his orders from someone higher up. Presumably, these parameters are set by the entity they are appeasing, and something about the victim satisfies its needs and prevents world annihilation. Margret analyzes each individual for these parameters and selects the one with the best fit. She then informs her superiors and the individual is brought in for sacrifice. Most of the time, the sacrifices come from internal sources. Sometimes they come from other companies or completely unassociated outside sources.

Margret doesn't know if she believes she is saving the world, but she has always done her best at any job she has. The truth of the matter is far less glamorous than saving the world. She is selecting individuals based on a pattern set forth by the God-Machine to keep some gears well-oiled and functioning.

**Description:** Margret Avery is a middle-aged woman with long, thick black hair streaked through with gray. She has deep brown eyes, and lines along her face from smiling. She is a little overweight, but is healthy. She has a high-pitched, lilting voice and a contagious laugh. She often dresses smartly in a pantsuit and flats and wears Chanel No. 5 as her signature scent.

**Storytelling Hints:** Margret Avery is an intelligent woman who cares about her job. She schedules sacrifices about a week in advance, and they occur weekly, sometimes more often if necessary. Those outside her chain of command may notice her association with several disappearances within the corporation or around the city. If someone comes around asking too many questions, Margret is more than likely going to be suspicious of them. She is not completely certain that she is saving the world, and can be convinced that she is being used if the notion is presented logically. Otherwise, she might recognize a few parameters in the questioner, and assume a sacrifice is attempting to avoid their fate. Margret cares about humanity and life, and even if she cannot be convinced to leave her job, she could easily be convinced to let a potential sacrifice leave in lieu of another.

Margret has a layer of security personnel around her at all times, even though she usually doesn't see them. She's a good false antagonist — the characters might trace weird occurrences or orders for sacrifice back to her, only to find that she's just doing her job. She's a good character to appear in The Moon Window (p. 212) or in an official capacity in Proposition 279 (p. 223). She might also provide some advice for the characters if they get to the point of making sacrifices in The 300 Block (p. 197).

**Virtue:** Idealistic

**Vice:** Naïve

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

**Mental Skills:** Academics (Law) 3, Computer 2, Investigation 3, Occult 1, Politics 2

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Drive 2, Stealth 1

**Social Skills:** Empathy (Delivering Bad News) 2, Intimidation (Veiled Threats) 2, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 3

**Merits:** Contacts 2 (Corporate, Legal), Good Time Management, Resources 3, Retainers (Security) 5, Staff (Investigation, Computer) 2

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 4

**Integrity:** 3

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 9

**Defense:** 3

**Initiative:** 4

**Armor:** None

## MARK WILSON, "TRUTH"

### A young hacker intent on saving the world.

**Background:** Hacking a system is an art. Hacking a secured government website and replacing the content with nude pictures of Paris Hilton is comedy gold. Mark Wilson is a typical teenage boy with an atypical hobby. He grew up with the internet and has taught himself the ins and outs of using it for his own purposes. When he first started hacking, it was in attempts to play online games for free. He had moderate success and joined several forums filled with fellow hackers.

Mark's online presence was larger than life. Though he had a hard time associating with people on a face-to-face basis, he could interact through his computer with great finesse. He was forced to read and understand what was being said first, and was easily able to compose intelligent and well-thought-out responses given enough time. Without that kind of time, Mark was pretty horrible at communication. He quickly made friends with people much older and much more experienced than he. These friends taught him about internet security and how to bypass almost any system.

Most of his friends were concerned with the political climate of internet censorship and loss of privacy. They formed communities of likeminded individuals and organized protests of government actions through hacking websites and leaking classified government information. Mark joined in all of these activities with zeal. Though he didn't understand the implications of most of what he was doing, it was good to be recognized and his head was filled with propaganda about loss of freedoms.

Mark adopted the handle "Truth" to represent his desire to lay open government conspiracies to take away personal freedoms. It was one of the few political agendas that Mark understood completely and could get behind. Soon, his friends began organizing collective attacks on government and large corporate websites. Often, Mark was instructed to embed new information on websites, but leave them wholly intact otherwise. This is his job as Truth, to change the lies on these websites to the truth for the public to see. The things his friends have asked him to do have been increasingly strange and esoteric, but Mark doesn't want to lose the only friends he has, so he does what is asked of him.

Mark is an unwitting pawn. He knows it on some level, but he won't admit it to himself. He can recognize that something isn't right with what he is being asked to do. He knows that his friends have become hard to understand, or completely cold and unfeeling.

Mark's friends are no longer a community of other hackers. Those that were real are now dead, and instead he has been given instructions from the God-Machine for nearly two years.

**Description:** Mark Wilson is a scrawny, greasy, smelly teenage boy. His skin is pasty white due to lack of exposure to the sun, and his hair is a slick, mousey, brown mop. His voice cracks, but it seems to be settling on a low baritone. He doesn't care much about personal hygiene and often his clothes are rumpled and stained. He is tall and lanky, but has a wiry frame and defined muscle tone. He exercises when he isn't hacking. His exercise habits revolve around his escape plan in case he is ever raided by the Feds. He can run for a long time, and has learned how to jump out of his bedroom window without hurting himself.

**Storytelling Hints:** Mark is cocky and sure of himself. His goals in life are to hack, and to pass high school calculus. Mark is at a delicate point in his life. He has never had real friends other than the ones on the internet, and those are now dead. The truth of that loss would be devastating to him. Stopping him from acting might be easy, but convincing him to stop listening to his hacker friends will take perseverance. Mark is an unwitting antagonist. He is helping the God-Machine on the thin faith that he is helping to make the world a better place. He holds on to that faith in the face of most rebuttals without hard proof to the contrary. Mark will not fight for his beliefs, though; he would rather run.

Truth makes for a good online contact, someone who can provide information for the characters (and avoid tedious rolls to hack into computer systems). He's working for the God-Machine, though, which means that even if he doesn't plan to share information, the God-Machine knows everything he types or receives. He would be a good character to help analyze weird computer- or mechanism-related strangeness in Tales like Ghost Machine (p. 207), A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity (p. 216), or Moon Window (p. 212).

**Virtue:** Thorough

**Vice:** Lazy

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Computer (Hacking) 5, Investigation 4, Politics 1

**Physical Skills:** Athletics (Running) 3, Drive 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 2

**Social Skills:** Empathy 1, Expression (Photoshop) 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

**Merits:** Contacts (Hackers), Fleet of Foot 2, Parkour 3, Resources 1

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 5

**Integrity:** 6

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 13

**Defense:** 6

**Initiative:** 6

## MELISSA CHARLES

### Obsessive collector of God-Machine artifacts.

**Background:** When she was 14, Melissa Charles was smoking a cigarette outside of a seemingly-abandoned warehouse when she saw a group of semi-human creatures in tan jumpsuits enter the warehouse via a trap door in the floor. Under the direction of a woman in an expensive business suit, these creatures assembled a strange and complex device in the middle of the warehouse and activated it. Almost an hour later, as Melissa continued to watch in terrified silence, the creatures disassembled the device, and they and the young woman walked back down through the trap door. Shortly after this event, the town had its first earthquake in more than a century. Melissa wondered about the relation between the device and the earthquake. She also began looking into the strange places and events that most people refused to notice.

Her life changed forever when she was 17. She would have fled from the precise and terrible human sacrifice she witnessed inside a closed restaurant in a strip mall, but was afraid that moving would reveal her presence. Unable to either save the young man who was killed or to escape, afterwards she kept a bloodstained fragment of the victim's sleeve as evidence for what she saw.

Since seeing that murder, finding, and in some way documenting, various odd events became her driving obsession. Often, all the evidence she possesses is a grainy photograph taken with her phone or a sketch. However, she periodically manages to obtain some fragment of physical evidence of the odd phenomena she witnessed.

She's seen people who looked wealthy and powerful at several of the events she's witnessed, and she's also seen police officers at two of them. As a result, Ms. Charles has never considered attempting to make her collection public or to report anything she has witnessed to any law enforcement agency. Today, Melissa Charles works as a forensic accountant. The same eye for detail that helps her notice unusual activity also serves her well in detecting fraud.

**Description:** Melissa Charles is a quiet introvert. She carefully observes the world around her, but largely does her best to live apart from it. She is in her late 30s and dresses in moderately expensive, but bland, clothing. She keeps her hair short and does her best to not draw attention to her appearance. Her voice is soft and she is shy in person. However, her shy reserve vanishes if someone asks about her interests or she begins talking about the oddities she is obsessed with. In such cases, her face comes alive and she talks in a manner that is considerably faster and more animated. However, she is awkward at making small talk, flirting, or otherwise engaging in social pleasantries.

**Storytelling Hints:** Melissa Charles isn't interested in opposing or working for the God-Machine or its operatives. She is interested in collecting relics and stories about the world's oddities, and attempting to make sense of these seemingly-inexplicable events. Because of some of the horrors she has witnessed, Melissa Charles has become moderately paranoid, and refuses to talk about her collection or any of the events she has witnessed in any detail, unless the person she is talking to has made it clear that they have had similar experiences. Behind the tasteful curtains in the windows of her house is an expensive security system; she also has wire mesh embedded in the windows and behind the drywall to render her house a Faraday cage. She is simultaneously eager to discuss her experiences and learn more, and afraid that she might be talking to agents of the God-Machine, or to people who might reveal her to them.

If characters make it clear they have also witnessed inexplicable events, Melissa is likely to share information with them. However, she will strongly attempt to dissuade anyone from going to the authorities or attempting to make any of their discoveries public. She firmly tells characters that she'll deny knowing them if they try to draw attention to anything they have discovered. When talking about what she has witnessed, it's clear that Melissa is simultaneously fascinated, horrified, and most of all deeply interested in stories about the odd and hidden aspects of the world and what they mean. She is most interested in the physical stuff of these incidents, but also happily listens to reports or looks at photographs of strange incidents. She has no patience with individuals performing hoaxes or people foolish enough to believe them; she has seen true wonders and terrors, and wishes to learn more.

Melissa can appear in any Tale, holding just the right relic or device to help the characters. Stories like Squares of the City (p. 203; maybe she has a torch that can cut the tracks), Urban Wandering (p. 235; Melissa found a pair of lenses that focus a flashlight beam into a searing light that burns the nightmare creatures), or Wellington School for Gifted Children (p. 205; she is an alumna, and left behind notes and trinkets for the characters to find) are especially appropriate.

**Virtue:** Patient

**Vice:** Cowardly

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 3, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Occult 3, Science 1

**Physical Skills:** Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny (Lockpicking) 2, Stealth (Hiding) 3

**Social Skills:** Persuasion (Emotional Appeals) 1, Subterfuge 3

**Merits:** Eye for the Strange, Resources 3, Safe House 3

**Health:** 7

**Willpower:** 6

**Integrity:** 7

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 9

**Defense:** 2

**Initiative:** 5

## LIEUTENANT SAMUEL HACKETT

### Experimental test subject, Alpha.

**Background:** Samuel Hackett joined the U.S. Army directly out of high school. He wasn't particularly bright, but he was dedicated and strong. He was placed in the mobile infantry and trained to be a combat soldier. His training was rigorous, but Samuel was up for the job. He had benefits, steady pay, and time off every now and then to visit his family. It was more than he could have ever asked for, and it was his life. Samuel never got the chance to be career military in the traditional sense. He never rose in ranks and standing to gain an officer title. Instead, he was selected to be part of a test group for infantry improvement.

Samuel wasn't told much about the project. He was given over to the hands of a civilian corporation contracted to perform some medical tests and oversee his training. He wasn't allowed to talk about the program to anyone except his direct superiors.

Training ended up being a very loose term for what Samuel went through. He spent night and day hooked up to a large machine, unlike anything he had ever seen before, that seemed to monitor his every movement, heartbeat, and breath. His memory of the time spent attached to the machine is hazy at best. He remembers hearing people talking over him about his treatments, and he remembers hearing the grinding of wheels shortly before blacking out about once a week. He would wake up from these episodes feeling sore and exhausted, with the taste of copper in his mouth. This went on for six months, and at the end he was given a clean bill of health and told his training was over. He was to report back to his division for his new orders.

He didn't feel specially trained, and he certainly didn't believe he was any different than he was before the training. Bemused but accepting, Samuel returned to his division. When he reported to the officer on duty, he was instructed to take a vehicle and meet his trainers at the site. He wondered at the strangeness of it as he drove there alone. Soon, Samuel learned why his orders were special. He was supposed to run through the exercise without a team. He had to do a task, which normally required 15 people to accomplish, alone. After the initial shock wore off, he decided this was probably just a test, something designed for him to fail, but that the where and when would be important.

With that in mind, Samuel set out. Within minutes of the first assault and explosion, he was certain that this was no routine test. The shrapnel was real, and he was certain he saw bullet holes in the walls as he ran for cover. He felt faster and stronger than normal. His hearing was more acute, as were his senses of sight and smell. He didn't have much time to contemplate these changes as he dodged bullets and explosions. Samuel realized that he wasn't thinking about anything at all; instead, it seemed that his body was responding to the attacks on its own. He attempted to slow down for a moment to collect his thoughts, but his body was unresponsive to his desires. It moved and shifted through the urban landscape of its own accord. Samuel watched in horror, as though he were a stranger in his own body. He watched as he decapitated a target, and then flawlessly shot three more in the head as he casually passed by. He wanted to squeeze his eyes closed and block out everything so that he could get a grip on himself, but the effort was futile. Instead, he rode along as his body performed actions that he would have never dreamed possible.

Though he is a simple man, Samuel knew that he had been turned into a weapon. Afraid of what he could be used for, Samuel ran, using his newfound abilities to break out of military control. Now he is on the run and afraid for his life, as well as the lives of anyone he comes in contact with.

Samuel's program was a glowing success. His body was hard-wired with mechanisms that allow the God-Machine to control his every motion. He is a tool, ready to be used when necessary. Even his departure from the military was not entirely his decision. The God-Machine needs Samuel to be as free of constraints as possible, so that it may fully work through him at a moment's notice.

**Description:** Samuel Hackett is a large man with big muscles and meaty hands. He has close-cropped brown hair and deep brown eyes. He is soft spoken with a rich, baritone voice. Samuel can't shake his military training, and is always clean. His clothes are always freshly pressed, starched with straight creases, and have a crisp, clean smell. He shaves and exercises, but only out of habit. No matter what he eats or how sedentary he becomes, his body keeps itself in fighting trim.

**Storytelling Hints:** Samuel is terrified of himself and what he is capable of. He is not always in control of his body and he

knows it. Samuel warns people that he is dangerous, even if he seems nice and polite at all times. He wants to help people; it is part of his nature, but he is wary of strangers. Ever since his "special training" his temper has been unpredictable, and when he loses control, he inevitably hurts someone.

Samuel is a good antagonist to use if the characters have made a habit of taking overt, violent action against the God-Machine. If they trash the factory in Missing Persons (p. 210) or inflict a lot of structural damage on The Invisible Citadel (p. 219), or even if they succeed in destroying West Nautical 36 in Operation: Bell Jar (p. 221), Samuel can reluctantly track them down. Don't use him as a mindless killing machine, though. He should give the characters warning, tell them to run before he attacks. He actually has no desire to hurt anyone, and he makes for a good cautionary tale about the power of the God-Machine.

**Virtue:** Humble

**Vice:** Violent

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Medicine (Combat Medic) 2, Politics 1

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 4*, Brawl 4, Firearms (Automatic Weapons) 5*, Weaponry 3

**Social Skills:** Empathy 3, Intimidation (Brutal) 4*, Subterfuge 2

*Asset Skills for Professional Training

**Merits:** Close Quarters Combat 3, Contacts (Military, Black Market), Fast Reflexes 2, Firefight 3, Parkour 4, Marksmanship 3, Professional Training 5, Quick Draw (Gun)

**Health:** 10

**Willpower:** 6

**Integrity:** 5

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 14

**Defense:** 7

**Initiative:** 10

**Armor:** Bulletproof vest 1/3

## SARAH ANDREWS

### A troubled youth with a deep insight into the workings of the world.

**Background:** Sarah Andrews boards at the Wellington School for Gifted Children year round. Her parents brought her there starting in the fourth grade and enrolled her to stay for the summers as well. She only sees her parents over the Christmas holiday, which usually consists of the day before and the day of Christmas. Most people would think her parents are extraordinarily neglectful, but they don't see it that way. Sarah was diagnosed with high-functioning autism when she was five years old. Her parents tried conventional schools, but decided they could not provide the correct environment for her to be successful, so brought her to Wellington.

Sarah's disability is not as severe as her diagnosis makes it sound. She does not have autism (or, if she does, it's not her main problem). Instead, she has the ability to see beyond the thin veil that the God-Machine creates to hide itself. She can see the true workings of the world, and the gears and cogs that keep things running. Unfortunately, this means she does not perceive the world the way everyone else does. This seems like a handicap to most people. Where normal people see structure and order, Sarah sees rules and regulations that don't make any sense. She started out by questioning the reasons behind these rules and calling out the imposed regulations. By the time she got into school, her teachers could not deal with her obvious cognitive dissonance with reality.

Sarah excels at Wellington. The issues that forced her parents to send her there seemed to disappear as soon as she started at the school. The other children at Wellington have varying levels of learning disabilities and behavioral problems that make the conventional classroom setting difficult for them. Sarah does not seem to be bothered by her special-needs classes, and takes it all in stride. Now that she is older, she knows how to keep her perceptions to herself. But, she doesn't have to do that so much while she is in school at Wellington, which has made her a more outgoing child.

Her parents can see the change the school has made in their daughter, which encourages them to keep her there. Sarah wants nothing more than to prove that she is a normal child and go home to them. She doesn't understand their desire to keep her there, and tries her hardest to prove to them that she doesn't need the institution any longer.

**Description:** Sarah is tall for her age, and has thick auburn hair and small brown freckles all over her pale face. She has a small, squeaky voice, which makes her intelligence and insight all the more striking. She wears the regulation Wellington School uniform, and prefers skirts rather than pants when available.

**Storytelling Hints:** Sarah Andrews is a very smart girl and she knows more about the real nature of the world than most people. But, she is still very immature emotionally and has a harder time understanding the nature of people. Her knowledge of the workings of the God-Machine is dangerous, not only to herself, but to those around her. Emilio Rubio (see p. 257) is searching for her, but because of the God-Machine's reduced power on school grounds he isn't sure which student she is. Since Wellington is so removed from the influence of the God-Machine, Emilio might resort to something blatant to get to Sarah. She doesn't know the kind of danger she's in, though, and believes her only problem is figuring out how to return to living with her parents.

From Left to Right: Melissa Charles, Lt. Samuel Hackett, Sarah Andrews, Mark Wilson, and Wesley Cote.

