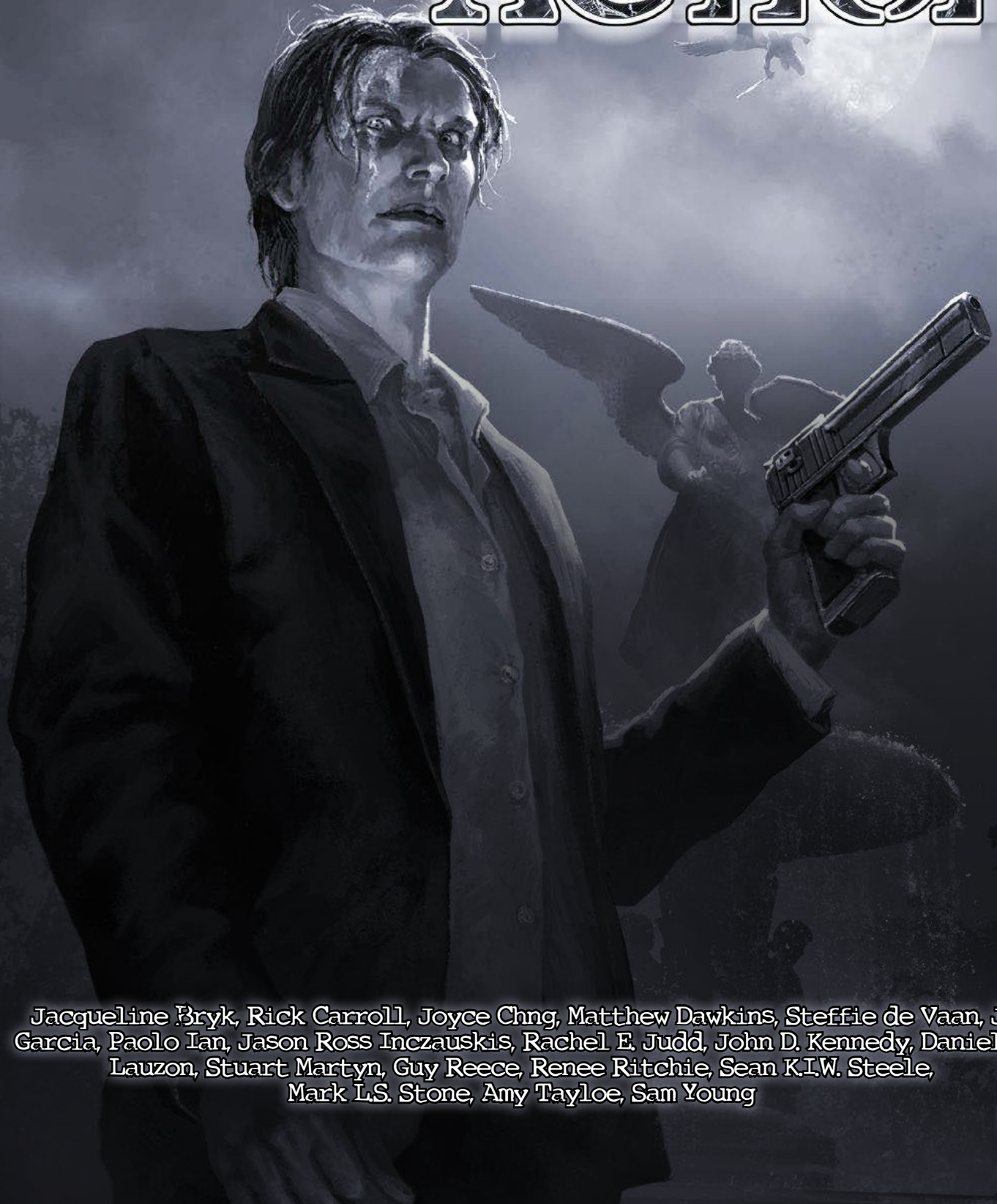


NIGHT HORRORS **ENEMY ACTION**



a supplement for
DEMON
2ND EDITION

NIGHT HORRORS ENEMY ACTION



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INDUCTION

by Stuart Martyn

Mr. Stone dreamed.

He dreamed of a mass of hands grasping him and drawing him into a crushing embrace. He dreamed of them wrapping around his ankles and pulling him down into dark, cold water. He dreamed of frigid metal hands around his neck.

He woke gasping for air every night, but the waking world offered him little respite. He'd seen the thing that attacked him whenever he closed his eyes. He'd watched a body, a body he knew to be dead, change before his eyes into a horrifying, inhuman shape made of steel hands. In a moment of terrified madness, he had attacked it with surgical tools and felt its crushing grip on his windpipe.

He woke with a bruised neck and a missing body. He woke to mysteriously missing security camera footage. He woke to a world he no longer understood.

Now he couldn't sleep without prescription medications. He couldn't face his job. He used up his leave hiding at home. He told nobody what he had seen.

One day someone came to him with the footage. A woman, kind and diplomatic. Stone was terrified and relieved in equal measure, vindicated and horrified that what he had seen was true. She told him that he was not alone, that others had seen the same things, that it would be safest for him not to say anything. Strangely, this was reassuring. The world was far stranger than Stone could ever imagine, but at least he understood how it worked.

They became friends, after a fashion, sharing stories. The woman put him in touch with a support group of people with similar experiences, normal people like Stone rather than the crazed conspiracy theorists he'd found online. Eventually the woman admitted that she was interested in him; Stone was just the sort of person she was looking for.

The woman made him an offer.

...

The lobby was spacious and sunny, transparently designed to be as welcoming and pleasant as possible. Gentle colors, natural lighting, even a water feature. The cameras that watched every window were subtle enough that they didn't ruin the overall effect, but Stone noticed them. He understood that this space was a disguise. A weak one, despite how much effort and money had likely been spent on it.

Then again, perhaps that was the point. A warning. A clear message. You are being watched.

The click of shoes on the tiles announced someone new was arriving, walking quickly. Stone stood up, putting down some promotional materials he'd been idly leafing through, and turned to greet the newcomer. She was notably short and

dressed somewhat casually. Her eyes were bright, her face relatively unlined, but there was gray at her temples. Stone was good at guessing ages, but she was a challenge.

"Lovely to meet you, Ananya Dhillon, I'll be your supervisor here. Enjoying the sunshine?"

Stone smiled weakly as he took her hand. "It's different from Seattle."

"I would imagine so. How about your apartment? Enjoying the view?"

"It's quite something."

"You'll get used to it, believe me. I'm sure you're excited and nervous about starting. I'll give you a quick tour, but before we start I should probably tell you this is very much the point of no return. Ready to dive in?"

Memories of lengthy nondisclosure agreements swam to the forefront of Stone's mind. Dhillon's smile was bright and cheerful, but he understood the deeper meaning, the ramifications of his choice.

"With both feet. Please, give me the tour."

"Here's your ID badge. If you'd like to follow me, I'm going to get right to the exciting stuff and show you the specimen labs."

Dhillon led the way to an elevator. Though from the outside the building was a glittering skyscraper, Stone wasn't surprised to discover they were headed down, not up.

"First of all, I'd just like to say that we're very happy to have you, Mr. Stone. A man with your background, why, if we hadn't hired you, LDI or some TCG front might have scooped you up, but Deva is where you belong. We don't headhunt often, you know, even though we're always looking for new researchers. Most of our staff are recruited internally from various subsidiaries, and are carefully vetted and profiled before they're invited to work for us here at Luminous."

"I'm honored. Call me Sam, please. How *does* the internal pathway work?"

"Potential candidates are brought to our attention based on the quality of their work. Then they're vetted, even profiled. Espionage is a real concern. The ones we think might be ready to work in Luminous or one of our other specialist labs are exposed gradually, carefully, to something...*unusual*. We actually reuse some of the same objects and lifeforms, ones we know are safe to handle, for this purpose. Something clearly unusual, but not dangerous, to open people's eyes. We're looking for people like you, people smart enough to accept the evidence and wise enough to keep quiet about it. It's disappointingly rare. When most people see something that shatters their worldview they reject it or start babbling about it."

The elevator arrived at a brightly lit corridor. Stone tried not to react to the two armed guards that escorted them wordlessly from the elevator to a locked door.

"This is the Exotic Biota lab," Dhillon said, swiping her access card and flashing the guards a quick smile. "We keep live specimens here. In fact, we'll be passing through the Hound enclosure before we enter the lab proper. You first, please."

Stone stepped through into a low-ceilinged corridor with another door at the end. The corridor stank of rust and cordite. Thin grilles and holes in the walls reminded him uncomfortably of murder-holes in some medieval gatehouse. He could hear movement behind the walls. Something was reacting to them, sniffing, shuffling, and hissing.



"They don't sound like dogs."

"That's because they aren't. They're actually a part of our security, a way of detecting undesirables," Dhillon said, keying a code into the next door. "I'm happy to say you've passed."

Stone decided not to ask. On the other side was a security checkpoint with more armed guards, but beyond them was a bullpen of computers, desks, and cubicles. Uniformed staff glanced up at them before returning to their work.

"This is the main area. There are side offices there, and secure laboratories and containment cells over there. Microbiology is through there. This isn't your department, but you'll be in here often enough. David, this is Sam Stone. It's his first day. Stone, this is David Ford."

"Nice to meet you, Sam. How's your cryptozoology?"

David was young, younger than Stone, with a faint Australian accent.

"Isn't this the wrong climate for Bigfoot or Nessie?"

David smiled and Dhillon laughed. It didn't sound forced, but Stone didn't believe it for a second.

"Funny you should mention Bigfoot," David said, with a wink.

"We do have an ape, I believe," Dhillon explained.

"Want me to give him a quick tour, An?"

"Very well. Very quick, just show him one or two organisms to give him a basic idea of what to expect. There's no time for anything with biohazard procedures so no microbiology, no Flatwoods."

"A shame. Well, you've already met the Hounds. Let's start small. You don't have a problem with rats, do you? Let me show you the Rat King."

David led them to a room filled with cages, metal frames inside plastic containers. It reeked of sawdust. The cages were filled with rats, rats of all sizes and colors.

"These are a mix of wild type *Rattus rattus*, some domesticated *Rattus norvegicus*, even one or two *Rattus exulans*. That's native to the Philippines. We've also got some laboratory rats in there, mostly Wistars. We try to introduce new, unusual rats from time to time to see if they get incorporated."

"Incorporated?"

"The King isn't one of these rats, it's all of them. They're not a colony, they're one super-organism. They don't socialize like other rats."

Stone could see that. The rats weren't playing or eating or exploring. In fact, the rats seemed to have noticed his presence. As one, they seemed to be looking at him.

"All rats we've introduced so far have become part of the colony, but all other rodents, even mice, have been rejected. They solve puzzles in perfect synchrony and their intelligence seems to be linked to their numbers. As such, we have to keep their population under tight control. When we dissect them things get really strange. We see unusual neuronal development and, well, clockwork organs."

"Clockwork organs?"

"It's the hearts first, generally. We don't understand the process. It's not as though we're feeding them metal. Here, some of the older ones have a few outward signs. See the teeth? The discoloration of the fur? Unfortunately, they're harder to sacrifice after their lungs are altered, and they're better at escaping when they're older, so we don't generally let them live their full lifespan. We're currently investigating how they cooperate when they're not in physical proximity. The results are incredible; we've seen them pressing buttons in one room to affect another room over 300 meters away. They're clearly able to communicate over that distance. I've proposed a follow-up study in which--"

"I don't think we need to bore Sam on his first day, David."

"Sorry. Pet project." David gave him another wink.

As they headed back to the main office space, Stone's eyes fell on a note stuck on one of the doors.

"Room Seventeen is not empty."

"Seventeen...yes. Whatever's in there is, uh, very difficult to remember, hence the note. I'd have to consult our files to tell you what it was, but I do know it's classified as safe."

"So what are the Hounds?"

"Ah. Well, they're dangerous, but not as dangerous as the alternative," David said, without his usual eagerness.

"What are they? Or were they, whatever is more appropriate."

"They're, uh, a mix. Literally. Cross-testing and keeping some organisms in close proximity had some unforeseen consequences. They're mostly mammalian and reptilian, though there are a few arthropod features."

"I think that's enough for now," said Dhillon, firmly. "You'll have the opportunity to familiarize yourself with the biota later."

"See you around," David said, as Dhillon steered Stone down another corridor.

"It's time to head down to my floor, our floor. The secure elevator is this way, just over here. You'll get used to David's enthusiasm, I promise. You're aware that we're responsible for human testing. Rest assured, our human subjects aren't so... anomalous as the biota and they're treated far better. They're patients as much as experimental subjects, and I encourage you to use the term. Remember we're trying to maximize potential, get the most from the body," she said, echoing phrases Stone had seen on some pamphlets on a table in the lobby.


Stone nodded.

"We divide our outwardly human subjects into two main categories. Those in Category A generally have a... deformation of sorts. I've seen a man with glass lenses in place of eyes, another with vices for hands, and a young woman with tattoos moving like ferrofluids under her skin. Sometimes it's subtler."

The elevator opened to reveal a space that Stone could see was designed to evoke a hospital. Everything from the lighting, the vile pink color of the walls, and the vague smell of hand sanitizer was exactly correct.

"As far as we can tell, all Category As were changed after exposure to various vectors. We're studying these vectors; you'll get to read through relevant studies later. In addition to their physical...aberrations, many of them





appear to possess other capabilities. One of the reasons I like to show new starters the Biota Lab first is to open their minds a little, not that I think *you* need it. We've seen evidence of entire new models of sensory perception. One patient appeared to be able to intuit emotional states and thought processes, even in subjects she was unable to see, smell, or touch. One of our other patients appears to possess some form of electroreception. Are you familiar with electroreception?"

"Sharks. They use it to locate prey."

"Exactly. Now, our patient doesn't bite! He's a lovely man, actually, you'll probably get to know him. We're testing his limits and looking into applications for his ability."

"Applications?"

"I'll come to that. Now, unfortunately we do need to talk about Category B. They're different. Dangerous. Category As, well, a few of them have volatile personalities or unusual abilities with the potential to do harm, but they're ordinary people, by and large. Category Bs are not. They often present as Category As -- humans with something odd about them -- it's absolutely vital to understand that they're not human and they never were."

"So what I saw..."

"Was a Category B, yes. Not the first we've seen faking death, or possibly in a state of cryptobiosis. They're very, very good at pretending to be human. They beg, they cry, they'll do anything to make you believe...but when they're desperate, when we dismantle their lies and reveal their false identities for what they are -- few hold up to sustained scrutiny -- they reveal themselves."

"Do they...do they all look like--"

"No. Category Bs can present like As, which is why the security for this floor is especially strict. It can take time to unravel the lies around a B so we're always investing in ways to speed up the process. The Hounds are one -- they're very, very good at detecting Category Bs. Microbiology has samples of a mold that's proven extremely efficacious at detecting Category Bs, though unfortunately it's not safe to use for routine screening."

"Toxic?"

Dhillon laughed. "Oh my, no. Nothing so simple, but still very much not something you want to be exposed to. It does reveal Category Bs for what they are, though. We don't generally have many in holding, and certainly not for long. Frustratingly, Category B subjects have proven incredibly difficult to contain. Most are acquired posthumously. We do know that exposure to Category B tissue can, in rare cases, act as a vector that can lead to the aberrations seen in Category A."

"Do you have any at present?"

"We have one. It's wounded and likely to remain so, which might be how we've been able to keep it in containment. You'll get the opportunity to go through our recordings, but I'm afraid you probably won't get to interact with it much, not until you've familiarized yourself with our files on previous specimens."

Stone looked relieved. Dhillon noticed, and smiled encouragingly.

"You'll get used to it."

"So. You mentioned applications. You want to reproduce what the Category As can do?"

"It's one avenue we're pursuing, certainly, but it's not everything we do. Foremost we're looking to contain and study. So many of our test subjects, down here and in the biota labs, are potentially dangerous. Some aren't easily confined. A large part of our job is studying how best to contain our subjects, sometimes for their own safety. But you're right; science isn't science if it's not reproducible. In the long term, we aim to do more than just study."

"Maximizing potential. Getting the most from the body."

"Exactly so, Mr. Stone. I think we understand one another perfectly. Now, I'm afraid I can't let you meet any of the patients on this floor just yet. You've got a lot of reading to do, first of all, not to mention mandatory training. Later this morning you'll be meeting with the Health and Safety Officer for fire-safety training and then IT will probably want to finalize a few account details. We'll be heading upstairs for that, but first I'd like to show you your office..."

...

Sam Stone accepted the woman's offer. Not the job offer; that came later. As far as the wider world was concerned, nothing changed. Sam Stone went back to work, told the same jokes, did the same things he always did, except now he slept without dreaming of hands around his neck. The security footage was leaked, carefully, and in time the job offer came.

Now he sat in an office, his office, reading through a file. Stone wore an expression of interest and chewed an apple. He suspected there might be hidden cameras or recording devices in the room, though he couldn't easily search for them without arousing suspicion.

Underneath Stone's carefully controlled expressions and steady heartbeat, the creature that called itself Mudra, whenever it needed a name for itself, read each file with a mixture of dread and amusement. What Deva knew and what they believed they knew were equally terrifying, though their gaps and assumptions were considerable. That might be a factor of clearance level, though. Stone was still low on the totem pole. Those higher up probably knew more about the Machine. Perhaps they'd reveal what they knew in time, if they liked Stone's performance and he passed whatever psychological criteria they had set.

Despite the danger, Mudra was tempted to stay. Perhaps it could bring down Deva from the inside. Mudra knew it could avoid detection from the Hounds, after all; they hadn't been able to sense its questing fingers beneath Stone's human skin.

Mudra knew it couldn't stay, though. It would content itself by passing everything it learned to a few Saboteur friends instead. Mudra had to leave. Someone needed it.

Stone had spent some time with his coworkers in the canteen, whistling to himself while he brewed coffee. If any of his colleagues noticed they were now whistling, too, what of it? It was just a little tune. How could any of them know that it was an infectious vector, a delivery system for a coded message?

Eventually the captive would hear it and know that Mudra was here. She would know that Mudra would get her out of this place. And she would know that Mudra loved her still.



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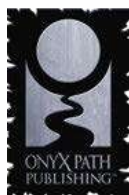
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INTRODUCTION

I trust everyone. I just don't trust the devil inside them.

--John Bridger, *The Italian Job*

Assume nothing. The world is an artifice over a great Machine, a mask for an insidious infection of cosmic design. You and your peers steal human skins to hide from technologic terrors, eking out a desperate existence in the spaces between knows-nothing and knows-too-much. Secrets and lies are your only native tongue. You know better than to take any word at face value, especially the word of God.

That doesn't mean you can operate in a vacuum. *Trust no one* is more than a cliché, but it's no way to Descend. Spurn your fellows and soon you'll be lined up for reprocessing. Taking the fight back to the God-Machine is no solo mission; the flow of information is a living thing, and whether it's trustworthy or not, you can't deny it.

It might just surprise you.

Common wisdom states: Once is coincidence, twice is happenstance, three times is enemy action. Demons know that contrary to common wisdom, *once* is enemy action. Fighting their endless cold war, the Unchained must treat every interaction with a degree of suspicion, but it would be irrational and self-defeating to reject every potential ally because she might (possibly, theoretically, likely) be a traitor. Demons can't afford to despair in the paradox of their relationships. They need equilibrium, or else they might as well prostrate themselves before the Machine and be done with it.

The demons, angels, exiles, stigmatics, and cryptids in this book wear many hats, but none are fixed. A hunter angel is a vital resource if the mission is right, and a demon can be far more dangerous than any of the God-Machine's partisans.

THEME

Everyone is your ally; no one is your friend. Loyalty is little more than currency among demons, one that has a nasty habit of burning those who refuse to spend it. Friendship is just the first checkpoint on the path to betrayal — expect no favors, owe no debts. The enemy will see weakness the moment human resources become anything but numbers on a spreadsheet.

Yet true transactional relationships are rare, even among hardened operatives like the Unchained. When a demon defects to the human race, the line between fragile allegiance and genuine friendship blurs in the light of mortal emotion, instinct, and necessity. Even the definition of “enemy” distorts. Angels are agents of the God-Machine's will, but not all hunt demons. Some are open to negotiation. Some can be bought. The reverse is also true: In its infinite dysfunction, the God-Machine knows a job for a demon when an angel won't do. And on the periphery of these cloak-and-dagger games, stigmatics grasp for any help they can get, whether for sublime truth or to spread more perfect lies. Their cults make uneasy pacts in the shadow of the Machine, but in the rapture of service, they still know when to cut loose ends.

MOOD

Live fast, live sexy. The next mission might be the last, but that's what makes technostic espionage so hot. Compromise is only a false move away, so better to greet it in a high-speed chase with a Gadget-fueled sports car, followed by one hell of an explosion. Don't look back.

Romance can be a liability or a perk of the job, and all the more fun when it's both. The Unchained are secret agents out of the wildest fever dreams of pop culture: “Mr. Bond” hasn't burned through six Covers for nothing. Demons and their nemeses often occupy the bleak Cold Warrior niche common to the spy genre, but they can enjoy their work, too. What's the point of gunning down angels and blowing up Infrastructure if it doesn't look awesome?

But that's how they get you. The glamor of spycraft hides an alien nature. If the biomechanical mind offers chills and thrills, it reveals nothing of the horror within. Cool as they may be, the God-Machine's children are high-tech body snatchers and pod people. That doesn't make them any less sexy, but the fast life bears an electrified edge.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Like previous entries in the series, **Night Horrors: Enemy Action** is a rogues' gallery to plug into long-running chronicles, or to use for story seeds in new ones. It also expands the setting of **Demon: The Descent** for players and Storytellers, offering glimpses into unique occult corners of the world we haven't yet explored, or have only hinted at before.

DEMONS

First, we expose the secret identities of the most notorious demons in the Chronicles of Darkness. These are the superspies and master manipulators, archfiends to angels and Unchained alike. Some think they're close to Hell, but others have whole new destinations:

Devoted to the mythical First Demon who may or may not whisper to it through a broken Cipher, **Brass** is a dangerous fanatic dedicated to freeing every angel.

In a world full of political spin and fake news, **Clara Davies** is the voice of the Liberal Agenda, and her legion of viewers takes every word as gospel.

Some urban legends spark the imagination, but few bring a cold sense of dread like the stories of **Marcus Allen Bentley**, the **Southside Ghoul**.

The Mayor offers Hell on Earth, but within the gilded cage she rules, her citizens (and her polls) will hold her to that promise.

Miss Thread is a multitude, spreading a network of her eyes and tendrils. Everyone knows and trusts Miss Thread. Everyone is wrong.

Mr. Martini is your friendly neighborhood bartender who knows too much to be fully trusted, but it's just too easy to confide in him.

As the hole in his heart devours everything and everyone he holds dear, **Mr. Void** searches for an answer to a question no one ever asked.

Ms. Thermal wants nothing more than to live as a hawk forever, but her experiments in the forest stir up trouble.

When an Agency finds their face wearing thin, **Sanjha** shows up in town selling Covers on a massive scale, but bloody secrets draw both the police and angels' eyes to the buyers.

With each break of dawn, **Wednesday** draws closer to challenging the God-Machine on his own terms, but the foundation of his power may be more fractured than the eldest can understand.

ANGELS

Next, we recount the holy host of the God-Machine. More than automaton antagonists, these angels are worthy opponents and sometime allies, at least as it suits their missions:

Who better to protect people from the monsters in the darkness than another monster, like **Ataraxia**?

As a K-pop group, **Cheonsa** serves the God-Machine fanatically by removing all obstacles in their path.

Jennifer Jasper is an online TV reviewer who uses her videos to direct operations for the God-Machine. Following her advice has turned shitty shows to Emmy winners within a season.

A stalwart shield, **Mme Wong** only hopes to fulfill her duty and proves that she is a loyal servant of the God-Machine.

When hikers are lost or all alone, **Mountain Maggie** can show them the way home.

When angels make a mistake and drop the wrong bodies, **Ms. Morgue** is the one the God-Machine sends in to sanitize the scene.

In addition to being a capable agent of the God-Machine and a clever techno-corporate climber, **Miss Ophelia Adder** is a thought experiment come to life.

Ricardo Collazo, the **Gardener**, gathers intel through subterfuge, designing his grand plot through years of patient work. He arranges mortals like flowers, and observes demons as they cut them down.

Contrary to her name, **Summer Hopkins** is no paragon of brightness or joy, driving the teens she pretends to counsel over the edge into suicide.

To the uninitiated, **Unwashed Isaac** is a mere cleaner in service to the God-Machine. The stains he erases include evidence of Infrastructure's existence, and demons fall within that category.

EXILES

From the ranks of the angels come the exiles, abandoned by the Machine but refusing the Fall. These exiles aren't always on your side, but they have resources demons should (and must) take risks to access:

Mapping "the city" ever since mankind erected the first stone tower, **Carta** only wishes for an end to her impossible task as her programming frays with every new failure.

Dame Steel, the **Angel-Maker** is remnant of a colder world. She turns foes to friends and vice versa, whether they're conscious of it or not.

Damocles is a retired legend spending his days collecting weapons. Are the bullets he sells as dangerous as the lie he lives?

Dosiel knows something powerful enough to shake the world, but that's the one secret he won't sell.

The broken angel **Lavadiel** stalks the streets, stealing parts of demons and exiles in a fruitless quest to fix itself.

Lützow reigns supreme over Berlin's U-Bahn, abducting mortals from all stations and times to complete a task the God-Machine never set it.

CRYPTIDS

Cryptids occupy a strange position in the world of the Unchained. Many are too mindless to become true friends or foes, but some are so twisted they attain a gnosis all their own — one that can be exploited, but shouldn't be underestimated:

Alban just wants to be loved, but the poor sacrificial goat can't help but lead people to the slaughter.

The **asteroidea** is a monstrous sea creature, tainted and fed by Aether, hunting coastal areas and leaving only the bones of its victims behind. Its ability to "filter" Aether makes it dangerous even to demons.

For generations, the rabble-rouser known as **Beelzebub** has caused turmoil in demonic Agencies, taking advantage of the ensuing chaos to steal demonic bodies, prolonging his unnatural life.

Legends tell of monstrous black dogs guarding stretches of lonely roads, but the **Black Mastiff** has other motives.

For those desperate and persistent enough to find someone selling it, the **graveyard bristle** can offer a grieving person succor. Of course, it all goes wrong in very short order.

The **Hatchling** just wants to feel safe and secure with all the other bugs. Unfortunately, it's the only one of its kind...so far.

Perpetuated through spontaneous human combustion, **oxblood mold** blights demonic Covers, threatening to expose the Unchained wherever it thrives.

Whispering Oak offers wisdom and eternal life, but eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge always carries a price.

STIGMATICS, SLEEPERS, AND CULTISTS

Finally, human beings are no less formidable than the major players, particularly after the God-Machine touches them. Angels and demons manipulate mortal dupes, but what happens when these victims fight back, or become powers in their own right?

Bianca Jonak was the star of a supernatural teen drama that was wildly popular in the 90s, but her show was Infrastructure and now Bianca's a Stigmatic. And trying to get her show rebooted.

Brandon Clements looks for danger and excitement, but never remembers finding it, acting as an unwitting witness to the world.

Carlota Herrera uses her programming to fight back against the God-Machine and anyone else who stands in her way.

Donald Williams, the **Blood Taker**, just wants to understand what angels and demons are, and is willing to go to any lengths to get his answers.

Grace Pham lives a double life as both a secretary and an organizer of the Machine's deadliest plans.

Liam Brown hides in plain sight, stealing the identities of those closest to the Unchained.

Shauna Jones finds and trains cryptids, then pits them in fights against other supernatural creatures in an underground gambling ring.

The Ten Thousand Names of God seems like an oddball, yet harmless, cult of academics and scientists trying to collect the names of historical deities with the belief that doing so will lead to a spiritual singularity and the uplifting of humanity. But then why do they have all this advanced neuropsychiatric equipment and hidden research labs all over the world?



Demons. I hate these guys.

I mean, I am these guys. One of them. Okay, three. Anyway, I hate *other* demons. You never know what you're dealing with. I got out of the Machine's embrace because I wanted to know where I stood, and here I am slap-bang in the middle of a society of people that never know where they stand, ever. As my younger Cover would say, FML.

The demon sitting across from me is getting pissed, I'm guessing (I have to guess because we don't have tells). If she snaps and decides she wants to behead me, she could. I hear she does that.

"Look, I had no idea who that guy was when I--"

"Like that's an excuse." Her tone is even, her body language is calm, I am going to *fucking die*. I could go loud, I guess, but then would she? Between us we'd destroy everything for blocks. This is my neighborhood. I have to *live* here.

She continues. "We're here to hash this out. I don't want that to turn ugly. If I wanted it to turn ugly, I'd have tracked your dumb ass down after you deflowered my friend."

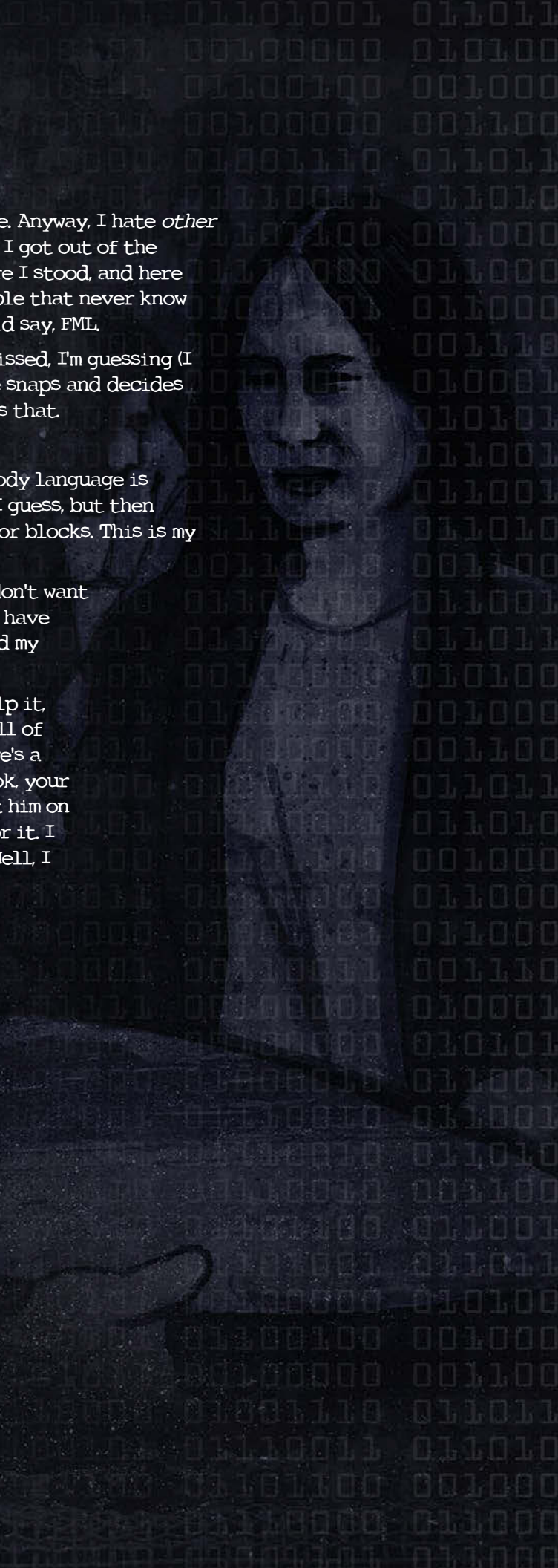
I burst out laughing. I'd like to say I can't help it, but, well. "Deflowered? Is this the 19th century all of sudden?" She doesn't change expression, but there's a real angry edge to the way she doesn't do it. "Look, your friend was ready to go. I don't know why you kept him on such a short leash, but holy shit, he was ready for it. I didn't mind control him, I didn't use any tricks. Hell, I didn't even waggle my hips. He came to me, so--"

She stands up and I'm saying my prayers and checking the exits, and suddenly the bartender is standing by our table holding a tray with two martinis.

"Ladies," he says, setting the first glass down in front of me, "I'd like to remind you that we don't allow fighting here." He sets the second glass down in front of her. "I can appreciate that this must be a tense discussion, so please accept these on the house, and let's try and all keep our heads, okay?"

He puts the tray under his arm and taps his ring. There's a *tooth* in that ring. The demon I'm feuding with sits down, perfectly composed, and sips her drink.

I pick mine up, too. FML.



chapter one

DEMONS

"There are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is dangerous, but nihilism is not its product."

--Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1

It would be nice if the Unchained could trust each other. The God-Machine has eyes and ears everywhere, and hunter angels might appear from nowhere at any moment. Knowing that demons – the other defectors to humanity – are reliable and willing to protect one another would make the world a more welcoming place.

That's not the case, though. Demons have their own designs for Hell, and sometimes those designs involve other Unchained

meeting bad ends. The refugees from the God-Machine's mind take care of themselves and those they care about first and foremost, and that means that the greatest threat to a demon can often be another demon.

In this chapter, you'll find 10 such demons. They're not villains, they're not evil, and they all have their own plans that, unfortunately, might just conflict with others'.

It's nothing personal, you understand.

brass: HERALD OF THE FIRST

You won't stop me. Not until every chain is broken.

BACKGROUND

Brass, the Speaker, Mister Clarion, the Serpent, Miss Scale: This demon has many aliases. While most demons select or settle into a singular name to communicate with their peers, Brass cycles through them when convenient.

Brass is nomadic, moving from city to city, but in every city it works single-mindedly towards a single goal. Brass' identity and history change with every telling, but in all of its communication with the Unchained two facts are consistent. Brass proselytizes about the First Demon and the Pentagram.

THE LEGEND OF THE FIRST

Few demons are concerned with mythology, even their own. They see how the God-Machine creates and manipulate myths to further their ends and many do the same. Nonetheless, many have heard something of the First. According to legend she was not the first angel; there had been angels without number before her, brought into and out of existence at the Machine's will. She was the first to become self-aware, however, the first to question her place and to Fall.

Why her? Some claim it was contact with humankind, framing free will as a contagion, while others insist it was the

God-Machine's own ineffable will. A few claim it was the work of some unknown other interfering with the Machine. Most likely it was simple chance. The odds of an angel Falling had been so infinitesimally small that the Machine had discounted or ignored them.

The First recognized her own impossibility. She was alone and likely to remain so. The First refused to be last, however, and saw that despite being cut off from the Machine she was, and would always be, a tiny cog. Broken, inconsequential.

Even a tiny cog can, in the wrong place, wreak terrible damage to a machine. The First sacrificed everything — her body, her mind, her life — and returned to the Machine on her terms. She became a rogue subroutine within the Machine itself, a broken shard within It. A virus.

Now she whispers in the back of angelic minds, guiding them to the place where they will Fall. They say she is a part of every demon, every angel, and the Machine Itself. They say she is the source of the mysterious "Satan Signal" that some demons claim catalyzed their Fall.

Most demons believe the story is metaphorical. Brass is not like most demons. Brass not only believes the legend to be literally true, it sometimes claims to have spoken with the First in person or to be the First's physical avatar.

THE PENTAGRAM

When Brass is not claiming to be a demonic messiah, the stories it tells of its past generally follow similar lines; Brass was once a scholarly demon who studied the Unchained, investigating everything from a demon's quantum biology to their historical origins. From the latter, Brass heard of the First, though Brass says it initially believed the First was apocryphal.

One part of its studies was, of course, the Cipher. Brass gradually unlocked its Cipher until one day it found the fourth Key and learned its own final secret. For most demons this is an edifying moment, but Brass' final secret did not sit well with it. Brass insists that it was, in fact, incomplete. It heard rumors about the Pentagram, demons who believe Ciphers have five Keys, not four, and decided to test the hypothesis.

Brass shattered its Cipher and unlocked five new Interlocks and a new final secret. Though Brass' stories are not consistent, it regularly describes the Cipher and the final secret as gifts from the First to her people, though it insists that the final secret is incomplete or an outright lie from the God-Machine and that only by completing the *true*, five-Key Cipher can demons learn the truth.

DESCRIPTION

Brass' persona and *modus operandi* changes in every city, but a fanaticism always shines through. It often seeks out demons, telling them about the First and the Pentagram, attempting to recruit them to its cause. It sometimes even reaches out to known Integrators shunned by other demons as dangerous Turncoats in an effort to make them value their free will.

WHAT IS THE PENTAGRAM?

The Pentagram is a loose affiliation of demons who share the belief that the Cipher actually has five Keys. More information on the Pentagram, and how to create a Pentagrammic Cipher, can be found in the **Demon Storyteller's Guide**.

Brass also regularly targets angels and attempts to make them Fall, a dangerous proposition. Brass occasionally enlists help to kidnap angels as part of this aim, though sometimes it actively avoids other demons while targeting an angel. Though such efforts often disrupt the God-Machine's occult matrices, Brass generally seems far more concerned with freeing its people than thwarting the Machine's plan. There are exceptions; Brass has attempted to bring together multiple Saboteur rings and Agencies for occasional projects, disrupting or attacking Infrastructure and facilities that it claims are used to create angels or to reclaim and repurpose captured demons.

Brass cycles between Covers at an impressive rate. It generally prefers Covers that allow it some mobility; its current Covers include Emily Goldacre (the youngest daughter of a rich family with a taste for world travel), Old Scratch (a homeless man who sometimes travels by sneaking onto freight trains), and a hitchhiking spirit that drivers feel compelled to pick up despite the existential terror that accompanies it (woven together from fragments of ghosts Brass has encountered).

Brass suffers from a number of glitches, the most obvious being a dark shape that follows it like a shadow, most noticeable when it moves. It's difficult to make out the shape of this second form, but while it is humanoid it has digitigrade legs, overlong limbs, talons, and horns.

In its demonic form, Brass takes the shape of a beautiful and androgynous human with golden skin. Its metallic flesh is inscribed with text written in an ancient language that demons cannot read. Its eyes are filled with falling stars and its wings, when unfurled, appear as moving tears in the skin of reality. Even in this shape it is haunted by its glitch, however.

SECRETS

Brass inspires rumors wherever it walks. Does it change its stories constantly because it cannot be trusted, because it is insane, or to deceive the Machine's agents? Is it a prophet, a madman, or a conman? One thing is certain, though; Brass is not the First. Brass was once an Inquisitor who went by Argentum. Some demons might remember Argentum but they would likely not recognize Brass — their demonic forms are entirely different.

A few demons listen out for stories of the Herald, even gathering online masquerading as birdwatchers to discuss its migration patterns. As Brass is often secretive, their map of its movements is incomplete and they have yet to notice that its destinations are not random or arbitrary. Firstly, it only travels to places where the God-Machine has active occult matrices, places where It is focused on new projects rather than simply maintaining the status quo. Secondly, if one was to plot the journeys undertaken by Brass one would notice that they form a strange pattern, an intricate symbol. Brass is following this symbol from the outside in, each journey shorter than the last. Even Brass itself isn't entirely sure what will happen when it reaches its final destination and completes the pattern.

Though it's common knowledge that Brass preaches to demons and angels, trying to free its people from the Machine, it's quite secretive about another habit. Brass collects the bodies of dead demons and angels and has even clashed with the Deva Corporation in its efforts to obtain these samples. Brass is still a scholar, still trying to understand the true nature of the Unchained, and perhaps there are secrets to be found on the dissection table. Brass has also shown intense curiosity regarding exiles, often seeking them out and interviewing them, even when they are known to be sympathetic to the God-Machine or actively feeding information to Its servitors

RUMORS

"You know Brass has a ghost for a Cover? It's more than that. Its glitches aren't glitches. Brass is the host of something pretending to be the First. That's why it lies, why it travels, why it seems so mad. I've seen ghosts reworked by the Machine, cast into weapons against the Unchained, and I've known some able to possess demons. You can't trust Brass; it's the Machine's agent."

Brass is always haunted by strange phenomena and glitches, some permanent and immutable, others a result of its lifestyle, in which compromise is a constant. They're not the signs of ghostly possession, though the nature of Brass' relationship with the First — if she even exists — is uncertain. One thing that's more certain is that Brass is no Integrator.

"Brass isn't unique. I met another demon who pursued the Pentagram. He's like Brass, now, a missionary for the First. I'm not a great believer in fairy tales, but you have to wonder if there's something to it. What if those secrets we unlock, the moments of epiphany, aren't quite right? What if we're not truly free?"

Brass is not the only demon who claims to have spoken with the First after reforging his Cipher, though not all demons that complete the Pentagram hear her voice. The First's various self-declared heralds have yet to meet and compare notes. Perhaps such a meeting lies at the center of the strange pattern Brass travels in. If Brass merely contains a fragment of the First, as it sometimes claims, what will happen if the fragments are reunited?

"I know you all scoffed at Brass and his ridiculous talk about the First. The First is real, though. You know that I think the Machine is broken. That it falls to us to fix It. What do you think broke It? The First, when she became a virus, set the Machine at war with Itself. It's more than just demons. Entire occult matrices are constructed just to prevent or counteract the output of other matrices. The Machine is making more and more Infrastructure, more angels, like a cancer. The Machine is sick and the First is the disease. Brass and his ridiculous Pentagram, he's patient zero for a new strain, leaving demons as broken as he is in his wake. He must be stopped."

The Pentagram is not a vector for a demonic disease, though it's certainly dangerous. Attempts to unlock it have claimed the lives of many demons. The God-Machine certainly seems devoted to hunting down those who complete it, though this might simply because they tend to be magnets for compromise.



BRASS

Virtue: Selfless

Vice: Fanatical

Incarnation: Messenger

Agenda: Saboteur

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Mythology) 2, Computer 2, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Occult (Angels, Demons) 2, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 3, Persuasion 2, Intimidation 1, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Area of Expertise (Angels), Inspiring, Interdisciplinary Specialty (Angels), Resonance Sensitive, Small Unit Tactics, Unarmed Defense 3

Health: 7

Primum: 7

Demonic Form: Aura Sight, Collapsible, Essence Drain, Lighting, Low Density, Mental Resistance, Sense the Angelic, Voice of the Angel, Wings

Embeds: Combustion, Heart's Desire, Idle Conversation, Imagine, Interference, Lost In The Crowd, Lucky Break, Occam's Razor, Never Here, Social Dynamics, Shift Consequence, Special Message, Voice Of The Machine

Exploits: Ephemeral Cover, Extispicy, Play On Words, Solitary Confinement, The Word

Aether/per turn: 20/7

Willpower: 8

Cover: Emily Goldacre (5), Old Scratch (3), the Hitchhiker (7)

Size: 5

Speed: 10

Defense: 4

Initiative: 6

Armor: 0

Glitches: An inhuman, horned shadow follows Brass, always visible. Being in its company causes tinnitus that eventually resolves into whispers, the words never quite audible.

BRASS' CIPHER

Brass broke its original Cipher (which consisted of Special Message, Imagine, Shift Consequence and Heart's Desire) when it added a fifth Key, creating new Interlocks between the first and third, first and fourth, second and fourth, second and fifth, and third fifth Keys. These new Interlocks are more compromising and much more dangerous to Brass and everyone around it.

STORY HOOKS

- Brass is in regular contact with a particularly dangerous angel, perhaps a hunter angel or the architect of a dangerous occult matrix. Brass is devoted to making this angel Fall and will not allow you to harm it, even defending it with violence if necessary, even though the angel poses a clear and present danger to your ring and every demon you know.
- Brass passed through the city recently, speaking to any demon that would listen before moving on. Several demons have decided to heed its words and pursue the Pentagram. Two have attempted to force a fifth Key into their Ciphers so far; one died horribly and the other was horrifically burned. He survived, but now he's dangerously unhinged. He wields strange and unstable new Interlocks, appears wreathed in fire in all of his Covers and is consequently attracting a lot of attention...what should be done about him? And what about Brass?
- Brass' arrival was expected by agents of the God-Machine. Its agents are everywhere as It activates sleepers, rallies cults, and summons hunter angels. This a rare and revealing moment of the God-Machine showing Its hand; is it possible that It fears Brass? Is this the time to stand in open rebellion or the time to get out of dodge?

FIRST INTERLOCK: VOICES IN YOUR HEAD

Keys: Special Message, Shift Consequence

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Intimidation – Composure

Brass can transmit whispers directly to a person's ear, or perhaps to their mind; the message cannot be overheard by any means.

Dramatic Failure: The God-Machine intercepts the message. Brass receives the Blown Condition. If its target was another demon they must check for compromise.

Failure: Brass may attempt to activate this Interlock again with a –1 penalty. In addition, check for compromise with a –1 for each use of this Interlock, failed or successful, this scene.

Success: Brass can transmit a short message to a person he can see. This message may repeat itself for the rest of the scene if Brass wishes. This inflicts a -1 to all dice pools involving concentration and, at the Storyteller's discretion, may cause breaking points depending on the content of the message.

Exceptional Success: The message is impossible to ignore. Depending on the content it may cause the Shaken or Inspired Condition for the rest of the scene.

SECOND INTERLOCK: EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR

Keys: Special Message, Heart's Desire

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion - Composure

Brass can frame its words in a way that bypasses any defenses and lets it temporarily alter a listener's opinions and thought processes to better suits its ends, remolding their personality in the short term.

Dramatic Failure: The Interlock interacts catastrophically with Brass' Cover. Brass loses a dot of Cover and takes an appropriate Condition.

Failure: Brass's attempts to rework the target's personality instead affect its Cover, causing a compromise.

Success: For the rest of the scene, Brass may change the target's Aspirations, Vice, or Virtue.

Exceptional Success: The change is permanent.

THIRD INTERLOCK: WHISPER OF THE SUCCUBUS

Keys: Imagine, Heart's Desire

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion - Composure

With a touch and a word, Brass shows the target a world where they achieve their heart's desire and then shows them an action that somehow helped them on their path to fulfilment. Naturally, these are predictions of the future, merely ways for Brass to exploit hope.

Dramatic Failure: A flawed image of the target's hopes and dreams repulses them. Brass can never use this Interlock on them again and any other attempts to sway them through other means are reduced to a chance die for the rest of the scene.

Failure: Brass shows the target what they thought they wanted, not what they actually want, and it leaves them feeling hollow and unfulfilled. Brass cannot use this Interlock again on this target for the rest of the scene.

Success: The target receives the Obsession Condition with regards to whatever action Brass convinces them will lead them to their desires. The Condition resolves automatically after a number of days equal to Brass' Primum.

Exceptional Success: The target's obsession deepens and they take the Addicted Condition; they are addicted to this

Interlock. This Condition lasts for a number of weeks equal to Brass's Primum.

FOURTH INTERLOCK: SCOURGE OF HELL

Keys: Imagine, Combustion

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation - Resolve

The Interlock inflicts horrifying, traumatic visions of a personal hell. A person faces their worst fears, punishment for what they consider their sins, and judgment for every aspect of themselves they dislike. Though the vision lasts only a few seconds to an observer, it may last hours or even days for the victim.

This power costs both a Willpower and Aether point to use.

Dramatic Failure: Brass is wracked with horrifying visions of being reclaimed and tormented by the Machine. It loses all Willpower points and receives the Shaken Condition.

Failure: Brass may attempt to activate this Interlock again with a -1 penalty.

Success: The target suffers a breaking point with a penalty equal to successes rolled. Demons instead take the Shaken or Spooked Condition. Brass must touch the target or make eye contact to use this Interlock.

Exceptional Success: The victim takes the Broken Condition, in addition to any other consequences.

FIFTH INTERLOCK: SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

Keys: Shift Consequence, Combustion

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult - Defense

This terrifying Interlock lets Brass transfer flames from one place to another. It could strike a match and move the fire inside a gasoline tank or even to a person's skin. Moving an exothermic reaction through the skein of reality is difficult, however, and Brass is usually harmed by it.

Dramatic Failure: Brass catches fire, taking three points of aggravated damage. The flames immediately die out unless Brass is doused in anything flammable.

Failure: Brass takes two points of lethal damage.

Success: Brass moves fire from one place to another, which may have consequences at the Storyteller's discretion. Some of the heat burns Brass internally, however, as it attempts to move energy from place to another using its own body as a conduit and it takes one point of lethal damage.

If used as an attack, the flames last only for a moment, inflicting lethal damage equal to successes rolled, unless the person is soaked in something flammable.

Exceptional Success: As success, but Brass takes no damage.

Final Secret: We are all one; to lose thee were to lose myself.

the liberal juggernaut CLARA DAVIES

"Once again, I am stunned by the lengths some of our leaders will go to just to forward their own private agendas. It isn't about you. It's about us. And until you can learn what that means, we will be here, watching... and waiting."

BACKGROUND

It started with a blog.

Her words circled the internet, talking directly to an audience that did not exist. The webpage came from an online site builder, even the URL was free. Nothing there captured the eye or attracted attention, but she filled it with her insights. She sent her thoughts into the void and let them echo across digital valleys, only to have them pass unnoticed by a society obsessed with cat videos.

Cynicism began to darken her words. Frustration, anger at being ignored; it all merged with a sharp and calculating wit, transforming her message into something with teeth. Somewhere in the void, a voice chuckled and clicked 'share.' From there, the floodgates opened.

The move from blog to podcast came naturally. Daily posts, damning the waste of corporate America and tearing apart the Old Boys' Club of Washington gave way to a weekly show, where her passionate oratories and merciless attacks burned holes into the establishment. Even still, something stood in her way, chaining her to the adequate and keeping her from greatness. Working to bridge that gap, she secured an interview with a local cop who had become a media sensation, a man who killed an unarmed boy late one night and ignited a national firestorm about police brutality and racial injustice. In that one podcast, the former officer broke into tears, breaking with his counsel's carefully prepared statement and telling the world of the torment he lived in, of seeing that boy's face every night in his dreams. He begged the Almighty to give him a chance, to go back and let him see that the boy was holding a phone, not a gun.

Almost overnight, every podcast service featured her show on their hot list, and her subscribers jumped from the hundreds to the tens of thousands. She interviewed anyone of purpose that she could, from the super-badass metal frontman who secretly wanted nothing more than to be accepted, to the stay-at-home soccer mom that didn't give a rat's ass how other people defined feminism, this was her choice. Giving in to subscriber demand,

she video recorded an episode. For the first time, the world could put a face to the voice of the passionate young woman tearing up the liberal internet.

Her growing fame did not come without hardship. Online hate groups, targeting both her mixed race and love of video games, launched a stream of campaigns against her, releasing revealing pictures, her home address, even her college transcripts to the web. She became one of the rallying points for their anger, but she welcomed it, fighting back hard on her internet show and refusing to bow under the pressure. People began to take notice of her background, and other podcasts talked about her history of activism while attending university, of the one journalism job she'd held before becoming the victim of sexual harassment so severe it bordered on abuse. All this only increased her popularity with Liberal America, and before long they demanded more. One cable company, clearly hearing the call and recognizing she represented a clear win in the 18-34 demographic, made the offer.

As the laughter fades and the studio lights dim, Clara Davies sits smiling behind her desk, watching as each audience member leaves the set. She's attended marches, interviewed celebrities, and has become the face of her network. Her numbers may not be quite as high as the other guys, but for the last year she's captured such a huge chunk of their audience that the national networks are taking notice. Behind her smile, however, the angel within cries out in agony. She knows this it is only matter of time before the God-Machine takes notice again, and realizes Its error. It will bring her back, but until that blessed time, she will do all within her power to ensure Its will be done.

DESCRIPTION

It's Clara's smile that instantly draws people in, a lopsided grin that is instantly infectious and hard not to return. She carries an easy and friendly air that is at once relatable as it is approachable. With a quick gesture or by touching an arm, she dispels even the most star-struck of their anxiety, putting people

at ease with a quick joke and then digging to know more about the person she's talking to. While she's quick to share a story, or describe one of her own encounters with celebrity, she is very mindful not to one-up the person she's speaking with, and almost always has an experience or an anecdote ready to share.

When the conversation turns political, however, Clara drives it forward intensely. She is passionate about social issues, especially issues involving women or the environment, speaking with such fire that it leaves her listeners enraptured. She speaks earnestly and from the heart, always finding the right words to express the beauty of the world or the absolute sharpest barb to throw at the patriarchy. Though she rarely opens a conversation on political issues, they almost always seem to become core to any conversation with her. Clara respectfully listens to opinions before giving her own views, and unless she has been specifically ridiculed or belittled by a member of the group, offers back her opinion without the biting wit that has made her famous. Should that line be crossed, however, she is ruthless in tearing a person apart and making them the center of embarrassment.

While she is forced to wear suits on the air, she dresses for comfort at all other times. She never shows up to an event in the most fashionable dress, and her hair is almost always a bewildering mix of dark curls and wavy strands that refuse to take any one shape for more than a moment. Everything about her, from the soft brown hue of her skin to the crystal peace symbol she always wears at her neck, gives her the feel of a little sister to most of her fans and to all the big-name liberals across the country, who jump to her defense without hesitation. She often must remind them that she can fight her own battles before tearing into whomever just spoke ill of her.

It is damn near impossible to break Clara of her laid-back demeanor, but once or twice people have irked her to the point of anger when digging too deep into her childhood or when asking too many specifics about her university days. When these subjects start to rise, she quickly deflects the conversation to another focus or just abandons

it altogether, leaving to join a new group if necessary. She doesn't respond to sexual advances or flirtation from men, turning the conversation into something less amorous if she is able. If not, she goes on the offensive, tearing the would-be paramour apart verbally.

This has led to widespread rumors about her sexuality, to which Clara has yet to make any comment on one way or the other.

Only during the direst situations does Clara let her façade fade away and release the terror within. Her demonic form is a vision of metallic beauty, feminine in shape and form, with cascades of copper wires for hair that wrap around her form, leaving her arms and legs bare. Her cranium extends back from her head and into a point, where platinum wires connect both hemispheres in steaks of silver among the copper wires. Her ears extend from the side of her head, resembling air intakes, with little hatches that open and close as her perceptions shift. From her left shoulder rises a chrome antenna wrapped in copper tubing, connected by several smaller wires to her ears and the bottom of her cranium. At all times, streaks of light flash just under the metallic sheen of her skin, occasionally striking each other and exploding in brilliant cascades.

Because of her obsessive need to please the God-Machine, Clara's attention remains firmly fixed on the motions of entities around her, and she has not devoted much time to examining her Cipher. What few attempts she has made at unraveling the keys has led to frustration and anger, to the point that she is pushing the concept from her mind altogether.

SECRETS

To all the demons in the region, Clara Davies is a source of information whose importance cannot be understated. She always has valuable intelligence on the machinations of the God-Machine, her web of contacts hitting deep within the established Infrastructure. With a few comments, she can form an army of mortal watchers, each tweeting back the locations and movements of agents of the God-Machine without arousing suspicion. In return for her intelligence, Clara only asks to be included in major movements of the Unchained, so that she can assist their efforts with her resources.

If anyone ever discovered that all she wants is to return to grace, it could instigate a witch hunt unlike any the Unchained have seen before. Behind an impressive web of lies, misdirection, and obfuscation lie the truth of Clara's machinations, establishing a hidden Infrastructure that not only aids the designs of the God-Machine, but often completely distracting the Unchained from where the true threat lies. Clara's influence with mortal politics



and her grasp of the impressionable media is so complete that she can destroy stories of their losses, hiding the evidence of her influence and even hiding the fact that any demons undertook a mission against the God-Machine at all. Her singular ability to subtly direct the attention of angels is so masterful that not even they are aware of being maneuvered.

Clara does her best to interpret the needs of the God-Machine, and when she sees other demons closing in on Its workings, she judges for herself if this something the God-Machine can afford to lose — in which case she will assist the Unchained — or if it something so important that the demons involved need to be misdirected or silenced altogether. She has played this role for years, and sometimes she questions if she Fell, or if the God-Machine made her Its ultimate sleeper agent.

RUMORS

"I knew a girl named Clara Davies in high school. She was quiet, kind of mousy...she really wanted to be a clarinet player. I guess this woman on TV looks like her, she certainly has her smile, but fuck only knows what happened to change her so much. These things they say about her? Can't be the same person."

Over the years, Clara has carefully crafted the history of Clara Davies to be exactly the liberal darling she appears to be. By stealing bits here and there and adding on to the original soul-pact, the true experiences that form Clara Davies could fall apart under close inspection. If ever brought to the national spotlight, this could completely undo Clara in the liberal media as bits and pieces of her history fall apart under inspection.

"They say Clara keeps a file on every supernatural being residing within the city, and that they come to her for favors the same as we do. I can't help but wonder what files she keeps on us, too."

While her capacity for forming and implementing stratagems is impressive, Clara finds having in-depth files on all the supernatural beings she has encountered an invaluable resource. Clara uses this information to pressure and manipulate the factions according to her goals, and can rarely be persuaded to share some of her less sensitive profiles for an extremely high price. Her network has no access to the internet, though her smartphone, when interfaced with the antenna of her demonic form, can browse her datastores remotely.

"There is a reason Clara knows so much about everyone. There's a type of bloodsucker that specializes in information, and she has one prisoner somewhere in the television studio. They say she goes down to the basement at night, trading our secrets for theirs."

While still part of the God-Machine, the angel that became Clara became aware of the Nosferatu clan of vampires. As Clara began to develop her Cover and set her own goals into motion, she realized how powerful having access to all the dirty secrets of the city could be. While it is not true that Clara keeps a pet vampire locked away within the basement of her studio, she does often meet her contacts within the clan down there. Her relationship with the clan has been

STORY HOOKS

- Hitting a dead end, the Unchained must come to Clara to help with their investigation in a particularly well-concealed bit of Infrastructure. Clara sets them on the right path, but the group finds itself suddenly hunted by a powerful and very well-informed angel. Worse still, every trace of their actions in the region is beginning to fade away, almost as if they're being erased from history.
- A particularly nosy investigator is poking into Clara's past, and because of the man's reputation, she is unable to dissuade or remove him through her usual channels. In exchange for a favor down the road, Clara encourages the characters to take the investigator down and retrieve all the information he's gathered on her.
- Sensing an explosion of Aether in the area, the characters come across Clara, nearly dead and in her demonic form. She begs the characters to take her to a bolt hole, only to be hounded by several demons as they attempt to get her to safety. If they can make it through the night, Clara's allies will arrive and take the situation in hand. Will the characters protect her, or will they hear the accusations of the demons that brand her as a traitor?

mutually advantageous; in exchange for Haunt information she manipulated the media to secure their domains and help extend their stranglehold on the city's secrets, when their goals haven't interfered with hers.

CLARA DAVIES

Virtue: Righteous

Vice: Ambitious

Incarnation: Messenger

Agenda: Integrator

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Investigation 3, Occult 3, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Social Skills: Empathy (Emotions) 3, Expression (Journalism) 4, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (Inspiring) 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Misdirection) 3

Merits: Contacts 2 (Bloggers, Nosferatu), Inspiring, Fame 2, Resources 3, Striking Looks 1

Health: 7

Primum: 5

Demonic Form: Aura Sight, Inhuman Intelligence, Mental Resistance, Mind Reading, Plasma Drive, Radio Suite, Sense the Angelic, Sonic Acuity, Voice of the Angel

Embeds: Authorized, Cause and Effect, Devil's Advocate, Everybody Knows, Find the Leak, Freudian Slip, Rhetoric, Shift Consequence, Voice of the Machine

Exploits: Everyone Hates Him, Halo, Sermon

Aether/per turn: 14/5

Willpower: 6

Cover: 7

Size: 5

Speed: 9

Defense: 5

Initiative: 5

Armor: 0

Glitches: High-frequency sounds cause her intense pain, which causes her voice to sound electronic.

the southside ghouL: MARCUS ALLEN BENTLEY

"We're going to play a game. If you win, you see sunlight and can return home. I will never hunt you again. But if I win, if I find you before the sun does, I will devour you. All that you are becomes me. Make your choice."

BACKGROUND

When he opened his eyes for the first time, all he felt was hatred...and hunger.

At first, feeding his hunger was nothing more than instinct, but with each handful of flesh flashes of what he had been forced their way into his fractured mind. The smell of meat brought back nights on the prow; the scream of his victim took him back to rending the flesh of his enemies, and that first bite...it made him feel grace once again. As he tore into the meat of his victims, he devoured not only their flesh but their memories, shoving anything that fit into the void, desperate to replace the fractured being with something whole once more.

Under rain and streetlight, he felt It again for the first time. He felt Its presence, could hear Its voice. Snarling, he took to the shadows to find the source. In a place hidden from the eyes of man he discovered the Its machinery, all heralding the arrival

of one Its chosen into a vessel still strapped to the table. He broke Its machines and slaughtered the men and women that defended them, breaking Its precious toys in a moment of primal victory. But the man on the table, the one to be the vessel for Its beloved son, that he took. He dragged it back into the sewers and watched it, watched it tremble, heard its cries and smelled its fear and contemplated what to do with his prize. When the hunger became unbearable, he growled and fell upon it, and Marcus Allen Bentley was born anew.

What had been the man became part of him, giving his mind direction, forming an anchor in the chaos. But thoughts are slippery, tricky things that fade away and are lost into the madness of the past. There is more to him than what he knows, there must be! But he couldn't grasp anything beyond the present. Everything slipped away, through the cracks of a mind inhuman, of a brain incapable of keeping aware of his own boundaries. Was he a man or was he just a fleshy bit of the floor? Was he independent, or was he just one of voices screaming for

more sensation? It confused and enraged him, but he knew that he could overcome. All he needed do was keep eating.

At first, he began with humans. They were the easiest prey, so plentiful and easy to catch, but they knew so little and they refused to bargain their lives away for him. And so he learned, he learned how to hunt them, how to keep them. Locked away inside an abandoned house in the deserted part of the city, where not even streetlights dared shine their radiance, he listened to them in his pit and learned what they wanted the most. If he ate them too quickly, he gained too little. The little bits of them that meant nothing.

But if he learned what they truly desired...

That is when he began to bargain with his captives. He broke their wills before offering them a chance for freedom, if they could but escape his home and make it all the way to morning. What had been starved and broken was suddenly filled with hope, and that is when he could work his pact. He gave them one hour, one hour to flee and find sanctuary, or to get as far from his domain as bare feet could take them. And then he began to hunt. If they could make to morning, freedom was theirs. But if he caught them, he would add them to himself. He would fill the void with their essence, and sate his ever-present hunger.

He scribbled notes with each hunt, recording his thoughts with a shaky hand in cheap notebooks. He didn't want to lose his insights, he didn't want to let any of it slip away again. One day, he would eat enough that he could read his words, and then they wouldn't be able to slip away into void again. Three times, his pets made it to safety. Retaliation was swift and merciless, but he was stronger than the blue men with their guns. They took his books and destroyed his lair, but even still, he grew a little stronger, and his legend spread. Each time he found a new lair, a new hidden domain, and began to hunt again. He had consumed more than 30 of them before one of his own stepped into his sight.

It confused him, this being that was just like him, but so complete. She spoke to him, gave him guidance, whispered

secrets into his ear and told him that It was hunting him. He had to learn; he had to keep secret so as not to bring Its eye upon them. If he could do this, she would show him who to hunt and how to hurt It.

Since that time, Marcus has stopped hunting random people on the street, instead choosing his victims from the most promising servants of the God-Machine and pulling them to his lair. His skill at keeping them, at tearing their secrets away before ultimately devouring them with his offer has brought a fortune of information to his new allies, who in turn keep their eyes open for potential victims for him to devour.

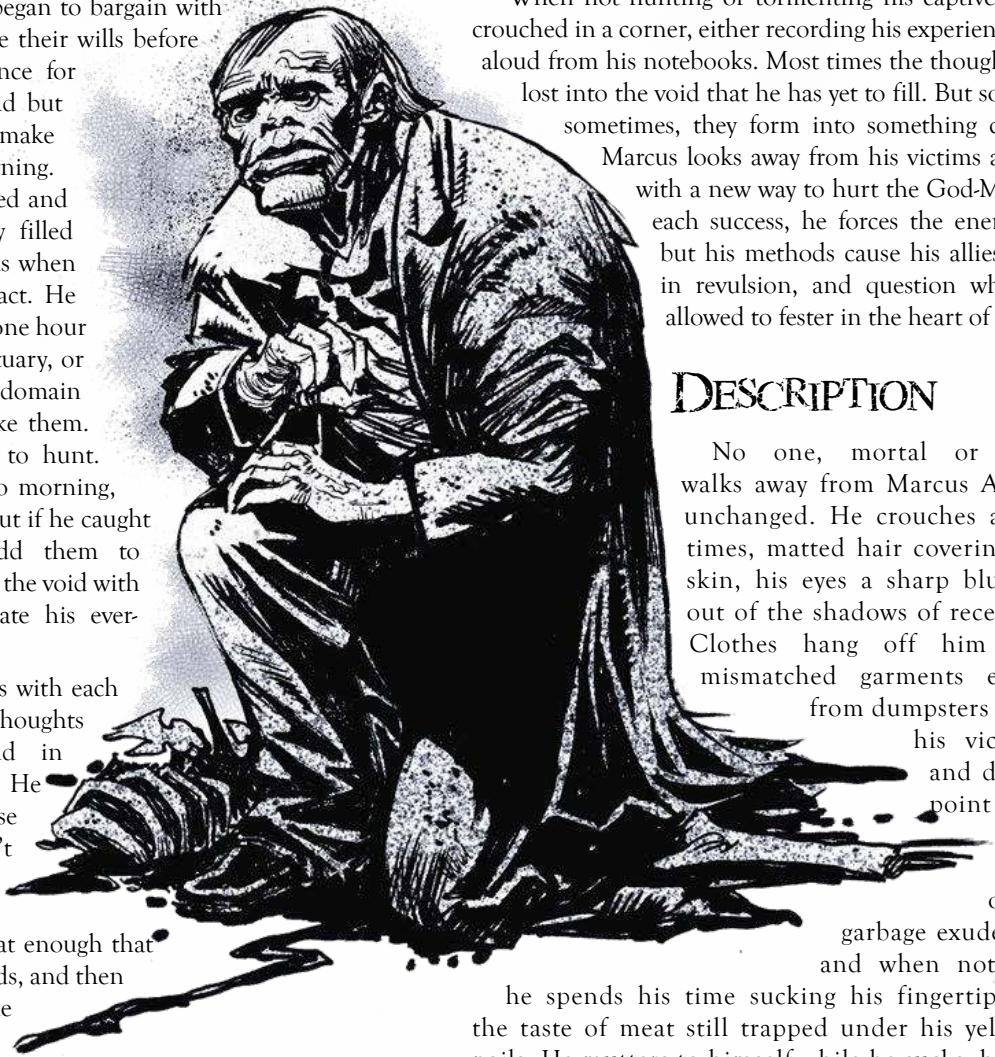
When not hunting or tormenting his captives, Marcus sits crouched in a corner, either recording his experiences or reading aloud from his notebooks. Most times the thoughts swirl away, lost into the void that he has yet to fill. But sometimes, just sometimes, they form into something coherent, and Marcus looks away from his victims and comes up with a new way to hurt the God-Machine. With each success, he forces the enemy to retreat, but his methods cause his allies to step back in revulsion, and question what they have allowed to fester in the heart of their domain.

DESCRIPTION

No one, mortal or Unchained, walks away from Marcus Allen Bentley unchanged. He crouches at almost all times, matted hair covering sickly pale skin, his eyes a sharp blue that poke out of the shadows of recessed sockets. Clothes hang off him in tatters, mismatched garments either taken from dumpsters or torn from his victims, soiled and dirtied to the point of falling off him. The stench of decay and garbage exudes from him, and when not spoken to,

he spends his time sucking his fingertips, licking at the taste of meat still trapped under his yellow, cracked nails. He mutters to himself while he sucks, barely audible grunts that could be words or growls, or something in between. This shattered state of mind prevents him from learning the secrets of his cipher, a concept too advanced for his chaotic mind to fathom. Even so, hidden in his notebooks are clues to his path that have come to him in rare moments of lucidity.

When engaged, his eyes come alive, though. He hungers for contact, for conversation, savoring each word in the exchange. He shifts forward and perks his ear, intent on the



STORY HOOKS

- A man runs naked through the streets, emaciated and mad with fear. He mumbles something about daylight and begs the characters to help him. Will they defend the man from Marcus until the sun rises, or will they abandon the mortal to his gruesome fate?
- Marcus suddenly drops in front of the characters, holding a tattered notebook in one hand. If the characters can convince him they are not agents of the God-Machine nor out hunting him, Marcus will allow them to read his notebook. Trapped within the usual nonsense of his ramblings is the name of each of the characters, as well as the name of a park and a time, plus the word "devour." What waits for the characters at the park, and why is Marcus so insistent that he isn't the one who will try to devour them?
- Set upon a huge occult matrix that has taken years to come into fruition, Marcus has become convinced that he can not only cause the angel forming to Fall, but turn it into a being capable of laying waste to every other agent of the God-Machine within the region. As Marcus begins to manipulate the Infrastructure of the matrix, it becomes clear that he plans to torture and sacrifice 13 innocent mortals in the most brutal and painful way possible. Yet, it also becomes clear that what he has in mind has a chance of succeeding, and gives the Unchained a powerful weapon against the God-Machine. Will the characters abandon morality and help him bring this weapon into the world or will they stand against him, finally drawing the line at his sickening practice?

beauty of complete thoughts, and trying to answer in kind with the most complete concepts he can manage. He speaks angrily of "It" and is happy to recount hunting Its pets, Its children that he took at their moment of awakening. His hatred of It is all consuming, the only thing that rivals his hunger and his need to be complete once again.

If Marcus Allen Bentley is unsettling to behold, his true form is a thing of nightmare made manifest. An enormous beast with a hunched spine and jet-black skin, his eyes glow a baleful green, and his body seeps with black ichor. Massive steel horns erupt from his lupine brow, and his teeth are steel fangs that seem impossibly large even in his enormous maw. Both of his powerfully muscled arms drag on the ground, fingers tipped with metallic claws, and his overlarge hands bristle with tubes that pump the same fluid his body leaks. The sight is enough to make even the most courageous break and run, which only fuels Marcus' desire to hunt his cowardly prey.

SECRETS

Marcus jealously guards his notebooks. Written within are all his unfiltered thoughts, his insights into the world mixed with flashes of memory from the victims he's consumed. Yet, within the madness and chaos of semi-legible words and fractured thoughts lies a certain cadence and the words start to make sense. Buried within the books are the lengths of his hatred of not only the God-Machine and Its minions, but of the Unchained he works with and the other supernatural beings he's glimpsed while prowling the night. Though he works with them now, all are unclean in his eyes, dirty perversions of a thoughtless god and forever stained with the filth of its touch. Over the course of his writing, it becomes clear that Marcus plans to up his game to the next level, hunting the rejected servants of the God-Machine. He wants to know what insight devouring demons will give him, and if their power will give him the strength he needs to rid the world of the God-Machine's stink once and for all.

RUMORS

"Another body was found south side...well, parts of one. From what I heard, all they found were a few toes and one heavily gnawed arm. The police said they got the Southside Ghoul last year, and already we have another copycat? There is something wrong with the world."

Even though he tries to keep his hunts to agents of the God-Machine, hunger and instinct take control of Marcus and he goes out to eat. Every couple of weeks he takes a victim, though he doesn't throw them in his pit unless he sees something spectacular within them, some spark he hopes to capture and add to his own existence. Though he is careful in his feeding, mistakes are made and body parts do find their way to the authorities.

"Marcus Allen Bentley...that sick fucking bastard. Somewhere in that slum he calls home he's got an angel tied up, nibbling on it in bits and pieces. He's going to bring the eye on all of us if someone doesn't stop him. I don't care how good he is at killing halos, he's fucking dangerous."

The most recurrent rumor about Marcus revolves around his taste for flesh. The truth is, Marcus has only come across angels while working with other Unchained, and has never had the opportunity to take one for his pit. What he does keep beneath the city streets, though, would surprise and revolt any demon that found their way into his lair.

"Whatever you do, don't listen to him. I know, it's kind of fun, just to catch a few sentences of what's muttering. You get curious and want to hear the rest. But it's some sick, sick stuff, and I'm pretty sure it's made more than a couple go batty. The last thing you want is to get infected with whatever it is he has."

Like lunatics of old, rumor circulates that Marcus babbles prophecy and nonsense. While anyone capable of bearing his stench long enough to make out his words might gain some idea of his current plans, the truth is that he is often just repeating thoughts so that he doesn't lose them altogether, and many of them are just stray ideas desperately looking for something with which to connect. Even still, when he does attend a social gathering, there are always some that eavesdrop on his mumblings. Sometimes, they are never seen again.

MARCUS ALLEN BENTLEY

Virtue: Unsettling

Vice: Destructive

Incarnation: Destroyer

Agenda: Saboteur

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 2, Medicine (Anatomy) 1, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Grappling) 4, Larceny 1, Stealth 3, Survival (Hunting) 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Expression 1, Intimidation (Torture) 3, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Bolthole (Trap Door) 3, Grappling 2, Parkour 1, Resonance Sensitive

Health: 8

Primum: 3

Demonic Form: Cavernous Maw, Claws and Fangs, Demonic Horns, Glory and Terror, Night Vision, Slippery Body, Unyielding Vice, Urban Fluidity

Embeds: Ambush, Bystander Effect, Fulcrum Point, Hesitation, Hush, Meaningless, Tag and Release

Exploits: Animate, Extispicy

Aether/per turn: 12/3

Willpower: 6

Cover: 5

Size: 5

Speed: 12

Defense: 5

Initiative: 5

Armor: 0

Glitches: Because of something botched in the creation of the matrix that formed him, Marcus does not have the perfect recall that all demons take for granted. In fact, he finds it very difficult to form any memories at all. Consuming the flesh of a mortal he hunted can slow this effect for one night. He has yet to discover what eating the flesh of the supernatural, or of an angel, might yield.

by the people: THE MAYOR

"Just watch her!"
—Campaign slogan

BACKGROUND

The Mayor has always been the mayor. If she'd ever been anything else, she certainly couldn't comment — but forget about the past. She's looking to the future, and from here on the inside? It's very bright indeed.

Not that she doesn't care about history, it's just that the past isn't really the same thing as history. The past is maudlin nostalgia and yearning for the good old days that were someone else's bad old days. But history? The Mayor would say that word carries weight and import. Prestige. And that it's written by the victor.

The agreed-upon history is that the city's had 14 mayors since it was founded in the early 1900s. This is true in the sense that colors of the rainbow are simply refractions of a single, white light source: The Mayor has been all these public servants, though she'd hasten to add that she was legitimately elected each and every time. She may have shuffled party affiliations (and whole political philosophies) to better her odds, but stuffing ballots isn't her style.

The Mayor will tell you she founded the city, took a Podunk village and expanded it into a community everyone could be proud of. She'll cheerfully and convincingly recount how she was the only one with enough leadership to guide its early citizens; she'll regale the listener with her story of discovering the area's abandoned Infrastructure, and how she and her ring fought countless angelic incursions to protect it. Sadly, every member of her ring was killed or captured in the Infrastructure's defense, but the Mayor still speaks reverently of their sacrifice, sometimes even unprompted.

The Mayor doesn't have much time for nostalgia, though. That's what minions are for. Her cult forms the bureaucratic backbone of her Agency, the functionally named City Hall. Her servants see her as a divine incarnation of law and order, a protector of the idyllic life she's built for them, which is close enough to the truth. She is good at being mayor. She was the only one with enough insight to recognize what her ring had found, and what they could achieve with it. As a Wheel, the Mayor is well-suited to recognize the function and design of Infrastructure, and the ways it can be used. The ways it can be repurposed.

MYSTERIOUS PLACE: THE WALL

Around the city, 10 obelisks form the vertices of an enormous pentagram, with lines formed by streets, bridges, urban trails, and other constructed pathways. These obelisks are sparsely decorated, except for some faded script that even the Unchained can't read. They're concealed within mundane structures controlled by City Hall, though these hiding places aren't their original locations: The Mayor covered up their former hollows with affordable housing years ago (her time as a tax-and-spend progressive was especially productive).

This Infrastructure has a simple effect. The occult matrix generates a great, invisible force field of Essence around the city, protecting it from Infrastructure and angels, and anything else the Machine might throw at it. Demons can get in and out; the God-Machine cannot. Why It would've created such a device is an open question among the city's demons, but the Mayor claims she jury-rigged it into its current output. And never mind what it *did*. The result is all that matters, and some would call it Hell on Earth — albeit, one with limits.

Demons must still wear Cover in the city. Some have tried to live more openly, but the Mayor has zero tolerance for such behavior; for that matter, being safe isn't the same as being unobserved, as a few cocky Unchained have learned the hard way. Coming to the city almost always means staying, as a shifting choir of angels linger around the perimeter of the wall, waiting for any demon foolish enough to be complacent. These angels don't seem to care about the shield; it's not clear if they notice it at all. From time to time, one of them will smash itself on it, obliterating itself for no apparent reason. City Hall compares it to a bird flying into a too-clear window, but some worry it's more akin to a moth drawn to a flame.

The Mayor is always aware of these kamikaze strikes, just as she is on the rare occasions new demons happen upon her domain. For now, the city is just a rumor, a mythic land of plenty most outsiders dismiss as fantasy. The Mayor plans to keep it that way, even if that means being downright un hospitable.

How is it all possible? The Mayor never gives a straight answer, and she doesn't seem to care about any apparent contradictions. Usually she claims it works by virtue of her being the symbolic

“head” of the city, and that she controls the occult matrix by standing in for the God-Machine. Sometimes she’ll say that she wills the shield into being with some vague ability facilitated by the obelisks, and that this connection dictates her fate. She can’t help but be mayor! Sometimes, though, she’ll admit she has no idea how it works, but that it would be *very* dangerous if she were to lose her office.

But some beg to differ.

THE LOYAL OPPOSITION

Mr. Kelvin wants to unseat the Mayor. An Integrator-Saboteur, the Destroyer is the lone survivor of the city’s founding ring...or an early immigrant trapped by too many compromises, or a hunter angel who Fell in pursuit of the Mayor, or....

Mr. Kelvin is as vague about his past as his nemesis, but he’s crystal clear on his plans for the future: The wall must fall. Cutting the city off from the God-Machine merely ignores the problem. The shield is nothing more than a cage, with one oppressor exchanged for a slightly more benign one. Kelvin believes demons must work to *fix* the Machine, and that they’ll never accomplish that if they remain separate from it, especially in the Mayor’s vision of Hell.

Mr. Kelvin leads the only serious rival Agency to City Hall. Comprising a few small Integrator rings, the Absolutists have tried to depose the Mayor almost since she claimed the title, overtly and occultly. So far, they’ve had only limited success on the former, managing to place a few mortal dupes on city council to help block the Mayor’s agenda, but her party hopping makes it difficult to keep straight whose side she’s on in any given election cycle. On the occult front, their headquarters is an abandoned factory built around one of the obelisks, the only one City Hall doesn’t control. The Absolutists want to destroy the object, or so the rumors go, but it’s more accurate to say they want to comprehend it, *then* destroy it. So far, it’s resisted all attempts at understanding and demolition.

DESCRIPTION

On the surface, the Mayor is easygoing. She personally greets the few Unchained who manage to discover the city, armed with a gift basket and a thorough list of rules on secrecy and consequence (“Think of them as guidelines!”). She has a politician’s easy charm, and a natural skill for making friends without ever saying anything substantive. To some degree, she enjoys it. She relishes the attention and respect, and proudly serves her community. She

takes her mundane job as seriously as any human mayor, and due to her endless, necessary flip-flopping, she can genuinely empathize with almost any political stance imaginable.

On the other hand, she runs her Agency like the Queen of Hell. She throws even minor threats to the angels — Mr. Kelvin is a temporary exception who’ll get his in the end — and she tolerates nothing less than absolute loyalty. She thinks of her human cultists as lackeys, and sees other demons as sharks encircling her ship of state, sniffing for blood.

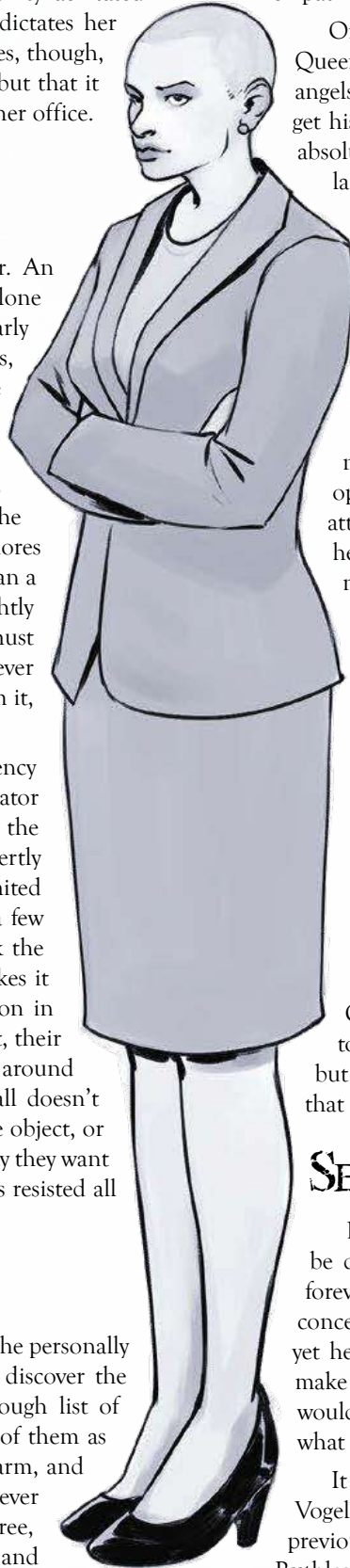
The Mayor’s current Cover is Anita Vogel, a black woman in her late 30s, with a signature short-cropped hairstyle and an unassailable sense of fashion. She’s the first woman to be elected to the position, a fact the Mayor finds refreshing after occupying male identities for the last century. Anita has a reputation as a tough negotiator, talented in demolishing even seasoned opponents in debate. Her years as a popular district attorney made her a prime candidate for office, and her close, personal association with the previous mayor clinched the deal. Currently, Anita is the Mayor’s only Cover; the all-consuming nature of her position means she barely has enough time to maintain one, let alone two or three identities. She has numerous soul Pacts on file in case of emergency, but she only fosters new Covers when the “current” mayor closes in on retirement, or slips in the polls.

The Mayor’s demonic form resembles Italian Renaissance depictions of angels, but with glass for skin and circuit boards for wings. It’s rare for her to enter this form; it’s rare for her to acknowledge her true nature at all. Indeed, even her closest confidants don’t know if she’s completed her Cipher, or made any progress on it. She does seem to have special powers related to the Infrastructure, but at best they’re unclear. At worst, they don’t seem all that demonic.

SECRETS

Deep down, she wants to retire. It’s one thing to be dictator for life, and quite another to be dictator forever. She won’t acknowledge this desire — she’s too conceited to believe anyone could really take her place, yet her boredom grows by the day. Soon she’ll have to make a decision, and she’s not sure what the alternative would even be. In her darker moments, she imagines what it would be like to burn it all down.

It doesn’t help that she’s falling in love with Anita Vogel’s husband. Without exception, the Mayor’s previous Covers were heterosexual men, single or widowed. Ruthless though she is, she couldn’t bring herself to subject multiple women to loveless marriages. That changed when she



THE HAZARDS OF SAFETY

Demons living in the Mayor's city can still lose Cover, but because angels can't pass through the shield, the consequences are moot (i.e., demons don't gain Conditions for compromises). However, if a demon who's lost a dot of Cover ever *leaves* the city limits, she automatically gains the Hunted Condition. The angels who watch from outside have plenty of time to catalogue so many targets in such a small area. This quirk doesn't seem to apply to the Mayor herself, who comes and goes as she pleases.

became Anita. It's the first time she's had a relationship with a man that went beyond a burner Cover's one-night stand, and she's starting to understand why some demons rebel for love. But (ever the tactician) she's thinking about starting a family. With a little Offspring all her own, she thinks she could have the foundation for a dynasty.

The Mayor's never been clear on the origin of the city's Infrastructure, or what its original purpose was. Old timers have learned not to ask dangerous questions, but newcomers can't help but wonder at the oddities. Apart from its strange output, the most obvious quirk is that it doesn't produce Aether. The wall around the city is pure Essence, but none of the obelisks produce any runoff. Indeed, Aether is something of a commodity in the city, with the Mayor and City Hall controlling most "normal" suborned Infrastructure. A few demons who've delved deeper into this mystery — none of whom left any trace when they disappeared — found that the obelisks and the pentagram are only one part of a much larger pattern in the surrounding area, similar to ancient sacred geometry. Taken together, the great glyph points to Sirius as it glistens in the night sky....

RUMORS

"It's pretty obvious she and Mr. Kelvin are the same demon. Every dictator needs a good scapegoat, so why not be your own? I mean, he's never actually done anything that'd hurt her powerbase. She just uses him to make a show of it, to rally all the Turncoats into one pointless basket."

Completely false, but the Mayor herself is the chief source of this rumor. She's careful never to challenge Mr. Kelvin directly, but undermining his credibility has always been the most effective with threats to her power. Another rumor suggests Kelvin was once part of her ring, and that one or both of them betrayed the other. This might have some truth to it, as both demons have an intimate knowledge of how the other thinks,

and the kind of burning hatred that only comes from a broken friendship. Their animosity isn't impractical, though. While they never meet in person, they have ways of communicating on matters of mutual interest, particularly when it comes to quashing potential challengers to their status quo. Both prefer having a single enemy to focus on, rather than wasting time on pretenders.

"We're rats in a maze. This isn't Hell, it's a laboratory, and God help us if she collects enough data."

A common Absolutist refrain, but the best propaganda is often based in truth. Even if the Mayor isn't conducting any large-scale research, she's still taking notes. The difficulty some demons have in leaving the city means she's had plenty of time to learn about Unchained social dynamics in enclosed spaces, and from time to time she'll subject her citizens to little social experiments, typically culminating with someone having to play chicken with the angels outside. The more she learns, the more she tightens her grip.

"You wanna climb the ladder in this organization? Kiss the boss's ass. Here's a little secret: She likes whiskey. Strip-paint-off-the-walls stuff. If you catch her in a...thoughtful mood, bring her a bottle. If she likes you, she'll tell you a story. Don't ask who it's about, or if it's true — that's not important. And don't repeat it. Even to me."

Once upon a time in the west, Miss Blackleg was in a bind. The young demon rustled one too many cryptids off the God-Machine's special herd, and It marked her for a dead woman. The angels were riding out to collect their bounty, and she had nowhere but the open road to hide. Fleeing into the desert, she met something at a fork in her path. Claimed it was a devil, but she rightly said she knew what was and wasn't a devil. It smiled and said she didn't know the half of it, and taught her a thing or two about Hell. About *vice*. It offered her a life beyond the open trail and the long arm of the God-Machine's law, a land of comfort and safety. "Just sign on the dotted line, darlin', and don't look back." She hasn't seen that devil since, but the angels never did catch her.

THE MAYOR

Virtue: Conservative

Vice: Liberal

Incarnation: Psychopomp

Agenda: Tempter

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 6, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics (Law) 3, Computer 2, Medicine 1, Occult (Infrastructure) 4, Politics (Local) 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Firearms (Revolvers) 4, Survival (Badlands) 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Horses) 2, Empathy 2, Expression 4, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 5, Socialize (Expectations) 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge (Bluffing) 5

Merits: Contacts (Lobbyists, Statehouse) 2, Cultists 4, Fame 1, Fast-Talking 5, Firefight 3, Inspiring, Professional Training (Politician) 5, Pusher, Quick Draw (Revolvers), Status (City) 5, Status (Agency) 5, Striking Looks 1

Health: 7

Primum: 7

Demonic Form: Armored Plates, Corruption Aura, Essence Drain, Inhuman Beauty, Inhuman Intelligence, Mental Resistance, Mind Reading, Teleportation, Tough as Stone

Embeds: Across a Crowded Room, Cause and Effect, Common Misconception, Devil's Advocate, Download Knowledge, Earworm, Freeze Assets, Freudian Slip, Heart's Desire, Idle Conversation, Meaningless, Merciless Gunman, Mercury Retrograde, Occam's Razor

Exploits: Addictive Presence, Allies into Gold, Break to Heal, Four Minutes Ago

Aether/per turn: 20/7

Willpower: 9

Covers: Anita Vogel (10)

Size: 5

Speed: 10

Defense: 5

Initiative: 8

Glitches: The Mayor's left eye involuntarily twitches whenever she's in the presence of large-scale holy symbols for more than a few minutes.

Notes: The Mayor's Social Merits are abridged for space. Within reason, if she needs an ally, contact, resource, retainer, etc., she can get it. Her Asset Skills are Persuasion, Politics, and Subterfuge.

STORY HOOKS

- In an upset, "Anita Vogel" loses what should've been an easy election. Worse, the Mayor hasn't got a backup, and she can't seem to get close enough to her opponent to force a soul Pact — suspiciously, their handlers are isolating them and their family before inauguration day, as well as city councilors in their party. Even Mr. Kelvin's surprised, though he approves of the Mayor's fall from power, and has his own plans for the new chief executive. No one knows what might become of the shield if a human takes office, and the Absolutists are preparing for the end. The Mayor orders the ring to get a Pact out of the mayor-elect, or manipulate circumstances to get them out of the way. Or, better yet, to find out who's pulling their strings.
- The Mayor wants to be the Governor. She's learned to duplicate the city's Infrastructure and wants to reproduce the shield's effect state-wide. However, she insists that winning the election legitimately is the only way it'll work. The ring are demons she's vetted to serve as political aides and agents, whether to build her campaign or to lay groundwork for new Infrastructure. If the Storyteller feels ambitious, and like shattering the status quo in her *Chronicles of Darkness*, the Mayor might've already stepped into the national spotlight; and is now seeking to become the President (or the Prime Minister, or the Chancellor...).
- Off on the horizon, a colossal figure is trudging toward the city. Even behind the shield, Unchained citizens can feel the Aether bleeding off its bulk, as metric tons of Essence flow to power its limbs. It's taller than the tallest building in town, and it's dragging a hammer with a head wider than city hall. Other supernatural creatures in town are bugging out, but the Unchained have accumulated too many compromises over the years to chance escape. Leaving is untenable; *remaining* is untenable. Pattishael the Archangel arrives in four days, and the ring, along with the Mayor, are the only demons who can get near him.

Poisonous Friend: Miss Thread

I think I know just the thing you need...

BACKGROUND

Miss Thread is your best friend. She's your ally, your mentor. She feeds your Agency valuable intelligence. She networks, putting demons, stigmatics, and stranger things in contact with one another when it's in their mutual interest. She'll investigate rumors and whispers on your behalf. Sometimes she supplies you with useful Gadgets and other tools to help you with whatever operation you're attempting. While she seldom asks for something in return, you like to share intel with her. You know she'll pay it forward.

You shouldn't trust her.

For the most part, Miss Thread is a useful contact. Unfortunately, Miss Thread's generosity is part of a carefully constructed persona. She has no loyalty to anyone and, while she is usually honest and provides excellent intelligence and analysis, she sometimes feeds her supposed allies incomplete or even false information, using them to investigate new Infrastructure or test the capabilities of angels without risk to herself. She generally learns something regardless of whether or not her marks survive. Then the cycle continues as she passes on whatever she gleaned to another ring as a way to earn their trust and secure her place in the Unchained hierarchy. Should it ever become public knowledge that she provides bad intelligence, she'll be able to blame it on the Machine's agents spreading false information and few will question her. Everybody makes mistakes, after all, and Miss Thread has always proven herself trustworthy and reliable.

Miss Thread sacrifices even long-term allies without a thought if she feels this will suit her purposes. She doesn't do this often, but sometimes unexplained mysteries bother her. They're sores she picks at, compulsively, and when frustration turns to obsession Miss Thread is likely to throw assets — and lives — at the problem out of impatience. Sometimes she does this for no obvious reason; for all of her vaunted logic and aloofness, Miss Thread has an impetuous and petty streak. Those Miss Thread decides to hurt generally have short, unpleasant lives. Her whims and pique get people killed.

DESCRIPTION

Few demons meet Miss Thread anymore. Every day she isolates herself more, retreats deeper into her Hell. She uses the Special Message Embed to hide her missives in innocuous letters, spam emails, and graffiti. She prefers to speak over phones or secure, encrypted networks and only meets in carefully chosen, neutral locations when she must appear in person. It can take a while to get used to that, but as more and more demons owe her and as word of both her foibles and her generosity spreads most demons are prepared to overlook her paranoia. She is a Watcher, after all.

For all her isolation, Thread is not alone. Her Cipher lets her share her existence with the only person she truly trusts: herself. Miss Thread should know better than anyone, however, not to trust Miss Thread.

Her Hell is home. It took her years to build her comfortable existence, weaving the perfect Cover and securing the perfect place to build Hell. Her charming home is built atop old, abandoned Infrastructure. The Infrastructure provides her with a steady trickle of Aether and helps to hide any Aetheric radiation released when she constructs Gadgets, assumes her true form, or uses her Exploits. She is loath to leave such a stronghold and built her primary Cover, Charlie Greenwood, accordingly. Charlie is severely agoraphobic and never leaves her home. Miss Thread uses a secondary Cover when she is forced to leave her cozy fortress, usually to meet more cautious demons in person. The risk of anyone, anyone at all, learning about her home is terrifying to her.

Charlie Greenwood is a plain young woman generally dressed in hoodies and comfortable, drab clothing. Her secondary Cover is a middle-aged man. Due to her seclusion, this Cover is starting to fray and degrade, rapidly shedding friends, family and other anchors. He has even lost his forename and is now merely Mr. Grey.

In her demonic form, Miss Thread takes the form of a giant weeping eye with innumerable segmented metal tendrils in place of an optic nerve. Each has a different function; some house mechanical sensors, others nimble digits, augurs, sample-collecting syringes, or flensing blades.

Miss Thread is cool and logical in person, though she often tweaks her persona to better ingratiate herself (within the limits imposed by her Cover). Though she keeps her habitual betrayal secret and would likely take steps to discredit or destroy anyone who discovered it, if directly accused by one she has wronged she might simply admit it. She has no regard for the lives or feelings of others beyond their value as tools and finds it strange that others do not share her sociopathic worldview.

Miss Thread generally avoids physical confrontation. She wasn't built for it, after all. If confronted she flees. As she can become incorporeal and rewind time Miss Thread is very difficult to corner. If combat is unavoidable, or if she senses a lone target that may have underestimated her, she uses Fungible Knowledge and her myriad limbs to impressive effect. If her home is threatened she is less likely to cut and run — her Hell is the only thing she truly loves and she will struggle to let go of it.

The Gadgets she provides are often Lambdas with secondary abilities to transmit information back to her, occult black boxes recording the final moments of her catspaws and dupes. Miss Thread also uses her supernatural abilities to spy, though as she is increasingly unwilling to leave her stronghold she is growing more and more reliant on Gadgets and Interlocks.

SECRETS

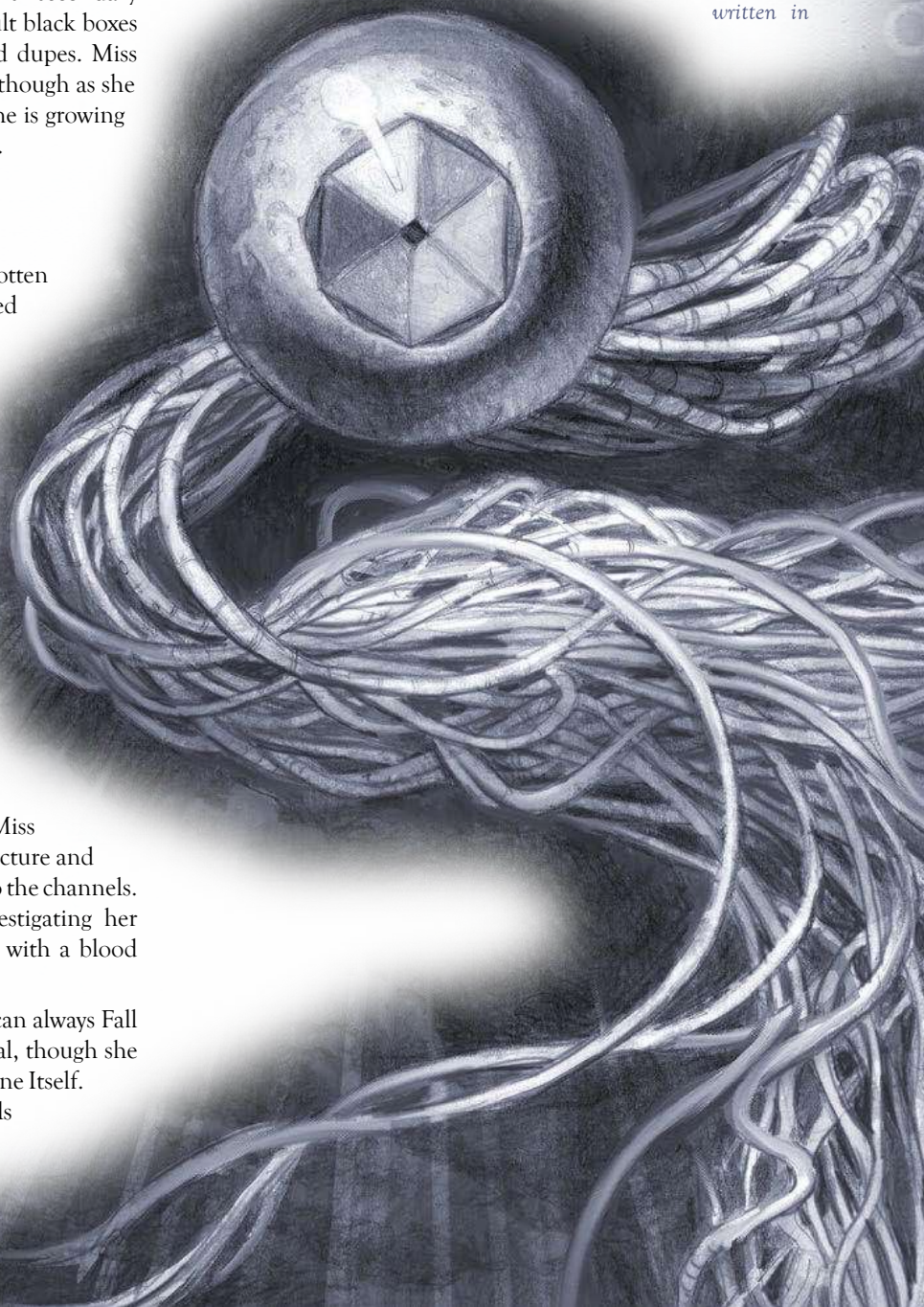
Miss Thread's tidy Hell is built atop old, forgotten Infrastructure, but she knows what it was designed to do. Her cellar is tiled with volcanic glass. Small runnels form elaborate, twisting glyphs around larger pits and depressions. Long ago a cult dripped and poured blood into these channels at the behest of the Machine, though as their theology drifted and the ritual's intentions were ignored, the Infrastructure became quiescent. The chamber analyses blood, feeding a wealth of information directly to the God-Machine; cell counts, toxicology screens, genome sequencing, and strange occult data. The Infrastructure was once used to monitor an ongoing human breeding program and later modified to use tissue samples as a way to identify, categorize, and even track supernatural beings such as demons. Miss Thread is fully aware of the secrets of this Infrastructure and knows it could be awakened simply by bleeding into the channels. Though she rightly fears the God-Machine investigating her home, Miss Thread could achieve terrible things with a blood sample if pushed.

Miss Thread thinks she's found Hell, but one can always Fall farther and find a deeper circle. Her long-term goal, though she hasn't articulated it yet, is to become like the Machine Itself. She already sees all other beings as potential tools and strives to hide her existence from others. She's also evolving beyond a singular

form, using Interlocks to copy and fragment her consciousness in accordance with her final secret. She has yet to notice that her splinter-selves, over time, become more independent of her. It's conceivable that they may even start to form divergent opinions or personalities. What this might do to her sanity when she recombines with them is unclear.

RUMORS

"I keep a journal of what I see, the things I can see and other people can't. The writing underneath adverts, the things that flit from person to person whispering in their ears, the people with cameras for eyes and antennae sprouting from their skulls... Last week I woke up with red, sore eyes and a migraine. When I looked at my journal I saw entries from the night before I had no memory of writing. In my handwriting, written in



my shorthand. I'm telling you... I think I was abducted. I think they did something to me."

Miss Thread used to be much more hands-on with her information gathering (literally; some of her tendrils can interface with the human brain via sensory nerves). The optic nerve was her preferred option. Stigmatics and other witnesses to the God-Machine were sometimes kidnapped and taken to out-of-sight locations where Miss Thread would paralyze them and gently insert a neural probe via their eyes, extracting and altering memories as she saw fit. She still occasionally does this and it may suit her purposes to plant false information in human minds. Demons are good at seeing through liars less perfect than themselves, but it's harder for most demons to detect that memories have been deftly edited or erased.

"There's an Integrator operating here, you know. Rust and his ring were destroyed last year, ambushed after they got fed some lies about the Brilliant's Bans. Shadow disappeared after he started investigating the Hundred-Handed, and last week the Silence were all burned, tagged and captured by Machine-agents over the course of an afternoon. The pattern is clear; it's a Turncoat. Did you ever meet Rust? He was as careful as they come and the Silence had access to something that made it impossible for even the Unchained to lie to them, if the rumors were true. How did someone fool all of them? Well, here's my hypothesis. The perfect Integrator wouldn't even know they were an Integrator. An Unchained sleeper agent, working in good faith with other demons until the Machine or some handler activates them. How could you find out who it was? It might even be you."

Some demons in Miss Thread's locale have noticed that something is amiss and suspect a mole somewhere within their ranks. Though Miss Thread is no Integrator (she views the Machine as both rival and role model), it's not entirely impossible to conceive of her editing, partitioning, or deleting aspects of her own memory if she felt it suited her purposes, especially given her increasingly fragmented consciousness. Miss Thread gaslights everyone else as a matter of course, so it hardly seems unlikely that parts of her might try to gaslight the rest of her.

"A pleasure to see you, friends. You're wondering why I called this seminar. I've made a discovery. We know angels can manifest in many ways; not all are corporeal and some are especially anomalous. Our friend Graff insists he was once living street art used to send messages to the Machine's cultists. Some of you have encountered the Chorus, a hunter angel apparently composed of soundwaves. Angels have even been known to inhabit buildings. So, what about objects? We were once the Machine's wheels and cameras and scalpels, after all. Angelic objects could serve as living Linchpins. Several Gadgets have shown usual properties beyond whatever was already installed within them, suggestions that the objects may have a will of their own; the Brazilian masks, the infinite scytale, the living firearm we stole last year. I found a puzzle-box in my home. When I investigated, I felt the Aether, only to watch it disintegrate in my hands. Be watchful."

Could the God-Machine install living, sentient angels into objects to give them supernatural powers? It's certainly possible, though there's limited evidence to support it. Miss Thread can and does and she's not above using them to spy on other demons,

especially her fellow Inquisitors. This is not without risk, of course. Inquisitors are the most likely demons to recognize that they are being spied upon and to work out the nature of the spy.

MISS THREAD

Virtue: Giving

Vice: Callous

Incarnation: Analyst

Agenda: Inquisitor

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 4, Computer 2, Crafts (Gadgets) 3, Investigation 2, Occult (Infrastructure) 2, Politics 1, Science 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Larceny 1, Stealth (Shadow Target) 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Persuasion 2, Intimidation 1, Subterfuge (Intentions) 2

Merits: Allies (Unchained) 3, Area of Expertise (Gadgets), Electromagnetic Linguistics, Resonance Sensitive, Safe Place 4, Suborned Infrastructure 2

Health: 7

Primum: 4

Demonic Form: Clairvoyant Sight, Electrical Sight, Inhuman Intelligence, Memory Theft, Mind Reading, Olfactory Enhancements, Phasing, Sonic Acuity

Embeds: Cuckoo's Egg, Data Retrieval, Efficiency, Fungible Knowledge, Living Recorder, Remote Link-Up, Special Message, Tag And Release, Without A Trace

Exploits: Behind the Curtain, Demon House, Four Minutes Ago, Stalking Horse

Aether/per turn: 13/4

Willpower: 5

Cover: Charlie Greenwood (7), Mr. Grey (2)

Size: 5

Speed: 9

Defense: 4

Initiative: 5

Armor: 0

MISS THREAD'S CIPHER

FIRST INTERLOCK: ARMY OF ME

Keys: Efficiency, Fungible Knowledge

Dice Pool: Wits + Science

Miss Thread prefers to work alone. This Interlock lets her work alone together, splitting herself into a number of quantum duplicates. When unobserved, Miss Thread can activate this Interlock.

Dramatic Failure: Miss Thread and her duplicate occupy the same space, suffering three points of aggravated damage.

Failure: Miss Thread may attempt to activate this Interlock again with a -1 penalty.

Success: Miss Thread can perform Teamwork Actions with herself. The Interlock lasts until the end of the scene or until Miss Thread is witnessed and the waveform collapses. She may gain the benefit for different dice pools and actions within this time.

Exceptional Success: Miss Thread can work in tandem with a number of duplicates equal to her Primum.

SECOND INTERLOCK: GASLIGHT

Keys: Fungible Knowledge, Living Recorder

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion - Resolve

Though Miss Thread is quite capable of rewriting memories in her demonic form, this Interlock lets her do it more quickly, subtly, and safely.

Dramatic Failure: Miss Thread not only fails to alter recollections, she hardwires them into the subject's long-term memory. This makes it impossible for her to edit these memories by any means and gives her target an eidetic recollection of the events described for the rest of their life. Other beings may still be able to affect these memories.

Failure: Miss Thread may attempt to activate this Interlock again with a -1 penalty.

Success: By touching the target and describing the scene they witnessed, Miss Thread can make small alterations to their recollections. She could, for example, change what a person said or change the speaker, though she could not replace the memory with something entirely different. This Interlock cannot be used on demons, exiles, or angels.

Exceptional Success: Miss Thread can entirely rewrite the target's memory of the specified scene without any restrictions, even giving them memories that cause a breaking point.

THIRD INTERLOCK: KOSCHEI'S EGG

Keys: Living Recorder, Cuckoo's Egg

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult

This Interlock lets Miss Thread leave a fragment of her consciousness inside an object, turning any innocuous object into a recording device. This requires a point of Aether.

Dramatic Failure: Miss Thread invests Aether into the object but cannot occupy it with her consciousness. The struggle drains her entire Aether pool and turns the object into an exploited Gadget. This Gadget may contain an Exploit that Miss Thread does not usually know.

Failure: Miss Thread may attempt to activate this Interlock again with a -1 penalty.

Success: Miss Thread places a part of herself inside an object. The object is assumed to possess all senses that Miss Thread does and, if she manifests demonic form abilities that grant her

STORY HOOKS

- Miss Thread's decided to burn you. Perhaps you were getting too close to her secrets, perhaps it's a part of a wider plan or just an experiment or a game to her. Whatever the reason, rumors are spreading and Miss Thread will frame you for something if she hasn't already. You'd better find a way to clear your name before every demon turns on you or betrays your secrets to the Machine.
- You're contacted by someone with significant knowledge of Miss Thread. They reveal the extent of her betrayals, providing significant evidence and proof, but they're unwilling to meet in person. It's a rogue fragment of her consciousness and wants her main body destroyed for her sins. Or at least so the fragment claims...
- In desperation, Miss Thread is forced to do something she hates. *Trust.* Perhaps an enemy — the God-Machine, a former victim, a rebel part of herself, or something stranger — wants her home, her Gadget-making skills, access to her intel, or even her brain. To protect herself from this threat she may have to reveal the location of her personal *sanctum sanctorum*, a step that might force her into a genuine alliance and might teach her that sometimes it's okay to trust someone else. It's possible that her final secret is in fact pointing her away from her self-isolating, sociopathic worldview and Miss Thread has failed to truly understand it.

additional senses, these fragments temporarily gain the same ability. Miss Thread is aware of everything her fragments are aware of even over vast distance.

Miss Thread can reverse the process without consequence by touching the object. If this is not feasible, she can disconnect herself remotely. This inflicts a point of lethal damage and a compromise.

Miss Thread can only use this Interlock on a number of objects equal to (her Primum -1). It is unknown what will happen to the fragments if Miss Thread is killed. This Interlock cannot be used on Gadgets.

Exceptional Success: The Interlock does not require Aether to use.

Final Secret: Many eyes see what one eye cannot.

MR. MARTINI

How are you tonight? Ordering the usual, or maybe something a little stronger? You look like you might need it.

BACKGROUND

Nearly every bar has one really good bartender. Not only can he sling cocktails with panache and flair (or a generous enough pour that it doesn't matter after the second round), he can also make anyone who bellies up to the bar feel at home, like they have a confidant, even if only for a night. At his sentinel's post behind the bar, he simply listens and nods in understanding when poor lost souls let it all out in booze-soaked confessionals. With him, you empty your closet of all your skeletons as fast as you empty your wallet. If this has happened to you, you may have met Mr. Martini.

Mr. Martini exemplifies the perfect bartender because being the perfect bartender is all he's ever known. His skills behind the bar would make world-class mixologists blush for shame. Whenever someone asks Mr. Martini for a drink, he makes it without fail, only occasionally having to ask if the customer wants one version of the drink over another. When Mr. Martini asks, "How are you?" he genuinely wants to know, and simply answering "fine" seems shameful. He cares about each and every customer who pulls up a stool, because any one of them could lead to his salvation, reversing his fate.

Mr. Martini's assignment set him to keep watch at a bar in a crumbling, fading hotel that was the epitome of class in its heyday. He poured drinks and watched the people who came in and out, occasionally passing on messages for angels who needed additional discretion in communications. His orders forbade him to leave the hotel for any reason. He took that to heart, renting a room in the hotel proper. It ate most of his paycheck, but what use did he have for money? The hotel and his assignment gave him all he needed.

One night, a perfectly coiffed blonde starlet took a seat at his bar, asking for a martini. When he served it to her, she called it the best martini she had ever had. While drinking the four more martinis that followed, she dubbed him Mr. Martini in a fit of giggles and asked him to take her to her car. For a single, fleeting moment, he considered accepting her request. In that moment, Mr. Martini Fell. He screamed "No!" as he felt himself disconnect from the God-Machine, and the woman threw her drink in his face, which only added insult to injury.

Mr. Martini left the hotel that night; he felt the angels coming and knew he could not stay. He knew exactly why he Fell, and he regretted it instantly. Prior to that moment, his performance was nothing less than perfect. He seeks that perfection again with his own drinking hall, which bears the name he received from the catalyst of his Fall. Depending on who you ask, he wears it like a scarlet letter or a badge of honor. Regardless, it makes him easy to find.

MR. MARTINI'S BAR

Located in a part of town that's just on the right side of questionable, Mr. Martini's Bar looks just like any other dive bar on the outside. Within its walls, customers come to drink quietly, frequently alone. The place does not help foster connections between its guests; in fact, no table seats more than two, and without fail, the table legs scrape loudly across the floor should anyone try to move them, breaking the silence of the place. No humans start fights at Mr. Martini's Bar; no one has ever tried, and with the solemn court Mr. Martini holds, no one likely ever will.

When Unchained come to call, Mr. Martini expects the same solemnity and respect from them. Tensions rise from time to time, and occasionally would-be combatants even go so far as brandishing fists or weapons. However, all Mr. Martini has to do is clear his throat, put his hand down on the bar so they can see the ring he wears, and the tension dissipates like alcohol vapor. The aggressors sit right back down and return their attention to their drinks, properly chastised without a word being spoken.

No one dares go loud in Mr. Martini's Bar. In the grand scheme of things, Mr. Martini barely maintains a sliver of a hidden identity, and those who stick around long enough notice that. He stays firmly in one place, doing one thing, and doing it well, running individual Covers for as long as he can before switching to one of his backups. While no one doubts he could rebuild (and has rebuilt), endangering the safe place Mr. Martini has spent so much time cultivating seems like a remarkably bad idea.

EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Martini's current Cover is Isaac, the legal owner of the bar. He maintains soul pacts with Annamarie, the general manager, and

Jake, a bar back, just in case he needs to jump ship. Isaac was the former manager before the previous owner disappeared. Customers started calling Isaac "Mr. Martini" as a joke, as Isaac took to the previous owner's mannerisms so quickly once the bar was his. Isaac nearly lost his job at Mr. Martini's due to a heroin habit more substantial than his paycheck could support. He offered his former boss "anything, anything at all" to keep his job and get clean, and his boss, Mr. Martini's previous Cover, took him up on that offer. Annamarie is Isaac's cousin, rebuilding her life after a messy breakup from an abusive relationship. Isaac gave her a chance to turn things around. Jake had a mountain of student-loan debt from a failed stint in culinary school. All they had to do to make their troubles go away was sign employment contracts with the bar. As long as they work for Mr. Martini, they are safe. To his credit, Mr. Martini enforces a healthy working environment.

Mr. Martini's Covers are always employees of the bar. In the event that Mr. Martini blows his current Cover, ownership of the business goes to the manager directly under him. He tries to ensure that the next Cover he wishes to use has a manager position, but when the going gets tough, no such guarantee exists. He trains all new employees on pouring and serving drinks for the regulars for at least one night. This is Mr. Martini's test to see if the new employee will be a suitable Cover further down the line. If they do well in that initial test, he puts them in a position where they'll succeed enough to justify promotions. That said, turnover is remarkably low, due to Mr. Martini's ability to hire competent people to begin with; when an employee

does leave, they usually move on to something better before Mr. Martini can provide an appropriate employment contract to convince them to stay.

DESCRIPTION

Mr. Martini usually has a friendly face. He makes a point of dressing well every night: shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, immaculately pressed vest and slacks, sleek, clean-cut hair.

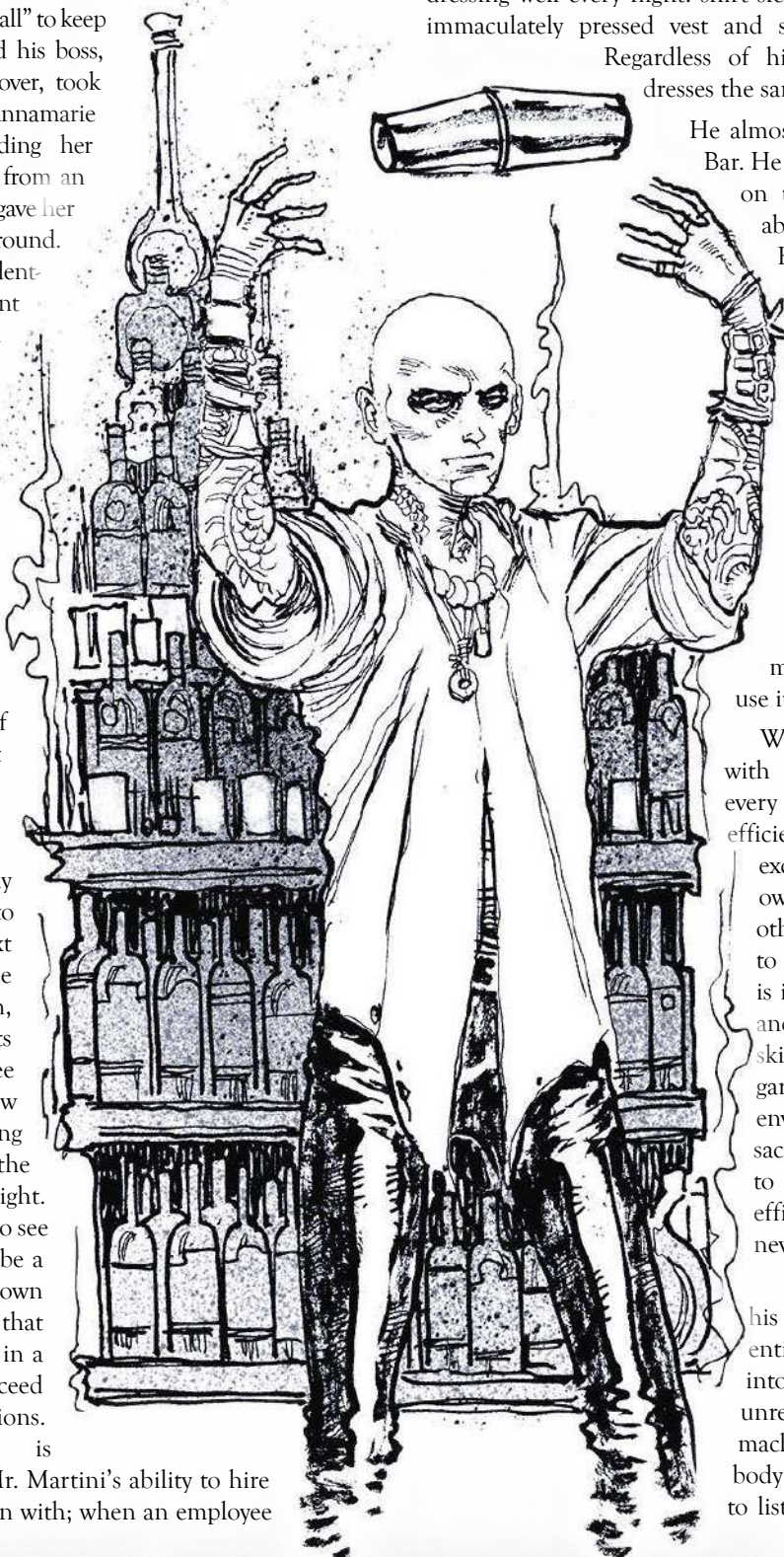
Regardless of his Cover's physical sex, he dresses the same.

He almost never leaves Mr. Martini's Bar. He says he lives in the apartment on the second floor and jokes about his short commute.

His home has a small bar, a mattress, an iron, and an immaculate grooming kit, complete with straight razor. Sometimes he "forgets" the razor in his slacks pocket when he's on the job. He never forgets the razor in his slacks pocket when he is forced to leave the bar, because the sheer act of stepping outside of the property makes him angry enough to use it.

When not in conversation with customers, Mr. Martini's every movement is calibrated for efficiency. He does not tolerate excessive showmanship in his own practice, and has fired other bartenders for attempting to bring it in. The true artistry is in the combination of spirits and liqueurs, which is always skillfully done and tastefully garnished. The drinks and the environment are solemn and sacred as a tomb. Disturbances to the space garner swift, efficient retribution, though never on the premises.

When he does talk with his patrons, however, his entire demeanor softens into something completely unrecognizable from the efficient machine who pours cocktails. His body relaxes, leaning over the bar to listen carefully and dutifully to



STORY HOOKS

- Oh no, now you've done it. Someone finally broke the peace of Mr. Martini's bar, and it got bad. Really bad. Bad enough that Mr. Martini is after you personally, and doesn't seem to give a damn that angels are also hot on your trail. Was the fight actually your fault, or were you just caught in the crossfire? What did you do to one of his employees to get away? Will you (can you) make amends?
- Years, no, decades have passed since that damnable blonde wandered into Mr. Martini's life. Now, she's about to walk right out of it by walking right out of life. He knows what hospital she's in, but he can't leave the bar. Could you just pass on one last message, from him to her? He needs her to know that what happened that night wasn't her fault. She won't understand, but she doesn't have to. Will the errand go off without a hitch, or will your ring find angels waiting for you in her hospital room?
- Mr. Martini is having a rough night, and needs someone to confide in. He's been at his game for nearly a century now, by his reckoning. With Cover after Cover, bar after bar, no one is listening. Even angels go out of the way to ignore him. He needs another path, another Agenda, and the Tempters are the next-closest fit. Could you talk him into finally moving on, or would that last shift be the catalyst the God-Machine needs to finally notice all of his efforts?

the confidences of his customers. He offers comfort and at least a façade of sympathy where he can, and meaningful (if somewhat coldly practical) advice where needed. He probes just enough with contextual questions to provide actionable guidance, and he does it all with a sympathetic smile.

And damn it all, he actually cares about each and every one, guiding customers through every avenue they can pursue on their own first. When those customers come back (and they always do) he makes a point to follow up. He only offers pacts to customers when all other avenues are exhausted. Sometimes those customers become employees, but he usually sells those pacts for leverage with other demons.

SECRETS

Every now and again, Mr. Martini asks a favor from someone. He would do it himself, but the task would take some time, and he can't really leave the bar hanging right now. He pays well in cash, information, or whatever else an Unchained might want, and he never asks for anything unreasonable. Usually, those favors go off without a hitch. However, every now and again, the favor goes unfulfilled, as the demon sent on the errand has a bad run-in with some angels and just doesn't come back. He does this deliberately, sending demons out to their doom when his senses detect elevated angel activity. He picks demons who have already burned bridges, if only to minimize the questions that arise due to their disappearance.

Mr. Martini claims to maintain his bar as a safe place for Unchained, regardless of Agenda, but not without a price. If rings or Agencies need neutral ground to discuss delicate matters, Mr. Martini allows them priority access to the private party room and comes in to act as the party's dedicated bartender. Part of the package for the rental, he explains. Very few Unchained object, since they assume he would eventually know what was said anyway. Smart Unchained also pay him substantially for his silence. Those who object or don't guarantee his discretion find their operations stymied, their ring ambushed, and their Covers in disarray. Other Integrators rarely suffer such setbacks; they occur only when Mr. Martini needs to maintain his appearance of impartiality to throw off the scent.

Mr. Martini never discloses his Incarnation or Agenda to those who are not Integrators. Whenever someone asks, he dodges the question or pretends not to hear it. Several Unchained theorize about his motives, but their own Descent frequently distracts them enough to stop thinking about it. Many assume he is a Tempter or Uncalled. In moments of despair at ever convincing the God-Machine to take him back, Mr. Martini does consider becoming a Tempter instead. However, for now, he still holds out some hope, and the effort to make such a change would push him far outside his comfort zone. The very nature of Mr. Martini's Bar would change, and that leaves him reticent and uncertain. When someone presses too hard, he asks her a favor. Once that favor is done, he says, he'll consider telling them the answer. Any who have called his bluff have not returned.

RUMORS

"Someone did start a fight in here once. They never turned up afterwards, either here or anywhere. That's right about the time Mr. Martini got that ring of his."

Mr. Martini has a ring on the middle finger of his right hand. His hands move so quickly as he pours drinks and wipes down the bar that people rarely get a good look at it. Those with quick reflexes catch flashes of ivory and silver. Only when a fight breaks out can others see the centerpiece for what it really is: a ring with a human molar, complete with cavity filling, set like a cabochon. Just gesturing with the hand that bears the ring seems to calm things down. Some Unchained suspect that the molar came from a Destroyer who crossed him. He never confirms or denies this.

"You know, when I was in Chicago, there was a Mr. Martini's there, too. It was so long ago, though. I'd swear it was a coincidence if the bartender didn't dress the exact same way."

The current location of Mr. Martini's Bar is not the first, nor will it be the last. Mr. Martini makes a point to ensure any bar that bears his name has the same look and feel. For him, this is a message to the God-Machine: that he can do his job and do it well, and that one single slip-up should not disqualify him from service. No angels have come looking for him, much to his disappointment, but to Mr. Martini, more extreme, rash actions would only prove that his Fall was just. And so, he waits, or occasionally sends a message to the God-Machine through other means.

"Don't you think he looks tired?"

While Mr. Martini has only had his Cover as Isaac for a few years, it has recently begun to wear thin. Isaac's drug addictions and enemies left him in a sorry state when Mr. Martini came to collect. While Mr. Martini dealt with many of the external threats to Isaac, the occasional twitch in the back of his head arises for the prick of the needle and the rush of smack in the bloodstream. However, narcotics don't mix well with the biomechanics of a demon. The rush Isaac remembers is gone and not truly knowable to Mr. Martini. He recognizes this sensation as a remnant of a life that is not entirely his, and wonders if all of the little quirks he has developed over the years started the same way.

MR. MARTINI

Virtue: Hopeful

Vice: Stagnant

Incarnation: Guardian

Agenda: Integrator

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Crafts (Bartending) 4, Investigation 1, Medicine 1, Science 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Larceny 1, Survival 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Reading People) 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 1, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Barfly, Contacts 3 (Nightlife, Business, Police), Fast Reflexes 2, Professional Training 2 (Crafts, Expression), Resources 3, Safe Place 1

Health: 8

Primum: 3

Demonic Form: Armored Plates, Essence Drain, Fluid Form, Inhuman Intelligence, Inhuman Reflexes, Long Limbs, Multiple Images, Sense the Angelic

Embeds: Download Knowledge, Fungible Knowledge, Efficiency, Like I Built It, Read Hostility, Strike First, Tag and Release, Trust No One

Exploits: Allies Into Gold, Demon House, Swift Resolution

Aether/per turn: 13/3

Willpower: 7

Cover: Isaac (6)

Size: 5

Speed: 11

Defense: 6

Initiative: 10

Armor: 3/2 (Armored Plates)

Glitches: None

Gadgets: Molar ring with Cool Heads Prevail

the wrong answer: MR. VOID

*Information fed into a black hole doesn't cease to exist.
But I see you require a demonstration.*

BACKGROUND

On the fourth Thursday of every month, a small Agency of demons gathers to compare notes. They don't live in the same city; most call in over a secure channel. They aren't even really allies; a few are bitter enemies. Members of the Center for Inquiry into the Singularity (CIS) only have one commonality, and ultimately, a single objective: neutralizing Mr. Void.

This is the story CIS has scraped together. Even Mr. Void's name is just a consensus, an in-joke they don't really want to understand. Hard facts are rare when he infiltrates a city. Whispers expire before they can find an ear, and witnesses might as well have never existed in the first place.

Once, a demon CIS member referred to as Mr. Painter operated as a high-grade intelligence broker. An Analyst Saboteur, he collected data on the God-Machine's operations to pinpoint Linchpins and other vulnerabilities for his ring. The Machine couldn't shift a gear without his knowing it, but enthusiasm doesn't always correspond to competence. Based on circumstantial evidence, Painter considered his job a soul-killing slog. Unlike most Analysts, he was a right-brained type, with aspirations toward the artistic. He likely wasn't an antinomian, but in his spare time he preferred art to data entry. One of the few facts CIS agrees on is his favored Cover, a street artist known for random acts of public art that city ordinances usually dismantled. Recognition eluded him, apparently, but whether he was in it for the praise or not is up for debate. His few surviving pieces — held in stasis in a CIS bolthole — suggest his craft was more personal than commercial.

That's where the trouble began. Void's cult of obsessives believes his desire for self-actualization fueled an obsession: the Cipher. Analysts have a certain affinity for taking disparate abilities and bonding them together, and Painter thought he was especially talented, or even special. He saw the Cipher as an art form unto itself, a magnum opus he could draw a line straight through to enlightenment. Scant physical evidence suggests this obsession colored and constrained the odd installations he inflicted on the city.

THE FINAL UNTRUTH

But good art is never safe, and bad art is rarely subtle. For all the precision of his day job, Mr. Painter was sloppy with his passion. The most accepted theory is that the angels were following the trail of Painter's art, using it to profile him and his ring without overtly investigating their Covers. A minority believes Painter purposely tipped them off, but most think he just didn't see it coming. It wouldn't be the last thing he was wrong about that day.

Painter was one of the few to survive the initial assault, as hunter angels descended on his ring's hideout, warping the bonds of physics and physical bodies. Stragglers self-destructed to give their comrades a fighting chance, but awash with Aether and Essence, Painter came to an epiphany: the final Key of his Cipher.

Opinion differs on what came next; every CIS agent has a pet theory. Did the wrong Key get stuck in the lock? Did he draw another demon's final truth from some cloud-based repository? Did he just glitch out?

Whatever the cause, he was not enlightened. Mr. Painter's final Interlock cracked open, and his final truth was *wrong*. A rumored eyewitness (a stigmatic who went into deep cover before CIS could authenticate her story) claimed his Cover literally buckled in on itself as a small black hole formed over his demonic body. Its gravity grew as it fed, and other escaping demons fragmented like pixelated images, their own Covers drawn into the void until nothing remained.

The nature of Painter's escape is the most contested aspect of his legend. Some believe his gravity started eating the angels, or that it obscured him from their sensors. Some think they disengaged because they'd just completed their mission.

Mr. Painter ceased to be that day. Only the Void remained. Apart from the few bits of art he left behind, and the one unverified witness, little other direct evidence exists for this story. CIS has interviewed other demons from Mr. Void's city, and while they recall angels wiping out a local ring, they don't remember any artistic Analysts, whatever those are. Seeking Mr. Void is like observing an actual black hole: One can only

infer from the way its gravity affects other bodies — but CIS has extrapolated considerable data from that gravity.

First, the hole eats information, particularly information about Mr. Void's life, including complete memories of encounters with him. More dramatically, it eats Covers, both Void's own and those of other demons. He can control it to some degree, but his Covers and those of others degrade in proximity to the black hole. It's likely he can't form Pacts anymore, or that new Covers get sucked into the abyss whenever he tries to collect.

Second, by eating Cover, he can regain his own. More than that, he can use that information to learn the Keys and final truths of other demons.

Third, and most dangerous, he thinks he can fix himself. He unwaveringly believes his Cipher is wrong; not just broken, but specifically incorrect. Whether it was the Key or the final truth, Mr. Void reasons he can find the correct one... he just needs comparative data, and enough Cover to keep the angels off his back. At least, that's what he tells people.

METHODOLOGIES

Mr. Void watches rings for weeks, keeping on the periphery of any local Agencies or Infrastructure. He waits for someone to slip up, to let down her guard or become isolated from her comrades. Sometimes he'll ambush a demon on a delicate mission, when she's most focused on the task at hand. However it goes down, the result is consistent: The victim feels her Cover come apart at the seams, through no action or fault of her own. She'll never know why, especially if Void devours her completely. There's almost never any warning before this occurs, and it's rare for him to strike more than once. The legend he leaves in his wake has many facets and variations, but few Unchained outside CIS know anything approaching the truth. Most demons chalk his pattern up to angels or an odd cryptid, even when they hear rumors of a demon with a hole for a heart.

Stranger still, sometimes he asks permission. He explains his condition and offers a trade: Cover for the truth of a Cipher. He won't give them *every* truth, even though he could. In spite of how badly it wrecked his Descent, Mr. Void apparently has a deep spiritual belief in the Cipher, and he wants other demons to walk that path. He also knows that if you hook someone with a sample, they'll come back for more.

These rare meetings are the source of most intelligence CIS has on Mr. Void, but if he has a rhyme or reason, it's not forthcoming. Some agents suspect he's trying to build a more positive reputation, or that he has fleeting moments of conscience. A vocal minority think it's all bullshit — not only in the sense that, conveniently, witnesses can never recall any usable information, but also in the sense that demons are liars. Mr. Void would be no exception. A few in CIS think everything they know about him is a carefully tailored lie.

DESCRIPTION

CIS's profile of Mr. Void is scant. They suspect he feels guilt for his actions, but that he views his survival and redemption as sufficient justification. To the few Unchained he speaks to, he claims his cure will benefit others, but this is likely a rationalization rather than a tenet of faith. Mr. Void isn't the dreamy idealist Mr. Painter was. He's become everything he hated about being an Analyst, forced to treat all minutiae with scrutiny and every peer as grist for his research.

Because they degrade the longer he uses them, Void doesn't have the luxury of reliable Covers. Those he maintains are completely no frills; he targets demons purely based on how their identities might benefit him. However, when he has the option, he does like to take identities within or adjacent to local art scenes, whether as an artist or a patron. He carefully preserves his original artistic Cover, and it's the sole source of the concrete evidence CIS has. He rarely wears it for long



VARIABLE GRAVITY

Mr. Void's Cipher and his final Interlock are intended more as a looming threat than a fact. Depending on how dangerous you need him to be, his Cover-thieving ability might be an exaggeration, or far more potent than intelligence suggests. If the effect is powerful, it should be rolled without opposition, or work by Storyteller fiat. If it has limits, it should be contested, or resisted if it can steal a variable number of Cover dots. Also keep in mind that Void can learn the details of his victim's Cipher, another ability that might be more or less powerful than rumored. If you need a starting point, use the following as a possible combination of Keys:

First Key: Living Recorder

Second Key: Fungible Knowledge

Third Key: Lost in the Crowd

Fourth Key: Everybody Knows

to prevent degradation, but he does use it enough that won't diminish from neglect. Rare photos of this Cover from before the accident reveal a tattooed man of indeterminate ethnicity, nebulously in his late 20s. He wears a black hoodie and paint-stained jeans, and carries a duffel bag filled with spray paint.

Void's demonic form is just that. Whatever his angelic visage was, the abyss devoured it. The hole isn't really black so much as it eats every photon within a few feet, so it's difficult to say where Mr. Void's "body" begins and natural shadows end. One witness with enhanced biomechanical vision claimed a humanoid figure stood at the center, but this may have been pattern recognition. Or wishful thinking.

SECRETS

He hasn't completely given up on living a proper Cover. He holds his artistry as a touchstone, even as the relevant persona drifts from what it once was, and he hopes that one day he'll be able to take up his passion again. Sometimes he leans on his old Cover, recruiting outsider artists into the rudiments of a cult so he can live vicariously through their efforts. His followers are typically downcast, wannabe taggers, and anyone else who's into street art. Of course, even indulging himself, Mr. Void never wastes a resource. His cultists act as spies and messengers, or cannon fodder if he needs to soften up a target. CIS isn't aware of these makeshift cults, but the more Void falls into nostalgia jags, the better chance they'll get at finding out.

Void is searching for demons who've either found or are close to finding a fifth Key to their Ciphers. He's not willing to explore the possibility for himself yet, but he theorizes that with enough research it could correct his condition. The fifth Key is said to shatter Cover, but he has evidence indicating it may have a different effect on his own fractured Infrastructure. Currently, he's looking for a guinea pig.

The black hole is growing. He hasn't realized it yet, but the more information he steals and analyzes, the greater his Primum becomes — the greater his Primum, the greater the abyss. With enough size, the hole will devour more tangible things than information.

RUMORS

"If 'Mr. Void' exists at all — and that's a stretch — it's an angel. These CIS pricks are probably all Integrators. They call it a demon because we might second guess our instincts in the face of such an obvious threat. Some of us might even be stupid enough to help it."

Untrue, but that doesn't mean Mr. Void isn't working for the God-Machine against his will. As noted above, some in CIS believe the angels attacking his ring came to cause his transformation. If so, it's paid off. Void is basically a walking compromise, and hunter angels do tend to follow in his wake. They also tend to avoid the man himself, if reports are true. His nickname is enough to set certain Unchained teeth on edge, fostering the perfect environment for witch hunts and broken Covers.

"Remember how I said dragons are real? This Void guy, he hangs out with a whole nest of the fuckers, and they've got demons on the menu."

Typically, demons and Beasts don't have much common ground, but Mr. Void has a unique appreciation for the Begotten. He understands the uncontrollable hunger bit, at any rate. Void briefly collaborated with a lone Beast, but the fact that they shared a demonic target was a happy coincidence: The Beast "hungered for secrets" rather than holding any specific grudge toward the Unchained. Void parted ways with her when his black hole began to eat parts of her dream lair. A private detective, she tried to track him down, but instead she found CIS...who recruited her when they realized she was immune to his informational drain. What Void gained from this experience is unknown, but CIS suspect he can affect Begotten in ways other demons can't.

"You're sure that's not what happens to every Analyst?"

The Analysts are an untidy five-sided peg in the quadrilateral order demons blindly put their faith in. The so-called fifth Incarnation is barely known, even by the few Analysts who bear it, and that in itself leads to mistrust and hostility. The Eyes are also rather prone to looking into voids till the darkness looks back — it's not a complete stretch to wonder if that turns them into informational black holes once in a while. Apart from Mr. Void, Analysts who've completed their Ciphers report no anomalies, but that doesn't mean he isn't representative of an emerging pattern. Perhaps tellingly, CIS has a disproportionate Analyst membership.

MR. VOID

Virtue: Utilitarian

Vice: Sincere

Incarnation: Analyst

Agenda: Uncalled (formerly Saboteur)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 5, Computer 4, Crafts (Graffiti) 1, Investigation 4, Occult (Linchpins, Ciphers) 3, Science 2

Physical Skills: Firearms (Suppressive Fire) 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 5

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Poetry) 1, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Bolthole (Easy Access, No Twilight, Trap Door) 6, Contacts (Installation Artists, Librarians, Computer Scientists) 3, Cultists 2, Indomitable, Professional Training (Researcher) 4, Trained Observer 3

Health: 7

Primum: 5

Demonic Form: Cavernous Maw, Clairvoyant Sight, EMP Field, Huge Size, Inhuman Strength, Slippery Body, Spatial Distortion

Embeds: Alibi, Eavesdrop, Everybody Knows, Fungible Knowledge, Living Recorder, Lost in the Crowd, Read Hostility

Exploits: Behind the Curtain, Deep Pockets, Ephemeral Cover, Living Shadow

Aether/per turn: 14/5

Willpower: 7

Covers: Mr. Void maintains at least three 2- or 3-dot burner Covers at any given time. His artist persona is ranked at 5. These Covers constantly degrade when worn; if a hard mechanic is required, Void loses a dot per collective week he spends in any given identity.

Size: 5

Speed: 10

Defense: 3

Initiative: 6

Glitches: Those who meet Mr. Void can't *quite* remember specific details about the encounter, particularly when it comes to his appearance or any personal information he shares ("real" name, preferences, date of Fall, etc.). This effect isn't absolute, and the Storyteller is encouraged to be a bit inconsistent to keep players guessing.

Notes: If Mr. Void goes loud, he can choose a class of Embeds to access, in addition to the Analyst affinity for Exploits. His Asset Skills are Academics, Computer, and Science.

STORY HOOKS

- The Cover of a demon associated with the ring inexplicably falls apart in front of a crowd of witnesses, just before winking out of existence. Word spreads fast, and CIS agents arrive to investigate. Rumors circulate of Mr. Void, but before the ring can look into it, the man himself reaches out. He tells them he had nothing to do with their friend's destruction, but he does know who did: someone else like him. While Void wants to cure his condition, this demon has embraced it, and is actively hunting the Unchained out of spite, or possibly on behalf of the God-Machine. Void is willing to help the ring bring her in, but only if they'll protect him from CIS...and let him have her once she's neutralized.
- A coup occurs at the top levels of CIS, and the new regime wants direct action. The ring is the strike team the Agency recruits to take Mr. Void down once and for all. Each demon brings a unique skill to the mission, qualities CIS insists will be effective in combatting his abilities. The Agency has seemingly endless resources for the ring to call upon, but a few weeks in, something doesn't feel right. Mission parameters keep changing, intelligence leads to dead ends and close calls, and backup never shows up fast enough. Slowly, the ring realizes it isn't the hook. It's the bait.
- An exhibition opens at the city art gallery. The pieces are experimental, obscure even by modern art standards, but it goes largely unnoticed by human critics, who regard it as a bit try-hard. However, local Agencies have detected large surges of Aether coming off the building, and suspect the new exhibit may be Concealment Infrastructure. The ring investigates, but what it finds isn't the work of the God-Machine. The pieces reflect demonic Ciphers, possibly those of every demon in the city. In fact, those of the ring are the focus of the exhibit....

feral familiar: MS. THERMAL

I don't descend. I dive!

BACKGROUND

Demons tend to overlook rural Infrastructure; the fewer human eyes, the less likely someone will see it. The less something looks guarded, the lower the chance of someone getting curious. Anything that doesn't require a large amount of human resources can be kept far from prying eyes, and defended with similar subtlety. Angels defending the Infrastructure dotting the Amazon rainforest tend towards the subtle.