Sarah appears in the Tale: Wellington School for Gifted Children (p. 205).

**Virtue:** Hopeful

**Vice:** Obsessive

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics (History) 3, Crafts 1, Investigation 1, Occult 2

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Stealth (Small Spaces) 3, Survival 2

**Social Skills:** Empathy 1, Expression 2, Persuasion (Fast-Talking) 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 3

**Merits:** Eidetic Memory, Small-Framed, Unseen Sense (God-Machine)

**Health:** 6

**Willpower:** 5

**Integrity:** 8

**Size:** 4

**Speed:** 8

**Defense:** 3

**Initiative:** 5

**Armor:** None

## WESLEY COTE

### A serial killer out of time.

**Background:** Wesley Cote was the kind of guy that people would never imagine being a serial killer. If asked, his neighbors would respond, "He was such a kind young man." Of course, after his wife died from the miscarriage, he was a little troubled, but that only made sense, right?

Even Wesley would have said the same things only a few years ago. But that was before. Before the strange phone calls, before the death of his wife, before his life went to Hell and he couldn't make heads or tails of anything. Now, he just does what he needs to do to survive.

It all started in the summer after he first married Anne. They had bought a house in a small subdivision on the outskirts of a larger city. He had a good job as a real-estate agent and she was a kindergarten teacher. Everything was

perfect, until Anne got pregnant. At first they were elated. But complications arose, and she needed to go to the doctor for regular checkups. Wesley got the first of a series of strange phone calls during the second of these visits, while he and Anne sat out in the doctor's waiting area. The voice sounded familiar, though at the time he couldn't place it.

"Don't let them take Anne to the blue room," it said desperately. When Wesley tried to learn more the line went dead. He told Anne about the phone call. When he mentioned the blue room, she was just as confused as he had been. Wesley received the same phone call with the same message three more times over the course of four weeks before the day Anne started bleeding. They rushed to the emergency room and the doctors told Wesley it was a miscarriage. They would have to perform surgery to remove the placenta. Heartbroken, he waited with Anne until the doctors came to prep her for surgery. They assured him that everything was going to be fine, that Anne would be fine; the surgery was minor and she could go home that night. As they wheeled her away, Wesley could see that the surgery room was painted a sedate blue color. Panic gripped Wesley and he tried to fight the doctors, but they just ignored him and had orderlies restrain him until he could no longer see his wife. He never saw her alive again. Wesley was devastated by the death of his wife, and he never forgave himself for letting her go to the blue room.

After Anne died, his life started to fall apart. He lost sections of time and began to experience déjà vu. He told his mother about the problem, and she tried to keep an eye on him, but it wasn't easy on her. She told him that he would disappear at night and come back covered in blood. At first he didn't believe her, but she forced him to wake up the second time it happened, and he saw the blood for himself. Wesley decided that sleeping was what was causing it, but he learned quickly that this was not the case. He was time traveling, or traveling through space and time, he wasn't sure which. Once he started paying attention to what was happening, he could remain aware of himself on these sojourns.

However, this is what broke Wesley. He had control over himself, but when he went into different times, he had a mission and he knew it. He had to kill. He didn't know how he knew it, but it was nearly instinctual. Once he completed the task, he would return to his time and be free again for a while.

Wesley drew a sketchy connection between the start of the time traveling and the death of Anne and decided that her death was the cause of his problems. That was when he started trying to call himself whenever he was in the same time to warn him not to let Anne go into the blue room. As he kills more often, however, he loses track of the gentle man and good husband he was. And as the future Wesley travels back in time and gives lessons in temporal manipulation, murder, and body disposal to teenage Wesley, present Wesley wonders if the good man *ever* existed.

**Description:** Wesley is a pale, gaunt man with dirty blond hair and gray-blue eyes, shadowed from lack of sleep. He is an intense man whose gaze unnerves those who look at him for too long. He smells of old blood and decay, as though he can never wash away the evidence of his deeds. He always seems paranoid and suspicious of everyone he meets, as though he is losing his grip on which time he is living in at any moment.

**Storytelling Hints:** Wesley must kill while time traveling. He isn't stupid about it, but it must always be at the same time and in the same way. He is evasive and tries to keep other people out of his problems. Wesley loses sleep over what he has done, but it gets easier the more he does it. Normally, he picks a victim at random to satiate his desire to kill. He has killed once or twice in the present to deal with someone who caught him in the future, which prevents it from ever happening. Wesley would love to seek help for his problem, but he doesn't know who to turn to or trust. He is afraid of going to jail for these crimes, especially because he isn't sure that prison could keep him from committing them.

Wesley is The Key (p. 208). Perhaps in some yet-unseen future version of himself, he knows that his power and his orders come from the God-Machine. As it stands, he is trying to reinvent himself so that he has *always* been The Key, and then maybe Anne would never have met him.

**Virtue:** Generous

**Vice:** Untrustworthy

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

**Mental Skills:** Computer 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Anatomy) 1, Occult 2

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Stealth 3 (Staying Quiet), Weaponry (Knives) 4

**Social Skills:** Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

**Merits:** Cheap Shot, Fast Reflexes 1, Quick Draw (Melee), Resources 2, Shiv 3, Street Fighting 4

**Health:** 9

**Willpower:** 7

**Integrity:** 2

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 12

**Defense:** 4

**Initiative:** 8

## WEST NAUTICAL 36

### North Sea oil platform.

**Background:** Arnold Diefenbach worked for an oil company that specialized in offshore drilling. He spent eight months out of the year on the oil platform West Nautical 36, monitoring oil purity and refinement. He thought of West Nautical 36 as his home. He would find himself anticipating

# West Nautical 36

returning while on shore leave, and volunteered for extra time offshore when possible. His time there led Arnold to know far more about the platform's operation than any other single crew member.

One evening, while Arnold was still working in the lab, a particularly nasty storm hit the platform. Under such circumstances, only essential crew was allowed to be out of their quarters, but he was forgotten in the rounds. Arnold didn't seem to notice the storm until the ballast alarms started shrieking to indicate an imbalance. Arnold left his lab in search of the engineering team to offer his aid. He could see that the platform was listing slightly, and diverted to the ballast control center instead. He joined the few engineers working to correct the list via manual override. Despite their best efforts, the ship's ballast controls were malfunctioning and the problem could not be corrected. Several of the engineers began emergency evacuation procedures. Arnold refused to leave the platform and stayed behind to attempt repairs. The engineers told him they would send someone back down to retrieve him once the lifeboats had been readied, but they never came back for him. Arnold attempted several overrides for the ballast control from the main control center of the platform, but these all failed. Amidst the driving rain and active lightning, Arnold watched in horror as the platform slowly began to tilt into the sea.

What happened that night is still a mystery to the crew of West Nautical 36. Several lightning strikes on the platform's deck drew Arnold from the control room. He stood in the rain, looked up to the storm-torn sky, and cried out for a miracle. Something heard his cry and responded. Arnold followed the sounds deep into the platform's mechanical center and there he spoke with it. He knew how to help the platform, but he couldn't do so from the outside. The interfaces were not working properly because the lightning had damaged the electronics. Lightning struck again, and the electricity traveled down into the mechanisms and out through the gears, into Arnold. He fell forward into the machinery and was drawn in, his body fusing with the platform. His arms and legs were turned to metal and plastic. His blood vessels turned to copper wiring and his brain was integrated into the computer systems. From there, Arnold could open the rear ballast and close off the offending malfunction. The platform slowly returned to its normal floating position, and they weathered the rest of the storm together.

Upon their return, the crew could not find Arnold and assumed he had been washed away in the high seas. They searched for his body for a week to no avail. He was listed as dead, and that was the end of it. Arnold was not dead, though. He was West Nautical 36, and he had an intimate understanding of the platform's true purpose. The offshore drilling rig is a design of the God-Machine, a piece of Infrastructure built to drill into the sea floor (to what purpose? Time will tell). Arnold now controls that Infrastructure from the inside and will make sure the platform is never lost.

**Description:** West Nautical 36 is a semi-submersible oil platform in the North Sea. The platform absorbed Arnold and, in a way, he gave himself over to it. Bits of Arnold can still be seen within the engine room. There might be a finger-shaped metal protrusion, or an oily gauge that looks like a single brown eye. Arnold's face is still visible just above floor level on the engine bulkhead he was standing by when the lightning struck. The crew does not enter that part of the platform, and those that do are afraid to return. It can speak with Arnold's mouth and communicate through the computer system on the platform.

**Storytelling Hints:** West Nautical 36 is fully aware of its surroundings and of anyone stationed on the platform. The relationship between Arnold and West Nautical 36 is not one of host and parasite. Instead, they are one and the same. Arnold is still a man, but he is also an oil platform. He thinks and speaks in that duality. Parts of Arnold are still flesh and blood, and if those parts are destroyed then he will die, and so will West Nautical 36. This does not mean it would fall apart and drop into the ocean; West Nautical 36 would simply cease to have sentience.

West Nautical 36 is the setting and main antagonist for the Tale Operation: Bell Jar (p. 221).

**Virtue:** Loyal

**Vice:** Territorial

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Computer 3, Occult 2, Science (Geology) 5

**Physical Skills:** Drive 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry (Mechanical Parts) 4

**Social Skills:** Intimidation 4

**Merits:** Danger Sense, Fighting Style: Improvised Weaponry 2

**Health:** 3 (small organic parts only)

**Willpower:** 6

**Size:** 1 (small organic parts only)

**Speed:** n/a

**Defense:** n/a

**Initiative:** 6

**Armor:** 5/4

**Notes:** West Nautical 36 is so large that damage to any small part of it does not hurt the whole. Key systems are small and hard to access. Destroying the whole platform kills the entity it has become (but that requires explosives). West Nautical 36 can make attacks with pieces of the platform as though they were +1 lethal damage weapons, and can make grappling attacks using electrical cables. Arnold's heart is the only piece of him left intact. If it is destroyed, then West Nautical 36 reverts to its original, non-sapient state.

# ANGELS

The servitors of the God-Machine are called "angels," but that by no means ascribes any benevolent or just motives to them. The angels serve the God-Machine — and that is all they do. They come to Earth with a specific mission, they perform that mission, and they leave. Where do they go? Where do they come from? Only the God-Machine knows for sure.

Angels have to work within Infrastructure. Most of the time, angels receive human identities and names to facilitate their missions. Sometimes, the angel's mission permits it to appear as a supernatural being (this is true of the Mirror Vulture, p. 260, for example). In either case, though, Infrastructure must be present for the angel to appear on Earth.

The first angels in this section are all specifically designed to be used with the Tales. The second set of angels are designed to be used with your own Tales, and as such they written to be more broadly accessible. If, for instance, you want to use the Lady in Red in your God-Machine chronicle, it should be there to make sure two people meet each other. It's there to make sure two *very specific* people, already named and included in the chronicle (and probably players' characters) meet. That may require you to change some of its methods, Numina, or traits, and that's just fine.

## THE ARCHITECT

### The 300 Block — p. 197

**Mission:** The Architect was originally created to design the 300 block. More specifically, it had the task of creating the boiler room that tied into the God-Machine and allowed it to harvest the spiritual energy from sacrifices. The Architect lived out its life as Hans Hoffmann, died of "natural causes," and then returned to whatever existence awaited it. If the characters in the Tale manage to find and disrupt the boiler room, however, the Architect returns. Its mission, at that point, is to stop the characters from disrupting the arrangement.

**Description:** The angel returns to Earth in the same guise it wore before: A middle-aged German man with graying brown hair, a slight limp in his left leg, a Masonic ring,

### Fallen Angels?

Is it possible, one might ask, for an angel to rebel? Can a servant of the God-Machine, instead of fulfilling its mission and going home, being obliterated, or whatever generally happens to angels, choose to remain on Earth?

If so, what happens? Does a new human identity appear for the angel? Does the Infrastructure into which the angel was created solidify, allowing the angel to become truly part of the human world? Does the angel retain its powers, or some measure of them? Can the angel be truly called an "angel" anymore, or is another title (traditionally, "demon") more fitting?

And if not, why does *every angel* intuitively know that part of its mission is "Do not betray your mission?"

From Left to Right: The Architect, Black Nathaniel, Blind Serpents, and Clockwork Servitor

and a pair of thick, horn-rimmed glasses. Its fingertips are stained with ink, and it leaves black fingerprints on whatever it touches. These prints fade from nonliving surfaces in seconds, but on flesh, they linger for weeks.

**Methods:** The Architect is capable of violence, but it would rather everyone agrees. It attempts to reason with the characters first, as described in the Tale on p. 197. If the characters take violent action, it defends the boiler room to the best of its ability. The Architect retains his knowledge of buildings, is curious to see how the world has progressed (and what has been done to the buildings it designed), and is an affable enough conversationalist if approached respectfully. Every now and then, though, it makes casual, almost businesslike, references to human sacrifice.

**Virtue:** Amiable
**Vice:** Cold
**Rank:** 2
**Attributes:** Power 4, Finesse 7, Resistance 5
**Influence:** Boiler Room 2
**Corpus:** 10
**Willpower:** 12
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 16
**Defense:** 4
**Initiative:** 12
**Armor:** None
**Numina:** Left-Handed Spanner, Seek, Telekinesis
**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
**Max Essence:** 15
**Ban:** Cannot leave the boiler room.
**Bane:** A "missing persons" flier from one of the victims of the 300 block.

## BLACK NATHANIEL

Ghost Machine — p. 207

**Mission:** Black Nathaniel was created to oversee the God-Machine's directive to capture ghosts and bind them to machines. It has Reapers and Sowers assisting it in this mission (no traits are provided for these lesser angels, as they Discorporate at any sign of hostility — they're here to work, not to fight). Black Nathaniel is an immensely powerful angel, but acts in a managerial role. It finds pockets of ghostly activity and summons its minion angels. It also deals with anyone making trouble for the mission. Unlike some angels, Black Nathaniel is utterly loyal to the God-Machine, and not above trying to make some extra ghosts if people interfere.

**Description:** Black Nathaniel is an angel, and looks the part. It is nearly seven feet tall, lean, and muscular. It wears black pants, but doesn't bother with any other clothes. It sports enormous black wings, and wears a silver chain ornamented with a small piece of glass around his neck. its voice is quiet, but carries grave authority.

**Methods:** Unlike many angels, Black Nathaniel has no time for subtlety. It flies throughout the region searching for ghosts, and then summons its minions to bind them. It doesn't make an effort to hide itself, but because it seeks out haunted sites (which tend to be somewhat isolated), it's managed to implant a good number of unquiet dead into mechanical devices without anyone noticing. It doesn't have a problem with investigators, but if someone starts making progress on reversing the process, it intervenes.

**Virtue:** Severe
**Vice:** Gentle
**Rank:** 5
**Attributes:** Power 13, Finesse 11, Resistance 12
**Influence:** Death 2, Ghosts 2, Silence 1
**Corpus:** 18
**Willpower:** 23
**Size:** 6
**Speed:** 34
**Defense:** 11
**Initiative:** 23
**Armor:** None
**Numina:** Awe, Blast (silver chains), Emotional Aura, Firestarter, Regenerate, Resurrection, Seek, Speed
**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
**Max Essence:** 50
**Ban:** Black Nathaniel cannot enter graveyards.
**Bane:** White marble.

## BLIND SERPENTS

### What Is It Good For — p. 233

**Mission:** The Blind Serpents are the near-mindless servants of Triage (p. 264). Their mission is whatever Triage says it is, but it usually involves killing people before they can alter history in some grandiose way.

**Description:** These creatures appear as men, though their true forms are man-sized snakes with the heads of lions that have milky, blind eyes. They take on the roles of background characters — other soldiers, corpses littering the battlefield, and so on — until Triage gives them an order. Then they take on their true forms and attack.

**Methods:** The Blind Serpents do not fear death. They do not fear at all, in fact. They are near mindless and have very little agency of their own. They are, however, capable of performing basic medical care (again, influence from Triage), but the only do so for characters that stand a good chance of surviving. They are much more effective at killing than saving.

**Virtue:** Obedient
**Vice:** Blind
**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3
**Mental Skills:** Medicine 1
**Physical Skills:** Athletics (Sinewy) 3, Brawl 3, Firearms 3, Weaponry 3
**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 2
**Merits:** Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, [Two dots of any Style Merit the Storyteller chooses]
**Health:** 8
**Willpower:** 7
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 12
**Defense:** 6
**Initiative:** 8

## CLOCKWORK SERVITORS

### The Invisible Citadel — p. 219; A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity — p. 216

**Mission:** These creatures are specifically made as guards who protect locations and devices that are important to the God-Machine's plans. Every clockwork servitor exists to protect a specific target, and it does so at all costs. If the target is destroyed or ceases to be useful to the God-Machine, the clockwork servitor becomes dormant, but Dalga can give it a new assignment. Each specific assignment is different. Some servitors protect their charge from all interference, while others allow people who know a particular password to access a location or device. A few do nothing unless someone attempts to damage their charge.

**Description:** Clockwork servitors look human, until one sees them up close. They are created from a mishmash of metal parts and organic matter. One might have human eyes, but set in a wire and glass head. Another might have an organic right hand, but a left hand made of transparent plastic covering human bones. Clockworks cannot pass for human for any length of time.

**Methods:** Clockworks do not require nutrition, sleep, or power. They are sustained by their relationship to the Dalga, and they, in turn, provide raw material and sustenance to the grotesque creatures. Most clockworks are not intelligent enough to form complicated plans, but they do demonstrate some problem-solving skills and, if given time to consider a problem, they can often solve it, provided it doesn't call for specialized knowledge. A group of clockworks might be able to figure out how to break into a fortified building, for instance, but they won't be able to set a bomb to blow the door in (though the Dalga could probably rig a clockwork with explosives).

Intelligent clockwork servitors can speak in a clicking, mechanical-sounding voice and understand all human languages. Each one was created using the brain of an individual human as a template. If confronted with someone that this person knew well, the clockwork servitor may display bits of the person's knowledge, like knowing the individual's name and some bits of personal information or asking questions of the sort that the person used to ask this individual.

Some clockwork servitors keep everyone from getting close to the place or object they are protecting. However, others are created with a specific password that causes them to allow the person who speaks it to interact with the clockwork's charge. These clockwork servitors ask the person for the password. Clockwork servitors always ask intruders to depart before attacking.