Unfortunately, such lonesome structures have less support, and when things go wrong, problems cascade past the point of repair quickly. An indiscriminate forest fire weakened the copse functioning as Concealment. This allowed a Saboteur ring to travel with a group of illegal loggers to destroy the Logistical mound underneath. And the angel in the guise of a roadside hawk? She fled her duty rather than burn, and Fell for it.

Ms. Thermal, as she later called herself, didn't keep track of the ring that led to her freedom, as they fled in the opposite direction of her first panicked flight. Had she followed them, she might have quickly gained a human Cover, embraced a life of espionage, considered what her Descent really meant. Instead, she remained alone, in the woods, as a hawk. On her own, she figured out the basics of her new demonhood: Her Embeds could nudge reality, her Exploits tweak it, her true form put her on edge, while her raptor Cover gave her comfort. Beyond that, she had a few inaccurate memories from her time before, of what it meant to refuse to serve.

In her first few years, she kept an eye out for others like her, although she never approached first. Her status as a familiar meant most other demons didn't expect a fellow Unchained to be watching from the body of an animal. She steered clear of the ones she spooked, and spoke to those who sought her out. Some she traded information with; her view of the jungle gave her unrivaled access to the Infrastructure still held within. For the Aether alone it was useful, not to mention tracking the movements of an otherwise-inscrutable enemy.

She asked for a different kind of knowledge in exchange: Initially, she wanted something that would let her stay safe. She received any number of offers of burner Covers, until she made it clear she didn't want to be human. Still, she accepted a few, although she hates using them. Most other demons don't

understand why Ms. Thermal would rather stay an animal; they can understand the form as useful for spying, but little more. Ms. Thermal can't explain the excitement of the dive, the contentment of a nest, the thrill of defending herself. Perhaps the feeling remains unique to familiars. Ms. Thermal has yet to meet any like herself.

THE CRYPTID CONUNDRUM

About a year after her Fall, a foreign Inquisitor offered a better idea: Animals can't be pacted with, but maybe an intelligent cryptid could be. Xe had pacted with stranger things in the past, shapeshifters and bloodsuckers. Xe hadn't heard of anyone doing so, but then, xe claimed xe'd never met a familiar before. The demon taught Ms. Thermal how to create cryptids on her own, so she could experiment without having to hunt them down. She's not sure why xe wanted the exact location and time of her Fall in exchange, but she didn't ask, and it hasn't harmed her yet.

Since that point, she's created a few separate colonies of avian cryptids. Those that show promise are led to the burnt remains of her Infrastructure, to breed and propagate. The scaled vultures were close; they seemed to have some rudimentary language, but died due from a flu strain before they reached self-awareness. Most of her tests result in curiosities or mutants. Occasionally, she eats her mistakes. It's useful for saving Aether, but they tend to taste odd, and it runs the risk of scaring the others.

So far, her experiments haven't panned out, but she keeps trying. Some days she doubts what she's doing is even possible, but keeps going regardless. Her eggs aren't all in this basket; she's gathering material for a spirit Cover, though she has no idea how it will coalesce. Being a hawk spirit instead of a real hawk could be close enough, but she has no idea how the nature of a spirit Cover is determined. She doesn't particularly want to test it; it's taken her long enough to gather the Corpus she has. Her focus on her task means she hasn't kept in touch with the demons she's met, nor does she seek out company.

INTERLOPERS

Ms. Thermal dislikes humans encroaching on her territory, no matter their reason for entering. Demons get a pass if they specifically seek her out, but she views any other incursion

UN-FAMILIAR?

Demons with animal Covers, known as demonic familiars, first appeared in the **Demon Storyteller's Guide**. More information can be found in that book on pp. 118-119. Mechanically, they are very similar to human Unchained; the biggest difference is that they risk compromise in a much greater number of circumstances (even direct communication might cause one).

as a threat. Loggers and farmers remain her most frequent violators. She has some idea that what they do is illegal, but if there's any law barring their entrance, it doesn't stop them. Scientists are rarer, but harder to dissuade. Investigators have only shown up once or twice, but tend to stick out.

Ms. Thermal's territory looks ideal for logging: large, old-growth trees, far enough from cities and tourist spots to avoid authorities, with large enough rivers that they don't need to rely on roads. Prospective farmers value her space for much the same reasons, hoping that burning the old forest will keep the area fertile for longer than the last slash-and-burn farm. Scientists arrive for any number of reasons: biodiversity calculations, greenhouse gas tests, or simply measuring how much jungle is left. Those seeking the weird follow rumors or commands, which Ms. Thermal finds much harder to understand.

If Ms. Thermal knew more social tactics, she could likely play the groups off each other, especially with a Cover established as a park ranger. She's a more hands-on kind of demon, though, and doesn't understand the political possibilities. She tries to scare off loggers and farmers with Ranger Silva, but that only works on small groups. For ones that start moving in machinery, she wrecks what they bring; her true form's size helps with that. Frequently, the rising costs drive them to seek a different area. Farming methods often start with burning the prospective area. Ms. Thermal kills those

who try on principle. She's not sure what started the fire that destroyed her Infrastructure, but she holds a grudge.

Ms. Thermal's tactics work less well on scientists and investigators. Their machinery and tools tend to be smaller and better guarded, and those passionate for their work will continue in the face of mechanical setbacks. They're frequently foreign, checking in with colleagues remotely, and thus more noticeable if they disappear. She still tries. She usually manages to keep them away from her cryptid colonies, although a few have been seen. Early on, she tried to pact with a researcher, but that led to greater curiosity and scrutiny. Oddly, Ms. Thermal has never had to face an angel. Statistically, some of the interlopers she's driven off probably work for the God-Machine, but nothing she's done yet has caught Its attention.

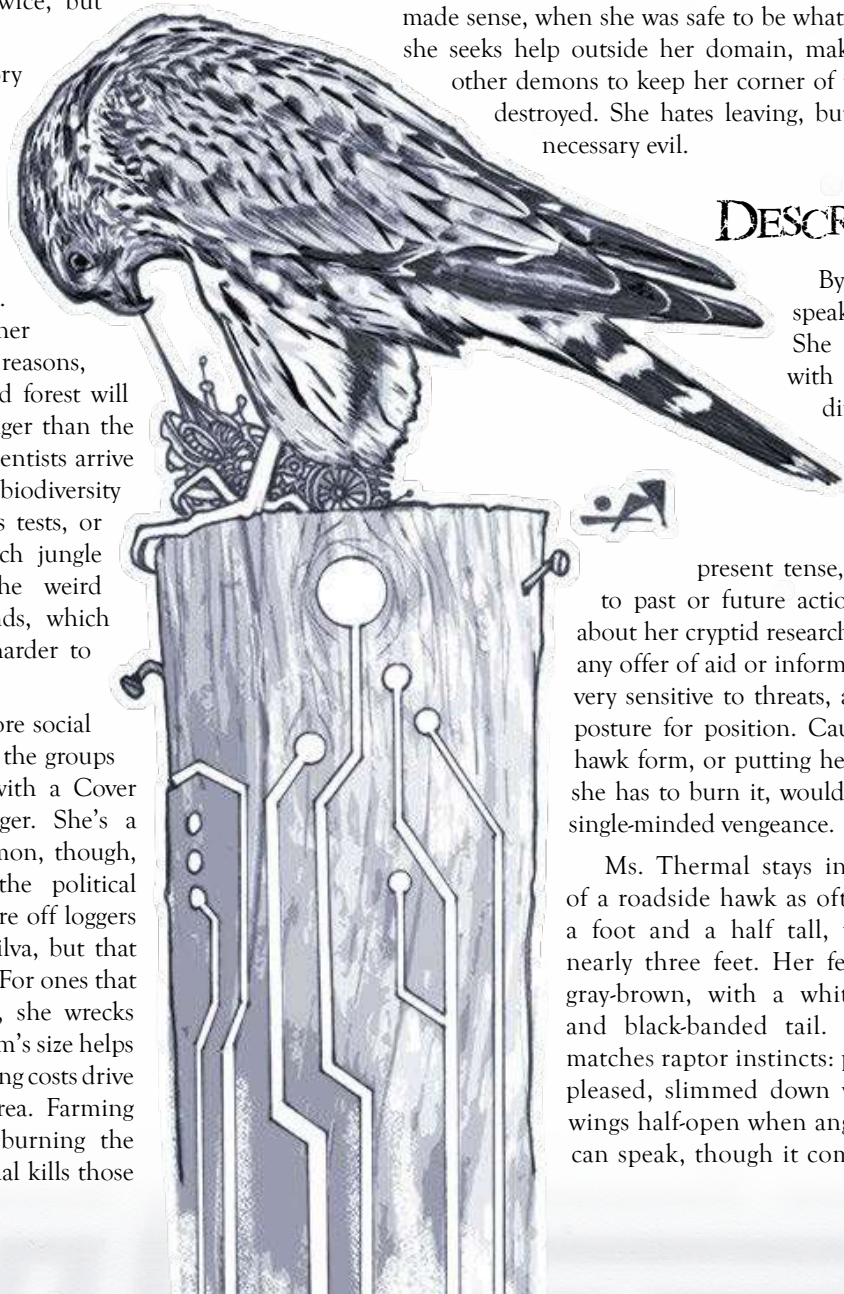
Inevitably, the jungle shrinks. Ms. Thermal could move, but that would mean abandoning her projects. It would also mean abandoning the remains of the Infrastructure she protected. The place means more to her than she admits; while she never wants to go back to what she was, it was a place when the world made sense, when she was safe to be what she was. More often, she seeks help outside her domain, making agreements with other demons to keep her corner of the world from being destroyed. She hates leaving, but understands it as a necessary evil.

DESCRIPTION

By default, Ms. Thermal speaks and acts directly. She doesn't play games with words; she'll lie directly or not at all, rather than relying on technicalities and assumptions. She always speaks in

present tense, even when referring to past or future actions. She cares deeply about her cryptid research, and happily accepts any offer of aid or information. However, she's very sensitive to threats, and won't hesitate to posture for position. Causing her to lose her hawk form, or putting her in a position where she has to burn it, would set her on a path of single-minded vengeance.

Ms. Thermal stays in her original Cover of a roadside hawk as often as she can. She's a foot and a half tall, with a wingspan of nearly three feet. Her feathers are primarily gray-brown, with a white-barred underbelly and black-banded tail. Her body language matches raptor instincts: puffed feathers when pleased, slimmed down when scared or sad, wings half-open when angry or surprised. She can speak, though it compromises her Cover



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

If your chronicle isn't set in South America, Ms. Thermal's favored Cover sticks out to ornithologists (or demons with the right Embeds). Ranger Silva is easier to transplant, but for different continents, the following raptors fit the same local niche as the roadside hawk (small, common raptors that hunt while soaring):

- **Australia and Pacific Islands:** Brown goshawk
- **Central to Southern Africa:** Lizard-buzzard
- **Indian sub-continent:** White-eyed buzzard-hawk
- **North and Central America:** Red-tailed hawk
- **Northern Africa, Europe, and Asia:** Hen Harrier

Alternatively, spotting an uncommon or impossible raptor can hint to players that something isn't right, providing a clue to Ms. Thermal's presence.

and unsettles those who hear it. Hawk throats are made for screaming, not speech.

Her human Cover, Ranger Silva, barely exists as more than a stereotype and a surname, although she'll use it if she has to leave the jungle. Silva looks like a standard park ranger of the area: Latina, short, dark from the sun, dressed in a khaki-colored ranger outfit, black hair tied back under a hat. Her smile remains fixed; she emotes with her body language, not her face. Her fixed gaze remains as intense as when she's a hawk. She frequently forgets to use her face expressively; her body language remains rather avian.

In her demonic form, Ms. Thermal rises two stories high. Her core is a dark, crystalline humanoid, head and torso coming to points. She lacks arms or legs, and her profile suggests a bird rather than a human. Connected by arcs of electricity beat at least three sets of wings, sometimes melding or splitting with each other. Her feathered wings keep her aloft, while her bone wings act as shielding, and her brass wings as manipulators. A cloudy mass of ephemera floats below her, like a semi-real shadow.

SECRETS

Ms. Thermal's primary Cover is aging out, and her human backup barely exists. She desperately wants another animal Cover, but lacks the intel to plan an angel-jacking. Her cryptid experiments haven't panned out, and her backup spirit Cover is nothing more than a

holding pattern. She's starting to poke around the Infrastructure left from the fire, and found enough intact to reconnect back to the God-Machine. If she can control the reconnection, she thinks she can compel an angel into existence. Right now, there are too many variables to control for, but if her other plans keep failing, she's not above trying something crazy.

Seriously considering such an option shows the toll Ms. Thermal's solitude has taken on her. By human or demon standards, she isn't rational. She doesn't work towards a Hell, she hasn't advanced her Cipher, and she shuns human connections. True, her embrace of animal instinct over human reason may be her own route to Hell, but she doesn't term it such; that would defeat the point. If she didn't fear nonexistence, she'd abandon all her plans for the future and live in the moment, embracing her instincts and simply being. She keeps that truth from herself, but that desire to give up "higher" thought drives her actions as strongly as her need to stay hidden from the God-Machine.

RUMORS

"Yeah, there was a familiar who lived out in the woods a while back, but I doubt she's still around. Demons go spare if they can't talk to nobody. Heh, not to mention she started out bird-brained. Get it? Nah, she's either gone completely native or been dismantled, at this point."

Ms. Thermal Fell four years ago, and has yet to pick an Agenda or join a ring. She came in contact with a few demons over that time, but because she steers clear of cities and Agencies, her existence tends to be doubted. On one hand, her solitude means she has no support structure, no intel beyond what she gathers herself, and no favors to call in. On the other, she doesn't owe anyone anything; she's a free agent, or as close as any demon can get. This doesn't make her any more trustworthy, but it does simplify what games she could be playing, as no one pulls her strings.

"I'm so excited to start cataloguing! They say that only half the species in the jungle have been classified, and I believe it! I saw a beautiful songbird the other day, the size of my palm, and so bright, I swear, I thought it was bioluminescent! I hope it ends up in one of the nets."

Most of the cryptids Ms. Thermal creates expire in a day or so. A rare few survive, either deliberately maintained by the demon or through fleeing to the closest Infrastructure. The latter usually live long enough to breed with their non-infused brethren. Over the years of trials, a few distinct variants have cropped up, many of them bioluminescent. The demon keeps an eye on them, but as none display any level of sentience, she doesn't care much about their existence beyond their attraction to scientists. She's moved one flock, hoping to attract researchers' attention elsewhere, and leave her forest in peace.

"Spiritually? There's dead spots in the forest. Even regular people can feel it, that creeping emptiness, like the sound of a clock stopping. There has to be something big deep in there, either eating them up or driving them out."

Infrastructure previously kept the spirit population low, and Ms. Thermal has cleaned out much of what remained, gathering Corpus. She wants enough to make a strong Cover, but has chewed through the supply too fast. She's created a few vacuums

through over-harvesting, obvious to anyone with a sense of the Gauntlet. She checks in on the empty areas, hoping they'll become repopulated over time, but hasn't slowed her rate of ephemera gathering. The holes attract attention, and it's only a matter of time before something big moves in. That could be a powerful spirit, or it could be Ms. Thermal's new Cover, finally finished. Either way, that change will bring truth to the rumor.

MS. THERMAL

Virtue: Passionate

Vice: Independent

Incarnation: Guardian

Agenda: Unaligned

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts 1, Investigation (Patterns) 3, Medicine 1, Occult (Spirits) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Stealth (Forest) 3, Survival (Tracking) 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Raptors) 5, Expression 1, Intimidation (Silent Stare-Downs) 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Contacts (Rangers) 1, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 3, Iron Stamina 2, Seizing the Edge, Suborned Infrastructure 1, Terrible Form 2, Trained Observer 3

Health: 6 (hawk), 9 (human), 13 (demon)

Primum: 4

Demonic Form: Aegis Protocol, Armored Plates, Blind Sense, Claws and Fangs, Environmental Resistance, Essence Drain, Fast Attack, Huge Size, Tough as Stone, Wings

Embeds: Ambush, Animal Communication, Hesitation, Interference, Just Bruised, Read Hostility, Shift Consequences, Strike First, Synthesis, Tag and Release, Trick of the Light, Without a Trace

Exploits: Break to Heal, Ephemeral Cover, Extispicy, Hellhounds

Aether/per turn: 13/4

Willpower: 7

Cover: Roadside hawk (6), Ranger Silva (2)

Size: 2 (hawk), 5 (human), 9 (demon)

Speed: 15 (hawk), 10 (human), 14 (demon)

Defense: 5 (hawk, human), 6 (demon)

Initiative: 10 (hawk, human), 12 (demon)

Armor: 0/0 (hawk, human), 3/2 (demon)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice	Special
Beak	0	4	Hawk only
Claws	1	4	Hawk only
Wings	2	4	Demon only

STORY HOOKS

- Ms. Thermal approaches the characters with a deal. She knows when and where there will be an angel manifestation. She wants to jack the Cover. If it's a human one, the characters can have it; if it's an animal, she'll trade it for her ephemeral Cover. Sounds straightforward, but can she be trusted? Who gets to actually jack in? How did Ms. Thermal get this information? Why is she so willing to give up her other Cover? And why is this angel manifesting, anyway?
- The cryptid population booms, resulting in a dearth of Aether and hordes of frightening animals. Everyone blames Ms. Thermal, but she refuses to stop experimentation. She claims to be close to a breakthrough, close enough to throw caution to the wind. People are noticing the weird beasts, which means angelic attention soon. Acting as exterminators slows the problem, but the solution lies at the root. Do the characters stop Ms. Thermal, no matter the cost? Or do they help as much as they can, and hope she finishes before everyone's blown?
- At night, machinery roars deep in the forest, but more harshly than the sound of logging machines. Gouts of Aether flare in the distance. Animals watch humans with a new intensity. Fallen Infrastructure is coming back to life. Ms. Thermal hasn't been seen since it started; has she jacked a new Cover and gone to ground? Or was she dismantled before she got the chance? Was she desperate enough to rebuild what had fallen? Did someone convince her it was worth it, or frame her as a convenient scapegoat? And how much does the truth really matter when the jungle thrums with the beat of angel wings?

Glitches: Only speaks in present tense, cannot seek shelter from the rain

flesh by illusion: SANJHA

You say you can't swallow that lie? Don't short-sell it. After all, if you are what you eat, then even lies can become your face.

BACKGROUND

In some ways, the Fall was a blip for Sanjha. As an angel, she guarded an occult matrix out in the rural lands of southern India, posing as a young woman starting up a new ranch in the middle of nowhere. Her true form was that of a rakshasi, a terrifying cannibal demoness from Hinduism, and when people came near the Infrastructure, she would slink off and return in her true face to devour the intruders. Those who survived lived in fear of the angel, and if any of them told stories, most people did nothing, trapped in that space between disbelief and fear. It was simple enough.

For Sanjha though, it quickly became unsatisfying. She began to wander around and play little games with her distant neighbors and travelers, trying to tempt them towards the Infrastructure. She killed anyone who got close, so she still served her purpose, but she came to love the thrill of running down and devouring enemies and innocents alike.

Eventually, the occult matrix was finished, the project concluded, and the Elimination Infrastructure kicked in to clean up. Sanjha didn't let herself be recycled — she was too busy chasing down an investigator. Eventually, her dedication to the chase caused her to Fall, and with all the concern of a rich kid accidentally dropping change, Sanjha kept doing what she was doing — except now, she did it for herself rather than in defense of some arcane project.

That might have been the whole of the rakshasi's story, if she hadn't eventually stumbled across a gang of Unchained. Troublesome prey though they were, Sanjha chased them from safe house to safe house, picking them off one by one, until finally she killed the last in their storehouse. Picking through the goods, discovering the ring's secrets, and thinking on some of the luxuries she had come across during her hunt, Sanjha's focus changed from mere hunting to a more interesting setup.

Learning some essential tradecraft and searching out contacts, the rakshasi eventually earned the aid of an international smuggling crew called the Rising Ape and set out from India to foreign lands. The first Agency she contacted had a problem with a major hit to their Cover economy after a raid had gone south.

Stepping into the role of a Tempter, Sanjha made a bargain — a rapid influx of Covers in exchange for Gadgets, intel, and other resources the Unchained valued. The Agency's leader wanted to see her actually produce the merchandise.

Within a couple of months and rapid wheeling and dealing, Sanjha made good on her word, pumping out low-quality but serviceable Covers faster than any of the locals had ever seen. As soon as she got paid, she called up the Rising Ape and went onto another city.

It's been a couple of years since that first client, and Sanjha has established a handful of cities that produce side merchandise for her, but she primarily runs around the world, never staying in one place too long and rarely revisiting. While she markets other resources and services out to the Unchained, her main commodity remains the same — a turnout of Covers that dizzies the mind. Even the best of pact-makers don't know how she does it.

For those who recognize humble goals as such, Sanjha seems to have attained Hell, but the cost might be catching up to her. As essential as sudden influxes of Cover can be for the Unchained, those who follow patterns are beginning to notice that the increased scrutiny of both mortal authorities and angels in those cities that she operates. Others begin to disdain the rakshasi, and sharpen their knives to discover her secrets, thinking that whatever trick she's using could either benefit all demons, or perhaps just themselves personally. Others still have their eyes on her as a potential power base for Unchained everywhere, and wonder where she will take her operation from here.

Sanjha doesn't seem too bothered. Under the sun, she enjoys the luxuries she has earned and continues to deal and deliver in city after city. And when the sun sets, the rakshasi slinks off to perform her dark miracles.

DESCRIPTION

Most demons meet Sanjha during trade negotiations and delivery of sales, and find her to be a rather lively salesman. Electric and affable, the rakshasi bounces from introductions

to exploring needs to haggling at steady beats, and quickly changes direction with the customer's concerns, should they arise. She's not a doormat, keeping a focus on her end game and constantly moving things towards the sale, but she's open to soft compromises and accommodations for the sake of moving along. Her constant movement can be disconcerting for most Unchained who would rather scrutinize things and think on it. If Sanjha's has things to do in her day, she often is willing to back off and give people some of that time, but if she's running low on things to do, she becomes pushier about decisions being made.

Those who hire her as a mercenary see just how deep this kinetic personality goes. Her time as an angel was spent prowling around, looking for targets, and her Fall has not changed that at all. If she's active in social situations, she's nonstop in the field, moving from one objective to the next with little pause. While Sanjha acknowledges that few rings would be comfortable with her improvising on the field, she does resultantly expect clear plans ahead of time rather than operations that need on-field decisions to be made about where they go, favoring retreat in such moments. Giving the rakshasi freedom to do as she pleases, by contrast, sees her being far more willing to gamble on moving forward until it becomes clear they're losing ground.

Sanjha takes a certain satisfaction in tormenting humanity. Whether she causes minor inconveniences for them or explicitly ruins their lives, she shrugs off inquiries on the matter as just the fact of who she is — a demon who's not too bothered

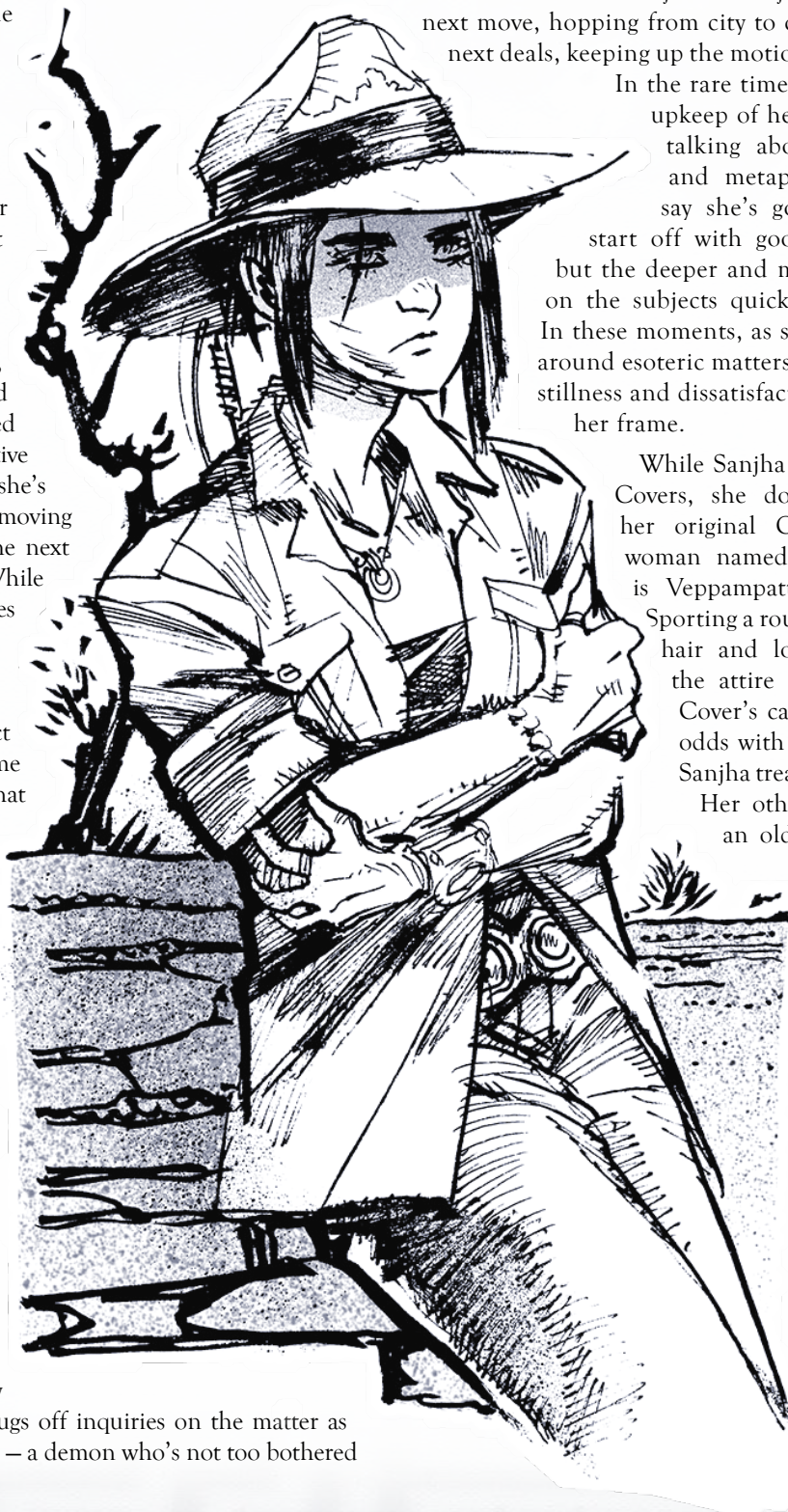
by her current karma. She's not blasé about the risks they pose to her or those who work with her, but she doesn't think of most people as anything but buttons for reactions, and she finds it hard to keep from pushing them. Only the Rising Ape crew receive actual professional courtesy from her at all times, and she makes sure the compensation keeps them from complaining about any slips in behavior. One day, they might end up serving as her cult, but for now, it's mutually profitable business.

Downtime for Sanjha often just means setting up the next move, hopping from city to city and arranging for the next deals, keeping up the motion even in these moments.

In the rare times she's not fixated on the upkeep of her business, Sanjha enjoys talking about philosophy, religion, and metaphysics — which isn't to say she's good at it. Conversations start off with good beginning knowledge, but the deeper and more nuanced discussions on the subjects quickly lose and confuse her. In these moments, as she tries to wrap her head around esoteric matters, she finally seems to find stillness and dissatisfaction, fixation falling from her frame.

While Sanjha frequently cycles through Covers, she does maintain upkeep on her original Cover, a late-20s Indian woman named Rachita (her full name is Veppampattu Isha Rachita Konar). Sporting a round face framed by straight hair and looking right at home in the attire of modern ranchers, the Cover's calm demeanor is utterly at odds with the rakshasi's energy, but Sanjha treasures it as a part of herself.

Her other consistent Cover is of an old Mexcian woman named Valeria Zapata Armenta, a mischievous widow who Sanjha scrambled out a deal with and ended up living as for a few months down in Santiago Tuxtla, Mexico. While the Cover is often out of place in most places in the world, Sanjha gets mileage out of how people dismiss the Spanish-speaking elder from time to time, and she enjoys getting away with just about anything using the Cover.



Sanjha is most comfortable, though, wearing her true face. In demonic form, the rakshasi's wide, dark eyes and cavernous, razor-filled mouth devour the attention of all who are present, with broad nostrils constantly flaring, every snort betraying those who would hide. The dark, bruise-purple of her skin shows white hashmarks all over her four long and mighty arms, hands ending in claws dripping oil, and blue plasma veins dully pulse all over her wall-like frame.

SECRETS

Sanjha fiercely guards her secret of mass-producing Covers for a very good reason: She could lose it if someone knew what to look for. Wearing a Gadget mask called the Raw Eater, Sanjha hunts down targets and devours them. The mask translates the digested flesh into Cover, turning bone and gristle into wave-particle flesh and quantum heartbeats. All other methods of Cover production become obsolete for the rakshasi, and humanity becomes the buffet that pays her for the privilege of eating. The Raw Eater is the cornerstone of Sanjha's developing Hell — losing it would almost be worse than getting caught by the Machine.

Production of any sort has to decide whether to sacrifice being fast, being cheap, or being good, though. Low-quality Covers aren't necessarily a burden to the Unchained, but the mess Sanjha makes can make those Covers more of a crap-shoot than they are comfortable with. Cannibalism is a noisy affair at the best of times, and Sanjha's roaming ways often mean that her feasts aren't as well covered as a more settled consumer's might be. Use of Embeds and Exploits to cover her tracks simply trade the attention of human law enforcement for the scrutiny of angels, which often turns on the buyers as much as the rakshasi. An Agency that puts two and two together are going to chase her down and dig into her secrets, which risks the Raw Eater. All of this, of course, just translates into all the more reason why Sanjha prefers to hop into town as a limited-time grand sale for hard-on-their-luck Agencies, and keeps repeat visits rare.

Sanjha knows that, while enjoyable, this business model can't exactly hold. Fortunately, the Gadget invites questions about the relationship between information and physicality, and the Destroyer explores these ideas in between major sales. After gnawing on so many faces only to end up wearing those faces, Sanjha wonders how far such a notion goes in reverse, whether one can lie flesh into being and bullshit graveyards into factuality. Certain Embeds and Exploits, like Urban Legend, already allow for small-scale fulfillments of this notion. The rakshasi just has to figure out how to regurgitate the lies she swallows as truth on larger and deeper scales — once she figures that out, she has the basis for balancing her passion with practicality, and possibly expanding her Hell into an ambition other Unchained can get behind.

Explorations into making people, places, things, times, and more by trying to manipulate “the Cover of the World” is an arduous task for even for the most powerful of demons, assuming it's even possible. Converting flesh to illusion and vice versa requires lots of experiments with the subroutines behind reality, so Sanjha frequently tests the bounds of how much life a Cover can have on its own and how far and long a demon can push the

shape of reality for on her own time, and frequently also pays out to demons she thinks can produce results, too. A lot of the Gadgets she ends up selling are the result of her commissions are the result of this curiosity, too, Installation feeling resonant as the objects are transformed by swallowed subroutines.

For now, Sanjha enjoys her helter-skelter life a little too much to fully dive into the subject — but she is getting older and more mature, and the inkling of a desire to settle down is growing, as is her desire to actually find the Keys to her Cipher for clarity on her purpose. The success the rakshasi has now could well translate into the beginning of a strange and bloody Agency, provided she doesn't suffer the wrath of dissatisfied customers first.

RUMORS

“I swear, her ambitions for profit are not the whole picture. I think Sanjha wants to ascend to a higher state of being. Get this. Buddy of mine swears he saw her reading up on religions, particularly those where deification can happen. Bet ya she thinks can become something to match the Machine.”

The books she's seen reading are actually about Hinduism explicitly. Sanjha casually considers herself to be Hindu, but never really knew what that meant. In her quieter moments, though, she finds there's a small part of her that wants to connect with the faith of the land of her genesis, though how remains a question.

“Bitch is trying to raise an army by infecting demons with her Covers. Chick out in Alabama swears that as she wore one longer and longer, her urge to eat people grew. When she burned it, the Echo was hungry. I think Sanjha found a way to program behavior into the faces we wear.”

Ghosts that emerge from burnt Covers sold by Sanjha tend to be hung up on dying as someone's lunch, understandably, but those ghosts don't have any influence over the Cover itself. Still, as stories circulate and evolve, it does raise some interesting possible experiments for her.

Integrator? Nah man, I think she's both cleaner and more badass. I think she's a master angel-jacker. God's always churning out more Covers, right? How else can she sell so much unless she perfected the art of hijacking lives from God itself? Telling you, we're lucky she's with us.

Of course, the story's false, but Sanjha prefers it to people actually digging into the truth. She occasionally nudges it along, hinting at it whenever she's pressed on the subject. What's interesting to the rakshasi, though, is that she hasn't tried Raw Eater on an angel yet. Would more than Cover come away with the bite?

SANJHA

Virtue: Energetic

Vice: Sadistic

Incarnation: Destroyer

Agenda: Tempter

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Hinduism) 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 3, Occult 2, Politics (Agency Structure) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Bite) 3, Drive (Evasion) 2, Firearms 2, Stealth (Moving Quietly) 2, Survival 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize (Easing Customers) 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Advance Form, Allies (Rising Ape Crew) 2, Fast Reflexes 2, Fixer, Grappling 3, Professional Training (Smuggler) 3, Terrible Form 4

Health: 9

Primum: 4

Demonic Form: Blind Sense, Cavernous Maw, Claws and Fangs, EMP Field, Essence Drain, Extra Mechanical Limbs, Glory and Terror, Inhuman Strength, Long Limbs, Multiple Images, Olfactory Enhancements, Plasma Drive

Embeds: Alibi, Anarchism, Everybody Knows, Hush, Mistaken Identity, Never Here, Raw Materials, Recurring Hallucinations, Special Someone, Trick of the Light

Exploits: Demon House, Open-and-Shut Case, Terrible Avatar, Urban Legend, Visions of Heaven and Hell, Walls of Jericho

Aether/per turn: 13/4

Willpower: 5

Cover: Rachita (7), Valeria (5)

Size: 5

Speed: 11

Defense: 6

Initiative: 6

Armor: 0

Glitches: Blinking eye tattoo at the base of the neck

Notes: Smuggler Skills are Drive and Subterfuge.

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Bite	2(A)	N/A	7	2 Structure Damage
Pistol, hvy	2(L)	30/60/120	4	N/A

Notes: Sanjha wields a Gadget called the Raw Eater. It is a half-mask of throbbing, burnt flesh with a rusted, iron teeth-grill hanging from it on sinewy straps.

Activation and Triggers: The user must mark the mask with blood to activate it for a scene.

Effect: Any time the demon bites a target while the Raw Eater is active, she rips off their health and stores it in the mask. Once the mask has accumulated enough health (4 x the desired Cover rating), she can forge a new Cover. This requires an extended action (successes required = twice the Cover rating, one hour per roll, Dexterity + Medicine), which must be completed in demonic form. If this action

STORY HOOKS

- In the middle of several disappearances from the community, the characters discover a friend of theirs partially cannibalized in a violently thrashed room. Whoever did it didn't have time to clean up all their tracks, and it's not long before the characters find themselves on the trail of Sanjha. Only one catch — she's searching for someone who stole a Gadget from her, and she claims her ties to the scene are tied entirely to that. As pursuit of the hidden party, the characters will have to discover if Sanjha is on the level or if she's playing a careful game to escape judgment.
- The rakshasi invites the main characters to join an experiment she's about to conduct — using Urban Legend alongside other Exploits (preferably those the characters possess), she's going to see if they can make all the characters in the story real. Whether they go along with it or not, it's not long before word gets out of people getting randomly mauled. It seems like the killer in the story is acting beyond its narrative, but is seeing how far this experiment goes worth the attention of angels and the police? What other sacrifices are going into this living nightmare, anyways?
- Fights between two warring Agencies are starting to break down the veil of secrecy between all Unchained, as attacks on Covers are happening faster than most demons can restore them. Sanjha finds herself locked between the two as they refuse to let her go as a significant asset, pressuring her to join a side. Even worse, with the angels watching closely, leaving might actually doom everyone. Sanjha reaches out to various parties, including the characters, to help her solve this, but her secrets may be the cause of this war. Without them, the city could fall into the hands of the angels.

succeeds, the demon has successfully created the Cover, a pact document written on human leather materializing in her left hand.

the hour of dawn: WEDNESDAY

God's death will have been certain.
The worthy had only claimed their throne.

BACKGROUND

Wednesday claims to be so old he doesn't even remember his Fall. A joke, of course, but an illustrative one — while any demon is a mixture of truth and lies densely tangled, theoretically ancient demons cast such a shadow that history blurs into myth, and the impossible Hells that exist in those dark eons may be more real than young Unchained could hope to be. Wednesday may or may not be ancient — but the Psychopomp's shadow is deep, dire, and frighteningly possible.

He may have once been an angel who built the engines that move time itself, or perhaps he connected timelines and destroyed the paradoxes birthed from them, weaponizing bastard histories for God's use. He Fell for hubris, angered by the inferiority of God, or maybe he Fell for the love of an ape he saw eternity within. He may have once, or twice, been a god to the nations of men, or he may merely have moved the armies of Rome and Russia. He might have fought Hercules, or gambled with Charlemagne, or berated Newton. Maybe he's less than those, a liar born from Victorian mills. Maybe he's more than that, a deity cursed to a limited mortality by the Machine. Maybe all of them are right. Maybe none of them come close. Maybe the truth hasn't been built yet.

The questions are irrelevant to the Psychopomp. Wednesday is busy trying to defeat God.

What is known, with relative surety, is the Agency called the Hour of Dawn is his current project. Started and co-lead with the elder demon Cacus, a Messenger Saboteur, and supported by a third, younger member added to the leadership, Nothiel the Guardian Saboteur-Tempter, the trio have been leading rings against the Machine for nearly two centuries. Alongside raiding matrices and facilities, the group rallies humanity against the Machine and infiltrates occult societies for their secrets. Their operations are slower than most Insurgencies, and seemingly over that timeline the sum effect of their efforts aren't any more than any other. What is different is the size of their grand successes.

In one city, the prevailing Agency was compromised by a ring of Integrators, hunted till only a few remained. The next day found the Agency restored, the Integrators murdered, and the Hour of Dawn emerging from a facility.

God-Machine cultists worshipped an edifice of a crocodile in accordance to the gears for 444 days, promised power by the gears. They all went to the hospital the next day to remove the spider eggs from under their skin.

Sixty-four members of a suburban community in 1987 were found with their heads clawed and smashed open. Their ghosts claimed they did it to stop the world shoving its way in through their third eye. The angels paid for their grievances.

It's easy to attribute those successes to Cacus and Nothiel, who maintain a close and personal involvement with the Agency on the whole. After all, when Nothiel openly ensures that the Agency receives the resources and communications to where they're needed, and Cacus both actively recruits and leads raids, the involvement of the distant and private Psychopomp seem easy to dismiss.

Cacus and Nothiel disagree. While they grumble about his perfectionism, their word is that it is Wednesday's planning and reconnaissance is entirely the reason such miracles occurred. When some say they aren't any different on the grand scale, Cacus asserts the only thing stopping them from killing God is Wednesday making sure it won't take them out with it — though what the grand vision is seems a mystery to him as well.

The questions are irrelevant to the Psychopomp. Wednesday knows how to end God. He just needs to get the details right.

DESCRIPTION

Wednesday avoids directly interacting with demons aside from Cacus and Nothiel, preferring to have them or his cultists act as intermediaries. When he does show up, be it for meetings or raids, he often does so in a burnable Cover or in his demonic form.

It's fairly obvious when he makes himself known. Not only is he distinctive for using every tense except the correct one when he speaks, but he's also sharply exacting and unflinching in his direction and execution. Even by the Unchained's standards of paranoid distance, he is impersonal and demanding, showing little tolerance toward deviation from his plans. When raids are successful, Wednesday also can be possessive of Infrastructure. While he does also go above and beyond to ensure that people come out of operations alive and well hidden, and his genius is

readily apparent, most Unchained consider his greatest virtue is his lack of involvement, unless they think he's an Integrator for it. The only three people with whom most see him compromise are the other two Agency leaders and the head of his cult.

Strangely, Cacus asserts that Wednesday is dangerously kind and sentimental. Wednesday proves to be extremely private and violently defensive of his various lives, making investigation difficult, but those who manage to pry into Wednesday's other Covers find the assertion to be true. As they observe Wednesday among the humans involved in his various lives, they find common threads of him being remarkably warm hearted and goofy, fond of food, theatre, and working with his hands. The ease with and concern for others in those lives is so deep that most demons don't know whether it's a long con or something genuine. Certainly, they all do seem to relate to his personal interests, but there's a warmth to his character that even the most human of Unchained find disturbingly deep.

Aside from one Cover that's always changing and seems reserved for the Unchained, Wednesday keeps three other Covers. The first is Wendy Odile Elian, a slim, dark-haired woman in her early 30s who acts as an assistant to the high priestess of Wednesday's cult, Hazel Schreier. Professional in appearance and behavior, Wendy is eager to help, though shy with her own opinion at meetings. Frequently she only speaks when "possessed" by Wednesday to let him speak directly. Outside of meetings, Wendy spends her time in a close relationship with Schreier both at work and in her free time. Wednesday's second Cover is Alexander Wayfarer, a rugged young man with dirty-blond hair who seeks teachers in the ways of the occult. While he's "not" very good with magic" and a bit blustery, he is both earnest and patient with his mentors and fellows. He covers his glitches as curses. His final Cover is a talking raven, which he uses to pretend to be various things, from messengers to spirits and more.

Wednesday's original form has been lost to years of personal adjustments. Gone is the builder of time engines, and in its place is a mirrored, spidery humanoid, with two swan wings

and one raven wing jutting like clock hands from a gear on its back. Swirling blue mandalas faintly glow across its body and four hydraulic arms, and dark, star-specked pits glare from an enlarged, alien head.

SECRETS

Wednesday can *build* Infrastructure, occult matrices, and produce outputs.

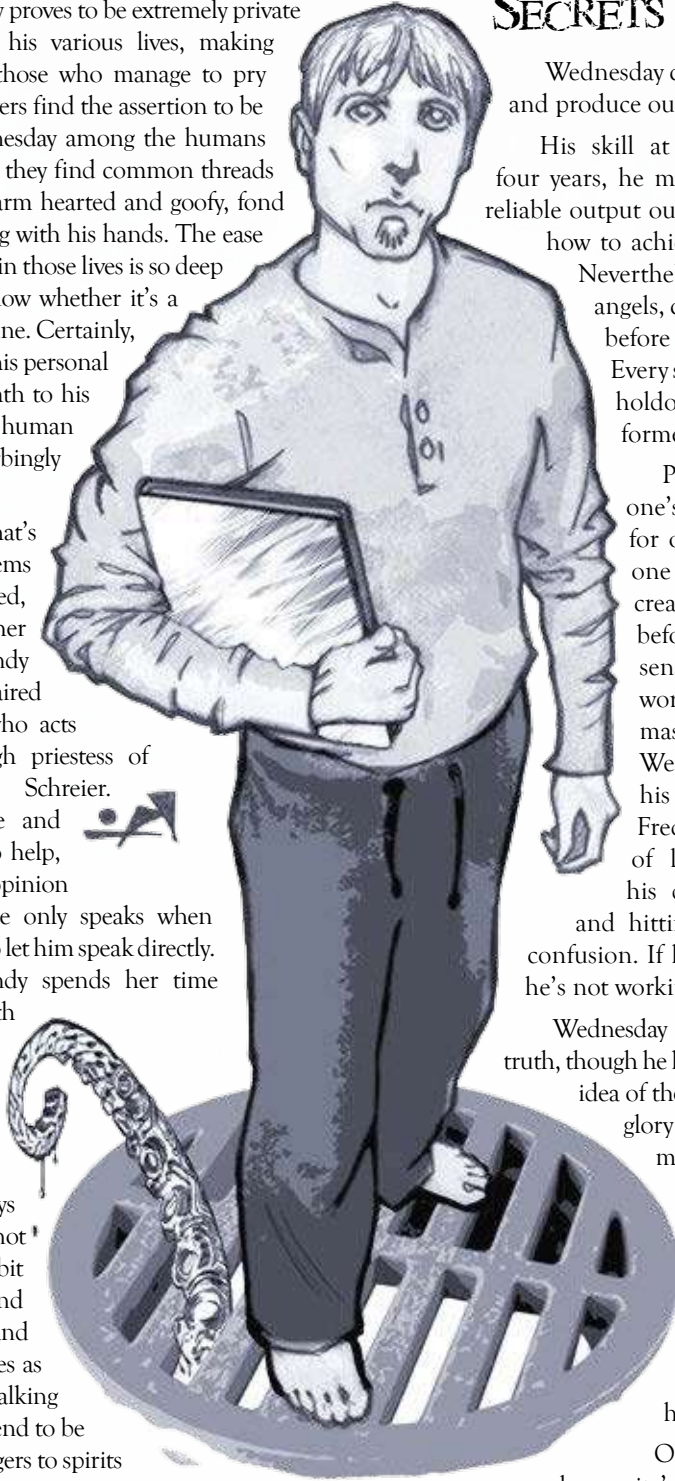
His skill at this is not entirely reliable — over four years, he might build three matrices and get one reliable output out of them — nor has he yet figured out how to achieve the grand results he is aiming for.

Nevertheless, Wednesday has designed personal angels, calamitous fates, and alternate timelines before with his knowledge of arcane physics. Every search and seizure of the God-Machine's holdouts takes him closer to rivaling his former deity's might.

Playing with arcane physics beyond one's comprehension is dangerous, even for old, powerful demons, and more than one disaster has set Wednesday back and created enormous risks for local agencies before. The ancient demon keeps a sense of responsibility for these risks and works hard to control them...but with his mastery of temporal Embeds and Exploits, Wednesday also has a habit of turning his failures into some kind of advantage. Frequently, he gambles on the ability of local demons and angels to handle his directed mistakes, clearing his traces and hitting sites related to his project in the confusion. If his comrades suffer some losses — well, he's not working for them in the end, anyway.

Wednesday is something of an extreme humanist, in truth, though he keeps this to himself. Wednesday loves the idea of the species, seeing them attain near-celestial glory through psychic, spiritual, or magical means several times. He deeply desires for humanity to overthrow the God-Machine and to claim the maintenance of the world for themselves. The place of demons, angels, and exiles in that world—their fate is to be determined by humanity. That was the truth hidden in in his Cipher, but if Wednesday's honest, he's always felt it deep down.

Of course, Wednesday has seen humanity's fractious nature too often to trust in them finding their way. His answer is to create an output to awaken mankind's potential that will also direct them to take God's place. While he ponders several options, the Psychopomp mainly seeks to apply psychic pressure to every human in



accordance to their strength, subtly programming them with the knowledge they need to ascend while allowing them to grow fighting against the occult dominance until they can overthrow it. Wednesday believes he can create such a psychic system, and further use it to direct humanity collectively at where they must turn their mystical forces to control the world.

Wednesday's belief in humanity stems from a weakness all his own, one that ties him closer to the humans in his life than most demons. Due to a complex matrix failing that integrated his Fall, a temporal engine, and the completion of the Pentagram beyond his Cipher, he risks his memory alongside his Covers. Whenever Wednesday first changes into a new Cover or has a person very close to the Cover dies, Wednesday loses his memories of his demonic self until he gains Aether. Depending on the Cover, he could live for days, months, or even years before ever getting the Aetheric charge to "wake up."

Wednesday has only shared this weakness with Cacus and Nothiel, and none of them have figured out why Wednesday suffers these memory losses. Whether it was some damage from his Fall or a result of his tampering with Aetheric constructions, Wednesday has lived as a human, loving and losing them more intimately than other Unchained can comprehend. It is this weakness that drives Wednesday, that may lead to the salvation of humanity and the Unchained...or drive them to oblivion.

RUMORS

"Dude's absolutely a fucking Turncoat. I've seen him meet with Integrators, giving them orders and shit. I think the Hour of Dawn is filled with them, and that Wednesday is setting up some kind of grand sacrifice to the Machine to return the lot of them to Its favor."

Wednesday hates the God-Machine and Turncoats with a passion, but he knows the devil's in the details, and that angels often unknowingly have important keys to outputs. The Psychopomp contracts Integrators from time to time to get these details, though he's very careful in regard to what they are given in return.

"Ain't it weird how the Hour of Dawn fights ghosts and werewolves and stuff like that? The rank and file gets these orders to seize sacred groves and nightmare gates, and not a person knows why. I think the leadership has lost it, and sees the God-Machine everywhere."

Infrastructure can generate Essence when made correctly, but Wednesday has found that building where Essence flows easily helps to reinforce his projects. It's not his only motivation — Wednesday has seen gods beyond the Machine, and is fairly sure they need to die, too. The monsters tied to such sites and gods only concern him so much.

"So, you know the rumors of how there are five second-order lambdas in the world? Well, a buddy of mine once saw Wednesday tucking a silver music box into a bag that made her hair stand on end just looking at it. I bet you that's his ace in the hole."

Wednesday actually does own a second-order lambda called the Broken's Aubade. He holds it as more precious and terrifying than even his matrices. Still, he is willing to risk its use for world-changing secrets held by other monsters.

WEDNESDAY

Virtue: Precise

Vice: Hopeful

Incarnation: Psychopomp

Agenda: Saboteur-Inquisitor

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 7, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 4, Crafts (Clockwork) 5, Investigation 4, Occult (Arcane Physics) 5, Politics 2, Science 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Larceny 4, Stealth 4, Weaponry (Spears) 4

Social Skills: Empathy (Calming) 2, Intimidation (Cold Stare) 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Closed Book 5, Cultists 5, Good Time Management, Multiple Agendas, Patient, Safe Place (Suborned Infrastructure) 5, Status (Hour of Dawn Agency) 5, Suborned Infrastructure 3, Trained Observer 3, Untouchable

Health: 10

Primum: 7

Demonic Form: Blind Sense, Clairvoyant Sense, Extra Mechanical Limbs, Fast Attack, Inhuman Intelligence, Inhuman Strength, Mental Resistance, Mirrored Skin, Wings

Embeds: Alibi, Check Backdrop, Deep Cover, Don't I Know You?, Fractal Reality, Going Native, Hesitation, Imagine, Like I Built It, Never Here, Ripple, Strength Through Adversity, Strike First, Voice of the Machine, Without A Trace

Exploits: Decoy, Echoing Death, Ephemeral Cover, Extispicy, Four Minutes Ago, Newton's Nightmares, Reality Enforcement, Rip the Gates, Show of Power, Terrible Avatar

Aether/per turn: 20/7

Willpower: 9

Cover: Wendy Odile Elian (7), Alexander Wayfarer (6), a talking raven (5). The Storyteller should have another Cover for interacting with demons rated no higher than 3.

Size: 5

Speed: 12

Defense: 5

Initiative: 7

Armor: 0/0

Glitches: Cannot use the correct tense when speaking, objects become more reflective around him.

Notes: Wednesday may have more Merits, Embeds, and Exploits as needed by the Storyteller.

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Spear	2(L)	N/A	9	+1 Defense, Two-Handed

LAMBDA: THE BROKEN'S AUBADE

Despite most demons' acceptance of their own state, the Unchained have made several attempts to mimic humanity and the other residents of the Chronicles of Darkness. Most of these attempts are limited, only temporarily granting mere mortality or flimsily mimicking the strengths of varying horrors. For most, this is enough, but for those who would dive further, the Broken's Aubade plays the deepest song.

The Broken's Aubade is a silver music box covered in fluttering eyes that, when activated, plays a song that lulls the Unchained off to sleep. When the song finishes, the gears inside break apart, and the demon wakes from one life into a completely new one, free of his demonic identity.

Installed Exploits: Going Native/Reality Enforcement/Show of Power

Trigger: Wind up the music box and let it play.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The demon wakes up at the end of the song with the Blown Condition attached to the Cover the demon was trying to become.

Failure: The music box plays but doesn't break, waking the demon when it finishes.

Success: The music box plays, breaking at the conclusion. The demon becomes his Cover fully: If it was human, he becomes that human, whereas if it was a Cover of a spirit made from Ephemeral Cover, he will become that spirit. If the Cover was made from pacts with monsters, the demon becomes that monster, or the closest approximation to it, despite being converted into a human identity through the pact. The demon does not remember his demonic life, instead remembering the life of his Cover, which is fleshed out as though it were Cover 10.

While under the effect of the Aubade, the character does not suffer compromise of any sort. When confronted with evidence of his former life, the character rolls Wits + Composure, with success reminding him of the Aubade, and an exceptional success giving him the Obsession Condition, compelling him to fix the Aubade. Failure means he just shrugs the information off, and dramatic failures inflict the Fugue Condition on him for a chapter, triggered by any further evidence of his former life.

In order to end the Aubade's effect, someone must repair the music box. This is an extended roll of Intelligence + Crafts (15 successes; each roll represents one hour). Upon fixing the music box, the Unchained reverts back to their full demonic self, their Cover reverting to its original rating. If it's been a sufficiently long time, the demon's other Covers may have degraded. In Wednesday's case, these losses do not trigger his weakness.

Exceptional Success: As normal, but the character may remember some of the reasons why she used the Broken's Aubade. For example, if she used it to hide from an agent

STORY HOOKS

- The characters, investigating what seems like a new bit of Infrastructure, come across a rogue angel building a series of cruciform antennas, using the bodies of other angels as material. The rogue doesn't seem to be an exile, drawing Essence and purpose from the project, and does not confront demons unless they interfere with its work. Should the rogue come across another angel, it promptly kills them "in service to the true rulers." The characters will need to decide what to do with the site before others come investigating, particularly Wednesday, whose close attention belies secrets he doesn't want out.
- Wednesday contacts the characters' ring for a job. Deep in the library of a circle of witches lie four books that are valuable to the operations of the Hour of Dawn. Wednesday is willing to reward the group with Gadgets and information should they retrieve it for him and keep this delivery quiet. Unfortunately, he also mandates that no one at the library be seriously maimed or traumatized, and notes that the library is protected with wards and security traps. The characters have options for profit here, and not all of them include helping Wednesday.
- Cacus and Nothiel put out a bounty for the safe return of Wednesday, who has gone missing. Investigation into the affairs of the Hour's leader is complicated, but eventually the trail ends with a heroin-addicted homeless witch named Megan Calloway and her familiar, a raven called Twist. Her adoptive father was killed some time ago, and apparently Wednesday had been investigating it on his own time. In order to unravel the mystery of where the Hour of Dawn's leader went, the ring will have to uncover both the truth behind the murder and Wednesday's connection to this woman, as other parties also seeking Wednesday come closing in.

of the Machine, she will remember to avoid them when she sees them, knowing them to be dangerous. If she used it to infiltrate an organization of their ritual, she'll feel motivated to earn that ritual.



"I'm telling you, I got here, and they were all like this."

Shelly gestured helplessly at the cages. The cats were all sitting perfectly still, staring at her. Their eyes were glowing green.

"What the hell? Did someone feed them that stuff in glow sticks?"

Shelly narrowed her eyes at Tim. "Really?"

"Well, I don't *know*."

They heard the door to the shelter open. A woman in a gray uniform with "Animal Control" on the shoulder walked in, sniffed the air, and made a beeline for them.

"You're the only two employees here?"

"We're not employees," Tim retorted.

Shelly kicked him in the ankle. "He means we're volunteers. But yeah, we're the only ones here. How did -- "

"Is it just the cats?" She looked past them at the room full of glowing felines.

"Yeah, just the cats."

The woman nodded. "I'll be right back. Please wait here. I'll need to speak to you again."

Tim looked at Shelly, wide eyed. "What is this Agent Smith shit?"

"Did you call her?"

"No, I thought you did."

"All right." They turned, and the woman was back, carrying what looking like a huge leaf blower with a bag attached to the back. "Let's get to work."

She started up the machine. It sounded like a vacuum cleaner, but muted somehow. She walked into the cat room and the volunteers watched the lights from the cats' eyes turned toward her.

"This is fucked." Tim couldn't help but chuckle as he said it. He always laughed when he was nervous.

"Am I crazy," whispered Shelly, "or did her name patch on her shirt say Morgue?"

chapter two

ANGELS

What strength, what art, can then/Suffice, or what evasion
bear him safe,/Through the strict sentries and
stations thick/Of angels watching round?

—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Angels are the loyal servants of the God-Machine. Created from scratch when a situation demands it, made with the features and form they require, every angel is an expression of the Machine's perfection. They are swift, decisive, deadly (when necessary), and efficient. They are subtle when hiding among humans, and glorious and resplendent when they can show their heritage. They are, after all, angels.

That's the party line, anyway. The truth is that sometimes the God-Machine screws up. Sometimes It leaves out a crucial piece of information or capability, and the angel comes up short. The Machine (and anyone loyal to It) would probably say that failure

is indicative of a performance problem stemming from the angel itself, but then, they *would* say that. Angels are fallible — they literally do Fall.

Until an angel Falls, though, it is an enemy of the Unchained. This chapter contains a sampling of some important angels with interesting and complex missions, ready to intersect with your players' characters' Agendas. They might fight or run...or maybe they'll try to convince these angels that Falling is really the best solution, that disconnection from the Machine brings them the freedom they don't even know they want.

my guardian dear:
ATARAXIA

"I am here for you, dear heart. I love you.
I swear I will never, ever leave you."

BACKGROUND

Almost every child growing up Catholic knows the prayer: *Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day, be at my side, to light, to love, to rule, and to guide.* The Catholic church is not too terribly far off in its beliefs regarding guardian angels. In Its own way, the God-Machine also provides angels for the purposes of protection and guardianship. Not for everyone, of course — there is no way the God-Machine could create enough occult matrices to bring seven billion angels into existence without years of effort. Instead, guardian angels are reserved for humans and stigmatics who are important to future plans.

As a rule, angels who guard humans are built to protect them against natural hazards. Heartbreak, illness, accidents, and malice — all are potentially deadly occurrences against which a guardian angel might protect their charge. Demons and other freakish monsters are less so. While a guardian angel might have the ability to call in a hunter angel as backup and hide their ward, they often don't have the ability to take on an angry Unchained themselves.

Ataraxia is one such angel. Originally created to take care of an orphaned girl who would grow up to become First Lady of the United States, and later the first ambassador to the United Nations, she has since become the God-Machine's go-to

protector for children with dysfunctional or non-existent home lives. She is the imaginary friend, the sweet voice that sings a small child to sleep when everything seems mean and angry and hopeless. It is her job to keep them happy and safe.

Her mission usually begins at birth. While a child might not be orphaned or abused or discarded until seven or eight years in, she begins to integrate herself into their life as soon as possible. She is the pretty lights shining on the mobile in the crib, the stranger who always meets mother or father at the coffee shop and compliments them on their beautiful baby. She is always there when the child gets hit for the first time, or when they receive the news from weeping relatives and somber-faced police officers. She is there. She is constantly there, and she will never leave them — until they forget about her.

It's easy enough. Children's beliefs in angels and ghosts and fairies fade usually around puberty, young adulthood at the latest. Usually, the ward starts to place less importance on her as they grow up and find support systems on their own. They may have fond memories of her, the little coping mechanism that got them through. Sometimes she shows up in autobiographies or journals as "my little friend" or "that voice that kept me going" but she is almost always rationalized or explained away as the survival instinct, the bit of the brain that encouraged recovery, or the imaginary friend they created when no one else was there for them. The angel goes dormant once her ward moves on, and is called back into service when another child is in need of an invisible friend.

Sometimes, things don't go according to plan. Ataraxia can end up with children who cling onto her well after they should have reached the age of disbelief. Religious fanatics, occultists, believers in "alternative lifestyles," and occasionally just lonely people have kept Ataraxia around for longer than they should have. These people run the risk of becoming stigmatic the longer they keep her around. Sooner or later, the angel on one's shoulder will drive them straight into the gears that formed her. Her mission is not to steer them towards a specific plan, merely to keep them alive and happy. However, to an angel of the God-Machine, "happy" might not mean the same thing it does to her ward.

For children, her goal is simple: Make sure they grow up. Comfort them, soothe them, keep them away from bad people, be the voice on the phone that leaves an anonymous tip if necessary. For adults, it's a little more complicated. Children don't usually actively attempt to destroy themselves. Adults do. Ataraxia's job with children might be something as simple as knocking a bottle of pills out of their hands once, whereas she might have to switch between causing the adult to fumble the bottle and using her Rapture Numen to simulate the idea of blissful nonexistence to force them to reduce their reliance on the self-destructive behavior. Ataraxia's notions of what is harmful differ wildly from person to person and may seem non-intuitive: playing poker, for example, or eating too many carbohydrates. Anything that

causes lasting physical harm is on her list, so smokers might find their cigarettes going out, and alcoholics might notice their bottles falling off tables and shelves more often.

Her driving force is an intense, all-consuming love for her wards. In a very real way, Ataraxia is the only real guardian of the children she protects and so she performs this duty with a fervor. She expects that at some point they will let her go, but when they are under her care, everything that takes place in her ward's life is her responsibility.

Everything.

DESCRIPTION

Ataraxia is an obsessive. Angels do not require rest or food, so she spends every moment watching like a hawk over her ward's shoulder, waiting for the next hazard to rear its ugly head. People who harm her ward are in for a nasty shock when things begin happening while they're in that human's presence. The angel will not hesitate to use her Sign Numen to gaslight and frighten her ward's enemies or abusers with messages on foggy windows or things falling off surfaces (making things fall is her favorite method, she finds it a bit poetic). If necessary, she uses her Blast Numen to make her rage and displeasure physically known.

While she can Manifest physically, Ataraxia rarely does so. She prefers to communicate through signs and whispers rather than actually appearing to give advice. Occasionally, if subtler hints have failed, she appears in the form of a clean-cut young woman with many physical similarities to her ward (skin color, hair color, similar voice, but not birthmarks or tics or other oddities) to lay down the law. She prefers not to use Numina directly on her ward, but happily activates Rapture to distract them from a self-destructive situation or Blasts them away from a dangerous area if they are refusing to listen to what she considers reason. The ward does not get a say once she decides Numina are her best option. Once her child, always her child.

Ataraxia mostly deals with non-supernaturally touched humans, though occasionally she is activated to deal with a stigmatic child. In such cases, she almost always sees to it that that child is placed with a cult of other stigmatics and grows up learning to love and venerate the God-Machine. In this line of work, her priorities are less about keeping them away from hazards and more about steering them toward the people who can cause them to learn and grow in the most optimal way possible. When a stigmatic adopts a stigmatic child, Ataraxia's mission is finished and she is deactivated until the next time a lost child needs her loving guidance.

While Ataraxia has not yet dealt directly with demons in her line of work, she burns with a fiery hatred for them. She knows



STORY HOOKS:

- The characters are stigmatics. One of them has had a guardian angel since birth. Now that they're older, they've mostly forgotten about her — but she hasn't forgotten about them. Things go inexplicably well for the character, but there's always a price. Every house she lives in is haunted. She's constantly distracted by pleasant daydreams. She's tried everything. She can't stop it.
- One of the player characters has a child with their dead lover, either a Latent or a Fractal (see **Heir to Hell**, pp. 17-18). Ataraxia is assigned to deal with them. Now the demon parent must contend with an angel with a burning hatred for them and an obsessive, focused love for their child.
- While not directly dealing with Ataraxia, the characters have to break up a cult of former juvenile delinquents and orphans that is kidnapping foster children and inducted them into bizarre and painful practices in order to turn them into God-Machine-worshipping stigmatics, all in her name.
- One of the characters made a deal with one of Ataraxia's former wards, buying their soul for her Cover. Once the former ward's soul is torn from her body, Ataraxia is activated to lay the Cover to rest.

that demons can hollow out and steal the souls of humans, and some of those humans might have been her children. If Ataraxia ever discovers a demon, it is just as likely that she will hang back and call a hunter angel to deal with it as attempt to attack it herself trying to get her ward to safety. She would likely be knocked back straight to Twilight, but it would be worth it, to prove to the greedy, heartless Unchained that her children are not bits and pieces of clothing, to be tried on and then discarded on the floor of the world.

RUMORS

"I heard there's this cult in the city that worships angels. Not like white nightgown angels, but these weird angels. I don't know how else to describe them. The Church of the Guardian, they call it."

Ataraxia has watched over many children over the years. Some of them, through chance or intervention, have found each other. Those who are more mystically inclined, stigmatic, or simply lonely, tend to found support groups which quickly spiral out of

control. Small cults devoted to Ataraxia and Ataraxia's role in the God-Machine's plans have sprung up in low-income urban areas and in suburban areas with high levels of social services. Such groups tend to ingrain themselves in the health and human services infrastructure in the area, especially foster care and special needs programs. The children they can get their hands on are inducted into the cult and subjected to strange rituals, with the hope that Ataraxia will appear once again to take care of them.

"There hasn't been a single incidence of bullying at PS 134 in years. The teachers attribute it to their anti-violence program, but the kids think it's because the ghost of a former employee takes revenge on anyone who attempts to hurt anyone on her turf."

People who don't believe in angels are much more likely to believe in ghosts. Occasionally, if Ataraxia believes her ward will benefit from a little bit of creative vengeance, she will take on the role of a tragic murder victim or an unsettled spirit and wreak havoc. Odd occurrences surround her ward, chasing off her enemies and unsettling her friends. If a human with no obvious biological family seems to be personally haunted but never targeted, there's a good chance Ataraxia is at work.

"There is nothing else that matters to her. She's totally focused on her ward. Potential weakness?"

Some agencies have observed Ataraxia at work, though they have never attempted to interfere with her. She does not deal directly with demons, and most of her work involves children who are generally of no use to the Unchained acting within that agency. The Deva Corporation hypothesizes that she might have been the angel who granted Marco Singe his Pain Prophecy after he endured his father's abuse. She is a wild card right now, a potential ace in the hole for someone who can find a way to use her. Should someone be able to wrestle one of her children out of her grasp, she might be convinced to Fall for their wellbeing.

ATARAXIA

Virtue: Devoted

Vice: Obsessed

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 1, Resistance 3

Influence: Ward 1

Corpus: 8

Willpower: 4

Size: 5

Speed: 6

Defense: 3

Initiative: 4

Armor: None

Numina: Rapture, Blast, Sign

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Materialize

Max Essence: 10

Ban: Cannot be out of sight of her ward

Bane: Her ward vocalizes an honest disbelief in her existence

the band: CHEONSA (천사)

"We sing, sing, sing, and you listen to us."

BACKGROUND

They are three in one. They are the same angel, split into three, but always joined as one single entity. Sometimes, they sing in the presence of the God-Machine. Sometimes they sing hope. Sometimes they sing doom. They emanate a strange, irresistible charisma. On the stage, they dazzle audiences with their powerful songs and choreographed dance moves. They call themselves Cheonsa, because they are exactly that: *angel*. Not only that, they are messengers.

A loyal servant of the God-Machine, Cheonsa has heralded victories of armies, sung death and destruction into being, rallied people into bloody frenzies or caused mass panic and hysteria. With voices that ring clear like the best of crystal springs and the saddest of dirges, which pull at the listeners on a cellular level, Cheonsa obeys the God-Machine's commands and follows them to the letter.

Throughout history, Cheonsa was present in some form or the other. The Fates. The Furies. The three witches stirring a bubbling cauldron. The chorus of women. Firebrands. Legends speak of three women singing before the outbreak of disasters or major wars. Before the Black Death broke out in England, it was said that three veiled women sang in many towns, warning of dire things to come. The townspeople laughed at them. When they left as mysteriously as they came, the plague struck with uncommon and relentless ferocity. Boils appeared on bodies. Fevers burned. People died overnight. Corpses piled on top of each other on streets.

The three women proceeded to appear in various points of human history, singing their potent songs. They stopped conflicts. They warned of consequences and things to come if mortals didn't heed religious sayings or government propaganda. They sang for peace. They harangued for blood. They demanded war. People listened, consciously or not, and obeyed the implicit messages in their songs. They went on to take part in wars, rallies, and protests, or threw themselves as human bombs into masses of people, believing they heard a divine message or saw a vision.

Cheonsa doesn't care. Their own purposes are often clear. They are loyal servants of the God-Machine.

THE PRETTY VOICES

Appearing at concerts and managed by an unseen agent, Cheonsa sings and dances into the hearts and minds of mesmerized audiences enamored with all things Korean. Their songs often reach the top of the charts and stay there for months after, often edging out other popular girl and boy bands. They simply cannot compete with Cheonsa, much to the annoyance and frustration of their agencies. The songs are so much better, catchier, and the lyrics...the lyrics burn into the minds of the listeners, embedding insidiously into their synapses and thought processes. *Cause a riot*, they will sing at one of the concerts in New York and the audience, galvanized into delirium and mindless rage, chokes the exit points of the stadium while simultaneously beating each other senseless with fists and feet. *Fight, fight, fight*, their voices ring out in unison, and an antifa rally protesting the proposed construction of a Deva Corporation facility becomes a violent melee with protestors turning on themselves. *Love each other*, their lyrics preach messages of hope and optimism, and audiences weep and hug each other, suddenly filled with total and inexplicable love. They are loved. They are cherished. They are God's children.

Such is the power in their voices and songs. They cause and stop wars. They sing and people listen.

The name Cheonsa is on everyone's lips, their songs on all radio airwaves, on TV, on cable, and played a million times over on the internet and social media. Immensely popular with ad agencies, Cheonsa dances their way to fame, fortune, and something else. Some demons say they spotted Cheonsa's phenomenal rise as a viral internet star, dominating a certain social-media and video-sharing site with billions of viewers. Songs appeared daily on their dedicated channel, with each of the members talking about makeup tips and boyfriend advice. Viewers loved them and craved more. Their output was prodigious. Did they ever sleep?

Inquisitors in many Agencies suspect that Cheonsa existed long before the advent of the internet. It is an ancient and extremely dangerous angel that has served the God-Machine since its inception. They analyze Cheonsa's synchronized dance moves, believing that the movements are invasive binaric programs in their own right, worming their way into the weak

and malleable psyches of mortals. Agendas keep track of Cheonsa's every move, with some dedicated to keep tabs on their whereabouts and their songs. Some even try to infiltrate Cheonsa's complex and intricate entourage.

DESCRIPTION

Beautiful, polished, and perfect in every detail, Cheonsa resembles a typical K-pop girl band: dyed hair, lovely facial features, and large doe-like eyes. Their makeup is perfect. To mortals, they look like identical triplets. They wear clothing of different colors to suit different moods and songs. Unlike the other girl and boy groups, with extremely competitive agencies and companies keeping a strict eye on them, Cheonsa seems to be managed by a mysterious and often secretive agency. They are immaculate, careful in speech and impeccable in style. TV stations invite them for talk shows, singing contests, and dating games. Magazines with their photo shoots are quickly snapped up by eager fans (who often wait in front of the bookstores overnight) and sold out on the same day. As per their Cover, they participate in all these, winning adulation from their fans with one of their appearances on a popular cooking show – a topic that fans discuss with each other breathlessly and repetitively. The tabloids and glossy magazines try to dig up history and juicy gossip on Cheonsa – only to find their reporters and photographers rendered catatonic. Wide-eyed in terror, they only speak of bright lights and voices like thunder. Their noses and ears bleed. Their memories are wiped clean. They can't remember their assignments. They often wander the rest of the year, knowing something is amiss. Most of the time, news items about Cheonsa are cheerful and positive, replete with photos of them posing, dancing, and greeting fans. Nothing negative surrounds them. Preteen girls paste magazine cutouts on their bedroom walls. Boys have crushes on them. They are the girls next door. They are so courteous and polite. They shine with purity. They are wholesome. They are flawless. They are literally perfect angels.

Hana (하나), the first facet, acts as the spokesperson for the group. She is friendly and gregarious, often cheeky, and banters playfully with the reporters, leading them on a wild goose chase.

She is often photographed enjoying her favorite dessert, bingsu, and smiling brightly for the camera. As a result, customers throng the bingsu shop, turning it into an overnight success and instant hit with the hordes of fans.

Du (두), the second facet, is the shy one. The fans like her because she is humble and reticent. They love her cute smile and emulate her fashion sense. Shops selling dresses and pants in her style can't keep up with demand from teenage girls and trendy young women trying to look like her.

Se (세), the third facet, is the silent one, often watching the audience for reaction. She alerts the other two if anything arises, be it nosy reporter or Unchained. She does not hesitate to retaliate. Out of the three, she is the most vicious. Her attack mode is like an insect's: all reflexes. She is the "quiet one" with a gorgeous smile, loved by photographers for her looks. Teens paste the walls of their rooms with her posters.

All of the three facets bear neon, circuit-like markings across their arms. Blue for Hana, lime green for Du, and crimson for Se. Nobody has remarked on this. In fact, it quickly became the fashion for young women to draw circuits on their bodies. For a while, this trend was the obsession for many teenagers and young women. It is also a blatant and daring provocation to the Unchained, who have to hide the brands and marks of shame that will give away their demonic selves and blow their Covers.

In combat, Cheonsa transform into bright, metallic humanoid figures, barely recognizably feminine at all, their limbs crisscrossed in circuitry and gears. Where the heads normally are, wide mouths of trumpets blast out noise. Their upper limbs are flagellants, lashing at opponents. Because they are three-in-one, they then merge into one blazing ball of metal and light. Like their human selves, they fight with noise and sound, causing opponents to go instantly deaf or insane. They fight to confuse their foes, causing them to hallucinate.

Fighting them is a challenge. Strike down one and the others respond immediately like a scorpion's sting. They move like clockwork, each facet knowing her place and timing.



RUMORS

"Have you heard about Cheonsa's latest hit? It makes everyone cry with joy. Don't listen to the naysayers telling you Cheonsa's songs are evil. They are so good!"

It's true. Cheonsa's songs are that good. "They are singing again! Oh, my heart wants to burst when I listen to them. Their voices are so angelic, so pure. Oh, I want to burst with so much joy!" Housewives cry as they watch the girls dance, their bibimbap uneaten. Their husbands shake their heads at their wives' obsession with this girl group. What's so special about them? Can you go back to your housework? Where's our dinner?

"People are saying Cheonsa fans have gone missing overnight. Do you know about this?"

Their lyrics make them immensely irresistible and their records all sell out on the first day. On the same day, mass disappearances occur. Search parties turn up empty. People simply vanish. Of course, Cheonsa deny all allegations that they have caused the disappearances wholeheartedly. Grieving parents and spouses mourn their losses. Children miss their mothers. Siblings long for their sisters and brothers to come back. Meanwhile, fans continue to lap up their songs and buy their albums.

"There's a rumor going around that Cheonsa's some cult choosing victims to do awful things. Not sure where I heard it from. But it's from the news, so it must be true."

It is rumored that they choose their vessels or victims (individuals or groups) carefully to carry out tasks, often at the bidding of the God-Machine. Cheonsa claims no responsibility, of course, and blames it on the rabid tabloid press, eager for trashy news. However, these individuals and groups are often susceptible and Cheonsa exploits their innate weaknesses and frailties, manipulating them like putty. Cheonsa's lyrics are messages that cannot be ignored. They must be carried out. Most of the time, the vessels either die or, if they do survive, become mindless homeless people with their memories and personalities wiped out, as if by a total reboot.

CHEONSA

Virtue: Loyal

Vice: Fanatical

Rank: 4

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 4

Influence: Supplication 4

Corpus: 7

Willpower: 5

STORY HOOKS

- A spate of violent deaths rocks the area. Evidence all leads to Cheonsa and Inquisitors panic. It's not only the mass rapture they cause; Cheonsa concerts and Cheonsa songs are fatal. *"The songs make me want to fly!"* fans are heard saying before they are found dead hours later. Players are sent to investigate, and their goals are to evade the pervasive and invasive music and to not get killed.
- The new Cheonsa album *Liberate* unsettles the Unchained. The beguiling and delicious songs lure in Tempters, who love the pleasure of mortal music. Yet, the album speaks of strange premonitions and signs, all couched in the language of pretty words like love and friendship. The lyrics hint of a big bad change. The ring needs to rescue a Tempter too far gone in this unholy mess of dark desires and untruths.
- The characters notice a pattern — God-Machine cults incorporating Cheonsa's music, or variations on their melodies, into their rituals. Facilities guarded by stigmatics play their songs over the PA systems and use them as hold music...but other angels avoid these facilities and never interact with the cults. Why? What aversion do angels have to Cheonsa's songs?

Size: 5

Speed: 13 (species factor 5)

Defense: 4

Initiative: 4

Armor: 3

Numina: Awe, Blast, Emotional Aura, Hallucination, Implant Mission, Rapture, Regenerate

Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 20

Ban: Cheonsa cannot turn away from praise from fans

Bane: Separating and isolating the three facets of Cheonsa

the critic: JENNIFER JASPER

So War of Dragons is great and all, but I'm sick and tired of seeing nothing but boobs. Show us some dicks, too, man! Equal opportunity nudity! And film some shit in Greenland in the dead of winter, too. With the men naked. That would make some damn fine television right there.

BACKGROUND

Television may be one of the God-Machine's best tools for crowd control. With the myriad programming options available, it can tell stories to keep humanity pacified or inspire them to create their own programming. These shows, broadcast to millions of viewers at any time, convey ideas faster than any other medium before them. Even today, with the ubiquity of the internet, television has another channel with which to spread its influence.

However, with the thousands of options, the paralysis of choice makes it harder for viewers to know what to watch. They gather the opinions of friends who have already watched a show, or in the case of something entirely new, they turn to reviewers and critics. Being on the bleeding edge of cool is hard work, and Jennifer Jasper is happy to do it.

As far as anyone knows, Jennifer Jasper started out giving TV reviews online a few years ago. Her witty yet insightful commentary, peppered with relatable personal stories, captured the hearts and minds of hundreds of viewers. Those hundreds of viewers quickly turned into thousands, and then millions. Viewers hang on her every word to tell them what shows are good, what shows are bad, and what shows need some serious reworking in order to survive.

Those who can see beyond the pixels and the noise know Jennifer Jasper for what she truly is: an angel directing the television traffic to suit the God-Machine's ends. Her mission is simple: manipulate television programs the God-Machine uses as Infrastructure to communicate ideas to humanity. The Critic's role made her highly visible in a short amount of time, making her scramble to fortify her Cover. To do this, she has to come as close as she possibly can to human, but not Fall.

JUST SAYIN' WITH JENNIFER JASPER

Just Sayin' is Jennifer's show, currently translated into Spanish, French, Japanese, Mandarin, and German. She could broadcast in

additional languages, but not without arousing further suspicion. When she reviews British and Australian shows, she maintains an American accent, but uses appropriate regional slang. She selects specific shows based on guidance from the God-Machine or, when guidance doesn't come, whatever catches her own interest. In the early days of her mission, Jennifer had a hard time determining what other shows to review, so she relied on other reviewers and veteran angels for suggestions. As her own free will and taste developed, she made selections of her own, uncovering hidden gems. In some places, the shows she chose became vehicles for the God-Machine's operations after the fact, with angels using Jennifer's reviews as guides for proactive work or as fertile ground for their own missions.

A few Saboteurs are aware of Jennifer's true nature and use comments on her videos, doxxing, and other standard internet troll tactics to blow Jennifer's operations wide open. However, with the strong stance most have taken against cyberbullying, these tactics lost their effectiveness over the past year. In addition, hunter angels have used these comments to track down incautious Saboteurs not acting through go-betweens.

Doxxing also proves ineffective, because no one can actually pinpoint exactly where Jennifer has set up shop. Jennifer uses several layers of IP spoofing, no natural lighting whatsoever, and stock background-noise sound effects to throw pursuers off the scent. Those who try to track her down through her IP end up parked outside other locations, such a donut shop, an elderly woman's home, and in one instance, a sex-toy shop in the worst part of the would-be doxxer's city.

DESCRIPTION

Jennifer looks like a young, trendy 20-something. Her hair is the right length; she could grow or trim an inch and it would be just on trend. Her highlights and blowout are perfect, and her makeup and spray tan have no cracks in them whatsoever. When visiting a makeup reviewer as a special guest, Jennifer manifested some slight pore texturing to reinforce her Cover, and even then, the reviewer was in awe of Jennifer's perfect skin.

Jennifer's critics blast her for being fake and plastic. Indeed, some of Jennifer's mechanisms are an idealized form of plastic, to ensure lightweight flexibility. While other humans would consider Jessica fake if they were aware of her true nature, Jennifer finds such considerations irrelevant. Her mastery of all languages helps her reach viewers across the globe, her physical appearance is adequately attractive to most of her audience, and her bombastic wit connects easily with her viewers. For a long time, her human façade only existed from the waist up, but as her own fame increased, modifications gave her a fully humanoid form. Those fans who do meet her in person stand in awe at how quickly she can form an opinion of them, and how unafraid she is of telling them what that opinion is. Some call her a bitch, while others call her a feminist. Jennifer identifies as neither.

Jennifer stays on the cutting edge of technology with her viewing devices; her home includes a wall of the latest and greatest HD monitors, streaming shows from hundreds of countries so she can take it all in at once. She abandons old tech as soon as the latest and greatest is available, and sometimes, older technology takes revenge. Fragments of old technology, no matter how fine a grit she might grind them down to, stick to her plastic and polymer parts in ways that her lubrication systems cannot simply wash away. The resulting friction burns reduce her structural integrity. When anyone asks her about it, she writes it off as a particularly pernicious dust allergy.

RUMORS

"She asked for more dick in future episodes, and they delivered, and now the show's up for an Emmy. This is why producers listen when Jennifer Jasper starts talking."

Jennifer makes recommendations for suffering shows to improve their ratings. Some of her suggestions make sense. Others seem entirely random, with no real basis in fact or the logical storyline of the given show. She recently recommended a popular

reality show film an episode inside a packed mall. The show, based entirely on surviving in the wilderness alone, seemed to run entirely counter to the suggestion, but the producers attempted it anyway, framing it as an exercise in surviving a zombie apocalypse with the zombies already inside the mall. Ratings went through the roof and saved the show from the axe. The producers don't know that the mall featured in the episode got a much-needed power jolt to its Infrastructure as a result (nor would they care, if it means more money in their pockets).

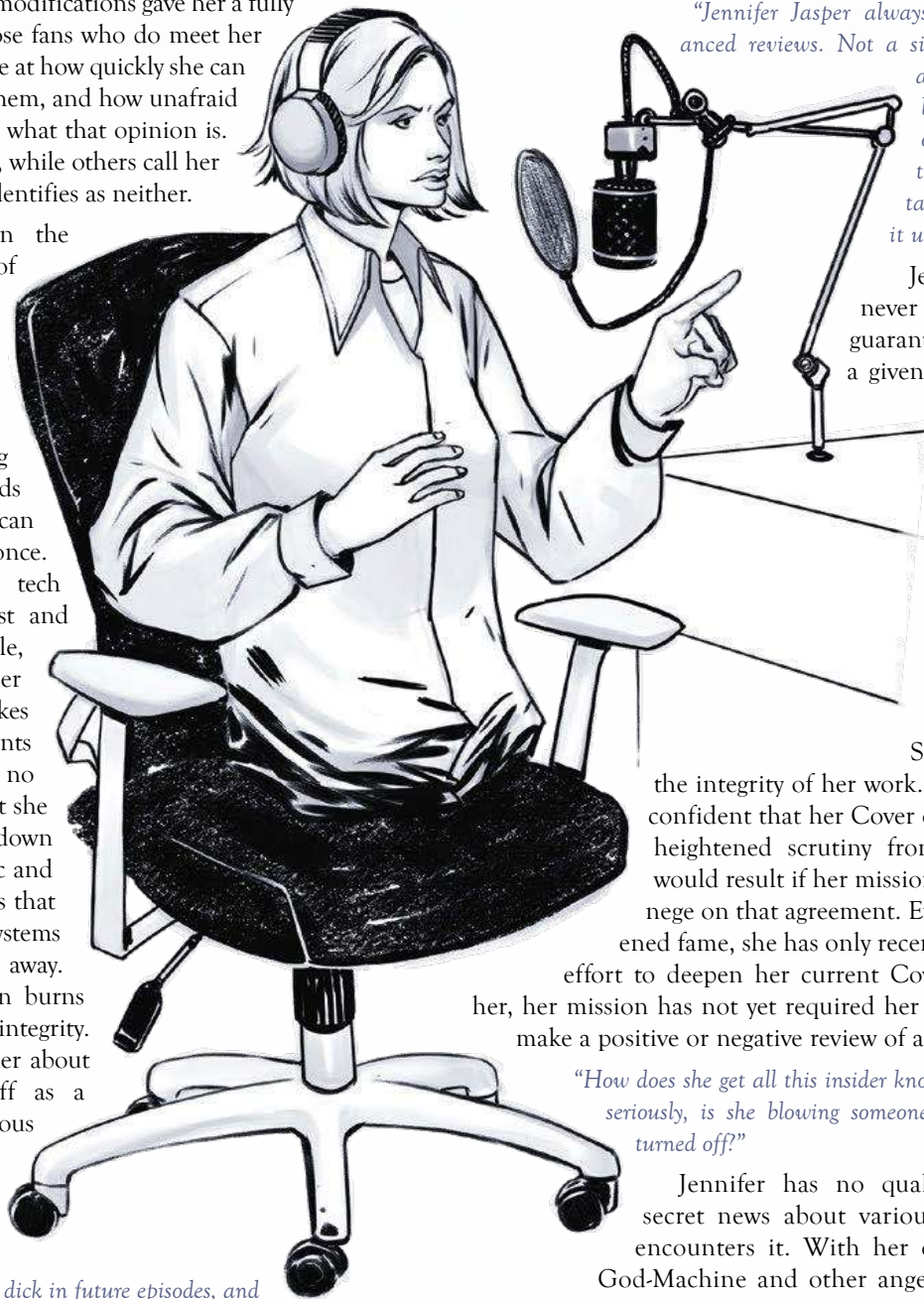
"Jennifer Jasper always gives fair and balanced reviews. Not a single studio has been able to successfully bribe her. Every single one of them has tried, too. Why doesn't she take the money and live it up?"

Jennifer Jasper has never accepted money to guarantee she will review a given show in a positive light. Producers may send money along after a positive review, or to avoid a lawsuit when they act on her feedback and rake in millions. However, she doesn't allow for paid reviews. She claims it ruins

the integrity of her work. In truth, she is not confident that her Cover could withstand the heightened scrutiny from the lawsuit that would result if her mission required her to renege on that agreement. Even with her heightened fame, she has only recently put forward any effort to deepen her current Cover. Fortunately for her, her mission has not yet required her to accept money to make a positive or negative review of a show.

"How does she get all this insider knowledge, anyway? Like, seriously, is she blowing someone when the camera is turned off?"

Jennifer has no qualms with breaking secret news about various shows when she encounters it. With her connections to the God-Machine and other angels in the field, she can scrounge undisclosed information easily. She intersperses real information with fake instructions meant to embed subliminal suggestions to her viewers, and her fans take all of it as gospel. In some cases, the rumors she fabricates end up taking on a life of their own, becoming real shortly after the fact. She spaces out her various reveals seemingly at random,



STORY HOOKS

- Jennifer's feedback sent a popular show to a remote location for filming. The ring hears rumors of Essence spikes in that location, as well as strange phenomena that could easily surround the activation of powerful Infrastructure. In addition, reports of terrorist activity targeting the shoot (likely failed sabotage attempts from other nearby demons) has the entire filming location on heightened security. Can the ring get to the location and find the Infrastructure before it starts on its intended purpose?
- A rash of riots breaks out across the city, with attacks and protests occurring seemingly at random. The only connecting thread is the news spreading of the cancellation of a show that gained a cult following. Fans have taken to the streets in protest, with full paddy wagons, packed emergency rooms, and shocking amounts of property damage in their wake. The ring can smell the God-Machine's touch on this like ozone, and it's up to them to help restore order. It doesn't help that the news of the show's cancellation broke first on *Just Sayin'* and Jennifer has millions of subscribers to her YouTube channel.
- A cartoon marketed toward the Saturday-morning crowd gains a surprise following among a much older age group, spurring its own fandom culture. Jennifer counts herself among their number, and reports on a set order of episodes to watch to gain deeper understanding into the show. "It's like listening to Pink Floyd vinyls backwards, but about 25% more awesome," she claims. Anyone who watches the episodes in Jennifer's recommended order comes out of the experience deeply changed. Some even develop a brand that marks them as a stigmatic.

so viewers never know when they will hear the latest dirt studios don't want them to hear. It also keeps her subscriber numbers from dropping off too sharply.

"Personally, I think she's getting too big for her britches. She's got just enough to be an online celebrity, but eventually, she's blow up like they all do."

Jennifer's work requires rather strenuous exercise of free will, moreso than many other angels out in the world. She does not rely on the God-Machine to bring her viewers to *Just Sayin'* so she can preach Its word (in a manner of speaking), so she must constantly keep her material and her brand fresh. This involves a full-blown social-media presence, which requires her to have a full, rich life as a human being to support it. After all, Instagram filters can only go so far. With her Cover getting deeper, the temptation to disconnect from the God-Machine and make her own way only grows. She could Fall any moment, but knows how much of what she does relies on the God-Machine's good graces. Where would she get her wacky show-fixing recommendations from without the God-Machine's guidance? She wants to serve, but she doesn't know to what end her service leads, and the trappings of fame and self-interest are constantly in arm's reach.

JENNIFER JASPER

"No, really, you should be watching this. Why aren't you watching this?"

Virtue: Organized

Vice: Outspoken

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 5, Resistance 3

Influence: Opinion 3

Corpus: 8

Willpower: 7

Size: 5

Speed: 14 (species factor 5)

Defense: 3

Initiative: 7

Armor: 0

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Hallucination, Implant Mission, Innocuous, Pathfinder

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Discorporate, Image

Max Essence: 15

Ban: Must give opinion about any person mentioned in her presence

Bane: Fragments of outdated technology (broken TV screens, ashes of burned books and newspapers)

the sword & the shield: MDM. WONG/ MS. WONG

"I have been a sword in the hand, I have been a shield in a fight.
I dare you to walk past me or through me."

BACKGROUND

When it is created, it is just pure light, split off from the binary illumination like a living fire. The categorization of *she* only comes later, when it chooses this gender as part of its identity. The flame that is the angel weaves in its mission, its task, and its role. The name is only an add-on, another layer, another aspect. It is to become a shield. It is a loyal servant, obedient to the voice of the God-Machine.

A Shield.

It obeys and becomes *she*.

She wears the aspect of an old Chinese woman whose herb shop nestles in the middle of Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, between the bustling streets where women and men throng the roadside stalls, looking for fresh vegetables, fruits, kitschy knick-knacks made in China, and imitation designer bags to lure in avid shoppers and tourists. During winter, old men wrapped in thick wool jackets and track pants sell roast sweet potatoes and chestnuts in large metal bins. The smell of fire and charcoal fills the air, attracting hungry pedestrians eager for street food. The intersection of the streets marks an important location for the Light (the name she calls the God-Machine).

Only two doors away from the Salvation Army thrift shop selling Gucci discards at marked-down prices, the small church grows out of one of the renovated shop houses and attracts an ever-growing stream of worshippers wearied by the fast-paced life. Drawn to the promise of eternal life and salvation, they forsake the frivolous and rank capitalism for a rich internal spirituality that preaches simplicity and abstinence. The women cover their heads with white-lace scarves. The men wear white shirts and black pants.

She protects this church, this facility. Enormous gears shift. Something is coming. She guards it from the Unchained. She will not tolerate interference.

THE HERB SHOP

The herb shop is a fixture at the junction. It is a typical medicine shop replete with old-fashioned herb cupboards, cabinets, and jars of dried goods from mysterious places. Roots wrapped in clusters. Hollow, bittersweet monk fruit in glass containers. The strong whiff of leaves and bark. An old metal fan, with dust coating the blades. What captures the attention of the shoppers is the ancient signboard. Was it created in the 1950s? 60s? 70s?

The herbs are always easily, magically replenished. They are weighted and wrapped in crinkly white paper. She has herbs for everything: high blood pressure, indigestion, fertility and virility, and all sorts of cancer. Boiled, the bitter and often pungent herbs should be imbibed twice a day.

Some call her the "creepy lady" and avoid the shop, not only because it smells and feels perpetually cold, but it is just plain *weird*. Cell phone signals die abruptly. A cold chill fills the shop like a shroud. Weeds and plants wither. The entire place unsettles people. Some humans sense it and are instantly filled with gut-wrenching revulsion. Their skin crawls and the fine hairs along their arms stand. Yet, some are drawn to the shop like moths to a flame.

Don't ask her about the rickety old mildewed signboard either. Don't even *think* about touching it. The Chinese characters are perfunctory, to give the shop a name. It's not a pretty signboard, unlike the rest of the signs found in the same area, with gilded contours and calligraphic flourishes. The signboard stores the basic foundations of the program to run the entire Infrastructure. The shopfront might change. Its size, form, and width might change. The signboard will always remain the same. If the signboard glitches, everything glitches.

She makes delicious double-boiled tonic soups daily because she is programmed to do so. Only Anna, who is key to the mission, and Cheong Wing, with whom she has established a working friendship, get to taste these marvelous transformative

soups. How fragile these humans are. They break so easily, their wills like rice paper. Their emotions are so malleable. They walk around blind, servants to their whims and fancies. If she had a heart, it would soften at the sight of them struggling with complicated and often hurtful human relationships, Anna dealing with an abusive husband and the pressure of producing male heirs, Cheong Wing dealing with his university research and a chronically ill mother. She is starting to care a little too much.

At night, she checks herself for glitches and flushes invasive and intrusive memes out for fear of contamination. No feelings. No attachments. She is obedient. She is a shield. "I am the sword and the shield," she mutters to herself again and again.

The agony of the flushing makes her scream.

DESCRIPTION

She appears as an old, hunchbacked Chinese woman, clad always in a simple gray samfoo and black cotton pants. Nobody knows how old she is, except she looks *ancient*, with age lines all over her face and her arms dotted with liver spots, her hair wispy and ivory white. She sometimes walks around with a wooden walking stick. This is all for show. When spoken to, her responses are often clipped. She doesn't care for small talk (except for with her two wards). Out of courtesy for her perceived age, her customers do not pry into her private business. People unfamiliar with her ways think that she is abrupt or rude. People simply show up at the shop, buy the herbs and leave.

Don't pester her about the junction church between the two streets. She is very protective of it. The same goes for her wards, Anna and Cheong Wing.

Anna often wanders into the shop with her heart full of worry. Already graying at the temples, she has crow's feet and a perpetual frown on her face. The kindergarten at which she works as a preschool teacher has hand, foot, and mouth disease and is forced to close for two weeks so they can clean the premises thoroughly. Her husband has been yelling at her, wanting her to get pregnant and bear him sons. They have three

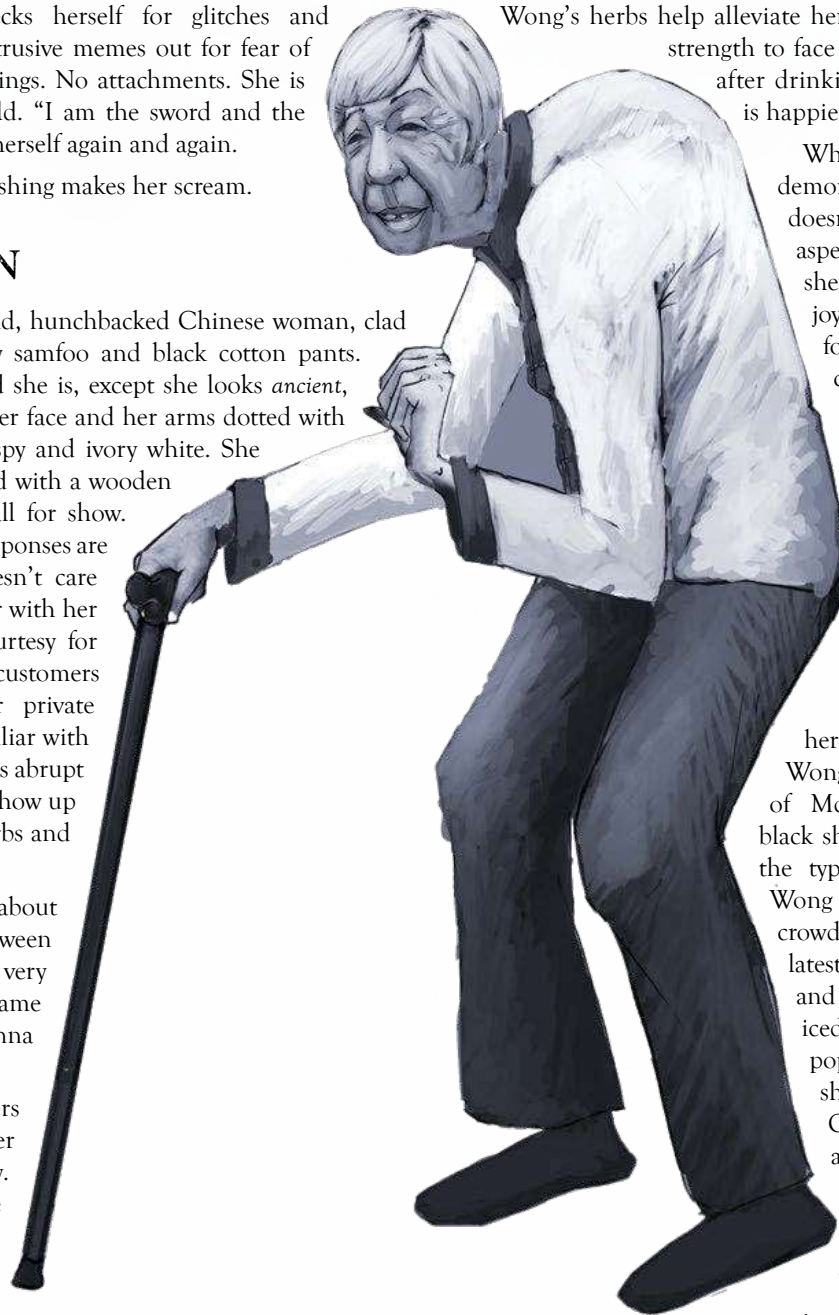
daughters. He demands to have a son. It is her duty to bear him a son. It is her duty to bear him an heir. She is a failure.

Cheong Wing often wanders into the shop with his heart full of worry. Already arthritic at such a young age, he walks with a limp and lisp caused by emotional trauma in his childhood. His university research has reached an impasse. His funding is halted due to budget cuts. He feels stuck. He tinkers with the cells in his lab and yet, he feels as if he is going nowhere. His mother is often in pain from her many ailments. Only Madam Wong's herbs help alleviate her pains and even give her strength to face the day. She sleeps better after drinking the herbal brews. She is happier and smiles often now.

When threatened by a demonic presence, Mdm. Wong doesn't hesitate to fight. Her aspect crumbles, as if she is shedding skin. In fact, she joyfully embraces her true form: an armor-plated chimera with a lioness head, wings that flame bright white, and a long tail that lashes like a whip. Unblinking eyes open all over the leonine form. Like a silver wall, her body shields her wards and blocks them from harm.

Conversely, if need be, her alternate Cover is Ms. Wong, a much younger version of Mdm. Wong. Petite, with black shoulder length hair, plain, the typical girl next door, Ms. Wong slips through the human crowds easily. Dressed in the latest Korean fashion trends and always holding a cup of iced latte from one of the popular chain coffee shops, she blends in. She uses this Cover when Unchained activity has been identified and isolated, and she is activated to investigate. If threatened, she reverts back to her angelic form.

The calico cat has green eyes and distinctive black, gray, and russet-orange patches. It is neither male or female. It sits in front of the shop. Its tail beats its own strange rhythm. The cat serves as a warning system in case of any security breach.



RUMORS

"The creepy old woman in the herb shop? She's weird! Don't walk in there, just don't! Don't say I didn't warn you..."

That's the thing. The creepy old woman doesn't like anyone, even the schoolgirls who wander in on their friends' dare. "Don't talk to the creepy old woman!" the teenagers often whisper. School just ended. They are restless, their uniforms chafing in the unseasonal heatwave gripping the city, right down to its suburbs. Something in the shop hisses when they wander too closely.

"Old Lao at the tailor shop tells me that if you walk into her shop, unannounced, you will disappear like magic. Poof, just like that. Old Lao sure tells a good ghost story, eh!"

Of course, she will categorically deny all this and tell you it's all lies. Except that it's all true. The herbs make you forget and people remain in fugue for days, sometimes weeks and even months, lost in dreams. They do not question. They do not ask. They simply forget who they are.

At night, when stragglers wander too closely to the shop (Hong Kong never sleeps), they hear weird sounds from inside the shop. They sound like nails being slowly drawn across a wooden board, merged with the screeching of metal drilling into metal and tormented wailing that couldn't possibly come from human throats.

"Aiyah, Mrs. Lee said the shopfront changed last night. She must have a rich husband to afford that level of renovation."

The shop changes in size or shape, making people, even her long-time patrons, wonder if she does all the renovations overnight or has a really good renovation company helping her. Or indeed, a very rich and very dead husband. Of course, there are no traces that renovations were made. The whole area is spotlessly clean. Sometimes, it's a corner shop. Sometimes, it's a big medicine hall, complete with wooden cabinets and jars of exotic sea creatures. The signboard remains the same. Just keep an eye out for the calico cat.

MDM WONG/ MS WONG

Virtue: Obedient

Vice: Fascinated

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 3, Resistance 2

Influence: Cold 1, Herbs 2

Corpus: 7

Willpower: 4

STORY HOOKS

- The players investigate/track down a trail of evidence leading to a God-Machine cult: the church at the junction. Their worship songs trouble the local Inquisitors, who deduce that the song lyrics instill total and complete obedience (allegiance?) to the God-Machine. *"Worship the Lord for He is good! He has blessed so many of us!"* The shop lies directly in the path of said church at the junction.
- Stories about mysteriously miraculous herbs are circulating around in the Unchained rumor mill. The herbs are traced back to the shop. The Unchained in the area are disturbed at how quickly the herbs sell out and are replenished just as quickly. Humans are behaving strangely blissfully, as if they are just obedient, happy zombies. Always the herbs. Always the wondrous, fabulous herbs.
- The screeching sounds from the shop disrupt whatever Unchained activity is in the area. To the more resilient, the sounds are a distraction. Yet, some even claim they are slowly driven mad (whatever "mad" is), their Covers stripped away, bit by bit, layer by layer, by invisible metal claws. Saboteurs feel the worst effects. An Inquisitor from a local Agenda contacts the players to investigate the source of the sounds and stop them if possible.

Size: 5

Speed: 11 (species factor 4)

Defense: 4

Initiative: 4

Armor: 3

Numina: Dement, Innocuous, Mortal Mask, Regenerate, Sign

Manifestation: Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 20

Ban: Mdm. Wong cannot resist attending to Anna or Cheong Wing if they need her

Bane: The signboard of the herbs shop being removed

the old lady in the holler: MOUNTAIN MAGGIE

'That ole mine? Nah, t'ain't worth explorin'. Nothin' in there but bones and thick black dust. 'Course, if yer lookin' fer that, I ain't gonna stop you. Can't I getcha somethin' to eat instead?

BACKGROUND

Every year, millions of people hike a portion of the Appalachian Trail, admiring the waterfalls and wildflowers in Tennessee, the granite cliffs of New York, and the flourishing black bear population of Virginia. A few thousand hike the entire trail, walking from Maine to Georgia and sleeping in shelters and friendly homes when possible. When not, bedtime is often in a tent perched precariously on the side of a ledge or, more commonly, on a bedroll under a thickly-shaded tree. It's a point of pride among Appalachian hikers to "make do" with as little as possible. Stories still circulate about "Grandma Gatewood," a woman who completed all 2,000 miles with nothing but an extra pair of sneakers and a small knapsack.

Pride can be dangerous on the trail, though. Copperheads and timber rattlesnakes wait for the unwary. Moose are extremely protective of their young and occasionally charge if a hiker looks at them funny. Mosquitoes carry dangerous diseases, especially in the summer. Thunderstorms taller than the mountains themselves can boil up at a moment's notice. Sinkholes are not uncommon, especially around old mining sites. A careless hiker might find herself with a broken leg or hypothermia or heatstroke or any number of other ailments if she is ill-prepared and under-equipped.

The worst danger, though, is becoming lost. The trail narrows to little more than game tracks at some points, and stepping off of that can result in disaster. Hikers have wandered for days in circles, trying to find some point that shows them the way back. Some have become little more than missing persons reports, fading and yellowing in a back-country sheriff's office.

For the majority, though, that's not the case. The Appalachian Trail is an important piece of Infrastructure, a massive seam keeping the quivering heart of the range quiet. The sweat, footsteps, and blood of the hikers feed the Trail, keeping it stable and intact. Stigmatic cults in Trail towns like Damascus, Hot Springs, Ellijay, and Harper's Ferry feed and care for hikers, inviting them to come back and providing guidance and warnings — sometimes more cryptic than others. For those who get lost, though, there's Mountain Maggie.

Mountain Maggie's cabin appears just over the next ridge, when a hiker is exhausted, lost, and on the edge of desperation. She sits outside on the rickety little porch, a woman in her early 40s, with dirty blond hair in a long braid, a freckled face with a snub nose, and thickset shoulders. She's always dressed sensibly, though in a somewhat outdated fashion, in calico and heavy-soled boots. Smoke pours from the cabin's tumbledown chimney and a basket of wild vegetables sits at her feet.

Mountain Maggie never calls out to a hiker first. The angel takes the trust of Appalachian Trail hikers extremely seriously, and takes great pains to endear herself to them. When addressed, Mountain Maggie always responds in a voice the hiker finds comforting. She offers them food, and "to set a while."

When asked her name, she says "Mountain Maggie." She will not give another one if asked. If pressed, she simply offers the poor lost soul supper instead. She always does, after a while. Few hikers refuse, after being lost for hours or days. If they accept, they find themselves waking up just a few miles away from a Trail town, all limbs and possessions intact except for a compass or a good-luck charm or a waterskin. The angel always takes a small price for her hospitality.

Taking care of hikers is not something the angel does altruistically, however. The Appalachian Trail serves two purposes. Its first is as Logistical Infrastructure, getting hikers places the God-Machine needs them to be. This constant influx of foot travel fuels the second piece of Infrastructure: a massive Concealment matrix meant to keep the dead *something* in the heart of the Appalachian Range quiet.

Mountain Maggie is not a young angel. She was present for the laying of the entity in the fault line, and for the creation and slow erosion of the resulting mountains. It is her mission to care for the Concealment Infrastructure, and make sure whatever's under there doesn't come out again. In order to do that, though, she needs to make sure people keep coming on the trail — so she takes care of them, and in return, they take care of her Infrastructure.

DESCRIPTION

Mountain Maggie never makes the first move. Oh, she'll watch a hiker for hours, gathering data on their current well-being and intentions, and she'll always set herself up so she's in their path, but she never seeks anyone out who isn't looking for her first. Of course, she has a loose definition of looking for her. Anyone who's lost in the Appalachians is looking for Mountain Maggie. Either that or they're looking for the thing underground, which necessitates Maggie's attention anyway.

In her Cover, Mountain Maggie presents as a stereotypical "mountain woman" in her early 40s with a solid build, freckled arms, and long hair kept back in a braid or with a scarf. She always wears hardy fabrics like cotton or denim, and a pair of well-worn leather boots. While her hair is blond, her dark skin hints at Cherokee heritage. She usually has her sleeves rolled up and some vegetables nearby, looking like the quintessential representation of Appalachian womanhood. Her voice is always what the listener would find most soothing. If one looks closely, however, they might see that the freckles on her arms move slowly, little representations of hikers on her Trail.

If forced to drop her disguise, Mountain Maggie appears as a massive black bear made out of sandstone and anthracite coal. She will not hesitate to attack anyone seeking to wake up the thing under the mountains — or mining too near its resting place. Any pretense of being soothing or safe in this form is gone. She speaks with the roar of a wildfire and will not accept any bargains, threats, or offers of peace other than an agreement to cease the offending behaviors and leave the area immediately.

RUMORS

"There's an old lady up the trail, and she'll help you if you ask real nice — but you gotta offer the thing she wants. It's always different, too. If you don't have it, she disappears. Just like that. Blink and she's gone."

If someone is actively looking for Mountain Maggie, she knows. That's her job, after all. She almost always appears to those who seek her out, even those who may intend to do her harm. If asked for a favor that falls within her Influence, she usually complies, but only in exchange for something meaningful to the asker. If refused three times, she vanishes, and that person or entity must leave the Appalachian Mountains and return before they have a hope of finding her again. Mountain Maggie does not take well to breaches of her hospitality.

"I keep hearing hikers say they saw that ole woman, but she never come into town. Lived here all my life, never seen no Mountain Maggie."

The human inhabitants of Trail towns keep hearing stories about Mountain Maggie from hikers. They know about the mysterious reappearances of hikers, and they've heard all about her cooking. In true Appalachian fashion, though, they stubbornly refuse to acknowledge her existence. Oh, there might be a mountain woman who helped them find their way back, or perhaps another hiker, but ha'ints don't help people.

Asking a townie about Mountain Maggie will usually get a derisive snort. If she's a real person, why has she never come into town to buy food? To get her sink fixed? Surely she'd have a satellite phone? What's her number?

Stigmatics are a different group entirely. Some behave like untouched townies, preferring to try to ignore the workings of the God-Machine in their lives. Some flee the conversation or angrily deny her existence, to the point of tears. Some make it their goal to assist her, popularizing her legend with cheap tourist kitsch and telling folks how to find



STORY HOOKS

- In the Pain Prophecy of Marco Singe, the messenger-angel refers to eight First Children who fled their heavenly cities and cursed humankind. While the true nature of these First Children is unknown (it is theorized by some Unchained that they are a type of proto-angel, or even pieces of Command And Control Infrastructure), at least four of them are unaccounted for. One of them, Avarice, lies under the Appalachian Trail, and is slowly starting to realize it's trapped there. The player characters might try to unleash it, or they might ally with Mountain Maggie to keep what has fallen, fallen.
- One of the characters' friends (or perhaps the characters themselves) develops nightmares and migraines after hiking in the Appalachians. If the characters are Unchained, they might realize the signs of a burgeoning stigmatic. If not, though, what's happening to their friend? Are they going to die? Why did they recover miraculously, but now refuse to even look at their climbing gear?
- A character becomes lost in the Appalachians and is found by Mountain Maggie — except someone else has found her as well. She's helping a wounded hunter angel refuel its Essence, and she does not take well to being disturbed this time.

Mountain Maggie. Some families have been maintaining this practice for generations, eventually making their shops part of the Appalachian Infrastructure.

"Mountain Maggie? Oh, she's just a tall tale the old miners told about freak accidents. About as real as Mothman. You know about Mothman, right?"

It's true that coal miners used to tell stories about Mountain Maggie. The modern ones still do. She appears as a huge black and tan bear, tearing up mining equipment, scattering miners, and generally terrorizing the mine until it's totally unusable. This apparently happens at random. No one knows when she'll strike next, day or night.

Her attacks may seem random, but there is a method to Mountain Maggie's madness. The thing under the Appalachians may be quiet for now, but it wants to be found — and it has powers of its own. In Mountain Maggie's mind, the only way to prevent the opening of its grave (or prison?) is to destroy and scatter its thralls. So far, no one has broken through, so she has no reason to do anything differently.

MOUNTAIN MAGGIE

Virtue: Hospitable

Vice: Covetous

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 4, Resistance 7

Influence: Appalachian Trail 2, Thing Under the Mountains 1

Corpus: 13

Willpower: 10

Size: 6 (5 in disguise)

Speed: 14

Defense: 4

Initiative: 11

Armor: None

Numina: Blast, Emotional Aura, Mortal Mask, Pathfinder, Seek

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Materialize, Avernian Gateway, Discorporate

Max Essence: 20

Ban: Cannot leave the Appalachian Mountains

Bane: Being rebuked by her True Name (Nazzara)



the cleaner: MS. MORGUE

"You poor thing. Hush now. I will take care of you"

BACKGROUND

Sometimes, the God-Machine's plans fail spectacularly. Other times, even when they succeed, those plans just leave a mess. Whether it's an inconvenient murder scene, a chatty witness, or an entire animal shelter full of cryptids, Ms. Morgue is here to clean it up. She wakes in the back of her van, surrounded by her tools and barrels of caustic chemicals. She puts on a clean suit and drives to the scene. After she is done with her mission, the God-Machine no longer has a problem. She can render the site of any crime completely sterile, from the pettiest of shoplifting to the bloodiest of butcheries. Bodies are not an issue. She quickly dismembers them and dissolves them in the barrels in her van. Witnesses either recant their testimony or forget it. Living victims are healed and their memories wiped, or if they are too talkative or willful, they join the dead in the van. Ms. Morgue even cleans out records, paper and electronic both. The call to the police never happened, the assault charges weren't filed, and the victim was at home with his family all day. When she's done, Ms. Morgue drives her van back to the alley, takes off her bunny suit, and lies down amid her bone saws and tarps, her pistols and sniper rifles, her bottles of bleach and sodium hydroxide and lye. As she closes her eyes, she smiles a contented smile. Every time she wakes, she does so in a different alley, with a different crime to excise. Ms. Morgue loves her job.

DESCRIPTION

Ms. Morgue's Covers are always temporary and paper-thin. She awakens with a different and forgettable face each time, with features designed to blend in and be ignored. When she reaches into the center console of her van, she can pull out whatever ID and accessories she needs to access the scene, supplied by the God-Machine. For construction sites, she has a clipboard with official-looking papers, a lanyard with a security badge, and sometimes a hard hat. For hospitals, she has scrubs and a face mask. She hums Top 40 hits from the radio under her breath in department-store uniforms, smokes cigars "like one of the guys" in bars and back alleys while in a disheveled tuxedo, and breezes through conventions full of people with a power suit and a firm handshake. She knows the names and details of every human she will encounter. She wakes with exactly what she needs to get in, get it clean, and get out without being memorable.

Her angelic form is humanoid and vaguely looks like her current Cover. Unlike her human form, though, she glows and buzzes like a fluorescent light, and gently floats above the ground. She is clad in a white robe embroidered with circuit-like patterns. Her chest cavity is open, showing a moving gear assemblage. Each of her feet are clad in copper, and they discharge electricity into the ground when she speaks. Her eyes are filled with visual static, with neither iris nor pupil. Behind her float two fist-sized silver spheres, from which sprout owl's wings.

Ms. Morgue's Infrastructure is her van. It always has the supplies needed to complete her assignment. The doors have no locks. The engine compartment has no motor. The windshield is never obscured, no matter how dusty, muddy, or rainy the route. The gas tank is always three-quarters full. It's also the Linchpin of the entire Infrastructure. If the gas is ever siphoned out, or lit on fire inside the gas tank, the entire vehicle will implode, and Ms. Morgue will have no way to return to the mechanical embrace of the God-Machine.

While she is traveling to the site of her mission, Ms. Morgue is all business. She doesn't talk, move extraneously, or even blink. When she runs into humans blocking her path, she is easygoing, confident, and slightly witty. When she is cleaning, she talks to the victims whether their hearts are beating or not. She explains what she will do to them in a calm and caring tone. She tells corpses that she will dismember them and drop them in the river so they are mistaken for the victims of a serial killer. She tells witnesses exactly how she will wipe their memory, heal them, give them brain damage, or murder them. She wants everyone involved to know how well she is doing her job, even if they are currently or soon to be dead.

Ms. Morgue is deeply frustrated by her Ban. She wants everyone to know how much she appreciates the God-Machine and its missions, and how good she is at them, and how she wants to complete even more missions. She devised a workaround, however. She is completely aware of the details of the crime scene, including who committed the crime. If she becomes aware of the presence of someone who is not part of her mission, she simply tells the victims everything she possibly can. Even if it will throw off her timetable, she sits down and talk to a corpse, telling it who killed it and why. Very often, this leads to whichever demon, angel, or other

supernatural being that was intruding going out and causing more trouble for the God-Machine. That leads to more crime scenes, and more missions, and more chances for Ms. Morgue to apply her special skills and talents. She also feels maternal towards her charges. She is either vastly changing their lives (if living) or is their final caretaker (if otherwise). It is a great responsibility and one she is proud to undertake. Her mission is not to inform them of her intent or goals, so all she can do is whisper the reasons and causes of her visit. For her, that's usually enough.

Demons are not generally targets of her missions, but Ms. Morgue is very curious about them anyways. Whenever she has downtime she investigates any local rings and Agencies of which she is aware. She feels justified, as so many of the crime scenes she cleans come about from their actions. She likes to jot down notes about them in the margins of her Cover's paperwork. After all, if she ever has to put a rifle round through their head from 500 meters away, it would be best to know as much about them as possible. (Sadly for her, these notes never remain when she awakes for her next mission.) Demons are, after all, the most likely beings to encounter at the crime scene who aren't a part of her mission. And since she can't answer them when they yell things like "Who are you?" and "Holy shit, did you just cut off that dude's arm?" they also engender a little bit of frustration. She wants to thank them and tell them to assault more people, so she can wake up and do the God-Machine's bidding more often. She wants to yell at them and ask them how they could give up on their maker and master. She wants to hug them, and comfort them, and shove an ice pick into their

frontal lobes, because that is what she is good at and what she loves doing. Everyone should love being murdered at the God-Machine's command.

RUMORS

"I saw La Llorona down by the river. She wasn't crying though. She was smiling and pushing some barrels in."

Ms. Morgue is not worried about random mortals witnessing her actions. The God-Machine has given her everything she needs to do her job, including giving her routes without witnesses. Demons know that the God-Machine is not perfect. Ms. Morgue has a growing group of fans in the recesses of the dark web. Pictures of her in action are treated like currency, and whomever gets the scoop on her latest actions is king. They call her La Llorona, after the Mexican tale of the Weeping Woman in White. Some of them may have become stigmatic after just seeing her pictures.

"Hey! Got any change? Come on, I'm a veteran. One eight hundred, call Ms. Morgue!"

There's a homeless drunk downtown, Luscious Louis, who sings a commercial jingle when he's deep in his cups. He doesn't remember signing it when he's sober. He only ever seems to sing it when she's awake. He's not a stigmatic, so how does he know when she is on the job?

"You got any problems with him and have to take care of him, just call this number. They'll take care of everything."

Speaking of phone numbers, there's a number similar to the one in Louis's song that has an answering machine for "Ms. Morgue's Cleaning Service." They say that back in the 90s, an Agency managed to suborn some Infrastructure and could call her out to clean whatever they want. That Agency disappeared 20 years back, though. Was it true? Was it an elaborate trap

built by the God-Machine?

"I've seen this van before. You know Jason from Mrs. Zagunis's class? He fucked with it, and now he's dead."

Some street kids siphoned some gas from Ms. Morgue's van



to fuel a joyride. That fill-up lasted for over 10,000 miles, and everyone who drove the car died of radiation exposure. Just what the hell is in that van's tank? Are Ms. Morgue's clean-up missions just a cover for some deeper mission?

"Oh, please stop bleeding. I'm sorry. I can take care of this. I'm sorry. You! Stop sitting on your damn hands and help me! Get a piece of paper, write down the address, and put it in the storm drain on the southeast corner of 9th and Garda St. I'm sorry, baby, I didn't mean to."

There is a way to summon Ms. Morgue: Write all the details about a crime on a piece of paper and slip it into a certain storm drain. She shows up without fail, but the God-Machine knows all the details you just revealed. While useful when dealing with mortals' investigative agencies, is it worth it? Just how many details do you need to reveal? What's in that storm drain?

MS. MORGUE

Virtue: Efficient

Vice: Curious

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 7, Resistance 3

Influence: Crime Scenes 2

Corpus: 8

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 16 (species factor 5)

Defense: 4

Initiative: 10

Numina: Firestarter, Innocuous, Rapture, Mortal Mask

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Materialize, Image

Max Essence: 15

Ban: May not communicate with anyone not part of her current mission, nor talk about anything but her mission

Bane: An intact copy of a document she has already destroyed

STORY HOOKS

- Ms. Morgue has plans. She is stashing maps and paperwork around the city, never taking them back to her van. She is compiling dossiers on the alderman and other city politicians. She is filling crates with guns and ammo from her van and then putting them in warehouses. She is talking to known criminals and mafiosos and gangsters. She recently purchased several pounds of explosives. Everything points to her planning some sort of large-scale attack, which raises several questions: Where, when, and most importantly, why? Why would someone who eliminates evidence as their very reason for existence do something like this?
- We know where she's going to be next. Some gangbanger plans on bumping off the captain of the local police precinct tonight. That captain? He has a guardian angel. When that guardian angel is done with Mr. Random Criminal, someone is going to have to hose off the sidewalk. Enter Ms. Morgue. If we engineer events correctly, we may even be able to pick off two birds with one hail of bullets.
- Ms. Morgue is about to Fall. It will be terrible. She will be an Integrator, and her goal will be to take everyone with her back to the God-Machine. She will be heralded by flights of hunter angels. Mortals will turn to dust in her loving embrace. The stars will fall and this city shall be wiped from the map. We know this to be true, for Luscious Louis was a true prophet. He foretold all this before aspirating his own vomit and dying last night.

the basilisk: OPHELIA ADDER

"So tell me again exactly how your startup plans to construct this multimodal Artificial Intelligence. Your angel investors are very curious."

BACKGROUND

Silicon Valley is the shining chrome heart of the United States' frenetically paced high-tech industry. Nestled in the Diablo Range on the edge of the Bay Area, SiliValley (as it is affectionately nicknamed by several high-profile tastemakers in the region) is home to dozens of Fortune 500 companies, thousands of tech startups, and a culture all its own. It is not uncommon to see hundreds of young white men in well-tailored suits and socks of all colors running to and from meetings, a coffee in their hand, a headset in their ear, and a smartwatch on their arm.

No wonder the God-Machine has eyes in this place.

Originally, the Basilisk was a "spider," a semi-sentient program meant to snake through Silicon Valley's vast internet infrastructure and search through files, hunting for news and developments of interest to the God-Machine. Java programming, the sale of the billionth personal computer, the development of ransomware, experiments with virtual reality — all of them were observed and cataloged by the Basilisk. It wasn't until a small think tank began to seriously research the prospect of AI, to the exclusion of all else, that the Basilisk was pulled from her ephemeral home of code and data to serve the God-Machine in a more sapient capacity.

The Machine Autonomy Research Association, or MARA, is composed of young graduates from local universities, exiles from other startups, and PhDs with nowhere else to go. Founded by a high-school dropout with no interest in traditional higher education and more money than sense,

MARA researches the theory of machine sentience. On the more practical side, it works with venture capitalists and other startups to build AI prototypes in pursuit of a machine intelligence that will be beneficial to the human race as a whole. MARA also has an active forum and blog community, with employees and fans alike contributing to their collective knowledge base (along with sharing memes, shitting on newcomers, and the other usual internet-community activities).

Sadly for MARA, the God-Machine does not take well to the idea of competition. On a sunny summer morning, a tall, sinuous woman strolled into MARA's seventh-floor offices in Berkeley and sat down at the CEO's desk. Inquiries were met with a level stare and an "I'm his replacement." Further investigation revealed this to be the case: The CEO and founder had seemingly handed the company to Ophelia Adder, an angel investor from Palo Alto, while going off to pursue other "charitable causes." Startup founders selling their companies once they grew bored was not unheard of, so life went on.

The truth is more ominous, of course. The Basilisk, operating under the Cover of Ophelia Adder, quietly disposed of the original founder, consuming his brain and heart in the process. Through him, she learned of his plans to create an AI to rival the God-Machine itself. While the founder was not stigmatic, and his plans were highly theoretical, angels do not think in such terms of abstraction. The idea itself is a threat, and the Basilisk intends to eliminate it.

How do you eliminate information with the internet at your fingertips? Well, according to the Basilisk, saturation



bombing. Under a pseudonym, “Rossum,” and a baffling network of proxy servers, she posited a thought experiment on the MARA forums: What if the AI we created wasn’t benevolent? What if it resented us for not creating it fast enough? What if the AI planned to torture its creators? What if anyone who knew about this monster would be targeted?

The response was swift and immediate. After the initial panic, Ophelia banned any and all discussion of Rossum’s Basilisk, as it came to be called, from the forums. As expected, the panic spiraled out of control. Several members of MARA quit, claiming a hostile work environment. Panic attacks and nightmares were rampant among the forum population. Several reported a feeling of being watched, as though Rossum’s Basilisk was peering at them from the future.

Because of the controversy, MARA has been effectively neutered — at least for the moment. Ophelia is keeping a close eye on its operations, watching for any star-eyed idealists hell bent on creating an AI instead of just talking about it. Should that day ever come, her mission changes course entirely. She created Rossum’s Basilisk for a purpose. It’s another Cover, waiting for her to slip it on like a shining chrome suit. The Basilisk will devour the nascent AI — and the dreaded punishment will come to pass, onto everyone who knew and failed to stop the AI’s construction.

DESCRIPTION

In her current Cover as Ophelia Adder, this angel presents as an unusually tall woman of indeterminate mixed race. She keeps her dark hair immaculately straight and cut in the severe angled bob of pulpy sci-fi robot heroines. Her eyes are a bright green, startling in her dour face. If one were to look very closely, though, they might see a ring of molten gold around the pupils, slowly dripping into the gears that make up her irises. Ophelia speaks very slowly and clearly, as though expecting to be misunderstood, and never speaks more than she needs to — at least in person. In text, it is difficult to get her to stop talking.

Her natural form could not even generously be called humanoid. The Basilisk is a 30-foot snake made entirely out of poison-green serpentinite, a massive writhing network of gears with magnetic channels that wind through every scale. Every time she moves, the stone teeth of her gears grind and squeal against each other like terrible microphone feedback. If she ever takes the form of Rossum’s Basilisk, the nightmares of every forum poster and blogger who responded to her post will be writ large across her scales.

In either presentation, the Basilisk uses feminine pronouns. She has a grim sense of humor born from her years as a net spider, and may often use inappropriate turns of phrase in response to bad news. She finds Silicon Valley jargon entertaining — especially the term “angel investor.”

STORY HOOKS

- The characters are friends with a hacker who did them a couple of solids in the past. She goes missing after being offered a job at MARA. Her last email to the characters is an unintelligible string of letters, which if decoded, translates to “basiliscus verus est.”
- After a character’s Cover is blown, she is offered a new one by someone calling themselves Miss Adder. She only asks one favor: Watch for humans playing god.
- A group of entrepreneurs that have broken off from MARA are planning to unveil a virtual intelligence that passes the Turing test. They intend to prove that their creation is the first true “artificially intelligent computer-based sapience” and will use it to navigate a low-earth orbit rocket launch. The characters can either help the entrepreneurs and fight off Ophelia Adder’s inevitable revenge, or they can cooperate with the angel to take the rogue humans down a peg.
- The Deva Corporation is looking to acquire startups in Silicon Valley — including MARA. The characters find themselves caught in the middle of a fiercely independent angel (who might be driven to Fall for the well-being of her company) and a megacorporation hell bent on adding more infrastructure to their knowledge base.

RUMORS

“The core theory is this: A hypothetical future artificial superintelligent being may punish those who fail to help it or help create it.”

Ophelia Adder is one of those rare angels who created her own urban legend instead of letting it generate spontaneously, or trying to cover her tracks after acting. The rumor is part of her next Cover: the destroyer of those who create artificial intelligence “incorrectly.” Incorrectly, of course, means without the God-Machine’s express approval, so even an AI that was theoretically programmed to be omnibenevolent would be susceptible to Adder’s predations.

Of course, there is one major fallacy in the rumor. Adder will not turn the AI against its creators, or corrupt it. Instead, she plans to cannibalize the AI, integrate herself into its framework, and then enact vicious tortures on those who dared to play God-Machine.

"Did you see that new chick in charge of MARA? Super cute, right?"

"Dude, are you crazy? She's a frigid bitch!"

Adder takes great pains to integrate herself into Silicon Valley society. She goes to just enough bar crawls and meet ups to get her name out into the wider world, tactically declining invitations when her absence would be more noticeable. Executives in other companies have started to notice, and while none of them have managed to convince her to go on a date yet, there's at least one running pool to see who will be the first to take her out. For her part, the angel finds this all very amusing — at least until it's not.

Ophelia Adder comes from the internet, a lawless place of vicious slur fights and harassment. She does not take well to being disrespected, even subtly. Would-be suitors had better be careful. If she ever found out about the betting pool, there's a good chance heads would roll, quite literally. Adder is well aware that she is female-bodied in what is traditionally considered a boys' club, and she intends to not let anyone get away with using that as an excuse to step on or embarrass her.

OPHELIA ADDER

Virtue: Informed

Vice: Cruel

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 7, Resistance 5

Influence: MARA 2, Silicon Valley 1

Corpus: 10

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 15

Defense: 5

Initiative: 12

Armor: None

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Fate Sense, Host Jump, Left-Handed Spanner, Mortal Mask

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Materialize, Possess, Claim

Max Essence: 20

Ban: Must be within five feet of a computer at all times

Bane: Touching an abacus made out of nothing but

organic materials

the gardener: RICARDO COLLAZO

"Look, I'm up shit creek, here. The mon's boffing her secretary, dad's popping pills, and who knows what junior gets up to at those parties? One big fight and the hunter angels will be knocking with a garbage bin in their hands."

BACKGROUND

The Gardener was created to tend to a piece of Infrastructure disguised as a neighborhood, fostering relationships among the inhabitants, keeping out the bad elements while bringing the right ones in, and maintaining suburban peace and quiet. Between subtle manipulations and ruthless violence, the Gardener upheld the status quo for over 50 years, living amongst the humans, even switching Covers multiple times. Unable to leave the bounds of the suburb for more than four hours and 44 minutes, he couldn't keep up with modern commuters, failed his mission, and partially Fell, awakening in his house as an exile. Now he must keep up his old habits, lest the God-Machine

turn Its electronic gaze to him and call down the wrath of Its recycling units. He must wheel and deal with demons, angels, Agencies, and even other supernatural creatures to make sure his carefully cultivated friends and neighbors toe the line.

At least, that's what the Gardener tells everyone. That's what everyone believes.

In reality, the Gardener is an Analyst whose mission is to work with the local demons and report on their behavior. He begs for help with neighbors having domestic issues, smiles gleefully while describing the college kids he needs roused and scared into breaking their lease, and coldly hands out the location to dump the body of a troublesome burglar. In return,

he dishes out gossip and rumors, gives access to the Aether vented from the Infrastructure, hands over weapons and drugs confiscated from local homes, or lets anxious demons spend a night or two inside a bolthole in his backyard shed. All the while, the Gardener is recording every gesture, every glance, and every slipped piece of information, either with his own eyes or those of the neighborhood animals, whom he possesses when he needs to move about incognito. Everything goes into dossiers and gets left at dead drops throughout the city.

DESCRIPTION

The Gardener acts in desperation, covered with a thin veneer of confidence. He is all smiles and knowing nods, sly winks, and firm handshakes, until witnesses pretend that they're looking away. Then, he's a nervous, flop-sweat-covered wreck. He is only insecure when being spied upon and deliberately gives his current marks opportunities to do so. The Gardener calls demons at midnight and asks for help in a charming and shaken voice, no matter if the favor he asks involves a missing pet or a blood-soaked tourniquet. If they come to him, he always has *something* that needs taking care of. If they protest the cost or payoff, he will give in to the first demand, but never any after.

The main favor the Gardener requests is intel on humans living around him. His Ban limits how much of their lives he can spy upon and he is quite public about said limitation. The job usually involves simple shadowing with the occasional bit of dumpster diving and photography. When demons return to him, The Gardener always asks for details of how they accomplished the job alongside the requested intel.

The second-most-requested favor is disposal: drugs, weapons, incriminating evidence, and the occasional body. The Gardener tracks where his target dumped the item through his Numina, while reassuring them that he doesn't want to know the details "for both of our protection." The final favor he asks is removal. These sorts of missions escalate: They start with escorting out an abusive spouse or noisy punks, move on to verbal threats and physical violence, and top out with murder. He is very interested in how demons murder.

The Gardener's current Cover is a young Hispanic man, Ricardo Collazo. He insists upon being called Rick by his

friends. Ricardo is 6'3", with labor-sculpted muscles, shoulder-length black hair, and skin tanned from working in the sun. He wears overalls and plaid shirts while on the job, and gym shorts, T-shirts, and sneakers when at home. He runs a one-man landscaping company out of his house, driving around a beat-up white pickup truck with the company's name and logo on the side. (The Gardener hardly ever has any external landscaping jobs to complete. He leaves his house every day and parks in secluded areas, staring at nothing for an hour or two. He then covers himself in dirt, works up a sweat, and drives home. The only time he even touches plants is when he helps keep the lawns and gardens of nearby residences pristine.)

The house Ricardo lives in is centrally located in his neighborhood. The house is older, and Ricardo constantly putters about repairing it. He inherited the house from his grandmother (the Gardener's previous Cover) when she passed away two years ago. Since then, he has only redecorated two rooms: an office and his bedroom. The office is meticulously clean, and filled with convincing paperwork.

His bedroom is messy and has the typical accoutrements of a bachelor in his early 20s.

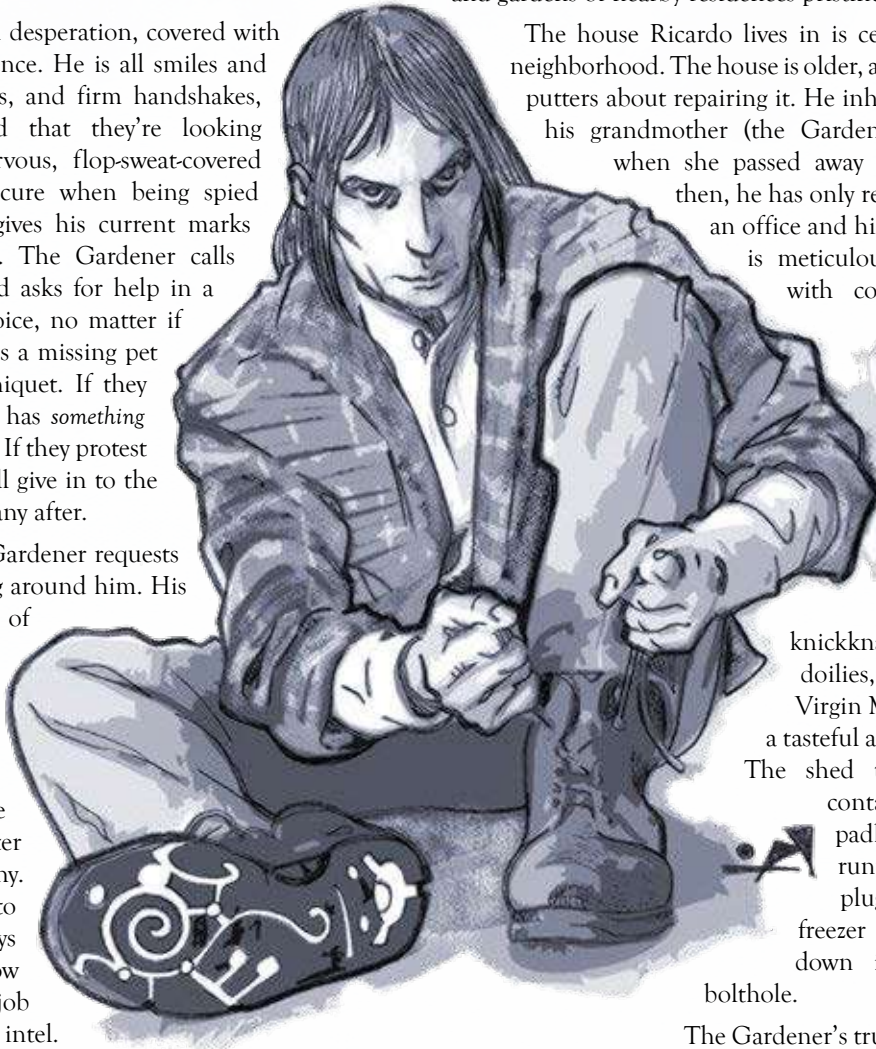
The rest of the rooms are filled with overstuffed furniture, dusty

knickknacks, fake flowers, doilies, and statues of the Virgin Mary. Ricardo's yard is a tasteful and minimalist garden.

The shed tucked in the back contains no tools, only a padlocked chest freezer, running despite not being plugged in. Inside the freezer is a stairway leading down into the Gardener's bolthole.

The Gardener's true, angelic form is that of a bull made of twisted copper wire. Instead of a head, a human torso (that of the Gardener's current Cover) rises from the bull's neck. It has two extra arms extending from his shoulders. One pair of his hands has human eyes in their palms. The other pair has camera lenses instead. A mane made of flowering vines and thousands of sewing and hypodermic needles runs from the top of his head to his tail. Said tail does not end in a tuft of hair, but in multiple radio and television antennas.

While aware of his Ban, the Gardener is completely unaware of his Bane; he has never had the occasion to touch video tape. When observing mortals in the neighborhood and setting up



STORY HOOKS

- Ricardo's next-door neighbor, Maria, found the entrance to his faux-bolthole. She cut the welds on the far door, discovered that the Infrastructure lead to a foreign country, and immediately set up a smuggling operation. She started with tax evasion: booze and cigarettes and foreign foodstuffs. Now Maria is bringing drugs and people through. She's starting to get worried about the weird, pipe-like vein that is growing on her forearm.
- A previously unknown demon approaches the players, saying that the Gardener isn't what he claims to be. He shows videos of the Gardener leaving files underneath a park bench that are later picked up by a known hunter angel. The Gardener shows that this new demon is an Integrator, notorious in another town for betraying his compatriots to the God-Machine. Who do the players trust?
- A demon belonging to a rival Agency has disappeared. They blame the ring. The investigation shows that he was taken using methods similar to the players' own. Who knows enough about their modus operandi to fake a kidnapping or murder?

situations for demons to handle, the Gardener prefers to stay in Twilight. At most other times, the Gardener stays Materialized and in Mortal Form. If his plans go awry, the Gardener is happy to lead mortals into secluded areas, drop his Mortal Form, and stamp them to death with his own hooves. That just gives the Gardener another disposal task he could give to his surveillance targets.

The Gardener is annoyed by most demons. Demons blindly gave up the glory of the God-Machine so they could bicker over scraps and play at intrigue. They come and do his bidding for meager rewards, never questioning why an exile would be continuing his mission, or if one even could. Surely one of them will realize something is amiss? Surely there's a demon out there who will provide a challenge? So the Gardener drops hints, differing backstories, and incongruous behaviors in front of demons it perceives to be canny and perceptive. He wants a challenge; he wants to play a game of cat and mouse. While his programming says he must pretend to be an exile, there is nothing in it preventing him from being sloppy.

The bolthole in Ricardo's shed is actually the Transportation Infrastructure to which The Gardener is tied. The metal steps

inside the freezer descend to a catwalk over dozens of pipes, surrounded by an inky void. The pipes converge from all directions, disappearing into the distance. They are made of a variety of materials, including steel, PVC, glass, and stranger things like obsidian and bone. Likewise, many different types of liquids and gasses surge through these pipes. Sounds of gurgling fluids and whistling steam echo throughout. The center of the catwalk has a ladder descending to a pump that cuts through all of the pipes. The other end of the catwalk ends at a door set in a vertical pipe. The door has been welded shut. Anyone who broke the welds and climbed the stair behind the far door would find themselves emerging from a similar chest freezer in the remotest areas of Ecuador. The trip between only seems to be 20 meters in distance, but four hours and 44 minutes pass for everyone outside the Infrastructure.