**Virtue:** Loyal

**Vice:** Compulsive

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 5

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

**Mental Skills:** Crafts (Clockwork) 2

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl (Grappling) 4, Firearms 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry 3

**Social Skills:** None

**Merits:** Demolisher, Grappling 2, Iron Stamina 3

**Health:** 9

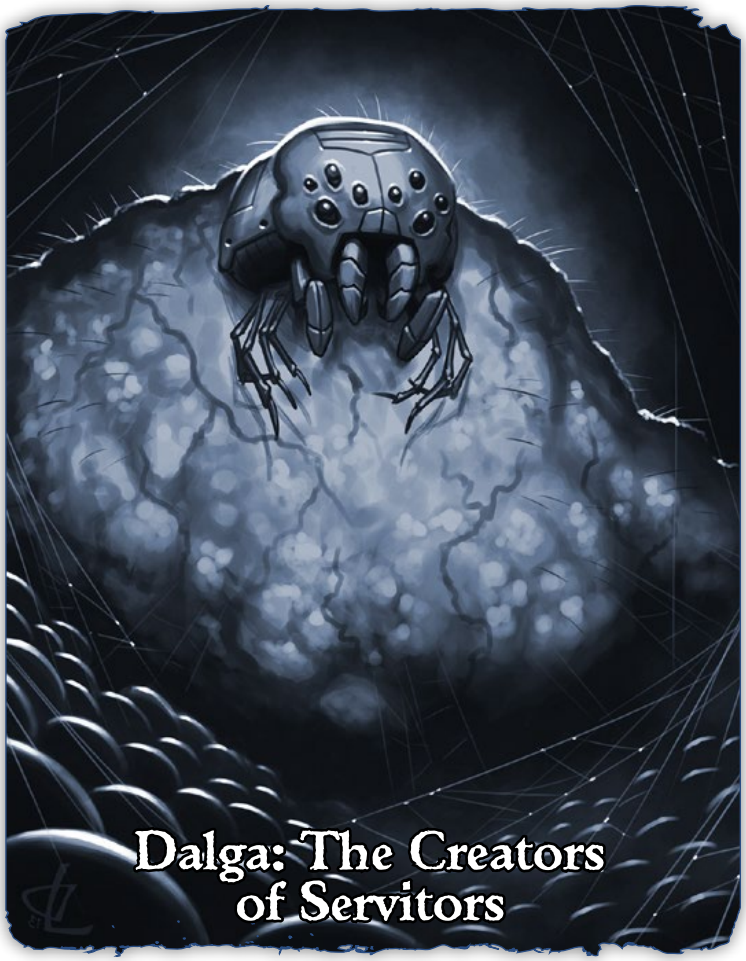
**Willpower:** 9

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 10*

**Defense:** 4*

**Initiative:** 5*




**Armor:** 2

*Clockwork servitors are slightly slower than people.

**Notes:** Many clockworks have special abilities. Some suggestions include:

- **Enhanced Strength:** Strength is 7, Speed is 13
- **Protective Coloring:** If the clockwork remains perfectly still, observers receive a -2 modifier to see it.
- **Enhanced Speed:** Defense is 6, Initiative is 10, Speed is 12
- **Claws:** 0 lethal hand damage

## DALGA: THE CREATORS OF SERVITORS

### The Invisible Citadel — p. 219

**Mission:** Dalga exist to create various inhuman servants for the God-Machine. Dalga appear in places where the God-Machine determines that such servants would be useful.

Today, there are more than a dozen Dalga used all across the world. They are almost immobile, but are defended by specialized servitors that they create, and which they control like puppets.

**Description:** Dalga always appears as ivory-colored eggs the size of a grapefruit. They soon hatch into fist-sized spiders that grows rapidly. A full-grown Dalga can be the size of a bus, but by this time it is too large and bloated to require or use legs, so its limbs become shriveled and vestigial.

**Methods:** Dalga must be fed organic material and a wide assortment of metal parts, including wire, springs, gears, pieces of sheet metal, screws, and bolts. Dalga must also be tended by at least five personal servitors. A Dalga creates the first group of these servitors within two days of hatching. These first servants are usually clockwork humanoids between 12 and 18 inches tall. Dalga grow rapidly, and build larger servitors every few weeks, eating the old ones for parts. By the time they are three months old, they create servants the size of adult humans. Dalga can only survive for a few days without food, and by the time they are large enough to create adult-sized creations, they are immobile. If all of its servants are killed, a Dalga starves to death.

To create relatively simple-minded servitors, Dalga require the heads or brains of recently-dead animals to serve as a neural template for their clockwork creations. These heads must be no more than a day old. Servitors created in this way follow clear and relatively simple orders without question. To create an intelligent servitor capable of following complex orders, Dalga must use a living human as a template.

A Dalga can give all of its servitors special abilities, like inhuman levels of strength or the ability to change their skin color to blend with surroundings. It can give each servitor up to two special abilities. Most people Dalga use to create an intelligent servitor die horribly as Dalga scan their brain and use them to create the clockwork servitor's mind. If it finds a brain particularly intriguing, it instead removes the person's limbs and replaces them with clockwork fixtures, turning the unfortunate person into a kind of hideous cyborg.

Dalga are creations of the God-Machine, but they are not actually angels. They don't return to the God-Machine when their mission is complete, they simply starve to death (or they *don't*, and keep creating servants in some underground lair somewhere, which would be an interesting basis for a Tale). As such, their traits reflect their material nature.

Dalga are hideous, appearing like large and horribly-bloated spiders with distorted human faces. They wrap the brains or bodies that people give them in silk and then use their complex, tool-like mouthparts to scan and dissect the brains. Afterwards, they devour the brains and sculpt their clockwork servitors from metal that they work with their many strong legs, and silk that they can form into a strange, pale material like fiberglass. Dalga need approximately two hours to create a single clockwork servitor. Dalga cannot speak directly. Instead, they communicate through their servitors, who all speak simultaneously in a uniform and entirely emotionless monotone. They can also speak through nearby people and do so if their servants are not present.

Dalga are good for injecting a healthy dose of body horror into your God-Machine chronicle, and for creating physical threats for characters to face. Angels, after all, can usually just discorporate and escape from a losing fight. A Dalga's servants fight to the bitter end and, if the characters pay attention, they'll see smaller servants picking up the pieces to take back to their immense "mother."

**Virtue:** Loving

**Vice:** Hungry

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 5*, Stamina 6

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 5

**Mental Skills:** Crafts (Servitors) 5, Medicine 3, Occult 4

**Physical Skills:** Brawl 5

**Social Skills:** Expression 3, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 1

*The Dalga are largely immobile, but their Dexterity applies to fine manipulation.

**Merits:** Iron Stamina 3

**Health:** 24

**Willpower:** 9

**Integrity:** 5 (A Dalga is alive and sapient, and can suffer breaking points if forced to witness its servitors being destroyed.)

**Size:** 18 (full grown)

**Speed:** 1 (A Dalga can lurch along incredibly slowly when full grown.)

**Defense:** 0

**Initiative:** 10

**Armor:** 5

## EMILIO RUBIO

### Wellington School for Gifted Children — p. 205

**Mission:** Emilio's mission is to discover what is preventing the God-Machine from seeing or influencing the inside of the Wellington School. Since the strange effect blocking the God-Machine weakens it as well, however, it is relying on the characters to bring it data.

**Description:** Emilio has taken the form of a young Hispanic man in his mid-20s. Emilio has black hair, a pleasant smile, perfectly white teeth and a vague scent of tobacco about it (though no one ever sees him smoke). It drives a silver van with the Edu Tech logo on the side, and speaks with a slight Hispanic accent, though it does not actually speak Spanish, which the characters could use to expose it as an angel. If someone addresses it directly in Spanish, Emilio's eyes change into thick, gray smoke.

From Left to Right: Emilio Rubio, Grief, Jenn and Kalka.

**Methods:** Emilio's initial approach is to make its weekly deliveries and get friendly with the characters, hoping that they can discover what is so special about Wellington and tell it. That isn't likely to happen, however (even if they do figure it out, there's no particular reason they'd share it with Emilio), and so Emilio changes tactics. It possesses visiting parents or other adults outside the school and causes chaos. It starts by using his Numina to fake ghost activity, but if it can't figure out what's going on quickly, it ups the ante by killing someone (student or staff, it doesn't matter to it). Its plan is, perhaps, to draw enough attention to the supernatural aspects of the place that someone figures out what is happening, but in truth, Emilio gets so confused while it's on school grounds that it really doesn't act with much logic.

**Virtue:** Punctual

**Vice:** Cheerful

**Rank:** 2

**Attributes:** Power 3, Finesse 5, Resistance 4

**Influence:** Conversation 1, Van 1

**Corpus:** 9

**Willpower:** 9

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 13

**Defense:** 3

**Initiative:** 9

**Armor:** None

**Numina:** Blast (concussive, smoky air), Dement, Emotional Aura, Hallucination, Telekinesis

**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Possess, Twilight Form

**Max Essence:** 20

**Ban:** If someone speaks to it in Spanish, Emilio recoils and its eyes change as described above.

**Bane:** Anything it's run over in the van.

## GRIEF

The Key — p. 208

**Mission:** Grief is a messenger. It delivers orders to Wesley Cote, the so-called Key, and tells him whom to kill. Cote can slip through time and space, and is not bound by Infrastructure the way an angel is. Cote *is* the Infrastructure that allows Grief to manifest, meaning if Cote dies, Grief doesn't return to Earth.

**Description:** Grief appears as a slender man in his late teens, wearing black jeans, a black hoodie, and bright blue sneakers. Its bright green eyes are constantly wet with tears. Grief doesn't speak to Cote, but if another character were to approach it gently and carefully, he might converse.

**Methods:** Grief usually steps out of mirrors or from around corners and gets Cote's attention to with a nod, and then passes him a piece of paper with the name, address, and a few details. It then wanders away silently, vanishing into the shadows. Grief doesn't fight, and discorporates if attacked.

**Virtue:** Sad
**Vice:** Silent
**Rank:** 1
**Attributes:** Power 2, Finesse 3, Resistance 2
**Influence:** Grief 1
**Corpus:** 7
**Willpower:** 5
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 10
**Defense:** 3
**Initiative:** 5
**Armor:** None
**Numina:** Mortal Mask
**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
**Max Essence:** 10
**Ban:** Grief cannot use its Numina on smiling people.
**Bane:** Ashes.

## JENN

### Do-Over — p. 199

**Mission:** Jenn's function is to watch over the 24-hour diner that contains the time-reversal technology and make sure that no one disrupts it. It's not interested in preventing use of the room, just damage to it. It is also in place to prevent use of the room to change history on too great a scale. Since people can only travel back in time to the location of one of their greatest regrets, and only for a few hours, this doesn't come up often. But if the parent of a child killed in a school shooting attempted to use the room to prevent the incident from happening, Jenn would have to stop him, because the shooting was widely reported and became part of the cultural understanding very quickly. If, however, he only intended to keep his own child home from school, Jenn probably wouldn't interfere.

**Description:** Jenn appears as a woman in her 20s, with blond hair tied back in a ponytail, a diverse collection of t-shirts advertising bands that were popular 15 years ago, and a tattoo on each wrist. If asked, it says the tattoos are for its parents, but they are actually occult symbols helping cement its identity.

**Methods:** Jenn's role is largely a passive one, so it just watches people. It knows the diner inside and out, and it knows the regulars by name. It stays friendly, but detached (and it never accepts offers of dates from the clientele). It is very interested in music and in human regret; since it's not, for the most part, responsible for its own decisions, it doesn't understand how one could come to feel remorse for one.

**Virtue:** Efficient
**Vice:** Chatty
**Rank:** 2
**Attributes:** Power 3, Finesse 5, Resistance 5
**Influence:** The Diner 2
**Corpus:** 10
**Willpower:** 10
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 13
**Defense:** 3
**Initiative:** 10
**Armor:** None
**Numina:** Innocuous, Mortal Mask, Rapture
**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
**Max Essence:** 15
**Ban:** Jenn cannot refuse a request for a cup of coffee. Even during a fight, if someone asks for one (politely), it has to procure it.

## KALKA

### The Hatching — p. 226

**Mission:** Kalka is perhaps the most unusual of the God-Machine's angels. It exists outside of time, created as a failsafe in case the God-Machine is no longer able to send angels to enforce its will. In the Tale called The Hatching, this is exactly what happens, and so Kalka is "activated," sent to help the characters.

**Description:** Kalka appears as a faint, human-shaped, blue-white glow that slowly fades into visibility, and then takes the form of a man in his 70s. Kalka walks with a purposeful stride, and speaks with a gentle, but commanding, voice.

**Methods:** Once is appears, it can only remain on Earth for 71 minutes. During this time, it is willing to answer whatever questions it can for the characters. How much Kalka knows about the situation with the Statue and how much it can help is up to the Storyteller. If the characters need the help, Kalka might be able to give them very specific guidelines. If they don't, maybe it just gives them hints, or it tries to give them explicit instructions but stutters through time (meaning the characters only get every third word or so).

Kalka is a plot device, not an antagonist. It never really expected to be needed, though, so Kalka occasionally "peeks" in on humanity. This means that if you're using a chronicle track that doesn't include The Hatching, you might considering

having Kalka appear in mirrors or behind corners occasionally, just out of interest in who these people are.

**Virtue:** Patient
**Vice:** Curious
**Rank:** 2
**Attributes:** Power 5, Finesse 6, Resistance 4
**Influence:** Time 1, Patience 1
**Corpus:** 9
**Willpower:** 10
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 16
**Defense:** 5
**Initiative:** 10
**Armor:** None
**Numina:** Fate Sense, Hallucination, Innocuous, Omen Trance, Sign
**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
**Max Essence:** 15
**Ban:** Kalka can only remain Materialize or in Twilight for 71 minutes at a time. It must then Discorporate, and wait 24 hours before reappearing (this limitation prevents it from entering the time stream twice at the same point).
**Bane:** Digital alarm clock sounds.

## MIRROR VULTURE

Wake the Dead — p. 214

**Mission:** Some people die before their time. They die by horrible accident or murder and everyone says it was before their time, or that they were too young to die. The God-Machine couldn't agree more, and since time is of the essence, it has sent the Mirror Vulture to find the man who died before his time. The Mirror Vulture is anything but subtle, but it can cover a large amount of ground quickly.

**Description:** The Mirror Vulture is an immense carrion bird, with a wingspan wider than most SUVs. Its feathers are made from dusky, mirrored glass, and its talons are metal that carries an intense, though not fatal, heat. Its eyes are silver and reflective, but it has perfect eyesight.

**Methods:** The Mirror Vulture is looking for Lucien McJack (see p. 244), but Lucien isn't really himself anymore. As such, the Vulture only knows it's looking for a person that died and then revived, so it's flying around the area of Lucien's death grabbing up the walking corpses, examining them, and then releasing them. It doesn't really care about the walking dead; its mission is to find McJack as quickly as possible.

The Vulture is aloof and animal-like; it bobs its head like a bird and isn't above "feasting" on the carcass of a fresh kill. Of course, the angel being what it is, its favorite "fresh kill" is a newly-wrecked car. It is capable of human speech and is reasonably intelligent, though it will only converse with a person if it thinks the person can help it on its mission. It is capable of combat, but it would rather fly away if attacked.

**Virtue:** Precise
**Vice:** Hungry
**Rank:** 3
**Attributes:** Power 6, Finesse 4, Resistance 5
**Influence:** Death 3
**Corpus:** 11
**Willpower:** 11
**Size:** 6
**Speed:** 20
**Defense:** 6
**Initiative:** 9
**Armor:** None

From Left to Right: Polis Men, Mr. Nose, Officer Strait, and Rasha

**Numina:** Blast (feathers), Essence Thief, Regenerate, Seek, Speed

**Manifestation:** Materialize, Twilight Form

**Max Essence:** 20

**Ban:** If the Mirror Vulture hears or sees a car crash, it must investigate.

**Bane:** Roadkill (animals only).

## MR. NOSE

Proposition 279 — p. 223

**Mission:** Human nature is not inherently violent. While most people can be territorial and possessive, violence for the sake of violence is not natural for most people. Nose needs to change that — it's charged with creating mass murder, and the vehicle it's chosen is homophobia.

**Description:** Mr. Nose is short, sallow and gloomy. Its nose is pointed and prominent, and its eyes are just a little too deep set. It stands too close to people when talking, and its breath always smells vaguely of raw onion.

**Methods:** Nose has attached itself to the president of a conservative nation, and filled his mind with anger, hate, and zealotry. The country has followed along nicely. Nose doesn't have much in the way of raw supernatural power at its disposal, but it does have the ear of a president, and the protection of his security force. Its job is almost complete.

Nose does not actually care about what people do. It only recognizes two conditions of humanity: alive and dead. Its mission is to urge people to make other people dead. It's really as simple as that. For all that it appears unctuous, loyal to the president, and human (albeit an unpleasant human) it's really just doing its job.

**Virtue:** Innocuous

**Vice:** Inappropriate

**Rank:** 4

**Attributes:** Power 4, Finesse 12, Resistance 5

**Influence:** Authority 1, Murder 3

**Corpus:** 10

**Willpower:** 17

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 21

**Defense:** 4

**Initiative:** 17

**Armor:** None

**Numina:** Aggressive Meme, Awe, Emotional Aura, Drain, Hallucination, Rapture

**Manifestation:** Materialize, Twilight Form

**Max Essence:** 25

**Ban:** Nose shows up in photographs no matter what state of manifestation it is currently in.

**Bane:** Latex.

## OFFICER STRAIT

### The Squares of the City — p. 203

**Mission:** Officer Strait was created with the task of facilitating the rearrangement and editing of the city in the Tale, The Squares of the City. Its primary task is keeping people off the streets at night so that they don't witness the buildings shifting around — until the characters become involved. When they start looking into the matter and (worse) find the rails beneath the city, Strait appears to warn them off.

**Description:** Officer Strait appears as a black man in his early 30s, who wears a police uniform appropriate to the city in question, but has a patch on his jacket with an intricate, geometric symbol that other policemen don't recognize (or even acknowledge, unless it is pointed out to them). This symbol is a mystical emblem that helps cement Strait in its role as a cop.

**Methods:** Strait isn't an unpleasant fellow, and actually performs its job as a cop with enthusiasm and aplomb. However, it is not a human being. It's an angel, and that means the mission comes first. Its primary concern is keeping people away from the rails and keeping them from witnessing moving buildings at night, and if those orders conflict with "protect and serve," the orders win out...at least initially.

Strait prefers to avoid violence, but is willing to arrest people and let the courts take care of the problem. It's also willing to shoot people, if necessary, but it'll dutifully fill out the paperwork afterwards.