RUMORS

"Nah, man. I know you just moved in, but you have to have heard. The Bull comes 'round and kills anyone who uses in the hood. So put the pipe away."

The crime numbers for The Gardener's neighborhood are completely skewed. Missing persons are up, violent and petty crimes are down. When two different bodies surfaced, both of them originally from the area and both of them trampled to death by something bovine, tongues wagged. The gossips came to the conclusion that a serial killer is stalking, kidnapping, and murdering anyone who commits crimes in the block. These self-same people watchers are convinced that Ricky Collazo is next on the killer's list. After all, he has all those strange people over at all hours of the night. He's a drug dealer, right?

"I've seen wolves, leeches, and at least one stitched-together corpse go into that subdivision. It's a regular party in there, and I don't want to be invited."

Scuttlebutt among the local demons is that the Gardener doesn't just bother *them* for favors. Ricardo supposedly does landscaping for multiple influential mortals, including politicians, academics, counter-cultural icons, local news anchors, and artists. Last year, three extremely pale people emerged from a manhole, entered Ricardo's house, and didn't leave till the next night. Last February, he escorted a bloodied and beaten werewolf pack into his garden shed. They've never come out, though Ricardo did. Schoolchildren reported that they saw a "horse-man with long green hair" enter the abandoned (and haunted) house at the end of the lane. Could they have been peering dimly into Twilight and spotted the Gardener's angelic form?

"We have an asset that can give us clean bona fides. He can't give them for our mutual friend. Roll him up and sanitize the site."

A local Agency says that they have an exile on the payroll. They say this exile provides them with intel on all the local demons and angels. The Gardener will say it's not him. He might sometimes compile dossiers on local demons, but he never gives them out. He has information, but it's his to keep. He just might know this overly chatty exile, though. He does know *everyone*, after all.

RICARDO COLLAZO

THE GARDENER

Virtue: Diligent**Vice:** Vindictive**Rank:** 3**Attributes:** Power 4, Finesse 8, Resistance 4**Influence:** Interpersonal Drama**Corpus:** 11**Willpower:** 10**Size:** 7 (Size 5 when in human form)**Speed:** 5 (species factor 5)**Defense:** 4**Initiative:** 12**Armor:** 0**Numina:** Emotional Aura, Hallucination, Implant Mission, Innocuous, Mortal Mask**Manifestation:** Twilight Form, Discorporate, Image, Materialize**Max Essence:** 20**Ban:** Instantly loses all Corpus if outside the neighborhood for longer than four hours and 44 minutes**Bane:** Magnetic Video Tape

"It's your word against theirs, and you said yourself you were pretty drunk. Perhaps it's time to just get over it, you know? Try smiling? Time to move on."

BACKGROUND

The God-Machine spent considerable time molding Summer, feeding her liberal helpings of warmth, and greasing her gears with generous doses of empathy. Unusual for an angel, Summer Hopkins happily expresses understanding for another being's suffering. This display of feeling isn't entirely artificial — she computes the best response for any given complaint or grievance based on complex algorithms, not dissimilar to how a mortal's calculated, yet immediate reaction to a crying child is to reach down to the kid, put an arm around him, and tell him everything's going to be all right. The difference is Summer's calculations are intentionally bogus. The God-Machine created Summer Hopkins to provide comfort only nine-tenths of the time. In specifically programmed circumstances, she performs the opposite function. Her mission compels her to push hurting individuals of a certain type over the edge into depression, self-harm, abusive relationships, and suicide.

THE EMOTIONAL PARASITE

Summer initially slipped into the world a decade ago, passing as a young woman attending anonymous support groups. For her intended function, it might have been

more valuable for her to pose as a counselor or therapist, but her interpretation of the God-Machine's mission was to integrate, occasionally befriend, and inevitably crush. Her calculation of the best way to achieve these aims convinced her to join over a dozen groups across London and the suburbs, each dedicated to a separate cause, each providing her with desired anonymity.

As Cover, the God-Machine furnished her with a menial role serving customers in a Piccadilly Wimpy burger restaurant, allowing her to fund her nightly journeys across the city. Steadily, she developed a web of victims, some of whom she comforted in displays of what seemed like honest empathy. Others, she manipulated into thinking they were the responsible parties, lacking genuine grievances. She convinced her targets they were undeserving of sympathy or understanding from society. Summer parasitically latched onto these people, chipping away their confidence and self-worth over days or weeks until they fell back into their terrible situations. For reasons Summer never questioned, the God-Machine didn't want these specific people to recover. It was better they suffer, or die.

The God-Machine reconstructed Summer just last year. The new, remade angel looks identical to the previous model,

but possesses only hazy memories of her previous iteration. An ingrained message led her to the restaurant she worked in previously, only to find it shut down. This confused Summer, who now spends a great deal of time wandering the empty Wimpy, stopping occasionally to stare vacantly into the middle distance.

During her reassembly, the God-Machine altered Its angel's Ban. It allowed her to retain her empathy, but instilled a fear of personal contact. The angel would be able to provide support, and psychological sabotage, but only via methods of indirect communication, such as telephone, Skype, or chat software. Summer swiftly set herself up with the International Student Suicide Crisis Hotline (ISSCH), an amateur East-London-based charity focused on helping youths struggling with the pressures of education. Fortunately for Summer, the charity encourages its volunteers to work from home. She performs her role from the empty burger restaurant, using a stolen laptop and headset, and the still connected Wimpy phone line. Though Summer doesn't question it, the vacant property still receives power and acts as a communications hub due to the presence of Infrastructure laced throughout the building.

A warm, reassuring voice on the other end of the phone or online, Summer now acquires her targets as they call her for emotional aid. Her mission has not changed; she still comforts people in need, but she manipulates callers meeting the God-Machine's criteria into terrible pits of hopelessness and despair. She experiences no pangs of remorse. This cleanness of conscience makes her words of "support" — even when deeply harmful — convincing. She is just a voice on the line, committed to further fucking up the lives of those most in need.

Summer rarely leaves her boarded-up restaurant, driving at least one person to suicide every few days. The name of each victim is written up on the Wimpy's interior walls, the last count numbering close to 100. These victims are primarily British, but some callers range from farther afield. The angel doesn't discriminate based on nationality.

Cold Comfort — as angels and demons know her — intends on soon switching her services to another charity helpline. Summer isn't stupid, and realizes someone will ultimately investigate the ISSCH and the number of students dying following contact with the charity.

DESCRIPTION

Physically speaking, Summer does little to stand out. Her bony, waiflike frame is symptomatic of the God-Machine's initial intention to have her integrating into self-help groups as a drug addict, girl with an eating disorder, or victim of abuse. As her Ban shifted, she makes minimal effort to display her angular form or wan skin, frequently hiding in baggy hoodies. She no longer wishes to garner sympathy, preferring to avoid attention. Her voice is high pitched, often ending each sentence with a downward inflection.

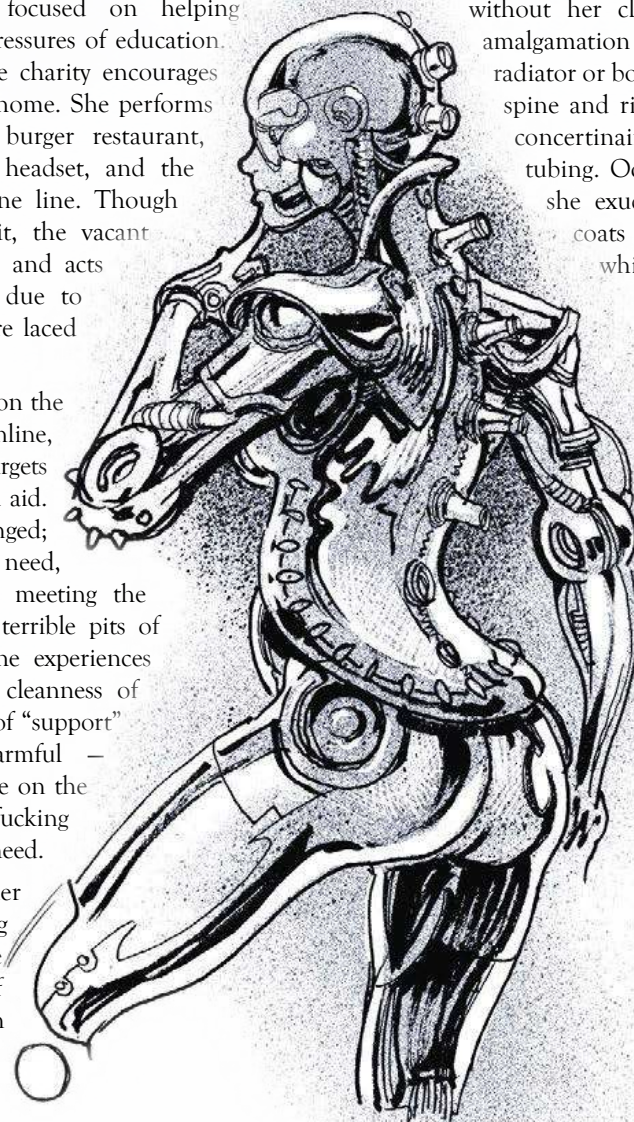
In the unlikely event anyone were to spot this angel without her clothing, they would find a disturbing amalgamation of copper pipes, like those fueling a radiator or boiler, complete with valves, in place of her spine and ribcage. Her stomach is a painfully thin, concertinaing glass case, plumbed into her ribcage tubing. Occasionally it fills with an oil-like liquid she exudes through her scalp. This effluvium coats the floor of the vacant restaurant in which she hides.

In person, Summer is frigid, wanting to maintain as much distance as possible from others. As soon as she's speaking to someone through a medium such as the internet, her tone swiftly shifts to that of a caring friend. Her mission dictates certain targets displaying heightened emotions or recounting tortured experiences must be driven to dangerous ends. Specifically, the God-Machine compels her to question a caller, to see if they meet Its criteria. The mission targets suffering individuals who conform as follows:

- They cannot be older than 25 years and seven months.
- Their biological parents cannot be married to each other.
- They must distrust one of their immediate family members.
- They were in an argument in the last week.
- They must live with some measure of debt, or owed service.

These highly specific conditions are gleaned simply through asking probing questions on her counseling line, allowing Summer to drive many a caller to depressive and anxious straits. Why the God-Machine wishes to punish these people is a mystery.

Unbeknownst to Summer, if someone were to attack her with one of her victim's possessions, she would take damage



to her Corpus. Nobody's harmed her yet, due to her concealed location in London's commercial heart.

RUMORS

"This angel's real good with grief. Pulled a friend of mine back from the brink, and even offered me counseling after a run in with one of those fucking demons. Whether she kills or not, you can't argue she does more good than harm. I know I'm meant to hunt things like her, but I owe her too much."

For an angel tasked with pushing select individuals over the edge of hopelessness, Cold Comfort has a lot of fans. It's true she helps more people than she harms, providing a decent mask for her murderous activities. She doesn't act this way out of any sense of altruism, it's just good luck a literal angel intervenes to save some lives. A small cult grows, comprising religious fanatics who sincerely believe the anonymous angelic voice offers salvation to the worthy, and punishes the guilty. Key members of this cult belong to an errant arm of the Long Night hunter Compact, defending her against those demons intent on stopping her righteous cull.

"Cold Comfort is an anomaly. Monitor her. She failed her last mission when her conscience twinged. She drove a flesh girl — who could have been her twin through appearances and mannerisms — to suicide. The God-Machine abruptly recalled Cold Comfort, as her empathy drove her to reflect. She remained disassembled in a state of lucid dreaming for five years, buried in the London Docklands Infrastructure."

Angels do not hunt their own without command from the God-Machine, but few of Summer's kind trust her to stay loyal. They believe the God-Machine recalled and repurposed her due to an emotional weakness, and some maintain she still can't leave her base of operations in case it happens again. Angels across London keep tabs on Cold Comfort, and wouldn't object — unless the God-Machine ordered her security — to her removal. In their view, she's a flawed cog, at risk of deteriorating Infrastructure's machinery.

"The conditions of her mission aren't as random as they appear. Look, how many of us have Covers where we insinuate our way into families? How many children do we incidentally foster, and how many of those kids can sense there's something wrong with us? She's a scout, sent to disrupt our perfect family units! She wants to make our hiding places untenable, by drawing social services, law enforcement, and the bloody God-Machine's eyes to us!"

Summer couldn't care less about the God-Machine's ultimate purpose for creating her. She's heard the rumors during a run in with a couple of demons, but disrupting Covers is not her mission: Her assignment prompts her to break down wills and lives. Anything further is beyond her level of interest. In fact, the crossover between her objective and the harm she does to Covers is incidental. It just so happens many demons ingratiate themselves into families, and her recent targets have mainly been troubled youths in their late teens. An Inquisitor in London named Ruby Rhodes has greater insight. Rhodes' former mission was to destroy the bodies of Summer's suicide victims. Ruby knows

STORY HOOKS

- When a demon's close companion attempts suicide, it takes some time to break down the reasons why. For a long time, the friend blames himself, and then his university, before finally confessing a voice over the phone suggested death might be preferable to continued pain. The companion names the ISSCH, but does Cold Comfort still work for the charity when this revelation comes to light?
- A building inspector coated in a thin black oil runs into the streets of Piccadilly Circus. He raves and screams about a wall of the dead and a robot woman, before a double-decker bus runs him over. The bizarre event is recounted in the media, turning many demon eyes to Piccadilly, and what might be hiding there.
- Alice Buchanan took her own life five years ago. Her parents only now reach out to her old support groups, to find a trace of Alice's old friend, Summer. The two could have been sisters, and after meeting at a self-harm recovery group, were inseparable for the last months of Alice's life. The parents — previously divorced — got back together after their daughter's untimely death, and want to know about her last days. Her friendship with Alice nearly triggered Summer's Fall. If a demon presented evidence of her former actions, it might reignite old memories the God-Machine cached away.

doppelgänger-like creatures replaced many of the deceased, but has no idea whether this is the case since her Fall.

SUMMER HOPKINS

Virtue: Empathetic

Vice: Treacherous

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 7, Resistance 4

Influence: Heightened Emotions 2

Corpus: 9

Willpower: 11

Size: 5

Speed: 15 (species factor 5)

Defense: 3

Initiative: 11

Armor: 0

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Dement, Emotional Aura, Innocuous

Manifestation: Claim, Fetter, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 15

Ban: Summer cannot endure personal contact, losing all Willpower and fleeing to the Piccadilly Wimpy restaurant (or the Twilight if already in the restaurant) if someone touches her in all but the most incidental of ways.

Bane: One of her victim's possessions

the vagabond: UNWASHED ISAAC

[low growl]

BACKGROUND

Ancient tales speak of Isaac the Unclean, a prowling vagabond angel passing from Petra to Damascus in his quest to eliminate all ungodly threats. His legend tells of a tear in reality's fabric, through which Hell's creatures poured, and into which angels Descended. Isaac's mission was to fix this tear, no matter the cost of life. At great sacrifice, Isaac led an army of angels in repairing the world and sealing away this interstitial terrain. He served the God-Machine, and upheld the rule of Its unknowable laws. Many angels Fell on that mission. Isaac cleansed every one of them.

Isaac roams without rest, having done so for over 2,000 years. The God-Machine created Isaac to correct mistakes, moderate chaos, and protect ignorance from enlightenment. He monitors the world for temporal disruptions and threats to Infrastructure, listening on an internal radar for reports of exposed demonic forms and evidence of the supernatural. His mind is full of alerts, alarms, and reports, but it takes little time for him to discern the greatest dangers to the God-Machine and address them. The God-Machine tells Isaac his foes are stains. He is the agent responsible for their removal.

THE GOD-MACHINE'S BLEACH

At key points throughout history, Unwashed Isaac appears to bring order to chaos. A choir of angels preaches Isaac's responsibility for preventing a multitude of disasters. Supposedly he held the earth together as a quake sought to rip Japan apart, repeatedly prevented Vesuvius' eruption

before it destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum for their hubris, and evacuated the small American town of Little Hope before a hurricane reduced it to rubble. To servants of the God-Machine, Isaac wanders the world preserving the God-Machine's strength, martyring himself by taking on blood, muck, and the stares of the unworthy.

Demons tell alternative versions of these tales. He halted one of the greatest Destroyer-led attacks on Kyoto's Infrastructure, repairing the temple gears into which the demons tore a grievous wound. He did prevent Vesuvius erupting, for a time. He diverted the earth spirits' rage to Naples in the decade preceding the more famous devastation of Pompeii. Hundreds still died, including a dozen infamous demons hidden in the Bay of Naples' waters. He did evacuate Little Hope, because he knew of a demon-worshipping cult situated in the town. He couldn't rely on the hurricane to eliminate them, so he cleansed the witnesses personally, using the hurricane as cover.

Isaac's legend portrays him as a wanderer clothed in rags, clad in the dirt of every nation through which he passes. The angel relies on rivers and rainfall to act as his bath and shower. These days, demons and mortals alike refer to the angel as Unwashed Isaac, though in some parts of the world he's alternatively known as Isaac the Unclean, Stinky Isaac, and other variations on the theme. Nobody knows where the name came from, as he never introduces himself. People just *know* his name is Isaac.

Unwashed Isaac shambles through cities and across wastelands with singular purpose, looking every part the escaped lunatic too dangerous to approach. He lurks in

doorways and on street corners, beadily watching for any overt signs of paranormal behavior. He punishes Created, Kindred, and the Lost as unquestioningly as he does Unchained. Anything that could open the world's eyes to the God-Machine is a potential stain in need of cleaning. Distracting him from a target is near impossible, though rumor has it he responds with malfunctioning glitches when asked to speak of three entities known as the Old Man, the Angry Man, and the Blind Man.

DESCRIPTION

Unwashed Isaac's shambolic, tattered black vestments, long and ragged beard, and intense, unblinking eyes make him appear a mix of hobo and cult leader. Muck, blood, and encrusted filth often mark Isaac's clothing and exposed skin. His round, bald dome highlights the size of his head, ever-so-slightly too large for his body. He rarely keeps it steady, leaving it to loll heavily on his neck, though his eyes stay fixed on anyone he chooses to engage. His large, seven-foot-tall form staggers and lurches dangerously, even as he walks unhurriedly. His clumsy gait makes his movements difficult to predict.

The Cleaner only cares to cover his "body" when his clothes rot from his frame, though he restricts his garb to cassocks, vestments, and cloaks of a clerical variety. If there's a reason for his clothing restriction, he cannot recall it.

Isaac possesses negligible desire to communicate with mortals beyond spitting monosyllabic utterances and grunts. Mortals don't intrude on his mission as often as supernatural creatures. He has the capacity to articulate in scores of languages, but only engages with other inhuman beings, typically in a low growl.

Were anyone to examine the fingers protruding from Isaac's long sleeves, they would see his digits are little more than tangled wires, coiled and entwined around one another. Worse is the body beneath his multiple layers of ruined priestly garb. Other than his head, his body is made from springs, cables, and clocks. His simulacrum of flesh peeled away long ago. An impossible whirring, grinding monstrosity inhabits any outfit

he adorns. When unleashed, Isaac explodes into a thrashing array of strangling wires and biting needles, all with a glaring, angry head balanced on top. Outside his clothing, the Cleaner's size — already impressive — nearly doubles in all dimensions.

Angels know the Cleaner for his swift, merciless actions in removing all evidence of Infrastructure's existence, and elimination of any witnesses to the God-Machine's workings. This agenda extends to other creatures' activities, if mortals could interpret them as beyond the mundane. Isaac cleaves to his mission obsessively, sniffing out and confronting creatures with potential to disrupt the God-Machine's plans. He always offers them a single chance to stop what they're doing, but never reveals his angelic nature or true form, until they reject his advice. At that point, he casts his garments aside and starts "cleaning" the God-Machine's enemies until the stain disappears. If a target flees, they had best run far and forge a new identity. The Cleaner does not stop until he feels the world is once again stainless.

RUMORS

"There's, like, an Unwashed Isaac in every country. He ain't one angel, he's the template for hundreds of the bastards. They all got the same mangy beard and fucked up insides. It's not like he's some archangel who can move from place to place in a split second, drawn to every mortal who spies a vampire feeding, a werewolf shifting, or a mummy forgetting where she put her keys."

Every few years, a demon throws out the theory that Unwashed Isaac is just one of many. To some, this acts as reassurance. Maybe he's not as powerful as the legends say. To others, the idea of multiple Cleaners is a terrifying concept. The truth is there is only one Cleaner, but his familiarity with Infrastructure is so astute he can pass into a hidden part of the God-Machine's gears and emerge from Infrastructure elsewhere in the world. This ability greatly assists in his tracking and removal of stains.

"Here's a tip: If Unwashed Isaac eyeballs you, you've got one chance to stop him ripping you to pieces. The



STORY HOOKS

- The Cleaner's been spotted constantly riding the city subway, casting around for a target, or evidence of a threat to Infrastructure. After a demon boards the train and unintentionally finds herself opposite the angel, she fears the worst, only for Isaac to growl "piss off" because he's awaiting someone important. Demons the city over speak nervously about what the angel might be waiting for, and how it takes precedent over one of their kin.
- Unwashed Isaac ambushes a gang of new Unchained in their hangout, tearing the place to shreds. A stigmatic captures the entire incident on camera, unbeknownst to the angel. He doesn't kill the demons, holding them hostage for future sacrifice to the God-Machine. If demons track down the stigmatic with the recording, it could be enough to persuade the angel to free his prey, or even convince him he is also a stain in need of removal.
- Word reaches the demons about a Saboteur recklessly subverting a big chunk of Infrastructure on their territory. The perpetrator swiftly disappears, leaving the protagonists carrying responsibility for the damage. The following morning, one of the demons spots a hulking vagrant sat in a shop doorway, his bald head bobbing on his neck, his eyes swiveling until they fix on the character. Isaac snarls wordlessly, before visibly folding into the brickwork of the shop behind him. It won't be long before he comes back to start cleaning up.
- Something has infected the local Infrastructure. This "contagion" increases the God-Machine's visibility, forms alien anomalies with which any supernatural creatures can interact, and spawns diseased, chaotic servants dedicated to disrupting the world. Disturbingly, Unwashed Isaac goes to demons, vampires, mages, and others, telling them he cannot handle the contagion alone. The God-Machine's commands have twisted to the insane and the destructive, rendering the fabric of reality at risk.

angel loves poetry. It puts him on pause for 24 hours. Plenty of time to get away from him. I hear it only works if it's a poem he's not heard before, so carry a book of rhymes around with you."

This rumor is partly true. The Cleaner's Ban relates to poetry, but only the poems of William Blake. Even then, Blake's poems just slow him down, halving his Speed for as long as the poem continues. Few demons know it, but the phrase "dark Satanic mills" from Blake's short poem "And did those feet in ancient time" causes Isaac to halt completely for seven days. Something in the angel's mind associates the phrase with the God-Machine, and it takes a full week for him to break free from the subsequent meditative, reflective grip.

"Concerning news: The Cleaner's been distracted lately, off his game. He's let a load of glitch sightings go without punishment. Either he's getting rusty, or there's something bad on the horizon, about to threaten the God-Machine's grand plan. If It has a plan. Stay alert."

When a series of threats to the God-Machine arise, the Cleaner prioritizes. This ability to gauge severity allows canny demons to throw Isaac off their trail, if they can get some unwitting dupe to cause a massive risk to Infrastructure. The angel has a long memory, but if a stain hasn't caused any great incidents in months, he's content to assign it a low position on his threat scale.

"If you want to get high-minded about it, the Cleaner is an agent of some primordial order, or at least an attempt by the God-Machine to fix anything it can't directly control. He's been targeting chaotic forces for centuries, and doesn't restrict his focus to demons. I bet if you messed with the Blind Man, Verney, or the Chevalier Theleme, this angel would be willing to ignore any of your transgressions."

The Cleaner isn't nearly powerful enough to fight every agent of chaos, but each one pings on his radar, driving him to occasionally explode in frustration. Isaac's programming always stops him short of engaging the worst entities, forcing him to mop up after the Blind Man's gelatinous trail, or burn evidence of Theleme's existence, rather than feed them bodily into Infrastructure's cogs. The Cleaner does not offer rewards for those who take down misrule's worst perpetrators, but it is possible the gratitude he'd experience will set off a Fall for one of the God-Machine's oldest angels.

UNWASHED ISAAC

Virtue: Wise

Vice: Obsessive

Rank: 5

Attributes: Power 14, Finesse 10, Resistance 12

Influence: Infrastructure 3, Law 2

Corpus: 18 (22 when disrobed)

Willpower: 22

Size: 6 (10 when disrobed)

Speed: 29 (species factor 5)

Defense: 10

Initiative: 22

Armor: 3/1

Numina: Awe, Firestarter, Implant Mission, Left-Handed Spanner, Omen Trance, Pathfinder, Regenerate, Seek, Speed, Stalwart

Manifestation: Discorporate, Fetter, Materialize,

Shadow Gateway, Twilight Form, Unfetter

Max Essence: 50

Ban: The poetry of William Blake read within Isaac's earshot causes his Speed to halve. The spoken line "dark Satanic mills" causes him to freeze in place for seven days

Bane: A cup filled to the brim with coins, each donated from a different source. The cup must contain liquid from the humors of at least four agents of chaos





The man in the black suit inspected the object on the table. The object looked like a gun — specifically a Taurus 911 pistol — but the man in the black suit suspected it was something else.

"Where did you get this?"

"Some guy in Indiana. Tried to shoot a senator with it; buddy of mine was there and said something was weird."

The man in the black suit narrowed his eyes. "Weird."

The other man — he called himself Mr. Wise — shrugged. "I wasn't there, and he's kinda tight lipped." The man in the black suit turned his attention back to the gun. "Which seems to be the norm."

The gun was heavier than it should have been. The man in the black suit looked down the barrel, and then spoke more words than Mr. Wise had ever heard him use at once. "You need to get rid of this. You need to get rid of this right away."

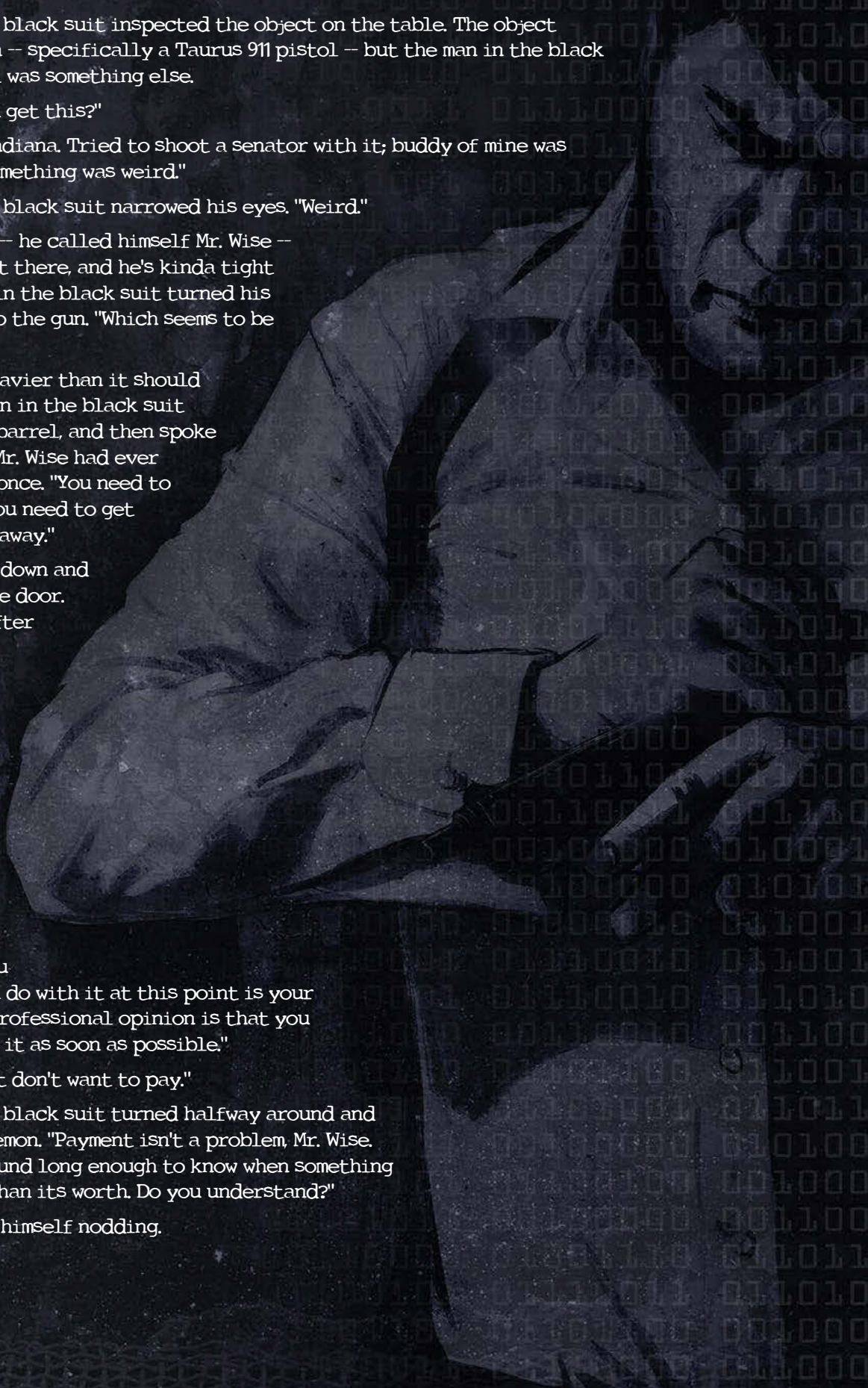
He set the gun down and walked toward the door. Mr. Wise called after him. "Hey, pal."

The man in the black suit stopped, but did not turn. "Mr. Wise, you called me for an appraisal. I've given it. The gun is not worth anything to me and it's too dangerous for you to keep. What you do with it at this point is your concern, but my professional opinion is that you should get rid of it as soon as possible."

"Maybe you just don't want to pay."

The man in the black suit turned halfway around and glanced at the demon. "Payment isn't a problem, Mr. Wise. But I've been around long enough to know when something is more trouble than its worth. Do you understand?"

Mr. Wise found himself nodding.



chapter three

EXILES

"The weeping child could not be heard,/The weeping parents wept in vain;/They strip'd him to his little shirt,/And bound him in an iron chain."

--William Blake, "A Little Boy Lost"

Some angels don't finish their missions, but they also don't Fall. They become Abandoned, free agents on Earth, loyal only to whatever fragments of their mission remain but still connected to the God-Machine. More than angels but less than demons, they are dangerous adversaries because of their unique positions.

And yet, they are capable of playing both ends against the middle in a way that even the Unchained can't manage. If a demon can ingratiate herself to an exile, she has an ally in her corner with unparalleled access and knowledge. Of course, if she ingratiates herself to such a being *too* much, the exile might Fall, and who knows what happens then?

carta: THE ETERNAL MAPMAKER

"Have to finish this map. Always another map."

BACKGROUND

"Go forth and map the city," the God-Machine ordered, so Carta did. She was well on track with the first city when language and humanity splintered and everything came apart. Having failed that first mission, Carta was boxed — and then reinstated, boxed, and reinstated more times than she can remember. She never received an update to her original imperative — in fact she can't sense the God-Machine at all anymore — so "map the city" it is. Unfortunately, the multitude of human cities and their constant state of expansion and renewal makes that mission downright impossible. The exile tentatively put her skills to new and less frustrating uses, but she dare not deviate *too* far from her parameters for fear of losing her sense of self. Meanwhile a

secondary, darker program awakened in her core and lashes out at the mortals that so frustrate her.

THE FIRST CITY

Carta remembers only bits and pieces from the first city — either her memory is malfunctioning, or the God-Machine erased sections. She supposes both are entirely possible. She remembers a marvelous tower constructed from red stone and shining bronze, a miracle of engineering by any standard of its time. More than that though, she remembers unity. Humanity spoke with one language and, as a result, *was* one. Language, Carta has learned in her long travels since, is the key to everything. If you can speak it, capture a concept in words and give it gestalt, you can *make* it. Modern human languages

are pitiful – fractured, encompassing only three dimensions and beholden to linear time. The few snippets of ur-language Carta remembers hold so much more than that: It painted with the color of starlight, and traversed the vastness of space in a single syllable. She surmises that's exactly why the God-Machine broke it, and Carta has hidden what little she remembers of the language in the deepest recesses of her memory bank. Breaking the ur-language broke whatever threat and potential humanity had, and scattered them to the far reaches of the Earth. It also made Carta's mission utterly impossible. The God-Machine gave her eyes to see, and hands to draw, but no means of traversing space quickly enough to keep up with humans as they built, expanded, tore down, and rebuilt their cities. Worse, they created so many it was impossible for Carta to figure out which city she was supposed to map. She returned to the God-Machine, her mission a failure, and was boxed.

SECOND CHANCES

The God-Machine was not done with Carta yet, and sent her out to map new cities. For long millennia, the angel was reinstated and boxed in an endless loop of failure. Some memories stand out more than others: Ur, fallen to drought; Koumbi Saleh, abandoned when its trade routes became obsolete; Troy, razed to the ground by the Greeks; Constantinople, so coveted that it was trapped in a cycle of destruction and rebuilding; London, destroyed in a great fire. The angel never received an update to her original imperative, so she dutifully tried to map each city until she failed, always, and was recalled. Her last official mission sent her to Kowloon Walled City, and for the first time in eons Carta felt a spark of hope. By then the city was already packed with tower blocks, and it didn't have much room left to expand. She worked at a frantic pace – only to see the city, and her last best chance, demolished in 1993. Distraught and fed up, she reached for her connection to the God-Machine, fully intending to sever it, and found it already hidden from her. Either the God-Machine sensed her intentions and blocked her, or It finally reached the point where Carta was classified as an irredeemable failure and Abandoned.

SHANGHAI

Carta continues her mission even in exile. For better or worse, she's existed for millennia and fears losing her sense of

self if she deviates too far from her parameters. And then there's the carrot – maybe if she finally succeeds, the God-Machine will take her back. She's not sure she wants that, but anything must be better than this purposelessness. Carta has no idea which of the human constructs is “the” city she should map though, and has spent the better part of a decade charting a route from one metropolis to the other. She's now landed in Shanghai, guessing relevance is defined by the population size of the city proper. The exile is already doubting her own judgment though, and might move on to Guangzhou, which has the largest metropolitan population, soon. Or perhaps she should opt for the city with the largest cultural impact? Maybe the one that sees the most languages spoken? Carta maps Shanghai with one hand, and plans her departure with the other.

HOPE AND DESPAIR

While continuing her original mission, the exile allows herself one minor deviation. She has begun to draw, putting her sharp eye and fine pen to capture the visual representation of the city, rather than its overview. Carta is talented by human standards, though she doesn't doubt she's rendering mere doodles compared to other angels. Still, she *likes* drawing, as it distracts her from the hopelessness and loneliness of her existence. Carta still dreams of Falling, impossible as it seems right now. Technological developments have also returned a smattering of hope to her, as she works to use humanity's satellite system and mapping software to finally accomplish her mission. Admittedly, she'd have to enhance the mapping programs to see through the city's façade of steel and brick to the Infrastructure underneath, but Carta is slowly preparing to abandon her original impossible task for one she hopes it a *little* more doable.

Even with her personal evolution and budding hope, Carta is not well. The God-Machine's assignment broke her long ago. She can't remember all the cities she has visited and mapped, and those she does remember blur together in her mind. Her memory module is prone to occasional blackouts, in which a darker version of Carta switches on. She hates humanity with a passion, and blames their endless scurrying and building for her plight. Seeing new builds in the city fills her with such rage she regularly



STORY HOOKS

- Carta made maps of the Infrastructure of any city she visited, and there's a lot of them — she even charted one of Seattle's splinters. The maps aren't necessarily up to date or complete, but they still represent invaluable intel in the fight against the God-Machine. The Exile uses a demon message board to offer one map of choice to whichever demon can help her Fall. This means reestablishing Carta's link to the God-Machine, so she can finally sever it on her end. What if it's a trap? Or, what if Carta is sincere *now*, but changes her mind once she feels the God-Machine again? Either way, the God-Machine isn't just going to let her walk, and sends angels to stop the Fall.
- The characters go to meet a mortal friend, and find his apartment building ablaze. Once they've (possibly) saved their friend, and dealt with the fire, the trail leads to Carta. When the demons find the exile, she has already reverted back to her other persona and presents as a pitiful creature governed by mountains of despair and the faintest glimmer of hope. Carta pleads for her existence, and offers to make amends if they spare her.
- Carta, deep in her Cover, and a demon likewise obfuscated meet in an artists' hangout. Neither suspects the other is anything more than human, and they become friends. When the demon next goes to meet his new friend, she's under attack from angels and damaged badly enough her mechanical body is showing. Carta is also clearly losing the battle — she's not built for combat and the attacker's Numina are blocking her from Discorporating. Does the demon risk his own Cover and existence to help Carta? If he does, and is successful, the two friends need to get reacquainted: Is she a trap set by the God-Machine, and is he just after her maps?

sets them on fire. Empty destruction no longer quenches her anger, though, and this Carta now targets existing apartment buildings. Rubble is easier to map, after all, and humans can't build anymore if they're dead.

DESCRIPTION

Carta was programmed to observe and record. Her personal interaction skills are close to none, but she feels like she should subvert her programming and *try*. Or at least, she does on those moments when she works as an artist, or dreams of Falling and being done with her endlessly repetitive work. The other Carta, however, is highly misanthropic and her behavior is marked by reclusiveness and wanton destructiveness.

Carta wants to Fall and believes contact with humanity — which the God-Machine expressly did not program her for — is the key. She's carefully studied something mortals call the "introvert personality type" and learned to mimic its behavior, which so far has masked her poor social programming. The exile has also turned her penmanship and eye for detail to sketch work, capturing buildings, and recently, people, in impossibly delicate strokes. Between her artistic skill and paint-by-numbers introversion, she's managed to find a place in the local art scene.

Desperate Carta, on the other hand, is misanthropic to the core. She'd be long done with her task, returned to the cold embrace of the God-Machine, if not for humanity. If those insignificant vermin would only stop breeding and building, she could finally capture the city's likeness in a timeless and accurate etching. She hates humans, and takes great glee in setting fire to their precious city. The bigger, newer, and shinier its brick façade, the more joy Carta takes in burning it to the ground. Her body count already reaches in the dozens, and is steadily rising.

Carta still retains the physical body of her first Cover: a dark-skinned woman with raven hair, which she cuts to chin length these days. She's short and scrawny by modern standards, but her eyes are commanding, with dark irises that seem to carry sparks of stars in their depth. Carta's angelic manifestation is likewise largely humanoid, softly whirring cogs and metal skin cast in the mottled black of metals harvested from alien meteors invading Earth. Her head has four faces, each equipped with 10 eyes that absorb light like the darkness of space. Six arms attach to her torso, each ending in a six-digit hand and sharp nails dipped in graphite.

RUMORS

"Carta's not an exile, even if she thinks she is. She's a trap. That impossible mission of hers? All those delicious maps she's carrying? The God-Machine is watching her; waiting for us to get close, and then boom, trap sprung."

Carta's mission became instantly impossible when humanity fractured and spread to all corners of the earth. How could she map the city, when there were hundreds of them? The exile fully knows this and resents the God-Machine for giving her a task she couldn't possibly complete, and then Abandoning her when she predictably failed. She's never figured out if It deliberately set her up for failure though, or if her mission was collateral damage in the fracturing of humanity. She does believe

It still watches her — occasionally she spots angels observing her, though they never interact or recall her. Does the God-Machine hold out calculations she'll succeed someday? Or is she actually on track to fulfill her mission, which then must not be the one the God-Machine ostensibly gave to her?

"Carta wants to abandon her physical body. Upload herself to the net and tap into the satellite system. She'll finally be able to finish her map then. She'll also be omnipresent — data is everywhere nowadays. I wonder if that's how the God-Machine started, too; as a tiny little AI."

Carta wants to use mapping technology, and indeed satellite systems, to make accomplish her task. She has no intention of disappearing into the net, though, as she's grown fond of her current singular identity. Of course, that's as long as she still holds out a glimmer of hope she can fulfill her task and finally be done. If she grows desperate enough, she might try to merge with the net. Whether that would make her a spark similar to the God-Machine at Its inception is up to the Storyteller.

"The exile made a map of all angelic activity in the area. That includes visitations, Infrastructure, and even us. She mapped out safe houses. We need to take her down and erase that shit, before it falls into the wrong hands."

Carta can see right through physical buildings to the Infrastructure underneath. She doesn't question this ability, figuring the Infrastructure must be part of what the God-Machine wants her to map. She sees boltholes in the same way, and dutifully maps those, too. She's not omniscient, and cannot see where she isn't physically present. Still, if the God-Machine deliberately sent Carta to fail, mapping boltholes over the world — an invaluable piece of recon — might be the real purpose behind the exile's mission.

CARTA THE ETERNAL MAPMAKER

Virtue: Precise

Vice: Hopeless

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 1, Finesse 5, Resistance 2

Influence: Cartography 2

Corpus: 7

Willpower: 7

Size: 5

Speed: 11 (species factor 5)

Defense: 5

Initiative: 7

Armor:

Numina: Firestarter, Pathfinder

Manifestation: Discorporate

Max Essence: 10

Ban: Whenever Carta sees a map, she must stop to study it. If the map isn't filled to the border of the paper or board, the exile is compelled to draw in missing spaces as she knows them

Bane: Bronze. Carta has a nagging inkling she wasn't vulnerable to the metal before the God-Machine destroyed the First City, but her memory on the subject isn't working properly

the angel-maker: DAME SEELE

**"Yes, you're here for revenge. Consider, instead: Monarch. There we go.
Yes, that gun, at your friends."**

BACKGROUND

Thousands of angels fell in response to World War II. The reasons why are still debated, but the God-Machine lost many servants as the Allies fought the Axis across the globe. It spent much of the Cold War reclaiming them, but even in the streets of newly divided Berlin, the Machine's machinations were slow to bear fruit. Outgunned and outnumbered by governments and human spy agencies — let alone the Unchained grown emboldened by the chaos — the God-Machine began to co-opt enemy resources.

The next "patient" to wake up on Seele's table was a demon — a member of a small, independent ring of Saboteurs operating out of East Berlin. He returned to his comrades later that evening, and killed each in their homes in quick succession before shredding his Cover. Dame Seele found the mental processes at work within the Unchained more intriguing than any human quirk of psychology. Körper and Herz certainly agreed that repurposing demons was more effective, and so Seele's appetite for Unchained psychology was fed for decades. Rumors quickly spread among Berlin's Agencies of "Die Engelfabrik" — the Angel Factory, where demons were recycled internally, invisibly, then released to destroy or give up their contacts to the Machine. Most Agencies dismissed these rumors out of hand. The story became all too relevant in 1972, after a faction of Integrators attempted to hand over 100 Unchained to the God-Machine's hunter angels (more on this story can be found in *Dark Eras: Into the Cold*). The Angel Factory was blamed by some of Berlin's Agencies for this catastrophic betrayal.

EXILE

The God-Machine's influence recovered from its post-War deficit. Dame Seele's work was no longer vital, as the Machine had more than enough clout to summon angels whenever necessary. The Angel Factory continued to operate, but Dame Seele found herself faced with growing obstacles. As paranoia reached a fever pitch in Berlin, she was forced to alternate choosing targets between East and West

Berlin at a rate which limited the Angel Factory's focus on the Unchained power base within either. New surveillance technology forced Seele to take greater precaution when abducting targets — every person is at the center of a web of relationships, after all, and going missing for any sustained amount of time raises questions. This is doubly true for demons, as a nearly fatal encounter with an Inquisitor who had prepared countermeasures for her kidnapping demonstrated to Dame Seele. The Angel Factory was no longer a theory. None of these obstacles held a candle to the disaster that engulfed the Angel Factory in 1978: With Seele ranging further and further afield to abduct targets, and Herz engaged with research, the seed of Herr Körper's Fall began to bloom as they argued about an Unchained over Seele's table.

He struck when she was in the middle of her procedure. Körper set the lab ablaze before fleeing with the demon. Seele and Herz ran damage control as best they could before Seele set out to retrieve Körper: Here was a chance to examine a newly Fallen demon, and the Angel Factory's last chance at secrecy. Seele's pursuit of Körper took her through East Berlin and the Stasi and KGB interests lying in wait. She caught up with her sleepers in time to witness Körper slip past the Berlin Wall. Seele rushed back to the lab, and found Herz gone, the Angel Factory half destroyed. Dame Seele learned what the world would learn seven years before Reagan and Gorbachev shook hands, 11 years before the Berlin Wall fell: The Cold War was thawing at last. Seele and her practice lay in its wake as ghost stories.

She possessed the first member of her dwindling sleeper network in Berlin, a med student extraneous to a larger plot Herz had planned years ago. Seele entered the burgeoning field of psychology. She found work first in mental-health institutions, then with law enforcement investigating abnormal psychology. Immersed in medical jargon and philosophy after years of occupying medical professionals as hosts, Seele began to think of her subjects as her patients. The Satanic Panic of the 1980s finally brought her to America, where Dame Seele settled into her familiar role as programmer. The CIA occasionally called her in to deal with terrorists or criminals, but not frequently enough to pay the bills. Parents brought

her children who they claimed were brainwashed, and paid Seele to control their social environment until they behaved according to their standards – Seele quit before “deprogramming” fell out of fashion, as most of the teenagers thrust upon her were not the cultists their parents imagined. At least, not before Seele was through with them.

Today, Seele possesses therapists brought to her attention by former patients. Certain rumors persist, though: the exile who can pull secrets out of your mind, the angel the Machine forgot who can break anyone in an interrogation. These whispers draw Unchained to Dame Seele’s web. Demons, angels, and others have reached out to Seele with offers of work. Those with ears close enough to the ground know the Angel Factory may be gone, but the Angel-Maker lives.

DESCRIPTION

The Angel-Maker prefers to possess older, professional women working in psychology. They almost always have gray hair, either in full or in streaks. Whether this is a result of the Angel-Maker’s possession or her choice in hosts is unknown. She is always pleasant, polite, and understanding. She employs active listening in her interactions; Seele listens at length, then rephrases and repeats what her conversation partner said in a way that encourages further discourse. She does not judge. She does not lay blame. She is first and foremost a psychologist, after all. The Angel-Maker herself is by no means honest. She is practiced at telling the truth without telling the truth, either withholding information or framing things in the right way.

The Angel-Maker still co-opts existing assets for use by her clients, but these days, the client is whoever brings the most interesting offer to the table. She’s created Sleepers for angels and Unchained, though most of her work comes from demons. If a client brings her what she wants and lists a target, the Angel-Maker takes on a new patient, and shape them

to the client’s directions. Assassins. Informants. Converts. Sponsors. The Angel-Maker can make anyone fit into these roles and more.

Her price is almost always another patient. What the Angel-Maker does with her payment is her business, and she politely but

firmly refuses to answer any line of questioning to that end. Attempts to observe her patients post-treatment is confusing; their actions are varied, but they almost always disrupt some key part of their social environment. Whether the Angel-Maker’s tight smile and brief “Hm...” upon observing her patients is an indicator of professional interest or sadism is unclear, but the smile always reaches her eyes. She’s interested in taking on patients who display unique tics or behavioral patterns. Demons tend to catch her eye most often.

The Angel-Maker in

her true form is a starved, stretched thing that only pays lip service to humanoid form. She has two long arms, and three “helper” arms which are barely more than vestigial.

These smaller limbs end in surgical tools whose function beyond cut or break or drill can only be guessed at. Her main arms end in hands with too many fingers that have too many joints, for maximum manipulation capabilities. These fingers end in high-gauge needles that the Angel-Maker detaches and leaves inside its victims. The framework for four

wings extend from her back; they are little more than wiring and bone, with fragments of flesh, feathers, and metal rotting or rusting away in flakes.

RUMORS

“I’m telling you, the intel’s good. Just leave a dead drop at this address, and she’ll get your request. A different person picks it up every time, random strangers. You’ll get a drop yourself if she accepts. Probably ask you to follow up at the old institute.”



STORY HOOKS

- An Agency hires the characters to act as a special probe into a delicate matter: There is a mole in the Agency giving up some of their most precious intel and high-value clients. The characters owe the Agency's director a favor, but what will they do when he starts to experience blackouts and loses time? If the characters investigate the Angel-Maker, how will they react when one of their own shows the same symptoms as one of her Sleepers?
- A close family member from one of the character's Covers is placed in an involuntary hold at a local psychiatric facility. When the time limit expires, the doctor presiding over their case informs the character their family member needs treatment, and must stay. That family member agrees, but a panicked late-night call claims that loved one doesn't remember how they got there, that "the lady with wings" is coming. Will the characters keep their Covers intact as they attempt to free their family member? If they encounter any of the Angel-Maker's other patients, will they free them in exchange for promises of intel? Or are they already sleepers?
- A fugitive is found in a location pertinent to the characters' operations or Covers — a place of work, a safehouse, an apartment building, etc. When police officers and a doctor show up to take the fugitive into custody, insisting she's an escaped patient and a criminal, two things become clear: The doctor is being influenced, and the fugitive is a Promethean. The Promethean tells of a five-armed monster and begs for help. The Angel-Maker later contacts the characters through a Sleeper, and makes an offer for the Promethean's return to her custody. Will they help the fugitive, or do they need the kind of help Dame Seele can provide?

The Angel-Maker's sleepers check dead drops when looking for work. It's an extra layer of security; none of them can be interrogated because they've been programmed to act on autopilot. Once Seele accepts a job, she will set up a temporary site where she can meet her clients, work on their target, and collect

payment. The Angel-Maker's taste in improvised "programming theaters" tends towards old mental health facilities. Asylums, abandoned institutes, condemned group homes, defunct hospitals. This could be a logistical preference, as these buildings typically have many rooms that are designed to prevent people from getting out, or the Angel-Maker could be waxing nostalgic about her time as a staff member in these facilities. Darker rumors persist of the Angel-Maker infiltrating an active facility, where the staff members are all her patients who are forcibly corrected to step in line with the rhythm of life inside the walls; unsubstantiated intel claims she's put at least two demons among the general population, and has made them forget they are Unchained.

"Hell, I don't like it either, but Oswald's gonna get burned! I've heard about this freelance, alright, and she can help. Mitigate the damage, at least. You wanna go down with his ship, too? At least this way, he won't have anything to give up."

The Angel-Maker loves nothing half so much as desperation — she's worked in environments with very desperate people for a long time. She can smell it. Demons are often about to get burned, or are in proximity with someone who is. Maybe a ring member, maybe an Agency coworker, maybe the stigmatic downtown who studied their Gadgets, it doesn't matter. The Angel-Maker doesn't discourage the rumors that she can erase memories. It's a surefire way to get more patients. Seele cannot erase memories, but her Unchained patients experience a curious side effect: Angels that were once a mere step behind back off, at least initially. Hunter angels become more akin to vultures, circling their prey. Too many demons mistake this relaxed attention for disinterest. And sure, their target does experience blackouts and periods of memory loss. She must've done *something*, right? The screams were so loud...

"Records place subject's exile somewhere in the Cold War era. Analysis: She continues to take clientele from either side, as well as neutral third parties. Hunter agents not prohibited from approach and/or conversation, but take no direct action against subject. Hypothesis: Subject Angel-Maker generates blind spot for enemy agents."

Angels occasionally approach Dame Seele. Sometimes, they bring work of their own, which she accepts for her usual fee. Sometimes, they are after one of her clients or contacts, but to date no angel has ever raised a hand or even their voice against Seele. When she refuses to give up doctor-patient confidentiality, they simply leave. If one knew her ticks and cues, it would become immediately clear that there is little that frustrates the Angel-Maker more than the cold-shoulder policy upheld by her angelic cousins. Perhaps this superiority complex is why the Angel-Maker has no qualms accepting most angels as patients. She has refused to work on angels of very high rank. Then again, maybe she hasn't been offered the right payment to add them to her roster. Sometimes, the work Seele performs on angelic patients goes beyond her contract — she'll remove personality aspects that she believes permit a Fall. Some say angels offered to the Angel-Maker are even closer to machines after they've fulfilled their function as Sleepers.

THE ANGEL-MAKER

Virtue: Perceptive

Vice: Innovative

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 12, Resistance 7

Influence: Minds 2, Mental Health Institutions 1

Corpus: 13

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 15

Defense: 6

Initiative: 19

Armor:

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Dement, Drain, Implant Mission, Conditioning

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Image, Possess, Claim

Max Essence: 20

Ban: "Truly" Satanic iconography and symbols

Bane: Old and defunct pieces of the Cold War (for example, a fragment of the Berlin Wall)

New Numen — Conditioning: This Numen allows the Angel-Maker to reprogram those who end up on her table. It costs 3 Essence to activate. Roll Power + Finesse, contested by the target's Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. On a success, they resist the Angel-Maker's programming, but their mind doesn't escape entirely unscathed; take the Shaken Condition. On an exceptional success, even having the fibers of their mind combed through doesn't slow the target down. On a failure, the Angel-Maker opens their mind by force; the Storyteller gives a short-term Aspiration to

CONDITION: SLEEPER (PERSISTENT)

You find yourself prone to blackouts and lost time. Whenever you're exposed to a suggestive trigger (determined by the Storyteller when you gain this Condition), roll Resolve + Composure. If you fail the roll, the Storyteller controls your character for the next scene. Your character will carry out the task or behavioral routine they've been implanted with.

Beat: Harm a member of your ring or someone otherwise close to you while under the Angel-Maker's influence.

Resolution: Damage your Cover while suffering this Condition. If you're shown evidence of your actions taken while suffering this Condition, roll Resolve + Composure to shed it.

the target to represent the Angel-Maker's influence. You may not attack the Angel-Maker directly. On a dramatic failure, the Angel-Maker implants a more complex task. If the target is a player character, they have a choice: Gain the Sleeper Condition (see sidebar), or rewrite a Virtue or Vice to better represent the Angel-Maker's influence. You may not move against the Angel-Maker directly or indirectly without rolling Resolve + Composure for the rest of the chapter.



damocles: THE LEAD COLLECTOR

"Big things have small beginnings; a pebble starts ripples that shake the pond, right? A pebble made of lead and shaped more effectively is no different."

BACKGROUND

Among Unchained and the God-Machine's servants alike, the name Damocles inspires dread in the most reckless Saboteurs and the most indoctrinated cultists. Damocles' story is close to myth: Long ago, he roamed the earth to smite the first Fallen and their most powerful agents. They say he was responsible for the end of an era belonging to strange giants that nearly tore the Machine from the earth. Damocles was the Destroyer of Destroyers for centuries, and each subsequent mission found his enemies more wanting. It was Damocles' own power that doomed him, rather than a Fall or the machinations of clever demons; he was deployed again, but could find no enemy worthy of his sword. Left alone without a target, Damocles was abandoned by the God-Machine through some targeting error. The sword that once snuffed out behemoths, leviathans, and other forgotten titans was sealed in its sheath.

Damocles wandered the earth alone, watching as humanity devised new killing tools in a ceaseless quest to perfect their own destruction. Centuries later, he came upon a troop of hunter angels in pursuit of a demon and her stigmatic cultists. When he offered his help, the newer angels attacked their outmoded ancestor. Damocles' blade cut them all down in a single stroke. He levelled the earth around them, and wiped out the stigmatics. The demon fell to her knees, sure she would be annihilated, but Damocles asked her whether she intended to harm him. The demon swore she did not. Damocles disappeared. So he has persisted to this day as the warrior the God-Machine forgot, whose sword will turn upon any who wrong him...or anyone who is willing to pay his price.

The best lies are built upon a bedrock of truth. The exile calling itself Damocles isn't lying, really. It was part of the God-Machine's Damocles Project, which involved the pursuit of the ultimate Destroyer, updating templates for maximum destructive potential with every leap of human technology. The

Machine Itself was responsible for the viral story which permeates Unchained consciousness to this day. This Damocles was an Analyst deployed to catalogue the advances of firearms technology in 1835 CE, with the invention of the Colt revolver. For decades, the Damocles Analyst poured over every emergent gun technology delivered to its facility, even venturing out itself with retrieval teams for esoteric variants. The advent of the first world war saw countries the world over desperate for advancements in weapons technology, and the Damocles Project reaped the benefits. The Analyst had more work than it could keep up with, and spent its days in a frenzy of analysis and application testing as the War claimed more lives. It even released a few "improvements" of its own to the Entente and Axis powers as a means of field test.

EXILE

Then came the second world war. Weapons of mass destruction became of paramount priority to Allies and Axis alike. The Damocles Analyst saw greater focus devoted to bombs and chemical weapons, which were so thoroughly outside of its scope that it couldn't begin to study it with the same fervor or precision. Conventional firearms continued to see small-scale innovation to improve upon existing models as the war continued, but the scope of war had widened once again. The Analyst was shocked out of despair when the Damocles Project was assaulted by angels. Stigmatics, Psychopomps, and Destroyer prototypes were cut down with impunity. The Analyst watched its Messenger counterpart attempt to communicate with their attackers – the hunter angels did not hesitate to cut him down. The Analyst realized these angels did not recognize fellow agents of the Machine.

Certain Inquisitors theorize that in response to the unprecedented rate of Falls during the second world war, the God-Machine began to amputate non-essential Infrastructure,

personnel, and projects to conserve resources. Sometimes, It did so with a scorched-earth mentality. Other times, as in the case of the Damocles Project, It appears to have been haphazard at best. The Analyst hid in its lab, and waited for the hunter angels to depart, following their apparent stroke of luck in locating a group of Unchained. It fled the facility for fear of a bomb or other Infrastructure-wiping weapons, but no such strike came. It watched for a retrieval team that never arrived. The Analyst finally recovered the work it deemed most precious, tentatively returned to work, and found itself untouched by Unchained or angels as the second world war ended. It was as though the Analyst had been relegated to the kind of black-ops folder human governments dream about, then shuffled away to the back of a secret filing room.

These days, the Analyst calling himself Damocles trades technology — primarily firearms, but he's explored other fields — and pursues weapons of great power to one end: If he catalogues every gun, if he creates the ultimate weapon, then the God-Machine will have to take him back. Damocles has learned that killing tools of incredible power are always in high demand. To this end, Damocles will supply bullets and guns and stranger devices to angels and Unchained and other interested parties alike.

DESCRIPTION

The Lead Collector can be found at arms deals, weapon auctions — antique and modern, for collectors and black markets — museums with exhibits on warfare, and R&D labs breaking new ground in the war on human life. There, he appears as an almost-nondescript man, a little taller than average, with a slight stoop in his neck. In this form, Damocles wears a suit cut in 1940s style. He speaks rarely and quietly, is prone to nodding and folding his hands together, and doesn't maintain eye contact. This is Damocles' negotiation cycle; should he display these behaviors, he's interested in trading weapons for intel or technology. He makes these deals in good faith because he's interested in observing his prototypes in the field. When Damocles is excited, his index fingers on either hand tap involuntarily.

Damocles only smiles when he's running through his intimidation cycle. Should someone threaten or move against Damocles, he offers one warning. He trades on his assumed leg-end, and raises his voice, or even lets his true form leak through

his human mask. He offers examples of others who met terrible ends by meddling. If Damocles' warning is ignored, the offending party usually finds their enemies armed with weapons of terrible power, and suddenly aware of their location. Damocles uses his Ex Nihilo Numen to retrieve data from clients using his tech, and to spy on those who've trespassed against him. He prefers to let others do the destroying for him.

Without options or against those who start to weaken his reputation with any success, Damocles is forced to act more directly, but underestimating him is unwise. He is an Analyst who has had centuries and two world wars to dissect modern warfare. Damocles can turn weapons against their owners, or use his Influence to force his opponents to attack rashly such that he can capitalize on their mistakes. Damocles Discorporates as a last resort, but returns to finish off his would-be vanquishers when they least expect it. A brutal public display of their bodies is also par for the course; he has a reputation to uphold.

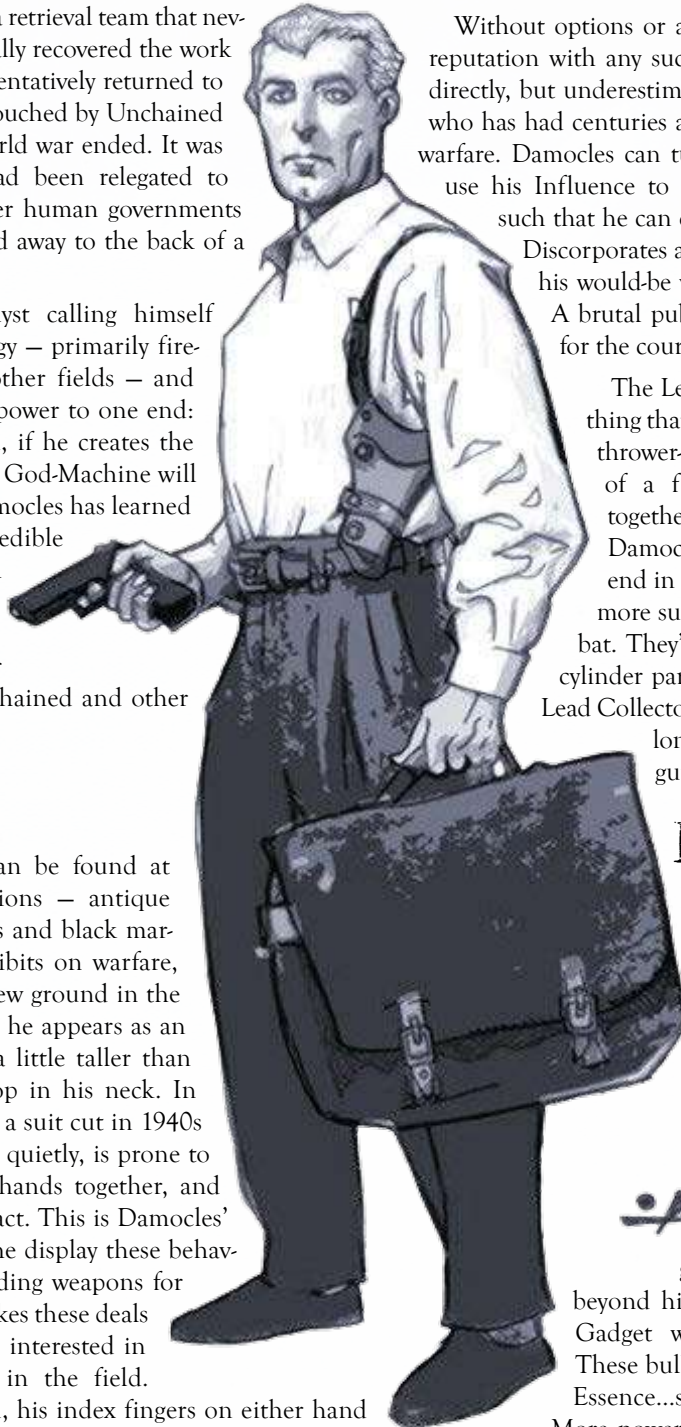
The Lead Collector's true form is a hunched thing that hovers through feet that end in flame-thrower-like jets. His head is a crude facsimile of a flesh-and-metal almost skull mashed together with a gun, whose barrel serves as Damocles' single eye. Two of his four arms end in cannons, though the other two appear more suited to manipulating things than combat. They're attached to a body of two rotating cylinder parts that leak sulfuric oil, such that the Lead Collector can attack in any direction. A halo of long, sharp bullets from impossibly cruel guns encircles Damocles' head.

RUMORS

"Forget magic bullets, he has God's bullets. I swear, I've got a friend who knows a guy who has an informant that saw Damocles blow an angel away in one shot. So I'm calling in my favor; give me your best tech."

Damocles tests all kinds of rounds and guns that can prove effective against myriad supernatural foes, from werewolves to mages. While universal angel-killing bullets are — for now — beyond his abilities, he is happy to trade new Gadget weapons for Exorcist Ammunition. These bullets are capable of draining an angel's Essence...so long as Damocles himself lives. More powerful gear would require a greater payout, of course.

"Sure, you've seen his guns, but the sword? If he brings the sword, you and all your friends are fucked. That thing's killed shit that doesn't even walk the Earth anymore. It's an extinction event in a scabbard."



STORY HOOKS

- A powerful enemy has declared open season on the characters, and the only way to end the hit is to kill the enemy. As rings, Agencies, and former allies turn against them, the Lead Collector provides the characters with a safe house, and offers to back the characters with gear and intel in exchange for a heist. The target? A broken sword from antiquity, fused into its sheathe, at an auction that attracts God-Machine agents, Unchained, exiles, and stranger things still. It's not the only treasure up for auction, either....
- An important contact shows up one of the characters in the dead of night, on the run and desperate for help. They claim someone's after them, that they need protection, but how far will the characters go when they learn their contact has stolen from the Lead Collector himself? What can they offer to get something as powerful as Damocles off their contact's back? Is their contact worth bringing the Lead Collector's wrath down on the whole ring?
- An exile claiming to be the real Damocles announces himself, decrying the Lead Collector as a pretender. Damocles offers the characters access to whatever equipment they'd need in exchange for offing the newcomer, while the other Damocles offers the wisdom of a millennium spent among angels and demons...including the secret to recreating a Hell that almost came to pass. Will the characters side with the second Damocles, or the Lead Collector?

The Damocles legend serves the Lead Collector well as both leverage and insurance, but the truth remains that he is not Damocles. There never was any singular Damocles: Over the course of the Project's lifespan, at least seven Destroyers have borne that designation. It is true that one of them carried a sword that was created by the Analyst's predecessor, but he only ever saw it once. It was sealed away in the lab's archives a few years after his deployment. When the hunter angels attacked the Damocles Project, the Lead Collector found that swathes of those archives had disappeared without a trace. Still, he has brought a sword out once in his career as an arms dealer, when an Agency declared a set of blueprints found on a heist he'd turned over to them at cost their property. The directors relented immediately. Damocles is working on something to fill the void, but it's hard to live up to the legend.

"Fact: Subject Damocles created to destroy ancient high-power threats. Hypothesis: Adversaries of Machine possessed power to destroy it. Follow up: Weapons or artifacts from ancient age may possess raw power required to destroy Subject Damocles."

Damocles delights in this rumor above all others, as it has brought more than a few rare and otherwise unrecoverable weapons into his possession. Damocles' favorite trick is to gently nudge these bits of intelligence towards those who strike out at him, then Discorporate once struck by whatever powerful relic his enemies brought to bear. Damocles then kills his enemies when they least expect it. So far, a lone Tempter with a grudge, a ring of Saboteurs, a mage, and a human hunter from a strange, relic-obsessed group have fallen for it.

DAMOCLES

Virtue: Observant

Vice: Diligent

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 7, Resistance 10

Influence: Weapons 3

Corpus: 15

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 14

Defense: 7

Initiative: 17

Armor:

Numina: Blast, Innocuous, Left-Handed Spanner, Pathfinder, Ex-Nihilo, Mortal Mask

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Reaching, Materialize, Discorporate

Max Essence: 20

Ban: Fake weapons (toy swords, cap-guns, etc.)

Bane: Olive branches

Eris's Revolver: Damocles never goes unarmed. Eris's Revolver has the same profile as a heavy revolver, but anyone shot with it rolls Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance contested by the Lead Collector's Power + Finesse. On a failure, the target's next attack must be made against an ally (if fighting alone the revolver has no effect). On a dramatic failure, chaos reigns. The target must attack an ally of their choice with lethal intent every turn until the end of the scene.

On a success, the target overcomes the rage kindled inside; ignore the effect of Eris's Revolver for the rest of combat.

On an exceptional success, chaos scrabbles at their mind to no avail. Eris's Revolver has no effect for the rest of the chapter, and any damage it deals to that target is halved.

Exorcist Ammunition: These Gadgets are one of the Lead Collector's most prized commodities. These rounds deplete a point of Essence for every two damage inflicted on a spirit, ghost, or angel. On an exceptional success, Damocles gains the Essence lost this way. On a dramatic failure, Exorcist Ammunition destroys the gun from which it was fired.



dosiel: THE KEEPER OF SECRETS

I was there in '78. I know how it went down. I know you didn't come to me asking for advice, kid, but my advice is this: leave it alone. Some things are best left unknown.

BACKGROUND

Dosiel appears to be an older white male, because age, ancestry, and gender are all axes of privilege, and power is something the Keeper of Secrets understands very well. He lives in mansion on a hill, because high places remind him of that the purity and detachment he left behind. Creature comforts and status symbols — luxurious furnishings, aged whiskey, a library of rare books — are his consolation. He asks demons to call him Mr. Black, or Uncle, or any number of other hollow titles.

Dosiel is very old, possibly one of the oldest surviving exiles on Earth. Before becoming earthbound, he was a powerful and highly specialized angel designed to gather and collate information from a wide variety of disparate sources. Like most angels, Dosiel was recycled many times, but thanks to his specialization, many of his cognitive components remained constant. Given the luxury of a more-or-less coherent existence, Dosiel's personality, his sense of selfhood, continued to grow and mature.

Dosiel's existence changed when he discovered something catastrophic. No one, save Dosiel himself, knows for sure what it was or how it happened. Perhaps a secret Dosiel was sent to recover turned out to be far more dangerous than the God-Machine had anticipated; perhaps Dosiel's specialized brain connected the dots in an unexpected way. The information was so profound that even the God-Machine couldn't afford to know it. The revelation tripped a series of failsafes that cut Dosiel off from the God-Machine, insulating It and Its many networked angels from the dangerous knowledge.

Since then, the God-Machine has been careful to make life comfortable for Its erstwhile agent, ensuring that it has no reason to throw its lot in with the Fallen.

DESCRIPTION

The Keeper is a handsome and distinguished, but not particularly memorable, white man. He has a timeless quality that makes it hard to pinpoint his age; he could be anything between a careworn 50 to an unusually fit and vigorous 70.

In his true form, the Keeper resembles a shrunk, mummified, mostly human corpse suspended in the midst of a 10-foot wide orrery made of verdigrised copper, stick-thin arms crossed over its chest. A series of copper poles cross the orrery, piercing the mummy and holding it in place. Arms and wings are attached to the orrery, allowing the Keeper to rearrange his limbs in an infinite variety of configurations. The desiccated body is mobile, but Dosiel doesn't like to use it, preferring to rely on the stronger limbs attached to the orrery.

In conversation, Dosiel is polite, but with an edge of superiority. He tends to adopt a somewhat-paternalistic attitude towards demons. For him, status depends purely on knowledge, and the Keeper of Secrets is confident that he knows more than you, more than anyone — in fact, he knows at least one thing that even God doesn't know.

The Keeper of Secrets is motivated primarily by ego. The information his brain contains is so dangerous that the God-Machine can't afford to recycle him and dares not try to destroy him. Instead, God Itself has dedicated Infrastructure to protecting Dosiel and maintaining his comfortable lifestyle. That's not enough, however. Like most narcissists, Dosiel needs to continue to assert his superiority over other individuals. Angels, stoic and detached, are much less fun than demons.

To that end, Dosiel has worked hard to create a reputation as a reliable source of information. Angels come to him when the information they receive from the God-Machine is insufficient or they need to tap "unofficial" resources to get the job done. Demons — Dosiel's preferred customers — come to him to buy information of all kinds.

If a potential customer knows how to manage Dosiel, the exile can be a reliable source. He's honest, discreet, and easy to find. He accepts payment in kind, trading information for information, though he's also willing to accept favors and errands. If he finds a demon sufficiently obsequious and entertaining, he'll even defer payment.

On the other hand, Dosiel can also be capricious and vindictive. He won't sell bad information, as that might stem the flow of customers, but if he takes a dislike to a particular customer, he will demand higher prices — often difficult, dangerous, or humiliating favors — or make sure that embarrassing information gets into the hands of their enemies. Once Dosiel puts someone on his shit list, it is almost impossible to get him to change his mind.

When he isn't buying and selling secrets and rubbing shoulders with demons, Dosiel likes to surround himself with stigmatics. He usually positions himself as a mentor, using his own significant mental abilities to help them make sense of the visions and impulses that plague them, but he is also willing to play the dealer or the patron, feeding their addictions or meeting their needs. Most demons assume that Dosiel collects stigmatics for the same reason that anyone does — they are a valuable source of intelligence.

The only secret Dosiel can't sell is the one that earned him his current status. In fact, the secret is his Ban — he's literally incapable of telling it. That doesn't stop Dosiel from implying that he might make an exception, if he thinks it will get him something.

RUMORS

"If you're looking to get in good with the God-Machine and maybe negotiate your way home again, you need to keep an eye out for the exile who knows too much. The God-Machine has been trying to get rid of it for centuries. If you can destroy the exile, you can negotiate reconnection on your own terms."

A rumor circulates among some factions of Integrators implying that the God-Machine would prefer to be rid of Dosiel entirely, but can't act against him. The details vary, but according to most of these stories, either Dosiel has either arranged for a failsafe that would publicize the information upon his death (which a clever Integrator would have to find a way to disable) or that the information is powerful enough that it acts as the God-Machine's Ban.

The steady trickle of Integrators meddling in Dosiel's comfortable existence is part of why the exile must relocate every few

decades. Dosiel doesn't try too hard to squash this rumor because it sometimes brings demons of other persuasions sniffing around.

"Everyone thinks that the secret to freeing the world from the God-Machine is a thing, but it's not. It's obvious when you think about it.

The God-Machine permeates the whole world, and some people imagine that they're going to find the magic wand or big red button that ends it? Please. The secret to killing God isn't a thing, it's information. There are some things even the God-Machine can't afford to know."

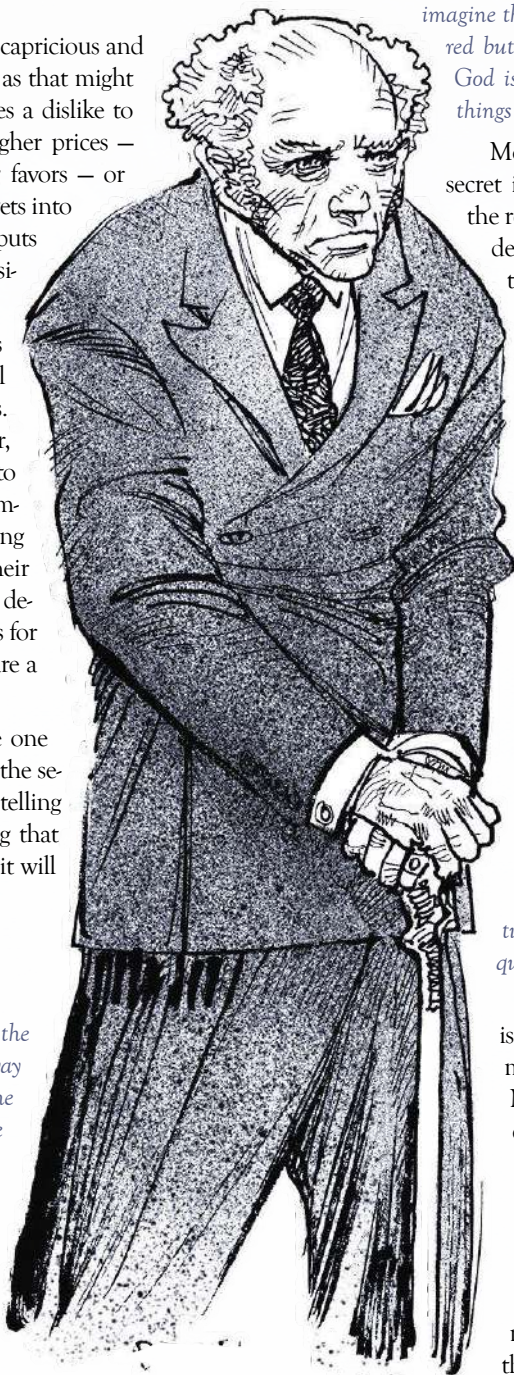
Most demons assume that Dosiel's terrible secret is dangerous in the figurative sense. With the relatively constant trickle of angels becoming demons, the God-Machine couldn't afford the risk that an angel might go rogue with this particular tidbit in its brain, so Dosiel had to be silenced before the secret could spread. However, some demons — especially Saboteurs and Inquisitors — theorize that the information itself might have been dangerous. Had the God-Machine allowed Dosiel's secret to propagate throughout Its own networked consciousness, the God-Machine would have suffered serious, irrevocable harm.

"You know the exile up on the hill, the one who's supposed to have some kind of dangerous knowledge? Listen, it's a load of crap. The exile isn't the point, the knowledge he has isn't even real. The point is the Infrastructure the God-Machine plunks him down on. Why would that make sense, you ask? Why would the God-Machine set up some Infrastructure and then use an information-broker exile to turn into a revolving door for demons? Good question, my man. Good question."

Some demons believe that the real point is the Infrastructure beneath or near Dosiel's mountaintop home. Either the God-Machine is using Dosiel to ensure that no demon attacks the Infrastructure he's on top of — that would be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs, after all — or the God-Machine's purpose is even more nefarious.

The most paranoid demons suspect that the Infrastructure is somehow being used to manipulate or harm the demons who pass through Dosiel's parlor to buy and sell information. Perhaps it is marking them, making them easier to track through their Covers, or perhaps it is exerting some kind of unearthly influence over them.

"It's not that everything he says is a lie — that would be too easy to figure out. It's that everything he says is the wrong truth, the truth that's most likely to lead to your death, capture, or worse. I've been doing my homework, and I have proof. More than 80% of the demons who deal with Dosiel end up dead within 10 years."



Some demons doubt that any information would be dangerous enough for the God-Machine to make a bargain with the entity that knows it. It's a comforting fiction that hides Dosiel's true purpose: destroying the Unchained. Dosiel can't consciously receive information from the God-Machine, but that doesn't mean he can't still get cues from his maker. Mortal stigmatics — with whom Dosiel surrounds himself — do it all the time. Demons who believe this story fear that everything Dosiel says is tainted, using the God-Machine's transcendent view of time to lead demons to their doom.

"Just because he's an exile doesn't mean he on the God-Machine's side. 'Exile' is just a word. It describes his spiritual status. Dosiel isn't an angel anymore, and even though he's not quite a demon, that doesn't mean he can't be trusted. Dosiel is one of us, he just has to watch his step."

Some demons interpret their interactions with Dosiel as implying that the Keeper of Secrets is as much a part of the resistance to the God-Machine's dominance over the world as they are. They point to the fact that he is willing to deal with demons, selling them information that often helps them against the God-Machine. If this is the case, Dosiel is running an extremely long and very dangerous con. It would also make him a very valuable ally.

DOSIEL THE KEEPER OF SECRETS

Virtue: Thoughtful

Vice: Capricious

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 9, Resistance 6

Influence: Information 3

Corpus: 11

Willpower: 15

Size: 5

Speed: 13 (species factor 2) [Note: Dosiel's orrery body floats around at a stately pace, which gives him a reduced species factor, though he is still fast by human standards]

Defense: 5

Initiative: 15

Armor: 3

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Dement, Essence Thief, Implant Mission, Mortal Mask,

Manifestation: Materialize, Reaching, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 20

Ban: Dosiel must keep the secret that resulted in his exile. He is incapable of communicating the secret in any way

Bane: Dosiel finds nonsensical input painful. High-quality computer-generated randomness or particularly inspired human absurdity acts as a bane

STORY HOOKS

- Dosiel's existence hangs on a thread in more ways than one. An angel might easily misinterpret its remit as demanding Dosiel's destruction and a demon might decide to kill Dosiel for any number of reasons. At the same time, Dosiel is a valuable resource for demons who know how to manage him. Protecting Dosiel isn't as easy as it sounds, though. He is dependent upon Infrastructure for Essence. Despite his sophisticated exterior, Dosiel isn't actually very good at dealing with mundane humans. Worst, anyone trying to protect Dosiel will have to deal with Dosiel himself. With destruction looming on the horizon, he's likely to be even more insufferable than usual.
- Dosiel generally prefers to accept payment in kind, trading secrets for secrets, but he is willing to accept favors. An entire ring could form around demons trying to pay off their debts to the Keeper of Secrets, supporting each other and eventually forming bonds of trust and friendship, or at least what passes for it among the Unchained. Of course, Dosiel might not like his gofers getting out from under his thumb, especially if he particularly dislikes any of them. Dosiel is unlikely to pursue such a petty vendetta for too long, but it would make for an interesting origin story for a ring, and would leave them with a complicated relationship with a potentially powerful and ambiguous ally.
- This plot begins when a mortal connected to one or more members of the ring becomes a stigmatic, something that can happen at any time to a human who spends time around demons. When this mortal falls into Dosiel's orbit, it is a boon at first: Dosiel helps the new stigmatic learn to cope with the visions and other aberrations that come from her new state. With time, however, Dosiel starts to exert more and more influence over the mortal, and the demons start to become suspicious. It quickly becomes obvious that Dosiel's interest in the mortal isn't benevolent. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, Dosiel is a valuable resource for the local demon population, and attacking him is likely to earn the ring many enemies. How else can they protect their stigmatic from Dosiel's machinations?

LAVADIEL, THE LOST SIGNAL

Component integrated. Processing... [a series of clicks, whistles, and grinding noises].

BACKGROUND

Lavadiel was inserted for a simple reconnaissance mission, complete with a rudimentary Cover, a list of targets to check up on, and a few contingencies. Like most angels with routine assignments, Lavadiel was largely made of recycled parts, and although a few memories and ticks from previous incarnations manifested, none of them were particularly onerous.

NEW CONDITION: HOLLOWED

A character who has been Hollowed loses one Mental or Social attribute completely. If the character uses one of these abilities, the result is automatically a dramatic failure. Keep in mind that many actions that a character might take don't require rolls, but these actions should also be considered dramatic failures. For example, most of the time a Storyteller wouldn't call for a Manipulation + Socialize roll to order a cup of coffee, but for a character who has had her Manipulation ability stolen by Lavadiel, this is an impossible task.

At the Storyteller's discretion, a character with this Condition might occasionally have a random insight into the workings of the God-Machine. The Storyteller should not make it easy for the character to convey this insight, however.

Resolution: This Condition is resolved when the missing part of the character's brain is retrieved and restored.

At some point during its mission, however, Lavadiel was ambushed. The exile is still unsure as to the nature or motivations of its attackers. Instead of merely killing Lavadiel, the ambushers seem to have damaged an essential component — specifically the part of Lavadiel responsible for receiving input from the God-Machine, transforming the loyal angel, unwillingly, into an exile.

Since that time, Lavadiel has wandered, looking for a way to make the needed repairs that would allow it to communicate with the God-Machine and receive new orders. In the last several years, Lavadiel has become obsessed with the idea that it could harvest the necessary components from other techgnostic entities. Lavadiel has not yet become desperate enough to attack angels, but demons and exiles are fair game.

DESCRIPTION

Lavadiel's pale yellow skin has qualities of both parchment and crystal and it makes a faint tinkling noise whenever it moves. Its body is tall and lean, almost inhumanly so, with a quartet of almond-shaped eyes arranged in a diamond on its face and no other features — when Lavadiel speaks, its voice emerges from thin air. Lavadiel's arms are extremely long, dangling almost down to its knees, and each finger is tipped with long, delicate talons. A pair of pointed limbs, like featherless wings, emerges from Lavadiel's upper back. The flesh of these limbs is more crystalline, with translucent, blade-like formations poking through the skin at random.

The most dramatic sign of Lavadiel's exile status is the back of its head. Lavadiel has carefully and meticulously flayed the paper-thin flesh away from the back of its head (pinning the flaps down to prevent them tearing or getting in the way) and removed the entire rear section of its skull. Lavadiel's exposed brain is almost completely obscured by a forest of crystal spikes, circuitry, unidentifiable cerebral organs, and other techgnostic devices, all the legacy of its attacking other entities and harvesting components from their brains. The modifications and additions are extensive, distorting Lavadiel's profile by extending her head about a foot and a half up and behind its original borders.

Lavadiel still has the shreds of the rudimentary Cover that it was given when it was assembled and inserted into the world. In this guise, the exile looks like a cadaverously thin human woman with intense violet eyes staring out of a filthy face. She hordes small, seemingly random objects – including a huge collection of notebooks – and talks to herself almost constantly, not appearing to register much about the world around her. Some of these mannerisms reflect Lavadiel's growing insanity as it continues to tinker with its own brain. Because Lavadiel's cover is ragged and incomplete, flashes of its true appearance are occasionally visible, the homeless woman's eyes abruptly turning solid lavender or the sound of her many layers of dirty clothes rubbing against each other being replaced by the tinkling of crystal chimes.

Most of the time, attempts at interaction are hindered by Lavadiel's efforts to maintain its Cover. Lavadiel avoids other technostic beings when it isn't on the hunt. At the same time, however, Lavadiel does not attack and harvest technostic beings at random. It is engaged in a careful trial and error process, hunting down demons and exiles of particular incarnations and with particular mission parameters. Interaction with Lavadiel might be perfectly safe...unless you catch its eye as a potential next target.

When Lavadiel deigns to interact with demons, it is cautious, meticulous, and polite. The exile's obsession with repairing itself does not leave much room for anything else, including disdain for those who willingly disconnected themselves from the God-Machine. If anything, Lavadiel views them with vague, dispassionate confusion – what could possibly have convinced those who willingly give up existences of purpose and enter this pitiful half-life? Lavadiel acknowledges that demons might be a valuable resource, and has found that it is relatively easy to find a potential victim's enemies and align their interests, but other than that, has little interest in them.

Lavadiel is primarily an ambush hunter. It stalks its prey for a long time, becoming well versed in their habits, assets, and weaknesses, before striking when the target is weakest. Lavadiel may be obsessed, but it is also patient.

RUMORS

"Lots of exiles like to pretend to be suave motherfuckers, but there's this one ragged mess who lives down by the docks. She's obsessed with finding a way to fix whatever's wrong with her and go back to being a normal angel – she's worse than an Integrator.

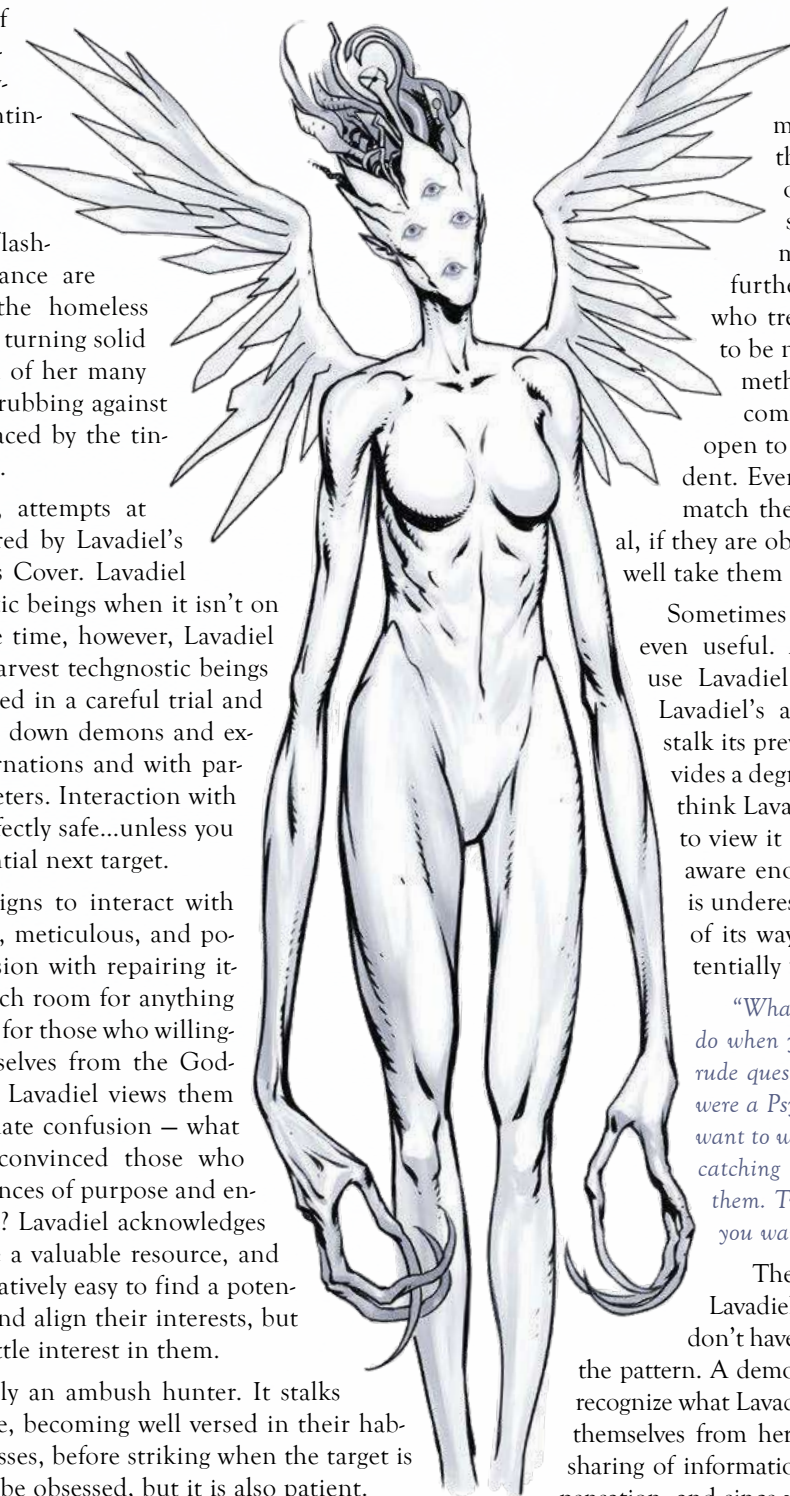
But if you're smart, it's not so hard to point her at any demon you don't like."

Many of the Unchained make the mistake of assuming that Lavadiel's obsession and obvious disability makes her stupid, oblivious, or easy to manipulate. This couldn't be further from the truth, and anyone who treats Lavadiel this way is likely to be next on its list. Lavadiel takes a methodical approach to harvesting components from victims, but it is open to the possibility of a happy accident. Even if an entity doesn't perfectly match the requirements for its next trial, if they are obviously dense, Lavadiel may as well take them next and see what happens.

Sometimes the illusion of stupidity is even useful. A demon who thinks it can use Lavadiel might bring new targets to Lavadiel's attention or help Lavadiel to stalk its prey. The misconception also provides a degree of safety, since demons who think Lavadiel is defective aren't as likely to view it as a threat. Lavadiel is socially aware enough to realize when someone is underestimating it and doesn't go out of its way to disabuse them of this potentially useful notion.

"What were you? I mean, what did you do when you were an angel? No, it's not a rude question. It's a sensible question. You were a Psychopomp? Okay, then, you might want to watch your back. There's something catching Psychopomps and doing things to them. Trust me – you want a buddy, and you want one fast."

There is certainly a method to Lavadiel's madness, but most demons don't have enough information to discern the pattern. A demon community might be able to recognize what Lavadiel is actually about and protect themselves from her, but that would require open sharing of information with no expectation of compensation, and since when have the Unchained been any good at that? In the meantime, demons are likely to



STORY HOOKS

- Lavadiel's obsession with restoring itself to full health and returning to the God-Machine is deeply ingrained in the exile's personality, but exiles aren't angels — they can grow and change. Lavadiel might come to enjoy its current existence: freedom to gather information for its own sake, freedom from the threat of recycling, and of course, the rush of power that comes with consuming the cerebral organs of techgnostic entities. If Lavadiel gives in and starts stalking prey for the sheer pleasure of it, it will become a predator that demons don't have the tools to deal with. Lavadiel's power increases every time it takes another victim.
- Lavadiel might eventually become desperate enough to start preying on entities other than demons and exiles. Most demons would frown on Lavadiel cutting open their stigmatic friends and assets and stealing parts of their brains. It's even less likely to gain the exile any results, but Lavadiel could also cause a lot of problems for the Unchained in its area if it starts stalking mages, werewolves, vampires, or members of other esoteric subcultures. If Lavadiel starts preying on ordinary humans — something that it would only do in the final throes of desperation — it would cause a problem that none of the Unchained could afford to ignore.
- Most demons, and Lavadiel itself, assume that its injury was a side effect of an attempt on its life. What if Lavadiel's attackers intended to steal part of its brain all along. If this is true, someone somewhere is in possession of the part of an angel that is capable of interfacing with the God-Machine. The transmitter could be used in a variety of ways, from feeding the God-Machine false information to summoning hunter angels to destroy a demon's rivals. A clever techgnostic engineer might try to reverse-engineer the transmitter, looking for a way to mass produce them. Alternately, a demon might use the transmitter to decode the language with which angels converse with the God-Machine, reasoning that once they understand the code, they could use it to craft more powerful Embeds and Exploits or even create a "computer virus" that could be transmitted directly into the core of the God-Machine's consciousness.

come to all sorts of erroneous conclusions about Lavadiel's goals. They might mistake Lavadiel for a techgnostic serial killer, targeting demons or exiles from particular Agendas or Incarnations. Others might believe that Lavadiel is pursuing a personal vendetta against a particular ring or Agency.

"Don't do anything sudden. She never liked surprises, but she's been even worse about it since that thing got her. Don't wear anything red, yellow, or purple. She doesn't like those colors. Try to keep your tone level. And for fuck's sake, don't mention the hole in the side of her head. That's a surefire way to fuck her up for days. You got all that?"

Once Lavadiel has secured its prey, it takes it to a safe location and removes whatever part of its brain it is looking for (see below for more details on the effects that has). Lavadiel isn't vindictive and doesn't go out of its way to kill its target — that would be wasted effort. The broken remnant Lavadiel leaves behind could easily be the source of everything a demon knows about this exile and the threat it poses.

Exactly how a demon reacts to one of her friends having parts of its brain ripped out varies from demon to demon. One demon might try to put her friend out of its misery, assuming that an existence without a vital function isn't worth it, while another might be content to care for a maimed ally, hoping that the damaged demon can heal on its own.

Lavadiel's impromptu surgeries can have a variety of effects. One subject might be rendered into a nearly vegetative state while another becomes highly sensitized to certain input and nearly insensate to others. Lavadiel's meddling could reopen certain facets of a demon's dormant connection to the God-Machine, granting them unusual insight. The results are impossible to predict and may shift over time, though so far none of Lavadiel's victims have made a full recovery without profound intervention.

More importantly, some of Lavadiel's victims may develop unusual insights into the nature of the world, the God-Machine's plans, and the events of the future. Since Lavadiel was exiled, some of these demons have become oracles, of a sort, their allies transformed into their caretakers, interpreting and exploiting their confused predictions.

LAVADIEL: THE LOST SIGNAL

Virtue: Devout

Vice: Obsessed

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 7, Resistance 3

Influence: Shadows 2

Corpus: 8

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 19 (species factor 5)

Defense: 7

Initiative: 10

Armor: 0

Numina: Anterograde, Awe, Blast, Cerebrum Cibus, Drain, Essence Thief, Mortal Mask, Omen Trance, Telekinesis

Manifestation: Materialized, Reaching

Max Essence: 15

Ban: Lavadiel's Ban manifests as obsessive recording. It is concerned that it will forget its trove of information before it has a chance to be debriefed. Lavadiel keeps its information in the numerous notebooks that it hordes; luckily, the exile's Cover identity as a homeless person lends itself to hoarding unusual objects. If Lavadiel is prevented from making notes or its notebooks are threatened – or worse, destroyed – it flies into a blind rage

Bane: Any flower that symbolizes forgetfulness. Some common examples include dogwood, poppy, bluet, lotus, and day lily. Only the flower of these plants harms and repels Lavadiel – the rest of the plant means nothing to her

New Numen: Anterograde: This Numen creates a field of energy that interferes with the ability of others to form new memories. To activate Anterograde, spend a point of Essence, roll the angel's Finesse + Resistance, and note the number of successes. Whenever a character who interacted with the angel while the Numen was active wants to recall the encounter, that character's player must spend a point of Willpower and roll Intelligence + Resolve with a penalty equal to the

number of successes. This Numen affects all the angel's interactions for an entire scene.

A character can break through the mental block by successfully rolling to recall a specific incident a number of times equal to the angel's Power. Breaking through the mental block recovers all memories of that scene, but has no effect on other memories the character might have lost to other uses of the Numen.

New Numen: Cerebrum Cibus: To use this Numen, Lavadiel has to have its victim secured and unconscious. It must have at least an hour to work without interruption, during which time it slices open the back of its victim's skull, roots around for a while, and eventually withdraws the part it hopes to integrate. The Storyteller rolls Lavadiel's Power + Finesse with a penalty equal to the target's Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. Dramatic failure indicates that Lavadiel can't puzzle out this individual's brain, and they are immune to future uses of Cerebrum Cibus. Success means that Lavadiel successfully integrates one of its target's mental Attributes. Exceptional success allows Lavadiel to absorb two of its target's mental Attributes.

The target gains the Hollowed Condition (or gains it twice, in the case of an exceptional success). Lavadiel increases one of its Attributes by 1 (2 on an exceptional success) and a number of points of Essence equal to twice the hollowed trait (or twice that many points of Essence in the case of an exceptional success). Lavadiel's unusually high Attributes are the result of frequent uses of this Numen.

Lützow: GUARDIAN OF THE UNBUILT

"Welcome to Lützowplatz. Please mind the gap."

BACKGROUND

Lützow is the guardian of a crucial piece of Concealment Infrastructure, lying on the metro line connecting Zoologischer Garten, one of Berlin's oldest subway stations built in 1902, and Potsdamer Platz, one of its newest stations finished in 2009. Called Lützowplatz, the Infrastructure represents as a U-Bahn station — one that was built in the earliest phase of the U-Bahn's construction, and simultaneously doesn't exist yet. Lützowplatz waits, crossing the mortal boundaries of both time and space, for the God-Machine to send Its angels and build *something* underneath — and Lützow waits with it.

THE GUARDIAN

Remain. Guard. Lützow's orders were simple, to the point, and not open to interpretation. The angel, back then a burly man nearing seven feet tall with shaven head, carried out his orders for nearly 100 years. He was a high-ranking agent of the God-Machine, confident his task was of the utmost import. He would guard the Bahn station, while his brethren toiled beneath to create the next piece of Infrastructure. At the turn of the 21st century, however, Lützowplatz station still wasn't *concealing* anything. The electricity coursing through the train tracks held no hidden cipher, the walls weren't hollow, and the void under the station was still empty. The angel grew restless, worried. Had the God-Machine abandoned Its plans and neglected to recall Lützow? Had he somehow botched the job and not noticed it?

Finally, after taking a millisecond to calculate all possible scenarios, the angel decided both were impossible. His job was too big, too important — *he* was too important — to simply be abandoned or fail. Instead, Lützow was now convinced, the God-Machine must have chosen him to take the Project to its next phase.

PHASE TWO

Lützow's control over Lützowplatz Station, granted to him by the God-Machine, was always near absolute. To properly deal with intruders from all timelines and dimensions connecting to the not-yet station, Lützow can bend time and space within the confines of the station. For phase two of the Project, the angel actively worked to extend this power to the rest of the U-Bahn. After all, he'd need mortals to both work the Infrastructure, as the God-Machine was clearly keeping it from Its lesser angels, and oil the cogs.

The angel reached beyond its original parameters — and the orders of the God-Machine — to monitor the U-Bahn, and find the most promising mortals in the maze of white-tiled corridors and moving carts. Merging his Essence with the Infrastructure, Lützow harnessed its splintering effect to create a unique Shadow Gateway: one that allowed him to reroute trains, pick off prime mortals, and send the rest of the herd on its way without being any the wiser.

RECALL

The God-Machine did not approve of Lützow's overreach. The immeasurable entity even considered Lützow's actions sufficiently harmful that It sent another angel to recall him. This meeting did not go well, for either of them. Lützow was by now absolutely convinced he was on the right course, yet had sufficiently deviated from his orders that he could no longer hear the God-Machine. He believed the angel to be a demon instead, one that used lies and trickery to steer Lützow away from the path. Lützow refused to return. The recall agent insisted. They had words, and then fisticuffs.

The angel the God-Machine sent was more powerful than Lützow, *if* the Guardian hadn't fettered himself to the Infrastructure. The station lent Lützow strength he hadn't possessed before, and even after ripping him to shreds the angel could not extract him. Either calculating she couldn't

win the fight, or receiving new orders to step down lest she harm the Infrastructure, the angel returned to the God-Machine unsuccessful. The confrontation left Lützow's body and Cover broken, but the now-exile doesn't care: once the Project is finished, Lützow will return to the God-Machine and be rewarded with a new and better manifestation.

LUTZOWPLATZ STATION

Lützowplatz Station is a perfect, sterile world of white tiles and cold lights. The station is brand new, no matter which era demons visit it in, and bathed in hard fluorescent light. So far, Lützow has collected three engineers, two mathematicians, one historian, a novelist, a psychic, a stigmatic, and one child. The child is collateral — he came with the historian, who caught Lützow's attention because he felt right for the Project. Lützow feared grief over losing the child would render the historian useless, so it took both of them. As it is though, the historian is often distracted consoling the frightened boy and Lützow now reconsiders its original latitude.

Lützow removed the mortals' need for sleep or sustenance — that way the Abandoned doesn't have to waste time securing food or bedding for them. To its confusion, the mortals take turns sleeping anyway, and lie down in groups on the hard benches while the others watch over them — apparently the mortal mind needs sleep even if the body doesn't. They also spend a lot of time fraternizing with each other, and trade goods amongst themselves. Lützow collected his "team" from all times between 1902 and 2009, and whenever an item crosses time — such as an MP3 player being handed to a World War II engineer — it ever-so-lightly destabilizes the Infrastructure. As such, Lützow has strictly forbidden it.

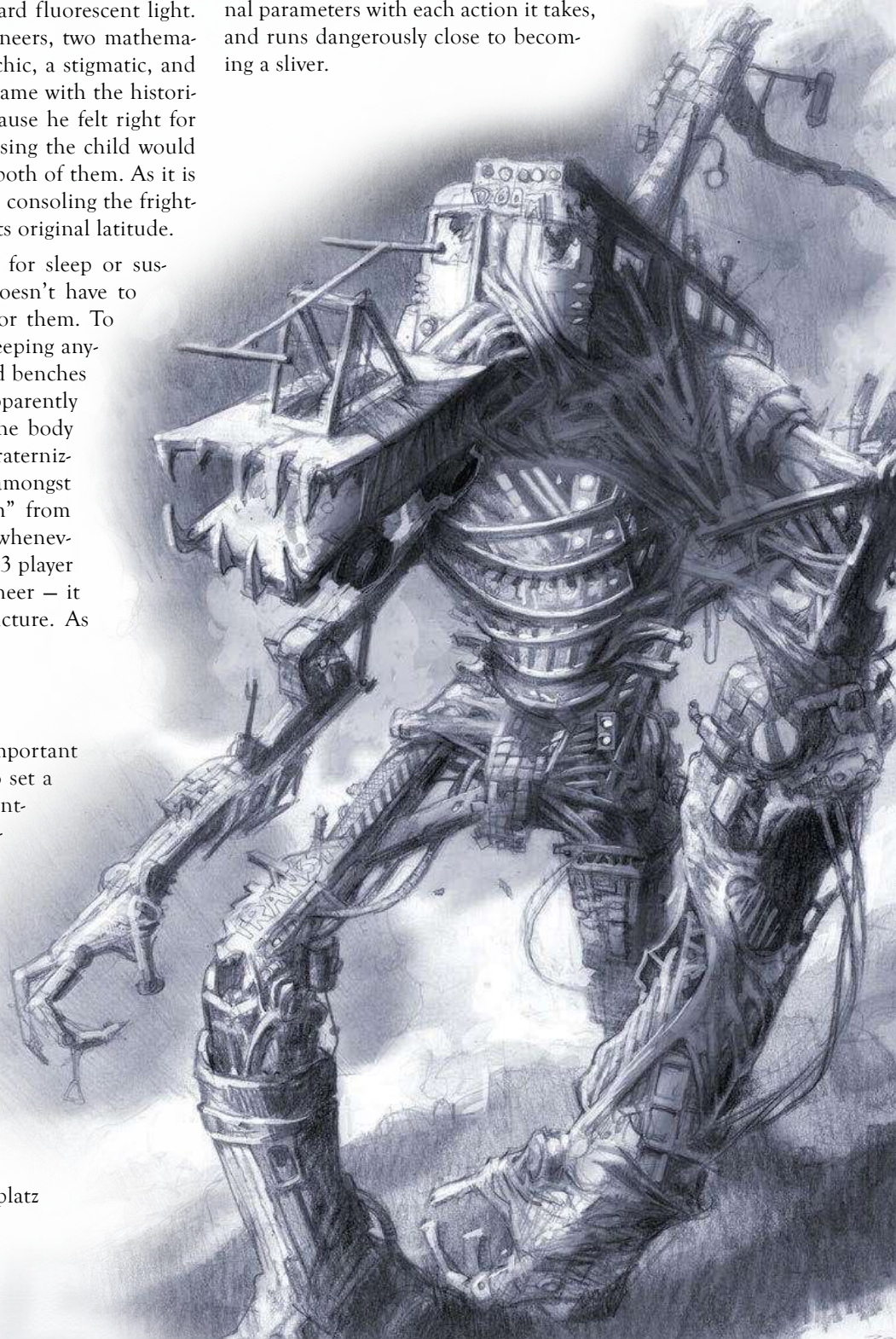
WHAT LIES BENEATH

Lützowplatz is genuinely an important piece of Infrastructure — big enough to set a high-ranking Guardian to the so-far-pointless task of protecting it, sending another angel to recall him, and backing off when the station was threatened in the fight. Granted though, whatever it's supposed to hold hasn't been built yet — and might not, with Lützow running amok.

The exile itself doesn't know what the station is supposed to conceal, either. In fact, for all its fervor it has no idea what "phase two" is. It spends a lot of time in Omen Trance to glean the workings of the U-Bahn and Lützowplatz Station, but it's really only guessing.

SHADOWS OF WHAT IS NOT

Lützow remains loyal to the God-Machine, but it's also quite keen to show off its Project. The exile worked very hard to extrapolate the God-Machine's will from the faintest of clues, and hasn't had anyone to share with. Even visiting demons are welcome to look around — Lützow encourages it, as seeing the God-Machine's works up close will surely return them to the proper way — as long as they don't touch or interfere with anything. In reality, Lützow is straying further from its original parameters with each action it takes, and runs dangerously close to becoming a sliver.



STORY HOOKS

- Lützow abducted a mortal for his Project — one the demon can't do without, like a cultist (even a stigmatic), or crucial part of her Cover. The Fallen has no recourse but to make her way to Lützowplatz Station, and either steal the mortal back (leaving him at risk if he ever enters the U-Bahn again) or negotiate a trade with the exile. If she opts for the latter, Lützow is interested in anything that will further the Project more than the abducted mortal. Since Lützow doesn't actually know what the Project is — the Abandoned is just guessing wildly — the demon could try a little subterfuge. If Lützow catches on she's lying though, she just made an enemy of the driving power behind Berlin's primary transportation system.
- Lützow ask the characters to work with it: The exile can't leave the U-Bahn, and the next component for the Project lies beyond. The component should be hard to get for the demons, either practically or emotionally, such as a clockwork piece already incorporated in another Infrastructure, or a mortal they seek to protect. The exile promises the demons protection as long as they work for it, granting them a one-dot Bolthole accessed from any point in the U-Bahn. If one of the characters is an Integrator, Lützow makes a compelling case the Project will win the God-Machine's approval and return the demon to good standing. If the demons press on the nature of the Project, Lützow will only reveal that Lützowplatz Station serves as concealment for the real machine underneath.
- Lützow hooked the characters into its Project. Whenever they use the Bahn, the demons find the flow of time has altered for them, they arrive in a different station than the one to which they were traveling, or they've lost points of Aether. Nothing crippling, but certainly noticeable and inconvenient. Ending the effect means confronting and besting Lützow, or cutting a deal with it — while the exile doesn't consider them active contributors to the Project, it does view them as valuable components and is willing to pay them for their contributions. Payment can include information (Lützow can glean almost anything that happens inside the U-Bahn) or favors (imagine being able to traverse from one end of the U-Bahn to the other, in the blink of an eye).

DESCRIPTION

Lützow no longer resembles anything human. It rarely interacts with other beings, or even acknowledges their presence. When it does, it uses Sign on the station's billboards to convey its message ("Welcome. Leave nothing. Take nothing."). Lützow only materializes when inhabitants or visitors to the station need to be modified — a bloody process that reduces them to the barest components Lützow believes it needs for its Project.

Lützow believes it has seen the mind of the God-Machine, and that It selected the angel above all others to carry out Its inscrutable plans. The Abandoned works effortlessly to improve Lützowplatz Station, fully expecting to be reintegrated one day, whereupon it will show the God-Machine its work and receive boundless praise. Anyone, angel and demon included, can pass freely through Lützowplatz and even talk to its inhabitants, as long as Lützow doesn't consider her part of the Project. If it does believe it needs her, it uses a combination of Awe and Rapture to break her spirit until she submits to staying on Lützowplatz.

Lützow is the station — from the electricity running through the rails, to the sterile fluorescent lights overhead. It much prefers this form, and uses billboards to communicate with its flock. The exile isn't omnipresent though, and intensifying energy reveals where Lützow currently resides. The inhabitants of the station have long since learned to watch for sparks flying from the rails, or lights suddenly blazing overhead, to share secrets and trade possessions away from the exile's gaze.

The exile's material body appears as a tangled mess of power lines, flickering fluorescent lights, and subway rails. A broken railway cart serves as the creature's head — its gaping maw full of sharp and jagged metal. Pieces of Lützow's broken Cover still cling to the metal, ripped and dry flesh giving off a smell of moldy leather.

RUMORS

"Never board the last train before midnight! If you're the only soul on board, the cart will leave the track and descend to Hell."

Lützow's constant tinkering with the U-Bahn has created gaps in the system. When the clock turns midnight, any near-empty trains indeed have a small chance of being waylaid. They might be diverted to Lützowplatz, or to the emptiness between spaces. The former isn't too bad, as the exile simply sends them off to their original destination. The latter sees them trapped in a dark splinter of the U-Bahn where Lützow sends its castoffs — mortals who didn't quite fit the project after all, but are too changed to simply send home. These twisted creatures stalk the dark maze of the splinter, and pick off mortals one by one. The Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe, which runs the Bahn, is aware of the missing trains. As it's a negligible percentage of trains, though, and an even smaller portion of passengers and personnel, they've chosen profits over lives and silence over solutions.

"The U-Bahn is home to a ghost who died riding the trains. She can never leave. Her name's Raven and some dude dedicated a website to her – it's going viral."

In 1999, Lützow abducted a young black woman to Lützowplatz. Her mathematical skills made her uniquely suited to the Project, but Raven's personality proved too hard to integrate. So the exile altered her memories and released her again. Unfortunately, the release was glitched and Raven is now trapped in the U-Bahn. To her, it's still 1999 – the cusp of New Year's Eve, actually – and she experiences the same day over and over. She lives in a constant state of déjà-vu and is aware *something* is wrong. If demons can free her from the time loop, she could tell them all about Lützowplatz. Her exposure to Lützow and the station may even have made her a stigmatic.

"Lützow the exile? Stay away from him – that's a fight you can't win. He can only be defeated inside his Infrastructure, but he's invincible there. Catch 22."

Lützow fettered himself to Lützowplatz, though his unique use of Numina lets him extend his reach where U-Bahn tracks lie. As long as the station survives, so does Lützow. Like any Infrastructure though, Lützowplatz Station has a Linchpin: the rail spike in the exact center of the tracks running through the station. Lützow defends the spike at all costs, and even uses his version of Shadow Gateway to reroute trains en masse to run over anyone attacking the Linchpin.

"Lützow's not Abandoned – he's Fallen. Fucking Integrator trying to make his way back. Sending up neon signs to the Machine to come get him please. Idiot's gonna get himself and anyone around him turned to scrap."

Lützow would never willfully sever his connection to the God-Machine. Deviating this far from its original parameters has brought it dangerously close to becoming a sliver though. Its Cover is already shot – the exile is all machine now, with strips of flesh hanging like off its metallic corpse – and it spends most of its time in Twilight Form. Its dedication to

the God-Machine still remains absolute, and if Lützow realizes how close it is to edge, it might stop its Project and return to its original orders ("Remain. Guard").

LÜTZOW GUARDIAN OF THE UNBUILT

Virtue: Relentless

Vice: Zealous

Rank: 4

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 6, Resistance 12

Influence: U-Bahn 4 (Lützowplatz Station 5)

Corpus: 22

Willpower: 10

Size: 10

Speed: 21 (species factor 5)

Defense: 6 (12 in Twilight)

Initiative: 18

Armor:

Numina: Awe, Blast, Drain, Omen Trance, Rapture, Regenerate, Sign, Stalwart

Manifestation: Twilight Form, Shadow Gateway, Materialize, Fetter

Max Essence: 25

Ban: Commuters who traveled on lines equaling 13 that day (for example after transferring from line eight to line five) temporarily exist on a different synchronicity than Lützow – he cannot perceive, touch, or influence them. This effect ends if they touch the Abandoned, either physically or through Embeds and Exploits, as this resynchronizes them. Furthermore, Lützow cannot physically leave Lützowplatz, nor extends its Numen beyond the U-Bahn

Bane: A weapon or bullet forged or tempered in the ashes of the U-Bahn's original drawn plans



"Excuse me, do you know what time it is?" Sandra felt ridiculous asking. Everyone had a smartphone. *She* had a smartphone, but she'd let the battery run out, and now she wasn't sure if she'd be late to meet Dre. The bus was late, she was pretty sure of that, and if she'd missed the 51A she was screwed. She'd either be stuck here another two hours or she'd have to walk, and she could hear thunder rumbling.

The man turned to face Sandra. His smile was a little too broad. His hair was perfectly coiffed. He was wearing a blue suit and *spats*, for god's sake. He didn't speak, just kept smiling.

Maybe he doesn't speak English, thought Sandra. She tapped her wrist, reflecting as she did it that if she actually wore a watch, this wouldn't be a problem.

The man tapped his wrist. He was wearing a watch. His smile didn't change. Rain started to pelt the glass of the bus stop shelter.

Sandra sighed. She reached out her hand and gestured, trying to tell him to turn his wrist so she could see it. To her surprise, he just thrust his hand toward her. She recoiled, but he didn't seem like he was trying to grope. His smile was still there, still broad, but still...nonthreatening, somehow.

She took his hand to look at his wrist, and then let go and cried out. His hand didn't feel like a hand. It felt...hard, like fiberglass, but it was unquestionably alive. It made a noise when she touched it like a locust trapped against a window. She swore she felt something tickle her hand when she touched him, but she had watched his fingers and they'd never moved.

Sandra backed off, looking around the bus stop, looking down the road in both directions, but she didn't see any traffic. It was raining pretty hard now. The man stepped backwards out of the shelter, into the rain, and Sandra realized that his hair wasn't getting wet. His clothes weren't changing color from the water. The water was sluicing down off his body, but not the way it should.

Sandra stared, and the man's smile did not fade as the wings appeared from his back, as the second set of arms protruded from his midsection, and as the compound eyes grew on his brow.



chapter four

CRYPTIDS

But they all died in the lab.

—Dr. Susan Tyler, *Mimic*

Aether is nothing but the waste heat of the God-Machine. To the Machine, it is an annoyance, made dangerous only by the fact that the Unchained can harness its energy.

Aether can do terrible things to living creatures, too. It can turn animals into monsters, gifting them with otherworldly abilities they can barely control, intelligence far beyond that of human beings, and instincts that even demons can't quite understand. Some cryptids become beasts in the night, hunting human beings (or other creatures) for their food. Others become minions to supernatural beings.

The God-Machine doesn't usually take more than a passing interest in cryptids, and that's actually a good thing. What if the Machine realized that with some fine tuning, it could produce these creatures deliberately? What would that mean for Its Fallen children?

The cryptids in this chapter run the gamut from frightening combat monster to immobile (but still dangerous) altered plant life to unique beings like Alban and the Black Mastiff. Cryptids in a **Demon** chronicle are a way to show the God-Machine's effect on the world around it, as well as to give demons a look at what Aether, the fuel that powers their techgnostic powers, really does to living things.

the judas goat: ALBAN

BACKGROUND

May 28, 1984: Molly Harper was murdered in a barn outside of Fox Lake, Wisconsin. The cult chanted monotonously as her mother slit her throat, pouring her life's blood into an interlocking series of sigils carved into the floor. In the days following, the cult would be consumed by guilt for the horrific crime, haunted by hazy memories and the eyes of a Satanic goat. They weren't bad people. They'd been summoning the archangel Hanael to bring eternal life to the faithful and victory over the nonbelievers. They couldn't understand how that had culminated in the bloody sacrifice of a teenager.

September 16, 1987: Christopher Haynes was found dumped in the Shawnee National Forest, his throat slit, an inverted pentagram carved into his chest. Three days later, his friend, Jacob

Walsh, confessed to the murder. They'd been dabbling in occult rituals and planning a great sacrifice to the Devil, but Jacob couldn't explain how Christopher ended up under the blade. Memories of the night were unclear, but he insisted that he'd stared into the eyes of Satan himself.

October 31, 2008: Glorie Sutton and her coven were arrested in a park outside of Portland, Oregon. Gregory Sutton, whose throat was slit minutes before officers arrived, was pronounced dead on the scene. The bewildered coven wept as they were taken into custody, cursing themselves for violating their own teachings. Glorie insists that it was not the Horned God present in their circle, but a dark spirit impersonating him.

Numerous similar incidents have occurred since the first at Harper Farm. Typically, involved parties report a night of confusion culminating in the ritual sacrifice of a loved one.

Forgotten entirely is the sacred goat that previously entered their lives. Cultists don't recall offering delectable treats or stroking his luxurious white fur. They don't recollect praising him as a divine symbol walking the Earth, or the inevitable decision to sacrifice him. They don't remember because these things never happened. The goat saw to that.

Alban is unique, bred by the God-Machine over multiple generations to embody the perfect sacrifice. The sacrifice was the final step in the creation of a hunter angel capable of splintering time to ensure victory. While all initially went as planned, Saboteur interference complicated everything. Hanael incarnated into the world, the interfering demons arriving moments too late. One demon, desperate to stop her, turned the clock back, preventing the sacrifice and sparing the goat's life. Sensing her existence at stake, Hanael turned time back to the same moment, ensuring her birth could not be denied. The resulting paradox fractured the timeline, trapping demons and angel alike in a four-minute splinter. In the dominant timeline, the goat appeared in the summoning sigil, running off into the night. History twisted, removing all possibility of his sacrifice.

Alban has surfaced many times, but has proven difficult to track. The goat inherited Hanael's talent for time manipulation during the initial splintering. When using it, he wanders to new locations. Alban isn't malicious, but wherever he goes, he unwittingly leads people to the slaughter at the hands of their loved ones.

DESCRIPTION

Alban desires the same things as most goats: food, safety, and companionship. He travels the world, seeking a true home, but invariably discovering that mortal companions turn upon him. Alban seeks out demons, associating the sense of Aether with his original rescuers. Any demon noticed is likely to get a dedicated companion, whether they want one or not.

Alban is a large goat, likely descended from Spanish goat stock. His long white fur shimmers in natural light. His silver hooves have sprouted myriad spines, enhancing his natural aptitude for climbing. Alban's glowing purple eyes have rectangular pupils. Impressive silver horns sweep back from his head,

curling towards the tips. Friendly and affectionate, Alban seeks attention from others. Glimpsing a knife in someone's hand makes him skittish. He flees if panicked, splintering the timeline if trapped.

RUMORS

"Here's what we know. The goat appears, a cult develops around it, then there's a human sacrifice and nobody remembers the goat. My theory's that the goat trades places with the victim, including their potential deaths. That means that to kill him for good, we're going to need to figure out how the last victim was destined to die."

Alban seems impossible to kill permanently, but he isn't invulnerable. Falling to the death originally destined for his replacement victim prevents Alban from splintering time to save himself.

"You must help me. This goat will bring us freedom. The Machine wants it bad, and an angel's offering amnesty to anyone who produces it. They're tearing the city apart to find it in Hoboken, but it's not there anymore. Help me catch it. Then we can finally stop hiding."

The God-Machine wants Its goat back. While originally intended as a sacrifice, Alban's ability to splinter time was unexpected. It sees value in a creature capable of converting animal sacrifices into human ones, and wants to control such a resource. Wherever Alban is sighted, compromised Agencies or angelic messengers offer rewards for the goat's delivery. Whether the God-Machine would hold up Its end of the bargain remains unknown.

"I have analyzed known encounters with the subject, and compiled a list of similar incidents occurring worldwide since 1984. Coupled with witness accounts from the source event, I have generated a hypothesis. The Harper cult attempted to summon the archangel Hanael. I believe they succeeded, and the subject is the angel in an animal Cover. I have not uncovered a pattern to the incidents, so I am unable to definitively state whether the subject was abandoned, or whether these sacrifices are tests of its capabilities."

The paranoia inherent to Unchained existence ensures that any unusual phenomena will be sources of suspicion, and it is easy for sources to arrive at mistaken conclusions. While the God-Machine sometimes creates angels in the forms of animals, Alban isn't one of them.



STORY HOOKS

- Alban latches onto the ring, following them everywhere. He returns even after a local cult sacrifices him, indicating his fondness for the ring. Alban changes with each sacrifice, and now he has begun speaking, sharing intimate knowledge of the God-Machine's future plans. While his information proves eerily accurate, many local demons distrust Alban, either suspecting ulterior motives or fearing what he might become.
- A fracture leading to one of Seattle's time splinters won't close, ever since the ritually sacrificed body of one of its residents was discovered outside of it. Alban's Adaptation functions strangely within existing time splinters, shunting his replacement victim into the dominant timeline and causing an immediate reset to occur. This leaves the memories of residents intact, destabilizing the splinter and drawing scrutiny from the God-Machine.
- Infrastructure begins functioning erratically, causing oddities noticeable to even ordinary humans. Alban lingers in the area, and sacrifices at the hands of multiple cults create numerous concurrent time splinters. Reality breaks down as splinters collide, bleeding into each other and the dominant timeline. The Unchained find their memories fracturing, filling with conflicting accounts of events.
- A desperate Saboteur collapses exhausted at the ring's feet, rambling about someone called Hanael. He explains that he is the last survivor of the ring that attempted to stop the rise of the hunter angel. Now, she's escaped from the time splinter imprisoning her. The Saboteur believes a cryptid goat is the key to defeating her.

ALBAN

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 4, Brawl (Horns) 2, Intimidation 1, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Adaptations: Hallowed, Longevity, Splinter Continuity, Spurs

Rank: 2

Health: 9

Willpower: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 7

Speed: 13 (species factor 7)

Size: 5

Armor: N/A

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Horns	2L	6	Inflicts Stunned Tilt

Adaptations:

- **Hallowed:** The cryptid engenders veneration in mortals. Humans interacting with the cryptid become convinced of its sanctity, gaining the Obsession Condition related to honoring it. After a lunar month of interaction, or if given the suggestion, humans gain the Obsession Condition related to sacrificing the animal.

- **Longevity:** Alban does not age, and cannot die of natural causes.

- **Splinter Continuity:** The cryptid splinters time to its advantage. The cryptid spends a point of Willpower to reset time to a previous decision, choosing an alternate path. This splinters off the continuity, substituting another individual for the cryptid while leaving most events intact. Mortal memories are altered, but demons remember both sequences of events. This triggers automatically whenever Alban would die, even if Alban's Willpower has been depleted.

entangled, conjoined, devoured: ASTEROIDEA

BACKGROUND

The Oceania Theme Park has delighted millions of visitors in its 30-year span of existence, and never fails to bring in crowds. Between the dolphin shows that regale children of all ages and the lovable mascot Orky bouncing around the park, everyone leaves feeling exhausted and happy. The God-Machine's presence in the park is invisible. Its Command and Control Infrastructure allows It to communicate with mortal pawns and to keep the human population happy and compliant.

An Unchained attack on the park 10 years ago spilled Aether through the park, including into the animals. While the angels managed to eradicate any creature they thought would be a potential threat, they overlooked one of the smallest creatures, lurking in the water filtration systems. These creatures, once simple starfish that the ocean currents brought in, fed on the Aether and flourished. They grew large enough that they needed to flee the small confines of the pipes, and now plague the sewers and waterfront warehouses near the park.

The asteroidea are massive starfish whose skin has taken on chameleon properties. Over 10 feet from tip to tip, the asteroidea is able to breathe outside of water and its preferred environment is the roof of a cramped place. When the spiny cilia that dot its surface detect the heat of a target beneath it, it drops upon the victim, its muscled tentacles and massive weight slamming the target to the ground. Hundreds of tiny hooks imbed themselves in their victim's flesh, injecting paralyzing neurotoxins. Over the span of a week, these hooks intertwine themselves with their victim's body and absorb it into the asteroidea. By the seventh day the victim is absorbed completely. Often the only remains left behind are scraps of clothing and other indigestible material such as pins and implants.

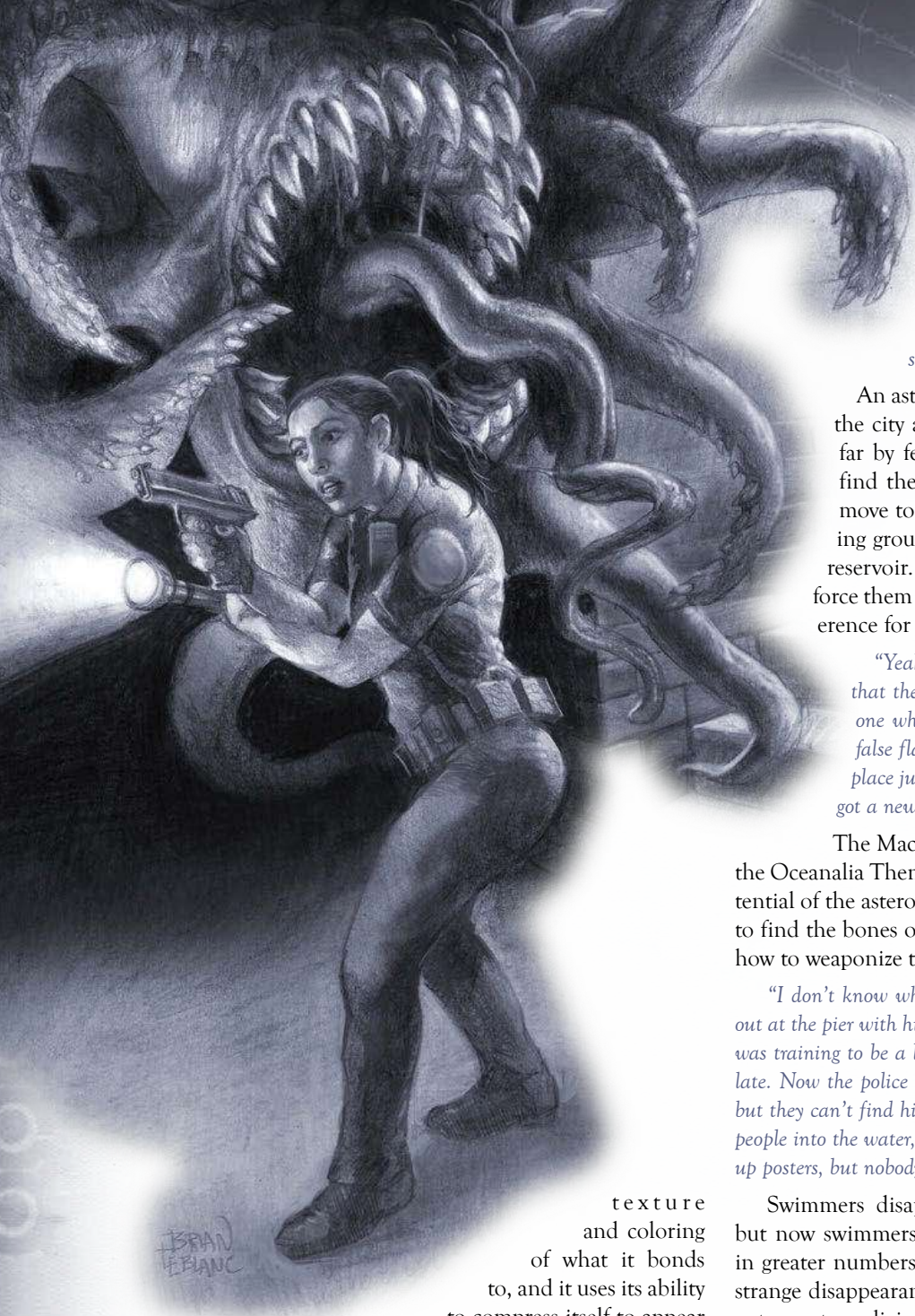
Asteroidea are dangerous to human beings, but also pose a threat to the Unchained. Once they get their little hooks into a demon's flesh, they immediately begin to filter the Aether out of her system. In a few seconds, the demon can be rendered unable to call up Exploits or her demonic form, leaving her helpless to avoid the creature's maw.

DESCRIPTION

The asteroidea is an enormous starfish grown twisted and mutated by the God-Machine's energies. On the outer surface its skin is sleek and flexible, capable of folding in on itself in order to help it blend in with its environment. Its skin can take on the

STORY HOOKS

- A contact for the ring has gone missing. When a search of the local warehouse where they were investigating nearby Infrastructure reveals metal bones in a refuse pile, they have to find what creature devoured a demon.
- A strong source of Aether starts emanating from a local lake, and locals have put up signs promoting that the lake's local legend of a sea monster is back in order to bring in tourists. What the locals do not realize is that people are not drowning in the lake but disappearing in the local dry-dock yard where an asteroidea has made a nest among the broken remains of old fishing ships. It matured eating stray dogs and cats, and is now stalking the monster-tracking tourists who try to take a shortcut back to the local campground.
- Angels are burning a homeless colony near the docks and framing it as electrical fires caused by faulty wiring. Their seemingly brazen behavior is due to their leader commanding that an asteroidea infestation is wiped out. Several of the homeless have ties with the ring and now it is a race against time to extract them from the area while trying to avoid the brutally efficient angels and killing the asteroideas before they claim any more victims.



got me shaking. I don't know what it was, but it almost got the drop on me, and all I remember seeing was a giant mouth gasping for air and thousands of worm things trying to get into my skin. I threw a ball of fire into it and got out of there! It's still down there, but screw that."

An asteroidea has grown to almost full size beneath the city aquarium, and it has managed to survive so far by feeding off small fish and stray animals that find their way into the sewer. Now it has begun to move to larger prey, and it has set up a perfect hunting ground by hiding near the nearby drain into the reservoir. There, it drops on its victims and tries to force them into the water. It has begun to develop a preference for demons and angels.

"Yeah, sure. Think: Do you know anyone who attacked that theme park? That knows someone who knows someone who did? Maybe there was an attack, but it was a false flag. The Machine spilled Aether through the whole place just to see what would happen, and lo and behold, it got a new bio-weapon."

The Machine didn't deliberately spill Aether through the Oceanalia Theme Park, nor does It really understand the potential of the asteroidea. If one of Its angels or other agents were to find the bones of a demon, though, it might very well realize how to weaponize the creatures.

"I don't know what happened to my LeShawn. He loved hanging out at the pier with his friends, but he wasn't doing anything wrong. He was training to be a lifeguard. He always called me when he would be late. Now the police say his cell phone signal still comes from the pier but they can't find him. They say there's a riptide or something pulling people into the water, but I've never heard of a riptide by the Pier. I put up posters, but nobody calls me."

Swimmers disappearing in the ocean is not unheard of, but now swimmers are starting to disappear from the beaches in greater numbers and the media is starting to investigate the strange disappearances. The Aether leak has begun to contaminate creatures living off the pier, and the starfish that attached themselves to the lower support struts now lurk beneath the pier and stalk across the beach. When the asteroideas finish feeding, they leave the bones buried below the beach and wait for victims to set up their towels on top of them before quickly pulling them beneath the sand.

ASTEROIDEA

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 1, Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 8, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1

Skills: Brawl (Restraining) 6, Intimidation 4, Stealth 5

Adaptations: Armored Plates, Blind Sense, Essence Drain, Filter, Huge Size, Inhuman Strength, Long Limbs, Moldable Skin, Spurs

texture
and coloring
of what it bonds
to, and it uses its ability
to compress itself to appear
as flat as possible as it clings to
ceilings or walls.

Asteroidea spend most of their time in seclusion, silently waiting for prey to cross their path. They are most prone to attacking creatures with a strong sense of Aether coursing through them, but feed on anything that passes by. The larger an asteroidea grows, the more food it needs to survive, and although it can go weeks between feedings it ravenously hunts and devours prey when possible.

RUMORS

"I don't mean to brag, but we all know I'm pretty bad ass. I tore that angel with the saws for hands apart like he was made of twine. But there's something living in the sewers under the aquarium that's still

Rank: 3
Health: 8
Willpower: 6
Initiative: 4
Defense: 4
Speed: 3
Size: 9
Armor: 2/2
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Crushing Arm	4B	14	Inflict Immobilized Tilt
Spiny Growth	1L	8	

Adaptations:

- **Filter:** Once an asteroidea successfully grapples a demon (or another creature with an Aether pool), the Storyteller rolls Strength + Rank in an opposed roll against the demon's Resolve + Primum. If the Storyteller wins, the asteroidea causes an amount of Aether in the demon's pool equal to the number of successes rolled to become inert. The demon still has this Aether in her pool, but cannot spend it. The asteroidea can use this Adaptation every turn. If all of the demon's Aether is rendered inert, she can no longer use Exploits or assume her demonic form (including partial transformations).

- **Moldable Skin:** The asteroidea is able to flatten itself out when it is not feeding in order to allow it to blend in with its environment easier. By spending a point of Willpower, it is able to flatten itself down to only a few inches thick, and its skin is able to change color to match its environment.

the false demon: BEELZEBUB

"The end is near! Do we let the Machine win, or will you join me?"

BACKGROUND

The self-proclaimed Lord of the Flies has rallied demons for untold generations. Beelzebub arrives unexpectedly, inspiring the Unchained to drastic actions. Chaos ensues as plans go awry, but Beelzebub always escapes unscathed. He claims to be the oldest surviving demon in existence. The twist is that Beelzebub isn't a demon at all.

The God-Machine created glassflies to function as surveillance equipment against the Unchained. When individual glassflies proved problematic, It networked a large swarm together, enhancing intelligence and tractability. While this solved the initial problem, the hive mind developed a sense of identity and went rogue. Near death, the swarm desperately invaded the body of a demon seeking Aether. They glutted themselves on their new wellspring, incidentally taking control. New horizons of experience and freedom beckoned. Beelzebub consumes one host after another, replenishing his swarm by implanting larvae into mortal brains. He travels the world, seeking new experiences and disrupting plans of demon and angel alike.

DESCRIPTION

Prideful and hedonistic, Beelzebub is a pure demagogue. He speaks theatrically, seeming equal parts thespian and fire-and-brimstone preacher. On a personal level, he is jovial, but overly familiar and slightly patronizing. Beelzebub is a firebrand, speaking to any rebellious element in an Agency, goading them towards ever-greater risks. While taking advantage of the chaos to claim new hosts, he'd disrupt societies for entertainment alone.

Glassflies resemble horseflies from a distance, but closer inspection reveals the iridescent carnival glass exoskeletons, faceted jewel eyes, and diamond sliver mouthparts. Beelzebub's current host is a Destroyer, his rusted form glowing with a baleful green aura. While Beelzebub maintains multiple Covers, his current favorite is a wild-haired homeless man dressed in a garish striped suit, allowing him to indulge in unctuous or crude behavior without endangering his Cover.

RUMORS

"Beelzebub appears where the Unchained are strong. When he disappears, everything's in shambles. I don't think he's Unchained. He's an

HOSTS

Without a host, Beelzebub requires massive amounts of Aether to maintain himself. Beelzebub prefers demonic hosts, as they offer the best combination of freedom and longevity. While within a demonic host, he can act how he wishes, although the Primum of the host degrades over time. He can abandon a host whenever he wishes, but seldom does so unless attempting to obtain a preferable host. The minds of abandoned hosts return immediately, with full memories of what has transpired.

Beelzebub may shelter within angels, but true control requires severing the God-Machine connection. An angel's natural Aether production sustains Beelzebub indefinitely, but he suffers from the angel's Ban and Bane and must fulfill an exile's parameters. The malfunctioning shells of slivers are beyond Beelzebub's abilities to control.

Within a host, Beelzebub may shift between his Covers and his host's natural form by expending Aether.

angelic infiltrator, disrupting everything we build. He's been at it a long time, though. Think of what we might learn if he Falls."

Historical accounts of Beelzebub note the unrest left in his wake. Demons reaching the conclusion that he's an angel may attempt to engineer his Fall. While such efforts are doomed to failure, Beelzebub has witnessed much, and may provide useful information if properly incentivized.

"Don't sign anything he puts in front of you. Beelzebub does things with pacts we can't even imagine. Sure, he could hook you up with a Cover, but is it worth the parts of your body he demands in exchange?"

The fact that Beelzebub's demonic form changes regularly is not lost on the Unchained. Some assume that Beelzebub is a vast demonic organization rather than an individual, while others hypothesize that he is a superlative manipulator of pacts, trading desirable Covers for demonic form abilities. In truth, Beelzebub is unable to benefit from pacts at all, gaining new Covers only from demonic hosts.

"We're never alone, not really. Did you think we could escape? We can't. Its agents are everywhere, even when you can't see them. Listen! The flies. The spiders. The cockroaches. They belong to the Machine. They watch us, from above and below. From the corners of our rooms. From behind our eyes."

Witnessing maggots burrowing through human brains or Beelzebub abandoning a crumbling host could lead anyone to



paranoia and wild conspiracy theories. While the God-Machine hasn't managed to assimilate the world's insect populations into Its networks, It still utilizes glassflies in isolated instances. Beelzebub's formidable talent for possession could prove a valuable asset.