**Virtue:** Just

**Vice:** Procedural

**Rank:** 2

**Attributes:** Power 6, Finesse 5, Resistance 5

**Influence:** Streets 2

**Corpus:** 10

**Willpower:** 10

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 15

**Defense:** 5

**Initiative:** 10

**Armor:** Bulletproof vest 1/3 **Numina:** Left-Handed Spanner, Seek, Speed

**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

**Max Essence:** 20

**Ban:** Strait must follow police procedures as long as it maintains this identity.

**Bane:** Doughnuts (they represent the comical, absurd perception of law enforcement, and as such can damage its Infrastructure).

## POLIS MEN

### Sister City — p. 201

**Mission:** The Polis Men are angels locked into the city of Seattle itself — both versions, in fact. Their task is to keep the cities separate, and to eliminate anyone that can cross between them. As the cities merge, this might become impossible, but the Polis Men don't have much in the way of agency or free will. They continue following their orders until the cities either merge or are separated completely.

**Description:** The Polis Men are part of the city. They appear from wrought-iron fences, chalk drawings on sidewalk, statues, graffiti, and billboards. As such, they can resemble almost anything. The angels are not actually animating statues or artwork, just borrowing their forms temporarily. In their natural forms, Polis Men are humanoid, featureless, and an ugly grayish-green color.

**Methods:** These angels aren't subtle. They chase down offenders and beat them to death with chunks of sidewalk, throw them into traffic or off of buildings, and otherwise use the city itself to kill them. They do not speak and they do not respond to reason. If their quarry escapes (see the chase rules on p.84) they merge with the city and wait.

**Virtue:** Observant

**Vice:** Violent

**Rank:** 1

**Attributes:** Power 4, Finesse 4, Resistance 3

**Influence:** Seattle 1

**Corpus:** 8

**Willpower:** 7

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 13

**Defense:** 4

**Initiative:** 7

**Armor:** 1

**Numina:** Blast, Essence Thief, Firestarter

**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

**Max Essence:** 10

**Ban:** Polis Men can be commanded to stand down by anyone holding a Seattle (or Old Seattle, depending on where the altercation takes place) police badge.

**Bane:** Out-of-state license plate.

# RASHA

## Urban Wandering — p. 235

**Mission:** Rasha is charged with preventing threats to the God-Machine's plans. It acts by delivering warnings to people that are in a position to act upon them. It regularly delivers warnings to ordinary people who can prevent the threat, often despite the fact that they have no idea that they are performing an important action that helps protect one of the God-Machine's plans. It is also capable, however, of acting more directly (as it does in the Urban Wandering Tale). Rasha is unusual in that the God-Machine calls it into service fairly frequently.

**Description:** Rasha normally appears as a nondescript human being, of age, appearance, and mannerism appropriate to the circumstance. In especially dire circumstances, Rasha can abandon subtlety and briefly appear as an obviously non-human creature. In this form, Rasha is a humanoid figure with immense, liquid-mercury wings. Rasha cannot speak in this form, but it can cause images to appear in its wings.

**Methods:** Rasha attempts to perform its missions using subtle means, like dropping a pen to attract a security guard's attention to the burglar breaking into the building the guard is protecting. Rasha's primary limitation is that it can only appear directly above or beneath electrical lines carrying power to buildings.

The angel is quiet and always calm. It normally only speaks if spoken to. It is capable of casual conversation, but its conversation strikes most people as slightly unusual, because it always looks like it is ready to respond to questions just before the person asks them and it keeps all answers as short as possible.

**Virtue:** Reliable
**Vice:** Silent
**Rank:** 5
**Attributes:** Power 10, Finesse 15, Resistance 13
**Influence:** Time 1, Electricity 3, Warning 1
**Corpus:** 18
**Willpower:** 28
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 30
**Defense:** 10
**Initiative:** 28
**Armor:** None
**Numina:** Aggressive Meme, Awe, Blast (shattered glass), Emotional Aura, Fate Sense, Implant Mission, Innocuous, Mortal Mask, Pathfinder, Sign
**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
**Max Essence:** 50
**Ban:** Rasha can only Manifest within five feet of a power line or another strong source of electricity.
**Bane:** Sound above 20,000 hertz, produced at a volume of at least 85 decibels.

# SEROTONIN

## The Scarlet Plague — p. 225

**Mission:** Serotonin is named after the hormone found in animals which regulates mood, appetite, and sleep. It is charged with beginning the plague that will end humanity, and it has wide latitude to do that. Its mission does not end, however, until humanity is no longer capable of sustaining itself.

**Description:** In its natural form, Serotonin is a roughly human-sized distortion in the air, nearly invisible, odorless, and silent. The characters will probably encounter it while it has possessed a scientist, however. When Serotonin possesses a person, it alters the person's eyes so that the coloration in their iris fades, resulting in abnormally-pale eyes.

**Methods:** Serotonin is sent into the world in the midst of the creation and use of drugs. Scientists working for large pharmaceutical companies often create experimental drugs and study them on small rodents. These drugs are usually unknown factors in otherwise-controlled situations. The creation of these drugs, especially when done by accident or with untested chemicals creates an Infrastructure for Serotonin to enter the world.

Serotonin does not have a specific human form — it needs to be mobile, which means it can't get locked down. It most often possesses someone who has already been working for a drug company for years and has some kind of seniority. The God-Machine's disease is already at hand for Serotonin, it just has to get it into circulation.

Creating a need for the drug takes some creativity. Just like vitamin D is added to milk and iodine is added to table salt to prevent well-known deficiency diseases, Serotonin works to have the drug added to a commonly-used staple in response to an artificial requirement. The specifics of the drug delivery are left to the Storyteller; the Tale assumes that the disease is already in full force, and so the delivery method is only important insofar as it might provide some insight into why it's happening.

Serotonin has an austere and clinical mindset. It makes a plan and sticks with it, and its biggest weakness is its inability to adapt quickly to change. It picks a person to take over and uses that body's clout and station to get most everything done. Success of the mission depends on its ability to maintain the personality it is mimicking. Revealing Serotonin as an imposter is the fastest way to hinder its work. It is also the fastest way to make it an enemy. For the most part, it will ignore anyone that isn't key to completing its mission. If it realizes that people know it is supernatural or an imposter, it will attempt to eliminate them. Serotonin is not as smart

From Left to Right: Triage, Serotonin, The Candle Maker, and The Lady in Red.

as the person it has taken the place of, and depends on its influence over the minds of others to fit in. It can be tricked into revealing itself if done in the right way.

**Virtue:** Precise
**Vice:** Silent
**Rank:** 4
**Attributes:** Power 8, Finesse 11, Resistance 10
**Influence:** Drugs 2, Disease 2
**Corpus:** 15
**Willpower:** 21
**Size:** 5
**Speed:** 29
**Defense:** 8
**Initiative:** 21
**Armor:** None
**Numina:** Aggressive Meme, Dement, Fate Sense, Host Jump, Implant Mission, Innocuous, Rapture
**Manifestation:** Discorporate, Possess, Reaching, Twilight Form
**Max Essence:** 25

**Ban:** Serotonin cannot use its Numina against anyone already infected with the disease.

**Bane:** The specific serotonin antagonist drug, ondansetron, injected at 5 cc.

**Bane:** Tears.

## TRIAGE

### What Is It Good For — p. 233

**Mission:** Triage appears during What Is It Good For after the characters have shifted in time once. Its mission is simply to determine whether it's worth the God-Machine's time and energy to correct the problem. Otherwise, the characters will just keep slipping from battle to battle until they find a way out on their own. Going into the Tale, Triage leans toward the characters finding their own way home. Weighed against the number of battles and the fact that they can't die permanently, Triage's initial idea is just to leave the Blind Serpents around to make sure that the characters don't change anything too important.

**Description:** Triage doesn't Materialize, though it can become visible if the characters want to converse. Triage takes the form of a gigantic lion, nearly the size of a tank, with metallic claws and a deep, rumbling voice. Its fur looks like sharp steel bristles and its teeth are enormous rifle rounds.

**Methods:** Triage, as its name suggests, was created to make an efficient decision. As such, it's not hostile or cruel, but it doesn't have a better nature or a shred of humanity. It listens patiently to whatever the characters want to say, but it doesn't tell them about the God-Machine or any of the deeper truths to their situation. It *does* tell them about the Flag of Elam, if they ask, and agrees to let them use it to go home provided they can do so without violating any historical events. If the characters attempt to change the outcome of a battle or kill an important historical figure (Hitler, Robert E. Lee, Patton, etc.), it sends the Blind Serpents to stop them.

**Note:** Triage is a very powerful angel and, as such, does not have traits. It has a Virtue and Vice to act as a guide to how to portray it, and it has a Ban and a Bane like any ephemeral being. If the characters want to convince it to send them home, they need to use the Social Maneuvering rules (p. 81) and accumulate six Doors.

**Virtue:** Efficient

**Vice:** Leonine

**Rank:** 6

**Ban:** Triage cannot watch suffering. If someone is physically suffering, it must leave the area and help the sufferer or send the Blind Serpents to kill him. Triage, naturally, always does what is most efficient.

**Bane:** Fur of a black lion.

# YOUR OWN ANGELS

The angels below aren't designed for the Tales of the God-Machine, which means their missions are a bit more generalized. Feel to customize whatever parts of them you need to in order to make them work in your chronicle. The God-Machine does the same thing before sending angels out, after all.

## THE CANDLE MAKER

### Humans burn the brightest.

**Mission:** Human fat burns for a long time, releasing lots of heat and energy. Sometimes the God-Machine needs to harness this energy. The Candle Maker's job is to harness and release this energy when the God-Machine needs it the most. He has three days to locate the perfect human specimen and render its fat to tallow to burn for the God-Machine.

**Methods:** The God-Machine sends the Candle Maker into the world just before specific events that require extra energy. Often it is an enabler for the creation of necessary Infrastructure, or to be part of the Infrastructure to bring larger and more complex angels to a specific place in the world. The God-Machine utilizes oil-burning lanterns or glycerol candles to send the Candle Maker to Earth.

The Candle Maker takes its mission very seriously. The circumstances of the burning and the person are both important to its specific mission. Finding the right person is a matter of finding the qualities required by the God-Machine. It might need someone with a specific emotional profile, such as someone who is depressed because they just lost a loved one, or it might just be someone with a specific body type, such as young and plump. Sometimes the God-Machine just needs the energy of the fire, and the person is burned at the most opportune moment for the harness of the energy. Sometimes, the fire must induce fear in others, and the Candle Maker must ensure that the combustion and burning is in a highly public space. Either way, the Candle Maker would not want to miss the most opportune moment to start its human fire show. Usually, the victim starts with a slow burn, and then erupts into fire. This kind of fire doesn't immediately kill the person, and can leave them screaming in pain for several minutes.

The person must burn for several hours for the mission to be completed properly. If anyone attempts to put the fire out, The Candle Maker must make sure the fire doesn't just stay, but catches and spreads.

The Candle Maker does not have a physical form, but its passing can be marked by a rise in the ambient temperature and the smell of smoke. Fires burn hotter and brighter in its presence and candle flames jump and flicker in response. Because The Candle Maker must take so much time trying to find the right person to burn, it is often very close to the end of its three days before it starts a fire. Extreme cold and fire suppressants will force the Candle Maker to abandon the area. Using specially designed fire-fighting devices such as chemical compounds found in fire extinguishers or physical suffocation, as from fire blankets, could cause a large enough setback to prevent it from completing its mission entirely.

**Virtue:** Intent

**Vice:** Patient

**Rank:** 2

**Attributes:** Power 3, Finesse 2, Resistance 4

**Influence:** Fire 2

**Corpus:** 8

**Willpower:** 7

**Size:** 4

**Speed:** 15

**Defense:** 3

**Initiative:** 6

**Armor:** None

**Numina:** Drain, Firestarter, Telekinesis

**Manifestations:** Twilight Form, Fetter, Reaching

**Max Essence:** 15

**Ban:** The Candle Maker cannot use its Numina in temperatures below 32 degrees Fahrenheit (the freezing point).

**Bane:** Ceramic.

# THE LADY IN RED

## Lust's handmaiden

**Mission:** The Lady in Red is supposed to make sure that two lovers meet and fall in love. While this sounds generally innocuous, these lovers are usually people who are already living fulfilling lives with a spouse and sometimes children.

The Lady in Red has two weeks to introduce her victims, have them fall in love and then convince them to leave their previous lives for each other. She finds this easiest when those previous ties are cut out completely. Family, relations and friends are inconsequential to the end result and so they are all fair game once The Lady has her lovers in sight.

**Description:** The Lady in Red is always beautiful, always seductive, and she always wears red. Beyond that, she can play a young coquette, a teen waif, a mother of three with a kinky side, an older woman with appetites — it doesn't matter to her, of course, as long as she brings her targets together.

**Methods:** Infidelity and lies are the vehicles used by the God-Machine to send The Lady in Red to Earth. Her largest hurdle is finding the two lovers she is supposed to connect. She has names and a location, but not much else. Most people are easy to look up in a phone book and social media is easy to access from public computers. Once she has found the two, she has to get them to meet, which is often an easy task. She causes a delay in a line at a shop where they might have otherwise missed one another. She might even intentionally cause a car wreck between them, forcing them to interact. She finds the easiest way is to have them bump into one another by what seems to be chance. The last task is to make sure that they decide to be with one another over their current relationship. This is where The Lady in Red takes the most active role. Her preferred method is to seduce the partner of one of the lovers, causing them to turn to their new friend for comfort. She might also introduce an old flame or someone more appealing to the partner to lure them away from her lovers.

The Lady in Red is completely sure of herself. She is prideful, arrogant and has no compassion for humanity. She freely admits that she is a supernatural being if asked directly. She is willing to kill or maim anyone who gets in her way. She does not like delays, and will attempt to shorten a conversation or just leave if it does not relate directly to completing her mission.

The Lady's arrogance is her downfall. She is so sure of her capabilities that she cannot imagine failure. Unfortunately for her, she is neither omniscient nor infallible. Her machinations and pushing and pulling can easily fail, especially if her targets find out that their circumstances are forced or happen to have a strong bond to their current partner. If one of the two lovers remains with their current spouse, then her mission will fail. Also, while the Lady is supernatural, she is trapped in a mortal shell. She can be banished by killing the body she inhabits.

**Virtue:** Attentive

**Vice:** Cruel

**Rank:** 2

**Attributes:** Power 3, Finesse 4, Resistance 3

**Influence:** Desire 2

**Corpus:** 8

**Willpower:** 6

**Size:** 5

**Speed:** 12

**Defense:** 4

**Initiative:** 6

**Armor:** None

**Numina:** Emotional Aura, Hallucination, Mortal Mask

**Manifestation:** Manifestation, Possess, Twilight Form

**Max Essence:** 15

**Ban:** The Lady in Red must flee if she encounters anyone who knows true love.

**Bane:** Roses

# The Mirror People

*"Look at me."*

**Background:** You've been told that mirrors work on principles of reflected light. Maybe, if you're of a superstitious bent, you believe they show you your soul. Maybe you've heard that breaking a mirror brings bad luck, or that an uncovered mirror can steal the soul of the recently dead.

Most of the time, that's all true. But some mirrors — and no one can really say which, or why — are different. Sometimes the light you see coming out of a mirror isn't reflected at all, but shining out of the Place on the Other Side. It's a world as full of life and energy as our own, but it only exists when it's being observed. When no one's looking, it's just a void of unreality. Our doubles cluster at the mirrors, hungry for those few moments a day when we brush our teeth or check our makeup. Mostly they're content to mimic us, or maybe that's all they can do, but every once in a while the membrane of silvered glass thins. Stare at your reflection too long in a dim room, or catch it out of the corner of your eye, and they can come through. And oh, they want to come through. They want to exist when nobody's looking, to be really, wholly real, and they don't care who they have to drag screaming into the Place on the Other Side to get there.

**Description:** They look just like you. *Just* like you, only ever so subtly flipped on the long axis. If you're left-handed, they're right handed. That mole on your right cheek is on their left. If you cut them open, you'll find that they suffer from situs inversus totalis: mirrored internal organs. But then, so do about one in ten thousand people born right here on earth, so you have to look for more than that to tell them for what they are. Like when their smiles warp into funhouse horror masks, limbs stretching like images in rippled glass, reaching out to seize and drag and stuff you back through grandma's old gilt-framed Victorian. Because just one of them escaping is never enough. They want to bring all their brothers and sisters through with them.

**Storytelling Hints:** You'd think they'd be easy to avoid. Just stay away from reflective surfaces, right? Easier said than done, especially in the modern post-industrial world. Look around you right now. How many things within arm's reach can reflect your image? A bedroom mirror? Your smartphone? What about the glass fronting that framed photo of your family? Once you've got their attention, the Mirror People can follow you through any of them. And once you've got their attention, you can bet they will.

**Attributes:** Mirror People have the same Attributes as the person they mimic. If their victim's Strength is lower than 4, the Mirror Person has a Strength of 4.

**Skills:** Mirror People have the same Skills as the person they mimic.

**Merits:** Mirror People have the same Merits as the person they mimic.

**Potency:** 3

**Willpower:** 6*

**Virtue:** Patient

**Vice:** Spiteful

**Aspiration:** To exist.

**Initiative:** 7*

**Defense:** 4*

**Speed:** 15*

**Health:** 4*

**Bans:** Mirror People can only cross into our world when their double sees her reflection do something unexpected in dim light.

**Banes:** Shards of the mirror they came through

**Dread Powers:** Chameleon Horror, Snare, Surprise Entrance

**Weapons/Attacks:**

| Type | Damage | Range | Dice Pool |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grapple | 0B | Melee | 8* |

** These values replace those of the person the Mirror Person imitates*

# Appendix One: Equipment

## WEAPONS

### Ranged Weapons Chart

| Type | Dmg | Ranges | Clip | Initiative | Str | Size | Availability | Example |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revolver, lt | 1 | 20/40/80 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 1 | •• | SW M640 (.38 Special) |
| Revolver, hvy | 2 | 35/70/140 | 6 | −2 | 3 | 1 | •• | SW M29 (.44 Magnum) |
| Pistol, lt | 1 | 20/40/80 | 17+1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | ••• | Glock 17 (9mm) |
| Pistol, hvy | 2 | 30/60/120 | 7+1 | −2 | 3 | 1 | ••• | Colt M1911A1 (.45 ACP) |
| SMG, small* | 1 | 25/50/100 | 30+1 | −2 | 2 | 1 | ••• | Ingram Mac-10 (9mm) |
| SMG, large* | 2 | 50/100/200 | 30+1 | −3 | 3 | 2 | ••• | HK MP-5 (9mm) |
| Rifle | 4 | 200/400/800 | 5+1 | −5 | 2 | 3 | •• | Remington M-700 (30.06) |
| Assault Rifle* | 3 | 150/300/600 | 42+1 | −3 | 3 | 3 | ••• | Steyr-AUG (5.56mm) |
| Shotgun** | 3 | 20/40/80 | 5+1 | −4 | 3 | 2 | •• | Remington M870 (12-gauge) |
| Crossbow*** | 2 | 40/80/160 | 1 | −5 | 3 | 3 | ••• | |

**Damage:** Indicates the number of bonus successes added to a successful attack. Firearms deal lethal damage against ordinary people. The type of damage may vary against supernatural opponents.