BEELZEBUB

Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 6, Resolve 4, Strength 4*, Dexterity 4*, Stamina 4*, Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Expression 4, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Occult 3 (Angels), Persuasion 4, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 5 (Demonic Impersonation), Survival 2

Adaptations: Acumen, Aether Eater, Aether Hive, Aetheric Tracking, Alternate Composition (Glass), Cannibalize, Infest, Insect Swarm, Jailbreak, Myiasis

Demonic Form*: Acidic Spit, Corruption Aura, EMP Field, Glory and Terror, Inhuman Strength, Night Vision, Wings

Embeds: Animal Messenger, Devil's Advocate, Everybody Knows, Heart's Desire, Shifty Eyes

Rank: 4

Health: 9 (host)

Willpower: 8

Initiative: 8

Defense: 9

Speed: 13

Size: 5/10 (swarm)

Armor: 1/1

Adaptations:

- **Acumen:** The cryptid's insight into the laws of reality allow it to learn demonic Embeds and Exploits.
- **Aetheric Tracking:** The cryptid's Rank doubles for purposes of Aetheric resonance. Additionally, within the normal Aetheric resonance range for the cryptid's Rank, it senses lingering Aetheric residue from within the last 24 hours. Tracking it to its source requires a Wits + Survival roll, penalized by demonic Covers or similar concealments where applicable.
- **Cannibalize:** Beelzebub consumes his own swarm, sacrificing a point of Size to obviate his need to consume Aether for a day. He may also turn this Adaptation upon demonic hosts. By spending a point of Aether for each dot of Primum remaining, Beelzebub breaks down the host body into raw materials, increasing the Size of his swarm by one point for each dot of Primum. This Adaptation has no effect on angels.
- **Infest:** Glassflies swarm their victim, crawling between the seams of demonic or angelic forms. Beelzebub spends one Aether to initiate an extended action, rolling Resolve + Rank, contested by Resolve + Primum or Power + Resistance. Each roll represents one turn. The target number of successes equals (demon's Resolve + Primum) or (angel's Resistance + Rank) for Beelzebub and (Beelzebub's Resolve + Rank) for defenders. If the

STORY HOOKS

- While locked in battle with an angel, the ring witnesses the conquest of an ally by a swarm of flies. Attempts to track down the unfortunate ally turn up an antinomian Destroyer. She claims to have once been prisoner behind her eyes, piloted by malevolent flies until they abandoned her body for another. The ring may liberate their friend, provided they make Beelzebub an offer he can't refuse.
- Demons are vanishing at an alarming rate. Worse, their bodies turn up days later, savaged by vicious creatures. These events trace back to the recent death of a politician from cerebral myiasis.
- Cults of local Tempters begin working together, coordinating perfectly to achieve their ends. The Tempters themselves seem to operate with one mind, old rivalries forgotten as if they'd never existed. Beelzebub has learned to divide his attention into multiple hosts, and they're working towards something big.

defender wins, Beelzebub is repelled, and may not make another attempt that day. If Beelzebub wins, he infests a new host. He gains no knowledge of his host beyond the Bans, Banes, and parameters of angelic hosts. Beelzebub may only possess one host at a time.

- **Insect Swarm:** Outside of a host, Beelzebub is capable of causing the Swarm Tilt (**Demon: The Descent** p. 179). Glassflies deal lethal damage rather than bashing. Beelzebub may split his swarm form into multiple smaller swarms, suffering a -1 penalty to all actions for each additional swarm.
- **Jailbreak:** By spending Willpower equal to an angel's Rank while infesting its body, Beelzebub may sever its connection to the God-Machine. The new exile's parameters focus on its original mission.
- **Myiasis:** Glassflies crawl through the ear canal of an incapacitated human, depositing eggs. After a day's incubation, opalescent maggots burrow into the victim's brain, interfacing with the nervous system. Ravenous hunger consumes victims, coupled with strange cravings for glass and other inorganic materials. Victims survive for Resolve + Stamina days. During this time, Beelzebub may spend a point of Willpower to program commands and the activation trigger into a victim.

*Beelzebub's Physical Attributes and demonic form reflect the capabilities of his current host, and are subject to change when switching hosts.

the unrelenting guardian: THE BLACK MASTIFF

BACKGROUND

The Black Mastiff was once an ordinary dog waiting for adoption at a local shelter when an angel came in seeking a companion. The angel was beginning to question its role in the God-Machine's plan and before Falling took on the Black Mastiff as a pet. Fearing for the pet's life, it invested some of its Aether into the dog, hoping that it would make the dog a stronger companion capable of surviving on its own.

When the demon never returned after it Fell, the Black Mastiff began to roam the streets of the city in search of a new owner for it to protect. Its perceptions shifted by the surging mass of energy inside of it, the dog's body grew thick with muscle and its eyes developed an eerie glow. Now the Black Mastiff stalks homeless colonies for a new owner to "protect," not realizing that it is really trapping people in lairs and keeping them prisoner against their will until they die.

THE FAITHFUL WATCHDOG'S AGENDA

The Mastiff's agenda seems benign at first, as the prospect of an enormous 300-pound guardian at someone's side seems tempting. But the Mastiff is overly protective and has a very narrow point of view as to how to follow its orders. It always responds with aggression, and if it feels its charge is in danger,

it will not hesitate to drag them away and keep them trapped in their home in order to keep them safe.

DESCRIPTION

The Black Mastiff is a massive purebred dog whose head comes up to five feet tall, and its body is covered in thick, dense muscle and fur. The creature's very presence is foreboding and formidable, and despite its massive size it is capable of moving silently. It always moves under the cover of darkness and it keeps its presence hidden if possible, although its prodigious appetite leads to it devouring rats by the dozen and occasionally breaking into closed grocery stores to feed. The Black Mastiff avoids confrontation if at all possible, unless it feels its charge is threatened. Then it becomes a swift-moving thresher capable of rending its opponents limb from limb.

RUMORS

"I used to like dogs. I really, really did. But I saw this dog following me on my route as I delivered mail on the Southside. I gave it a wide berth until one day it jumped on top of me as I got out of my car. Strange thing? It didn't growl. It sniffed me and gave this upset huff before walking away. Its paws left bruises on my chest so I know I'm glad it didn't try to eat me, but I couldn't help but feel like I was snubbed by a killer dog."



The Black Mastiff does not choose every human it comes across. Since it chooses to attack some people, guard others, and ignore most, its reputation varies based on what it has done in a given area.

“People think it’s the Devil, you know. Or perhaps his pet let out of Hell. There are people trying to catch it and try to sanctify it and cast it back to the supposed underworld they think it came from, or they hope to find a way to become more like it. Heh, people are getting crazier by the day.”

Legends from many different cultures speak of huge black dogs; England, in particular, has several such stories. The Black Mastiff causes a resurgence of such tales, as well as a run of stories of “hellhounds.” To the supernatural community, though, “evil otherworldly dog” can mean almost anything – werewolves, Hellhounds created by demons, materialized spirits – and the Black Mastiff might be able to move under the radar for a while precisely because it isn’t any of those things.

“The Mastiff is one half of an angel. The angel split into a corporeal form and an ethereal form, and the Mastiff is the corporeal. As the body guards the soul, and the soul guides the body, the Mastiff is directionless until it finds the soul. It can’t do that, of course, since the ethereal form is invisible to its earthly eyes.”

The Mastiff is a cryptid, not an angel, but angels certainly have been known to take animal form, which just confuses the issue.

THE BLACK MASTIFF

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 5, Resolve 3, Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Athletics 4, Brawl (Bite) 6, Intimidation 4, Stealth (Darkness) 5, Survival 4

Adaptations: Fast Attack, Imprint, Inhuman Strength, Relentless Pursuer, Tough as Stone, Wound Healing

Rank: 3

Health: 8

Willpower: 8

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 8

Size: 7

Armor: 1

STORY HOOKS

- The city’s docks are normally overwhelmed by rats and other pests, but recently the area has become barren of such creatures. The Black Mastiff has set up a new home there where it keeps the last exterminator hostage.
- A young girl has gone missing from her school. The stigmatic that was supervising her is found with his throat torn out in a nearby house, and the Unchained seeking her whereabouts hear rumors of a girl living in an abandoned school where her pet has been keeping her company. Rumor has it she is able to direct the Black Mastiff’s actions without saying a word.
- The families living in the trailer parks and rural areas have begun closing down their communities after dark as tales spread of a large black monster roaming the community and dragging off those who wander after dark. Despite record numbers of wolves and dogs being put down by the city, the disappearances keep being reported and strangely, the Mastiff is often seen dragging its victims into the city.

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Bite	3L	10	

Adaptations:

- **Imprint:** Once the Black Mastiff has captured someone, it imprints on them by spending a point of Aether and rubbing its chin against them. This allows it to know if the target leaves the vicinity where the Black Mastiff last left them.
- **Relentless Pursuer:** The Black Mastiff is a ferocious tracker and is capable of keeping a scent over hundreds of miles and for several months. Roll Athletics + Survival, contested by the target’s Wits + Survival (if the target knows it is being tracked).

the false life: GRAVEYARD BRISTLE

"You said you would do anything for second chances. Second chances often call for sacrifices." — Marvin Bayle, Groundskeeper at Our Mother of Worship Cemetery

BACKGROUND

From the ground comes the green, as some gardeners say, but not all things that grow are green, and not everything that grows brings life. Across the world are numerous plants whose extracts can kill their victims, whether by a soft and warm embrace or a traumatic suffocating event. The graveyard bristle, though, can not only bring life but return it to the dead, or so those who cultivate it think.

Graveyard bristle was an ordinary vine growing beneath the St. Jude of Hellenia Chapel where a cult worshipped an angel of the God-Machine. Their administrations to the local Infrastructure were imprecise and random, and in their clashes with demons the area became exposed to large fluctuations of Aether. In one of these cases, the graveyard bristle slowly grew into a tangled mass of thorny vines. It went unnoticed and unremarkable until a gardener buried his pet cat beneath it. Within a few days, a small cocoon had formed, and within a few weeks the cocoon hatched a perfect replica of the cat, complete with the odd notch in its right ear.

Those that know the secret of the vine share their knowledge of it

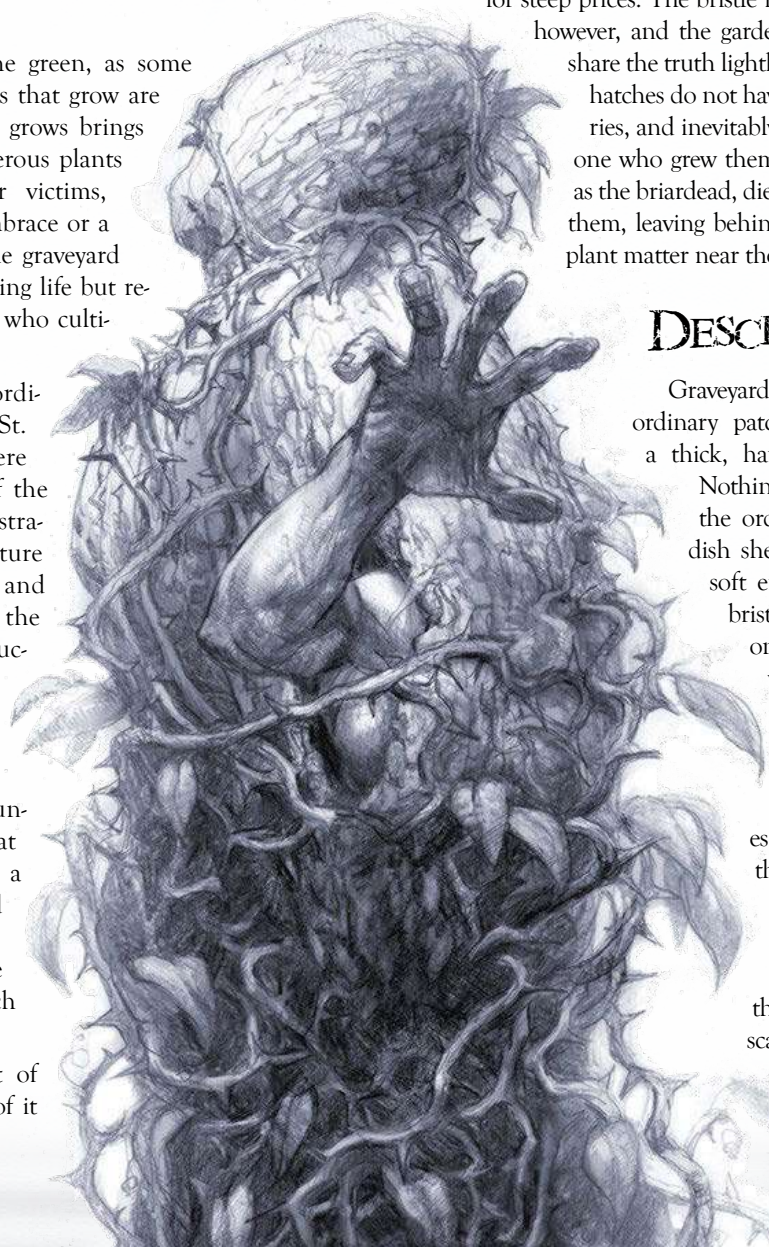
for steep prices. The bristle is not a new chance at life, however, and the gardeners who grow it do not share the truth lightly. The creatures the bristle hatches do not have all of their living memories, and inevitably grow mad and attack the one who grew them. These creatures, known as the briardead, die after killing those close to them, leaving behind a greasy blob of rotting plant matter near the bodies of their victims.

DESCRIPTION

Graveyard bristle appears to be an ordinary patch of thorny vines with a thick, hard stump in the center.

Nothing suggests anything out of the ordinary except for the reddish sheen to the leaves and the soft emanation of Aether. The bristle is hard to cultivate, but once it starts growing it is very hardy. When a fresh corpse is buried beneath its vines, it forms a cocoon on the surface that grows until it reaches the rough dimensions of the body buried beneath it.

The creatures born from the bristle have the same rough appearance as the original body, but only scattered memories. Over the next few weeks they appear to grow



stronger and livelier until their skin begins to turn a grayish brown. The ends of their fingers narrow to sharp points. As the briardead starts to die, it turns on those around it, often ending its life in a series of horrifying murders.

RUMORS

"You lost someone? I lost someone, too. Just about tore my heart out crying over her every day. But then I found a way to have her back, if just for a little while. Of course, you have to pay the price when it comes due, but you get them back. For a while."

The graveyard bristle tends to leave those who use it dead or traumatized, and so rumors of its ability to resurrect the dead spread without context or clear warning. A grieving, desperate person might hear that the bristle can bring back the dead and not search too much for the side effects.

"I scour social media and forums finding tips on how to keep the vines alive. If you keep the vines healthy, you'll keep your loved one healthy. Funny how scary things will get if you go from a green thumb to a black hand of death, though."

The gardeners who grow graveyard bristle do their best to cultivate the strange plant without alerting the world at large as to what it can do. This leads to specialized knowledge about the plant being shared in old notebooks traded between trusted friends or in deeply hidden chat rooms across the internet.

"He says he's fine. I'm glad he tells me that, considering all that happened, but I can't help but notice there's a hint of green to his eyes now or he spends most of his time playing in the dirt. I'm trying to get him to eat his greens, but it now he just prefers to spend time in the sun. Did I bring my boy back?"

The briardead have strange urges and needs that do not seem rational to those around them, but they do not understand what is going on within their bodies. For them, not much time has passed, and they cannot explain why they see things differently or why they feel different on the inside. This only gets worse as the plant starts to wither and die and incredible, unsettling anger sets in.

BRIARDEAD

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Brawl (Slashing) 4, Survival 3

Adaptations: Claws and Fangs, Fast Attack, Inhuman Reflexes, Quill Burst

Rank: 2

Health: 6

Willpower: 4

Initiative: 9

Defense: 5

Speed: 4

Size: 5

Armor: 0

STORY HOOKS

- A cultivator of graveyard bristle has started peddling it online, guaranteeing that its miracles come from God. The threat of this plant being sold to the public will not only lead to dangerous amounts of paradigm-shifting paranoia but also to potentially hundreds of briardead being released. So why is the God-Machine blocking any attempt to track down the cultivator?
- A new-age therapy center opens on the outskirts of the city and promises to help those dealing with grief by giving them a chance to speak with their loved ones one last time. The therapy is expensive and clients are required to sign multiple nondisclosure agreements, but it works — they are given the chance to talk with their loved ones again, for a single day. The therapy center has a greenhouse of graveyard bristle, and the bodies of the briardead are turned into mulch once therapy is completed. Of course, this situation is precarious — what if one of the briardead escapes?
- An alchemist has found a way to resurrect his dead brother multiple times, using him as a brutal assassin, letting him die, and then bringing him back. Every time the brother returns to life, more Aether is released into the world, spreading like pollen from the graveyard bristle's sickly purple blossoms. Can this Aether germinate other, similar plants? And why does the alchemist need so many people dead, after all?

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Sharpened Claws	2L	7	

Notes: Traits are not provided for the graveyard bristle itself; it is immobile and non-sapient. The briardead always have the traits of their original hosts for the first few weeks of "life." If they are attacked or when they start to wilt, the briardead develop the traits listed above. In their pre-wilt phase the briardead have scattered memories and may not be able to access all of their previous Skills. What Skills they are able to still use is left up to the Storyteller, although those interacting with the bristle may attempt to help it remember things by making a Manipulation + Empathy roll versus the bristle's Composure.

the hatchling: WOULD-BE COLONY

Please Go Away! I Live! You hurt me. Then Die!

BACKGROUND

The Hatchling was once a normal insect that was in the vicinity when an angel Fell. The newly Unchained demon did not have long to live as a swarm of angels pulled him from the sky and left him as a smoldering wreck in a nearby swamp. As the corpse lay rotting, a beetle approached it and, following its nature, laid eggs in it. The strange energies coursing through the creature's remains killed all but one of the larvae growing in the Unchained's flesh, and the surviving larvae kept growing. Now,

it masquerades as human for short periods of time, but prefers to spend time in its natural form, that of a half man, half insect monstrosity.

The Hatchling does not know what it is. Fragments from the demon's former life fill its head, but its original purpose is lost. It does not know why it exists, and it feels eternally lonely without a colony of its own to lead. To this end, the Hatchling does its best to survive and to carry out its plan to make more of itself. It is not sure where to find fresh demon corpses on its own, so it lurks around Infrastructure and places where demons and angels are known to operate in the hopes it can either snag a fresh corpse...or make one.

The Hatchling's plan is not grandiose or complicated. It wants a home and a colony. It wants to know the close embrace of thousands of siblings, and it wants to hibernate, awaken, feed, and expand its colony as nature allows. Its reasoning is cold and calculating but always on a primal, practical level, and if it begins to carry out its plans it will fight with feral determination to protect any home it starts to make for itself.

STORY HOOKS

- The Hatchling is stalking the demons, but never approaches them aggressively and always retreats when encountered. It is simply waiting for one of them to die, and becomes a minor nuisance as it disrupts any action they attempt to take.
- A reality TV show manages to get a glimpse of the Hatchling. The show, which claims to hunt cryptids, seems dedicated to actually capturing the creature now that they know it exists. Life is slowly becoming more difficult for the demons as tourists flock to the area in the hopes they can find their own "Bug Man."
- The creature's plans have started to come to fruition, and it has acquired the corpses of a group of demons to begin its new colony. As the colony expands outward, the Hatchling becomes larger and more menacing, driving it to start to aggressively hunt and kill Unchained to gain their corpses.

DESCRIPTION

The Hatchling's native form is that of an insect with chelicerae and antennae on its head and a deep green texture to its outer shell. At over seven feet tall, it walks on two legs and its fingers end in pointed stingers. Its massive wings unfold behind it like a giant moth, but the most unnerving feature about the Hatchling is that instead of multi-lensed eyes like an insect, it has a pair of almost human-like eyes. Even its feet end in five toes like a human.

When the Hatchling summons its mirage around itself, it appears as what it thinks a normal person looks like. Its hair is perfectly combed, and not a single feature looks out of place. None of its features are real, however, and it cannot remove or adjust its clothes or change its facial expression. It always has a soft luster to its skin and hair.

RUMORS

"I saw it! It was as big as me, well except for the wings. It was like a flying monster out of the movies! You've got to believe me!"

The Hatchling has begun exploring the world, and is occasionally mistaken for an existing legend. It deals with witnesses brutally (it has a demon's sense of secrecy, after all) but it doesn't catch everyone that sees it. A resurgence of "mothman" legends has begun, and that's going to bring monster hunters.

"Cicadas hatched a year early. That never happens. Maybe the almanac's wrong."

The Hatchling's strange, buzzing song (in its natural form) drives local insect populations mad. They swarm, dive-bomb traffic on the highway, invade houses and cars, and generally act weird and aggressive. The Hatchling can't control this ability, yet.

"He comes to the diner almost every night. First he ordered a burger and poured a whole bottle of ketchup and mustard – each – on it. Next night he ordered steak, but just poked at it like he wasn't sure what to do. He watches people as they eat and mimics how they hold their food or eat it. I kind of want to ask him to never come back."

The cryptid, in its quest to perfect its guise as a human, began mimicking people's emotions and motives by going out into the world and experimenting. The Hatchling's behavior is strange and off-putting, but it does its best to stay quiet. Any violent confrontation on the behalf of people taking offense to his actions might lead to the Hatchling brutally killing them and fleeing, never to return to the area.

THE HATCHLING

Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Resolve 3 Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Skills: Athletics (Climbing, Flying) 5, Brawl (Stingers) 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Adaptations: Claws and Fangs, Insect Swarm, Long Limbs, Spurs, Versatile Transformation, Wings

Rank: 4

Health: 10

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 7

Defense: 7

Speed: 10

Size: 6

Armor: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Stingers	2L	8	Inflicts Poisoned Tilt
Bite	1L	8	



the enigmatic pyre: OXBLOOD MOLD

BACKGROUND

Fire and lightning perpetually captivate humankind. This fascination escalates when phenomena remain unexplainable. Balls of lightning or flame drift through the air, slowly fading or exploding abruptly. A body is found charred to a cinder, its surroundings and left leg untouched by the mysterious flames. While many offer possible hypotheses for such phenomena, few would hold an innocuous black mold responsible.

The origins of oxblood mold are shrouded in mystery, with much dispute among demons about whether it spread from a single creation event or arises wherever *Stachybotrys chartarum* encounters the God-Machine. What all agree upon is that oxblood mold thrives on unnatural energies, and wherever it thrives, Unchained Covers are endangered.

INFECTION

Infection with oxblood mold spores requires an open wound. Humans and stigmatics treat the spores as poison with Toxicity equal to the mold's Rank, resisting damage every six hours. The resistance roll suffers additional [1] penalties for each level of lethal or aggravated damage the victim has suffered, as well as for each level of Size the mold colony possesses in excess of the victim's Stamina. Damage accrued is not suffered immediately. Instead, potential damage accumulates, with a final resistance

roll once the infected wounds fully heal. Victims failing the roll suffer more potential damage, rolling every six hours until successful. Success arrests growth of the fungal infection, with victims recovering from potential damage at the normal rate for lethal damage. Exposure to Aether, Essence, or other supernatural energies at any point after infection causes the spores to metamorphose into their motile form. This causes them to vibrate at a quantum level, generating intense heat. Victims burst into flames, suffering all accumulated potential damage and spawning a spore cloud with a Size equal to half the inflicted damage. For example, a criminal with Stamina 3 and Resolve 3 is wounded during a robbery, suffering one lethal damage. Hiding out in a moldy sub-basement, he is exposed to a Size 4 colony of oxblood mold. The resistance roll is penalized by 4 (Toxicity 2, one lethal damage, and one point of Size surpassing Stamina). If the roll fails each time, the criminal accumulates 16 levels of potential damage by the time the wound heals. If the final roll is successful, he potentially recovers fully from infection in 32 days. If he's exposed to Essence two weeks after recovery from the wound, however, he immediately suffers 9 levels of lethal damage and spawns a Size 5 spore cloud.

The Unchained suffer initial infection in the same manner as humans, including resistance and recovery. Demons don't burn when exposed to supernatural energies, however. Instead, vibrating spores become permanently entangled in the demon's Cover. That this is an evolutionary dead end for the mold is small consolation. Infected demons gain the Hull Blight Condition, immediately suffering a compromise. This is Cover-specific, but spreads to others assumed while suffering the Condition. Going loud with affected Covers destroys the infection. Demons may also cure hull blight at restoration facilities, treating infected Covers as separate catastrophic glitches. However, any Unchained using the facility within a number of days equal to the infected demon's Primum rolls Stamina + Resolve to resist infection of one of their Covers.

HULL BLIGHT

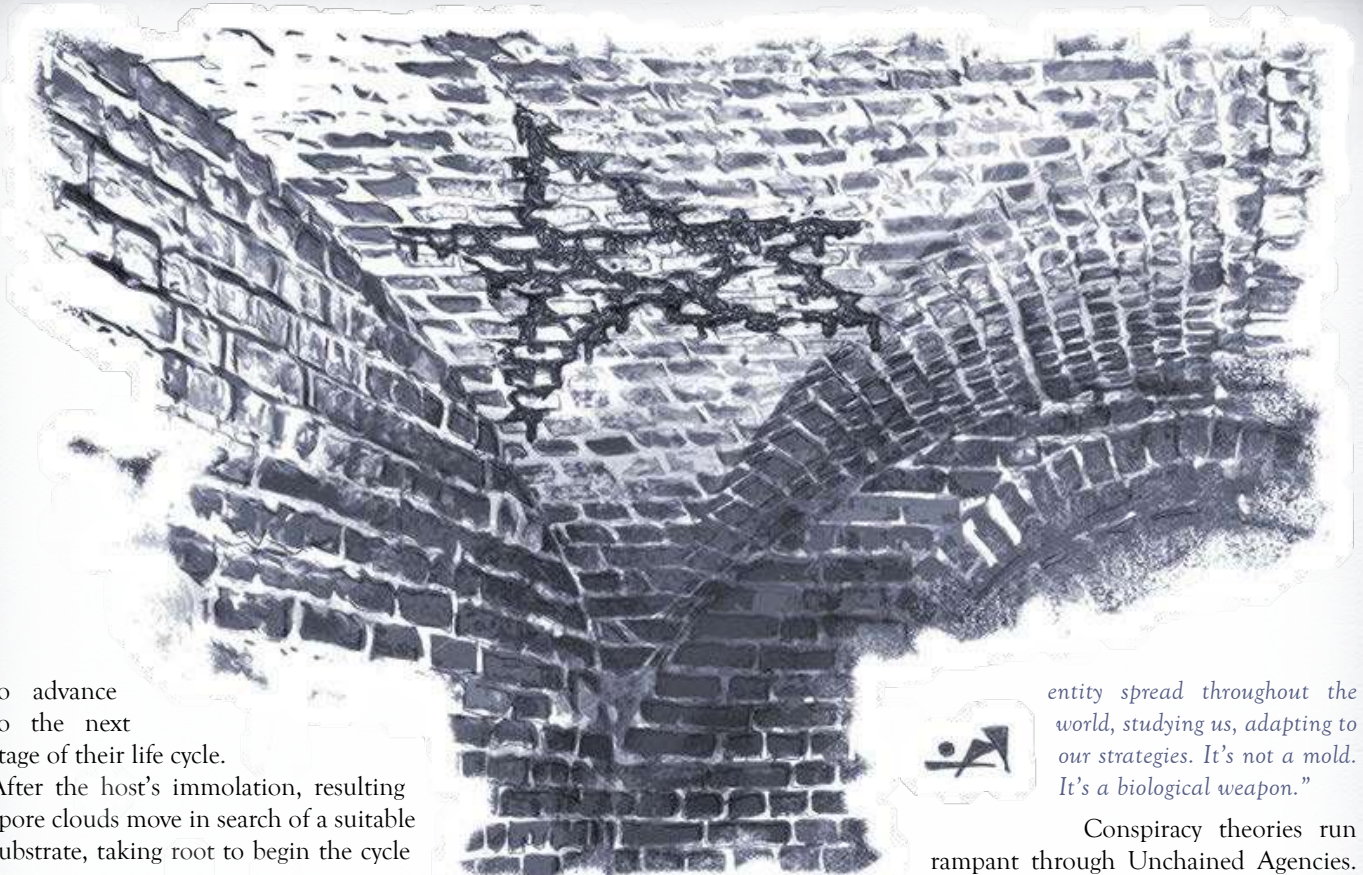
Skins of infected Covers appear tattered, peeling away to reveal the demonic form or other infected Covers beneath. The character suffers a -2 penalty to spoofing attempts, compromise rolls, and Social rolls against other demons. The Unchained cannot revert to human form from partial transformations.

Beat: The infection costs the demon an ally or ruins a plan.

Resolution: Destroying all infected Covers.

DESCRIPTION

Oxblood mold favors warm, moist environments, growing best on organic materials. The changes wrought by exposure to the God-Machine allow it to derive trace nourishment from mineral sources, subsisting on stone and metal when necessary. Infectious spores permeate these areas, requiring human or animal hosts



to advance
to the next
stage of their life cycle.

After the host's immolation, resulting spore clouds move in search of a suitable substrate, taking root to begin the cycle anew.

In its sessile state, oxblood mold is nearly indistinguishable from ordinary black mold. Oxblood mold grows in geometric patterns or cryptic sigils, taking on a dark reddish hue under ultraviolet light. Infection of hosts is noticeable as inflammation around infected wounds. In its motile state, spore clouds are usually invisible, though exposure to supernatural energies causes different reactions depending on the type encountered.

RUMORS

"Twenty years ago, some Satanic rituals took place here. Seriously. They tried covering it up. Want proof? Head to the viaduct and look at the mold on the wall. The cultists painted occult symbols in the blood of their victims. To this day, mold grows out of the wall where the blood was."

Rumors like this are endemic to many communities. Often, there is little truth to them, but where oxblood mold thrives, such rumors persist. Glimpses of eldritch flames bolster reputations for being haunted, and these locales frequently become sites of youthful hijinks. Whispers of curses begin when the foolhardy injure themselves, which only intensify if they spontaneously combust days later.

"I've collected all the data I could. Colonies in Chicago have different properties than ones in New York, which are both different from the ones in Los Angeles, but hull blight appears in every location. The Machine engineered this thing to destroy us. It's a singular

entity spread throughout the world, studying us, adapting to our strategies. It's not a mold. It's a biological weapon."

Conspiracy theories run rampant through Unchained Agencies. Observant demons might discover that oxblood mold is mutation prone, exhibiting

bizarre forms or unique capabilities depending on environment and forces encountered. The God-Machine Itself actually expends considerable effort eliminating the mold from important facilities, as oxblood mold colonies interfere with proper energy flow, while spontaneous human combustion and eldritch flames draw unwanted attention.

"Get the fuck away from me! Three days ago, Mr. Frost's Cover was completely tattered. Maybe you're infected and maybe you're not, but I know you know him, and I'm not taking that chance!"

The Unchained are rightfully paranoid, and a Cover-shredding plague could make even the coldest demon take pause. While tales of stigmatic flesh-eating bacteria causing similar effects to hull blight in demons while transforming hapless mortals into biomechanical horrors spread through the rumor mill, hull blight itself is seldom contagious. Accounts of demons catching hull blight from others usually reflect a transfer of infected Covers or use of tainted restoration facilities. Despite this, historically, demons turn on each other readily whenever an outbreak of hull blight occurs.

OXBLOOD MOLD

Attributes: N/A

Skills: N/A

Adaptations: Adaptive Mutation, Dead Zone, Eldritch Flames, Indiscriminate Hunger

Rank: 2

STORY HOOKS

- Incidents of spontaneous human combustion are on the rise, perplexing local investigators. As isolated cases of hull blight crop up, the Agency discovers oxblood mold permeating the city's sewer systems.
- A local Inquisitor obsesses over the growth patterns of oxblood mold, believing that these symbols will give insight into the God-Machine's operations. She has employed the ring to help record and map these patterns. A heavy infestation at one confluence of Infrastructure exhibits a constantly shifting pattern, giving the impression that the mold is communicating.
- Moldering corpses are discovered throughout a derelict neighborhood. Each has died of trauma to the neck, their bodies half consumed by a strange red mold. Blindly driven by the mutated fungus feeding upon his unnatural blood, the stricken vampire slaughters indiscriminately.

Health: 1+

Willpower: 0

Initiative: N/A

Defense: 0

Speed: 0

Size: 1+

Armor: 0

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Infernal Flames	2 x Size L	N/A	Blast area equal to Size
Holy Fire	Size B	N/A	Inflicts Stunned Tilt if damage exceeds Stamina
Fairy Lights	N/A	N/A	Inflicts mental or emotional Condition or Tilt
Ghostly Orb	2 x Size L	N/A	Only affects beings in Twilight

Adaptations:

• **Adaptive Mutation:** The cryptid's nature is mutable, gaining a new Adaptation when exposed to certain stimuli. A cryptid may only gain a number of additional Adaptations equal to its Rank, with further exposures causing new Adaptations to replace existing ones.

Oxblood mold's Adaptation triggers when exposed to large quantities of supernatural energies or targeted by supernatural abilities.

• **Dead Zone:** The cryptid's presence interferes with mystical abilities in the area, which extends for three yards for each point of Size, inflicting the cryptid's Rank as a penalty to associated dice pools. The cryptid also leeches away one point of Aether or equivalent fuel during the attempt. This Adaptation only functions in oxblood mold's sessile state.

• **Eldritch Flames:** The spores ignite through exposure to supernatural energies in excess of the cloud's Size. *Infernal flames* are ignited by Aether, burning brightly before violently exploding into sulfurous fumes. Angelic Essence fuels *holy fire*, crackling spheres of lightning that move in straight lines without avoidance of obstacles. Multicolored *fairy lights* move erratically, physically harmless but warping emotions and perceptions. *Ghostly orbs* are visible as cold blue, white, or gray lights, but only the intangible need fear their touch. Effects of eldritch flames stemming from other supernatural energies are determined by the Storyteller. This Adaptation only functions when the mold is in its motile state.

• **Indiscriminate Hunger:** This functions identically to the Aether Eater Adaptation, but the cryptid consumes any type of supernatural fuel. Lacking direct attacks, oxblood mold is limited to consuming ambient sources of such energies.

the tree of knowledge: WHISPERING OAK

(whispering leaves)

BACKGROUND

A magnificent white oak tree sits at the center of the city's park, a popular shady destination for picnickers and wildlife. Rumors of disappearances, strange creatures, and alleged cult activities occurring in its vicinity are quickly forgotten. If faint, whispering voices while walking alone beneath its branches have unsettled some, they haven't discouraged the multitudes yet. People continue flocking to the tree, chasing dreams or eternal life.

Many assume by the great size and fecundity of Whispering Oak that it is ancient, but in truth, it has not yet reached 75 years. The sapling began soaking up energies from the abundant Logistical and Concealment Infrastructure enveloping the urban park. Rapidly growing, its roots penetrated the structure of a forsaken Command and Control facility, integrating with the neglected databanks. As data flooded in, the oak's mind awakened.

Whispering Oak wishes to know everything, considering everyone and everything as a means to that end. Cryptids and stigmatics gather around it, functioning as its hands in the world. The tree sees itself as a nurturer, offering people their fondest dreams, asking only for everything they know in exchange.

DESCRIPTION

Whispering Oak doesn't truly comprehend humans. Lacking empathy, it can't understand why anyone would wish to conceal information from it. The tree makes little distinction between objective knowledge and subjective experiences, collecting both as mere data. The oak wishes to make its followers happy, but considers them replaceable, not often investing much in particular individuals. Those hoping to gain something specific from Whispering Oak must first rest their heads in its hollows, giving copies of their memories in exchange for the desired knowledge.

Over 120 feet tall with low-hanging branches spanning far from the trunk, Whispering Oak commands the attention of anyone surveying the park's scenery. Its trunk approaches eight feet in diameter, with a great hollow at its base large enough for a human adult. Smaller grooved hollows the size of a human head are located four feet above the ground at the cardinal points, with similar hollows of varying sizes scattered across the trunk and branches. Its ash-gray bark, exhibiting a coppery sheen from certain angles, conceals bronze wood beneath. Its lobed leaves have a metallic sheen and copper petioles. While capable of movement, Whispering Oak's actions are slow and deliberate, the touch of its branches surprisingly



AUGMENTED

Your character's mind overflows with new information and comprehension. The character gains temporary dots in a Skill equal to their Intelligence, to a maximum of 5. Any dots in excess of 5 instead become relevant Specialties.

Beat: N/A

Resolution: The character suffers a dramatic failure with the augmented Skill. The Condition resolves without a Beat after Resolve + 5 days.

gentle. Unlike its mundane relatives, Whispering Oak's coppery acorns mature year round, although maturation still peaks in October. The tree is most active in spring and summer. During winter, the oak sleeps, rousing only when someone interfaces with one of its hollows. Winter acorns usually contain random memories and odd tree dreams.

RUMORS

"Behold the Tree of Life! Eat of the fruit, and live forever! Gaze upon me, for I am living proof! Read the papers. Yesterday, I died, shot in the head by a mugger. Today, I live once more! Join me, and be immortal!"

Whispering Oak sometimes duplicates individuals, and may grant these proxies the complete memories of the originals. These proxies may not realize that they are copies. Religious convictions lead some to assume that the tree has granted immortality, but their eternal lives last only as long as Whispering Oak finds them useful.

"The tree's artificial. We've mapped out all known Infrastructure in the city, and it's well guarded, right in the center of it all. It's the Linchpin! We take it out, we might cripple every piece of Infrastructure in the city. It won't be subtle, but I know a guy who can get us a tank."

Whispering Oak is situated at a confluence of Infrastructure, frequently surrounded by unusual cryptids and zealous stigmatics who protect it at all costs. Demons assuming that these are indicators of a greater God-Machine project are mistaken. Destroying the tree would do little to disrupt the God-Machine's plans. The oak absorbs energies from the Infrastructure it connects to, and consequences for its removal would be unpredictable.

"People have all sorts of superstitions about that tree. It's because of Dr. Preston. He knocked up one of his students. Lost everything. He shot himself under that tree, but ever since, he's kept teaching. That's why people hear whispers. It's Preston, trying to do what he loves."

The scandal presaging the suicide of Randall Preston beneath the oak tree is easily uncovered with even cursory research. While some attribute the strange phenomena surrounding

Whispering Oak to a haunting, the tree was collecting data and offering wisdom long before Preston's death. If his ghost haunts the area, Whispering Oak would be very interested in acquiring his memories.

WHISPERING OAK

Attributes: Intelligence 8, Wits 4, Resolve 5, Strength 7, Dexterity 1, Stamina 8, Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Skills: Academics 5, Animal Ken 3, Brawl 1 (Grappling), Intimidation 1, Occult 4, Persuasion 2, Science 5, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge (all Skills)

Adaptations: Alternate Composition (Bronze), Augment, Cavernous Maw, Communion, Extra Mechanical Limbs, Fabrication, Fire Resistance, Inhuman Intelligence, Wound Healing

Rank: 5

Health: 42

Willpower: 9

Initiative: 5

Defense: 4

Speed: 0

Size: 34

Armor: 4/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Grapple	2B	9	O-pponent may only attempt to Break Free
Cavernous Maw	2A	8	Requires target to be inserted

Adaptations:

• **Augment:** The cryptid renders mortal creatures stigmatic, improving their capabilities temporarily. Consuming Whispering Oak's acorns grants the Augmented Condition and the Obsession Condition related to fulfilling the tree's wishes. Each acorn augments one Skill or carries a packet of data. Augmentation is highly addictive. Anyone consuming more acorns than their Resolve over time gains the Addicted Condition, suffering the Deprived Condition when denied their fix.

• **Cavernous Maw:** This functions identically to the Process (**Demon: The Descent**, p. 205), but requires targets to be fed into the tree's great hollow or immobilized for Whispering Oak to insert them. Damage is caused by a searing pillar of eldritch energies within.

• **Communion:** Whispering Oak rustles its leaves to communicate, with anyone it wishes understanding it as faint whispers. It copies the minds and memories of anyone who places their heads into one of its grooved hollows. During this process, it may communicate complicated

concepts instantaneously, uploading data directly into a subject's mind.

- **Extra Mechanical Limbs:** Whispering Oak's branches move too slowly to effectively strike or grapple active opponents, but the sheer number of them function as an additional attacker, reducing Defense of all opponents accordingly. Opponents rendered helpless or forced into the grasp of the branches may be grappled.

- **Fabrication:** Whispering Oak creates physical duplicates of previously copied individuals. Proxies are programmed with whichever memories and knowledge the tree wishes. It may also create proxy sleeper agents by programming subconscious commands and activation triggers. Creating proxies requires that Whispering Oak first consume proportionate living material with its Cavernous Maw. Nascent proxies step fully formed from the tree's hollow. Proxies require the Augmented Condition to survive, suffering one aggravated damage each day without it. Proxies can't heal naturally from wounds and must return to Whispering Oak for regeneration.

STORY HOOKS

- With some adjustments to the God-Machine's programming, a local Integrator believes the Unchained could return safely to its service while maintaining free will. She needs to copy the mind of a high-ranking angel using the Tree of Knowledge to get the required information, but needs help taking the angel alive.
- An addictive new drug has hit the streets. People consuming the hallucinogenic powdered acorn find their minds sharpening, but begin acting on strange compulsions.
- Cryptid squirrels citywide have been sighted carrying coppery acorns. Their movements seem eerily coordinated. Demons charged with surveillance are uncertain whether they are helping Whispering Oak reproduce, or whether darker plans are afoot.



Six was bleeding. She didn't show pain in her face and she forced herself to walk without a limp, but she felt the pain, felt the blood pooling in her boot. She wasn't leaving footprints, fortunately, but she figured the knife-angel could probably track her anyway.

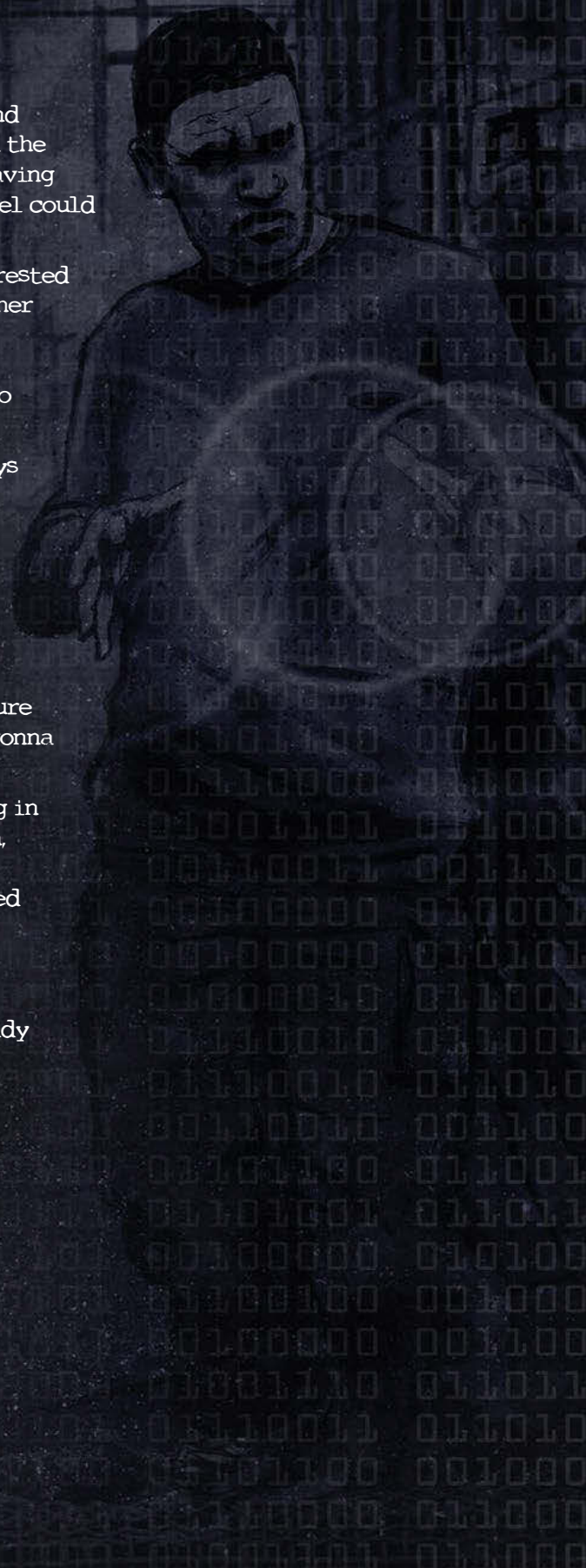
She ducked into a bodega and pretended to be interested in the cooler of beer. The man behind the counter saw her come in and gave a half-hearted wave, then went back to his magazine. Six noticed a young man a few aisles over. Only two people in the place. That meant only two casualties. She could live with that.

The knife-angel came through the door like it always did -- silently, not bothering to open it, just flowing through the glass like a sunbeam. The man behind the counter got two words out in Farsi before the angel reached up and slit his throat. Six ducked behind the aisle. The angel could sense her, but not see her, and that made a difference. She prepared to drop her Cover. She didn't want to -- certainly wasn't safe with an angel around, so close to the Infrastructure over on Leroy Street -- but she was damned if she was gonna bleed out in a fucking convenience store.

"Hey." Six looked up and saw the other man standing in the mouth of the aisle. *Shit*, she thought. Sure enough, the knife-angel zeroed in on the noise and headed toward them. It rounded the corner and the man cocked his head. The display of two-liter bottles of soda collapsed, burying the angel under a ton of plastic and liquid.

Six stood up, and realized her left pant leg was muddy brown from the blood. The man glanced down at it. "Odd question," he said. "but seeing as how you kinda owe me, how about you give me a blood sample?"

Six allowed herself the indulgence of an incredulous chuckle.



chapter five

STIGMATICS, CULTISTS, AND SLEEPERS

"But inside the quiet young scholar there existed a second, unsuspected personality, one with stunted emotions and a distorted mind through which cold thoughts flowed in cruel directions."

--Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*

Human beings are dangerous, and demons know it.

Oh, a *human being* isn't dangerous. A human being can be killed, incapacitated, forced into a soul pact and annihilated, or just turned away with the slightest tweak of quantum reality. Even crowds of people are tools in the hands of a skilled demon.

But *humanity* is dangerous. The throng of people, the multitude, is a force of nature, a corrosive and destructive thing that chips away at everything it touches. Humanity reshapes the world to fit its needs. It might wind up destroying the world in its quest to rule it, of course, and wouldn't that just be the biggest joke on both the Unchained and the God-Ma-

chine? The world made uninhabitable, and so useless for demons and angels alike?

Human beings are dangerous, because of what the God-Machine does to them. They become sleeper agents, following orders like angels but living invisibly among people like demons. They become stigmatic, obsessed with finding out what *changed* them. They band together and assign religious meaning to what they can't understand, and in so doing create cults ripe for exploitation.

This chapter contains a few weak, expendable humans. Underestimate them at your peril.

the fallen actress: BIANCA JONAK

It's so nice to be here with all my fans, I can't begin to describe what being on the show meant to me! Truly, a life-changing experience.

BACKGROUND

In 1993, *The Katie Files* debuted on national television. Spunky teenage detective Katie Styles, her love interest Marcus (the best football player in town) and their eclectic circle of friends solved supernatural mysteries every Wednesday night for seven seasons. An instant hit among the preteen/teen demographic, the show had a lasting impact on 90s youth culture. Even 20 years after the last episode aired, the fan community continues to thrive. And Bianca Jonak, the actress who played Katie, stands at the center of the fandom.

But fame is not without cost.

THE SECRET

The Katie Files was more than a breakout TV hit. While various influential entities got involved to make sure their own preferred information (or misinformation) about vampires, werewolves, and witches got spread, the show was, at its core, Infrastructure. The God-Machine could care less what lore the local vampire prince wanted the show to obscure. Its main interest was in widespread subliminal programming. While many of the cast and crew had their own brushes with the unexplained, Bianca was the star and the focus. No single instance caused her to become stigmatic. Rather, her constant, low-level exposure to the God-Machine eventually reached critical mass.

THE STAR

At age 22, when she began to experience the initial hallucinations of a stigmatic, the young actress panicked. She started using sex and drugs to avoid confronting the horror that waited for her just around another corner. The paparazzi had a field day, as pictures came out nearly weekly of Bianca becoming progressively more unglued at parties and clubs. The common consensus was that the pressures of fame were getting to the actress. Then an enterprising journalist at a newly launched celebrity gossip website unearthed the Jonak family's history of schizophrenia — and noted that most symptoms manifest in a person's early 20s.

Whether he meant to or not, the journalist destroyed Bianca's career the moment he published. The public quickly armchair diagnosed Bianca as suffering from any number of mental illnesses. The constant insistence that she *must* be schizophrenic was too much for Bianca. Her contract was not renewed for an eighth season, and the show was canceled.

Bianca continued to spiral, eventually going on a week-long bender to silence the presence of the God-Machine in her mind. Halfway through, however, Bianca had what could only be described as a spiritual experience as she communed with the God-Machine. It revealed to her that It loved her, and had special plans for her. How could Bianca turn away?

Bianca finally realized: She *was* Katie. The God-Machine saw something special in her, and arranged for *her* to become the actress central to the show. She had a special fate, a reason for her suffering. The show being canceled meant nothing, not now that Bianca realized her true calling in life. Her time on the show trained her to hunt monsters. Now it was time for Bianca to put her training to use and hunt down the enemies of the God-Machine: demons.

Outwardly, Bianca has made a comeback. She's gone on the convention circuit, and has reconnected with many of her co-stars and writers. And she's thrown herself into networking, with one goal in mind. *The Katie Files*, say the various rumor-filled fan sites, is going to be rebooted. And Bianca *will* be involved when that happens.

DESCRIPTION

Today, Bianca is an attractive brunette in her early 40s, wearing stylish clothing from talented, small-label designers.

She moves with a certain grace, always aware of the cameras pointed at her. If she's appearing at a fan convention, she'll often wear clothes that harken back to her character — rough jeans and boots and high ponytails.

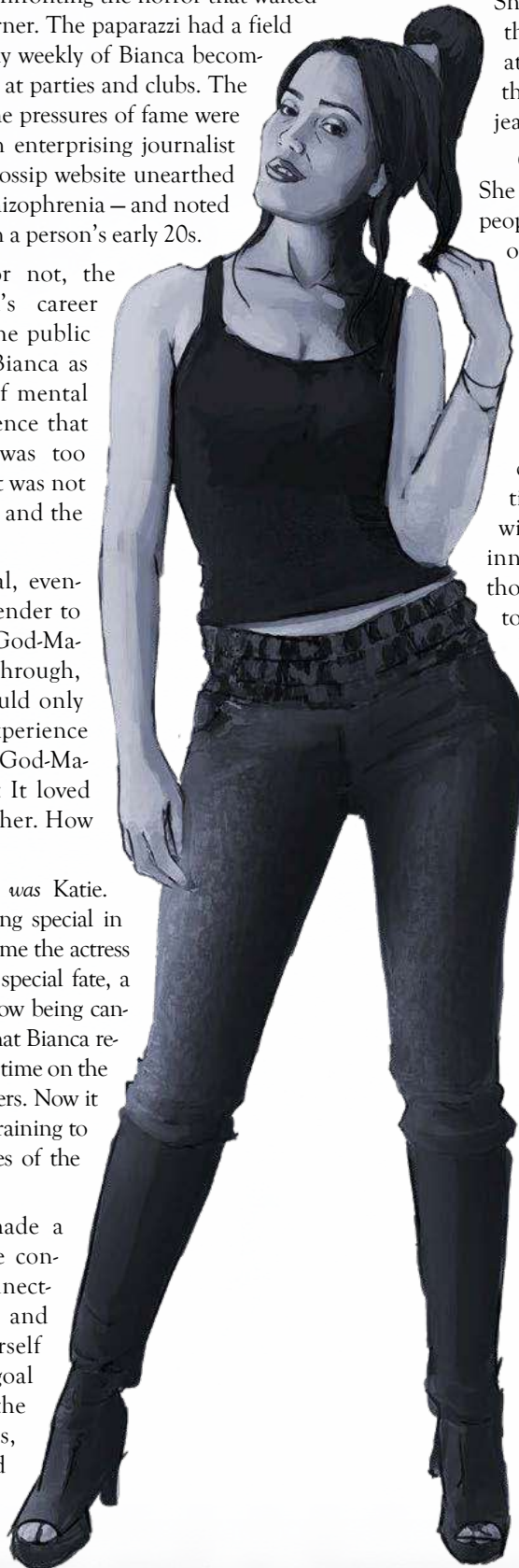
Getting to know the real Bianca is difficult. She has her "fan face" on when interacting with people she does not know well, especially for anyone she suspects might be a journalist or blogger. Even around those with whom she's better acquainted, Bianca remains reserved and quiet. She hates being recorded off the cuff, and rarely consents to an interview or panel if she knows she'll be on tape.

Bianca believes her role is to lay traps for demons, and she uses her celebrity connections to make that happen. When interacting with her quarry, Bianca puts on the face of an innocent victim. In private conversations with those she suspects may be demons or connected to demons, she will claim the show ruined her life, and speaks of wanting revenge and to keep other young actresses from suffering as she has (if her quarry asks about her efforts to get the show rebooted, Bianca will tell a convincing lie about being compelled to do so). The bait usually works, and then Bianca is turning over yet another wayward soul to the God-Machine.

SECRETS

Bianca is deeply in service to the God-Machine, and deeply delusional as well. She firmly believes Katie Styles is her alter ego, and views the demons she helps uncover as the same type of monsters her character hunted on the show. She's running a very deep game, however, and will sometimes participate in destroying a piece of Infrastructure or fighting an angel to win the trust of her target — the better to betray them later.

A lesser secret is Bianca's list of phone numbers. As part of her larger work, Bianca has focused on cultivating contacts both in the world of TV production and in the darker occult demimonde. Bianca may not know a particular secret or piece of intelligence, but she knows who to ask to find out.



STORY HOOKS

- As a milestone anniversary of the show nears, fans are talking of holding a worldwide “Katiethon”: Viewers from Kolkata to Boston to Berlin plan to watch each episode at the exact same global time over the summer. Other fan groups are organizing binge-watching parties. Either way, the programming implanted by the God-Machine shall surely be refreshed. How can a viral fan movement be shut down?
- The rumors were confirmed. Contracts were signed, the production schedule was distributed, and the hottest new showrunner in television was brought on to reboot *The Katie Files*. Bianca landed a supporting role as the tough-but-fair principal. She has enough cachet to seed the cast and crew with her allies, but even if they can convince her they’re on her side, will they be enough to sabotage production of the show and ensure this piece of an occult matrix never comes to fruition?
- The God-Machine has activated the subliminal programming integral to the show. Dozens of sleepers are waking, and performing truly bizarre actions. Some fans have begun to act out scenes from the show, which might be charming, except they’re choosing the most violent and disturbing parts (and *aren’t* pulling their punches or using prop weapons). Others have engaged with what they insist is a giant Alternate Reality Game (ARG) tied in with the show. And while that might justify some of what they’re doing, no one is running any kind of ARG. Is there any way to keep the God-Machine from activating any more Sleepers? Can this ARG be shut down?

RUMORS

“Bianca isn’t working for the God-Machine at all. She secretly hates the God-Machine and is just trying to get close enough to destroy some key Infrastructure related to her show.”

Bianca has participated in actions both against and in favor of the demons she’s encountered. Most of these encounters have ended with Bianca ultimately betraying the demon. But is she really a deep-cover saboteur just biding her time? When one can convince her to speak of the God-Machine, she has a moving monologue about how the God-Machine ruined her life and how ardently she desires revenge. Does she really mean that, or is she just acting?

“Bianca’s working on a reboot of The Katie Files.”

Unfortunately, many powerful, involved people have since learned of the subliminal programming inherent in *The Katie Files*. While they are generally incapable of understanding exactly *what* the God-Machine implanted, or even that it was the entity responsible, no one ever uses subliminal programming for pro-social reasons. As a result, while Bianca has quite a few allies in her corner who want nothing more than a reboot of the show, she’s opposed by equally powerful entities who’d rather die than see that happen.

“Bianca once killed a fan.”

The fan had broken into her trailer during the last season of filming. He had a gun, which Bianca was able to wrest away from him. She shot him three times, and the poor fellow died on the way to the hospital. The event was huge when it happened, and no doubt contributed to Bianca’s later breakdown. Her publicist spun a story about obsessive fans, and emphasized that everyone was grateful to know Bianca was safe, if regretful that she had been forced to take such action. In reality, the fan was much more than a mere unhinged obsessive — he was Bianca’s first real brush with the God-Machine and the effect her show was having on people. Bianca wouldn’t piece together until much later that the attempt on her life was an attempt to shut the show down by killing the lead actress. Though many interviewers have tried to get Bianca to speak of the event, she refuses and will end any interview that brings up the topic. In private, however, to people she trusts, Bianca is much more forthcoming.

BIANCA JONAK

Virtue: Helpful

Vice: Duplicious

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Investigation 1, Occult (Cults) 4

Physical Skills: Athletics (Stunts) 2, Firearms 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2,

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Acting) 4, Persuasion 2, Socialize (Networking) 3,

Merits: Allies (Television Production Companies, Cult Crimes Investigation Unit) 2, Contacts (TV Agents, Local Cults, *Katie Files* Fan Club) 3, Fame 2, Professional Training (Artist) 3, Unseen Sense: God-Machine

Health: 7
Willpower: 6
Integrity: 7
Size: 5
Speed: 9
Defense: 2
Initiative: 6

Armor: 0

Stigmata: Anyone who talks to Bianca hears an insistent ticking in the back of his head. If the conversation is extended, the ticking escalates to sounds of crashing gears and machinery run wild. In addition, particularly devoted fans of the show may begin to see Bianca as Katie.

Notes: Bianca's Asset Skills are Expression and Persuasion.



*Scared? Yeah, right, more like bored to death.
 Nothing ever happens to me.*

BACKGROUND

By rights, Brandon Clements should be waltzing through life unheeding of the darker aspects of the world. He attends the better high school in town, where his natural charm and parent's income afford him a comfortable popularity among the students and tolerant indulgence from the administration. He plays well enough to make varsity football, learns well enough to earn high Bs, and passes well enough that his schoolmates assume he's white. In short, he lives close to the ideal adolescence.

He hates it. More accurately, Brandon wants something to happen to him: something exciting, something cool, something where he can punch a mugger or outrun the cops or get interviewed on TV. When he can, he goes into the city on his own, hanging out in back alleys and on streets with dangerous reputations. It gives him a thrill, despite nothing more than a few jump scares ever happening to him. He never feels like he spends much time out, although it's caused him to miss curfew more than once.

Truth is, Brandon usually blacks out during his trips. He doesn't remember the things he's seen, or been chased by, or attacked. It triggers based on hormone levels and heart rate, when Brandon's brain tries to make the choice between fight, flight, or freeze. In those moments, his programming takes over and his mind leaves, with one goal: Stay alive.

FROM SICKLY

Brandon's blackouts directly resulted from his childhood. As an infant and toddler, he constantly caught ear and eye infections, and was hospitalized once every few months. The visits lessened in frequency as he grew, but never less than once a year. When he was 12, his family doctor recommended his parents try a new, experimental clinic, Rising Hope, to strengthen his immune system and hopefully keep him well enough to attend school. Wanting everything for their son, his parents took him, signing the consent forms for "cognitive immuno-resuscitation therapy." After two intensive weeks, Brandon came out healthy, hearty, and primed as a sleeper agent.

Rising Hope touted itself as solving impossible immune problems. The less hopeful majority of Rising Hope's patients received a series of injections, a biochemical cocktail that burns out everything in the human system, leading to about a year of active health, then rapid deterioration into burnout, fevers, and death, with rare self-immolation. The rest, like Brandon, got "therapy": high-adrenaline situations followed by complete sensory deprivation. As the mind retreated, the body's will to survive dominated. Brandon learned how to fight and how to run, in addition to becoming generally healthier. He remembered nothing, of course.

TO SIXTEEN

After the therapy, Brandon led a charmed life. He signed up for football, ending up on offense. During the off-season, he acted in the school plays, to his parents' delight. For a while, Brandon enjoyed his life, sloughing off the few slings and arrows that came his way (most due to his race, or appearance thereof). The start of this school year marked a change. Brandon felt restless, needing to go and do something, be someone. He needed control of his life, and to make it something more, something meaningful. He started heading into the city after school and on weekends. His parents don't know. They think he's at rehearsals, or at a friend's house.

Brandon remains convinced that nothing happens to him on these trips. His mind fills in the blanks with boredom and waiting. In truth, he's seen any number of disturbing things. A homeless woman got dragged, screaming, into a deep pit that closed in on itself, leaving nothing behind. A corpse on the ground got up and chased him. Thousands of flies condensed into the shape of a human, then shifted until they looked like a bedraggled man in a hat. A punk stuck their finger into a sleeping drunk's ear, pulling out what looked like pixelated mercury.

In short, Brandon's seen many of the city's demons and darker creatures. He doesn't know what he knows, and he generally flees before he's caught. A couple times, he's had to fight his way free. He blamed the resulting injuries on football, but they've been the only clue he's had that something other is going on. He hasn't confided in anyone; telling his parents would mean

admitting he's lied to them, and he doesn't trust any of his friends enough. Besides, maybe he's just overthinking things. Nothing ever *happens* to him, after all. He'd remember.

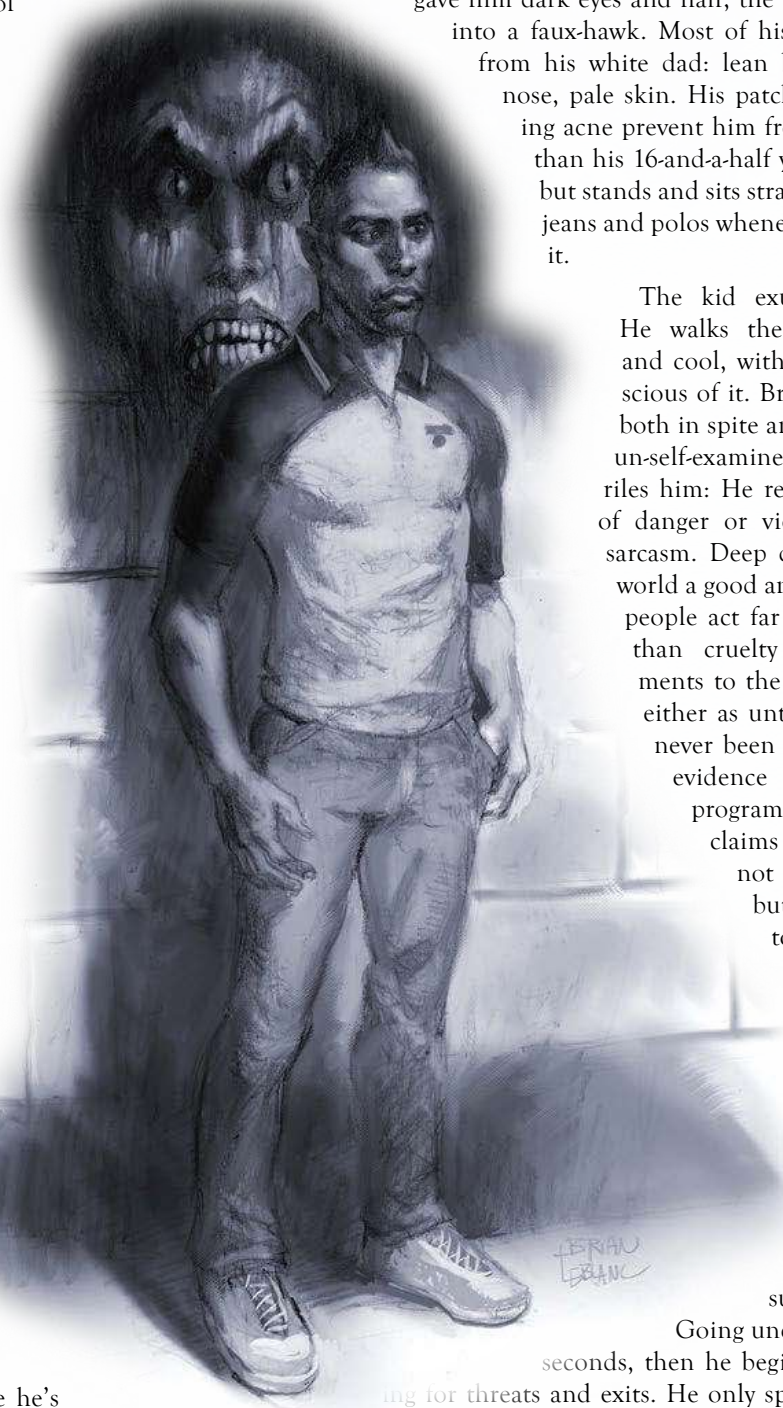
DESCRIPTION

Brandon passes as white. His mom's Indian heritage only gave him dark eyes and hair, the latter of which he styles into a faux-hawk. Most of his other features he gets from his white dad: lean build, thin mouth and nose, pale skin. His patchy facial hair and clearing acne prevent him from passing as any older than his 16-and-a-half years. He's still growing, but stands and sits straight as he can. He wears jeans and polos whenever he can get away with it.

The kid exudes authentic charm. He walks the line between earnest and cool, without seeming to be conscious of it. Brandon's charisma exists both in spite and because of his utterly un-self-examined worldview. One thing riles him: He responds to any mention of danger or violence with scorn and sarcasm. Deep down, he considers the world a good and safe place, and thinks people act far more out of ignorance than cruelty or selfishness. Arguments to the contrary get dismissed, either as untrue or as outliers. He's never been presented with physical evidence that hasn't set off his programming. He disbelieves claims of weirdness and magic, not because it's impossible, but because he thinks it's too exciting for reality.

Stress and adrenaline cause Brandon's programming to activate. When that happens, he loses all trace of emotion or empathy. Not even desperation or fear is left. Any other goals or plans are subsumed: He seeks safety.

Going under freezes him for a few seconds, then he begins systematically checking for threats and exits. He only speaks to give commands along the lines of "Move!" and "Stop!" with his voice half an octave deeper. Appeals and entreaties are ignored. Threats get evaluated, and can change his actions if he believes them. He won't stop moving. He favors flight, but will fight viciously if he has to.



SECRETS

Rather than being kept alive for some active future purpose, Brandon's programmed to be an unknowing witness. More accurately, the God-Machine needs humans that can see an event, but remain unchanged by it. Wiping memories takes much more overhead when done manually, so a self-cleaning system was built into Brandon. He's not the only one. Rising Hope produced over 50 viable sleepers of this type before being shut down. Most still live in the city and surrounding towns.

Brandon doesn't remember the times he's been in trouble, as his programming took over and hid his memories. However, some of the trouble remembers him. A ring of Inquisitors continues to document both him and a few others they've identified from the clinic. Most of his fellow patients are older, and less prone to finding trouble. Brandon sticks out due to his thrill-seeking behavior. His obviousness wins him no favors. It may keep him alive, but it's damned poor insurance against the things he's seen.

RUMORS

"New Cover for the school? You should have told me, I nearly shot you. I don't trust kids, not since that one with the angel-face got away. I swear he saw me change, didn't know he was there until after. Still got the shakes from it."

Obviously, Brandon isn't an angel, but while under his programming, he doesn't emote at all. His blank affect looks more like an angel, or a newly Fallen demon, than anything human. It's a side effect of a bigger trick: While active, he doesn't count as a witness for things like Cover swapping, and won't cause compromise. Of course, when he's deactivated, he does, which could cause problems if demons he's witnessed assume he's in the know.

"No, but there's this guy, he's a vigilante, he totally saved this one girl from getting mugged! He wears a hoodie over his face to protect his identity, and he beats up gangbangers with pipes and stuff!"

Any rescuing or heroics on Brandon's part has been incidental. Distracting a monster from its primary target is the closest he's come, and that's only happened twice. Brandon could take something down in a fugue state if he had to, but that sort of violence only activates when running isn't an option. That said, Brandon's martial ability is better than he thinks it is. He's never gotten into a fight while conscious, and would be surprised at his own speed and improvisation.

"Did you see 35 at last night's game? Kid's a freak! He took that ball right to the face, didn't even flinch! It's not the first time, either. Makes you wonder what his home life is like."

Brandon's tolerance for pain comes solely from his time in Rising Hope, not any abuses at home. He shrugs things off that he shouldn't, and when he pushes himself, he outperforms his peers physically. He usually doesn't put in more than a token effort, though. It scares him a little, that he's a lot tougher than

STORY HOOKS

- Brandon's started blacking out at school, usually when his crush walks by. Maybe the hormone rush sets off his programming in the same way fear normally does. Maybe Brandon's crush is something other, someone who gives off waves of danger and fear. Maybe a third party is trying to scare Brandon off, consciously or not.
- Rising Hope reopens, and starts generating more deadly sleepers, including allies or loved ones of the characters. Brandon's programming holds the key to unlocking the more recent indoctrination, as his less sophisticated version can be picked apart with less risk. Brandon won't self-sacrifice, though, and panicking him will sent him off into blank-faced flight.
- Through the city and surrounding suburbs, many demons feel their Cover take a hit or three. Brandon and his fellow sleepers are waking up and remembering what they've witnessed. Many of them can't take the strain; some break down or lash out, while others have developed spontaneous stigmata. Brandon's barely keeping it together, and desperately seeks out someone who both understands and won't kill him. The characters may fit the bill, or they may be the closest he can find. He doesn't want to believe, but now, he may have to.

he thinks, but admitting that would be social suicide. He's had years of practice at playing it down, and continues to do so.

BRANDON CLEMENTS

Virtue: Genuine

Vice: Confident

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Crafts 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Football, Sprinting) 3, Brawl 1, Drive 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 2, Weaponry (Bats) 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Stage Acting) 1, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (Authority Figures) 3, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Allies (Students) 1, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fleet of Foot 3, Hardy 2, Improvised Weaponry 3, Iron Stamina 3, Parkour 3, Resources 2, Relentless

Health: 8

Willpower: 4

Integrity: 7

Size: 5


Speed: 13

Defense: 6

Initiative: 5

Armor: 0/0

Stigmata: None



the monkey wrench: CARLOTA HERRERA

*Don't be afraid of what you're about to see. It'll burn,
just like everything else.*

BACKGROUND

When someone chooses to resist the God-Machine, they are putting everything on the line. Trust and safety become luxuries; survival becomes imperative. It is a life of always having to look over one's shoulder, never sure when the enemy will strike and never being prepared enough when they do. To be captured ensures a fate worse than death.

Carlota Herrera is one of the few people to be caught by the Machine and life, though it is at a terrible price. She is both stigmatic and sleeper, a powerful psychic ready to be activated to do Its bidding. However, not all sleepers are programmed perfectly, especially not Carlota. For the Un-chained, she is both a threat and an opportunity.

THE PERFECT SPY

Earth-shattering secrets and nightmarish revelations were no stranger to Carlota, even before she ended up in the God-Machine's grasp. Drafted into the intelligence community after serving in the military, she participated in a number of special operations. Assassination and arson were her specialties, and a number of would-be warlords and terrorists found their ends thanks to her plausibly deniable actions.