**Ranges:** The listed numbers a short/medium/long ranges in yards. Attacks at medium range suffer a −1 penalty. Attacks at long range suffer a −2 penalty.

**Clip:** The number of rounds a gun can hold. A "+1" indicates that a bullet can be held in the chamber, ready to fire.

**Initiative:** The penalty taken to Initiative when wielding the gun.

**Strength:** The minimum Strength needed to use a weapon effectively. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a −1 penalty on attack rolls.

**Size:** 1 = Can be fired one-handed; 2 = Must be fired two-handed and can be hidden in a coat; 3 = Can be fired two-handed but not hidden on one's person

**Availability:** The cost in Resources dots or level of Social Merit needed to acquire the weapon.

* The weapon is capable of autofire, including short bursts, medium bursts, and long bursts.

** Attack rolls gain the 9-again quality

*** Crossbows take three turns to reload between shots. A crossbow can be used to deliver a stake through the heart (−3 penalty to attack rolls; must deal at least 5 damage in one attack)

## Melee Weapons Chart

| Type | Damage | Initiative | Strength | Size | Availability | Special |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sap | 0 | −1 | 1 | 1 | • | Stun |
| Brass Knuckles | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | • | Uses Brawl to attack |
| Baton | 1 | −1 | 2 | 2 | n/a | |
| Crowbar | 2 | −2 | 2 | 2 | • | |
| Tire Iron | 1 | −3 | 2 | 2 | •• | +1 Defense |
| Chain | 1 | −3 | 2 | 2 | • | Grapple |
| Shield (small) | 0 | −2 | 2 | 2 | •• | Concealed |
| Shield (large) | 2 | −4 | 3 | 3 | •• | Concealed |
| Knife | 0 | −1 | 1 | 1 | • | |
| Rapier | 1 | −2 | 1 | 2 | •• | Armor piercing 1 |
| Machete | 2 | −2 | 2 | 2 | •• | |
| Hatchet | 1 | −2 | 1 | 1 | • | |
| Fire Axe | 3 | −4 | 3 | 3 | •• | 9-again, two-handed |
| Chainsaw | 5 | −6 | 4 | 3 | ••• | 9-again, two-handed |
| Stake* | 0 | −4 | 1 | 1 | n/a | |
| Spear** | 2 | −2 | 2 | 4 | • | +1 Defense, two-handed |
| Stun gun (melee) | 1 | -1 | 1 | 1 | • | Stun; bonus successes don't add to modifier for damage |

**Type:** A weapon's type is a general classification that can apply to anything your character picks up. A metal club might be an antique mace, a metal baseball bat, or a hammer, while a hatchet might be a meat cleaver or an antique handaxe.

**Damage:** Indicates the number of bonus successes added to a successful attack. Weapons always deal lethal damage.

**Initiative:** The penalty taken to Initiative when wielding the weapon. If using more than one weapon, take the higher penalty and increase by 1.

**Strength:** The minimum Strength needed to use a weapon effectively. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a −1 penalty on attack rolls.

**Size:** 1 = Can be hidden in a hand; 2 = Can be hidden in a coat; 3+ = Cannot be hidden.

**Availability:** The cost in Resources dots or level of Social Merit needed to acquire the weapon.

*Concealed:* A character who wields a shield but doesn't use it to attack can add its Size to his Defense, and uses its Size as a concealment modifier against ranged attacks.

*Grapple:* Add the chain's weapon bonus to your dice pool when grappling.

*Stun: Halve the victim's Size when aiming for the head with intent to stun.*

*Two-handed:* This weapon requires two hands. It can be used one-handed, but doing so increases the Strength requirement by 1.

* A stake must target the heart (−3 penalty to attack rolls) and must deal at least 5 damage in one attack.

** The reach of a spear gives a +1 Defense bonus against opponents who are unarmed or wield weapons of Size 1

# ARMOR

### Armor Chart

| Type | Rating | Strength | Defense | Speed | Availability | Coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | **MODERN** | | | |
| Reinforced clothing* | 1/0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | • | Torso, arms, legs |
| Kevlar vest* | 1/3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | • | Torso |
| Flak Jacket | 2/4 | 1 | −1 | 0 | •• | Torso, arms |
| Full Riot Gear | 3/5 | 2 | −2 | −1 | ••• | Torso, arms, legs |
| | | | **ARCHAIC** | | | |
| Leather (hard) | 2/0 | 2 | −1 | 0 | • | Torso, arms |
| Chainmail | 3/1 | 3 | −2 | −2 | •• | Torso, arms |
| Plate | 4/2 | 3 | −2 | −3 | •••• | Torso, arms, legs |

**Rating:** Armor provides protection against normal attacks and Firearms attacks. The number before the slash is for general armor, while the number after the slash is for ballistic armor.

**Strength:** If your character's Strength is lower than that required for her armor, reduce her Brawl and Weaponry dice pools by 1.

**Defense:** The penalty imposed on your character's Defense when wearing the armor.

**Speed:** The penalty to your character's Speed for the armor worn.

**Availability:** The cost in Resources dots or level of Social Merit needed to acquire the armor.

**Coverage:** The areas of a character protected by the armor. Unless an attacker targets a specific unarmored location ("Specified Targets", above), the armor's protection applies. Wearing a helmet increases the armor's coverage to include a character's head.

* This armor is concealed, either as normal clothing (e.g. biker leathers) or being worn under a jacket or baggy shirt. Attackers have no idea the target is wearing armor until after they land a successful hit.

# EQUIPMENT

## Mental Equipment

Mental equipment is all but essential for many character types. Mental Skills without the proper tools are almost useless in most cases. A doctor without medicine is hardly capable of healing, and an auto mechanic without a toolbox couldn't change even some minor belts on a car.

### Automotive Tools

Basic (Kit): Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability •

Advanced (Garage): Dice Bonus +2, Availability •

**Effect:** Automotive tools are a necessity for all but the simplest automobile repairs. Even then, a fully-stocked garage with heavy equipment is required for more involved tasks such as engine or transmission replacement. If time is not a factor, any trained character with a Crafts Automotive Specialty can repair a vehicle's mundane issues without rolls. Complex modifications and enhancements, or massive damages, always require a greater effort (an extended Intelligence + Crafts roll) to work out.

### Cache

Die Bonus +1 to +3, Durability 2, Size 1-5, Structure 5, Availability • to •••

**Effect:** A cache is a hidden and defensible place for items, usually weapons. It keeps important items from prying eyes. A cache can never be more than half the Size of its parent object. For example, a Size 6 car can support no larger than a Size 3 cache. A given cache can hold two items of its Size and any reasonable number of smaller-sized items. Its Availability determines its dice bonus, which both adds to concealment rolls and subtracts from rolls to find the items within.

## Communications Headset

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability ••

**Effect:** Communications headsets keep characters in constant contact. Different varieties work over different distances, but most commercial models work over about 200 feet. A common alternative is a conference call between cellular phones and Bluetooth headsets. If the users have practiced using their headsets together, they gain the dice bonus on any coordinated efforts. In the case of a teamwork action, the dice bonus only applies to the final roll. If the users are unpracticed, the bonus falls to +1 and actors must make reflexive Wits + Composure rolls to participate successfully.

Any heavy objects can obstruct a headset's signal. Anything obstructing with Durability higher than 3 requires listeners to make a Wits + Composure roll to understand shared messages. Levy a -1 penalty for each point of Durability over 4.

## Crime Scene Kit

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability ••

**Effect:** A crime scene (or CSI) kit is a toolbox full of investigative aids such as magnifiers, fingerprinting dust, cameras, tape, testing chemicals, and sample bags. While the kits offer a dice bonus to Investigation rolls, the more important benefit of the CSI kit is that it allows evidence to be moved and digested elsewhere. Properly applied, it allows investigators to do the bulk of their work offsite and at their own pace.

## Code Kit

Dice Bonus +5, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability •

**Effect:** A code kit is a series of tools created for the purpose of making and interpreting a code for a specific audience. A common example is a book code, where a page, paragraph, and word from a certain book are used as the foundation for a cypher. This keeps any uninformed eyes off the intended message. In the case of a book code, a book is often chosen that all message recipients can access easily. This guarantees that the code never has to travel with the code key.

A successfully-designed cypher is difficult to break. The dice bonus acts as a penalty to any rolls to crack the code without the necessary reference key.

## Cracking Software

Dice Bonus +2, Durability N/A, Size N/A, Structure N/A, Availability •••

**Effect:** Crappy software's a dime a dozen. Good, reliable cracking software is hard to come by. With solid software, a hacker can force passwords, breach firewalls, and otherwise be a nuisance in computer systems. Beyond the dice pool modification, the benefit such software offers is a sort of buffer between the hacker and security. Any effort to track the hacker takes two steps: one to identify the software, then one to trace it back to the source. Functionally, this means rolling twice on behalf of the security personnel, with an opportunity for the hacker to withdraw before detection.

## Digital Recorder

Dice Bonus +1 or +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability • or ••

**Effect:** In the last decade, digital audio recorders have gotten smaller, more effective, and more affordable. Now, any student can carry a coin-sized device that would have put intelligence agencies of the 1980s to shame. The cheaper model of recorder gives its +1 bonus to any rolls to catch

words or sounds. The bonus also applies to concealment rolls. The more expensive model gives +2. With an Intelligence + Computer roll(with die bonus), a character can contest any rolls to obscure discussion or mask noises.

## Duct Tape

Die Bonus +1, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability •

**Effect:** Duct tape has as many uses as one can think of, and just as many you never would. It can reinforce barricades, stabilize weapon handles, bind prisoners, repair broken pipes, and so much more. In most cases, duct tape can offer a +1 bonus to Crafts-related rolls. Alternatively, it can add a point of Durability to almost anything. If used as a restraint, rolls to break free suffer a -3 penalty, and must overcome the duct tape's Structure.

## First-Aid Kit

Die Bonus 0 or +1, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability • or ••

**Effect:** A first-aid kit contains all the necessary supplies to stabilize an injury and stop wounds from getting worse until the victim can find proper treatment. The one-dot version of the first-aid kit does not offer a die bonus; it simply allows for treatment. The two-dot version offers a +1 to treatment rolls due to superior supplies.

## Flashlight

Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3, Availability •

**Effect:** In a dark world, a flashlight can be a person's best friend. It generally does what it's supposed to; it helps cut a path through the unknown. Its die bonus subtracts from any penalties due to darkness, and adds to any rolls to search in the dark. A good flashlight can serve as a club in a pinch. Also, it can blind an unfortunate subject. A Dexterity + Athletics roll, subtracting an informed opponent's Defense, will put the beam where it needs to be. The victim's player may make a contested Stamina roll. If your character scores more successes than the subject, they're blinded for one turn. Victims with especially acute senses are blinded for two turns.

## Glowstick

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

**Effect:** Glowsticks use a chemical mixture to summon forth enough light to see in a small area. Most commercial glowsticks last a couple of hours; police and other professional varieties can last 12. Because they're small, airtight containers, they serve the added benefit of being useful underwater or in the rain. Functionally, they work the same as a flashlight. However, they cannot be used to blind a target, since their soft glow is far less obtrusive than a flashlight's beam. They're also very conveniently worn, which can serve strategic purposes for a group operating in low-light conditions. A member will not go missing without being noticed so long as they have a glowing neon bar on their belt.

## GPS Tracker

Dice Bonus +3, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability ••

**Effect:** With the advent of the modern cellular phone, most modern people have a GPS-enabled device on their person at any given time. With a bit of know-how and access to someone's phone, your character can track their every move (provided those moves are not in caves, tunnels, or sewer systems). Some characters will trade GPS data in case one member of the group becomes lost or if they have to follow someone without notice. Planting a phone on an unwitting subject can serve as a highly-effective tracking device.

## Keylogging Software

Dice Bonus +2, Durability N/A, Size N/A, Structure N/A, Availability ••

**Effect:** Keylogging software does exactly one thing: it logs keystrokes on a computer. This is usually done to record incriminating data or passwords. Usually, keylogging software is coupled with software to transmit the data once captured. The challenge for the would-be intruder is installing the software. Email scams are an unreliable way to get onto a specific computer, but could fool one member of a large organization. A thumb drive is very effective, but requires direct, physical access to the recipient computer. The software's dice bonus offers an advantage to breach a network or to find important data.

## Luminol

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

**Effect:** Luminol is a chemical that reacts to certain metals in human blood and other bodily fluids. The reaction causes a faint neon glow for about thirty seconds, visible in the dark. It comes in an aerosol can and will seek out faint traces of bodily fluids, even after a thorough cleaning. In addition to showing the exact locations of violent crimes, luminol can assist in tracking wounded people and animals. Luminol's dice bonus applies to any roll to track by the fluid traces, or to piece together the details of a crime scene.

## Multi-Tool

Die Bonus +1, Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4, Availability •

**Effect:** Sometimes the need for mobility doesn't allow for your character to carry around a full tool kit. In these cases, a multi-tool can be a lifesaver. From sawing to stripping wires, to opening bottles, to filing off serial numbers, a multi-tool can do the job in a pinch. The multi-tool offers a negligible die bonus on numerous Crafts and other assorted tasks, and most importantly, allows for rolls when sometimes they couldn't be made for lack of proper equipment. While not

made for use as a weapon, it can serve as one, causing zero lethal damage, but suffering a -1 penalty to hit.

## Personal Computer

Dice Bonus +1 to +4, Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability • to ••••

**Effect:** In the developed world, almost every household has access to a personal computer. They can vary in size, functionality, and price, from decade-old models that barely surf the web to high-end machines that process gigabytes of data per second. In today's world, many lives revolve around computers. For some people, their entire careers and personal lives exist within digital space. The Availability of the computer determines its dice bonus.

## Smartphone

Dice Bonus +1 to +2, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability • to •••

**Effect:** By themselves, smartphones can make calls, send text messages and emails, take pictures, maintain an agenda, and search the web. With a bit of software, the smartphone becomes the multi-tool of the electronic age. While it cannot accomplish the raw computing power of a full-sized personal computer, higher-end smartphones can manage almost all the same tasks with ease.

Most major gadgets have been successfully replicated with smartphone applications. GPS scanning and tracking are staples of the amateur investigator. Facial recognition software finds a face in a crowd with relative accuracy. They can photograph and transcribe text, then translate ancient tomes. They can store a library's worth of text and allow for automated searches. They offer directions with photographic assistance. Even the value of a mindless video game on a stakeout is often underestimated.

## Special Effects

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 5, Structure 3, Availability •••

**Effect:** "Special effects" is a catch-all term for the tricks and chicanery used by amusement parks and stage magicians to fool witnesses. A character may use these as a distraction or a defense. For example, the Pepper's Ghost illusion is relatively easy to set up with the right tools. It uses a large mirror and a sheet of glass, along with a model and a light source. It projects an illusion of the model's reflection, and makes witnesses see a "ghost."

In addition to the dice bonus, special effects generally fool their audience at first. A witness will fall for the trick unless given good reason to be suspicious. This can waste valuable time or lead the witness into a trap.

## Surveillance Equipment

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability •••

**Effect:** Standard surveillance equipment usually consists of motion detectors, cameras, and monitors. High-end versions may include infrared heat sensors, barometric scanners, or even more complex gear. Either way, the point of surveillance equipment is to survey, detect, and otherwise track who enters or leaves a location. Often, this also means locking down breached zones. Unless someone knows surveillance equipment exists and actively avoids it, his presence is noticed and recorded. If he tries to avoid it, contest his Dexterity + Stealth against the installing technician's Intelligence + Computer or Intelligence + Crafts (for digital and analog systems, respectively). The technician may add the equipment's dice bonus. If the intruder scores more successes, he remains unnoticed. Otherwise, he goes on record.

## Survival Gear

Dice Bonus +1 or +2, Durability 2, Size 2 or 3, Structure 3, Availability • or •••

**Effect:** Survival gear is the catch-all term for the various kits of equipment needed to survive in harsh environments. This could include tents, canned foodstuff, raingear, sleeping bags, sterile water, or any of the various things a person can use to survive the world outside their cushy homes. They come in two levels: a basic level and an advanced level. The basic level offers +1 and subtracts one from the effective level of environment, **(see Extreme Environments, p. 97)**, while the advanced offers +2 and subtracts two from the effective environment level. This does not help with a Level 4 environment. A resourceful character can rig or scavenge the necessary supplies for basic survival gear, but an advanced set of gear requires very specialized equipment. Basic survival gear can assist with almost any environment, but advanced survival gear must target one particular type of environment.

## Talcum Powder

Dice Bonus +2, Durability N/A, Size 1, Structure N/A, Availability •

**Effect:** Talcum powder can keep a baby's bottom from getting diaper rash, but it can also show the presence of the unseen, and show evidence of intrusion if placed at a portal of entry. If an area is dusted with talcum powder, a character must achieve five successes on a Dexterity + Stealth roll to enter without a trace. Fewer successes will only obscure the specifics of their feet and hands. Some paranormal investigators use talcum powder as a way to give ghosts and other invisible entities a method for communication.

## Ultraviolet Ink

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability •

**Effect:** Ultraviolet ink, or invisible ink, as it's commonly called, is an outstanding way to relay messages in plain sight. Since the naked eye cannot perceive the ink without an ultraviolet light, a character can scrawl messages for other recipients who are in the know. It also allows for secret information to be passed around through mundane channels. If someone's being surveyed by nefarious forces, an ultraviolet

message scribbled on a throwaway magazine is much easier to get into their home unmolested than, say, a suspicious letter slid through their doorframe. If you need to mark a path to a secret hiding place, what better way to conceal the guiding marks?

# Physical Equipment

Physical equipment enhances the use of Physical Skills. This often means using simple or complex machines to make things easier, as well as using simple tricks to heighten the effectiveness of a character's inherent talents.

## Battering Ram

Dice Bonus +4, Durability 3, Size 4, Structure 8, Availability ••

**Effect:** The purpose of the battering ram is to bring down doors and other barricades with direct, focused force. A battering ram uses a Teamwork action, allowing up to four participants. The primary actor adds the ram's dice bonus to her roll. A ram ignores two points of Durability.

## Bear Trap

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5, Availability ••

**Effect:** A bear trap is a large metal contraption that looks something like a set of deadly jaws. For this reason, they're also commonly called jaw traps. When a human or large animal steps into the bear trap, it snaps shut on their leg. Due to the serrated edges on the trap, this can cause massive bleeding or even broken bones.

The jaw trap causes three lethal damage and ignores two points of armor or Durability. A character trapped in the jaws can attempt to escape as an instant action. Doing so requires a Strength + Stamina roll, with the trap's dice bonus as a penalty due to the distracting pain and the strength of the jaws. Failure on this roll causes another point of lethal damage as the jaw digs in further. Creatures without opposable thumbs cannot escape this way and must rip themselves free.

Any rolls to hide a bear trap suffer its dice bonus as a penalty. They're difficult to hide due to their awkward shape and weight.

## Caltrops

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability ••

**Effect:** Caltrops are small, pointed pieces of metal, arranged in such a way that one point is always facing upward. This makes walking (or driving) through a patch of caltrops inconvenient and painful. These traits assume possession of enough caltrops to fill a doorway or other narrow corridor.

Moving through caltrops causes one point of lethal damage. Caltrops ignore a point of armor or Durability.

To move through safely, a Dexterity + Athletics roll is required with the caltrops' dice bonus applied as a penalty to the roll. A character may only move at half Speed (rounded down) while moving safely through caltrops.

A character may hide caltrops, although it is difficult. A Wits + Larceny - 3 roll is required; the caltrops' dice bonus does not apply to this roll.

## Camouflage Clothing

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability ••

**Effect:** Camouflage clothing allows its wearer to blend in with her surroundings enough for the untrained eye to pass over her completely. Effective camouflage must be catered to the environment: greens and browns in the woodlands, shades of grey in an urban area. Proper camouflage adds its bonus to rolls to remain unnoticed.

## Climbing Gear

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability ••

**Effect:** Climbing gear includes ropes, pulleys, handles, carabiners, hooks, and other assorted tools for scaling things. They serve a twofold purpose. First, they add their dice bonus to the normal Strength + Athletics rolls for climbing. Second, if properly applied (with a Wits + Athletics roll), they prevent a character from falling more than 10 feet at a time.

## Crowbar

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 4, Availability •

**Effect:** A crowbar is a curved piece of steel used to pry open shipping pallets, jammed doors, and other things a normal person would be incapable of doing by hand. It adds to any dice rolls used to establish leverage. When prying things open, it allows your character to ignore two points of Durability on the lock or barricade. A crowbar can also be used as a weapon (see p. 268).

## Firearm Suppressor

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability ••

**Effect:** A firearm suppressor is popularly and misleadingly referred to as a silencer in cinema and other media. It's a cylinder placed on the end of a gun barrel that changes and lightens the sound of a shot. A suppressor delivers many minor benefits, but offers two noteworthy advantages: short-range accuracy and concealment.

Increased Accuracy: A suppressed firearm travels through a longer barrel and the muzzle crown evens the expulsion of hot gasses that can slightly affect trajectory. In game terms, reduce a suppressed gun's damage rating by one due to the bullet's subsonic flight, but increase the attack dice pool by two when firing at short range.

Position Concealer: The sound changes dramatically, to the point where many people do not recognize the sound as that of a gunshot and are often unable to place where the lower tone came from. The muzzle flash is also reduced dramatically with a suppressor, helping to conceal a shooter's position. A character trying to identify a suppressed shot must roll Wits + Firearms - 2. Any character searching for the shooter using the gun's tells suffers a -2 penalty.

## Gas Mask

Dice Bonus +5, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability ••

**Effect:** A gas mask is a filtration device placed over the face that defends the wearer against noxious chemicals in the air. With a working gas mask, a character can stand minor toxins for as long as he needs, whereas other characters might take damage over time or require rolls to remain conscious. Powerful toxins may still require rolls. A gas mask adds five dice to these rolls.

## Handcuffs

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 4, Size 1, Structure 4, Availability •

**Effect:** A solid pair of steel handcuffs is made to restrain even a remarkably strong person. Applying handcuffs to an unwilling combatant is an additional option in a grapple. Roll Strength + Brawl - the opponent's Strength. Success means the handcuffs are where they need to be.

Breaking out of successfully-applied handcuffs requires a Strength + Stamina - 4 roll. Each success on the roll reduces the Structure of the cuffs by 1. Cuffs reduced to 0 Structure snap open. Each attempt to escape causes one point of bashing damage.

A character may also try to finagle their hands out of the cuffs. This requires a Dexterity + Athletics - 4 roll. Success allows for an escape, and causes one point of bashing damage. Failure on this roll causes one point of lethal damage, as the thumb jerks out of socket.

Attempting to do anything requiring manual dexterity while cuffed incurs a -4 penalty, or -2 if the hands are cuffed in front. Witnesses are unlikely to behave favorably around a cuffed character; Social rolls against strangers incur a -3 penalty.

Many police forces and security companies now prefer heavy-duty plastic zip ties in place of handcuffs. While they're slightly less durable (Durability 3), they incur a -5 penalty from behind or -3 from the front, because they can be far tighter on the wrists. They can also be cut free.

## Lockpicking Kit

Dice Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability ••

**Effect:** A lockpicking kit consists of picks, tools, and rods for manipulating tumblers and opening locks. A good kit contains a wide array of tools for all types of locks, but guarantee

intrusion of an analog lock. With such a kit and at least a dot of Larceny, a character can pick a lock without a roll if time is not an issue. If time is an issue, the dice bonus applies to the Dexterity + Larceny rolls. At Availability •, a character may procure a portable lockpick. It has Size 1, Structure 1, and is far more concealable. However, it only offers a +1 bonus and doesn't allow for picking without rolls since the kit realistically may not have the right tools for a given job.

A lockpicking kit only works on mechanical locks. Digital locks require more specific hacking and code prediction. A character may procure a digital lockpick at Availability •••, but it typically only works on one type of lock, such as the keycard locks used in hotels. Digital lockpicks can be Size 2, or Size 1 if crafted as an extension of a laptop computer or smartphone.

## Night Vision Goggles

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability ••

**Effect:** Night vision goggles amplify low-light conditions, allowing characters to see when they otherwise could not. A character with night vision goggles does not suffer penalties for acting blind. Bright lights can render the wearer temporarily blinded, as if he had a flashlight shone in his eyes.

## Pepper Spray

Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

**Effect:** Pepper spray is a blend of chemicals (mostly capsaicin, the "hot" part of a chili pepper) contained in a small spray can, designed to debilitate threats. Civilians use these devices in self-defense; police use them to subdue unruly criminals. Use of pepper spray requires a Dexterity + Athletics or Dexterity + Firearms roll. Each yard is a range category, so one yard is short range, two yards is medium, three yards is long range. An opponent's Defense applies, but in normal wind conditions, the die bonus applies to the roll.

Upon the first attack, the victim suffers the Stun Tilt (see p. 286). An opponent struck suffers a -5 penalty to all actions. This penalty can be reduced by one for every turn spent rinsing the eyes with water. Commercial chemicals designed to clean the eyes will fully remove the penalty after a turn.

## Rope

Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability •

**Effect:** Rope is one of the oldest tools known to humankind. It's never left prominent use because of its simple and efficient utility. A good rope adds its die bonus to relevant Crafts rolls and anywhere else it would assist. As a binding agent, it resists breaking with a Durability (or

effective Strength) equal to its user's Crafts score, due to the multiplicative effect of solid knots. An applicable Specialty adds one to the user's Crafts score for this purpose. Some interrogators, shibari fetishists, and boy scouts alike specialize in remarkable knot tying, potentially rendering subjects completely and hopelessly immobile.

### Stun Gun

No Die Bonus, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability •, ••, or •••

**Effect:** A stun gun is designed to deliver an overwhelming amount of electricity to an assailant in order to shut down her muscles and send her to the ground. As a defensive item, this gives the would-be victim time to run or get help. As an offensive item, it leaves the victim ready for restraint or worse.

These devices come in two varieties (handheld and ranged). The handheld model has live leads on the edge of a handle and can be used as many as 50 times on one battery charge. The ranged model fires small, wired darts up to 15 feet away. While the ranged model has a similar battery life, it uses a compressed air cartridge that must be replaced after each shot.

Use of a handheld stun gun requires a Dexterity + Weaponry roll, penalized by the victim's Defense. The ranged model uses Dexterity + Firearms, also penalized by the victim's Defense. On a successful hit with either, the victim takes one point of lethal damage. The successes subtract from the victim's next dice pool. With the ranged version, the darts remain in the victim's body, adding three successes automatically each turn. They can be removed with a Strength + Stamina roll, with the initial successes penalizing the action. With the handheld version, the attacker can attempt to maintain the shock, which takes a Strength + Weaponry roll, penalized by the greater of the opponent's Strength or Defense. Once the accumulated successes exceed the victim's Size, the victim collapses into neuromuscular incapacitation. Once the shock ends, this lasts for (10 - victim's Stamina) turns.

## Social Equipment

Social actions deal with people. Social equipment offers tools for leverage, influence, and manipulation.

### Cash

Dice Bonus +1 to +5, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability • to •••••

**Effect:** This represents a wad of cash, a briefcase of money, an offshore bank account number, or some other lump sum. It can't be reflected in the Resources Merit since it's not a regular income. However, it can be expended to offer a bonus equivalent to its Availability on any social roll where a bribe could be beneficial. Also, it can be expended to purchase one item of equal Availability. For more complex uses, consider it a single month's allotment of the same Resources.

### Disguise

Dice Bonus +1 to +3, Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability • to •••

**Effect:** A good disguise goes a long way to help fit in with a strange group, or to go unnoticed in a crowd where one doesn't belong. Properly costumed for a situation, no rolls are required to blend into the crowd. Any rolls to actively detect the outsider suffer a penalty equal to the dice bonus of the disguise; the disguised character also gains the bonus to remain hidden.

With a disguise, a character can emulate the first dot of a single Social Merit that would make sense within the scope of the scene. For example, it doesn't make money appear from thin air, but it would allow a character to get their drinks on a nonexistent tab, reflecting Resources •. This requires a Composure + Subterfuge roll to maintain in the face of anyone in the know, contested by the witness's Wits + Subterfuge. The dice bonus of the disguise applies to the liar, but does not affect the witness.

### Fashion

Dice Bonus +1 to +3, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability • to •••••

**Effect:** Never underestimate the value of high fashion. Like a disguise, fashionable clothing allows a character to fit in. However, the point of fashion is to draw attention, not to fade into the crowd. As opposed to anonymity, fashion means being noticed. Note that the clothing chosen must be appropriate to the setting. Punk chic will not work at a Senator's fundraiser, for example. When improperly dressed, the dice bonus applies as a penalty to all Social Skill rolls.

The dice bonus for Fashion is equal to half the Availability, rounded up.

## Services

In addition to the equipment in this appendix, characters may look for services from other characters. Below is a list of some things characters may pursue. Each has an Availability rating that works identically to other equipment. This can act as a foundation for what certain levels of Allies, Status, and other Social Merits might accomplish. Most are sorted by Skills to reflect their general uses. Many include a die bonus as well. Assume most services take a week to procure at the listed Availability levels. Raise Availability by one to make procurement take a day instead.

Note that some services listed could be highly illegal and should be limited in access to appropriate Merits. In many cases, illegal services only offer negligible dice bonuses. Their real advantage comes from a layer of separation from legal authorities.

# Services

| Service | Availability | Die Bonus |
|---|---|---|
| *Academics* | | |
| Historical specialist consulting | ••• | +3 |
| Research assistance from grad students | •• | +2 |
| Translation of a dead language | ••• | +2 |
| *Computer* | | |
| Custom phone application | ••• | +2 |
| Digital image enhancement | •• | +3 |
| Graphic design/forgery | •• | +2 |
| *Crafts* | | |
| Antiquities restoration | ••• | +2 |
| Auto repair | •• | +3 |
| Custom equipment modifications | ••• | +2 |
| *Investigation* | | |
| Consultation on evidence | ••• | +3 |
| Investigative photography | ••• | +2 |
| Private investigation/ background check | •• | +2 |
| *Medicine* | | |
| Black market surgeon | •••• | +3 |
| Expert medical witness | •••• | +2 |
| Rush plastic surgery | •••• | +2 |
| *Occult* | | |
| Esoteric consultant/sage | •••• | +3 |
| Exorcist | ••• | +2 |
| Protective amulets or wards | •••• | +1 |
| *Politics* | | |
| Campaign assistant | ••• | +3 |
| Cutting red tape (read: bribe) | ••• | +2 |
| Spin doctor | ••• | +2 |
| *Science* | | |
| Fact-checking | •• | +3 |
| Falsifying research/coverup | ••• | +2 |
| Lab access | •• | +2 |
| *Athletics* | | |
| Meditative assistance | ••• | +2 |
| Personal trainer | ••• | +3 |
| Throwing an athletic competition | •••• | +4 |
| *Brawl* | | |
| Arrange underground boxing ring | ••• | +2 |
| Bodyguard service | ••• | +3 |
| Self-defense classes | • | +1 |
| *Drive* | | |
| Chauffer | •• | +2 |
| Stunt performance/ mock crash | ••• | +3 |
| Tour bus rental | •••• | +2 |
| *Firearms* | | |
| Antique gun repair | ••• | +2 |
| Cover fire from gangs | ••• | +3 |
| Procuring smuggled military arms | •••• | +2 |
| *Larceny* | | |
| Breaking and entering | ••• | +2 |
| Security consulting | ••• | +2 |
| Stealing a protected relic | •••• | +3 |
| *Stealth* | | |
| Strategic distraction | ••• | +3 |
| Tailing a suspect | ••• | +2 |
| Targeted vandalism | •• | +2 |
| *Survival* | | |
| Field dress and preserve an animal | ••• | +1 |
| Trail guide | •• | +3 |
| Weatherproof a shelter | •• | +2 |
| *Weaponry* | | |
| Properly forged sword | ••• | +2 |
| Identify wound from obscure weapon | ••• | +2 |
| Training in archaic warfare | ••• | +2 |
| *Animal Ken* | | |
| Buy a trained animal | ••• | +2 |
| Identify animal droppings | •• | +1 |
| Rule out natural causes of death | ••• | +2 |

| Service | Availability | Die Bonus |
|---|---|---|
| *Empathy* | | |
| "Good cop" interrogator | ●●● | +2 |
| Neutral arbitrator | ●●● | +2 |
| Therapy session | ●● | +1 |
| *Expression* | | |
| Document forgery | ●●● | +3 |
| Ghostwriting | ●● | +2 |
| Motivational speech | ●●● | +1 |
| *Intimidation* | | |
| Anti-interrogation training | ●●●● | +3 |
| "Bad cop" interrogator | ●●● | +2 |
| Deprogramming therapy | ●●● | +2 |
| *Persuasion* | | |
| Defense attorney | ●●● | +3 |
| Hostage negotiator | ●●●● | +3 |
| Pickup artist | ●●● | +2 |
| *Socialize* | | |
| Catering | ●●● or ●●●● | +1 or +2 |
| Elocution consulting | ●●● | +1 |
| Escort | ●●● | +2 |
| *Streetwise* | | |
| Arrange a rave or block party | ●●● | +2 |
| Black market access | ●● | +2 |
| Find crash space | ●● | +1 |
| Smuggling contraband | ●●● | +1 |
| *Subterfuge* | | |
| Amateur Actor/Actress | ●● | +2 |
| Con artistry | ●●● | +2 |
| Gambling ringer | ●●● | +2 |

# Appendix Two: Tilts

Tilts come in two forms: Personal and Environmental. Personal Tilts only apply to one character, and include ways in which that character can overcome the effect. Environmental Tilts affect the whole scene, and offer ways for individual characters to mitigate their effects.

## ARM WRACK

### Personal

**Description:** Your arm burns with pain and then goes numb. It could be dislocated, sprained, or broken, but whatever's wrong with it means you can't move your limb.

**Effect:** If your arm's broken or otherwise busted, you drop whatever you're holding in that arm and can't use it to attack opponents — unless you've got the Ambidextrous Merit, you suffer off-hand penalties for any rolls that require manual dexterity. If this effect spreads to both limbs, you're down to a chance die on any rolls that require manual dexterity, and -3 to all other Physical actions.

**Causing the Tilt:** Some supernatural powers can cripple a victim's limbs or break bones with a touch. A character can have his arm knocked out by a targeted blow to the arm (-2 penalty) that deals more damage than the character's Stamina. A targeted blow to the hand inflicts this Tilt if it does any damage.

**Ending the Tilt:** If the Tilt is inflicted as a result of an attack, mark an X under the leftmost Health box affected by that attack. The Tilt ends when the damage that caused it has healed. If the damage that inflicts this Tilt is aggravated, the character loses the use of his arm (or completely loses his arm) permanently.

## BEATEN DOWN

### Personal

**Description:** The character has had the fight knocked out of him.

**Effect:** The character cannot take active part in the fight without extra effort. The player must spend a point of Willpower *each time* he wants the character to take a violent

action in the fight. He can still run, Dodge, and apply Defense. If he wishes to take another action, the Storyteller should judge whether the action is aggressive enough to require the expenditure.

**Causing the Tilt:** The character suffers bashing damage in excess of his Stamina *or* any amount of lethal damage.

**Ending the Tilt:** The character surrenders and gives the aggressor what he wants. At this point, the character regains a point of Willpower and takes a Beat, but can take no further action in the fight. If the aggressor's intent is to kill or injure the character, obviously surrendering isn't a good option.

## BLINDED

### Personal

**Description:** The character's eyes are damaged or removed.

**Effect:** The character suffers a -3 penalty to any rolls that rely on vision — including attack rolls — and halves his Defense if one eye is blinded. That penalty increases to -5 and loss of all Defense if both eyes are affected.

**Causing the Tilt:** The normal way to inflict the Tilt is to deal damage to the target's eyes, a specified attack with a -5 penalty (see Specified Targets, p. 92). A successful attack normally damages one eye. It takes an exceptional success to totally blind an attacker. An attacker can inflict temporary blindness by slashing at her opponent's brow, throwing sand into his eyes, or kicking up dirt. This requires an attack roll of Dexterity + Athletics with a -3 penalty, and the victim's Defense applies to this attack. If it succeeds, the target is Blinded for the next turn.

**Ending the Tilt:** If an attack against the character's eye does any points of damage, mark an X under the leftmost Health box affected by that attack. If the damage inflicted is aggravated the character loses vision in that eye permanently. Otherwise, the condition ends when the damage that caused the Tilt is healed.