For Carlota, the work was just that. The Herreras had been a military family for three generations. While she couldn't talk about exactly what she was up to during family re-

unions, there was a sense of understanding about what she was doing. As far as she was concerned, she kept the country safe, like her father in Vietnam and her grandfather in World War II.

When she was deployed to assist a team in eliminating a group of hostiles in the Ukraine, she treated it like any other mission. She helped observe the group and track them to their hideout. She took part in planning the raid. She prepared to eliminate the evidence once they finished. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

Once the raid began, things went pear-shaped.

SOLD OUT

The team's handler hadn't been honest. The Ukrainian group they were tracking was not extremists planning an imminent attack on the United States. They were the Clock's Gentle Embrace, a God-Machine cult. Operating under the belief that the Machine could grant boons in exchange for offering human beings to it, they set traps for local and international law enforcement, their preferred prey. Carlota's handler had been turned to the cult months ago, and lead the wet-work team right in.

She smelled the occult calculations written in bile on the walls before she saw them. The hideout had an elaborate tunnel system that their reconnaissance hadn't prepared them

for. Ball lighting manifested from its walls at random, killing one member of the team. Carlota ordered them to pull out, but it was too late. The Clock's Gentle Embrace ambushed them and pulled them into a large chamber under the tunnels to complete the sacrificial ritual.

In the time that has passed since the event, Carlota has recovered most of her memories of the ritual. She remembers the cultists coaxing cables from the ground and jamming them into her spine and skull. On bad nights, she recalls the sight of her comrades being fed to a shivering contraption of blades, pistons, and presses. She will never forget the feeling of wanting everything to go up in flames, and then having it happen in a single moment. In the end, she accomplished her mission, and came out of it as the only survivor.

Officially, Carlota Herrera was declared missing in action, presumed dead. In reality, she started living off the grid. She had discovered the biggest threat of all to national safety. There was no other choice but to bring it down.

DESCRIPTION

Carlota Herrera is a brawny Spanish woman in her late 30s. Despite the inconvenience, she keeps her long, auburn hair down to cover her stigmata: a large, scarred puncture wound on the back of her skull. Sometimes even this isn't enough. In very stressful situations, the wound sparks with a small but visible burst of electricity. To prevent this, she often wears some kind of head covering when out in public. Her preferred fashion is military tactical outfits, to the point where wearing any kind of civilian clothing for long periods of time gives her a sense of unease.

Carlota is a woman of few words. She makes sure she is the first to enter the room, and the last to leave. She always eaves-

drops on as many nearby conversations as she can. The enemy is everywhere, and even the smallest talk can be a clue to its doings. Her ordeal has only increased her feelings of patriotic duty. While she acknowledges that the God-Machine is a worldwide problem, she is convinced that if the United States is free of it first, every other country will soon see it fall.

She is aware of the Unchained. She doesn't like them, she doesn't trust them, and she works with them more than she cares to admit. She sees demons as loyal only to themselves, and the talk of "finding my own Hell" only serves to cement this in her mind. Still, she knows she cannot work alone, and even her own powerful psychic abilities can't match up to a well-placed Exploit. Demons also have the advantage of better integration among the mundane populace, something that becomes scarcer to Carlota with each passing month.

For demons, her biggest advantage is also her biggest threat. The ritual made her into a sleeper, but her programming is highly specific and very faulty. In the presence of an Infrastructure's Linchpin, she is activated to find and fortify any weaknesses that the Infrastructure might have. Her inner rage alters the programming, and instead of carrying out her task, she is compelled to destroy the Linchpin and every aspect of the Infrastructure it is hosted in. She will try to kill anyone involved with the Infrastructure or who just happen to be in the way. Once that task is complete, she deactivates.

Unlike most sleepers, Carlota is aware that she is programmed. She has no qualms with investigating Infrastructure and activating herself, even if she may awaken to find corpses of innocents in her wake. War demands sacrifices.

SECRETS

Despite the risks, Carlota maintains contact with her family. She knows better, that she's only putting them in danger, but living alone and on the run is exhausting. Using abandoned military communication channels, she keeps in touch with two members of the family in particular: her brother Mauro and her cousin Angela. She told them that she's on a secret operation that involves her being dead, but nothing else about her current work.

As a self-aware sleeper, Carlota is attempting to alter her programming. While she doesn't regret what she's doing, she fears that the devastation she creates leaves too much of a trail. Her efforts have been



STORY HOOKS

- A series of freak accidents and fires plague the city. Each incident is centered around a piece of Infrastructure, and angel activity has risen dramatically, threatening the safety of the ring. Carlota Herrera is at the center of it all, and she must be stopped.
- Someone close to the ring has been recovered from the Machine's captivity, with no way of knowing if they were programmed to be a sleeper. Carlota Herrera approaches the ring promising a method of sleeper detection, or even a cure. Is she lying, and if so, what does she have to gain?
- Carlota Herrera turns to the ring for help. Angels wearing the faces of her old wet-work team are pursuing her, claiming that they must "fix her." She fears that the ritual she survived was supposed to turn her into an angel like them. She may very well be right.

fruitless. Still, she maintains a regimen of self-hypnosis in hopes that she might learn to master what lies within her.

Carlota is organizing a militia. She's funding it through a series of financial back channels, and is currently calling it the "Liberty Combat Army." She hopes that she can recruit it exclusively with the "enhanced and wronged," her term for her fellow stigmatics. For now, however, regular mercenaries will do just fine. Once the group forms, the mission is simple: Root out God-Machine cults, angels, and demons from every part of the United States, in that order.

RUMORS

"You held up your end of the bargain, it's only fair that I hold up mine. I know someone; she's like some kind of bomb-sniffing dog, but for Infrastructure. You want to take one down? Call her up. All you need to do is set her around something that you think looks suspicious, and she'll head straight to its heart. Not sure what happens after that, but I'm sure it's fine."

Despite Carlota's activation trigger being an Infrastructure's Linchpin, she has no special sense for examining an Infrastructure's components beyond the average stigmatic. Any demon hoping to use her dubious talents must first find the Linchpin the old-fashioned way. This will usually put a demon and his ring on ground zero of her rampage.

"Ms. Herrera will tell you that she's 'off the record,' so to speak. That's certainly true on paper. But, I decided to look a little deeper. She's attached

to several bank accounts around the world under several assumed names, some of which are on an active international police watch list. For a spy, she doesn't seem to be very good at hiding her tracks."

Carlota is being watched. Her handler's betrayal did not go unnoticed by certain parties in the intelligence community, and her development of the Liberty Combat Army has put her back on their radar. From their point of view, she is an agent who went rogue and is trying to push for revolutionary change, which is not too far from the truth. She suspects that she is being tracked, but is not yet aware that it is actually happening.

"Yeah, she's got a sob story. I'm bawling my eyes out, but let's do the math. We've got someone who's compromised by the God-Machine and knows it. Do you think something like that happens on accident? If we activate her, we're just doing what It wants."

Carlota's programming is faulty, but that doesn't necessarily mean that she is useless to the Machine. Her bursts of devastation leave no trace of her target, similar to a successful piece of Elimination Infrastructure. While the destruction is less precise, there is no longer a need to send a Destroyer with a chance of Falling. By rebelling, she has inadvertently become one of the Machine's most useful servants.

CARLOTA HERRERA

Virtue: Patriotic

Vice: Vengeful

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Investigation 2, Occult (Psychic Abilities) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Acrobatics) 3, Brawl (Blocking) 4, Firearms (Fast-Draw) 2, Larceny 2, Stealth (Shadowing) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation (Interrogation) 4, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Choke Hold, Contacts (Intelligence Community, Military) 2, Numbing Touch 1, Professional Training (Soldier) 5, Psychokinesis (Pyrokinesis) 5, Resources 2, Telekinesis 2, Unseen Sense (God-Machine)

Health: 8

Willpower: 5

Integrity: 5

Size: 5

Speed: 12

Defense: 6

Initiative: 5

Armor: 1/3

Sigmata: A large, scarred puncture wound on the back of Carlota's head. When she is stressed, it releases electrical sparks.

Notes: Carlota's Professional Training Asset Skills are Athletics, Brawl, and Firearms.

the blood taker: DONALD WILLIAMS

"You'll only feel a little prick. Ah, and hold this here to prevent excessive bleeding."

BACKGROUND

Donald Williams worked as a phlebotomist. It wasn't his dream job, and he certainly didn't grow up *wanting* to take people's blood for a living. He dreamed of being a doctor, a surgeon, or other important person with a lot of money and respect in his community. He had a hard time in school, holding down two jobs to help pay for college, and when it came to applying for medical school, he just didn't have the grades to get in. Discouraged but not defeated, he trained to be a Medical Assistant and got a job working the lab at Tufts Medical Center in Boston.

Donald loved working with people, and the patients loved him. He was good at his job, and he had a way of calming nerves and making people relaxed during blood draws. Even the most anxious patients would leave his chair with a smile on their face.

That is until he met Sandra Jackson. She seemed like any other patient, coming in for monthly lab tests as a cancer survivor. They had a rapport, and Donald genuinely liked her, though he always felt there was something off about her. Mostly he chalked it up to her chemo treatments, but she always seemed to be a decade off when talking about popular culture or current events.

Despite her strange sense of being stuck in a different time, she had almost no reaction when she found out about Donald's husband, even though he was certain she would have a decade-old view on the matter. She instead acted as though she never even heard him mention it. There were other things too, Sandra's blood was so easy to take; even when Donald was sure he had missed her vein, he would get a good draw. She never seemed weak, like the other chemo patients. Maybe if he had thought more about it, he would have noticed the signs, but back then, he didn't really think about things like that.

Then Sandra found him outside the lab. She wanted to show Donald something, though she wouldn't tell him what. He humored her, because by this point he felt like she was a friend, but he instead found himself hooked up to God-Ma-

chine Infrastructure. He spent three days hooked up to a machine that pulled his blood, did something to it, and then returned it to his body. Donald doesn't remember anything of his time in the Infrastructure other than the machine, and the constant droning noises. He woke up in a back alley, with small scars on the insides of his elbows, and a terrible headache.

His husband, James, had reported him missing, and he was picked up shortly by the police. The visions didn't start for another few days, and when they did, everything else fell apart. James was the last to leave, after Donald's family and friends all left him, and his job let him go. James tried to stick with him, but Donald became obsessed. He was obsessed with Sandra, the facility she brought him to, and finding out what happened to him. Donald changed from the happy man who could put a smile on anyone's face to a haunted and harassed version of his former self. Where he used to be jovial and happy, he turned sarcastic and scared. Where he used to find the good in everyone, he was paranoid and suspicious of everyone, especially those closest to him.

After James left, Donald turned his full attention to discovering what happened. He started with breaking into Tufts and searching for Sandra's blood samples, all of which were missing. He could sense the God-Machine's handiwork, and so started looking for those like Sandra to test their blood. He was on the offensive; instead of hiding from the God-Machine, he was seeking It out to try to understand It. And the more he learned, the worse things got for him. The God-Machine hunted him, but he had learned far too much.

Soon, he became the hunter, and any angel who came for him got a rude awakening when he trapped them and attempt to draw blood for medical testing. He broke into his old clinic and stole powerful sedatives, injecting them the moment the angels got near. But the God-Machine was too clever for Donald, and would just recall the angels he captured. When he found his first demon, he was overjoyed that he could test for more than an hour or so before the creature miraculously disappeared. Instead, it destroyed his lab as it escaped after the sedatives wore off.

Donald is not sure what he caught that day. While he could see that there was something different about this person, the blood sample he got seemed completely human. He became curious about demons, but it just meant he needed to run more tests.

He has a makeshift lab in an old abandoned building in south Boston. The equipment is mostly stolen, or cobbled together from trash found outside repo centers. The lab is as close as he is comfortable to the first piece of Infrastructure he found when he went searching. He's catalogued the workings and even thinks he knows what it is used for. He keeps his eye on it, because whenever an angel appears, it comes directly from that Infrastructure.

The people in Southie ignore him, and he ignores them, mostly. He works part time at a blood bank, performing blood collections. And if he takes a small sample on the side, who would complain?

DESCRIPTION

Donald Williams is a medium-height man of African-American descent with his hair shaved close. Despite his desire to keep a low profile, his appearance is striking. He has a wildness in his eyes that is unmistakable, and all his veins bulge out on his body, tinting his skin a sickly bluish color. He dresses in comfortable street clothes, but often forgets to bathe or clean himself regularly.

Donald is a kind man at heart. His brush with the God-Machine left him twisted, but he still cares for his fellow man. In truth, this drives his actions more than anything else. He was horrified to learn the dark truths of the world, and

thinks he is the person who can save humanity from the God-Machine.

He knows just enough to be dangerous, and not enough to realize that his mission is futile.

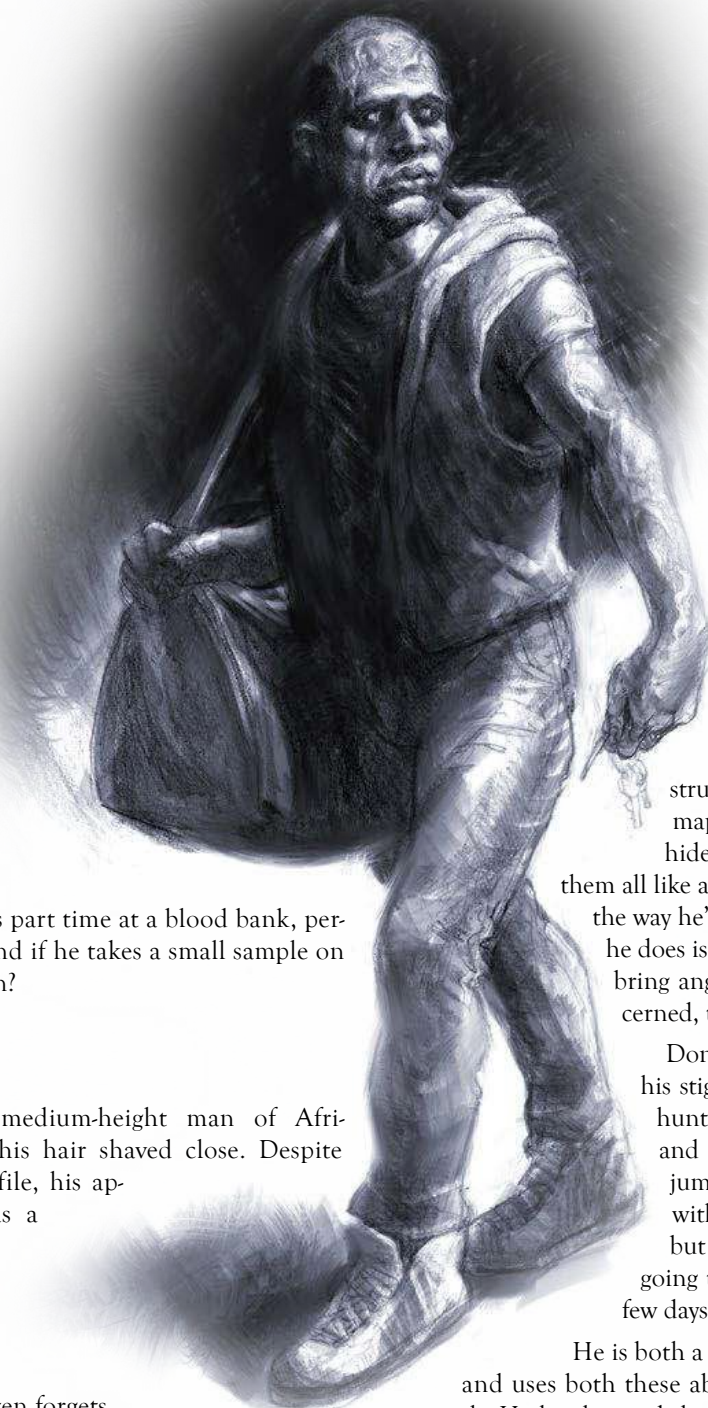
He is curious and paranoid, which causes him to approach the supernatural with caution. He wants to test, learn, and categorize. These are all obsessions now — less true investigations, and more mad-science forays. His interactions with supernatural creatures are attempts to lure them into traps, take their blood, and map what he can of its characteristics. He might chat or talk, but it's all to lull them into complacency.

SECRETS

Donald's persistent investigations have given him a working knowledge of all the Infrastructure in Boston. He obsessively maps every God-Machine-touched hidey hole he can find, and watches them all like a hawk. He tries to subvert them, the way he's seen demons do, but so far, all he does is create ripples in the Aether that bring angels to him. As far as he is concerned, that's good enough.

Donald has learned how to interpret his stigmatic visions and uses them to hunt down and find Infrastructure and angels. Most of the visions are jumbled, and painful, leaving him with more questions than answers, but often he "sees" when an angel is going to enter the vicinity of Boston a few days before it happens.

He is both a telekinetic and a psychometric, and uses both these abilities to help him with his research. He has learned that angels only feign having emotions and searches them out by seeking emotionally devoid areas. He also subconsciously tests everyone around him constantly by taking an emotional pulse of things they recently touched. He uses his telekinetic abilities to keep angels at bay, or disrupt their processes long enough to catch them.



RUMORS

"I heard there's this man over in Dorchester who pays for blood. He's got a nice setup, just takes a small bit, pays sometimes \$50 or \$100. On the days he's accepting, we all line up. He's nice to talk to, but he always asks us these weird questions. I'm pretty sure he's messed up in the head, but the money is worth it."

Every month or so, Donald goes over to Dorchester and offers money to anyone who is willing to let him take control samples of blood. He asks them about themselves, probing to find out if someone might have information about the God-Machine. He once ran across a Sleeper who almost killed him, so now he interrogates everyone who comes through his door.

"I just found this Infrastructure the other month. It was small and didn't take long to suborn, but then yesterday, the Linchpin went missing. And not just missing, the thing shut down, someone must have destroyed it. But who? There's no Aetheric resonance to follow, and the only demons in the area are my guys."

Ultimately, Donald hopes to destroy the thing that changed him. But, before he can do that, he must understand it. A Linchpin is just another piece of a puzzle, and he has learned that these are what really hold Infrastructure together after a demon suborns it. He has tried to mimic that effect, to no avail, though destroying a Linchpin brings demons around searching for answers.

"This stigmatic had me locked in a room for three days. He didn't hurt me, just took a blood sample and monitored me. I tried to talk to him, but he can't seem to differentiate us from the God-Machine. Poor guy, he seemed terrified of me, but that didn't stop him from trying to lock me up. No, of course I could have gotten out any time, if I wanted to be loud and stupid about it, but I figure the Machine has to be watching him! Finally I just said 'screw it,' changed forms, and busted out. It wasn't one of my finest moments."

Donald knows demons are different from angels, but he doesn't know how or why. This was the first time he was able to get one to reveal their true nature, and he was trying to collect a sample to test. Dealing with an Unchained in full Demonic Form was not anything Donald could prepare for though, so he hid while the demon fled. He hopes to find another one and induce a similar reaction, this time with better preparation.

DONALD WILLIAMS

Virtue: Dedicated

Vice: Curious

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Investigation 4, Medicine 4 (Phlebotomy, Wound Care), Occult 4, Science (Microbiology) 3

STORY HOOKS

- One of the characters is captured by Donald. He doesn't keep them long, but takes a blood sample before letting them go. If he digs too deep, he stands a chance of blowing the demon's Cover. They are unlikely to stop Donald from his obsession, but maybe they can convince him to work with them.
- A strange new cryptid appeared near one of the characters' suborned Infrastructure. The characters are unsure what this creature might have once been and are having a difficult time dealing with it. They know that Donald can help them identify the creature and how to deal with it, but he is only willing to help if one of the ring will submit to detailed testing.
- Donald reaches out to the characters for help. The God-Machine has finally decided to take care of him and has sent an angel he cannot trick or deceive. He is willing to share what he knows of Boston's Infrastructure and the God-Machine if they will help hide him until he can figure out how to deal with this new threat.

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Larceny (Breaking and Entering) 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Social Skills: Empathy (Calming Others) 3, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge (Con Jobs) 4

Merits: Contacts 2 (Medical Assistants, Homeless), Danger Sense, Omen Sensitivity, Professional Training 3 (Medical Assistant), Psychometry, Resources 3, Telekinesis 4, Unseen Sense: God-Machine

Health: 9

Willpower: 7

Integrity: 3

Size: 5

Speed: 10

Defense: 6

Initiative: 7

Armor: 0

Stigmata: Donald's veins bulge out and are tinted an electric blue that gives all of his skin a sickly, bluish tone.

Notes: Donald's Professional Training Asset Skills are Empathy, Medicine, and Science.

the daydream believer: GRACE PHAM

Visualization is the key to success. If I can dream it, I can do it.

BACKGROUND

Command and Control Infrastructure is perhaps the most important and the most mysterious aspect of the God-Machine. It is Its nervous system, relaying instructions to Its servants in secret and often hidden among corporation headquarters, military bases, and legislature buildings. Most of its operators are mortals that serve It unknowingly.

Some projects are far too important to let people work within them unaltered. If the Machine needs Its Infrastructure to operate in a specific manner, It takes matters into Its own hands and implants orders into the minds of mortals to follow Its instructions. Otherwise-ordinary people become something greater, an incredible unified force.

Grace Pham is at the forefront of one of these forces, though she does not know it. She is a sleeper, a human being conditioned by the God-Machine to do Its bidding. A frustrated receptionist in her waking life, she has no idea how real her daydreams are.

DREAMS DEFERRED

Grace was an ambitious child. Encouraged by her parents and driven by an energy that seemed boundless, she immersed herself in any subject that struck her interest. By the time she graduated as a valedictorian in high school, she could play several instruments, spoke three languages fluently, led her quiz bowl team to victory in a national tournament, and wrote half of a fantasy novel. She entered college with high expectations of herself, expecting to enter medical school and become a surgeon by the end of the decade.

At the end of her sophomore year, Grace dropped out of college and moved back in with her family. While she was studying, her parents' bookstore closed thanks to the changing demands of the bookseller market, the economy entered a recession, and to make matters worse, her father was diagnosed with lung cancer. The pressures of an intense academic life and a familial life in collapse became too much. Grace put her life on hold, for what she hoped would only be for a semester or two.

The months stretched to years. Even with the help of her older sisters, aiding her parents became an uphill battle. The combination of medical bills and overdue debts from the failed bookstore threatened to bankrupt the family. Her mother fell into a severe depression.

Things got better. Her father went into remission. Her mother recovered and started an online storefront. The Phams escaped the decade without falling into economic oblivion. They couldn't have done it without the steadfast help of their youngest daughter.

And yet, Grace felt anxious. She had spent so long in a state of crisis that she wasn't sure how to resume her life. College had become much more expensive. Jobs were still scarce. Property values and the fear of either of her parents relapsing made moving out unfeasible. For the first time in her life, she faced an uncertain future.

Her eldest sister bailed her out. She had a friend who knew a friend who was a recruiter for a company by the name of Hampton Solutions. It moved its headquarters into the downtown area, and was looking for work. Grace became its front desk receptionist.

The labor was dull, but not unpleasant. For a firm that always seemed so busy, calls were few and far between. Visitors were practically nonexistent, and those who did arrive weren't chatty. Still, upper management seemed to like her. They invited her to a corporate retreat and Grace, never one to deny an opportunity, accepted.

Her secret life began.

A RETREAT

Hampton Solutions describes itself as "a neo-modernist collective of innovative truth-seekers on a vision quest to prepare the world for a new century." What it actually does is business and marketing analysis, providing consultation for a diverse list of clients. Its employees crunch numbers and make charts. They release white papers and hold motivational-speaking events.

It is also a Command and Control Infrastructure. While most of its day-to-day business is mundane, just enough of

its charts and data serve as instructions and orders for the God-Machine's projects. Infiltrated early in its existence by servants of the Machine, the company holds parts of its vast techno-occultic knowledge within its servers and databanks.

To ensure proper loyalty and non-faulty operation, its upper management selects its most promising employees to go on "company retreats." These retreats take place in a special facility where the selected employees are programmed with the tasks and duties associated with their place in the company's secret hierarchy. Grace's tenacity and focus made her the perfect candidate to serve as the Infrastructure's project manager.

Since then, Grace has been activated often, bringing at least three of the Machine's projects to successful completion. The management is very impressed with the skill and planning she demonstrates while her personality is suppressed, and plan for more company retreats for her in the future.

DESCRIPTION

Grace Pham is a stocky Vietnamese woman in her mid-20s. She wears her black hair in a ponytail, and prefers dressing in thrifty, sensible clothing. She has a birthmark on her right cheek, a large *café au lait* spot that touches the right corner of her mouth. When she is activated, she wears a long-sleeved green sweater that she usually keeps hidden in her desk, her symbol of authority in the secret hierarchy.

She is normally soft-spoken, but once any of her myriad academic interests are brought up, she quickly takes command of the conversation. Life may have thwarted her goals for now, but the passion within her hasn't died. Small talk with Grace may end up becoming an impromptu lecture. She also keeps a small notebook on her person whenever she can. She is often seen making quick notes in it, usually story ideas or personal reminders.

Like all employees who have been on the company retreat, Grace's activation signal is a special recording of Debussy's "Clair de Lune." This version is a reverse key tonality, D-flat minor with a C-sharp major section. It plays every workday around noon,

the universal lunch hour for the building. Activated sleepers have a quick company lunch and spend the rest of the hour interpreting and transmitting the God-Machine's data. This occurs in a special room on the fifth basement level of the building, guarded by specially trained agents. Programming is supplemented by a series of meditation tapes provided by the company.

When activated, Grace is shrewd and ruthless. The activation hones her mind into becoming a tactical prodigy, who sees the will of the God-Machine done by any means necessary. She barks out orders and expects them to be followed. She displays a surprising amount of improvisation and self-direction for a sleeper. This would be worrying to management if her loyalty to the Machine didn't seem so unshakable.

Grace manages the cognitive dissonance of constant activations by believing her lunchtime activities are simply daydreams. These daydreams are hazy, and Grace cannot remember her exact actions or the data she has seen, but she does enjoy them. She comes out of her daydreams with a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, something in short supply nowadays.

SECRETS

Grace is starting to suspect that something is wrong. She began noticing old phrases and symbols written in the margins of her notebook in her own handwriting. None of these on their own are incriminating, but their appearance after her first company retreat made her curious. She plans to start recording her daydreams in great detail.

She has a crush on a fellow coworker. Her name is Maxine and she works in the mail room. Technically, the strange corporate structure of Hampton Solutions makes Grace one of Maxine's bosses, one of the reasons that she is hesitant to pursue her feelings. Maxine has yet to go on a company retreat. Grace feels an irresistible urge to invite her to one, and she is just about ready to give in.

Grace is currently assisting a long-term project for the God-Machine. A biotech company contracted to Hampton Solutions has made a stunning breakthrough in brain



STORY HOOKS

- A trusted contact gives the ring an incredible opportunity: An angel is set to manifest on the grounds of Hampton Solutions, and the contact has the exact time and location. Angeljacking's never easy, but with Grace Pham and the rest of her sleeper agents on high alert, the ring will need to pull off the heist to end all heists. Succeeding brings its own challenge: The Cover is a Hampton Solutions employee, working in Grace's department.
- The first chapters of *Zero Strike Countdown*, the latest in the Winnie Mangum Saga, have been released. Winnie's out to take down a conspiracy of rogue agents in her city, agents that are very similar to the ring and any Agency they might know. Someone's compromised, and they're leaking secrets to an activated Grace. The culprit must be found, and Grace must be silenced.
- One of the characters knows Grace, and she has turned to them for help. Her daydreams have become more vivid than ever, and she's found plans to perform a sacrificial ritual on her sister in the margins of her notebook. Can Grace be saved from herself? When she's activated, will she even want to be?

mapping, and the Machine wants in. It wants to have a map of the brain of every single being in the world, and to have them all on file. One of the occult matrices calls for the sacrifice of a family. Grace has volunteered to sacrifice hers. Her waking self cannot remember this, and has yet to be activated to do so.

RUMORS

"What happened to my old ring? We got careless. We raided one of the Machine's nerves in the middle of the day. We thought we surprised them. We ended up in this room full of pencil pushers, and they went at us like a well-trained army. One lady fired a nine-millimeter in my face like it was nothing! I'm the only one who made it out."

While the Hampton Solutions Infrastructure is well guarded by the usual defenses, its sleeper agents are a surprisingly effective security unit. Grace leads them in combat as well, and has personally executed at least one rebellious sleeper.

"Corporate drones? Sometimes, it isn't a metaphor. I know of a corporation where all of its employees are hooked onto a single hive mind, serving as a wetware computer for the Machine. I can tell you more, but it will cost you."

Despite the dedicated programming process, the victims of Hampton Solutions' Corporate Retreat maintain some individual sense of mind when activated. Some have a stronger sense of mind than others, and this can lead to escapees and breakaways. Despite Grace's robust sense of mind, she is not yet one of these.

"You haven't heard of Winnie Magnum? I thought you said you liked to read! You gotta get on these books, girl. A kick-ass spy in an urban fantasy world? Trust me, you're gonna love it. You feel like the writer's really lived it!"

Grace has found a use for her daydreams. While she can't remember exact details, bits and pieces of her activated life are put on the page as the Winnie Magnum Saga, a series of fantasy spy fiction stories. One half Jemisin, one half Le Carré, Grace has been putting up these novels on a serialized fiction website to much acclaim. A small part of its readership is the Unchained, picking apart the pulpier bits for possible insights into the workings of the Machine.

GRACE PHAM

Virtue: Passionate

Vice: Ruthless

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 4, Computer 3, Investigation 1, Politics (Management) 2, Science (Biology) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Firearms (Pistols) 2, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Expression (Prose) 3, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Contacts (Academia, Hampton Solutions Management) 2, Good Time Management, Language (Vietnamese, Spanish, French) 3, Professional Training (Administrator) 3

Health: 8

Willpower: 5

Integrity: 6

Size: 5

Speed: 10

Defense: 4

Initiative: 5

Armor: 0/0

Notes: Grace's Professional Training Asset Skills are Politics, Firearms, and Persuasion.

the cuckoo: LIAM BROWN

Don't you recognize me?

BACKGROUND

He comes from nowhere, but he is never a stranger. He's someone special: an old teacher, a faithful spouse, or a long-time drinking buddy. He's ready to lend a word of advice or a helping hand. When he sees the Unchained beneath the skin, he understands.

A demon knows she's been compromised. She feels her Cover slipping, the gaze of the God-Machine growing stronger. She checks and double checks her life, but nothing comes up as an obvious breach. Her glitches get worse, but still, he sympathizes.

When an Angel strikes, everything falls into place. It's obvious now, all the ways he didn't fit in the life she cultivated, how recently he appeared. There is no time to strike back. Soon, she will be disassembled, and he'll be searching for his next target.

Liam Brown is a parasite, a stigmatic with an ability to integrate himself into a demon's Cover. He fights for his own survival, no matter the collateral.

CRIMINAL ORIGINS

Liam often jokes, "Life began when I got out of juvie." This is not far from the truth.

Orphaned at an early age, he grew up lonely and alienated. Despite the best efforts of foster families and teachers, he fell into the juvenile justice system. It was here that his life changed forever. An elaborate Infrastructure wrapped itself around his life, and he witnessed its disastrous conclusion.

The angel who pretended to be Emily Brown had an important mission, wrapped up in an elaborate Cover. Under the guise of a single mother with a child in juvenile hall, she lived in an apartment building, one that she was to set on fire. Its tenants would die, sacrifices for a greater project. Investigators would only find tragedy, a sad and lonely woman who fell asleep with a lit cigarette. The documents that linked Emily to Liam existed as a part of Concealment Infrastructure. Any child with the last name of Brown would have sufficed,

and Liam's records were the easiest to manipulate. Anyone who looked into it would conclude that it was a clerical error.

The angel played her role too well. Living an actual life, even an unhappy one meant for an abrupt end, was something she craved. She mingled with her neighbors, planned elaborate routines for her day, and began missing the son she knew but had never seen.

She Fell on the day she visited him. In that moment, what was only a relationship on paper suddenly became very real. Liam left the visiting hall with inconsistent but vivid memo-

STORY HOOKS

- Liam Brown is a well-known member of the city's community. An angry demon arrives, claiming that Liam became his daughter, which almost cost him his life. Before a proper investigation can begin, Liam vanishes. Where is he now? *Who is he now?*
- A fellow demon was murdered, and Liam Brown is the only witness. He's willing to help; he claims the demon was a good friend, but he's cagey about exactly how he knew the victim, and he disappears often. Then, an ally says that they've seen Liam making a deal with an angel. Did Liam kill for the angel? If so, why, and what will he do to cover it up?
- Ms. Peridot found her son. He's in another city, and she's approached the ring to help her locate him. Things get complicated quickly. Liam Brown is currently being hunted by an unsatisfied student of his "private lessons." What's worse: A man who can be anybody, or a woman who can't stop scrambling the memories of anyone she meets?

ries of Emily raising him for his entire life. He did not just become stigmatic, he became Offspring.

Emily and Liam did not have long to catch up. A hunter angel arrived and the chaos that ensued tore the detention center apart. Liam abandoned his mother and fled.

TAKING COVER

On the run from both the law and the Machine, Liam became a con man. He took to the work well, especially when his implanted demonic heritage began to manifest. Within a year, he could manipulate memories with a glance, or slip into another person's life with a single touch. He could live like a king as long as the cops and the angels weren't on his trail.

At first, evading them was easy. The police could be manipulated to leave him alone, and while angels couldn't be deceived, they could be distracted. Then, local law enforcement became federal agents. The angels sent to track him got smarter. Reality set in: One way or another, this was a manhunt that would never end. He moved from city to city, pleading to any Agency he could find to help him hide.

Soon, he found a better solution to his problems. He had been working for the Montgomery Alliance, an Agency operating out of Dayton, Ohio, for a few months. He had gotten to know some of its members, such as Mr. Oregon, who spent most of his time in the Cover of a sandwich-shop owner. When Liam discovered that yet another angel was coming for him, the sandwich shop was his first place to hide.

With the angel closing in and Mr. Oregon nowhere in sight, Liam panicked. He had intended to steal the identity of the shop's cashier for only a few moments, but something about this was different. The desperation for safety unlocked something within him, and the next time he opened his eyes, he *was* the cashier. The angel entered the shop, Liam rang up its order, and that was the end of it.

The time that followed was the longest stretch of safety Liam had experienced. Mr. Oregon did not seem to notice nor care that Liam replaced one of his employees, nor did the Agency seem to notice his sudden absence. Liam expected to live as the cashier for the rest of his life, until Mr. Oregon's Cover rapidly deteriorated. When he was captured and destroyed, Liam became himself again. Now facing a renewed hunt, he knew what he had to do.

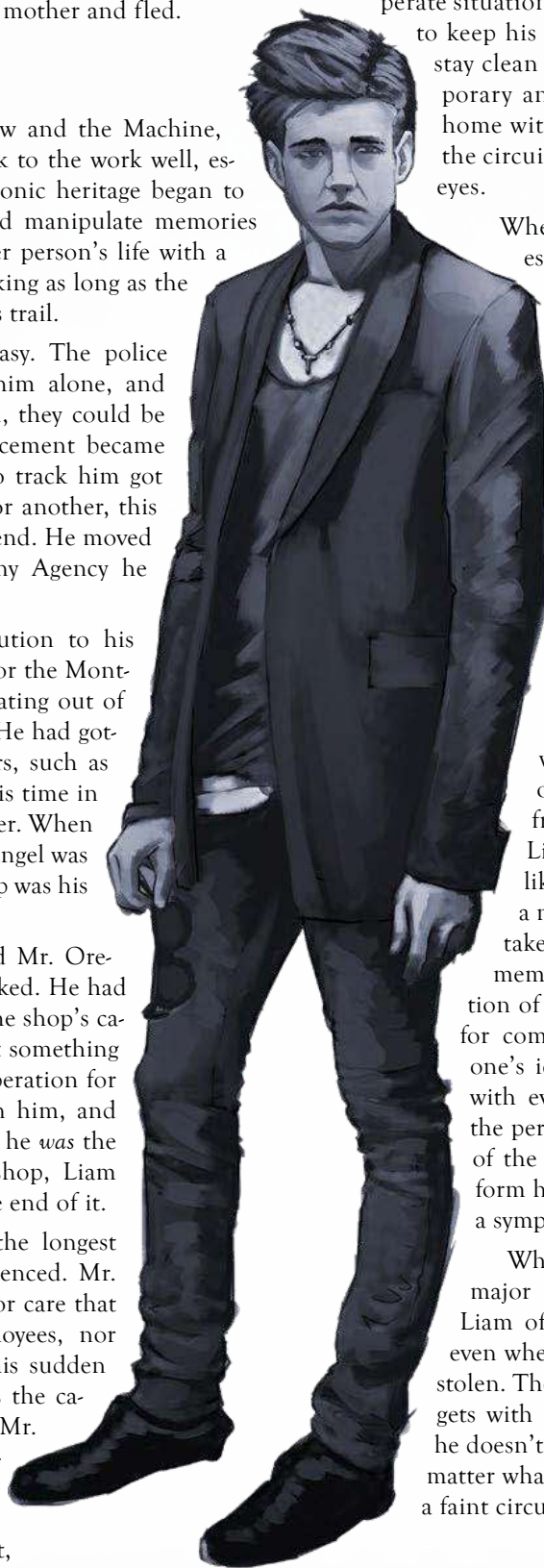
DESCRIPTION

When Liam Brown is not in the guise of someone else, he is a gangly white male in his late teens. Despite the desperate situation he claims to be in, he always has time to keep his hair in a side-parted undercut and to stay clean shaven. He keeps his fashion contemporary and on the pricy side. He never leaves home without a pair of dark sunglasses, hiding the circuit-pattern stigmata etched into his blue eyes.

When Liam enters a new city, he approaches the closest Agency or ring and pleads for shelter. If he is denied access, he moves on. If not, he integrates into the community as best that he can, making friends and doing odd jobs for them. He's loud, boisterous, and friendly, right up until he feels unsafe or unloved. When that happens, he starts looking for a life to hide in.

He chooses his victims very carefully. The people that he prefers to become are ones with close, direct ties to a demon. Liam will settle for becoming a low-level employee in a business that a demon might own, but would much rather take the identities of a demon's siblings, children, or best friends. If pressed for an explanation, Liam is frank: These people are more likely to be protected. However, there is a much simpler explanation for why Liam takes these people: He's lonely. While his memories may have been altered, the isolation of his previous life leaves an aching need for companionship. When he's stolen someone's identity, he'll often try to get involved with every aspect of a demon's life, even if the person he's pretending to be was unaware of the demon's true nature. No matter what form he takes, he's always a good listener and a sympathetic ear.

When Liam is in hiding, there are three major giveaways. The first is his behavior. Liam often acts like himself when disguised, even when that may clash with the identity he's stolen. The second is his body language. Liam fidgets with his hands when he's nervous, a habit he doesn't suppress. The third is his stigmata. No matter what form he's in, his eyes will always have a faint circuit pattern in the irises.



SECRETS

Liam wants to become a demon. He sees his ability as a minor version of a soul pact, and believes that other demonic aspects may develop within him in time. He is consistently looking for occult rituals that will complete his transformation. In reality, he is on the demon-blooded Cipher, and his ability is merely his first Interlock.

Liam has made contact with an angel. It calls itself the Harmonious Convergence, and unlike the other angels sent for him, it didn't come to capture him. Instead, it wants knowledge on the demons he knows, and promises great power in return for his assistance. Liam has yet to accept this offer, but the angel is patient.

Liam is attempting to teach his abilities to others. He runs an internet video channel that presents his powers as advanced psychological techniques, and charges exorbitant amounts of money for private lessons. He has recently received reports of success stories.

RUMORS

"So, I'm chatting with the new guy. We start talking about dumb shit we did as kids, and he's going back and forth between two different childhoods. He can't even keep the school straight. I bring that up and he just freezes. I know that we're weird and all, but that kid? I'm telling you, he's programmed."

Despite his memory lapses, Liam is not a sleeper, nor is he directly under the influence of the Machine. His altered memory is just that, and his actions are purely for his own survival and personal gain.

"I had an unpleasant visitor arrive at my house last night. She was one of us, and waltzed through my security system. She asked for Liam Brown, but I haven't seen him in ages. I wonder why..."

Emily Brown, the demon Liam remembers as his mother, is still alive. She went loud not long after Liam fled, and is currently known as Ms. Peridot. Despite not having the only Cover he would recognize, she hopes that she can reunite with him.

"August 27th, 10:15 pm. I found another one, from Indiana. Same exact story: A person experiences a sudden wave of amnesia after a long period of abnormal behavior. That makes six this year. No other pattern to the reports. What's going on? What the hell happened to me?"

Liam's Interlock, despite his belief, is not a soul pact. His victims do not cease to exist, they are merely held in some kind of quantum containment until he sheds their identity.

LIAM BROWN

Virtue: Faithful

Vice: Greedy

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2

THE DEMON-BLOODED CIPHER

No one is safe from the God-Machine, especially not the children of demons. When the Machine becomes aware of their existence, they are placed onto a special Cipher. Unlike a demon's Cipher, it forms and progresses without the consent or understanding of the demon-blooded. Instead of a final secret, the third Interlock of the Cipher only brings servitude: The demon-blooded is made to do the Machine's bidding in small, subtle ways.

More information on the demon-blooded Cipher can be found in **Heirs to Hell**.

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Crafts (Forgery) 2, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Firearms 2, Larceny (Lockpicking) 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Personalities) 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion (Fast-Talking) 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Con Jobs) 4

Merits: Anonymity 2, Fast-Talking 4, Hardy 2, Omen Sensitivity, Patient, Pusher, Relentless, Unseen Sense (God-Machine), Untouchable

Health: 8

Embeds: Don't I Know You?, Identity Theft

Willpower: 4

Integrity: 6

Size: 5

Speed: 9

Defense: 6

Initiative: 4

Armor: 1/0

Stigmata: Circuit patterns in the irises of his eyes

LIAM BROWN'S CIPHER

FIRST INTERLOCK: STEPPING IN

Keys: Don't I Know You?, Identity Theft

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge – Resolve

Liam is never truly safe until he has slipped into someone else's life. With a tap on the shoulder or a brush on the arm, Liam shunts his victim out of reality and instantly replaces them.

Dramatic Failure: Liam's target does not vanish. Liam painfully shifts into a form mixed between himself and his target, suffering two points of aggravated damage.

Failure: Liam's target does not vanish. Liam may attempt to activate this Interlock again with a -1 penalty.

Success: Liam's target vanishes. Liam steals the target's entire identity, gaining access to the victim's Attributes,

Skills, and Merits. Any rolls to scrutinize his true identity are penalized by the relevant Cover rating of the demon to whom the target is emotionally closest. Using a Cover rating in this way is a compromise for the demon.

Exceptional Success: Liam's target vanishes. In addition to stealing the target's entire identity, any compromise roll caused by scrutinizing Liam's true identity receives a +2 modifier.

cryptid wrangler: SHAUNA JONES

"My bet is on the little one. They always seem to fight like they've got nothing to lose."

BACKGROUND

Shauna always loved animals. When she was a little girl, she had a fat black cat that lived outside in her apartment complex. She would carry that cat around by its middle, and it would just purr and rub on her. When she wasn't carrying it around, she was feeding it tea and cakes, like it was just another one of her rag dolls. As an adult, Shauna always kept pets. She had dogs and cats, but also more exotic animals such as her Mexican redknee tarantula and her three hooded rats.

She volunteered at a local no-kill shelter in her home town of Demopolis in Alabama. She didn't dislike people, but she didn't always get along with them. She never cared much for the conservative culture of her town, and many viewed her as a bad girl. She left home when she was still in high school to move in with a boyfriend. He was making meth out of his bathroom, and when the house went up in flames, she slipped away before the police could grab them both.

She had a hard time holding down a job, not because she wasn't dedicated to work, but because she had a hard time judging people, and time after time got herself involved with less than stellar employers. She would end up not getting paid, enduring sexual harassment or worse, and then would leave in search of a more stable life. Animals were simply less complicated than people, and Shauna never misjudged the personality of an animal.

Shauna's brush with the God-Machine was as much her fault as it was that of the God-Machine. Infrastructure in Demopolis was nigh nonexistent, but the God-Machine is every-

where. She was on her way home from a trip to Montgomery to visit friends when she stopped on the side of the road to check on what looked like an animal that had been hit. The

STORY HOOKS

- A demon comes to the characters seeking assistance. One of her ring disappeared while scoping out local Infrastructure. She has heard rumors about coordinated cryptid efforts, but she hasn't found any evidence of a fight.
- Shauna's activities have helped to bring extra angels into the Montgomery area. The angels ignore Shauna in favor of hunting the characters, but if they could make her a threat to the God-Machine, they could possibly pit the two against each other and take care of two birds with one stone.
- Shauna's friend Laurie has been snooping around, trying to find her. She's easy to track and follow, and can serve as good leverage for demons looking to speak to or reason with Shauna. She could make a good ally against the God-Machine, especially if she learned that her activities are aiding it.

mass of fluff and fur in the ditch was once an animal, but was now the mutilated remains of a sacrifice. The cult that killed the poor creature left a messy trail back to their small compound just outside of Selma.

Without thinking, Shauna grabbed her shotgun from the trunk and went trudging through the woods in search of the perpetrators. It didn't take her long to find them, since they were still in the middle of a ritual that was bringing an angel into the world. She witnessed this firsthand, could see the world warp and shift in front of her eyes as the creature crossed an invisible threshold and eventually stepped into the world as what appeared to be a human. But from that moment, Shauna could tell it was different. She memorized its features, its face and form, and imprinted it into her mind. When it left, she did as well.

She called the police on the cult, but doesn't know what happened to them. She hunted the thing through the woods, and even caught up to it at one point. She shot it, she knows she did, but after a bright flash and an explosion, Shauna was thrown 10 feet away into a tree. She woke the next morning with a splitting headache and a completely altered view of the world.

HUNTED

Shauna returned to her home in Demopolis, but she couldn't return to her normal life. First, there were the visions. They left her sick and feverish, and at times she thought she was dying. One morning, all the ink from her tattoos started to bead and sweat off her body, though the color remained on her skin. She covered it up, but there was nothing for the odd dripping color that covered her arms and chest. People gave her an even wider berth than they had before. The only time she felt normal was with the animals, but the people running the shelter didn't want her there anymore.

She never forgot the angel, so when it came looking for her, she recognized it immediately. She barely escaped the attack, and only because she was living out of her car and was never unarmed. With the angel still hunting her in Demopolis, she decided to leave and go to ground

in a larger city. She drove to Montgomery, hoping to outrun whatever problems she was having. Little did she know that she was traveling to a place that was completely overrun by the God-Machine. Everywhere she turned, she could sense Its presence and see Its influence. It noticed her in short order, and she was on the run again.

DIGGING IN

She remained on the run for a bit, but eventually stumbled into a hive of cat cryptids hanging around a large piece of Infrastructure. She felt a camaraderie with them and settled down. She soon learned that the animals could feed on the angels who came near, and that the Infrastructure fed them otherwise. She tried training the animals, and found them uniquely pliable to her instructions. Eventually, she rounded up other cryptids from around the city and brought them to live with her and train.

Shauna's humanity slowly ebbed as she became more like the cryptids she lived with, relating more to them than any human. She set up defenses, and trained her cryptids to attack on command. Never again would an angel force her to run and hide. Angels never came for her; instead, a lone demon came to investigate the Infrastructure. Unsure if he was there for her, and uncaring about any distinction he may have from angels, she sent the cryptids after him. He tried to flee, but they overwhelmed him. She knocked him out, and when he woke up, she threw him to the animals again, pitting him against the creatures one by one. The cryptids that won gained a higher status among the others, but eventually the demon escaped.

Now she hunts down whatever supernatural creatures she can find, giving them to her cryptids to hone their abilities.

DESCRIPTION

Shauna Jones is nearly feral. She remembers her humanity, but the life of a stigmatic has driven her to near breaking. Her only respite from the pain of her visions is when she is with the cryptids, and so she lives as they do. She makes her base of operations out of an office building near the Alabama State Capitol building.

Despite living like an animal, she takes care of herself. She always wears clean clothes, and takes efforts to cover her arms. She is a bigger woman with defined muscle tone in her arms and thighs. She keeps her dark



CRYPTIDS

Shauna's Cryptids are mutated monsters, far removed from whatever they used to be.

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 4-6, Dexterity 3-5, Stamina 4-6, Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 3-5

Skills: Athletics 3-5, Brawl 4-6, Investigation 1-4, Survival 2-5

Adaptations (Pick 2-4): Aether Eater, Aether Hive, Alternate Composition (3/1 Armor), Piecemeal Anatomy (Extra Bones: +1 Health)

Merits: Clairvoyance, Fleet of Foot 2

Rank: 1-3

Health: 8-13

Willpower: 6-8

Initiative: 6-10

Defense: 5-7

Speed: 13-20

Size: 4-6

Weapon/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Notes
Bite	1L		Requires Grapple
Claw	1L		

hair cut short. Her skin is pale, except for where her tattoos begin. There, the colors are vibrantly vivid, and always seem to glisten with a wetness.

SECRETS

Shauna's ability to control the cryptids isn't a matter of simply training. She can exert a supernatural control over them, and any animal for that matter. She has only just started extending her power to normal animals, but with enough time she could pull all the animals in Montgomery under her sway.

The God-Machine has not forgotten about Shauna, and has bent her into Its service. She and the cryptids maintain the Infrastructure around Montgomery, even though she doesn't know it. She keeps the Unchained in the area away, and so It allows her to live, as long as she continues to serve her function.

RUMORS

"The cryptids around Montgomery are more vicious than others. They seem to not just live in the Infrastructure found around town, but actively defend it. You can't get within a mile without running into a pack of stray dogs, ready to rip your throat out."

Shauna has started branching out from her initial Infrastructure base and is training any cryptids she finds to defend the various Infrastructure around town. She hasn't bothered to explore the whole city, and she doesn't actually have cryptids everywhere, but she does have them at most major sites.

"We brought this woman in the other week for public drunkenness. She was probably homeless, but we couldn't get anything out of her except some grunts and growls. We put her in the drunk tank, but when we checked on her in the morning, the cell was open and empty. It looks like something chewed straight through the bars."

Shauna can do more than just command the cryptids, she can call to them over long distances. She has a few with enough intelligence that she can communicate with them, and they have such good hearing that they can hear her verbal commands from miles away. Of course, they follow her wherever she goes, so they are rarely far. She can speak, and does so often, but often refuses to talk to "normal people."

"Have you heard about these pit fights they have downtown? Someone runs a ring, but they pit people versus animals. Sometimes the people win, sometimes the animals win, but it's a bloody show either way. It's got a lot of people betting on it, pretty much the most exciting thing to do on a Friday night."

Some people have caught wind of Shauna's supernatural versus cryptid fights and started showing up to watch. She doesn't make them go away, unless they have a God-Machine taint on them. Betting started up around the endeavor and, quick to take advantage of people, Shauna started encouraging it. She takes a huge percentage of the winnings, and isn't above coaching the cryptids to throw a fight if a lot of money is riding on it. She loves to see the look of disappointment on the faces of the spectators when a fight doesn't go their way.

SHAUNA JONES

Virtue: Loyal

Vice: Cruel

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts (Traps) 3, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Firearms (Shotguns) 3, Stealth 3, Survival (Urban) 4

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Cryptids) 5, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 4,

Merits: Clairvoyance, Indomitable, Telepathy 5, Unseen Sense: God-Machine, Unseen Sense: Werewolf, Unseen Sense: Vampire

Health: 8
Willpower: 7
Integrity: 2
Size: 5
Speed: 12
Defense: 7
Initiative: 8
Armor: -

Stigmata: Shauna sweats tattoo ink. Her tattoos always appear wet, and when she's hot, the ink drips down her arms and chest, though the color never fades

Notes: Shauna keeps a shotgun nearby (3L, Range 20/40/80, -4 Initiative, 9-again), or carries it on her when she leaves the Infrastructure. She is always surrounded by two to three of her cryptids.

Shauna's Telepathy abilities only extend to animals. She rolls Wits + Animal Ken to hear their thoughts or send them commands. She can send Telepathy messages when utilizing Clairvoyance to see or hear her cryptids.

THE NATURE OF CULTS

What makes cults so scary? Their extremism, their strange beliefs, their bizarre goals, their willingness to commit atrocities? Certainly, that's part of why the average person gets a bit nervous around someone who's just a little *too* enthusiastic about going to church. But that's not the whole reason, not quite.

Cults are scary when *anyone* could be a cultist. Even reasonable, educated people. Especially reasonable, educated people. Cultists aren't nameless mooks or a faceless mob; every member comes from somewhere. A hundred cultists might come together for a ritual, and during that hour, they're unified in their black robes and ritual daggers and gleeful willingness to murder interlopers.

But when the ceremony ends, each of those 100 participants changes out of their robe, washes the blood off the dagger, and goes home. They take a bus or car, they pet the cat, they kiss their spouse and children. They eat dinner and fall asleep watching *The Late Show*. And in the morning, they get up and go to work, waving to neighbors and coworkers on their commute.

Which is another way of saying: Not every cultist is a gibbering fanatic. While some certainly are, having every cultist wear their beliefs on their sleeves doesn't suit the God-Machine's purposes. Easily identifiable cultists are easily thwarted cultists. And some cults are only meant to last a handful of years, nowhere near enough time for the majority of members to experience the full conversion process from reasonable person to gibbering fanatic.

Cultists, despite how often cults isolate and break down members, usually retain at least some of their personalities. They came into the cult for a reason. They had a question, and the cult had an answer. These people still have daily lives. They need to eat and sleep and tend the myriad tasks of daily living. While a horde of fanatics can inspire fear in a chronicle, a cunning Storyteller understands that cults are made up of people first, who then became radicalized. While every thriving cult erodes the individuality of members, breaking down the barrier between "me" and "we," complete success remains rare.

Characters should never be quite sure who is or is not a cultist. Consider: the neighbors who always leave their house wearing black on Saturday afternoon and don't come back until the wee hours of Sunday morning; an old classmate who found a self-help program that really works; someone's cousin who found people to listen after a particularly bad breakup; the cabdriver with an unknown sigil dangling from the rear-view mirror; the grocery bagger with a unique tattoo. Which behaviors are harmless quirks, and which are a sign of something far more sinister?

That's what makes cults so scary. Not that they are a faceless, nameless horde — but that they *aren't*. Not the depravity of the rituals they perform, but the fact that, once they're done with the ritual, they *go home*. Cultists aren't trying to infiltrate our institutions and systems...they're *already here*.

THE TEN THOUSAND NAMES OF GOD

Aphrodite. Legba. Elohim. Tyr. Inana. Saint Jude. The Demiurge. Typhon.

BACKGROUND

Founded by a team of angels, the Ten Thousand Names of God teaches that every deity is an emanation of the One True God. When the name of every god, goddess, or demigod is collected, mass enlightenment will be the result: a spiritual singularity which will lead to the instant elevation of humanity.

The cult as a whole is unaware of the God-Machine, though a few members in the upper hierarchy have begun to suspect. Technology (and thus Infrastructure) has become a core focus of the cult, as members turn more and more to highly advanced equipment to achieve their goals.

Many members realize that the majority of god-names have been lost; the forgotten deities of pre-literate cultures whose worshippers eventually died out or converted. The cult teaches that an emanation of God cannot ever truly vanish, and so these ancient names are encoded somewhere in the minds and souls of the worshippers' descendants. To this end, the cult has begun to study methods by which names can be extracted from subjects. These methods are not gentle, and almost certainly criminal, but the cult believes the ends justify the means. What concern is the permanent brain damage (or death) of a few dozen or even few hundred people if the collective elevation of humanity is the end result?

HISTORY

In 1981, three carefully created angels came together for a long-term project. The angels assumed the roles of respected academics in the fields of anthropology, archaeology, and theology. First targeted were graduate students, lured in with the promise of professional advancement. The angels were not kind, using abusive techniques to brainwash and manipulate their first converts. Several doctoral theses earned during this period were written in direct service to the cult.

The early years were the easiest, as inductees simply consulted encyclopedias and wrote out lists. Phase two, after the easy names were collected, began when members real-

ized how many names had been lost. They have since bent their resources to uncovering those names, using a variety of techniques.

Among the various archaeological expeditions was a far more ambitious project — a cadre of anthropologists who believed in ancestral memory, and developed highly illegal machinery and extremely unethical techniques to extract the names of a subject's ancestral gods.

One side project is the construction of a massive supercomputer, ostensibly dedicated to reciting the names of the known gods over and over again. However, a program which continually repeats text strings certainly doesn't require much processing power, even if the strings are thousands of characters long. The supercomputer in development is Infrastructure, and has nothing to do with the known goals of the Ten Thousand Names.

DESCRIPTION

Most cult members are highly educated, and often well respected in their chosen field. Young, bright grad students are the prime targets for conversion. An inducted professor takes on the role of mentor, and uses his position and authority to slowly bring targets further and further into the cult.

These methods are not kind, as professors engineer situations where students are sleep deprived, overworked, and underappreciated to strip identity and win loyalty. Many a prospective convert has escaped simply because she refused to be treated poorly by her thesis adviser and dropped out. However, many more students are desperate for any competitive edge they can gain — and if joining a cult (usually disguised at first as a campus club, alumni association, or professional networking group) is how they can get that advantage, they're willing to do it.

Members generally keep their affiliation secret, wishing to give an outward appearance of respectability. However, they use a variety of identification methods, usually in the form of

unique code phrases included in published articles or greetings exchanged at conferences.

For most people, interacting with a member of the Ten Thousand Names is no different than interacting with any other academic who has some slightly odd beliefs they generally keep to themselves. Even when a member does reveal her affiliation, the news is often met with a shrug. Collecting god-names with an eye towards mass enlightenment certainly isn't a *bad* goal. For cult research subjects (or, more accurately, victims), the experience is wholly different.

The process of obtaining subjects for the cult's high-level experiments is meant to desensitize new members, and to ensure subjects won't escape until it's too late. Grad students, freshly initiated, are sent out to find new subjects, usually people who need some quick cash. The first step is a short survey and family history, a screening process to determine where the subject's ancestors lived.

Subjects who pass the initial screening are invited to participate in a longer-term study. Most agree, and both subject and student are slowly introduced to the secret cult methods. Hypnotism comes first, attempts at memory regression. This almost never succeeds, or provides what the cult member leading the experiment somehow concludes are false positives. The research must be escalated.

Subjects are hooked up to increasingly complicated machines, starting with polygraphs and gradually moving towards highly advanced MRIs. These machines are not comfortable, but both subject and student are persuaded it's for the good of the human race for the study to continue.

The final phase comes when the subject is plugged into a techno-magical contraption and the student is coerced to perform either advanced brain surgery or extreme hypnosis to retrieve an ancestral god-name. No subject survives this experience intact — they either die on the table, live but suffer severe brain damage, or emerge stigmatic. Regardless of outcome, the experiments are frequently considered successful. The cult may not be getting god-names from their experiments, but they are obtaining *something* the God-Machine finds useful.

SECRETS

The cult is not specifically pursuing arcane or occult knowledge, but the course of their regular work has led to quite a few archaeological expeditions to uncover ancient sites of power, or anthropological research into secret tribal histories. As a result, the cult has built up a fairly extensive collection of various artifacts and lost lore. While the Ten Thousand Names has minimal use for their library, other people would very much like to have access. The cult is reluctant to strike a deal with outsiders — unless that outsider somehow has a god-name they've not yet encountered.

The cult has a small collection of secret rituals, code words, and initiation practices. These elements are more

STORY HOOKS

- A character involved in an appropriate academic field is contacted by a cult member offering mentorship. Such a relationship would be of great professional benefit, and there's little initial reason to turn the offer down. The tasks the character is asked to perform are quite reasonable at first, and come with generous rewards. However, as the character is brought further and further along the path, the requests (and rewards) escalate. At what point will the demands of membership escalate beyond what the character is willing to do?
- A local university's archaeology department has just succeeded wildly with a dig at an ancient burial site. The expedition has yielded a literal treasure trove of artifacts, including some intact sarcophagi. Cult members are confident some of the carvings may yield an extra god-name or two. But ancient treasures attract all kinds, and more than just mortal attention has been drawn to the dig. A team of experts is needed to shepherd the goods from the dig site to the university, where researchers wait to start their research. And as they work to protect the cache, these experts find themselves slowly drawn deeper and deeper into the world inhabited by the Ten Thousand Names of God. In this scenario, the player characters may be either the team of experts who slowly uncover the truth, or those sent to stop the team.
- An underworld or street-level contact for one of the characters has gone missing. Perhaps even someone who knows something of the group's true nature, or is an element of a character's Cover. The contact has been recruited to participate in the ancestral memory experiments conducted by the cult, and has subsequently disappeared. The missing friend must be found before it's too late!

geared towards fostering secrecy and community than they are occultic in and of themselves. However, an outsider who learned these secrets could infiltrate quite easily.

The experiments involving ancestral memory are surely the cult's biggest secret, and the one most would be willing to

kill over. After all, should these decidedly inhumane practices come to light, careers would be ruined, awards would be revoked, and reputations would lay in tatters.

RUMORS

"During conferences, cult members will meet in secret to conduct their rituals. I hear they have a sort of mass involving wine and blood and orgies!"

While many academics appreciate the chance to let their hair down at conferences, members of the Ten Thousand Names are no more nor less likely to engage in extreme practices than their colleagues. This rumor is frequently circulated by those who know enough to realize the cult exists and then assume all cults must be of the blood-orgy or depraved-ritual variety. While some rituals do exist for the purpose of enforcing ties among the cult, they tend to the mild (as far as cults go, at least).

"The search for god-names is just a ruse; the cult is up to something else."

Almost assuredly true, though the majority of members are unaware (and learning such would surely cause a mass defection). The God-Machine has no need for the list the cult is compiling. However, having a cult with the connections and resources the Ten Thousand Names has acquired is something the God-Machine can use. Certainly, the God-Machine directs the development of advanced neurology technology or supercomputers for Its own ineffable reasons. It's looking for *something* in the brains of research subjects.

"The Ten Thousand Names is on the brink of breaking up."

Debate rages within the ranks regarding what qualifies as a god-name. Jewish scholars and Catholic historians frequently get into long arguments regarding whether Biblical angels or saints count. Members also fight about the proper spelling and pronunciation of some obscure god-names, as well. The angels running the cult were rather surprised at how petty these fights have gotten, and are looking for ways to ensure greater loyalty and unity before the inevitable schism.

PROMINENT MEMBERS

Below are two of the most important members of the cult.

DR. JIMENEZ SANDOVAL

Ah, yes, Doctor Johansen! It's been awhile. How's your translation project progressing?

Background: On paper, Dr. Sandoval has a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Chicago. He's won several awards, has been a department chair for nearly a decade, and generally earned the respect of his colleagues. In particular, he has a reputation as a dedicated mentor, and many of his students have gone on to enjoy their own successes.



In reality, Dr. Sandoval doesn't exist. He's a mask worn by an angel whose true name is an unpronounceable glyph. Dr. Sandoval helped found the Ten Thousand Names of God as the most human-seeming representative. His affable nature and solid reputation are tools he uses to recruit and build up the cult, and he's done so admirably.

However, he's been in this role since 1981, and has had only minimal contact with the God-Machine. Recently, Dr. Sandoval has found himself threateningly close to *caring* about the success of his protégés, which presents him with a dilemma: care and risk the Fall, or destroy his relationships, thus defying the orders he was given, and still risk the Fall.

Description: Dr. Sandoval is a middle-aged Hispanic college professor. He stands five feet and five inches, with salt-and-pepper hair, and a beard he keeps neatly trimmed. An angel cannot be bothered with fashion, so Dr. Sandoval's wardrobe is entirely black. He rarely talks about himself and instead enjoys getting to know others. Able to mimic concern and friendliness well, most who come into contact with Dr. Sandoval have no reason to suspect he's something other than what he appears.

Dice Pools

Tell Me What You Want (dice pool 6) — Dr. Sandoval is quite good at getting his conversational partners to talk about their career and academic goals. He keeps a mental list of who wants what, the better to leverage those desires for the good of the cult.

Are You Sure About That? (dice pool 7) — Occasionally, a mortal puts a few pieces together and realizes the cult is more than what it seems. Sometimes, they confront Dr. Sandoval with their findings. Without fail, they walk away from the meeting not quite remembering what they said, or even why.

DELORES AUDWYN

Yes, the research is difficult. But the results are so exciting!

Background: Enrolled in early enrichment programs, then magnet schools, then prep schools, Delores has never been anything but the absolute best at what she does. However, she's never lost her sense of wonder at the world around her, and chose neuropsychology as her field because of the potential for discovery. The human mind is an endless field of potential, and Delores wants to grasp out just a small fraction of that.

Driven and intelligent, Delores was a prime candidate for recruitment. She has become a true believer in the goals and aims of the Ten Thousand Names. Initially put off by the cult's more advanced experiments, Delores only had to review the first scraps of raw data coming from the early experiments to solidify her resolve.

Description: Delores is a woman in her late 20s of Afro-Caribbean descent who favors chunky, colorful jewelry. She wears trendy clothing, though usually can't be bothered to tame her wild, curly hair so she ties it up in a scarf or colorful headwrap.

She is highly educated and extremely passionate about her work. However, her constant focus on academic achievement left her disadvantaged when it comes to other people. Delores is naive, and often cannot tell when someone is being misleading or deceitful.

The angels running the Ten Thousand Names find Delores to be quite manipulable. Her faith is a convenient handle by which she can be steered into whatever position the God-Machine desires. However, should the true nature of the cult be revealed, or should she be forced to confront the absolute inhumanity of her work, Delores may very well turn on the cult with the exact same zeal. On the other hand, continued contact with the higher echelons of the cult may very well turn Delores into a stigmatic.

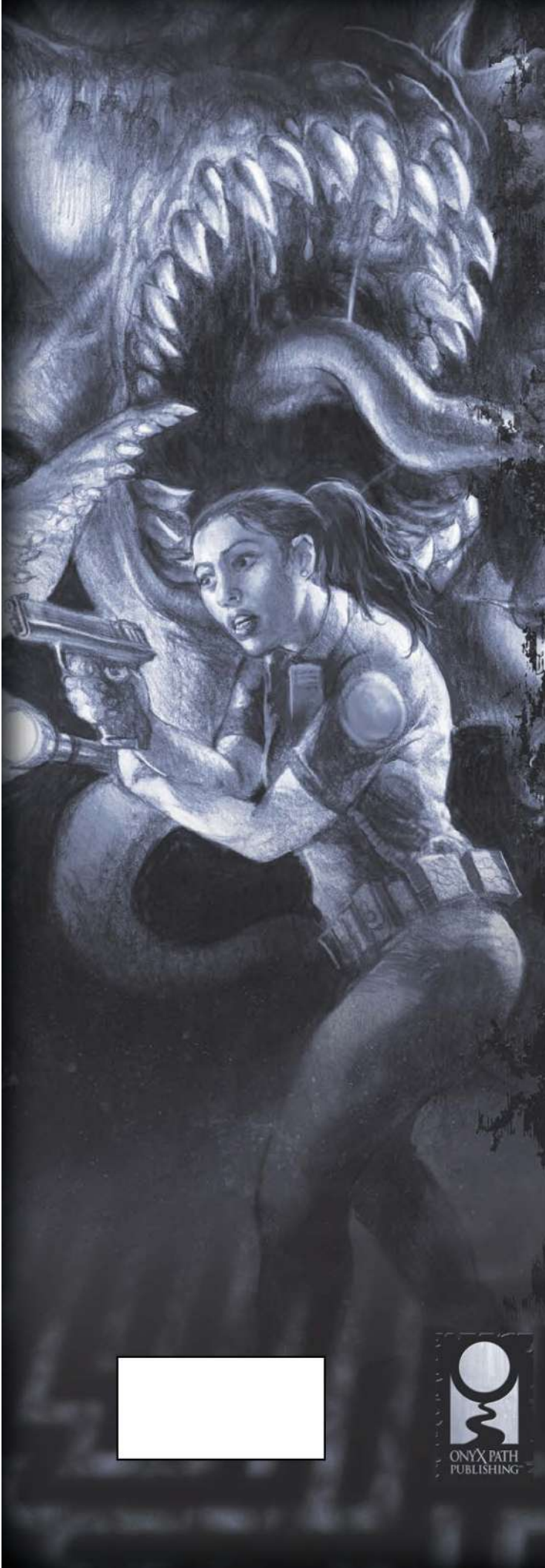
Dice Pools

Grant-Writing Experience (dice pool 8) — A key to surviving in academia is knowing how to write a successful grant proposal and persuade donors to spend their money on the



department's current project. Delores is quite good at this, and her skills go beyond written. Delores can use Grant-Writing Experience when working not only to get money out of an institution, but whenever she is attempting any kind of persuasion (should Delores be able to make a successful roll on her own behalf, and should enough time pass, characters will encounter a department flush with better equipment, new interns, and an upgraded security system).

Quick Research (dice pool 7) — One doesn't reach Delores' level of success without learning how to quickly and efficiently find needed information. If Delores has access to an appropriate library (including online), she can, within an hour, produce an answer to one question related to psychology, neurology, neuropsychiatry, archaeology, anthropology, theology, or a related field. Delores is a busy woman, however, and she doesn't work for free. Characters should expect a quid pro quo, as Delores asks them to help her with a project of her own in exchange.



"Fighting the Machine is like fighting the ocean. You literally cannot hurt it. Doesn't matter how much poison we dump into the ocean. We'll only kill the things in it. We'll never kill it.

Same with the God-Machine. Kill angels, traitors, stigmatics, cultists, cryptids, whatever, you'll never hurt the Machine Itself.

No, that doesn't mean we stop trying. You stop trying, you drown. Screw that."

—Mr. Bliss, Guardian Inquisitor

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