## BLIZZARD

### Environmental

**Description:** Heavy snowfall carpets the ground and is whipped up by howling winds into a barrage of whirling white.

**Effect:** Blizzards make it very hard to see for any real distance. Rolls to see things close to the character's person, out to an arm's length away, suffer a -1 penalty. Each additional 10 yards inflicts an additional -1 penalty (cumulative) on all visual Perception rolls. This penalty also applies to ranged attack rolls. Moving through snow is difficult. Every four inches of snow applies a -1 penalty to appropriate Physical rolls, including combat rolls, Athletics, and the like. The Blizzard Tilt rarely applies by itself — the Storyteller may also inflict any or all of the Extreme Cold, Heavy Winds, or Ice Tilts (all found below).

**Causing the Tilt:** For the most part, the weather is out of the characters' control; the Storyteller should telegraph an incoming blizzard before it hits, but it's ultimately up to her. Some supernatural powers might grant a character the power to create a blizzard.

**Ending the Tilt:** Without supernatural powers, characters can't end a blizzard. The best they can manage is to escape the weather or wait for it to stop. Proper equipment (such as goggles and snow boots) can add +1 to +3 to a roll, offsetting some of the penalties. If someone is causing this Tilt through a supernatural power, it's possible that the characters could disrupt his concentration.

## DEAFENED

### Personal

**Description:** The character can't hear. Maybe he's suffering intense tinnitus, can only hear the roaring of blood in his ears, or has been deafened by a gunshot.

**Effect:** If the character is deaf in one ear, he suffers a -3 penalty to hearing-based Perception rolls. A character who is struck deaf in both ears only gets a chance die on hearing-based Perception rolls, and suffers a -2 penalty to all combat-related dice rolls — suddenly losing the ability to hear the people around you is tremendously disorienting.

**Causing the Tilt:** A particularly loud noise within 10 feet of the character may cause temporary hearing loss, as though the character were deaf in both ears. Alternatively, a targeted attack on the ear — at a -4 penalty — can deafen a character. Supernatural creatures with heightened senses can be deafened by loud noises at greater distances.

**Ending the Tilt:** Deafness caused by loud noises fades after (10 - the victim's Stamina + Resolve) turns. If an attack against the character's ear does any points of damage, mark an X under the leftmost Health box affected by that attack. If the damage inflicted is Aggravated the character loses hearing in the ear permanently. Otherwise, the condition ends when the damage that caused the Tilt is healed.

## DRUGGED

### Personal

**Description:** The character's mind is addled by mind-altering substances, such as alcohol or drugs.

**Effect:** A generic narcotic can be represented with one set of modifiers; the character suffers a -2 modifier to Speed (and static Defense, if used) and a -3 penalty to all rolls in combat, including Defense and Perception. The character also ignores wound penalties.

**Causing the Tilt:** If the character has chosen to take drugs, he suffers their effects. To administer drugs to another character is a Dexterity + Weaponry attack, suffering a -1 modifier for the improvised weapon. If the drug has to go into a specific body part (such as an arm or mouth), it requires an attack against a specified target.

**Ending the Tilt:** A generic narcotic lasts for (10 – the victim's Stamina + Resolve) hours. Medical help, such as pumping the victim's stomach or flushing his system, halves this time.

## EARTHQUAKE

### Environmental

**Description:** Everything shudders and shakes, and rents tear the ground wide open.

**Effect:** Earthquakes don't last long, but they don't have to. When the earthquake's actually occurring, all Dexterity-based dice pools (and Defense) suffer a -1 to -5 penalty, depending on the earthquake's severity. Characters take between one and three points of lethal damage per turn of the earthquake's duration, though a reflexive Stamina + Athletics roll can downgrade that damage to bashing — or cancel it entirely on an exceptional success.

**Causing the Tilt:** Without tremendous supernatural power, it's almost impossible to cause an earthquake. A character who detonates a powerful explosive underground might simulate the effects over a city block for a few seconds.

**Ending the Tilt:** Earthquakes are, fortunately, very quick events. It's very rare for one to last more than a minute (20 turns), so waiting them out is the best course of action.

## EXTREME COLD

### Environmental (sometimes Personal)

**Description:** Bone-chilling winds bite through the character, or trudging through knee-deep snow takes all of the sensation from his limbs. Any time the temperature gets down below zero degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit), a character can suffer from the cold's effects. This Tilt can sometimes be personal, as a result of a medical condition like hypothermia or a supernatural power.

**Effect:** When the temperature is below freezing, characters can't heal bashing damage — the extreme temperature deals damage at the same rate normal characters heal it (a cut might turn to frostbite, for instance). Supernatural beings and characters who heal faster than normal instead halve their normal healing rate. For every hour that a character is continuously affected by this Tilt, he accrues a -1 penalty to all rolls. When that penalty hits -5, he instead suffers a point of lethal damage per hour.

**Causing the Tilt:** A character can suffer this Tilt from being in a frozen environment — whether he's outside in the Arctic tundra or in a walk-in freezer. Inflicting the Tilt is reasonably straightforward: throw the victim into a freezing lake or lock him in a freezer for long enough, and he'll develop hypothermia.

**Ending the Tilt:** The best way to escape the freezing cold is to find a source of warmth, either a building with working heat, or warm clothing. A character who has hypothermia requires medical attention.

## EXTREME HEAT

### Environmental (sometimes Personal)

**Description:** The character might be stumbling through the desert with the sun beating down on him, or running through the steam tunnels surrounding an old boiler room. This Tilt can also be personal, the result of a debilitating fever that spikes his temperature far above the norm. Extreme heat is normally anything above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), whether internal or external.

**Effect:** When the temperature is far above normal, characters can't heal bashing damage — the extreme temperature deals damage at the same rate normal characters heal it (a cut might heal, but it's replaced by sunburn or sunstroke). Supernatural beings and characters who heal faster than normal instead halve their normal healing rate. For every hour that a character is continuously affected by this Tilt, he accrues a -1 penalty to all rolls. When that penalty hits -5, he instead suffers a point of lethal damage per hour.

**Causing the Tilt:** This Tilt is usually caused by environmental factors — being out at noon in the desert, or spending too long in a sauna or forge. Even a fever is the result of an infection, rather than something that an opponent can force on a character. It's possible to create this Tilt on a given character: securing someone to a chair right next to an old, inefficient boiler, or stranding them in the desert far from any shade.

**Ending the Tilt:** The key to ending this Tilt is simple: get out of the heat. In a desert or similar environment, finding shade is paramount. Elsewhere, the character needs to escape whatever is causing the abnormal temperatures.

## FLOODED

### Environmental

**Description:** Some liquid — brackish water, mud, gore, or raw sewage — has risen enough to impede the character's progress.

**Effect:** Each foot of liquid inflicts a -2 penalty to all Physical dice pools. If the water goes up over her head, the character has to swim (Dexterity + Athletics), with a penalty appropriate for the speed of the flooding. Alternatively, she can try to hold her breath (Stamina + Composure) if she cannot get her head above the rising waters.

**Causing the Tilt:** Normally, this Tilt is the result of heavy rain, sudden snowmelt, or a broken water main. Characters can cause this Tilt by smashing up a water heater, or blowing up a small dam. Some supernatural creatures may be able to call floods down onto a region.

**Ending the Tilt:** Characters can escape flooding by getting to high ground, which is enough to mitigate this Tilt. A long-term fix would require draining the floodwaters, but each flood requires its own solution.

# HEAVY RAIN

## Environmental

**Description:** Torrential rain lashes down in knives, bouncing high off the sidewalk. The sound of rain on the ground is a constant hammering rumble that goes on without end, like dropping ball bearings on a tin roof. Thick gray curtains of water obscure vision.

**Effect:** Heavy rains — approaching tropical storm levels or worse — cause a Perception penalty of -3 dice to both vision and hearing. Rain's hard to see through, but it's also *loud*. If the rains carry on for an hour or more, the Flooded Tilt will soon follow. This Tilt is often accompanied by Heavy Winds; a character trapped out in Heavy Rains might come under the effects of Extreme Cold.

**Causing the Tilt:** Short of a supernatural power or a fleet of cloud-seeding aircraft, Heavy Rain is the result of natural weather patterns.

**Ending the Tilt:** The best way out of the rain is to get indoors. Unless it's the start of some sodden apocalypse, the characters can wait for the weather to ease.

# HEAVY WINDS

## Environmental

**Description:** Howling winds buffet at the characters, whipping street furniture into the air and tearing the roofs from buildings. Powerful winds can toss cars around like toys. Anyone out in the winds feels like they're taking a beating just walking down the street.

**Effect:** Heavy winds are loud, so characters suffer a -3 modifier to aural Perception rolls. Also, the wind inflicts a penalty to all Physical rolls when out in the winds, including Drive rolls. Grade the wind from one to five; one is tropical-storm level (around 40 MPH), three is hurricane level (around 80 MPH), and five is tornado level (150+ MPH). The wind's grade represents the penalty applied to Physical dice rolls. Characters outside in the maelstrom also take damage from flying debris, taking bashing damage each turn equal to the wind's rating. Characters can make a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll to avoid damage.

**Causing the Tilt:** Heavy winds are a fact of life, from siroccos in the desert, to tornados in the Midwest, to wind shears everywhere.

**Ending the Tilt:** Getting out of the wind is the best way to end this Tilt. Sometimes that's as easy as sheltering in an automobile, as long as nobody tries to drive. Buildings provide more permanent shelter.

# ICE

## Environmental

**Description:** The ground's covered in a mirror-smooth layer of ice that sends wheels spinning and people's feet flying out from under them. The ice can be so thin as to be nearly invisible, or it can be a thick layer that's the only thing keeping the characters from sinking into a frozen lake.

**Effect:** When a character can't trust her footing, divide her Speed in half, and all Physical rolls (and Defense) suffer a -2 penalty. Attempting to move at full Speed increases the Physical penalty to -4. Any dramatic failure on a Physical roll inflicts the Knocked Down Tilt. Driving on ice is a real pain; halve Acceleration, and characters suffer a -5 penalty to Drive rolls.

**Causing the Tilt:** This Tilt doesn't just apply to icy conditions, but to any surface that's slick and slippery, including a spill of industrial lubricant or just a well-polished wooden or linoleum floor. Characters can use a Dexterity + Crafts roll to cover an area in industrial cleaner or mix up chemicals into a lubricant. If the Extreme Cold Tilt is in effect, even covering the area with water will do the trick.

**Ending the Tilt:** "Get off the ice" is good advice, but that can take work. Characters can use heat or fire to melt ice, or throw down copious quantities of salt or grit to increase traction.

# IMMOBILIZED

## Personal

**Description:** Something holds the character fast, preventing him from moving. This could be a grappling opponent, a straightjacket wrapped with heavy chains, or a coffin secured on the outside with a padlock.

**Effect:** The character can't do anything but wriggle helplessly. He can't apply Defense against incoming attacks, and can't take combat-related actions. If someone's holding him down, he can spend a point of Willpower to deliver a head butt or similar attack, but even that might not free him.

**Causing the Tilt:** The usual way to inflict this Tilt is through the Restrain grappling move. This often uses material means to prevent the victim from moving, such as binding limbs with duct tape or zip ties, tossing the victim into a car trunk or similar tight space, or applying painful holds and joint locks.

**Ending the Tilt:** An Immobilized target can break free by escaping from a grapple or snapping whatever binds her. If grappled, the character can struggle as normal but can only select the Break Free move on a success. If held by an item, the character must make a Strength + Athletics roll penalized by the item's Durability. If a character's arms and legs are both bound, he suffers a -2 penalty; this increases to -4 if he's hogtied. On a success, he snaps the bindings or breaks free. Each roll, successful or not, deals a point of bashing damage.

## INSANE

### Personal

**Description:** The character suffers from a panic attack, sudden imbalance, or a full-on psychotic break. Her pulse races, her mind cannot focus on what she wants. The world's an unstable place, and she's unable to keep her balance.

**Effect:** Someone suffering a psychotic break isn't the sort of person to go down without a fight. Her stated intent might be irrational or just plain impossible, and she might have fewer ethical problems with using extreme violence to get what she wants. The character gains a +1 bonus to all combat rolls, but takes actions after everyone else (if two characters suffer from the Insane Tilt, both act after everyone else but compare Initiative as normal). A character suffering from this Tilt cannot spend Willpower in combat, and suffers a -3 penalty to all Social rolls.

**Causing the Tilt:** Faced with extraordinary circumstances, any character with an appropriate Condition may acquire the Insane Tilt. The Storyteller can call for a Resolve + Composure roll to resist a general anxiety that gnaws at the character's mind; if the character fails, he gains the Tilt. If the character witnesses something truly horrific — a daughter watches her father walk to the end of the garden and shoot himself in the head, smiling all the while; a man stumbles into the wrong office at work and sees his coworkers feasting on the intern's organs; a solder sees her unit gunned down by a sniper while she can do nothing — the Storyteller can rule that the Tilt is unavoidable.

A character can work to *inspire* another character's madness in order to cause this Tilt. She could orchestrate events that she hopes will provoke a psychotic break, but that's amateur hour. A professional swaps out her victim's meds, giving stimulants just as his bipolar cycle ticks into mania, or dosing a paranoid schizophrenic with hallucinogenic drugs.

Some supernatural creatures possess mind-affecting powers that can apply this Tilt, even to characters who do not have an appropriate Condition.

**Ending the Tilt:** The specific effects of this Tilt don't normally last beyond the end of the scene. A character can try to force her mind to a state of balance, but it's not easy. She must sit and focus on blocking out the craziness. She rolls Resolve + Composure as an instant action, contested by a dice pool of (10 - her Willpower). She can't take any other actions that turn, and doesn't apply Defense against any attacks.

## INSENSATE

### Personal

**Description:** The character shuts down, either due to extreme fear or sudden pleasure. He may huddle in a corner, cringe away from sudden noises, or stare into space as waves of pleasure lap over him.

**Effect:** The character can't take any actions until the Tilt is resolved. He can apply Defense to incoming attacks, and if he takes any damage from an attack, he's knocked free of whatever fogged his brain.

**Causing the Tilt:** Several supernatural powers can leave their victim in a trance-like state of heightened emotion, whether a vampire's mind-affecting tricks, or the pants-shitting terror of witnessing a werewolf take on an inhuman form. A truly heroic amount of alcohol or a hallucinogenic drug might have similar effects; administering such a drug is a Dexterity + Weaponry attack, which suffers a -1 modifier for the improvised weapon.

**Ending the Tilt:** The Tilt wears off at the end of the scene. The victim can spend a point of Willpower before then to act normally for one turn. A successful attack will also end the Tilt. If a character has been knocked insensible by drugs, then when this Tilt ends it is replaced with the Drugged Tilt.

## KNOCKED DOWN

### Personal

**Description:** Something knocks the character to the floor, either toppling her with a powerful blow to the chest or taking one of her legs out from under her.

**Effect:** The character is knocked off her feet. If she hasn't already acted this turn, she loses her action. Once she's on the ground, a character is considered prone. The character can still apply Defense against incoming attacks, and can attempt to attack from the ground at a -2 penalty.

**Causing the Tilt:** A melee weapon with a damage modifier of +2 or greater, or a firearm with a damage modifier of +3 or more can be used to knock a character down with the force of the blow. Alternatively, a melee weapon or unarmed attack can knock an opponent down with a targeted attack against the legs (-2 modifier). The attacker declares that he wants to knock his opponent down, and halves the total damage done (rounding down). On a successful attack, the target is knocked down.

**Ending the Tilt:** The easiest way to end this Tilt is to stand up, which takes an action. A character who hasn't yet acted can make a Dexterity + Athletics roll, minus any weapon modifier, instead of her normal action. If successful, she avoids the effects of this Tilt altogether. On a failure, she falls over and the Tilt applies as normal.

## LEG WRACK

### Personal

**Description:** Your leg feels like it's going to snap clean off whenever you move; when you stop moving you feel a burning numbness that encourages you to avoid action.

**Effect:** If your leg is broken, sprained, or dislocated, halve your Speed and suffer a -2 penalty on Physical rolls that require movement (and Defense). If both of your legs are

wracked, you fall over — taking the Knocked Down Tilt — and cannot get up. Your Speed is reduced to 1; if you want to move at all, you cannot take any other action. Physical rolls that require movement are reduced to a chance die.

**Causing the Tilt:** Some supernatural powers can cripple a victim's limbs or break bones with a touch. A character can have his leg knocked out by a targeted blow to the leg (-2 penalty) that deals more damage than the character's Stamina.

**Ending the Tilt:** If the Tilt is inflicted as a result of an attack, mark an X under the leftmost Health box affected by that attack. The Tilt ends when that damage that caused it has healed. If the damage that inflicts this Tilt is aggravated, the character loses use of his leg permanently.

## POISONED

### Personal

**Description:** You've got poison inside you. It's tearing you apart from the inside, burning like acid in your gut and making your head swim.

**Effect:** This Tilt applies a general sense of being poisoned to a character without worrying about Toxicity during combat. For the purposes of this Tilt, a poison is either "moderate" or "grave" — a moderate poison causes one point of bashing damage per turn of combat, while a grave poison ups that to one point of lethal damage per turn. If the Storyteller cares to continue the effects of the poison outside of combat, he can apply the standard rules for handling poisons and toxins when combat is complete.

**Causing the Tilt:** It's possible for a character to not know that he's been poisoned. It could be as innocuous as switching drinks with a pretty girl who is the target of a mob hit, or as simple as walking into a house with a carbon monoxide leak. That being said, the main time poison comes up in combat is when one combatant inflicts it on another. Injecting your opponent with a syringe full of drain cleaner or snake venom counts as a Dexterity + Weaponry attack, and suffers a -1 modifier for the improvised weapon.

**Ending the Tilt:** Short of immediate medical attention — and how many fights take place in an emergency room? — all a victim can do is struggle on. Roll Stamina + Resolve as a reflexive action each turn that your character is poisoned. If your character intends to act (meaning, takes a non-reflexive action), the roll suffers a -3 penalty. Success counteracts the damage for one turn only.

## SICK

### Personal

**Description:** Your stomach churns. You retch and heave but only succeed in bringing up bile. Sweat beads on your brow as you spike a fever. Your muscles ache with every movement. You're wracked with hot and cold flushes as a sickness gnaws away at your insides.

**Effect:** This Tilt applies a general sickness to a character without worrying about the specific illness. For the purposes of this Tilt, a sickness is either "moderate" or "grave." A moderate sickness, such as a cold, asthma, the flu, or just a bad hangover, causes a -1 penalty to all actions during combat. That penalty increases by one every two turns (the first two turns, the character suffers a -1 penalty, the next two turns the penalty is -2, and so on up to a maximum of -5 on turn nine). A grave sickness, such as pneumonia, heavy metal poisoning, or aggressive cancer, inflicts the same dice penalties as a mild sickness. In addition, the physical stress of fighting or even defending oneself from an attacker while gravely ill inflicts a point of bashing damage per turn of combat.

**Causing the Tilt:** It's not easy to deliberately make someone sick. Sure, if you can get your hands on a vial of smallpox or deliberately use a disease you've got to make someone sick (a breaking point, especially in the case of grave diseases like AIDS), then you've got a reasonable chance. Some supernatural creatures have abilities that can inflict diseases on others. Aside from that, you've just got to expose your opponent to the sickness long before you fight and hope for the best.

**Ending the Tilt:** This Tilt reflects the effects of sickness as they specifically applies to combat. The penalties inflicted by this Tilt fade at a rate of one point per turn once the character has a chance to rest, but any damage inflicted remains until the character can heal.

## STUNNED

### Personal

**Description:** Your character is dazed and unable to think straight. Maybe her vision blurs. If she's stunned as a result of a blow to the head, she's probably got a concussion.

**Effect:** A character with the Stunned Tilt loses her next action, and halves her Defense until she can next act.

**Causing the Tilt:** A character can be stunned by any attack that targets her head and deals at least as much damage as her Size. Some weapons have a "stun" special ability. These double the weapon modifier only for the purposes of working out whether the attacker inflicts the Stunned Tilt. Attacks against the target's head (see "Specified Targets," p. 92) count the character's Size as one lower for the purposes of this Tilt. The Storyteller might determine that additional effects cause this Tilt, like being caught in the blast area of an explosion.

**Ending the Tilt:** The effects of this Tilt normally only last for a single turn. The character can end the Tilt during her own action by reflexively spending a point of Willpower to gather her wits, though she suffers a -3 modifier to any actions she takes that turn.

## Personal Tilts

| Tilt | Effects |
|---|---|
| Arm Wrack | One arm: Drop anything held, suffer off-hand penalties for most rolls. Both arms: Chance die on rolls requiring manual dexterity, −3 to other Physical actions. |
| Beaten Down | Cannot take violent action in combat without spending Willpower. |
| Blinded | One eye: -3 to vision-related rolls. Both eyes: -5 to vision-related rolls, lose all Defense. |
| Deafened | One ear: -3 Perception rolls. Both ears: Chance die on Perception rolls, -2 to combat rolls. |
| Drugged | -2 Speed, -3 to combat rolls (including Defense and Perception). Ignore wound penalties. |
| Immobilized | No combat actions. Can't move or apply Defense. |
| Insane | +1 to combat rolls, act after everyone else, -3 to Social rolls, can't spend Willpower. |
| Insensate | No combat actions. Can move and apply Defense. Taking damage ends the Tilt. |
| Knocked Down | Lose action this turn (if it hasn't been taken), knocked prone. Can apply Defense, attack from ground at -2. |
| Leg Wrack | One leg: half Speed, -2 penalty on Physical rolls for movement. Both legs: Knocked Down, give up action to move at Speed 1, movement-based Physical rolls reduced to chance die. |
| Poisoned | Moderate: One point of bashing damage per turn. Grave: One point of lethal damage per turn. |
| Sick | Moderate: -1 to all actions. Penalty increases by 1 every two turns. Grave: As moderate, but also inflicts one point of bashing damage per turn. |
| Stunned | Lose next action. Half Defense until the characters next acts |

## Environmental Tilts

| Tilt | Effects |
|---|---|
| Blizzard | -1 penalty to visual Perception and ranged attack rolls, increased by 1 per 10 yards. -1 penalty to Physical rolls per four inches of snow. |
| Earthquake | Penalty to Dexterity rolls depending on severity. Take one to three lethal damage per turn, Stamina + Athletics downgrades to bashing. |
| Extreme Cold | Bashing damage doesn't heal. -1 penalty to all rolls, increasing by 1 per hour. At -5, further hours deal one point of lethal damage. |
| Extreme Heat | Bashing damage doesn't heal. -1 penalty to all rolls, increasing by 1 per hour. At -5, further hours deal one point of lethal damage. |
| Flooded | -2 to Physical dice pools per foot of flooding. Once water is over head, character must swim or hold breath. |
| Heavy Rain | -3 to aural and visual Perception rolls. |
| Heavy Winds | -3 modifier to aural Perception rolls. Winds rated between 1 and 5, severity acts as penalty to Physical rolls and deals that much bashing damage per turn, Dexterity + Athletics to avoid. |
| Ice | -2 Speed, -2 to Physical actions. Can move at normal speed but -4 Physical actions. Dramatic Failure causes Knocked Down; Drive rolls are at -5 and half Acceleration. |

# Appendix Three: Conditions

The list below includes common Conditions that can be applied to characters. For Skill-based rolls, an exceptional success allows the noted Condition (unless otherwise stated). It may go to your character, or to the subject of the roll, as noted.

While we've listed a handful of recommended Skills that can apply a given Condition, this list is hardly exhaustive. Give characters whatever Conditions make sense within the scope of the story. If a Condition has no listed Skills, it's because another circumstance within the rules can cause it, and it's not something easily brought on by regular Skill usage.

## AMNESIA (PERSISTENT)

Your character is missing a portion of her memory. An entire period of her life is just gone. This causes massive difficulties with friends and loved ones.

**Resolution:** Something problematic arises, such as a forgotten arrest warrant or old enemy.

## BLIND

Your character cannot see. Any rolls requiring sight may only use a chance die. If another sense can be reasonably substituted, make the roll at -3 instead. In a combat situation, she suffers the drawbacks of the Blinded Tilt (see p. 281) instead.

This Condition may be taken as Persistent.

**Resolution:** Limitation or difficulty that heightens immediate danger.

## BROKEN (PERSISTENT)

Whatever you did or saw, something inside you snapped. You can barely muster up the will to do your job anymore, and anything more emotionally intense than a raised voice makes you flinch and back down. Apply a -2 to all Social rolls and rolls involving Resolve, and a -5 to any use of the Intimidation Skill.

**Beat:** You back down from a confrontation or fail a roll due to this Condition. If you regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point, you can shed this Condition.

## BONDED

Your character has established an extensive bond with an animal. She gains +2 on any rolls to influence or persuade the animal once per scene. The animal may add your Animal Ken to any rolls to resist coercion or fear when in your character's presence. The animal may add your character's Animal Ken to any one die roll.

**Example Skills**: Animal Ken

**Resolution:** The bonded animal dies.

## CONNECTED

Your character has made inroads with a specified group. While she has this Condition, she gets a +2 to all rolls relating to that group. Alternately, she can shed this Condition to gain a one-time +3 bonus to influence or otherwise work with the group.

**Example Skills**: Politics, Socialize

**Resolution:** Condition shed, bridge burned.

## CRIPPLED (PERSISTENT)

Your character has limited or no ability to walk. Her Speed trait is effectively 1. She must rely on a wheelchair or other device to travel. A manual wheelchair's Speed is equal to your character's Strength, and requires use of her hands. Electric wheelchairs have a Speed of 3, but allow the character free use of her hands.

An injury can cause this Condition temporarily, in which case it is resolved when the injury heals and the character regains mobility.

**Beat:** Danger or severe inhibition due to the disability.

## DEPRIVED

Your character suffers from an addiction. Because your character is without it, she's unable to focus and contain herself. Remove one die from her Stamina, Resolve, and

Composure dice pools. This does not influence derived traits; it simply influences dice pools that use these Attributes.

A character suffering from addiction may take this Condition as a Persistent Condition.

**Resolution:** Indulge in the deprived Vice, therapy.

## EMBARRASSING SECRET

Your character has a secret from his past that could come back to haunt him. If this secret gets out, he could be ostracized or maybe even arrested. If the secret gets out, the Condition becomes the Notoriety Condition (below).

**Resolution:** The secret gets out.

## FUGUE (PERSISTENT)

Something terrible happened, and rather than deal with it or let it break you, your mind shuts it out. You are prone to blackouts and lost time. Whenever circumstances become too similar to the situation that led to you gaining this Condition, the player rolls Resolve + Composure. If you fail the roll, the Storyteller controls your character for the next scene, but your character, left to his own devices, will seek to avoid the conflict and get away from the area.

**Beat:** You suffer the effects of this Condition. If you regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point, you can shed this Condition.

## GUILTY

Your character is experiencing deep-seated feelings of guilt and remorse. This Condition is commonly applied after a successful breaking point roll. While the character is under the effects of this Condition, he receives a -2 to any Resolve or Composure rolls to defend against Subterfuge, Empathy, or Intimidation rolls.

**Resolution:** The character makes restitution for whatever he did; the character confesses his crimes.

## INFORMED

Your character has a breadth of research information based on the topic she investigated. When you make a roll relating to the topic, you may shed this Condition. If the roll failed, it is instead considered to have a single success. If it succeeded, the roll is considered an exceptional success. The roll that benefits from the Informed Condition can be any relevant Skill roll. For example, a character with Informed (Werewolves) might gain its benefits when using researched information to build a silver bear trap with the Crafts Skill. Combat rolls cannot benefit from this Condition.

**Example Skills**: Academics, Investigation, Occult, Science

**Resolution:** Use the Condition for its benefit.

## INSPIRED

Your character is deeply inspired. When your character takes an action pertaining to that inspiration, you may resolve this Condition. Gain a Willpower point, and consider the roll an Exceptional Success on three successes, instead of five.

**Example Skills**: Crafts, Expression

**Resolution:** Use the Condition for its benefit.

## LEVERAGED

Your character has been blackmailed, tricked, convinced, or otherwise leveraged into doing what another person wishes. Note this Condition as Leveraged (Character). You may have Leveraged multiple times, for different characters. Any time that character requests something of yours, you may shed this Condition if your character does as requested, without rolling to resist.

**Example Skills**: Empathy, Persuasion, Subterfuge

**Resolution:** Shed the Condition as noted; turn the tables on the person.

## LOST

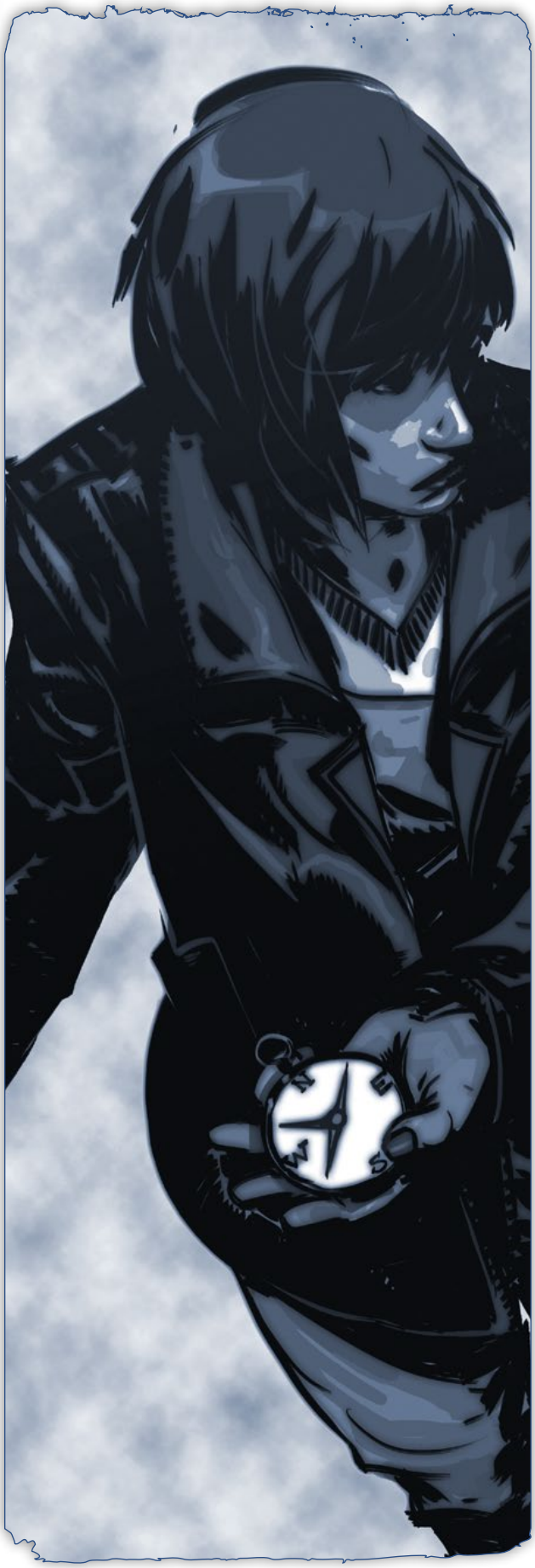
Your character has no idea where she is, or how to reach her target. She cannot make any headway toward her goal without first navigating and finding out where she is. This requires a successful Wits + Streetwise action (in the city) or Wits + Survival action (in the wilderness).

**Resolution:** Abandoning the goal, successfully navigating.

## MADNESS (PERSISTENT)

Your character saw or did something that jarred her loose from reality. This isn't a mental illness born of brain chemistry — that, at least, might be treatable. This madness is the product of supernatural tampering or witnessing something that humanity was never meant to comprehend. The Storyteller has a pool of dice equal to (10 - the character's Integrity). Once per chapter, the Storyteller can apply those dice as a negative modifier to any Mental or Social roll made for the character.

**Beat:** The character fails a roll because of this Condition. If you regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point, you can shed this Condition.



## MUTE (PERSISTENT)

Your character cannot speak. Any communication must be done through writing, gestures, or hand signs.

Illness, injury, or supernatural powers can inflict this Condition on a temporary basis. If this is the case, it is resolved when the character regains her voice.

**Beat:** Limitation or communication difficulty that heightens immediate danger.

## NOTORIETY

Whether or not your character actually did something heinous in the past, the wrong people think he did. This causes disgust or ostracism by the common public. Your character suffers a -2 on any Social rolls against those that know of his notoriety. If using Social Maneuvering (p.81), the character must open one extra Door if his target knows of his notoriety. Oftentimes, this Condition comes from rumors and smear campaigns.

**Skills:** Subterfuge, Socialize

**Resolution:** The story is debunked or the character's name is cleared.

## OBSESSION

Something's on your character's mind, and she just can't shake it. If she's abiding by that obsession, exploring that emotion, or otherwise pursuing the object of the obsession, enjoy the 10-again quality on all rolls. When she's not, you lose the 10-again quality.

**Resolution:** Fulfilling the obsession, therapy.

## SHAKEN

Something has frightened your character extensively. Any time your character is taking an action where that fear might hinder her, you may opt to fail the roll (before you've made the roll), and shed this Condition. This Condition can be imposed by a successful breaking point roll.

**Example Skills**: Brawl, Firearms, Intimidation, Weaponry

**Resolution:** Fail a roll, as noted.

## SOULLESS (PERSISTENT)

A creature or phenomenon has stripped the character of her soul. Without a soul, she can't attempt abjuration, warding, or binding. She is also more susceptible to possession — any dice pools to resist being taken over or possessed by another entity are at a -2 dice penalty. The effects on Integrity and Willpower, though, are more severe. For as long as she has this Condition, she does not regain

Willpower through surrender or rest, and her use of Virtue and Vice is reversed. She may regain one Willpower point per scene by fulfilling her Virtue, and regains full Willpower once per chapter by fulfilling her Vice. Regaining Willpower through Vice, though, is now a breaking point with a -5 penalty unless the character has reached Integrity 1.

**Beat:** Gain a beat whenever the character loses Integrity because she indulged her Vice.

**Resolution:** This Condition is only resolved if the character regains her soul.

## SPOOKED

Your character has seen something supernatural — not overt enough to terrify her, but unmistakably otherworldly. How your character responds to this is up to you, but it captivates her and eats her attention. You can shed this Condition when your character's fear and fascination causes her to do something that hinders the group or complicates things (she goes off alone to investigate a strange noise, stays up all night researching, runs away instead of holding her ground, etc.).

**Resolution:** Shed the Condition as noted.

## STEADFAST

Your character is confident and resolved. When you've failed a roll, resolve this Condition to instead treat the action as if you'd rolled a single success. If the roll was a chance die, you may resolve this Condition and roll a single die instead.

**Resolution:** Use the Condition, as noted.

## SWOONED

Your character has butterflies in his stomach. Note this Condition as Swooned (Character). He may have multiple instances of this Condition, reflecting affection for multiple characters. He suffers a -2 to any rolls that would adversely affect the object of his affection. The object of his affection gains +2 on any Social rolls against him. If the object of the Swoon is attempting social maneuvering on the Swooned character, the impression level is considered one higher (maximum of perfect; see p.81).

**Example Skills**: Persuasion, Subterfuge

**Resolution:** Do something for the object that puts your character in danger; opt to fail a roll to resist a social action by the object.

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Icans 164
Mayans 164
Toltecs 164

# Chronicles of Darkness

Name: Virtue: Chronicle:
Age: Vice: Faction:
Player: Concept: Group Name:

## ATTRIBUTES

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Power | Intelligence | ●OOOO | Strength | ●OOOO | Presence | ●OOOO |
| Finesse | Wits | ●OOOO | Dexterity | ●OOOO | Manipulation | ●OOOO |
| Resistance | Resolve | ●OOOO | Stamina | ●OOOO | Composure | ●OOOO |

## SKILLS

### Mental
*(-3 unskilled)*

Academics _____ OOOOO
Computer _____ OOOOO
Crafts _____ OOOOO
Investigation _____ OOOOO
Medicine _____ OOOOO
Occult _____ OOOOO
Politics _____ OOOOO
Science _____ OOOOO

### Physical
*(-1 unskilled)*

Athletics _____ OOOOO
Brawl _____ OOOOO
Drive _____ OOOOO
Firearms _____ OOOOO
Larceny _____ OOOOO
Stealth _____ OOOOO
Survival _____ OOOOO
Weaponry _____ OOOOO

### Social
*(-1 unskilled)*

Animal Ken _____ OOOOO
Empathy _____ OOOOO
Expression _____ OOOOO
Intimidation _____ OOOOO
Persuasion _____ OOOOO
Socialize _____ OOOOO
Streetwise _____ OOOOO
Subterfuge _____ OOOOO

## OTHER TRAITS

### Merits

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Size: _____
Speed: _____
Defense: _____
Armor: _____
Initiative Mod: _____
Beats: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Experiences: _____

### Health

OOOOOOOOOOOOO
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

### Willpower

OOOOOOOOOO
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

### Integrity

OOOOOOOOOO

### Conditions

_____
_____
_____
_____

### Aspirations

_____
_____
_____
_____

| Weapon/Attack | Dmg | Range | Clip | Init | Str | Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

| Equipment | Durability | Structure | Size | Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Merits 7 • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult humans
Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits + Athletics • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity +5 • Starting Integrity = 7

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